

### 3.1 Paternity leave

Paternity leave is generally a short period of leave for the father immediately following childbirth. Its aim is to enable fathers to assist the mother to recover from childbirth, which is also crucial in establishing breastfeeding, take care of the newborn as well as other children, attend to the registration of the birth and other family-related responsibilities. Paternity leave is either provided as a separate leave measure for fathers or included in the “special leave” provisions to which all employees are entitled. In that case, the birth of a child or “family events” are listed among the grounds for taking a specific number of days off, in addition to annual leave. Where national legislation does not include provision for either paid or unpaid paternity leave, collective bargaining agreements may provide for such leave (see box 3.1).

No ILO standard exists dealing specifically with paternity leave, however the 2009 ILC Resolution concerning gender equality at the heart of decent work recognizes that work–family reconciliation measures concern not only women but also men and a variety of new measures (such as provision of paternity leave and/or parental leave) have succeeded in permitting working fathers to be more involved in the sharing of family responsibilities. Thus, the Resolution calls for governments to develop, together with the social partners, adequate policies allowing for a better balance of work and family responsibilities for both women and men in order to allow a more equal sharing of these responsibilities. Such policies should include, among other things, paternity and/or parental leave with incentives to encourage men to take up such leave (ILO, 2009a).

Research suggests that fathers’ leave, men’s take-up of family responsibilities and child development are related. Fathers who take leave, especially those taking two weeks or more immediately after childbirth, are more likely to be involved with their young children (Huerta et al., 2013). This is likely to have positive effects for gender equality in the home, which is the foundation of gender equality at work.

By drawing fathers into the daily realities of childcare, free of workplace constraints, extended time off [immediately after the birth] provides the space necessary for fathers to develop the parenting skills and sense of

responsibility that then allows them to be active co-parents rather than helpers to their female partners. This shift from a manager-helper dynamic to that of co-parenting creates the opportunity for the development of a more gender-equitable division of labour (Rehel, 2014).

In addition, this early involvement enhances the resources of “parental capital” available to children via quality father–child interactions, thus contributing to child development (O’Brien, 2009). Evidence indicates that this participation is a key factor of children doing better in life on almost every indicator of success (Flouri, 2005 and Lamb, 2010 cited in Asher 2011).

The need for increased involvement of fathers in parenting is also driven by the often neglected urge to recognize men’s right to parenthood, together with their responsibility to share unpaid care and household work. Assumptions which frame men as breadwinners, ignoring their role as fathers and caregivers, remain extraordinarily persistent, including in the workplace, since policies do not necessarily change traditional social attitudes and behaviours. While men may feel valued as workers, their paternity and care responsibilities are often ignored. Fathers perceive that, while family-friendly policies might in theory be available to “parents”, socialization, lack of uptake by other men and the absence of a supportive workplace result in these options being used only by women (Burnett et al., 2013). Therefore the design and mix of work–family policies, and in particular leave measures, have enormous gender-transformative potential<sup>1</sup> when they make the achievement of effective gender equality at work and in the household an explicit objective, in line with the ILO Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156).

#### National provisions and duration

Paternity leave entitlements can be found in the national legislation of at least 79 countries out of 167 for which data are available: 29 in Africa,<sup>2</sup> seven in Asia,<sup>3</sup> five in Eastern Europe and Central Asia,<sup>4</sup> 24 in the Developed Economies,<sup>5</sup> 13 in Latin America and the Caribbean<sup>6</sup> and two countries, Saudi Arabia and Syrian Arab Republic, in the Middle East. Paternity leave provisions are most common throughout the Developed Economies, Africa and Eastern European and Central Asian countries.