

► ILO Care Economy Brief

June 2025

Brief Nr. 1

Closing the gender gap in paid parental leaves Better parental leaves for a more caring world of work

Key points

- In June 2025, the ILO marks the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183). This presents an ideal time for this brief, which takes stock of the state of paid parental leave policies (maternity, paternity and parental leaves) worldwide and the related gender gap. It also provides guidance on how countries could promote equality and fairness by investing in more gender-responsive paid parental leaves.
- Improving parental leave entitlements is essential to gender equality at work, as it enables parents to share care responsibilities at home, promotes work–life balance, supports child development and has a positive effect on women's labour force participation and wages.
- For employers, well-designed parental leaves offer a strategic advantage by supporting workforce stability, attracting and retaining skilled talent, and enhancing employee engagement. Publicly funded parental leave minimizes direct costs for businesses, especially micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), ensuring that inclusive work environments are sustainable for enterprises of all sizes.
- Globally, there is a difference of five months (22.5 weeks) between the duration of paid parental leaves available to mothers and that reserved for fathers. Comparing countries where parental leaves are available for both mothers and fathers, on average, mothers are entitled to 24.7 paid weeks, compared to 2.2 weeks of paid parental leaves reserved for fathers.
- Large gender gaps are usually driven by a lack of recognition of fathers' individual rights to paternity or parental leave. While small gender gaps driven by limited entitlements for both parents can also reinforce traditional gender roles and limit women's opportunities in the labour market.
- Countries face challenges in implementing statutory parental leaves effectively. Closing the gender gap by better balancing maternity and paternity leave at 14 weeks paid at 67 per cent of previous earnings, fully funded by social security or public funds – in line with the provisions of Convention No. 183 – would require an additional global annual investment of US\$ 142 billion by 2035. This represents an average increase of 0.13 per cent of GDP across countries, ranging from an additional 0.08 per cent of GDP in Europe and Central Asia to 0.49 per cent in the Arab States.
- In line with the ILO Resolution concerning decent work and the care economy (2024), social dialogue plays a key role in the design and implementation of integrated and coherent care policies and systems for decent work and gender equality, including parental leave policies.
- To maximize the chance of more effective and inclusive provision, parental leaves should:
 - meet ILO standards on maternity protection in law and in practice;
 - consider adequate cash benefits for mothers and fathers;
 - allocate individual and non-transferable leave periods for each parent;
 - finance benefits through gender-responsive universal and sustainable social protection systems with few eligibility restrictions (rather than relying in employer funding); and
 - provide flexibility on how parental leaves can be taken together with other incentives to families and businesses, especially MSMEs.

► The case for improving parental leaves¹

June 2025 marks the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the ILO Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183), an instrument that affirms the importance of maternity leave and related protections for advancing gender equality and decent work. The Convention calls for adequate income security and maternal and child health protection through collective financing and mandates a minimum of 14 weeks of maternity leave, with the Maternity Protection Recommendation, 2000 (No. 191), encouraging this to be extended to 18 weeks. Maternity protection is essential to safeguard the well-being of both mother and child and to protect women's rights at work, "including those in atypical forms of dependent work" (Convention No. 183, Art. 2). With the global average duration of paid maternity leave rising from 12.8 to 17.6 weeks over the past three decades (ILO 2025), this anniversary presents a timely opportunity for taking stock of the status of parental leaves around the world and for reaffirming commitment to universal maternity protection and equality of opportunity and treatment between men and women in the world of work.

Expanding leave entitlements for fathers around the birth or adoption of a child is also an important step towards the achievement of gender equality at work, and represents one of the most significant developments in care policies globally (ILO 2022). In 2024, 121 out of 186 countries with data in the [ILO Care Policy Portal](#) offered a right to paternity leave, with 37 countries introducing paternity leave entitlements in the preceding ten years. In addition, 31 countries introduced parental leave provisions or increased the duration of parental leave in the same period. These developments point to the increasing recognition of men's caregiving role in national legislation across the world, which has the potential to change social norms and perceptions concerning fatherhood, alter the distribution of unpaid care work between men and women, and support all parents to better balance work and family responsibilities (Blum et al. 2023; Koslowski et al. 2021; Koslowski 2021; ILO 2022).

In June 2024, the International Labour Conference adopted the Resolution on decent work and the care economy (ILO 2024a), which provides a common understanding of the care economy, as well as guiding principles to advance decent work in the care economy. The Resolution calls for the provision of appropriate responses to the needs of workers with care responsibilities, such as ensuring comprehensive maternity protection and care leave policies, including paternity, parental and long-term leave. Since, on average, women perform three times more unpaid care work per day than men, leading to significant disadvantages in the labour market (ILO 2018), progressively closing the gender gap in parental leaves is an essential step to improving gender equality at work. Well-designed and comprehensive parental leave arrangements:

- contribute to a life course approach to care;
- promote fathers' engagement in childcare;
- enable better work-life balance for both parents and a more equal sharing of care responsibilities between men and women; and
- increase the ability of mothers to engage in paid work, with a positive effect on female labour force participation and wages (ILO 2022; ILO 2023a; ILO 2024a; UNESCAP and ILO 2022).

Modern societies and workplaces increasingly recognize that caregiving matters to both men and women. Men want to be involved as caregivers and agree that more paid leave would be beneficial to them, to their relationship with their partner and to their children's development. However, what holds them back are outdated societal expectations and insufficient workplace support (Equimundo 2021). When fathers take parental leave, particularly when they care for children independently ("solo care"), it fosters caregiving skills, relational competence and stronger emotional bonds

¹ In this brief, the terms "parental leaves", "parental leave entitlements", "parental leave policies" and "parental leave provisions" will be used to refer to the total amount of leave provided to parents for childcare purposes, including maternity leave, paternity leave and parental leave. While the term "parental leave" will be used to refer exclusively to the leave entitlement provided to parents to take care of their child after the expiration of maternity and paternity leave.

with their children, giving them a head start in their initial parenting experience (Brandth, Bungum and Kvande 2022). Such early involvement shifts perceptions away from caregiving as solely being women's responsibility and promotes more equitable household dynamics. Current trends in parental leave provisions reinforce traditional caregiving patterns, often leading to greater care responsibilities for women after childbirth. By contrast, adequate maternity protection and longer parental leave for fathers is associated with improved child health and developmental outcomes due to increased paternal involvement (OECD 2013). When fathers are supported to take leave, it helps reduce maternal burnout and supports a more equal division of household tasks (Patnaik 2019). This supports beneficial changes in gender roles and attitudes, and helps ensure that a more egalitarian division of labour is transmitted from parents to children (Chung 2021; Fontenay and González 2024). In Spain, children born after the introduction of paternity leave have developed more egalitarian attitudes, are more likely to engage in counter-stereotypical behaviours and are less likely to adopt the male breadwinner model (Farré et al. 2022).

Supporting parental leaves for all parents is also closely linked to stronger workforce participation outcomes. Globally, 708 million women of working age were unable to engage in employment due to caregiving responsibilities in 2023, compared to 40 million men (ILO 2024b). Additionally, in 134 countries, women's labour force participation significantly decreases following childbirth and remains suppressed for up to a decade afterward, a consequence that has become known as the "motherhood penalty" (Kleven, Landais and Leite-Mariante 2024). Balancing parental leaves between men and women can help mitigate this challenge, enhancing women's employment opportunities and career progression, and improving household financial security (Andersen 2018).

Evidence also shows that businesses can benefit from more balanced leave systems, and overall, more and more employer and business membership organizations (EBMOs) are taking action to support work-life balance and greater equality and diversity (ILO and IOE 2024). In 53 developing countries, private enterprises reported higher women's employment rates in countries that mandate paternity leave compared to those without (Amina et al. 2016). Moreover, when paternity leave is shorter than maternity leave, it may unintentionally signal higher perceived employment costs for women, influencing hiring and promotion decisions (Arribas-Banos et al. 2025). Fathers' active participation in parental leave can reduce workplace gender stereotypes and biases and minimize the negative impacts on women's career progression and earnings following leave periods (Bewley, Ebell and Forth 2016; Apec 2024).

However, despite the progress made over the last decade, further efforts are needed to ensure that parental leave policies promote equality of opportunity and treatment for all. Drawing on data from the ILO Care Policy Portal² and the ILO Care Policy Investment Simulator,³ this brief takes stocks of current national provisions and presents the gender gap in parental leave across 186 countries, along with its estimation methodology. It also highlights different policy design elements in parental leave provision and showcases country examples of inclusive approaches. Finally, the brief includes the results of a macroeconomic investment simulation assessing the benefits of progressive equalization of leave entitlements between mothers and fathers.

