

# Promoting uptake of parental and paternity leave among fathers in the European Union







European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

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## Introduction

It is widely recognised that ‘family leave’ is an important factor in a worker’s ability to balance professional and private life, particularly for those who have children. Depending on the country and collective agreement concerned, workers can, in addition to maternity leave, be entitled to other kinds of family leave for the care of newborn and/or young children, such as paternity leave and parental leave. Traditionally, such leave tends to be seen and analysed from a perspective that considers women as the main carers, with little attention paid to the father’s situation. However, it is also important to reflect on family leave that relates to childcare responsibilities from the fathers’ perspective. This is especially so in view of an increased employment rate as advocated in the Europe 2020 strategy.

This report is based on contributions from the network of correspondents for **EurWORK, the European Observatory on Working Life**. The data were collected between July and October 2014 and refer to the situation for each country in October 2014. It looks at the most recent trends in terms of take-up of parental and paternity leave and examines the provisions, measures and initiatives recently implemented by national authorities, governments and/or social partners to promote the take-up of parental and paternity leave, particularly among fathers.

The report is structured around four sections. Firstly, it briefly addresses the current legal framework at European and national level, including the statutory provisions for parental and paternity leave across the European Union (EU) Member States, characterising the different schemes in place in 2014. Secondly, based on available national-level data, it looks at the evolution of take-up rates, in particular by fathers. Thirdly, a short section briefly looks at some factors influencing fathers’ take-up of parental and paternity leave. The final section looks into initiatives developed and implemented by public authorities and/or social partner organisations, at national level, to promote the take-up of family-related leave, in particular paternity leave and parental leave taken by fathers.

## Definitions and legal provisions

While maternity leave aims to protect working women during their pregnancy and recovery from childbirth, parental leave refers to relatively long-term leave that is available to either or both parents, allowing them to take care of an infant or young child over a period of time, usually following the maternity or paternity leave period (see ILO (2014) for a definition). In the EU, **Directive 2010/18/EU** implemented the revised framework agreement on parental leave concluded by the European social partners BUSINESSSEUROPE, the European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (UEAPME), the European Centre of Employers and Enterprises Providing Public Services (CEEP) and the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC). This repealed **Directive 96/34/EC**. The Directive essentially determines that all workers, men and women, irrespective of their type of employment contract, are entitled to a leave period of at least four months on the birth or adoption of a child. It considers parental leave as ‘an important means of reconciling professional and family responsibilities and promoting equal opportunities and treatment between men and women’.

As a consequence of the transposition of the Directive into national legislation, the adoption of legislation aimed at improving or introducing parental leave schemes has been reported in a number of countries since it came into force. The Eurofound (2012) report, **Industrial Relations and Working Conditions Developments 2011**, for example, addresses the adoption of legislation in 2011 aimed at improving or introducing parental leave schemes by a number of countries. Currently, and as shown in the next section, all Member States have provisions for parental leave.

Paternity leave, on the other hand, is generally a short period of leave specifically for the father, immediately following childbirth, the main purpose of which is to allow him to spend some time with the new child and his partner (see ILO, 2014 or **International Network on Leave Policies and Research**). Despite the fact that there is no legal framework at

EU level, legislation on paternity leave available to fathers after the birth of a child or during the first few months of the child's life has been introduced or developed in many Member States, in particular since the late 1990s. In **Eurofound (2004)** for example, there is reference to Belgium, Finland, France, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain and the UK in this regard.

As contributions from EurWORK's network of European correspondents did not cover the regulations for paternity leave of adoptive fathers, this report focuses on the regulations and entitlements of non-adoptive fathers. The International Network on Leave Policies and Research states in its cross-country comparison, which covers a high number of EU Member States, that 'in most countries, adoptive parents have similar leave entitlements to other parents' (Moss 2014, p. 24).

### **Brief overview of parental and paternity leave in the EU**

There are provisions for parental leave in all the EU Member States. Although Directive 2010/18/EU defines parental leave as an individual right in principle, Member States can choose whether or not to make it available to either or both parents.

The International Network on Leave Policies and Research applies the following categories to parental leave: family entitlements, which can be divided between the parents; individual entitlement; and mixed, which is part family and part individual entitlement. In 14 Member States, parental leave can be shared by the parents. This is the case for Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. In 12 EU Member States, it is an individual entitlement that cannot be shared. This is the case for Belgium, France, the Czech Republic, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Spain and the United Kingdom. In the remaining Member States (Portugal and Sweden) and in Norway, parental leave comprises two parts, one that can be shared and one that cannot be shared.

In most of the countries, there are cash benefits associated with the take-up of parental leave. In some countries these benefits are based on a flat rate; this is the case in Austria (in four out of five leave options), Belgium, the Czech Republic, France, Hungary (for the last stage of leave entitlements), Luxembourg, Poland (for the last stage of leave entitlements), Slovakia and Sweden (for part of leave entitlements). In the other Member States with such benefits, the amount concerned is a proportion of the individual's most recent salary – 30% in Italy, 60% in Poland, 67% in Germany, 70% in Finland, 80% in Austria (in one leave option), and up to 100% in Denmark and in Portugal (for the shortest length). In almost all cases, these benefits are paid by the public authorities responsible for social security or social insurance. In Denmark, leave compensation depends on the employment situation of the worker and the collective agreements covering their employer. It is partly paid by the state and partly by the employer (see annex for more details).

For eight Member States, there is no cash benefit associated with parental leave: in Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Malta, the Netherlands, Spain and the UK, parental leave, if taken, is unpaid.

All 28 EU Member States have statutory provisions for paternity leave, except Austria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Germany, Ireland, Malta and Slovakia. In terms of length, paternity leave varies considerably in terms of working days, from one compulsory day in Italy or two days in Greece, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Spain, to the more 'generous' Member States where it extends to 20 days in Portugal, 30 days in Lithuania, 54 days in Finland and 90 days in Slovenia. In Hungary and Romania, paternity leave comprises five days, while in Croatia it is seven days. In Belgium, Estonia, Latvia and Sweden, it is 10 days. In France, fathers are entitled to 11 days' leave. Denmark, Norway, Poland and the UK all provide paternity leave of 14 days; Bulgaria provides 15 days (see annex for more details).



