

Box 3.3 The effects of the economic crisis on paternity and parental leave and benefits

As with maternity leave (see box 2.5), a number of countries also reduced the duration of paternity leave periods, the level of benefits or eligibility criteria in direct response to the crisis. While some cuts were temporary, such as those in Lithuania which reduced the level of parental leave benefits, other countries have adopted more permanent changes. In **Latvia**, parental leave benefits decreased in 2009 by 50 per cent for all employed parents, irrespective of the date of the child's birth. Parents of a child born after 1 July 2009 were no longer eligible to receive more than 50 per cent of a maximum allowance of around US\$ 1,000 a month (in 2014). Latvia's budget deficits have persisted and the Government of Latvia has taken a decision to extend the current restrictions on sickness, maternity, paternity, parental and unemployment benefits until the end of 2014 (ILO, 2014). Countries such as **Czech Republic**, **Hungary** or the **United Kingdom**, in which the consequences of the crisis were significant, also experienced cuts to or cancellations of previously planned improvements. In **Spain**, the 2007 proposal to increase paternity leave from two to four weeks in 2011 has been repeatedly postponed. This decision was also accompanied by a cut in universal birth benefit, first introduced in 2007, equivalent to almost US\$ 3,500 (Escobedo and Meil, 2013). In 2012, **Slovenia** decreased the level of paternity and parental leave benefits from 100 to 90 per cent of previous earnings. The ceiling was also lowered from 2.5 to 2 times the average wage. As an austerity measure, this reduction will be enforced until 12 months after the first year in which economic growth exceeds 2.5 per cent of GDP (Stropnik, 2013).

However, over the same period, positive developments in both paternity and parental leave schemes intended to increase both fathers' allocation of provision and their take-up rates were also reported. These changes point to a trend aimed at fitting fathers into the work–family equation not only in spite of the current financial crisis, but also as a means of overcoming the global economic turmoil by promoting women's labour force participation. In some instances, positive changes or the relative protection of these policies despite overall austerity is also linked to concerns related to low fertility, such as in Poland (O'Brien, 2013). **Australia** introduced paid paternity leave (14 days) in 2013. The father quota was extended from ten, to 12 and, since July 2013, to 14 weeks in **Norway**, which also relaxed the eligibility criteria for fathers' take-up. Partners of part-time

women workers have had access to this entitlement since 2010. In **Greece**, a new law on parental leave was adopted in April 2012 in order to adapt the EU Directive 2010/18 on parental leave to the domestic situation. Parental leave can be taken until the child's sixth birthday (an increase from 3½ years of age) for a total duration of four months (instead of three-and-a-half months) per parent (individual right). However, since parental leave remains unpaid, with the deterioration of collective bargaining, it seems likely that, due to the economic crisis, high levels of unemployment and the fear of dismissal, take-up rates will remain low in the private sector (Kazassi and Karamessini, 2013). In 2013, unpaid parental leave was also extended to four months in **Ireland** and it can be taken until the child's eighth birthday (Drew, 2013).

Positive developments or reform discussions are also taking place in other regions. For instance, in 2011, **Chile** introduced a paid "postnatal parental leave" of 12 weeks, in addition to 12 weeks of postnatal maternity leave. Mothers can choose to transfer up to six weeks of paid parental leave to fathers, which should be taken in the final period of the leave. A three-day paternity leave paid by employers was also adopted in **El Salvador** in 2013. In the same year, **Singapore** introduced a one-week paternity leave paid by public funds at 100 per cent of previous earnings with a relatively high ceiling. This entitlement is, however, restricted to married fathers with Singaporean citizenship, which is likely to exclude the large and growing population of migrant workers (Yeung and Alipio, 2013).

Proposals are under discussion in **China** (introduction of a three-day paid paternity leave with 80 per cent of average pay) and **Brazil**, one of first countries to have introduced paternity leave in 1943. Some States and cities in Brazil already provide between 15 and 30 days for Government employees and, in 2007, discussions started about an extension of statutory paternity leave from the current five days to up to 30 days (UN, 2011; O'Brien, 2013). In the **Russian Federation**, since 2012 a national reform has been under consideration to extend the payment of 40 per cent of earnings during parental leave from 18 to 36 months (Kravchenko and Grigoryeva, 2013). A draft law on social insurance, which will be submitted to the National Assembly of **Viet Nam** in mid-2014, proposes to introduce five days of paid paternity leave for workers contributing to the social insurance system. If approved in late 2014, the law will take effect from 1 January 2015.*

* Tuoitrenews: <http://tuoitrenews.vn/society/13381/vietnam-intends-to-grant-husbands-paternity-leave> [30 Mar. 2014].