

Paid leave for fathers: Recent OECD policy trends

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Key messages

- Most OECD countries provide some form of paid leave for fathers, such as paid paternity leave and parental leave earmarked for fathers. However, these entitlements are generally shorter than those for mothers, although they vary widely across countries.
- Fathers have become more likely to take parental leave over the past decade, but parental leave is still far from being equally shared between mothers and fathers.
- Gender norms, workplace cultures and financial considerations often discourage fathers from taking parental leave. Policy design also affects family decisions (e.g. family entitlement).
- Fathers' leave benefits not only parents and children but also promote gender equality. To encourage uptake, many OECD countries have recently reformed paid leave for fathers.
- To promote more balanced parental leave use between mothers and fathers, policy makers can adopt a holistic approach, including the following:
 - Ensure adequate pay and well-designed incentives for fathers, such as “father quotas” and “bonus periods”.
 - Promote and design flexible parental leave that supports fathers' involvement, such as through part-time arrangements.
 - Raise awareness of parental leave rights to support shifts in gender norms and workplace culture (e.g. awareness campaigns, mandatory company reporting on leave use).
 - Strengthen efforts to monitor and collect data on parental leave uptake by each parent.

Paid leave entitlements for fathers – such as paid paternity and parental leave earmarked for fathers – have expanded rapidly in recent years across OECD countries. However, the use of leave is still far from equally shared between fathers and mothers. Fathers' use of leave benefits not only parents and children but also promotes a more equal division of care responsibilities and other unpaid work at home and supports gender equality in the workplace, fairness and women's economic self-efficiency. Furthermore,

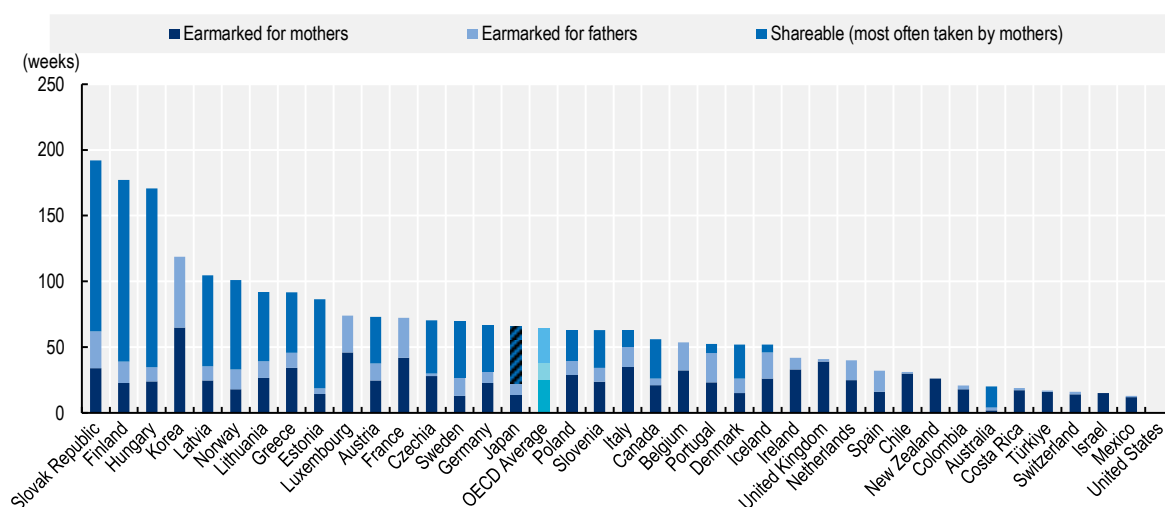
in view of demographic change there is a need to further mobilise women labour supply to underpin economic growth (Fluchtmann, Adema and Keese, 2024^[1]; OECD, 2025^[2]). Policies to foster a more equal sharing of care responsibilities go beyond the (short) periods of leave earmarked for fathers, but a discussion of policies such as tax/benefit measures or leaves to care for sick children is beyond the scope of this report. This policy brief outlines recent policy trends, key research findings and policy recommendations regarding paid leave for fathers to care for children.

