



Gender Equality

Expert's report



ФОРУМ
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РАЗВИТИЮ

SHARED PARENTAL LEAVE

Women's economic empowerment is a key pillar of sustainable development and growth. Yet, only about 50 per cent of working age women compared to 76 per cent of men¹ are represented in the labour force globally today, and women take on 2.5² times more unpaid work than men. Unequal pay, disproportionate burden of unpaid care work, and lack of paid parental leave for women and men, are ultimately holding back women in the world of work.

Gender inequality has deep impacts on health, whether through shaping the allocation of wealth and resources, determining whose health needs are recognized and prioritized, or directly affecting physical and mental health as a result of increased exposure to violence and discrimination. Gender inequality also has repercussions specifically for maternal and child health, and gender bias has been identified as a contributor to inadequate access to prenatal care and nutrition during pregnancy, lower birth weights, higher rates of maternal mortality, and un-

dernourishment of female children³. While the consequences of gender inequality and traditional gender norms primarily disadvantage women, men also feel the effects, which manifest in fewer opportunities to participate in caregiving, increased risk-taking, and shorter life expectancies⁴. Against this backdrop, SDG 5.4 calls on countries to promote "shared responsibility within the household and the family"⁵.

Research suggests that the structure of labor policies like paid leave has significant implications for gender equality, making these policies a potentially important lever for accelerating progress toward all of SDG 5's targets, as well as SDGs 10.2, 10.3, and 10.4. For example, a wide range of studies have found that fathers who take paid leave are more involved in childcare both during the leave period and later in the child's life⁶. This evidence supports the idea that when available to both parents, paid parental leave can support gen-

¹ <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/csw#data>

² <http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/annual%20report/attachments/sections/library/un-women-annual-report-2017-2018-en.pdf?la=en&vs=2849>

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<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15463967>

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<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15177828>

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der equality at home and at work. By contrast, when paid leave is available only to women, it may reinforce the idea that women are primarily responsible for caregiving, while men are the primary earners. Currently, while all but eight countries globally provide paid leave to women, only 49% make any leave available to fathers⁷. At the same time, leave for fathers tends to be for a far shorter duration; 49% of countries that make leave available to fathers provide less than 3 weeks.

Further, studies have shown that simply making parental leave available to men is often insufficient to increase men's take-up. This is partly due to stigma and longstanding gender norms⁸, though it may also result as a consequence of the gender wage gap. If paid leave is only provided at partial wages, it makes sense for the lower-earning parent, who remains more likely in most countries to be the mother, to take a greater share of the available leave⁹. Based on data from a wide range of high-income countries from 2000 to 2013¹⁰, a wage replacement rate of at least two-thirds

appears to be the minimum for even modest take-up by fathers, while a rate of 80–100% of regular wages is needed for broader participation. Still, even in the face of the gender imbalance in take-up, it is important to note there is substantial data that wage replacement rates also influence whether and for how long women take leave. In the USA, which only provides unpaid leave, women are nearly twice as likely as men to report that they needed leave but were unable to take it, while nearly half of those with unmet need for leave cite lack of affordability as the key reason. Likewise, in states that provide paid leave, including Rhode Island¹¹ and California¹², leave uptake was limited for both women and men due to the low wage replacement rates, which provide a maximum of 60 and 55% of wages, respectively.

In addition to ensuring wage replacement rates are high enough for families to be able to afford for both parents to take leave, two policy approaches, “use-it-or-lose-it” and “bonus” leave, have been effective in encouraging men to take leave. Re-

⁷ <https://www.worldpolicycenter.org/maps-data/data-download>

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<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0730888415574781?journalCode=woxb>

⁹ Reich N. Predictors of fathers' use of parental leave in Germany. *Popul Rev.* 2011;50(2)

¹⁰ Koslowski A, Blum S, Moss P. 12th International Review of Leave Policies and Related Research 2016. 2016.

¹¹ Silver B, Mederer H, Djurdjevic E. Launching the Rhode Island Temporary Caregiver Insurance Program (TCI): Employee Experiences One Year Later. US Department of Labor 2016.

¹² Milkman R, Appelbaum E. Unfinished business: paid family leave in California and the future of U.S. work-family policy. Ithaca: Cornell University Press; 2013.

search across the OECD has shown that reserving leave for fathers through “use-it-or-lose-it” schemes has markedly increased the share of fathers taking leave¹³. For example, in Korea, three times as many men took leave following the introduction of 1 year of non-transferable parental leave as an individual entitlement for each employee in 2007¹⁴. These policies may also reduce stigma for leave-taking, which is sometimes seen as a signal of low commitment at work. Similarly, economic incentives or bonuses that are only available if both parents take leave have been used to increase fathers’ leave taking. As of 2014, however, only 15 countries reserve more than 2 weeks of leave for fathers or provide incentives for fathers to take leave. More research is needed in low- and middle-income countries to assess which policies would best support an increasingly equal role by fathers.

¹³

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¹⁴ <http://www.oecd.org/employment/parental-leave-where-are-the-fathers.pdf>

USEFUL LINKS:

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Austria:

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Belgium:

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Czech Republic:

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