

## Box 15 Increasing men's parental leave take-up rates

Since 2007, Germany has moved away from a leave policy that supported mothers wishing to remain at home for three years after the birth of a child. Parental leave has now been reduced to 12 months. Its overall duration increases to 14 months, however, if both parents take at least two months of the paid parental leave (Geisler and Kreyenfeld, 2012). The benefit shifted from a means-tested flat rate to an income replacement modality at 67 per cent of previous earnings. The proportion of fathers taking leave increased from 3 per cent in 2006 to 28 per cent in 2012, with 83 per cent of these using their individual two-month entitlement. As Bünning (2015) shows, fathers who took up parental leave reduced their number of working hours per week while increasing the time that they spent on childcare and housework. The reform also resulted in the reduction of the overall number of parents taking more than one year of paid leave, which was a stated objective of the reform. In fact, just 11 per cent opted to prolong their paid leave to two years, paid at 33.5 per cent of prior earnings (Blum and Erler, 2013). In addition, Germany has invested heavily in the provision of childcare facilities (see figure 35) and since August 2013, every child between the age of 1 and school entry age has the legal right to early childhood support in a day-care centre or day nursery.

In France, the parental leave scheme was reformed under the 2014 act on equality between women and men, which was intended to promote men's uptake of parental leave from 18,000 to 100,000 by 2017. Parents with one child, who were previously entitled to six months of parental leave, are now allowed to take another six months, only if the co-parent is the beneficiary of leave as well. The leave remains available to parents even after the birth of their second child for the duration of three years, under the same condition that the co-parent is the beneficiary, or, failing that condition, for two and a half years. In addition and on an experimental basis, the act introduced a shorter period of better paid parental leave (18 months) for parents with at least two children (ILO, 2014d).

For instance, Iceland, which applies one of the world's most egalitarian parental leave policies, along with Japan, Norway, Portugal and Sweden, also has one of the longest periods of fathers' non-transferable leave entitlements (three months – to be extended to five months by 2016), paid over the entire period by social security at 80 per cent of previous earnings (with a cap). In 2009, 96 fathers took leave for every 100 mothers taking leave, using an average of 99 days compared to 178 for women (Eydal and Gíslason, 2013). In addition, according to a 2007 survey, 86 per cent of women and 73 per cent of men stated that their employer expressed a positive attitude towards their parental leave (Jónsdóttir, 2007, cited in Asher, 2011).

A growing number of countries, including Belgium, Germany and Norway, provide flexibility as to when parental leave may be taken, whether in one block directly after the birth of the child or as time off from work until the child reaches school age, and as to whether the leave can be taken on a full-time or part-time basis. In the Russian Federation, parental leave benefits can be transferred to grandparents or other caregivers. Other countries are also promoting the use of parental leave benefits to offset childcare costs and to encourage women's earlier return to work. In Slovakia, a 2011 reform of parental leave allows parents to receive the full parental leave benefit (around \$270 per month in 2014), regardless of the number of hours worked or level of earnings. If they opt to work, parents may choose to exchange the parental benefit for a childcare benefit to cover part of the documented childcare costs (up to a ceiling of around \$315 per month and per child up to three years) provided by a recognized institution or registered child-minder (EU, 2014).

### 4. Making quality early childhood care and education a universal right

Increasing public funds for early childhood education, in particular the provision of centre-based services for younger children when adequately paid leave periods expire, is crucial in promoting maternal employment and helps to empower women (Gornick and Hegewisch, 2010; Nollenberger and Rodríguez-Planas, 2011; Brilli and Del Boca, 2013; Lefebvre et al., 2009; Elborgh-Woytek et al., 2013). It is estimated that the labour force participation rates of young mothers would increase by 6.5–10 per cent if the price of childcare costs decreased by 50 per cent (Gong et al., 2010). Childcare also plays a role in supporting women's access to formal jobs (World Bank, 2011a; ILO, 2014j).

In its paragraph 21, ILO Recommendation No. 204 encourages the provision of and access to affordable quality childcare and other care services in order to promote gender equality in entrepreneurship and employment opportunities and to enable the transition to the formal economy. A universal right to quality childcare as part of adequate, comprehensive, inclusive and sustainable social protection systems is essential to efforts to reduce poverty and eliminate inequalities. There is also an important link to Recommendation No. 202, which, in its paragraph 5(b), sets out that social protection floors should also comprise basic income security for children, at least at a nationally defined minimum level, providing access to nutrition, education, care and any other necessary goods and services.