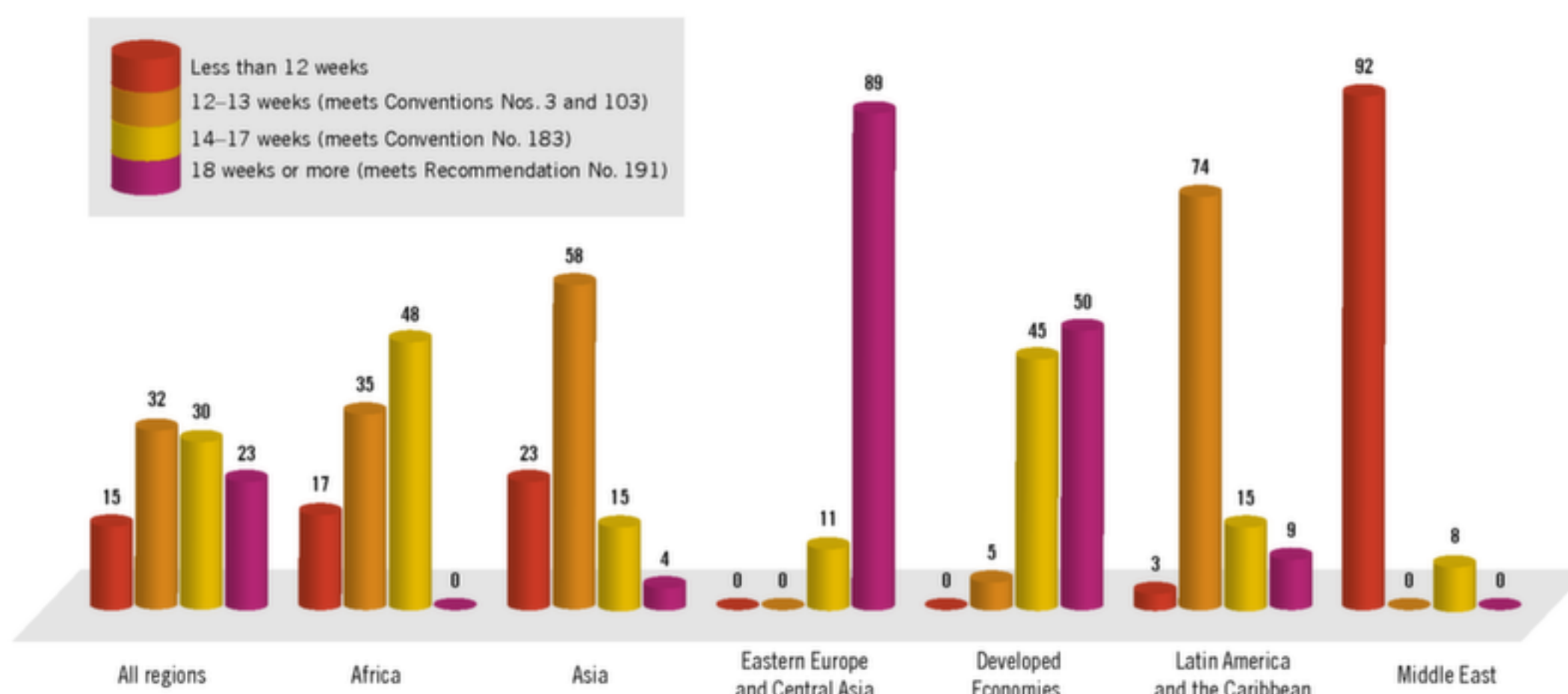


Figure 2.1 Statutory duration of maternity leave, by region, 2013 (185 countries and territories) (%)

Note: Figures may not add up to 100 per cent due to rounding.

Source: ILO Working Conditions Laws Database – Maternity Protection. Available at: <http://www.ilo.org/travdatabase> [25 Mar. 2014].

with many studies marking 12 months as the pivotal point (Grimshaw and Rubery, forthcoming). Any period longer than 12 months turns into a career break and is marked by a significant increase in wage penalty. Nevertheless, this review suggests there is currently no consensus about the optimum length of leave to encourage continuity of employment and minimal wage penalty effects. At the same time, there are clear costs for mothers associated with very short leave provision, associated with a high risk of women dropping out of the labour market altogether (Keck and Saraceno, 2013). The level of income replacement during the maternity leave period is also critical. It has a significant effect on employment continuity and, by sustaining a mother's economic independence, it can also act to constrain traditional gender division of labour in the household (Grimshaw and Rubery, forthcoming). As shown in Chapter 3, specific provisions for fathers are also a facilitator of gender equality at work and intra-household equality.

The most up-to-date ILO standard on the duration of paid maternity leave is Convention No. 183, which mandates a minimum leave period of 14 weeks – an increase from 12 weeks in the previous Conventions. Its accompanying Recommendation No. 191 goes further and suggests that ILO member States should try to increase the period of maternity leave to at least 18

weeks. As noted in Chapter 1, 28 countries have ratified Convention No. 183,² while far more ILO member States meet the requirement of 14 weeks' maternity leave (see Appendix II for a table of indicators by country for this chapter).

National conformity with ILO standards on duration of maternity leave

The majority of countries across the world adhere to the provisions of Convention No. 183 on duration of maternity leave. In fact, globally, 53 per cent of the 185 countries and territories studied (98 countries) provide a maternity leave period of at least 14 weeks, the standard established by Convention No. 183. Among those, 42 countries meet or exceed the 18 weeks of leave suggested in Recommendation No. 191. Sixty countries provide 12 to 13 weeks of leave – less than the duration specified by Convention No. 183, but consistent with the level set by Conventions Nos. 3 and 103 of at least 12 weeks of leave. Only 27 countries (15 per cent) provide less than 12 weeks of maternity leave. Figure 2.1 shows the percentage of countries in each region providing maternity leave by statutory duration.

The proportion of countries that meet the standard of at least 14 weeks' leave varies between regions (see map 2.1 for an illustration of the distribution of