

PF8: Use of childbirth-related leave by mothers and fathers

Definitions and methodology

There are considerable cross-national differences in the use of leave entitlements by parents. To some extent this is related to entitlements to leave around childbirth (maternity, paternity and parental leaves) being conditional on previous work experience, and there are considerable cross-national differences in the tightness of access criteria (PF7). Furthermore, even when parents are entitled to parental leave periods they do not always make full use of these entitlements. Some parents (and this often concerns fathers rather than mothers) are reluctant to make use of their leave entitlement for a longer period of time as not being on the job may hamper career development and earnings progression. The availability of income support during the leave period is another key factor determining the parental use of leave entitlements. In most countries, maternity leave is both obligatory and paid at a relatively high proportion of previous earnings, while prolonged parental leave periods (and/or home care payments) are generally paid at a much lower rate. Paternity leave often concerns a relatively short period of time (frequently up to two weeks) which contributes to it often being paid at 100% of earnings.

A comprehensive assessment of the use of leave ideally includes two indicators: the proportion of eligible parents among the working parents with children; and, the take-up rates of leave among those eligible parents. However, while information on the number of people on leave and/or the number of benefit recipients (administrative data) may be available, there is no comprehensive information on the eligible population for most countries. Such information often becomes available through specific (and irregular) surveys on the topic, but with cross-survey differences in questions and reporting methods it is difficult to build a comparable dataset on take-up rates.

The European Labour Force Survey (ELFS) contains information on parents in employment with young children on leave. The ELFS can be used to estimate, for a given year, the proportion of parents on leave (either on maternity, paternity or parental leave) among the employed population with children not yet one year of age. Again, this is not an indicator on *take-up*: it measures the *use* of parental leave as influenced by international differences in coverage of parental leave entitlements.

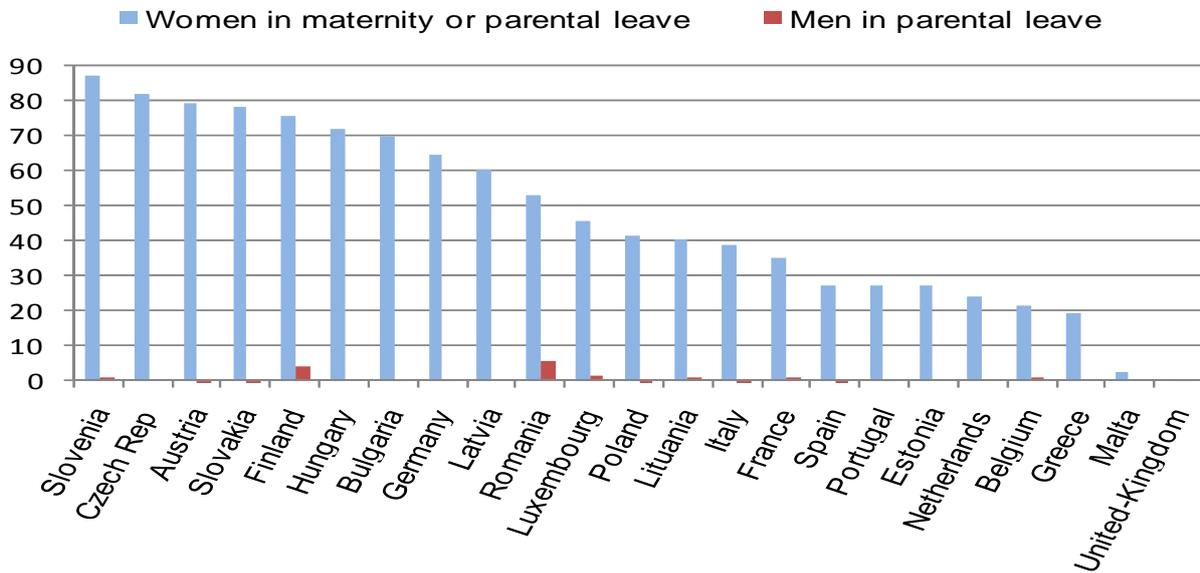
Chart PF8.1 considers all employed parents with a child under age 1, and Chart PF8.2 compares the proportion of parents with a child under age 1 by the birth order of the child. Data concern parents on statutory maternity, paternity or parental leave and/or contractual employer-provided leave (see PF7). Parents who do not work in the aftermath of the period of leave, or who have ceased to receive parental leave payments are not counted as “on leave”, but are categorized as inactive. Since parental leave periods are generally short, the probability for fathers with children under age 1 to be on paternity leave at the time of the survey is low (see below), and for that reason, Chart PF8.2 only considers mothers.