² The ILO Global Care Policy Portal is a knowledge hub on legal and statistical indicators on national care leave policies and services, and aims to advance the ILO transformative agenda for gender equality and non-discrimination. The portal presents over 60 legal and statistical indicators on maternity protection, paternity leave, parental leave and other care leave and non-discrimination policies, as well as childcare and long-term care services in more than 180 countries.

³ The ILO Care Policy Investment Simulator is the largest online care policy modelling tool developed to simulate the investment requirements and benefits present in filling national gaps in care services and parental leaves. Created to advance the ILO transformative agenda for gender equality and non-discrimination, the Simulator allows users to build tailor-made care policy investment packages for four care policies: (1) childcare-related paid leave; (2) breastfeeding breaks; (3) early childhood care and education (ECCE) services; and (4) long-term care services.

► The gender gap in paid parental leaves: a mixed picture

Globally, the difference between the average duration of paid parental leaves available to mothers and fathers is five months

The gender gap in paid parental leave entitlements is calculated by measuring the difference (in weeks) between the total duration of paid parental leaves available to mothers (paid maternity and parental leave) and the total duration of paid parental leaves reserved for fathers (paid paternity and parental leave) (see box 1).

► Box 1. The gender gap in paid parental leaves

- **Total paid parental leaves available to mothers:** The total duration of paid parental leaves available to mothers considering both paid maternity leave and paid parental leave.
 - **Maternity leave:** Employment-protected leave around the time of childbirth that allows mothers to rest, heal, recover, breastfeed and take care of a newborn child. As mandated in ILO Convention No. 183, maternity leave refers to the prenatal, childbirth and postnatal periods. The total maternity leave should last not less than 14 weeks and include a compulsory leave period of six weeks after childbirth. The amount of cash benefits should be not less than two thirds of the woman's previous earnings.
 - **Parental leave available to mothers:** Employment-protected leave that is often (but not always) provided in addition to maternity and paternity leave to allow parents to care for an infant or young child once maternity and paternity leave have ended. The paid parental leave period available to mothers excludes any length of paid parental leave that is for exclusive use by the father as a non-transferrable right. It attributes to mothers all the parental leave that is not reserved for fathers.

$$\text{Total paid leaves available to mothers} = \text{Paid maternity leave} + \text{Paid parental leave available to mothers}$$

- **Total paid parental leaves reserved for fathers:** The total duration of paid parental leaves reserved for fathers considers the duration of both paid paternity leave and paid parental leave earmarked to fathers.
 - **Paternity leave:** Employment-protected leave granted to the father to be used at or around the time of childbirth or adoption.
 - **Parental leave reserved for fathers:** Employment-protected leave that is often (but not always) provided in addition to maternity and paternity leave to allow parents to care for an infant or young child once maternity and paternity leave have ended. The duration of the leave reserved for fathers includes only the portion that is individually allocated to them as a non-transferable right.

$$\text{Total paid leaves reserved to fathers} = \text{Paid paternity leave} + \text{Paid parental leave reserved to fathers}$$

- **The gender gap in paid parental leaves:** Measures the difference between the total duration of paid parental leaves available to mothers and the total duration of paid parental leaves reserved for fathers.

$$\text{Gender gap in paid parental leaves} = \text{Paid leaves available to mothers} - \text{Paid leaves reserved to fathers}$$

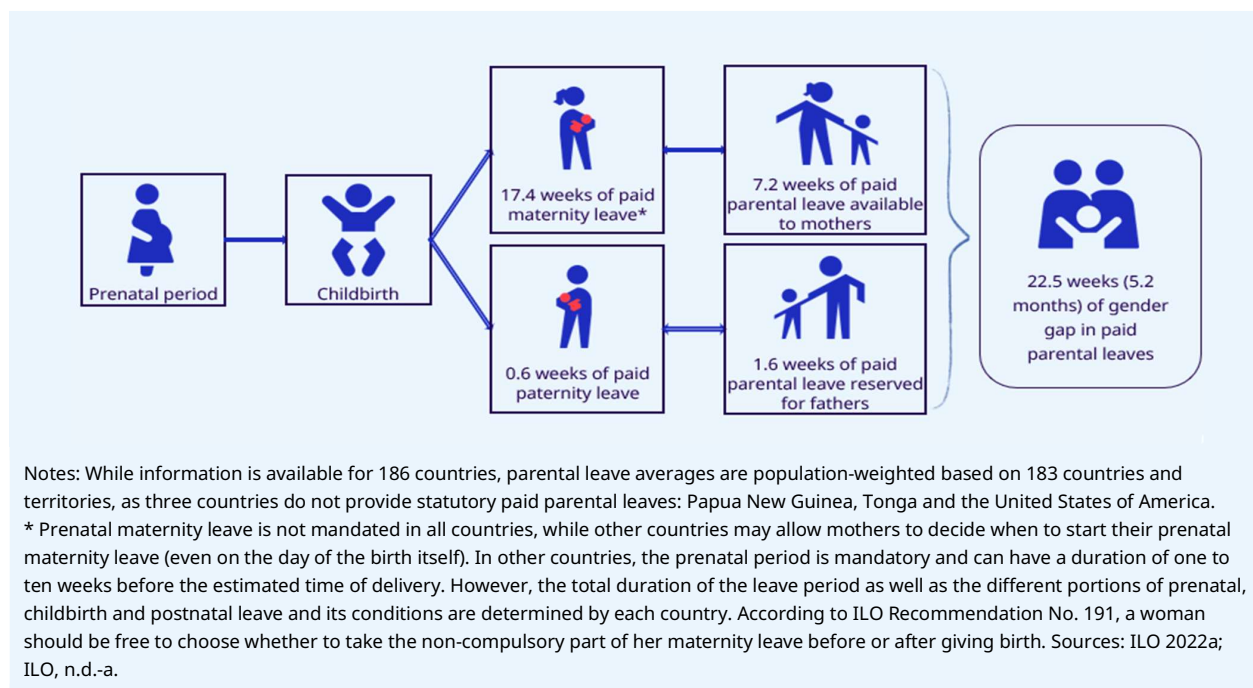
Note: See Appendix 2 below for more information.

Globally, the average length of the gender gap in paid parental leaves was 22.5 weeks or 5.2 months in 2024. This means that, on average, mothers are entitled to five more months of paid leave than fathers following the birth or adoption of a child. Globally, paid paternity leave is significantly shorter than maternity leave, on average, 16 weeks shorter. In fact, across the 186 countries for which the ILO has data, the average duration of paid paternity leave remains low – just four days (0.6 weeks) – with an average of nearly ten days among the 105 countries with statutory

paid paternity leave. **The average length of the total paid parental leave entitlements available to mothers is 24.7 weeks; while the total paid parental leaves reserved for fathers is just 2.2 weeks** (figure 1).

ILO data from 186 countries show that in 2024, a considerable number of countries (80 in total) displayed a gender gap in paid parental leave provisions equivalent to three months or less, with 28.5 per cent of potential parents⁴ worldwide living in these countries (figure 2). In 60 countries, this gender gap is between three and six months, and in another 14 countries the gap is between six months and one year. In 28 countries the gender gap in paid parental leaves is more than one year, while three countries do not provide any type of statutory paid parental leaves to either parent.

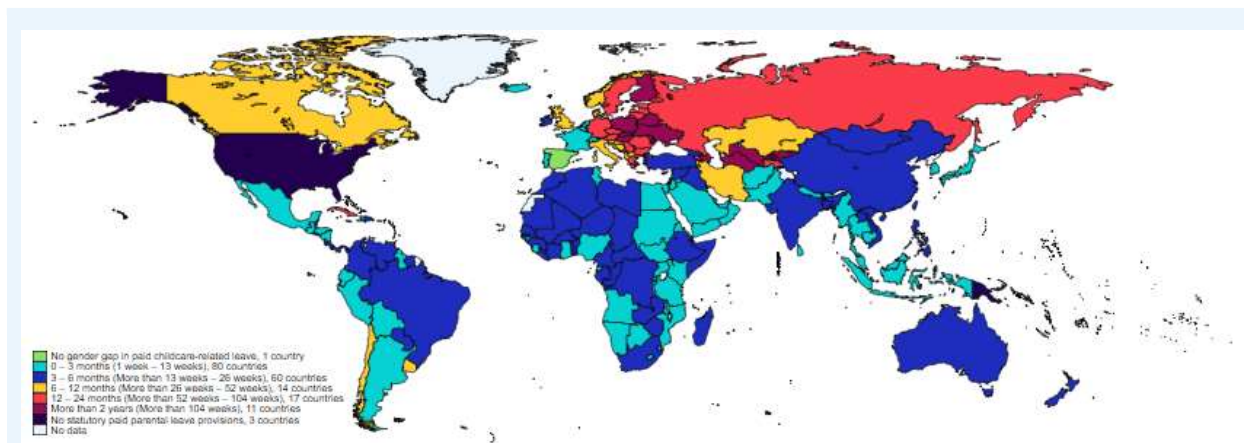
► **Figure 1. Average length of the global gender gap in paid parental leaves**



More than half of the world's population (57.3 per cent) live in countries where the gender gap in paid parental leaves is between three and six months. Less than 6 per cent of the global population lives in the 28 countries where the gender gap in paid parental leaves is longer than a year. Only one country, **Spain**, has no gender gap, since in 2019 paternity leave was progressively extended up to 16 weeks, the same duration as maternity leave.