In the great majority of Member States, paternity leave benefits are paid by the national social security systems. The exceptions are Belgium, Denmark and the UK, where they are paid by the employers and the state. For example, in the UK, employers are entitled to recover up to 92% of statutory benefits paid to workers in paternity leave. In Croatia, Greece, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Romania, employers are responsible for full payment of paternity leave benefit.

It is important to note that, for a small group of countries, provisions are not made for paternity leave, and parental leave, if taken, is unpaid: Cyprus, Ireland and Malta. Greece and the Netherlands can also be added to this group as parental leave is unpaid and paternity leave, although paid as 100% of previous earnings, is only provided for two days. In Spain and the UK, parental leave is also unpaid but paternity leave is slightly longer at up to 15 and 14 days respectively.

## Trends in take-up of leave

This section looks at trends regarding take-up of parental and paternity leave in the EU. There are no harmonised, comparative data available, so the information presented here derives from national sources as reported by the national correspondents for EurWORK and focuses mostly on the take-up rates among fathers.

The main trend emerging from the indicators provided by national data sources is that take-up rates of parental and paternity leave among fathers (where available) are increasing in most Member States, but are generally still relatively low. In other words, there is still room to improve the balance between parents when decisions are made in relation to the take-up of parental leave.

### Parental leave trends

Statistics Austria data show that a major goal of reform in 2010 – increasing the proportion of fathers taking parental leave – has not been reached. The proportion of men on parental leave only increased marginally from 3% to 4% between 2005 and 2013 (Leibetseder, 2013).

Although legislation in the Czech Republic enables men to take parental leave to the same extent and under the same conditions as women, men taking parental leave represent only 1.8% of all parental leave takers. This rate has remained quite constant over the last five years, with figures ranging between 1.6% and 1.8%. Regarding paternity leave, fathers are eligible for the benefit for 22 weeks after the birth of the child, with payment financed from sickness insurance and representing a rate based on their daily earnings. The proportion of male recipients for this was only 0.4 % in 2013 (**Ministerstvo práce a sociálních věcí, 2014**).

In Estonia, the take-up of parental benefit by men has increased in recent years, though it is still relatively low. Before 2008, when it reached 4.1%, around 2% of all recipients of parental leave benefit were men. This figure has risen to over 6% since 2009, reaching a high of 6.6% in 2010. (In 2011, it was 6%, in 2012 it was 6.3% and in 2013, the take-up was 6.5%.)

In Finland, take-up of parental leave among fathers has been steadily increasing, growing by 50% between 2002 and 2012. Nonetheless, it still comprises less than 9% of the total uptake of parental leave. Only 1.9% of fathers took parental leave in 2012, according to Finland's **National Institute for Health and Welfare (THL)** and the Social Insurance Institution of Finland (Kela Fpa, 2013). Before amendments were introduced on 1 January 2013, the take-up rate for paternity leave (ranging from one to 18 days) was at 84% according to the THL. Under that old system, fathers who took at least 12 of the last working days of the parental allowance period were granted an extra 'daddy month' – an earning-based paternity allowance for another 25 working days that could be taken while the mother was on parental leave. According to the THL, the take-up rate for this 'daddy month' had increased fivefold since it was introduced in 2003, although by 2012 it still remained low, at 32%.

In Italy, most beneficiaries of parental leave are women, although the proportion of men availing of it has been increasing. According to data provided by the INPS (**Istituto Nazionale della Previdenza Sociale**), men represented 9.7% of total beneficiaries among workers in 2010, 10.8% in 2011 and 11% in 2012. More men with fixed-term contracts use parental leave than do men working under an open-ended contract, with the former group showing a relatively faster increase over time: in 2010, 12.1% of workers with a fixed-term contract availing of it were men, rising to 15.7% in 2011, and 17.2% in 2012. By contrast, in 2010 only 9.5% of men on an open-ended contract availed of parental leave, rising to 10.4% in 2011 and 10.5% in 2012.

These data, however, do not indicate the share of workers who benefited from the measure in Italy. A report by the National Institute for Statistics (Istat), from 2011, showed that in 2010 the take-up of parental leave was much higher for mothers than for fathers. In total, 45.3% of female workers and 6.9% of male workers with children under eight years of age declared that they had taken parental leave at least once in their lifetime (**Istat, 2011**). Another recent study published by **Istat (2014)** indicates that in 2012, 8.8% of male and 32% of female workers (aged 15–64 years) with at least one child aged less than eight years had availed of parental leave in the 12 months prior to the interview.

Data from **Statistics Netherlands** show that between 2001 and 2013, women had a significantly higher take-up rate of parental leave than men. In 2001, among those entitled to parental leave, 35% of women and less than 10% of men actually took it. Take-up rates increased substantially up to 2013, when they reached 24% for men and over 57% for women. Take-up of parental leave among fathers went from less than 10% in 2001 to 24% in 2013, peaking in 2011 when it reached 27%.

Data compiled by the Commission for Equality at Work and Employment (Comissão para a Igualdade no Trabalho e no Emprego – CITE) in Portugal show that the incidence of cases where parental leave is shared by both parents has risen significantly: in 2013, 28.3% of fathers shared parental leave with mothers, up from 0.5% in 2005. This increase is observed both in relation to compulsory and optional parental leave: in 2013 the take-up rate among fathers of compulsory parental leave was 65.4%, 21.4 more percentage points than in 2008. The same trend emerges in relation to optional parental leave: in 2013, 57.3% of fathers made use of this, 20.5 percentage points more than in 2008 (**CITE, 2014 – 330 KB PDF**).

