

and self-employed workers and students are explicitly covered in the scope of parental leave. Chile covers cooperatives, households, women covered by the welfare system and independent workers for parental leave. Belgium allows for pro-rata amounts of parental leave benefits for part-time workers, related to the number of hours worked.

The age of the child when the right to parental leave lapses varies from country to country. While most countries do not specify an age limit, there are a few which do. For example, in the Republic of Korea, the cut-off point is 6 years of age. Other examples are Belgium (12 years), Iceland (three months for either parent until the child is 18 months old and 13 weeks of unpaid leave until the child is 8), Lithuania (3 years), Mongolia (3 years), the Russian Federation (3 years) and Sweden (18 months). According to the EU Directive on parental leave, the right to parental leave should be available to parents of children under 8 years of age (EU, 2010).

In some countries, parental leave can be used by a person other than the parents, who takes care of the child. In Lithuania, for example, parental leave can be granted, at the request of the family, to the mother/adoptive mother, the father/adoptive father, the grandmother, the grandfather or any other relatives who are actually raising the child, or to an employee who has been recognized as the guardian of the child. Another example is the Russian Federation, where child-rearing leave may be granted, in full or in part, not only to the mother, but also to the child's father, grandmother, grandfather, other relatives or tutor. In Estonia, if a mother or father does not use the parental leave, it may instead be granted to the actual caregiver, provided that they lawfully reside in the Republic of Estonia. Uzbekistan has similar provisions extending the entitlement to childcare leave to whomever cares for a child. The leave may be taken as a single period or be distributed in portions, and the employees entitled to this leave may take it in turns.

Cash benefits

Parental leave may be paid or unpaid and, in most countries, it is paid. Of the 66 countries that provide parental leave, 36 offer cash benefits to support parents on leave, while 30 provide parental leave without pay. In the

Developed Economies, Eastern European and Central Asian countries, 35 out of 51 countries provide benefits during leave (including Albania, Iceland, Norway and Romania). In 18 of these countries (including Denmark, Poland and Tajikistan), cash benefits provide replacement of two-thirds or more of a worker's previous earnings. A few provide lower levels of support: Canada at 55 per cent of a worker's earnings, Italy at 30 per cent, the Russian Federation at 40 per cent and Uzbekistan at 20 per cent of the minimum wage. In some countries, parental leave is paid at a flat rate, such as Azerbaijan, Austria, Czech Republic and France. Paid parental leave is typically funded by social security systems, largely through social insurance. In many instances, the State also fully or partly funds parental leave cash benefits through general taxation, especially when the amount paid is not income-related. For instance, in the Czech Republic and Hungary public funds supplement social insurance while in Germany, Luxembourg, Romania and Slovakia benefits are fully covered by public funds. In Denmark, as is the case with maternity and paternity leave, employers top up social insurance through collective agreements (see box 3.1 for the system of leave reimbursement in this country). Sixteen countries in these regions provide no financial support during leave, such as Armenia, Austria, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Ireland, the Netherlands, Spain and Turkey.

In Asia, the Republic of Korea provides for 40 per cent of a worker's previous earnings, funded through the social insurance system, while "special leave" is unpaid in Nepal.²⁰ Of the two Latin American and Caribbean countries which offer parental leave, Chile provides 100 per cent of a worker's previous earnings, subject to a ceiling, paid by a social security fund, and Cuba's social insurance provides for 60 per cent. In the Middle East, parental leaves are unpaid. In all ten African and Middle Eastern countries that provide parental leave, this entitlement is unpaid.

Take-up rates

The introduction of parental leave provisions available to both fathers and mothers can be an effective tool for promoting gender equality. It recognizes the fact that fathers also have caring responsibilities. But, even when parental leave is available to both mothers and fathers,