⁴ "Potential parents" are men and women of reproductive age, which for the purpose of this brief includes individuals between the ages of 15 and 49 years.

► **Figure 2. Length of the gender gap in paid parental leaves by country, 2024**



Note: 186 countries and territories. Sources: ILO 2022; ILO, n.d.-a.

Drivers of gender gaps in parental leaves

Inadequate and unequal paid leave entitlements provided to mothers and fathers explain the length of gender gaps in parental leaves across countries, regions and country-income groups (figures 2 and 3). This section explores the drivers of gender gaps in paid parental leaves by examining the design and distribution of leave entitlements. Three main patterns emerge:

Large gender gaps due to unequal, though often relatively generous, parental leave entitlements

In some high-income countries, longer periods of paid leave are granted to both mothers and fathers, with potential fathers in some countries being entitled to the longest periods of paid parental leave entitlements (on average more than 18 weeks reserved for fathers). However, parental leave provisions remain unbalanced, often due to long paid parental leave entitlements for mothers. This results in substantial gender gaps despite the leave system being generous overall. For example, in **Europe and Central Asia**, the average gender gap reaches 67.2 weeks (15.5 months). In **Finland**, mothers are entitled to 40 working days of maternity leave, and each parent receives 160 working days of parental leave, though 63 days can be transferred to the other parent (usually to the mother) or to a legal guardian. Families can also access home-care leave and a home-care allowance until the child is three years old. Similarly, in **Slovakia**, while mothers and fathers have relatively long entitlements (34 weeks and 28 weeks, respectively), only one parent at a time can receive the parental leave allowance, which usually results in mothers taking most of the leave.

In other countries, large gender gaps result from a lack of recognition of leave entitlements for fathers. For instance, there are 42 countries where paid parental leaves reserved for fathers represent only 5 per cent or less of the total parental leave entitlements available to a household. In another 71 countries, there are no statutory paid parental leaves for fathers, and all parental leave provision is available only to mothers. These parental leave schemes, while enabling caregiving, lead to large gender gaps – for instance, exceeding two years in 11 countries (figure 2) – and perpetuate unequal leave uptake.

Small gender gaps due to inadequate leave entitlements for both parents

In other contexts, the gender gap appears small due to the overall inadequacy of parental leave policies. In these cases, both mothers and fathers receive little or no paid leave, including maternity leave that is far below the provisions of Convention No. 183. For instance, in **Eswatini**, the gender gap is just two weeks, but this is because mothers only receive two weeks of paid maternity leave paid at 100 per cent of previous earnings, and fathers have no entitlements at all. In

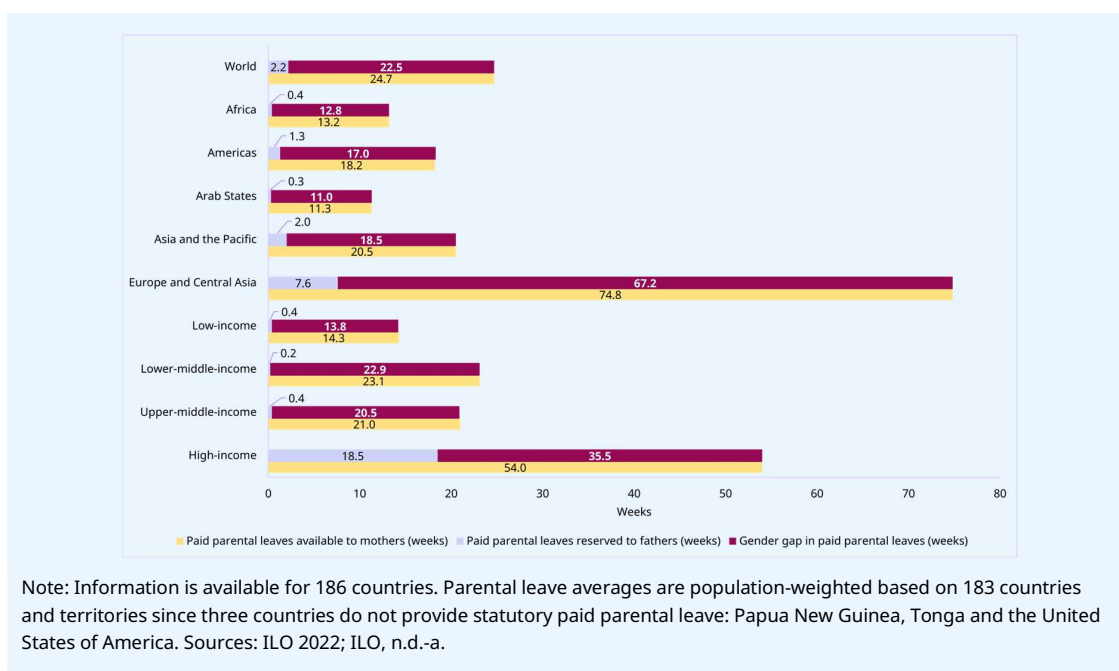
Samoa, the gap is five weeks, with mothers entitled to six weeks paid at 66.7 per cent and fathers to just five paid days. Such low levels of entitlement for both parents reflect the weakness of legal frameworks and labour market institutions, and may reinforce traditional gender roles by limiting the recognition of caregiving as a shared responsibility.

Small gender gaps due to equal and well-designed parental leave policies

A third category includes countries that have designed their leave policies to support gender equality by reserving a substantial portion of leave for fathers, while also guaranteeing adequate maternity and parental leave to mothers. In this group, which mostly consists of high-income countries, granting parental leave entitlements and reserving part of the leave to fathers as a non-transferable entitlement is more common. In these countries, the share of the fathers' entitlements is equivalent, on average, to 26 per cent of the total duration of leave entitlements available to the household. In seven countries, namely Belgium, France, Japan, Luxembourg, Portugal, the Republic of Korea and Spain, the total duration of paid parental leaves reserved for fathers represents more than one third of the total duration of the parental leave entitlement available to parents. In **Japan**, for example, fathers are entitled to four weeks of paternity leave, and both parents have equal and non-transferable rights to paid parental leave until the child turns one, resulting in a gap of only two weeks. Similarly, in **Belgium** and the **Republic of Korea**, gender gaps are modest (11 weeks), with paternity leave and individual non-transferable parental leave entitlements that are relatively equal in duration for both parents.

These examples highlight that gender gaps can be explained by the adequacy, distribution and coordination of national parental leave policies. In many low- and middle-income countries, small gender gaps often reflect inadequate legal entitlements for both parents and underdeveloped labour market institutions, rather than deliberate efforts to design egalitarian systems. These countries often also fail to provide a maternity protection scheme aligned with Convention No. 183. On the other hand, large gender gaps may exist even within care systems that provide lengthy parental leaves to both parents, if these provisions are not accompanied by mechanisms to encourage a more equal sharing of leave entitlements between parents. This reinforces the need to assess not just the size of the gap in any given country, but also the adequacy and articulation of leave policies and their intended outcomes.

► **Figure 3. Average duration of paid parental leaves entitlements available to mothers, paid parental leaves reserved for fathers and the gender gap, by region and national income level, 2024 (weeks)**



► Reducing gender gaps in paid parental leaves: Lessons from national experience

The design of paid parental leave entitlements plays a crucial role in challenging social norms and reducing gender inequalities at home, in the workplace and in society overall. Taking stock of national experiences, this section presents policy considerations and examples of measures that countries are taking to improve parental leave provisions and provide a package of gender-responsive leave policies that recognizes the right to care for both men and women while promoting a more equal distribution of family responsibilities. These measures include:

- ratifying and effectively implementing the ILO Maternity Protection Convention (No. 183) and Recommendation (No. 191), 2000, to guarantee adequate maternity protection to all employed women;
- increasing the availability, duration and adequacy of paid paternity leave;
- supporting paid parental leave to each parent; and
- financing paid parental leaves through social protection and based on effective social dialogue to respond to the needs of all workers with family responsibilities.