Data provided by the Swedish Social Insurance Agency (**Försäkringskassan, 2014**) also show an obvious trend whereby fathers are utilising parental leave to an increasing extent. In 2013, fathers took 24.8% of the total parental leave measured in days, which means they took twice as much parental leave as did fathers in 2000. There has also been an important increase in the share of men receiving parental benefits, from 38% in 2000 to 45% in 2013.

Data gathered for the International Network on Leave Policies and Research provide evidence of increased take-up rates of parental leave among men in Slovenia. There, parental leave was used by all mothers and 5.6% of fathers in 2008, the figure for the latter rising to 6.3% in 2009 and 2010 and 6.8% in 2011 (Stropnik, 2013).

### Paternity leave trends

In Estonia, according to that country's **Social Insurance Board**, 14% of fathers took paternity leave in 2006 and 2007, but in 2008, after a new payment scheme was introduced, take-up of leave increased to 50%. In 2009, the new scheme was abolished so there are no statistics on take-up rates between 2009 and 2013, when it was re-introduced. In 2013, 3%–8% of fathers took paternity leave.

According to the **State Social Insurance Fund SoDra**, the share of men taking childcare leave and receiving a parental allowance is steadily growing in Lithuania: from 7.5% of total parental leave taken in 2009 to 18% in 2014.

Slovenia presents evidence of increased take-up rates of paternity leave among men. Paternity leave (up to 15 days) was used by about three-quarters of fathers between 2006 and 2008, rising to 80% in 2009 and 2010, and about 78% in 2011 (Moss, 2014). Moreover, the proportion taking more than 15 days' leave rose from 15% in 2008, to 19% in 2009 and to 21% in 2010 and 2011.

The take-up rates of paternity leave and parental leave have become a research topic of interest in Spain, especially since 2007, with the introduction of parental leave into legislation via the Organic Law 3/2007 of 22 March for effective equality between women and men. For instance, a report on this issue shows that, in spite of cutbacks resulting from the recession, data indicate that paternity leave take-up rates increased from 63.8% in 2008 to 76.7% 2011 (figures calculated by applying an estimation model to registered social security data) (Flaquer and Escobedo, 2014). Statistics compiled by the Spanish National Social Security Institute (Instituto Nacional de la Seguridad Social – INSS) show that between 2009 and 2013 the uptake rate for paternity leave was quite stable, at around 80% to 83% of the rate for maternity leave in Spain.

In the UK, a father (or partner of a child's mother) is entitled to Additional Paternity Leave (APL). They are eligible to take up to 26 weeks' leave and 19 weeks' pay in cases where the mother has ended her maternity leave no earlier than 20 weeks after the birth of the baby. Since April 2014, the statutory rate is £138.18 (approximately €174) per week. A Trades Union Congress (TUC) analysis of the official figures found that although 91% of fathers took some leave after childbirth and 71% took two weeks (14 consecutive days) or less of paternity leave, of the 285,000 fathers eligible to take APL just 1,650 (0.6%) did so in 2011 and 2012.

## Factors influencing take-up of parental and paternity leave among fathers

Uptake of parental and paternity leave depends on characteristics of available schemes, such as duration, compensation, provisions for sharing between the two parents and flexibility. It also depends on the context. Eurofound research shows that take-up rates among parents depend on many intertwined factors that together constitute 'a system' (see for example [Eurofound, 2004](#)). Such factors include:

- information about the leave available;
- leave compensation and pay disparities;
- availability and flexibility of childcare facilities;
- prevailing family organisation models; and
- the extent to which workers fear isolation from the labour market when taking leave.

Those factors are not going to be discussed here in detail; rather they will be touched upon in relation to factors influencing the take-up of parental and paternity leave by fathers.

Examples of research looking at the factors influencing the take up of paternity leave do not seem abundant. However, some examples are worth mentioning here.

In 2006, the Equal Opportunities Commission in the UK published research that looked at the attitudes and practices of fathers in relation to paternity leave. It revealed that financial constraints, employer practices and personal attitudes play a major role in fathers' decisions in relation to paternity leave.

In 2007, Eurofound published a study looking at company practices and attitudes towards parental leave across the EU based on the European Survey on Working Time and Work–life Balance, 2004–2005. It found that only seven out of 21 countries had specific incentives for fathers to take up parental leave. The most commonly used incentives were high compensation rates for fathers or part of leave entitlements being reserved for fathers, combined with a reasonable financial compensation. The same study also found that countries with leave systems providing a high earnings replacement rate also had the highest proportion of establishments with employees taking leave.

The increase in the proportion of men accessing paternity leave in Spain could be explained both by a genuine interest in taking paternity leave and by the fact that male employment has been reduced in sectors and groups with lower quality employment conditions (Flaquer and Escobedo, 2014). Another Spanish report analysed some of the personal and socio-economic determinants of fathers' use of leave, concluding that fathers are more likely to take leave if they have stability in employment, if there are facilities for reconciling work and family life and if their partner is employed (Escot et al, 2013).

Research carried out in the Czech Republic by the nongovernmental organisation Open Men's League (Liga otevřených mužů – LOM), in the '**Full Time Father**' project, had interesting findings. A survey carried out in 2013, covering the region of Olomouc, showed that nearly two-thirds of women did not wish their partners to be on parental leave, if they had a child at the time of the survey (LOM, 2013). By contrast, 42% of men stated they would like to take at least some parental leave if they had a child (11% of men even demonstrated a 'strong preference' for their participation in parental leave). A follow-up survey carried out in 2014 captured the reasons why women are not willing to give part of their 'carer's time' to fathers. The most important reason mentioned was household finances: two-thirds of women respondents were concerned that the financial loss for the family would be too harmful if fathers took part of their parental leave. In addition, one-third of women respondents believed that fathers would not be able to take care of their children properly while the same proportion of women respondents was convinced that women simply do not want to give up their traditional role.

