

Economic empowerment

Maternity and paternity leave and related benefits



Key points

- As of 2020, 38 States Members of the United Nations had ratified the Maternity Protection Convention (Convention No. 183) adopted by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 2000.¹
- In 2020, of the 185 countries and territories with available data, 53% offer at least 14 weeks of maternity leave, an increase from 38% in 1994.
- As of 2020, 77% of the 185 countries and territories with available data had granted two thirds of women's previous earnings as maternity leave benefits.
- Of the 188 countries and territories with available data reviewed by the World Bank in 2020, 103 countries (55%) have provisions for paternity leave, an increase over the 30 countries (16%) that offered such leave in 1995. As reported by the World Bank, globally, the median length of paid paternity leave is five days, a low number when compared with the 56 days of paternity leave granted in some high-income States members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

Background

Maternity protection, which is a fundamental human right and a critical element of policies balancing the participation of women and men in family and work life, covers, inter alia: the prevention of exposure to health and safety hazards during and after pregnancy; entitlement to paid maternity leave and breastfeeding breaks; maternal and child health care; protection against discrimination in employment and occupations, including with respect to recruitment and dismissal; and the guaranteed right to return to the same position or an equivalent position after maternity leave.²

Maternity protection not only contributes to the health and well-being of mothers and their children, it also promotes gender equality in the workplace. Three conventions on maternity protection have been adopted by ILO, in 1919, 1952 and 2000: the most recent, the Maternity Protection Convention (Convention No. 183), stipulates that women should be entitled to no less than 14 weeks of maternity leave, with paid cash benefits amounting to at least two thirds of their normal earnings.³

Current situation

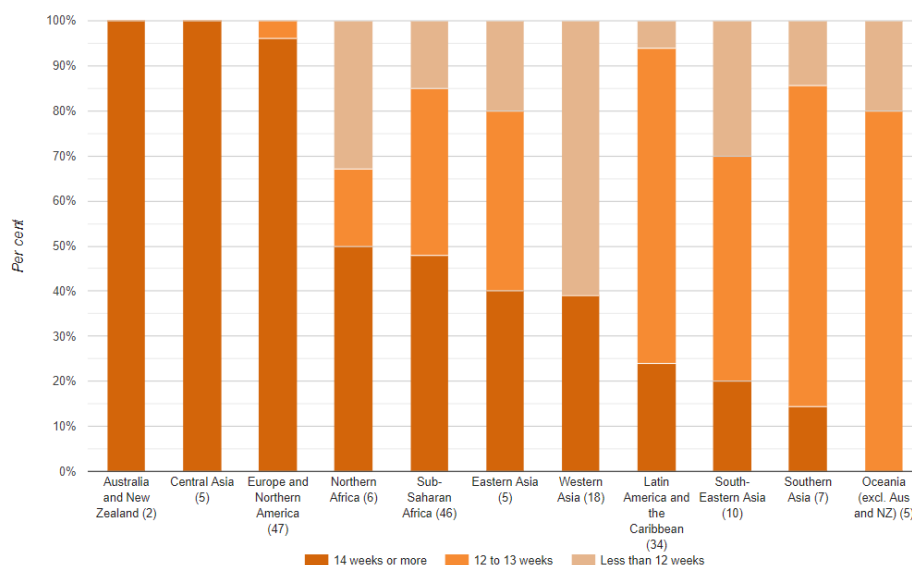
Worldwide in 2020 over 50% of countries offer at least 14 weeks of maternity leave, a marked increase over the last 25 years

As of 2020, 38 States Members of the United Nations in regions throughout the world had ratified the Maternity Leave Convention (Convention No. 183), 24 of them in developed regions: more than half (53%) of the 185 countries with available data offer 14 weeks minimum statutory maternity leave, specifying such leave in national laws and regulations, as recommended in Convention No. 183.

As of 2020, Australia and New Zealand and all countries in Central Asia offer at least 14 weeks of maternity leave. Almost all countries in developed regions have also followed the recommendation in Convention No. 183, with

the exception of Iceland (13 weeks) and the United States of America (12 weeks). Entitlement to maternity leave has been increased up to 52 weeks in five countries in Europe,⁴ and up to 59 weeks in Croatia, since the adoption of the Maternity Protection Convention in 2000. It should be noted that in these countries, women's labour force participation has grown in recent years, contrary to the global trend. In contrast, less than a quarter of countries with available data in Latin America and the Caribbean (24%), South-Eastern Asia (20%), Southern Asia (14%) and Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand) (0%) offer 14 weeks or more of maternity leave (see figure I). Globally, the proportion of countries with available data offering a minimum of 14 weeks of maternity leave increased from 38% to 53% during the period from 1994 to 2020.

Figure I: Distribution of countries with maternity leave provisions by length of leave and by region: 2020



Source: Calculated by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Development (UNDESA), Statistics Division, using data from the United Nations Minimum Set of Gender Indicators (last accessed on 29 May 2020).