Ratifying and implementing the up-to-date international labour standards on maternity protection

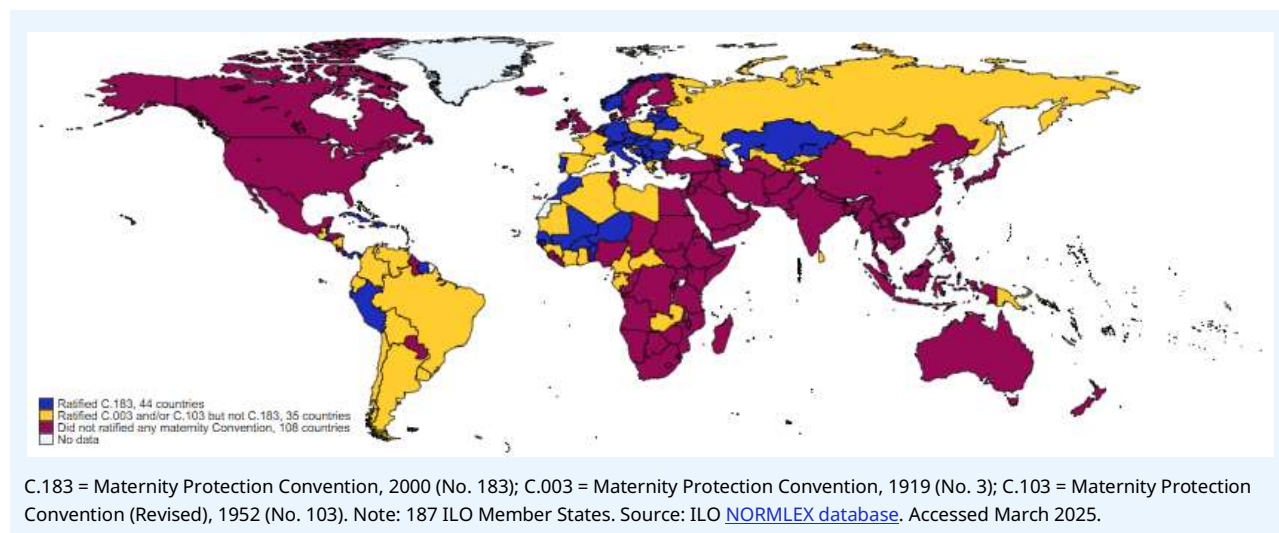
Ratifying and aligning national legislation to Convention No. 183 and Recommendation No. 191 are important to guarantee that all women have access to adequate maternity protection. As confirmed by the ILO Standard Review Mechanism Tripartite Working group (SRM TWG), the most up-to-date international labour standards on maternity protection are the Maternity Protection Convention (No. 183) and Recommendation (No. 191), 2000 (ILO 2023b).⁵ Figure 5 shows countries based on their ratification of the three Conventions concerning maternity protection, namely:

- Maternity Protection Convention, 1919 (No. 3);
- Maternity Protection Convention (Revised), 1952 (No. 103); and
- Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183).

From the total of 187 ILO Member States, 34 have ratified Convention No. 3, 41 have ratified Convention No. 103 and 44 have ratified Convention No. 183, as of May 2025. As shown in figure 4, there are 35 ILO member countries that have ratified either Convention No. 3 or Convention No. 103 (which are now closed to ratification), but have not ratified Convention No. 183. Since 2020, only six countries – Antigua and Barbuda, Djibouti, El Salvador, Germany, Panama and Suriname – have ratified Convention No. 183. ILO technical assistance is also supporting current ratification efforts in some countries, such as Bahamas, Barbados, Cabo Verde, Colombia, Guinea-Bissau and Uzbekistan. However, more efforts are required to address the obstacles hindering wider ratification and effective implementation.

⁵ The ILO SRM TWG is a subordinate body of the ILO Governing Body tasked to review the ILO's body of international labour standards in light of the changing patterns in the world of work. In 2023, the SRM TWG reviewed the five instruments concerning maternity protection and recommended the Governing Body to consider the Maternity Protection Convention, 1919 (No. 3), the Maternity Protection Convention (Revised), 1952 (No. 103) and the Maternity Protection Recommendation, 1952 (No. 95) as outdated documents. As such, only Convention No. 183 and Recommendation No. 191 currently have the status of being up-to-date instruments.

► **Figure 4. Ratification of the three ILO maternity protection Conventions by country, 2025**

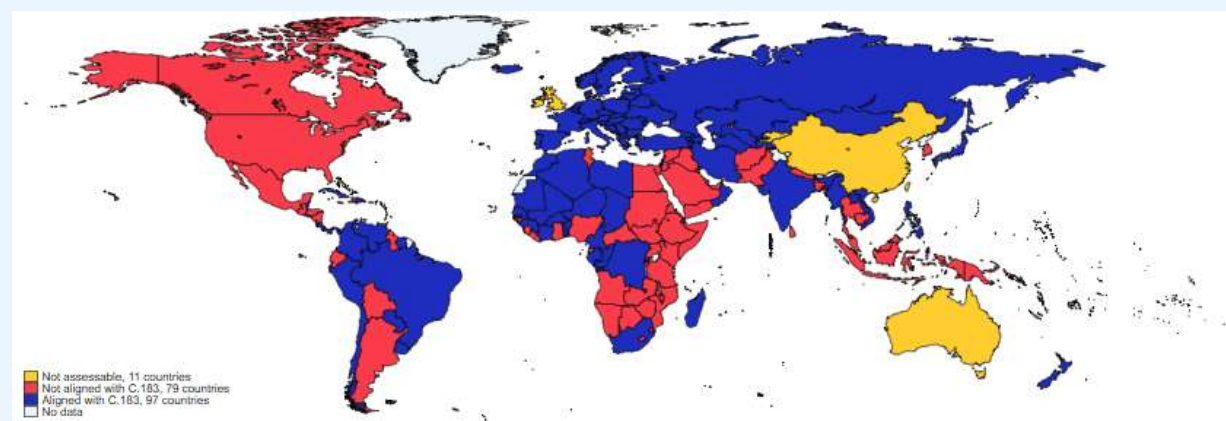


The ILO's analysis indicates that a total of 80 countries will require the introduction of legislative modifications in order to align with the main requirements on maternity provisions in Convention No. 183 (figure 5), which are:

1. leave should be not less than 14 weeks;
2. cash benefits should be not less than two thirds of previous earnings; and
3. maternity leave cash benefits should preferably be provided through compulsory social insurance or public funds.

The main reason for non-alignment globally is a maternity leave that lasts less than 14 weeks (49 countries), followed by maternity cash benefits being exclusively paid by employers (42 countries) and maternity leave cash benefits being less than two thirds of previous earnings (17 countries). **Among the total of 143 Member States that have not yet ratified Convention No. 183, there are 54 countries with a maternity leave scheme that is already aligned with the provisions of the Convention (14 countries in Africa, 8 in the Americas, 1 in the Arab States, 11 in Asia and the Pacific and 20 in Europe and Central Asia).** These 54 countries should consider ratification, and all countries already aligned with Convention No. 183 should consider progressively extending maternity leave to at least 18 weeks with full pay, in line with Recommendation No. 191.

► **Figure 5. Presence of maternity leave scheme aligned with the provisions of Convention No. 183 by country, 2024**



C.183 = Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183). Notes: Figure covers 187 ILO Member States. South Africa pays maternity leave cash benefits at 66 per cent of previous earnings, but it is considered as being aligned with Convention No. 183. Source: ILO research based on ILO 2022; ILO, n.d.-a.

In recent years, several countries have reformed their legislation to align more closely with ILO Convention No. 183. **Suriname** introduced 16 weeks of statutory maternity leave in 2019, expanding coverage beyond women in companies with collective agreements. **Zambia** extended maternity leave from 12 to 14 weeks in 2020; while **Ethiopia** increased it from 13 to 17 weeks in 2021. In 2017, **Colombia** raised maternity leave from 13 to 18 weeks through a legislative reform. **Libya** and **Rwanda** have also adjusted all three core dimensions of Convention No. 183 – extending leave duration, increasing benefit levels and shifting from full employer liability to schemes co-financed through social protection systems. Notable progress has also been made in **India**, **Israel** and **Paraguay**, where maternity leave has expanded from under 14 weeks in 1994 to 18 weeks or more today – and therefore in line with Recommendation No. 191 – with benefits now fully replacing prior earnings and funded through social protection.

Increasing the availability, duration and adequacy of paid paternity leave

Paternity leave provides to fathers a period of job-protected leave to care for the child and the mother around the time of childbirth or adoption. It provides an important opportunity for fathers to begin nurturing and bonding with their child, to support the mother with the many physical and psychological demands related to childbirth, and to start co-parenting and taking up care responsibilities.