An ongoing research project carried out by the Institute Sowitra and funded by the Hans Böckler Foundation in Germany is investigating whether parental leave taken by working fathers in 2014 impacted on gender relations in household and firms. The preliminary results show that fathers who took parental leave differ from those who did not in that they tended to have a higher level of education and live in larger cities. In relation to work, they were more likely to work in the public sector, be self-employed, or have a part-time or fixed-term contract. Fathers who took more than two months of parental leave also had a greater level of interest in supporting the career of their spouses.

In sum, decision-making processes about taking parental or paternity leave depend on a complex set of factors. From the point of view of a worker, father and household, the most important of these seems to be the financial compensation associated with such leave. Other relevant factors include the workers' level of education, the type of employment contract, the sector concerned and the geographical area concerned (urban versus rural context, for example).

### Initiatives promoting take-up of parental and paternity leave among fathers

As shown in the previous section, the take-up of parental and paternity leave among fathers is influenced by several factors, including the level of compensation involved, the availability of reserved leave periods, the availability of information and the extent to which workers fear isolation from the labour market when taking leave. This section briefly describes recent initiatives implemented in some European countries to promote fathers' uptake of parental and paternity leave.

## Promotion of parental leave uptake among fathers

### *Duration and compensation*

Entitlement to both paternity and maternity leave depends on the individual and on the legal provisions in place. Each person may have the right to a certain length of leave with a certain amount of compensation. At the same time, for around half of the EU Member States, entitlement to parental leave is family-based. In systems with entitlements based on the whole family, parents as a household or unit are entitled to a certain length of leave. The extent to which two parents can share the duration of the parental leave between them depends on regulations. In parental leave systems with entitlements based on the individual it is easier to legally guarantee fathers and mothers an equal length of parental leave. For instance, in France, from 2015 onwards, each parent will have the non-transferable right to six months of parental leave for the first child and 18 months for each additional child. Due to the non-transferability condition, if one parent does not use their parental leave, the total duration of parental leave for the family will be six or 18 months, depending on the number of children.

In Finland, a similar policy is expected to be implemented in August 2015. At time of writing, parents in Finland can freely share a homecare allowance between themselves, which has resulted in a great majority of recipients being women. Under the new regulation, if one of the parents does not take leave allocated to them, the family will lose this part of the family leave.

In Croatia, each parent can take up to four months of parental leave. This means that the total leave duration for a family is eight months when both partners use their leave entitlement. As with the new regulations in France and Finland, a total of six months is available for each family if only one parent takes parental leave. The four months of leave allocated to each parent cannot be taken at the same time.

In Sweden, the total duration of parental leave for parents is 480 days. Parents can take up to 30 days' leave at the same time, but the remaining 450 days need to be taken separately. Sixty days of the total 480 days are reserved for each parent. The exclusiveness of parental leave prompts fathers to take this leave and also means they care for their children alone for a set period of time. This regulation also promotes mothers' labour market participation and their reintegration in the labour market after maternity and parental leave.

In family-based parental leave systems (but also in some individual-based systems) a widely used instrument to promote fathers' use of parental leave is to provide bonuses in the form of time or cash when both partners take leave. For example, in Austria, depending on the option parents choose, a two to six-month bonus is granted if both parents are taking parental leave. In the case of the Austrian income-dependent parental leave option, one partner can be on leave for 12 months and the other partner for two months. The Austrian parental leave system offers a total of five different options. In four of those options, flat rate benefits are paid, which vary in amount depending on the chosen length of parental leave – from 12 months plus two additional months, up to 36 months plus six additional months. The shorter the length, the higher the flat rate benefit. The most recently implemented option is income dependent, accounting for 80% of previous income up to a limit of €2,000 per month. The share of fathers is higher among shorter leave options and is also high in the income income-dependent option, with 26% of fathers using this, according to the Austrian Federal Ministry for Family and Youth (BMFJ, 2014).

Similar bonus systems exist in Germany, Italy, Portugal and Croatia, where parents also receive higher benefits during a two-month bonus period. In Sweden, an equality cash bonus on top of the daily allowance is granted if parental leave is equally distributed between both parents. As noted earlier, the total duration of parental leave for parents in Sweden is 480 days and for each parent, two months of that period are reserved and non-transferable. The bonus is only granted if both parents take up to 240 days of leave each and not only their reserved time. In comparison to the other bonus

systems, the Swedish equality bonus not only encourages both parents to take leave but also ensures that the leave is equally shared between them. For example, in the longest option of the Austrian leave system, a six-month bonus period is available when the father is on leave for that period, but the mother can stay on leave for up to 30 months. The length of the bonus depends on the length of time the second parent is on leave: if the father is only on leave for two months the total duration of leave for the family would be 32 months. This contrasts with Sweden, as the bonus is granted even if the total length of leave is shared unequally.

The Austrian example, regarding the parental leave take-up rate of fathers, and the studies of Eurofound (2004 and 2007) illustrate that the level of compensation is an important factor influencing the parental leave take-up rate of fathers: leave systems with high income-dependent replacement rates lead to a greater number of fathers on parental leave. However, it is not only the amount of flat rate benefits available that varies greatly among the European countries; income-dependent benefits also range widely, from 30% in Italy to 100% in Estonia and Denmark.

The Italian region of Piedmont provides an interesting example of a regional government supporting and promoting fathers' uptake of parental leave. There, €400 per month is offered to fathers if they take parental leave during the first year of the child. If fathers take at least three months of parental leave, this is increased to €450 per month. This can be a strong motivation, as the Italian parental leave replacement rate of 30% is relatively low.

### **Towards more flexible parental leave**

Another policy used to promote fathers' use of parental leave is to offer them the option of taking part-time parental leave. One advantage of this is that parents are not fully disconnected from the labour market during parental leave and can reconcile family and work life more easily.