Key findings

Chart PF8.1 shows the proportion of women and men with a child under age 1 on maternity or parental leave. Maternity and parental leave are considered jointly because they cannot be separated in the data and because they are often taken within the first year of childbirth and/adoption. Chart PF8.1 clearly shows that fathers are much less likely to be on parental leave than mothers. Furthermore, mothers in countries where policy facilitates prolonged leave periods (Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Finland, Slovenia and the Slovak Republic) are most likely to be on leave during the first year.

Other relevant indicators: Key characteristics of parental leave systems (PF7); Additional leave entitlements of working parents (PF9); and, Family-friendly workplace practices (LMF14).

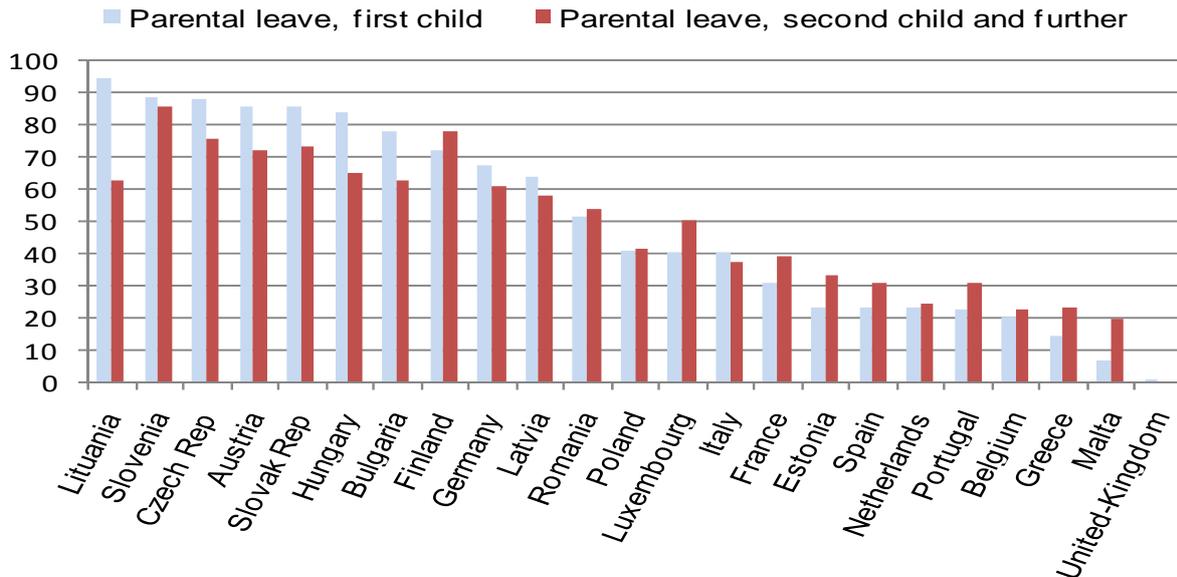
Chart PF8.1: Proportion of employed parents with a child under age 1 on leave.



Source: The European Labour Force Survey, 2006.

Chart PF8.2 shows that the probability of using parental leave varies by the rank order of children. In countries (except Finland) where the proportion of employed mothers on leave is relatively high, the likelihood that mothers are on leave for their second or third child is relatively low. By contrast in countries where the proportion of mothers on leave is low, the likelihood increases for second or third children.

Chart PF8.2: Proportion of employed mothers with a child under 1 on leave, by rank order of the child.