Over the past decade, 37 countries introduced a right to paternity leave, and another 19 increased its duration. However, in 2024, only 105 countries were offering paid paternity leave. Notable reforms in recent years include **Spain**, where paternity leave evolved from two days in the early 1990s to full parity with maternity leave in 2019. It is now referred to as leave for the birth and care of a child “for parents who are not the biological mother”, while maternity leave is designated for the “biological mother”.⁶ **Nepal** introduced 15 days of paid paternity leave in 2018 through the Safe Motherhood and Reproductive Health Rights Act. **Colombia** extended paternity leave from eight days to two weeks in 2021. Similarly, in **Ecuador**, paid paternity leave was extended from 10 days to 15 days in 2023 under the Law of the Right to Human Care.

⁶ Real Decreto-Ley 6/2019, de 1 de Marzo, de Medidas Urgentes Para Garantía de La Igualdad de Trato y de Oportunidades Entre Mujeres y Hombres En El Empleo y La Ocupación.

► Box 2. Promoting the use of paternity leave entitlements by fathers: Compulsory leave

In addition to providing paternity leave, countries should promote the use of leaves by fathers. Globally, countries tend to face significant challenges to increase take-up rates among fathers. Hence, some countries have established compulsory paternity leave. In nine countries, fathers do not just have the option to take time off after childbirth, but rather it is mandatory for them to do so, like with maternity leave. In **Chile**, the **Islamic Republic of Iran**, **Italy**, **Luxembourg**, **Paraguay**, **Singapore** and **Suriname** it is mandatory to take the full duration of paternity leave. In **France**, **Portugal** and **Spain**, only a portion of the mandated paternity leave entitlement is obligatory. In **Chile**, paternity leave has a duration of five working days paid by the employer. It is obligatory to take the whole period, but fathers can choose between taking the leave in one continuous period immediately after childbirth or, alternatively, they can distribute the five days over the first month after the birth. These arrangements have been successful in promoting take-up rates among fathers. For instance, in Spain, fathers' leave uptake gradually increased (2016–2023) as total and compulsory paternity leave expanded, with many fathers exceeding the mandated minimum period. This reflects a cultural shift toward greater paternal involvement, driven by policies emphasizing equality, non-transferability and adequate benefits.

Source: ILO 2022; Dobrotić et al. 2024; Recio Alcaide et al. 2024.

Supporting paid parental leave to each parent

In addition to maternity and paternity leave, parental leave and family-friendly working arrangement policies can help workers to balance their employment with family responsibilities. The structure and implementation of parental leave vary widely across countries, shaped by cultural, economic and policy contexts. Some systems provide non-transferable individual entitlements to each parent, while others offer shared family entitlements that can be divided between caregivers. The duration, flexibility and payment levels associated with parental leave also differ, ranging from short, time-limited options to longer-term arrangements that can be taken intermittently or part-time over several years.

In 2024, 69 out of 186 countries provided statutory parental leave to households, with 49 countries providing some form of paid leave. In the last decade, 31 countries introduced or increased parental leave provisions. The total duration of paid parental leave varies significantly across the world, ranging from one week per parent to parental leave that extends until the child is three years old. Among the 186 countries surveyed by the ILO, the average duration of paid parental leave available to households (including parental leave entitlements for both parents that can be used simultaneously) is more than eight weeks; while the average among the 49 countries that provide paid parental leave is close to 78 weeks (18 months), with an average of 64 weeks available to the mother and 14 weeks reserved for the father.

Promoting parental leave entitlements for fathers

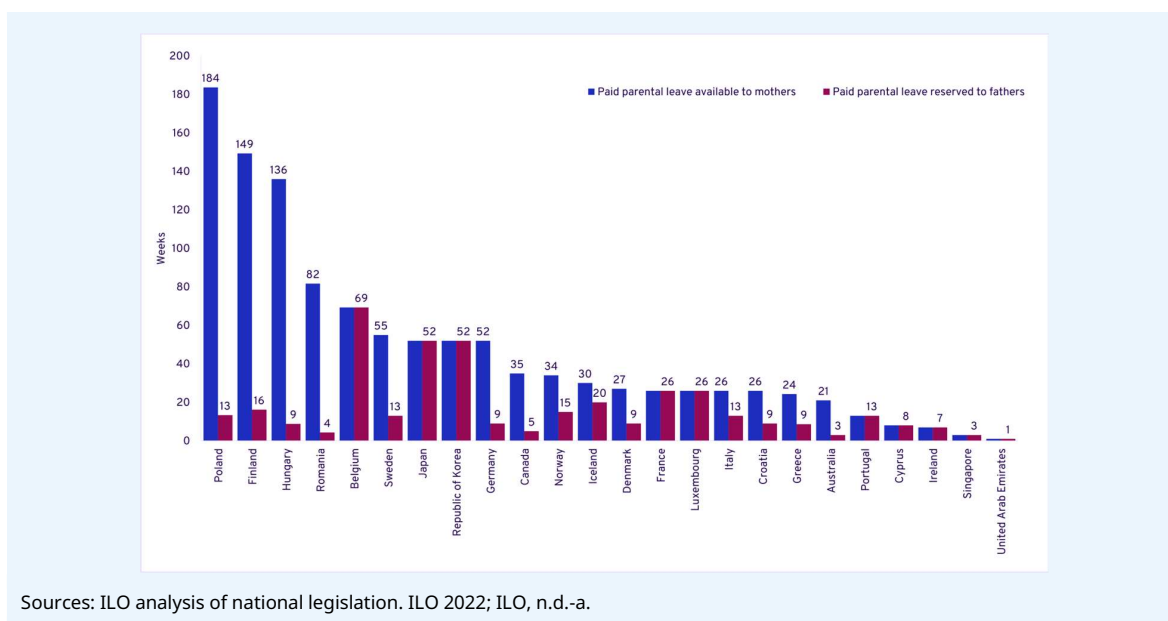
Across many countries, fathers remain significantly under-represented among recipients of paid parental leave, often taking shorter periods or limiting their leave to components explicitly reserved for them. In most Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries fewer than 50 men claim publicly administered parental leave benefits for every 100 live births, compared to much higher rates among women. However, despite their overall lower use of publicly administered parental leave benefits on average, the share of men among all recipients of publicly administered parental leave benefits has increased in some countries since 2010 (OECD, n.d.-a).

The way parental leave policies are designed can play a powerful role by challenging gender roles and reducing gender inequalities at home, in the workplace and in society overall, while also considering the financial and operational challenges this could pose to employers, especially MSMEs. Parental leave can be provided as a family entitlement, but legal frameworks could include individualized entitlements, non-transferable leave reserved for fathers ("use it or lose

it”) or bonus systems that extend leave when both parents participate as measures to encourage fathers to use parental leave. Such a bonus system exists in **Canada, Germany, Italy and Japan**.

Among the 49 countries with paid parental leave, 24 countries reserve a specific leave period for fathers (figure 6). Within these 24 countries, the amount of parental leave reserved exclusively for fathers ranges from 5 per cent to 50 per cent of the total parental leave assigned to families, with durations that range from one week in United Arab Emirates to 69 weeks in Belgium. There are ten countries where parental leave reserved for fathers represents half of the total paid parental leave entitlement for the family. Six of these countries are in Europe and Central Asia (**Belgium, Cyprus, France, Ireland, Luxembourg and Portugal**), with the other four being **Japan, the Republic of Korea, Singapore and the United Arab Emirates**.

► **Figure 6. Duration of individual and non-transferable parental leave for fathers in countries with specific parental leave periods for fathers, 2024.**



Various countries have implemented individual and non-transferable parental entitlements to support working parents and to improve fathers’ take-up rates. In the **Republic of Korea**, parental leave is provided as an individual non-transferable entitlement of one year for each employed parent. In **Italy**, paid parental leave is available for a period of nine months, three months of which are assigned to each parent as a non-transferable entitlement. In 2023, **Poland** extended parental leave from 32 to 41 weeks, introducing a nine-week non-transferable entitlement for each parent to align with EU Directive 2019/1158 on work–life balance. In addition, parents in Poland may take up to 36 months of childcare leave, with one non-transferable month reserved for each parent. In 2024, **Singapore** passed a law increasing shared parental leave. From April 2025, each parent will receive three weeks, rising to five weeks by April 2026. The reform is aimed at encouraging greater paternal involvement in childcare.

► **Box 3. How parental leave can change mindsets around the distribution of caregiving**

In 1974, Sweden became the first country to introduce six months of paid parental leave for both parents, as part of a broader move away from the traditional male breadwinner model and in response to growing labour demand and calls for gender equality. The system gradually expanded, and in 1995 Sweden introduced one non-transferable month of leave for each parent, a reform that led to a marked increases in take-up among fathers and their involvement in childcare (Duvander and Johansson 2015; Duvander and Cedstrand 2022). By 2017, only 18 per cent of

fathers had not used any leave, and by 2019, around 20 per cent of couples shared leave equally during their child's first two years (Blum et al. 2023; Savage 2024). Other Nordic countries followed – Norway (1978), Iceland (1981), Denmark (1984) and Finland (1985) – introducing care policies to ensure that children received care from both parents and to make it easier for men and women to balance paid work and family responsibilities (Arnalds, Eydal and Gíslason 2022). Reserved leave for fathers, introduced in the late 1990s, further boosted men's participation and helped shift societal attitudes toward caregiving (Nordic Council of Ministers 2019).