A number of EU Member States offer a part-time option. In the Netherlands, part-time parental leave is the norm. Under the Dutch parental leave system, the approval of the employer is needed if an employee working full-time wants to be on full-time parental leave. The impact of parental leave is lower for companies when the parent still works part-time and this approach may increase the likelihood of fathers using their allocated parental leave.

In Germany, the new parental leave regulation, which will be in force from July 2015, is planned to increase flexibility by extending the total length of parental leave available to 24 months plus a four-month bonus, instead of 12 months plus a two-month bonus, if both parents work part-time during parental leave. The extra income from part-time work will not be deducted from the benefits, as it is under the current regulation. This is a strong financial motivation for both parents to reconcile work and family life during parental leave.

Greater flexibility is also the aim for the pending bill in the Netherlands on the modernisation of parental leave legislation. This bill increases the number of days of leave a father can take directly after birth and creates more flexible arrangements on dividing the entitlements between the parents. In the United Kingdom, a new regulation will be in force from April 2015. It is grounded in criticisms made of the existing system by the Department for Business Innovation and Skills: that it is gender biased, inflexible and offers little in the way of promoting shared parenting (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2013). Under the new system, parents will be entitled to shared and statutory parental leave.

### **The role of collective agreements**

Innovative initiatives can also be found in collective agreements. In Sweden and Norway, social partners and governments are discussing the possible introduction of a parental leave system following the Icelandic model. Both mothers and fathers in Iceland are entitled to three months of parental leave plus a further three months, which can be freely divided between the parents (Eydal and Gíslason, 2014). The Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO) is in



favour of splitting parental leave into three parts, thereby making the Swedish parental leave system more individualised (Aftonbladet, 2013). Other organisations representing workers, such as the Swedish Confederation for Professional Employees, are in favour of an incremental increase in the number of months available to each parent, but oppose total individualisation (TCO, 2014).

In Norway, trade unions and employer organisations criticised the government for reducing the father's quota from 14 weeks to 10 weeks in 2014. The Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise (NHO) has argued for paternity leave to be split into three equal parts: one shared by both parents, one taken solely by the mother and one taken solely by the father. The NHO also argued against plans by the government to make it easier to transfer the father's quota to the mother. In Sweden, a survey carried for the Swedish Social Insurance Agency looked into employer's attitudes to parental leave; it found that 10% of employers consider it problematic that employees are on parental leave while 70% believe they should motivate employees to share parental leave equally between parents (Försäkringskassan, 2014). It illustrates that the support of social partners and employers is necessary for the successful promotion of parental leave among fathers, especially in countries where an agreement with the employer is needed regarding the time and duration of parental leave taken by a mother or father.

In Cyprus, where a national paternity leave system does not exist and parental leave is unpaid, collective agreements hold great importance. With the renewed collective agreement in the French–Cypriot School of Nicosia, for example, paternity and parental leave on a full pay basis for employees was extended from three to ten days and the right to full-paid leave was extended to up to 30 days if necessary. The Pancyprian Trade Union of Workers in Services in Cyprus has pointed out that the collective agreement is a landmark regulation. The Greek national collective labour agreement of 2014 highlighted that fathers have a right to childcare leave even if the mother is self-employed and therefore not entitled to parental leave. Both examples illustrate that collective agreements and social partners can have a strong influence on regulations promoting fathers' use of parental leave.

### **Hindering factors**

Some aspects of parental leave regulations can be considered to be negative for fathers' uptake of parental leave. In the Czech Republic, despite the fact that both parents can take parental leave, benefits are only paid to one parent. Since the financial aspect is an important determinant of fathers' use of leave, this can be a strong barrier. The financial aspect of parental leave was negatively affected by the economic crisis in some European countries. In Latvia, working parents were not eligible for parental benefit during the crisis. In October 2014 this entitlement was reinstated. In Estonia, paternity leave was abolished between 2009 and 2012, but reintroduced at the beginning of 2014 with a higher support rate than before the crisis. This led to an increase in fathers' uptake of paternity leave.

A further aspect that influences take-up of parental leave is the flexibility and simplicity of the system. In Greece, two different systems of parental and paternity leave exist, one for the public sector and one for the private sector. The duration of leave entitlement varies substantially between the two systems. Moreover, since some entitlements depend on whether or not one parent has already taken leave, and for how long, this system is not completely individual-based and can create problems when one parent is working in the public service and the other in the private sector. However, collective agreements and legal rulings strengthened the individual right to parental leave for fathers in Greece, although further sectoral or company level agreements, such as those for the police and fire brigade services in 2014, will increase the complexity of the parental leave system.

### **Promotion of paternity leave**

Fathers' increased use of paternity leave is encouraged in European countries through a range of different policy measures. For instance, in the last decade, Belgium, Portugal and Italy introduced mandatory paternity leave – a very strong promotional instrument. In 2004, a Eurofound report categorised the paternity leave systems in Europe by duration (Eurofound, 2004). At that time the paternity leave system in Belgium was already categorised as extensive,

whereas the Italian one was categorised as very restricted and the Portuguese version fell in the middle category. Mandatory paternity leave also strengthened the right of fathers to paternity leave in some Member States and represented a clear message from government. In Italy, all fathers working in the private sector are obliged to take one day of paternity leave and two further days are optional. In Belgium, three out of ten days of paternity leave are mandatory and in Portugal 10 days of paternity leave are mandatory and further 10 optional.

In contrast to maternity leave, paternity leave is, in the majority of EU Member States, voluntary. However, the replacement rate paid to fathers during paternity leave is in nearly all countries income dependent and in most cases represents 100% of their salary. The Equal Opportunities Commission in the UK illustrated that the financial aspect is a strong factor influencing fathers' take-up rate of paternity leave (EOC, 2006). Therefore, the existing high replacement rate of paternity leave is a strong motivation for fathers. Great variation exists across the EU Member States regarding the maximum length of paternity leave; in general maternity leave is for a longer duration than paternity leave. In Italy, Croatia and Spain, part of the duration of maternity leave can be transferred to the father. The new paternity leave regulation in the UK also supports fathers in the time before childbirth. Employed fathers have the right to take unpaid leave to attend two antenatal appointments.