Fathers and mothers can access different types of paid leave around childbirth

Child-related leave systems vary across OECD countries but are typically classified as maternity, paternity, parental and home care leave. All of these are employment-protected leaves intended to support parental caregiving while maintaining labour market attachment. Maternity and paternity leave are taken around the time of childbirth and are generally shorter but often better paid than parental and home care leave (OECD, 2024^[3]). However, the distinction between these types of leave has become increasingly blurred across OECD countries (Dobrotić et al., 2025^[4]). For example, in Denmark, parts of maternity leave and paternity leave can be transferred to the other parent.

An alternative way to classify paid leave entitlements is by distinguishing between periods earmarked for mothers, periods earmarked for fathers, and a shareable portion that can be used by either parent. Paid leave periods earmarked for mothers averages 25.4 weeks, which is twice the 12.7 weeks earmarked for fathers (Figure 1). Most OECD countries also provide a shareable portion of paid leave, averaging 26.6 weeks. In theory, this can be taken by either parent, but in practice, it is most often taken by mothers. (OECD, 2024^[3]).

Figure 1. Duration of legislated earmarked and shareable paid leave entitlements, in weeks, 2024



Notes: Information refers to legislated paid birth-related leave entitlements to care for young children in place as of April 2024, such as maternity-, paternity-, homecare- and parental leave. Some companies will provide additional paid leave supports, but these are not reflected here. Periods labelled “earmarked for mothers” and “earmarked for fathers” refer to individual non-transferable entitlements for paid employment-protected leave of absence for employed parents, “mother and father quotas” or periods of an overall leave entitlement that can be used only by one parent and cannot be transferred to the other, as well as any weeks of shareable leave that must be taken by one or both parents for the family to qualify for “bonus” weeks of parental leave. Periods labelled “earmarked for mothers” include weeks of maternity leave that are transferable to fathers. Weeks of shareable leave refer to parental- and homecare leave entitlements that can be freely shared between mothers and fathers. For Japan, the 44 weeks of the individual parental leave entitlements for the mother must be taken used simultaneously with the father if both parents are to use the entirety of their entitlement. The bar is therefore shaded. Many countries also provide paid leave for same-sex and adoptive parents. For further information on same-sex and adoptive parental leave entitlements, see (OECD, 2023^[5]), OECD Family Database, Indicator PF2.6.

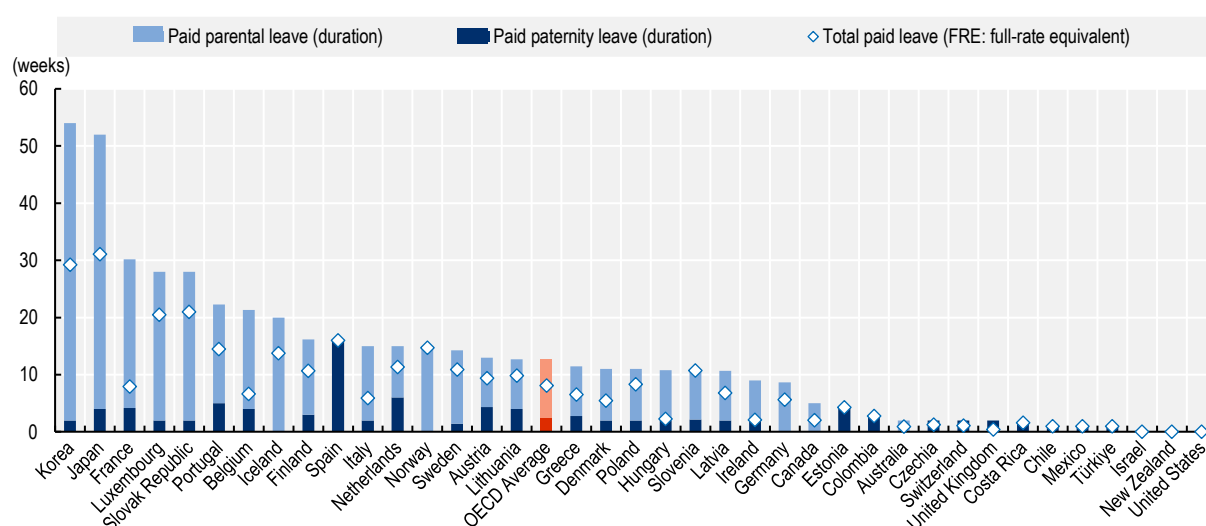
Source: (OECD, 2024^[3]), OECD Family Database, Indicator PF2.1, [Document](#) and/or [Datafile](#).