Fathers who share leave are more likely to remain active caregivers as their children grow, and employer support for parental leave is now viewed as a tool to promote a better work-life balance for attracting and retaining talent. For instance, two Swedish companies, one in automotive manufacture and the other in digital media services, recently introduced comparable parental leave systems for their employees worldwide (Kvande and Brandth 2020; Savage 2024). Still, challenges remain: mothers continue to take most leave and unpaid care work remains unequally shared. Take-up also varies by income, education and social norms, highlighting the continued need for comprehensive, gender-responsive care policies and awareness-raising (Equimundo 2023).

Flexibility in the use of parental leave

Since parental leave is often long-term, some countries offer flexible options – such as taking parental leave on a part-time basis or split leave over a certain time period – to help parents balance work and care. Flexible options along these lines support continued labour force participation during intensive childcare periods, and can also ease operational pressures on employers by avoiding extended absences. Since 2013, parental leave in **Uruguay** – known as the half-time subsidy to care for the newborn – is a family entitlement that allows either parent to work half-time while receiving full-time pay during leave. The amount of the parental leave cash benefits is equivalent to 50 per cent of previous earnings, and they are covered by the Social Security Institute of Uruguay (BPS). They start at the end of maternity leave (14 weeks) until the newborn turns six months of age.

Australia provides up to 12 months of unpaid parental leave for both parents. From July 2025, eligible carers of a newborn or recently adopted child can receive up to 24 weeks of Parental Leave Pay at the minimum wage.⁷ The birth mother must approve how this leave is shared, with flexible use until the child turns two years old. Fifteen days are reserved for the mother's partner. Since August 2022, **Denmark** grants each parent 24 weeks of parental leave with benefits, including two weeks of compulsory leave and nine weeks of non-transferable leave. If not used before the child turns one, these are lost. An additional 26 weeks can be shared between parents to fit their needs.

Publicly funded parental leave schemes, cost-sharing models, and support for workforce planning and re-entry can help mitigate the challenges related to introducing or expanding parental leave policies. Well-designed parental leave systems that are predictable, flexible and adequately financed can support business continuity while enabling workers to care for their families – striking a sustainable balance between employee well-being and operational efficiency.

Financing paid parental leaves for all parents through social protection and based on effective social dialogue

The ILO Resolution concerning decent work and the care economy (2024) calls for the design and implementation of **integrated and coherent care policies and systems for decent work and gender equality. These policies should contribute to a rights-based approach for care and be grounded in international labour standards and social dialogue** (ILO 2024a).

⁷ Parental Leave Pay will be extended to 130 days (or 26 weeks) for children born or adopted starting 1 July 2026.

Access to adequately paid leave funded through social protection mechanisms can play a vital role in supporting gender equality, family well-being and income security for parents. Cash benefits set at an adequate level and provided through collectively financed mechanisms – such as compulsory social insurance, universal benefits or social assistance schemes – can ensure the income security of parents. Social protection along these lines is important to support parents in the labour market and to extend coverage so no one is left behind, and can also serve to lessen the financial burden placed on employers, particularly MSMEs.

In most countries, leave cash benefits are commonly calculated as a percentage of past earnings; however, the definition of past earnings may vary. In other countries, benefits can be capped instead of being linked to past earnings. And a third group of countries may provide a flat amount. When cash benefit schemes are not anchored to previous earnings, the resulting benefit levels may be inadequate, potentially discouraging parents – especially men, single parents and the self-employed – from taking leave. This can also lead to pay penalties for those who do take leave. Therefore, ensuring adequate benefit levels is crucial for promoting gender equality and increasing the uptake of parental leaves.

The design of funding mechanisms for parental leave cash benefits significantly affects access and actual leave uptake. ILO maternity protection standards require that cash benefits be provided through schemes based on solidarity and risk-pooling, such as compulsory social insurance or public funds, while strictly circumscribing the potential liability of employers for the direct cost of benefits (ILO 2021a).

Sustainable funding mechanisms that uphold the principle of universality are essential to extend parental protection (including maternity, paternity and parental leave) to categories of workers frequently excluded, as well as to disadvantaged groups. For example, legal data from 185 countries indicate that laws on maternity leave cash benefits cover self-employed women in 100 countries, representing approximately half of all self-employed women globally. By contrast, statutory paternity leave cash benefits for self-employed men are available in only 31 countries, covering just 4 per cent of all self-employed men worldwide. Similarly, only 36 countries extend parental leave cash benefits to self-employed parents, covering merely 3 per cent of self-employed workers globally (ILO, n.d.-a).

To reduce the financial burden on employers, especially MSMEs, some countries, such as **Denmark, Costa Rica** and the **Seychelles**, combine contributory and non-contributory social protection schemes to finance leave provisions. High levels of informality should not be a barrier, as innovative solutions can successfully extend social insurance coverage to informal workers (ILO 2021b). For example, **Mongolia** has extended maternity protection by combining contributory social insurance with welfare schemes, reaching the self-employed, herders, nomads and rural informal workers (ILO 2018). Mongolia also established “one-stop-shops”, namely delivery points where remote communities can access diverse services ranging from social protection benefits, employment services, land management, civil registration, bank and notary services. This has supported comprehensive and inclusive coverage despite the country's sparse population (Ortiz, Schmitt and De 2019).

In the **United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland** maternity and paternity leave cash benefits are paid to the parent by the employer, but medium and large business can claim back 92 per cent from the central government, while small businesses can claim back 103 per cent. In 2023, **Oman** adopted a new Social Protection Law developed with ILO technical assistance that is aligned with Convention No. 183, marking a regional milestone toward universal coverage (ILO 2023c). The law expands maternity benefits to 14 weeks of fully paid leave for mothers in full-time jobs and introduces seven days of job-protected, fully paid paternity leave to be used within 98 days of the child's birth. All employed Omani and non-Omani parents are eligible, with cash benefits funded through a 1 per cent monthly employer contribution to the Social Protection Fund (ILO 2024c).

► Improving parental leaves so no parent is left behind: An investment case

Reducing gender gaps in parental leaves through social protection-based mechanisms and leaving no mother or father behind requires the commitment of sustained public investment. The expansion of well-designed and comprehensive maternity protection and care leave and protection policies, including paternity and parental leave provisions should be provided based on a life-course approach in order to address the evolving needs of workers with family responsibilities across different employment types and life situations. To illustrate the related investment case, a simulation exercise of annual public investment was carried out for 118 countries based on the data and the ILO policy parameters of the ILO Care Policy Investment Simulator.

The aim of the simulation exercise was to show what it could look like if men and women had equal rights and opportunities to take parental leaves in law and practice. The simulation first ensured that women fully benefit from 14 weeks paid at 67 per cent of previous earnings – as per ILO Convention No.183 – and in parallel simulates that men benefit from the same provisions by 2035. The aim was to close current childcare policy gaps through a combination of childcare-related policies, including offering a continuum of gender-responsive parental leaves and childcare services (ILO 2023d).

Progressively equal parental leave policies, implemented alongside robust maternity protections consistent with ILO Convention No. 183, have demonstrated clear benefits for maternal and child health, as well as broader gender equality goals, without weakening essential health-specific protections for mothers (Heymann et al. 2017; Malamitsi-Puchner et al. 2023). Countries introducing reserved leave for fathers – including Iceland, Norway, Spain and Sweden – have maintained strong maternity leave entitlements and take-up rates among mothers while also successfully increasing fathers' leave uptake and involvement in care provision (Arnalds, Eydal and Gíslason 2022; Recio Alcaide, Serrano and Jiménez 2024). Aligning parental leave terms by gender thus reinforces maternal health protections, encourages more equitable care responsibilities and promotes gender equality in the labour market.

► **Box 4. The ILO Care Policy Investment Simulator: Progressively expanding leave provisions to support working parents**

The ILO Care Policy Investment Simulator estimates the additional investment required for publicly or collectively funded care policies to fill existing provision gaps. If the national care system entails more generous provision than 14 weeks paid at a rate of 67 per cent of previous earnings for a particular category of workers and sex, the simulation will calculate the required investment as zero, effectively maintaining the more generous current system to preserve social rights already obtained. The simulation assumes that all workers in the same category (namely, formal employees, formal self-employed and informally employed) are entitled to the same leave and cash benefits, covered exclusively by social insurance or public funds, without eligibility conditions such as a minimum number of weeks in employment.