Fathers in Finland can be on paternity leave for up to 54 days, which is one of the longest durations of paternity leave in Europe. Eighteen of those days can be taken while the mother is on maternity leave and the remaining 36 days need to be taken she is not on leave. Again, as with parental leave in Sweden, the exclusiveness of paternity leave makes it easier for fathers to take it and it also encourages the labour market participation of mothers.

Extensive paternity leave regulations also exist at the sectoral and company level. For instance, in Spain, new paternity legislation, which will increase the duration of paternity leave from 15 days to four weeks, is expected to be implemented in 2015. However, the extension of paternity leave had already been brought about through some company-level agreements, for instance, at Orange España, a mobile network operator. Orange's employees can extend their paternity leave up to four weeks, though any days taken outside of the 15 days of national paternity leave are not compensated and are treated as a temporary (non-disciplinary) suspension from work. Another example comes from Italy, where Nestlé Italia promoted paternity leave among their employees in 2012 through the extension of the legal three days to two weeks' paternity leave with 100% wage compensation.

Paternity leave exists in the majority of European countries but not in all. Although paternity leave in Italy is compulsory, civil servants are not entitled to it because the labour law reform of 2012 only applies to the private sector. Since 2011, Austrian public employees can take up to four weeks of unpaid paternity leave but there is no paternity leave system covering employees in the private sector. Despite the fact that Ireland has no paternity leave, but only unpaid parental leave, the Irish Minister for Justice Frances Fitzgerald has indicated that she is in favour of introducing paternity leave through the Family Leave Bill, which is at the moment in the drafting process (Irish Examiner, 2014).

## Conclusions

Leave from work related to the birth of a child still tends to be strongly associated with mothers while less attention seems to be paid to the fathers' situation. Nevertheless, the fact that only three EU Member States provide unpaid parental leave and no paternity leave at all illustrates that, to a certain extent, fathers' involvement in early childhood care is seen as important in the majority of EU Member States. In fact, thanks to Directive 2010/18/EU, all EU Member States have parental leave systems to which fathers are entitled.

Existing paternity and parental leave systems in Europe vary greatly in terms of duration and the amount of compensation involved as well as the system for paying beneficiaries. They also differ in terms of regulations defining



the entitlement and how leave can be shared between parents. In practice, this means that under the current parental and paternity leave regulations, children born in different countries have different chances of spending some time with their fathers in the first days of their lives. For example, children born in Finland or Portugal are more likely to have their fathers spend more time with them than children in most other EU Member States.

The take-up rate of paternity and parental leave by fathers increased in recent years in the countries analysed here. Nevertheless, the levels of take-up are still relatively low, which means that an increasing, but still small, number of fathers use their entitlements to paternity and parental leave.

As previous Eurofound studies have illustrated, aspects that influence fathers' take-up rate of parental leave are: the level of compensation, the flexibility of the leave system, the availability of information, and the extent to which workers fear isolation from the labour market when taking leave. These issues therefore need to be addressed in order for policies in this area to be successful. Higher wage replacement rates, greater flexibility in terms of sharing and taking leave over time, the availability of more information to potential leave takers and employers, and flexible return to work policies are likely to make it easier for fathers to take parental leave and share it with their partner. That decision, however, is usually taken in the household, and depends on the preferences of both partners.

There are different ways to promote fathers' take-up of paternal and paternity leave. Some EU Member States provide incentives for fathers through granting bonuses in cash or in extra leave days to parents who share their parental leave. In a similar approach, others schemes reserve a certain portion of parental leave for fathers, which will be lost if not taken. Some systems promote equality: in Sweden, for example, parents receive a financial bonus if they not only share but equally distribute their parental leave.

Ensuring that some parental leave is exclusively available for men prompts fathers to take it, thus promoting fatherhood, especially if the father's partner is not on leave at the same time. It also promotes and facilitates mothers' reintegration to work after maternity and parental leave. Creating conditions for a more balanced distribution of the responsibilities of care between both parents certainly contributes to an increase in the participation of men and women in employment.

The decision of fathers to take parental leave is not only dependent on the amount of benefits and time reserved for them but also on how flexible the leave entitlements are and how feasible it is to combine childcare with working life. For example, parental leave regulations promoting part-time employment during leave, such as the Dutch system, facilitates parents' reintegration or continuation in employment. This is also beneficial for the employer, because the employees will not be completely absent for the duration of leave.

A further important way of improving flexibility is to allow parents to take their leave up to a certain age of the child and in several, not necessarily chronological, stages. The entitlement of parents to work flexible hours, as is the case in Portugal for parents with children aged up to 12 years, further supports fathers in the active role as carers. However, as illustrated, paternity leave does not exist in all EU Member States and where provisions do exist its duration varies greatly. In contrast to parental leave systems, the majority of paternity leave benefits replace 100% of income during leave. Finland promotes fathers' uptake of paternity leave through 36 days of leave exclusively for fathers that can only be taken if the mother is not on leave at the same time. In Belgium, Portugal and Italy certain portions of paternity leave entitlements are mandatory for fathers and thereby easier for them to justify taking.

It is important to note that where there are no provisions for leave, or where existing ones are considered insufficient, social partners may have an important role to play in establishing (or improving) provisions for parental and paternity leave for fathers through collective agreements. Collective agreements can function as guidance or reinforcement of existing national-level policies and support the implementation of initiatives that promote fathers' uptake of leave.

Finally, it should be borne in mind that childbirth-related leave may be considered as a right of the child. In order to ensure that newborn children can benefit from having their parents caring for them in the first days of their life, a number of factors and conditions have to be considered and met. These have been briefly addressed in this report. It is possible to conclude by saying that the promotion of an equal uptake of leave by both parents will greatly contribute to a more equal situation and greater participation of women and men in employment.