Most OECD countries offer paid leave for fathers, although entitlements vary

As of April 2024, 35 out of 38 OECD provide paid leave for fathers, either in the form of paid paternity leave or paid parental leave earmarked for fathers. Of these countries, 20 offer both types, 10 provide only paid paternity leave, and 5 offer only paid parental leave. Paid paternity leave is typically short, averaging 2.4 weeks. Spain offers the longest period of paid paternity leave at 16 weeks, which is more than three times longer than Portugal, the second highest. By contrast, eight countries do not provide paid paternity leave. Paid parental leave earmarked for fathers averages 10.3 weeks, bringing the average total paid leave for fathers to 12.7 weeks. Korea offers the longest at 52 weeks in total, while three countries provide none. Since payment rates vary across countries, entitlements are presented not only in terms of “duration” but also as “full-rate equivalent” (FRE), which refers to the length of paid leave in weeks if it were paid at 100% of previous earnings (see note to Figure 2). In FRE terms, the average is 8.1 weeks, with Japan offering the longest at 31.1 weeks. This is the most generous paid father-specific entitlement in the OECD (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Legislated paid leave entitlements for fathers differs across OECD countries

Duration of paid paternity leave and parental leave earmarked for fathers (duration), and total paid leave earmarked for fathers (full-rate equivalent), in weeks, April 2024



Notes: Information refers to entitlements to paternity leave, “father quotas” or periods of parental leave that can be used only by the father and cannot be transferred to the mother, and any weeks of shareable leave that must be taken by the father in order for the family to qualify for “bonus” weeks of parental leave in place as of April 2024. Data reflect entitlements at the national or federal level only, possible additional employer-provided paternity leave provisions and/or payment top-ups are not reflected here. Because payment rates vary across countries and types of leave, entitlements are presented in both “duration” and “full-rate equivalent” (FRE – the length of the paid leave in weeks if it were paid at 100% of previous earnings) forms. These payment rates are the average payment rate available across the relevant paid leave for an individual on 100% of national average earnings. In Austria, Chile, France and Germany, leave payments are based on net earnings and should not be compared directly with payment rates based on gross earnings. The FRE for the OECD average is computed solely for those countries with payment rates based on gross earnings. To facilitate international comparison, OECD terminology may not always fully align with national terminology. For example, in Austria, there is no directly paid paternity or parental leave, but fathers who take unpaid father’s leave can apply for a benefit payments (e.g. “kinderbetreuungsgeld”). Another example concerns Finland, where there has been no explicit paid paternity leave since 2022, but 18 days of father-specific parental leave that can be taken simultaneously with another caregiver, which is categorised as “paid paternity leave” here. For more detail on the assumptions and methodology, see the source below.