- **Paid weeks of maternity leave and paternity leave:** 14 weeks paid at 67 per cent of previous earnings (equivalent to 9.38 weeks paid at 100 per cent).

The induced employment generated by the leave policy (both overall and formal) reflects the jobs created through increased household consumption. This is because part of job-protected leave benefits is expected to be spent in the wider economy. The assumption is that paid leave helps mothers and fathers stay in the workforce, rather than leaving their jobs entirely after having a child. Research shows that in countries with adequate childcare policies, mothers are more likely to maintain their working hours and income after childbirth. To estimate these additional jobs, a standard input-output analysis is used. Input-output tables track how industries are linked, showing what each sector produces, what inputs they need and how their output is consumed by households, government and exports.

Sources: De Henau 2022; ILO 2024d; ILO n.d.-b.

The simulation indicates that progressively providing men and women with more equal maternity and paternity leave entitlements (funded entirely through social insurance or public funds), would require, in 2019 prices, an additional global annual investment of US\$ 142 billion by 2035. This total expansion represents an average increase over the current public investment of 0.13 per cent of GDP across 118 countries (equivalent to an average of about US\$19 billion per year) by 2035, ranging from 0.08 per cent of GDP in Europe and Central Asia to 0.49 per cent of GDP in the Arab States (see table below).

The level of investment needed would vary significantly by category of worker and by region. **At the global level, the expansion needed to provide 14 weeks of maternity leave paid at 67 per cent of previous earnings for all formally and informally employed workers including those in self-employment is 0.04 per cent of GDP.** Low-income countries would need to increase their investment by 0.21 per cent of GDP; while middle-income countries and high-income countries would need to invest between 0.02 and 0.05 per cent of GDP more so that all countries align their maternity leave scheme to Convention No. 183. This lower figure is because most high- and middle-income countries already provide maternity leave provisions that last 14 or more weeks with the cash benefits being at least two thirds of the woman's precious earnings. In addition, the bulk of the extension in paid maternity leave in low-income countries would go towards potential mothers in informal employment.

To provide an equal duration of paternity leave, countries would need to expand the annual investment, on average, by 0.09 per cent of GDP. All regions would need to invest a higher amount given the current gaps in legislation in terms of the duration of and source of funding for paternity leave. The Arab States might need to invest, on average, an additional 0.36 per cent of GDP to provide 14 weeks of paternity leave for formal employees, the self-employed and the informally employed, compared to 0.17 per cent of GDP in Africa, 0.09 per cent in the Americas and 0.08 per cent or less in Asia and the Pacific and Europe and Central Asia. As with maternity leave, lower-income countries face higher relative investment needs to cover paternity leave for the informally employed, due to the greater prevalence of informal employment in these countries. Closing the gender gap in parental leaves may have an induced effect in employment by helping both women and men stay in the workforce and spend a portion of their maintained household income in the local economy (see box 4). **Globally, this investment in expanding maternity and paternity leave could generate more than 4 million induced formal jobs. This higher employment – or rather the resulting increase in earnings and consumption – could be taxed, and thus partly “self-fund” the investment needed (ILO 2024d).**

- **Average additional annual investment needed at the country level to equalize maternity and paternity leave at 14 weeks paid at a rate of at least 67 per cent of previous earnings, by region and national income level, 2035 (simulated) (percentage of GDP)**

Region/income group	Gross additional annual investment (% GDP)	Maternity leave				Paternity leave			
		Formal employees	Formal self-employed	Informally employed	All employed	Formal employees	Formal self-employed	Informally employed	All employed
World	0.13%	0.022%	0.003%	0.015%	0.04%	0.058%	0.008%	0.023%	0.09%
Africa	0.28%	0.004%	0.013%	0.096%	0.11%	0.036%	0.017%	0.114%	0.17%
Americas	0.17%	0.066%	0.003%	0.009%	0.08%	0.074%	0.006%	0.010%	0.09%
Arab States	0.49%	0.065%	0.005%	0.057%	0.13%	0.171%	0.043%	0.149%	0.36%
Asia and the Pacific	0.10%	0.002%	0.002%	0.017%	0.02%	0.043%	0.005%	0.028%	0.08%
Europe and Central Asia	0.08%	0.001%	0.001%	0.008%	0.01%	0.054%	0.011%	0.009%	0.07%
Low-income	0.42%	0.010%	0.027%	0.168%	0.21%	0.012%	0.034%	0.173%	0.22%
Lower-middle-income	0.16%	0.003%	0.004%	0.042%	0.05%	0.028%	0.010%	0.076%	0.11%
Upper-middle-income	0.11%	0.002%	0.001%	0.017%	0.02%	0.060%	0.006%	0.027%	0.09%
High-income	0.13%	0.038%	0.003%	0.009%	0.05%	0.062%	0.008%	0.011%	0.08%

Note: Averages based on 118 countries and weighted by the projected GDP in US\$ by 2035. Source: ILO, n.d.-b.

► Conclusion: More balanced parental leaves for gender equality at work

Parental leave policies must go beyond formal entitlements to become effective tools that actively promote the redistribution of care responsibilities and support women's labour force participation and earnings. The 2024 ILO Resolution concerning decent work and the care economy calls for ILO Member States to ensure appropriate responses to the needs of all workers with care responsibilities through comprehensive maternity protection and care leave and protection policies, including paternity, parental and long-term care leave. To achieve this, policy design and adequate financing matter.

Providing father-specific parental leave can reduce discrimination against women and help shift gender norms within households (Barker et al. 2015). However, **the global average for paid parental leaves reserved for fathers remains just 2.2 weeks, compared to an average of 24.7 weeks available to mothers. Without adequate gender-responsive maternity, paternity and parental protection for both men and women, traditional societal roles and gender gaps at work are perpetuated.** Drawing from national experiences, this policy brief took stock of current entitlements and presented policy options countries can consider in order to reduce the gender gap in paid parental leaves:

1. **Align maternity protection with ILO standards for all employed women.** As the most up-to-date standard on this topic, Convention No. 183 sets a benchmark of at least 14 weeks of paid maternity leave at two thirds of previous earnings, financed through social protection. As of June 2025, there are 54 countries and territories with maternity protection schemes that are already aligned with the provisions of ILO Convention No. 183, but they have not yet ratified it. Common challenges related alignment with Convention No. 183 are the insufficient duration of maternity leave and reliance on employer liability for funding. As June 2025 also marks the 25th anniversary of the adoption of Convention No. 183, this milestone offers a timely opportunity for ILO constituents to reaffirm their commitment to universal maternity protection and gender equality at work.
2. **Recognize and support fathers' caregiving role through paid paternity leave.** Strengthening paternity leave through job protection, public financing, adequate duration and income is critical to promote shared caregiving. Introducing and extending the duration of paid paternity leave, removing employer liability and designing non-transferable leave entitlements and incentives for fathers can increase uptake and redistribute care among parents.
3. **Provide paid parental leave to each parent.** When parental leave is allocated to households rather than to each parent individually, it does not necessarily lead to more equal leave take-up by parents and better distribution of family responsibilities at home (ILO 2019). Without each parent receiving non-transferable leave entitlements and adequate benefits anchored to former income for the full leave duration, mothers remain the default leave-takers due to social norms, stigma against men's caregiving and gender pay gaps. Awareness-raising, proactive policies that encourage men's participation in parental leave – such as non-transferable parental entitlements – or offer flexible leave use – such as part-time or split options – and other incentives can support take-up among fathers.
4. **Promote income security and universal coverage through social protection and social dialogue.** Insufficiently paid leave, employer liability or restrictive eligibility discourage the use of parental leaves, particularly among fathers. Adequate and inclusive financing mechanisms based on universal social protection systems and policy design grounded on effective social dialogue are important to extend coverage to categories of workers and business that are usually excluded, including MSMEs, self-employed, informal and migrant workers, and those in diverse forms of work. Country examples and ILO macrosimulations show that comprehensive reforms are possible, and that effectively and gradually closing the gender gap in paid parental leaves is both feasible and affordable across a range of national contexts.

► Appendix 1. ILO legal data review

Legal information for the ILO *Care at Work* report (2022a) is based on data available as of December 2021, collected through a comprehensive comparative analysis of national level provisions on maternity protection and care leave and services for workers with family responsibilities. Since the publication of the *Care at Work* report in March 2022, the ILO has incorporated legal updates for several countries. Hence, national legal information in this brief may reflect changes in the legislation introduced after 2021 and may not coincide with the country-level data provided in *Care at Work* report. For a list of the included countries by region and income level, please refer to ILO 2022a and the ILO Global Care Policy Portal. Averages in the brief are population weighted.