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**Annex: Characteristics of paternity and parental leave by EU country** (as of January 2015)

	Paternity leave			Parental leave					
	Duration	Amount of cash benefits (% previous earnings)	Source of Funding	Flexibility	Duration	Amount of cash benefits (% previous earnings)	Source of Funding	Flexibility	Reserved time for fathers and bonus
<b>AT</b>	No paternity leave (public sector: 4 weeks).	Unpaid.		Needs to be taken during maternity leave, in first 2 months after birth.	Options: 1. 36 months (30 if not shared) 2. 24 months (20 if not shared) 3. 18 months (15 if not shared) 4. 14 months (12m if not shared) 5. 14 months (12 if not shared).	Options: 1. €436 per month; 2. €624 per month; 3. €800 per month; 4. €1,000 per month 5. 80% of previous income up to €2,000 per month (Additional benefits for single parents with very low income, Rules for max. income attained while receiving benefits.)	Social security.	Can be taken partly at the same time, can be taken up to a certain age.	Share bonuses.
<b>BE</b>	10 working days (3 days obligatory).	100% first 3 days 82% remaining 7 days.	Mixed: employer liability first 3 days and social security (remaining 7 days).		17 weeks (each parent).	Flat rate benefit.	Social security (Social Insurance).	Part-time option; in one block or several blocks; until a certain age; all or partly at the same time.	
<b>BG</b>	15 days	90%	Social Security (state public insurance).		410 days (either parent).	90%	Social security (state public insurance).		
<b>CY</b>	No paternity leave.				13 weeks (either parent).	Unpaid.			
<b>CZ</b>	No paternity leave.			156 weeks (either parent). Option to choose shorter (until child is 24 months) and longer period (until child is 48 months).	70% of earnings (with different monthly and total ceilings depending on length).	Social security (social insurance and public funds).	Up to child's third birthday (if part of parental leave is shifted between third and eighth birthday employer approval needed); all can be taken at the same time.		

	Paternity leave				Parental leave				
	Duration	Amount of cash benefits (% previous earnings)	Source of Funding	Flexibility	Duration	Amount of cash benefits (% previous earnings)	Source of Funding	Flexibility	Reserved time for fathers and bonus
<b>DE</b>	No paternity leave.				156 weeks, 52 paid (either parent).	67% (min. €300, max. €1,800 per month, income less than €1,000 benefits are 100%).	Social security.	Until child's third birthday (employer approval needed if part of leave is shifted to period between third and eighth birthday, max shifted time 12 months) can be taken: in one block or several; can be taken for a longer period with lower benefits: all or part can be taken at the same time.	Shared parental leave 14 months, if only used by one parent 12 months (single parents 14 months).
<b>DK</b>	14 consecutive days.	100%	Mixed: state and the employer.		32 weeks (either parent), longer period possible but less paid.	100% (ceiling in place).		Part-time option: in one block or several blocks; until a certain age; all or partly at the same time.	
<b>EE</b>	10 working days.	100% up to the ceiling of 3 times the national average gross wage in the quarter before last.	Social security.		Max. 435 calendar days .	100% parent's earnings of prev. calendar year (minimum and maximum rate related to national minimum and average wages).		Between child's age of 70 days and 3 years, can be taken in one or several blocks, can be transferred to non-parent.	
<b>EL</b>	2 days	100%	Employer liability.		Private sector: 4 months (each parent); public sector: up to 2 years (each parent).	Unpaid (except public sector for third and subsequent child: 3 months paid).		Leave can be taken until child is 6 years.	
<b>ES</b>	15 days (2 days' birth leave and 13 days' paternity leave).	100% of income with ceiling.	Employer (first 2 days) and social security (social insurance) (13 days).	Can be taken anytime in a fixed period after birth; additional time for multiple births and larger families: 10 weeks of maternity leave can be transferred to father.	156 weeks, each parent.	Unpaid.		Can be taken: in one block or several blocks; all leave at the same time; until child's 3rd birthday.	

Promoting uptake of parental and paternity leave among fathers in the European Union

	Paternity leave				Parental leave				Reserved time for fathers and bonus
	Duration	Amount of cash benefits (% previous earnings)	Source of Funding	Flexibility	Duration	Amount of cash benefits (% previous earnings)	Source of Funding	Flexibility	
<b>FI</b>	54 working days.	70%, up to a ceiling, plus 40% of an additional amount up to a ceiling, plus 25% of another additional.	Social security (social insurance).	Can be taken out in 2 phases up to 2nd birthday: 18 days at the same time as maternity; remaining 36 days mother cannot be on leave.	26 weeks/158 working days (either parent)	70%	Social security (social insurance).	Part-time option; in one block or several blocks.	Can be shared freely.
<b>FR</b>	11 working days.	100% up to a ceiling.	Social security (health insurance fund).	Can be taken any time in a fixed period after birth.	6 months paid for the first child, 18 months for each subsequent child (each parent).	Flat rate benefit (per household) (increased benefit both parents use leave).	Social security (social insurance).	Part-time option; can be taken all at the same time.	
<b>HU</b>	5 days	100%	Social security (health insurance fund).	To be taken during the first two months of the child's life.	156 weeks (either parent).	70% up to a ceiling for 104 weeks for insured parents; flat rate benefits for non-insured and all parents for the last 52 weeks.	Social security (health insurance fund and state).	Until child's third birthday; part-time option; leave can be transferred to non-parents.	
<b>HR</b>	7 working days.	100%	Employer liability.	Additional leave can be transferred from mother's leave up to child being 6 months of age.	4 months (15 months for twins) (each parent).	100% (ceiling of 80% of the budgetary base rate) .		Used after child is 6 months until eighth birthday; may be used in one part or in more parts, two times per year at most, each time in the duration of at least 30 days. Can be taken part-time; all or partly at the same time.	If used by both parents each parent's 4 months/15 months (cannot be taken at the same time); if only used by one parent 6 months/30 months - 2 month bonus plus higher payment for those 2 months.
<b>IE</b>	No paternity leave.				17 weeks (each parent).	Unpaid.		Can be taken in one block or several blocks; until child reaches certain age.	
<b>IT</b>	1 day mandatory, extra 2 days optional (only private sector).	100%	Social security (social insurance).	2 optional days are deducted from maternity; can be taken up until child's 6 month.	26 weeks (each parent).	30%	Social security (social insurance).	Can be taken until eighth birthday in single or several periods; all leave can be taken at the same time.	If father takes at least 3 months leave the total for couple is 11 months and father can extend up to 7 months.