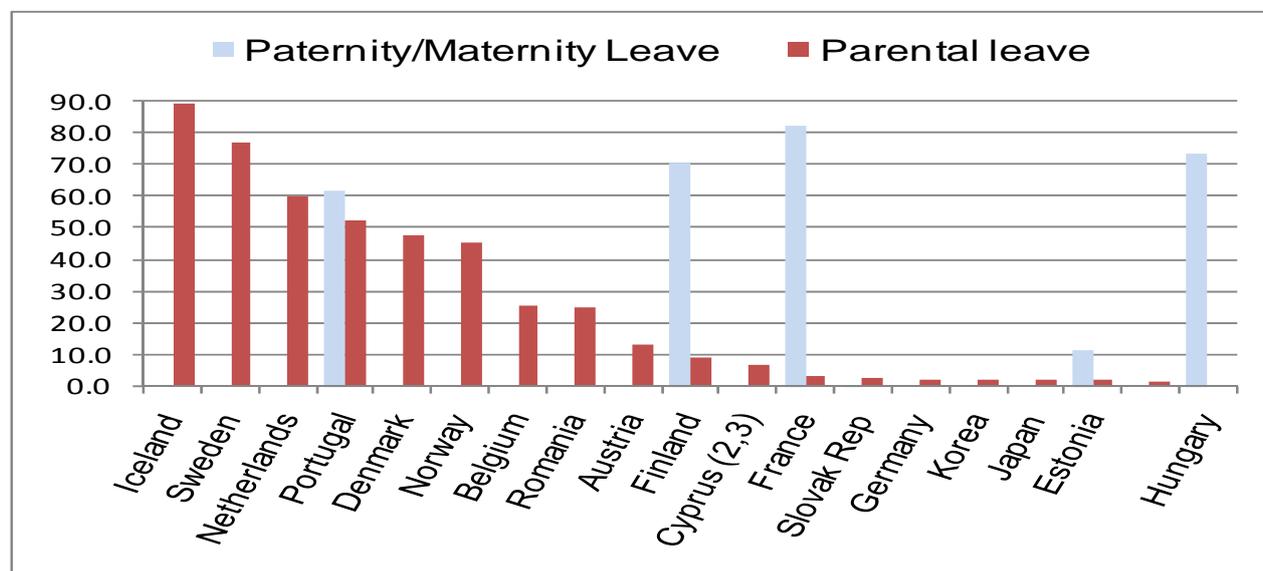
Source: The European Labour Force Survey, 2006.

Comparability and data issues

The *European Labour Force Survey* only allows for a rough estimate of use of leave which is likely to be biased downwards for variety of reasons; parents on a prolonged (over one year) unpaid leave can be identified as inactive in most countries, while parents on part-time leave will be counted as employed. In addition, the proportion of leave-takers is estimated and the probability of being on leave is thus determined by the available duration of (in particular paid) leave. Since the period of leave taken by fathers is generally much shorter than those taken by mothers, the probability to identify fathers on leave is relatively low.

Several countries provided more or less detailed data on the use of leave policies (see the list of countries in chart PF8.3). Data is not strictly comparable as reporting methods differ, but they nevertheless clearly point to large differences in the use of leave across countries, also by gender. Chart PF8.3 illustrates gender differences in the use of leave entitlements, as measured by the ratio between the total number of fathers using either their paternity leave compared to the number of mothers using their maternity entitlement, or the ration of fathers taking at least one day of parental leave compared to the corresponding number of mothers. The ratios are always below one hundred since the number of fathers taking leaves is lower than the number of women. However, the ratio of fathers taking paternity leave is higher than those taking parental leave, especially in Finland or France where paternity leave is relatively short and well-paid compared to the parental leave benefit (see PF7). Cross-country differences in the relative number of fathers taking parental leave are also very large. The ratio is relatively high in Iceland and Sweden where there are about respectively 89 and 77 fathers taking parental leave for 100 women; by contrast, less than 2 men for 100 women use their entitlement to parental leave in Germany, Japan or Korea.

Chart PF8.3 Ratio of Fathers to Mothers using their entitlement to leave, 2007¹



¹ year 2005 for Japan; 2006: Iceland.

² Footnote by Turkey: The information in this document with reference to "Cyprus" relates to the southern part of the Island. There is no single authority representing both Turkish and Greek Cypriot people on the Island. Turkey recognizes the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). Until a lasting and equitable solution is found within the context of United Nations, Turkey shall preserve its position concerning the "Cyprus issue".

³ Footnote by all the European Union Member States of the OECD and the European Commission: The Republic of Cyprus is recognized by all members of the United Nations with the exception of Turkey. The information in this document relates to the area under the effective control of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus.

Sources: Data from Family Database questionnaire sent to countries on parental leave, except for Iceland: Social Protection in the Nordic countries, 2006/7.