Note: Numbers in brackets denote the number of countries in the region with available data: calculations for Oceania (excl. Australia and New Zealand) include the following five countries in the region: Fiji, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

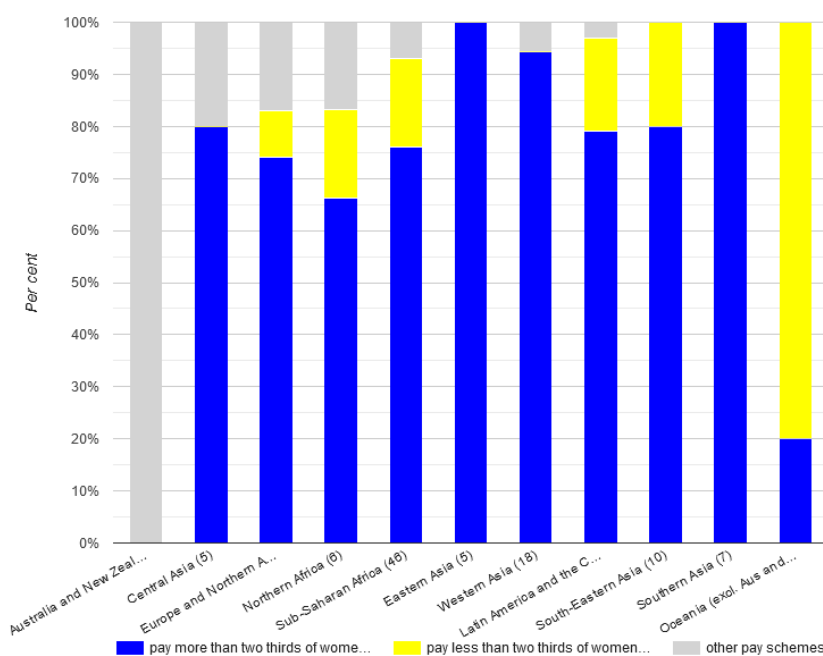
Four out of five countries grant at least two thirds of women's previous earnings as maternity leave payments as recommended by ILO Convention No. 183

According to ILO Convention No. 183, women should be granted paid cash benefits of at least two thirds of their previous earnings during maternity leave. In 2020, out of 185 countries with available information on maternity leave, 143 (77%) meet this criterion, including all countries in Eastern Asia and Southern Asia.⁵ The proportion that meet the criterion is slightly lower in Western Asia (94%), South-Eastern Asia (80%), Latin America and the Caribbean (79%), sub-Saharan Africa (76%) and Northern America and Europe (74%). Some countries have other pay schemes with conditional benefits constituting a higher or a lower proportion of maternity leave payments than two thirds of women's previous income (see figure II).

Three countries, Lesotho, Papua New Guinea and the United States (except the State of California), did not have legal provisions to provide cash benefits for women on maternity leave. In Tunisia, cash benefits during maternity leave for employed women varied based on institutional and economic sectors: while women employed in the

agriculture sector received 50% of their flat-rate daily wage during maternity leave, payments amounted to the full salary for women working as civil servants.

Figure II: Proportion of countries providing women with paid cash benefits during maternity leave by type of cash benefits, by region: 2020



Source: Calculated by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Development (UNDESA), Statistics Division, using preliminary data from the United Nations Minimum Set of Gender Indicators (last accessed on 29 May 2020).

Note: Numbers in brackets denote the number of countries in the region with available data: calculations for Oceania (excl. Australia and New Zealand) should be interpreted with caution as data were available for only five countries in the region.

Paternity leave is becoming more common

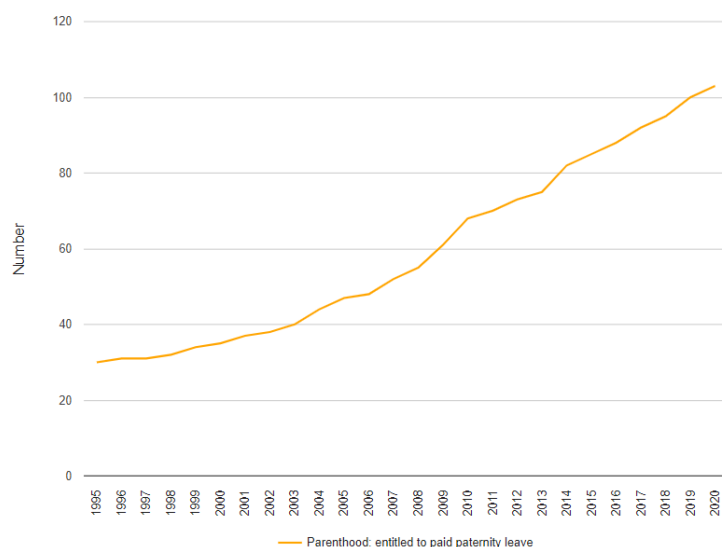
Many countries have adopted maternity and paternity benefits through legislation, benefitting both mothers and fathers. Paternity leave is a short period of leave for the father following the arrival of his child(ren), with the objective of encouraging fathers to assist in childcare and to attend to other family-related responsibilities. Paternity leave has become more common: in 2020, among 188 United Nations Member States and territories with available data worldwide, 103 countries (55%) had provisions on paternity leave, up from the 30 countries (16%) that provided such leave in 1995 (see figure III).

