

Box 5.1. Child-related leaves in OECD countries

The five most common forms of child-related leave are:

Maternity leave (or pregnancy leave): Employment-protected leave of absence for employed women at around the time of childbirth, or adoption in some countries. The ILO convention on maternity leave stipulates the period of leave to be at least 14 weeks. In most countries beneficiaries may combine pre- with post-birth leave; in some countries a short period of pre-birth leave is compulsory as is a six- to ten-week leave period following birth. Almost all OECD countries provide for specific public income support payments that are tied to the maternity leave period.

Paternity leave: Employment-protected leave of absence for employed fathers at the time of childbirth. Paternity leave is not stipulated by an ILO convention. Periods of paternity leave are much shorter than for maternity leave, and are three weeks at maximum. Because of the short period of absence, workers on paternity leave often continue to receive full wage payments.

Parental leave: Employment-protected leave of absence for employed parents, which is often supplementary to specific maternity- and paternity-leave periods (as above), and usually, but not in all countries, follows the period of maternity leave (If there is no specified maternity leave, as in Australia, OECD, 2002a, a portion of parental leave is reserved for women, to ensure a period of physical convalescence and recovery after childbirth). Entitlement to the parental leave period is individual, while entitlement to public income support is often family-based, so that only one parent claims such support at any one time.

Home-care leaves: Leaves to care for children until they are about three years old. These leaves can be a variation of parental leaves, and payments are not restricted to parents with a prior work attachment. In Norway and Finland relevant income support payments are contingent on not using public day-care facilities. In general, payments are intended to supplement family income while one parent is at home or to purchase private care (see Box 5.3).

Short-term leave to care for sick children: Being able to care for a sick child is important to any working parent. In some countries there are legal entitlements, for example, in Norway and Sweden there is a statutory right to take off work to mind sick children, often, however, such provisions are covered in collective agreements. Arrangements are most generous in Sweden where parents are entitled to take 60 days per annum to care for sick children; the system is used excessively (about 20% of sick days taken) as for sick children under 12 no doctor's certificate is required (Engström *et al.*, 2007). In Denmark, parents are entitled to take one day off work; thereafter it is assumed that parents will be able to make other arrangements. Stipulations in collective agreements can take different forms, including allowing parents to take more days than the legal entitlement, top up income support to full wages, allowing the use of worker's sick-days to care for sick children. Often, however, arrangements are made on *ad hoc* and informal basis, so that the overall importance of short-term leave to mind sick children is unknown, but it seems difficult to overestimate its value to working families.