Differences in take-up rates of leave are also difficult to capture since data on the eligible population is scarce. Both data collected through the questionnaire sent to countries and the review of the surveys on attitudes towards parental leave lead to believe that both gender and payment rates are clear determinants of the use of leave around childbirth:

- In Australia, data from the *Pregnancy and Employment Transitions Survey* in 2005 showed that 73% of mothers with children under two who worked as an employee in their last main job while pregnant took on average 34 weeks of leave; 14% used paid leave only; 22% took unpaid leave only; and, 37% have mixed both paid and unpaid leave (AST, 2007). A previous *Parental Leave in Australia Survey* showed that 68% of eligible mothers with a child born between March 2003 and February 2004 took leave, while the corresponding percentage for fathers was 30%. Around 25% of eligible fathers used some paid paternity leave, but less than 10% took unpaid paternity/parental leave. With about 80% of employees with newborn children being eligible for parental leave, fathers clearly only make limited use of their entitlements.
- In Belgium, the number of women employed in the private sector and taking parental leave has doubled from 2002 to 2007, while the number of fathers has been multiplied by 7 (Maron *et al.*, 2008). However, men still represent not more than 27% of parents taking parental leave. Moreover, most of them reduce their weekly working time by one fifth rather than having a one block period of absence of work.
- In Canada, in 2006 about 90% of mothers took leave upon the birth/adoption of a child, of which about 10% took some unpaid leave (Beaupré and Cloutier, 2007). By contrast, about 55% of fathers took some leave, compared to 38% in 2001. The increase is related to the introduction in 2005 of the *Régime Québécois d'Assurance Parentale* which includes a non-transferable father-quota. The proportion of fathers in Quebec who used such a leave is now about 80%.
- In Denmark, about 99% of mothers use maternity leave and 94% use parental leave; 89% of men use paternity leave, but only 26% of fathers use some parental leave (SFI, 2007).
- In France, about 97% of mothers eligible to maternity leave took it in 2007, compared to 66% of fathers taking paternity leave.
- Since leave reform introduced 1 January 2007 in Germany, take up of parental leave by fathers has increased from 3.5% of eligible fathers during the last quarter of 2006 to 14.3% in the first quarter of 2008.
- In Iceland, almost all women take their entitlement to maternity leave, and about 90% of mothers used more than their basic right to 3 months of leave (Eydal and Gislason, 2008).
- In Ireland, where parental leave is unpaid, take-up rates are also low, especially for fathers (5%).
- In Japan, the take-up rate of childcare (parental) leave was about 72% for mothers, but only 0.5% of male employees who had a child between April 2004 and March 2005 took childcare leave.
- In the Netherlands, maternity leave is paid at full earnings (up to a maximum) and use is deemed 100%. Parental leave is unpaid (unless paid by employers, as for example, the government), unless paid and of the eligible 114000 mothers in 2007 take up was about 44%; of the 143000 eligible fathers, take up was 21%. So, while there are more fathers eligible to parental leave, they make less use of it.

- In New Zealand about eight in ten mothers who were eligible for paid parental leave took some leave in 2005 (DoL, 2005).
- Estimates on basis of the June 2006 Current Population Survey for the US indicate that the proportion of women on maternity/parental leave was about one-third of mothers within the first month following the birth or adoption of a child. The duration of leave is relatively short as only 20% of the mothers with a child 3 months of age are estimated to be on leave.

Sources and further reading: PF7; Beaupré P. and E. Coulier (2007), *Vivre les transitions familiales: resultants de l'enquête sociale générale*, Statistics Canada; *OECD Babies and Bosses* (various issues); DoL (2005), *Parental Leave in New Zealand – 2005/2006 Evaluation*, Department of Labor, New Zealand; Moss P. and K. Wall, *International Review of Leave Policies and Related Research 2007*, Employment Relations Research Series 80, Department for Business, United-Kingdom; NOSOSCO, *Social protection in Nordic Countries*, 2005. Eydal G. B. and I.V. Gislason (2008), *Equal rights to earn and care - Paid parental leave in Iceland*, Felags og Tryggingamala Raduneytid; and, SFI (Danish National Centre for Social Research) (2007), *Evaluering af den fleksible barselsorlov*, Maron L., D. Meulders, and S. O'Dorchai, *Le congé parental en Belgique*, Brussels Economic Review, n° special "Parentalité et Emploi", 51(2/3), pp. 347-363.