	Paternity leave				Parental leave				Reserved time for fathers and bonus
	Duration	Amount of cash benefits (% previous earnings)	Source of Funding	Flexibility	Duration	Amount of cash benefits (% previous earnings)	Source of Funding	Flexibility	
<b>LV</b>	10 calendar days.	80%	Social security (social insurance).		78 weeks (each parent).	70%	Social security (social insurance).		
<b>LT</b>	30 consecutive days.	100% up to a ceiling.	Social security (social insurance).		156 weeks, 52 paid (either parent).	100% until the child is 1 year or 70% until 2 years; last period unpaid.	Social security (social insurance).		
<b>LU</b>	2 days	100%	Employer liability.		26 weeks each parent.	Flat rate benefit.	Social security.	Part-time option; can be taken until the child reaches certain age.	
<b>MT</b>	No paternity leave.				13 weeks (each parent).	Unpaid.		Can be taken until eighth birthday.	
<b>NL</b>	2 days	100%	Employer liability.	Can be taken any time in a fixed period after birth.	26 weeks (each parent), with part time work.	Unpaid.		With employer agreement leave can be taken: in one or several blocks; in shorter period with higher benefits or longer with lower benefits.	
<b>NO</b>	14 consecutive days.	Unpaid (though often covered by collective agreements or employers).			49 or 59 weeks depending on payment level (14 weeks reserved for mothers and 14 weeks for fathers).	9 weeks at 100% or 59 weeks at 80% up to a ceiling.	Social security (social insurance).	Leave can be taken: part-time; in one or several blocks; in shorter period with higher benefits or longer period with lower benefits; until child reaches certain age; all leave at the same time.	
<b>PL</b>	14 consecutive days.	100%	Social security (social insurance).		156 weeks after maternity leave, 104 paid (either parent).	60% for 26 weeks and flat-rate benefit for 104 weeks	Social security (social insurance 26 weeks and then state).		
<b>PT</b>	20 days (10 of which are compulsory).	100%	Social security (social insurance).		Initial parental leave: 17 or 21 weeks. Additional parental leave: 13 weeks (each parent).	Initial parental leave: 100% (or 80% for 21 weeks); Additional parental leave: 25%.	Social security (social insurance).	Leave can be taken: part-time; in a shorter period with higher benefits or a longer period with lower benefits; until child reaches certain age.	1 bonus month if parents share Initial leave; 2 weeks of father leave obligatory.

	Paternity leave				Parental leave				
	Duration	Amount of cash benefits (% previous earnings)	Source of Funding	Flexibility	Duration	Amount of cash benefits (% previous earnings)	Source of Funding	Flexibility	Reserved time for fathers and bonus
<b>RO</b>	5 working days (10 days if worker attended infant care courses).	100%	Employer liability.		Either parent. Option I: until the child is 12 months old and unpaid parental leave until the child is 24 months, if the parent decides not to return to work. Option II: until the child is 2 years old.	Option I: 75% up to ceiling and incentive pay if the parent returns to work. Option II: 75% with a different ceiling and no incentive pay.	Social security (state).		
<b>SE</b>	10 days	80% up to a ceiling	Social security (social insurance)	Can be taken any time in a fixed period after birth.	480 days in total (max. 96 days after child's 4th birthday) min. time for each parent with compensation 2 months.	80% up to a ceiling for 65 weeks (390 days); flat-rate benefits for 15 weeks (90 days)	Social security (social insurance)	Can be taken up to child's 12th birthday: part-time; in one or several blocks; some leave at the same time.	Equality bonus if leave is equally distributed between parents (60 days fathers' quota). Bonus using tax system.
<b>SI</b>	90 consecutive days	100% up to a ceiling (first 15 days); flat rate benefit (remaining 75 days)	Social security (social insurance 15 days and state 75 days; only limited benefits)	Can be taken any time in a fixed period after birth and can be taken in several blocks.	37 weeks (either parent)	90% up to a ceiling (100% when the amount does not exceed €763)	Social security (social insurance)	Can be taken: part-time; in one or several blocks; until child is certain age; partly or all at the same time.	
<b>SK</b>	No paternity leave.				156 weeks (either parent).	Flat rate benefit.	Social security (state).	Can be taken until child is 3 years.	
<b>UK</b>	14 consecutive days	Flat rate benefit or 90% of the average weekly earnings, whichever is less.	Mixed (employers pay the benefit but are entitled to recover 92% of the statutory paternity pay from social insurance)	Can be taken any time in a fixed period after birth.	13 weeks (each parent)	Unpaid		Can be taken: up to a certain age of the child; all leave at the same time.	

Source: Based on EurWORK's network of correspondents, ILO (2014) and Moss (2014).

Note: Cells in the columns 'Flexibility' and 'Reserved time for fathers and bonus' can be empty due to lack of promoting regulations, but also due to lack of information. The content is correct to the best of the authors' knowledge. Completeness is not guaranteed.





*The take-up rate of parental and paternity leave among fathers has been increasing in most Member States but it still remains relatively low. Covering all the EU Member States and Norway, this report looks at the most recent trends in terms of take-up of parental and paternity leave, existing provisions and factors influencing take-up rates. It also examines measures and initiatives recently implemented by national authorities, governments and social partners to promote the take-up of parental and paternity leave, particularly among fathers.*

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