► Appendix 2. Gender gap in paid parental leaves

The gender gap in paid parental leaves is built on the assumption that families will allocate and use all of the paid leave that is available. The leave provisions presented reflects the statutory leave provision for the private sector. However, it is important to consider that some countries may have different leave provisions between districts, regions and states within the same country. Additionally, there may be specific norms that allow or restrict the entitlement to paid leave to certain groups, such as same-sex parents, adoptive parents and self-employed workers, among others. These considerations will affect the actual gap duration and the leave entitlement received by families.

Paid parental leaves available to mothers

Paid maternity leave

Maternity leave refers to the leave around the time of childbirth that allows mothers to rest, heal, recover, breastfeed and take care of a newborn child.

- **Paid maternity leave (weeks) (1):** The duration of paid maternity leave is expressed in weeks and excludes all unpaid leave periods. The leave duration is converted into weeks based on one week being equal to seven consecutive days (or five working days, if national law defines it so), and one year is equal to 365 days, 52 weeks and 12 months. As per ILO Convention No. 183, maternity leave refers to the prenatal, childbirth and postnatal periods. It must be at least 14 weeks, including a compulsory leave period of six weeks after childbirth. Prenatal maternity leave is not available in all countries; others allow mothers to choose when to start their prenatal maternity leave (even on the day of the childbirth); while others have a mandatory prenatal period that can last between one to ten weeks before the expected time of delivery. However, the structure and conditions are determined by each country.
- **Maternity leave cash benefits (%) (2):** Percentage of previous earnings paid over the total period of paid maternity leave. If the leave is paid at different rates, a weighted average is calculated by multiplying each duration period by the corresponding rate. For flat-rate benefits, the percentage of previous earnings is calculated by dividing the flat-rate by the average wage in the country (ILOSTAT). If multiple payment options exist based on the duration of the leave, the highest option is assumed under the assumption that families will opt for the highest-paid leave option. All funding sources (social security, employer liability or mixed) are included.
- **Paid maternity leave – full-rate equivalent (3) = (1) x (2):** Length of paid maternity leave in weeks if the total benefit amount received was paid at 100 per cent of previous earnings. It is calculated by multiplying the duration of leave in weeks by the payment rate received over the duration of the leave. This allows for standardized cross-country comparisons.

Paid parental leave available to mothers

Parental leave is often (but not in all countries) supplementary to maternity and paternity leave to allow parents to care of an infant or young child, available after the expiration of the maternity and paternity period.. Parental leave also includes childcare leave. Although parental leave is usually long, it can sometimes be taken flexibly in portions over a longer period (for example, until the child is 8 or 12 years old). Parental leave could be available to (1) each parent (mother and father) as an individual and non-transferrable right (e.g. Belgium, Japan and United Arab Emirates); (2) to each parent as an individual but transferable right, where a portion or the totality of the individual entitlement could be transferred from one parent to the other (e.g. Canada, Denmark and Slovenia); (3) to either parent or other caregivers as a family right that can only be used by one family member (e.g. Chile, Iceland and Turkmenistan). To the purpose of assigning parental leave entitlements between parents, this study assumes that any paid leave available to the family (3) or any portion of leave that is transferable from the father to the mother (2), will be used by the mother.

- **Paid parental leave available to mothers (weeks) (4):** Duration in weeks of paid parental leave that is (1) assigned to mothers as an individual and non-transferrable right; (2) assigned to fathers but can be transferred to mothers, or (3) parental leave assigned as a family entitlement that can be used by only one family member. Unpaid periods are excluded. A consecutive weekday criterium is applied, namely a week is equivalent to seven or 5 working days (as specified by national laws).
- **Parental leave cash benefits (%) (5):** Percentage of previous earnings paid over the total period of parental leave available to mothers. If the leave is paid at different rates, a weighted average is calculated. For flat-rate benefits, the percentage of previous earnings was calculated by dividing the flat-rate benefit by the average wage in the country (ILOSTAT). If multiple payment options exist based on the duration of the leave the highest option is assumed under the assumption that families will opt for the highest-paid leave option. All funding sources (social security, employer liability or mixed) are included.
- **Paid parental leave available to mothers – full-rate equivalent (weeks) (6) = (4) x (5):** Length of the paid leave in weeks if the total benefit amount received was paid at 100 per cent of previous earnings. It is calculated by multiplying the duration of leave in days by the payment rate received over the duration of the leave. This allows for standardized cross-country comparisons.

Total paid parental leaves available to mothers

To estimate the total duration of paid parental leaves available to mothers (excluding any length of paid parental leave that is for the exclusive use of the father as a non-transferrable right):

- **Paid parental leaves available to mothers (weeks) (7) = (1) + (4):** Sum of paid maternity leave and paid parental leave available to mothers.
- **Paid parental leaves available to mothers (weeks) – full-rate equivalent (weeks) (8) = (3) + (6):** This corresponds to the paid maternity leave full-rate equivalent plus the full-rate equivalent of paid parental leave available to mothers.

Paid parental leaves reserved for fathers

Paid paternity leave

Paternity leave is defined as a leave period reserved for the father or partner of the birthing parent in relation to childbirth or leave that can be used exclusively by fathers or partners as paternity leave. It does not include “special” leave provisions in addition to annual leave that may be used by fathers at the time of birth, which are not strictly and explicitly “paternity leave” and linked to the birth of a child.

- **Paid paternity leave (weeks) (9):** Duration of paid paternity leave expressed in weeks and excludes all unpaid leave periods. A leave duration of one year is equal to 365 days, 52 weeks and 12 months. If the leave is 14 days or less, it is converted assuming a five-day work week; while for longer periods a seven-day week is used (so, for example, a

paternity leave provision of ten working days would be equivalent to two weeks instead of 1.4 weeks), unless defined in the law.

- **Paternity leave cash benefits (%) (10):** Percentage of previous earnings paid over the total period of paid paternity leave. If the leave is paid at different rates, a weighted average is calculated. For flat-rate benefits, the percentage of previous earnings is calculated by dividing the flat-rate benefit by the average wage in the country (ILOSTAT). If multiple payment options exist based on the duration of the leave, the highest option is assumed under the assumption that families will opt for the highest-paid leave option. All funding sources (social security, employer liability or mixed) are included.
- **Paid paternity leave – full-rate equivalent (11) = (9) x (10):** Length of paid paternity leave in weeks if the total benefit amount received was paid at 100 per cent of previous earnings. It is calculated by multiplying the duration of the leave in days by the payment rate received over the duration of the leave. This allows for standardized cross-country comparisons.

Paid parental leave reserved for fathers

- **Paid parental leave reserved for fathers (weeks) (12):** Duration in weeks of paid parental leave that is reserved for fathers as an individual and non-transferrable right. It excludes all unpaid leave periods. A consecutive weekday criterium is applied, namely a week is equivalent to seven consecutive days, unless national law refers to working days. In those cases, a week is equivalent to five working days.
- **Parental leave cash benefits reserved for fathers (%) (13):** Percentage of previous earnings paid over the total period of the parental leave reserved for fathers. If the leave is paid at different rates, a weighted average is calculated. For flat-rate benefits, the percentage of previous earnings is calculated by dividing the flat-rate benefit by the average wage in the country (ILOSTAT). If multiple payment options exist based on the duration of the leave, the highest option is assumed under the assumption that families will opt for the highest-paid leave option. All funding sources (social security, employer liability or mixed) are included.
- **Paid parental leave reserved for fathers – full-rate equivalent (weeks) (14) = (12) x (13):** Length of the paid leave in weeks if the total benefit amount received was paid at 100 per cent of previous earnings. It is calculated by multiplying the duration of the leave in days by the payment rate received over the duration of the leave. This allows for standardized cross-country comparisons.

Total paid parental leaves reserved for fathers

To estimate the total duration of paid parental leaves reserved for fathers (any leave that can be transferred to the mother is excluded):

- **Paid parental leaves reserved for fathers (weeks) (15) = (9) + (12):** Sum of paid paternity leave and paid parental leave reserved for fathers.
- **Paid parental leaves reserved for fathers – full-rate equivalent (weeks) (16) = (11) + (14):** This corresponds to the paid paternity leave full-rate equivalent plus the full-rate equivalent of paid parental leave reserved for fathers.

Gender gap in paid parental leaves

The gender gap in paid parental leaves measures is the difference between the total duration of paid parental leaves available to mothers and the total duration of paid parental leaves reserved for fathers. Any unpaid leave is excluded from the calculations.

- **Gender gap in paid parental leaves (weeks) (17) = (7) – (15):** Difference between the total paid parental leaves available to mothers and the total paid parental leaves reserved for fathers measured in number of weeks.
- **Gender gap in paid parental leaves – full-rate equivalent (weeks) (18) = (8) – (16):** Length of the gender gap in paid parental leaves in weeks if the total benefit amount received was paid at a 100 per cent of previous earnings. This allows for standardized cross-country comparisons as payment rates varies across countries.

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