In 2020 in developed regions, new fathers are not entitled to paid paternity leave in Austria, Belarus, Switzerland, Israel, Montenegro, New Zealand, the Russian Federation, San Marino, Slovakia and Ukraine. Twenty-six countries in sub-Saharan Africa and 17 countries and territories in Latin America and the Caribbean do not mandate paid time off for new fathers. In 2020, the median length of paid paternity leave worldwide was five days, similar to the corresponding figures observed in countries in sub-Saharan Africa (3 days) and Latin America

and the Caribbean (5 days), a low number when compared with the 56 days of paternity leave provided in some high income States members of OECD.⁶ The European Union work-life balance directive, which entered into force as of 1 August 2019, extends the length of paternity leave in EU member states to at least 10 working days.⁷

Paternity leave also has significant positive effects on women's **employment**, with an estimated increase of almost 7% in the proportion of women employed in private firms in developing regions when paternity leave is mandated.⁸

Figure III: Number of countries and territories with legislation on paid paternity leave: 1995–2020



Source: World Bank, 2020, Women, Business and the Law, time series (<https://datacatalog.worldbank.org/dataset/women-business-and-law>), 2020 (last accessed on 29 May 2020).

Note: Assessment based on 188 countries with available data.

Institution in focus: United Nations

In 2019, the Chair of the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) communicated his commitment to reviewing parental leave entitlements to balance participation of all United Nations staff, irrespective of gender, in family and work life. If endorsed by ICSC, the proposed gender responsive and family-friendly policies, such as paid parental leave for all parents, including those who adopt, foster or have children through surrogacy or assisted reproductive technology, would set the standards of inclusive participation, respect for diversity and work-life balance called for in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in order to promote a gender-equal world.^{9 10}

Social protection

In 2016, the proportion of mothers giving birth who were covered by maternity cash benefits stood at 41% worldwide. The proportion was above 90% in developed regions (94% in Europe and almost 100% in Australia and

New Zealand and Northern America) but varied greatly among developing regions, ranging from 69% in Northern Africa to 2% in sub-Saharan Africa.^{11 12}

About the data

Definitions

- **Length of maternity leave; Percentage of wages paid during maternity leave; Number of countries with paid paternity leave provisions:** These indicators provide information on maternity and paternity leave and related benefits.

Coverage and availability

185 United Nations Member States and territories with available data under the relevant indicators of the United Nations Minimum Set of Gender Indicators;¹³ and the paternity leave policies of 188 United Nations Member States and territories reviewed by the World Bank.¹⁴

Footnotes

1. [International Labour Organization \(ILO\)](#) .
2. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Development (UNDESA), Statistics Division, The World's Women 2015: Trends and Statistics, New York, 2015 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.15.XVII.8).
3. International Labour Organization (ILO), Maternity Protection Convention, No. 183, Geneva, 2000.
4. Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.
5. Not all of the countries that meet this criterion provided the minimum statutory maternity leave of 14 weeks.
6. World Bank, Women, Business and the Law, Washington, D.C., 2020.
7. [European Commission, "EU Work-life Balance Directive enters into force", 2019](#) .
8. World Bank, "Does Paternity Leave Matter for Female Employment in Developing Economies?", Policy Research Working Papers, Washington, D.C., 2016.
9. Source: [Letter to staff from the Chair of the International Civil Service Commission \(ICSC\) dated 20 December 2019](#) . (Last accessed on 27 July 2020).
10. Parental leave is a relatively long-term leave available to parents, allowing them to take care of children over a period of time usually following the maternity or paternity leave period (ILO, Maternity at work: A review of national legislation, second edition, Geneva, 2010). As of 2017, paternity leave for United Nations staff was provided for a total period of up to 20 working days, or up to 40 working days for internationally recruited staff members serving at a non-family duty station or in exceptional circumstances (ST/AI/2005/2 and Amendments 1 and 2).
11. Source: [Global SDG Indicators Database](#) . (last accessed on 27 July 2020).
12. The proportion of mothers with newborns receiving maternity cash benefits includes all women giving birth: estimates for Northern America, Australia and New Zealand and sub-Saharan Africa regions should be interpreted with caution as they are based on reported data coverage below 40% of the population.
13. [United Nations Department of Economic and Social Development \(UNDESA\), Statistics Division, United Nations Minimum Set of Gender Indicators](#) .
14. World Bank, Women, Business and the Law, Washington, D.C., 2020.