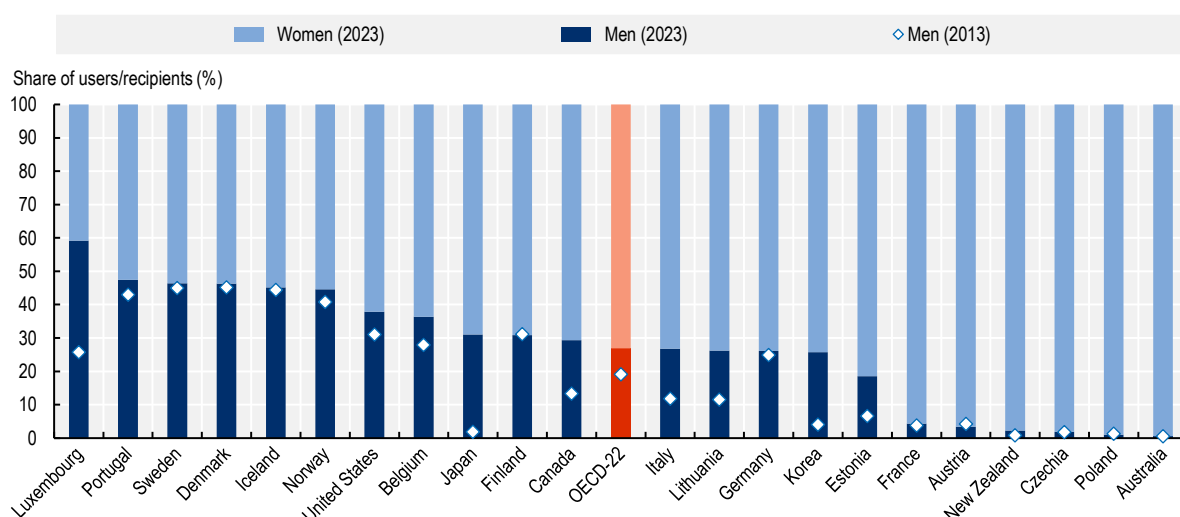
Source: (OECD, 2024^[3]), OECD Family Database, Indicator PF2.1, [Document](#) and/or [Datafile](#).

Fathers' use of parental leave is increasing, but it is still far from equally shared between parents

Fathers have become more likely to take parental leave over the past decade, but they still do so far less often than mothers. In the 22 OECD countries with available data, the share of men among all parental leave benefit recipients increased from an average of 19.1% in 2013 to 26.1% in 2023. Luxembourg is the only country where men are more likely than women to take parental leave. However, about half of fathers take it on a fractioned basis (in multiple blocks or one day per week), usually starting a while after the birth. In contrast, around 70% of mothers take full-time leave, typically beginning right after maternity leave (Berger, Salagean and Valentova, 2024^[6]). While men account for just under half of recipients in some countries (e.g. Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Portugal and Sweden), in others (e.g. Australia and Poland), only about one in every hundred recipients is male (Figure 3). Moreover, although data are available for only eight countries, the distribution of leave days taken reveals even greater gender disparities: even in countries where parental leave uptake is nearly equally shared (e.g. Iceland, Norway, Portugal and Sweden), fathers account for only around 20% to 30% of the total leave days (OECD, 2025^[7]). The average duration of father's leave taking may or may not broadly align with their earmarked entitlements. For example, in Norway 90% of fathers took parental leave in 2022, and 70% did so for precisely the length of the paternal quota (OECD, 2023^[8]). In Germany, fathers made up just 26% of all leave takers in 2024, but those who took leave did so for almost four months on average, twice as long as the earmarked entitlement (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2025^[9]). To what extent the increased use of father's leave has changed the sharing of care activities in households is an issue for future research.

Figure 3. Men's share among recipients of parental leave benefits is increasing, but remains low

Men's share among all recipients/users of publicly administered parental leave benefits or publicly administered paid parental leave, 2023 (or latest year available) and 2013



Notes: Data refer to recipients/users of publicly administered parental leave benefits or publicly administered paid parental leave, and do not include users of maternity or paternity leave unless the country in question does not make a distinction between the different types of leave. For more details on the assumptions and methodology, see (OECD, 2025^[7]), OECD Family Database, Indicator PF2.2. Data labelled "2023" refer to 2022 for Canada and Denmark, 2021 for Finland and Norway, 2018 for Iceland, 2017 for Australia, and 2016 for France. Data for the United States also include employer-provided schemes; "2023" refers to a pooled average between 2016 and 2020, and "2013" refers to a pooled average between 2006 and 2010.

Source: (OECD, 2025^[7]), OECD Family Database, Indicator PF2.2, [Document](#) and/or [Datafile](#).

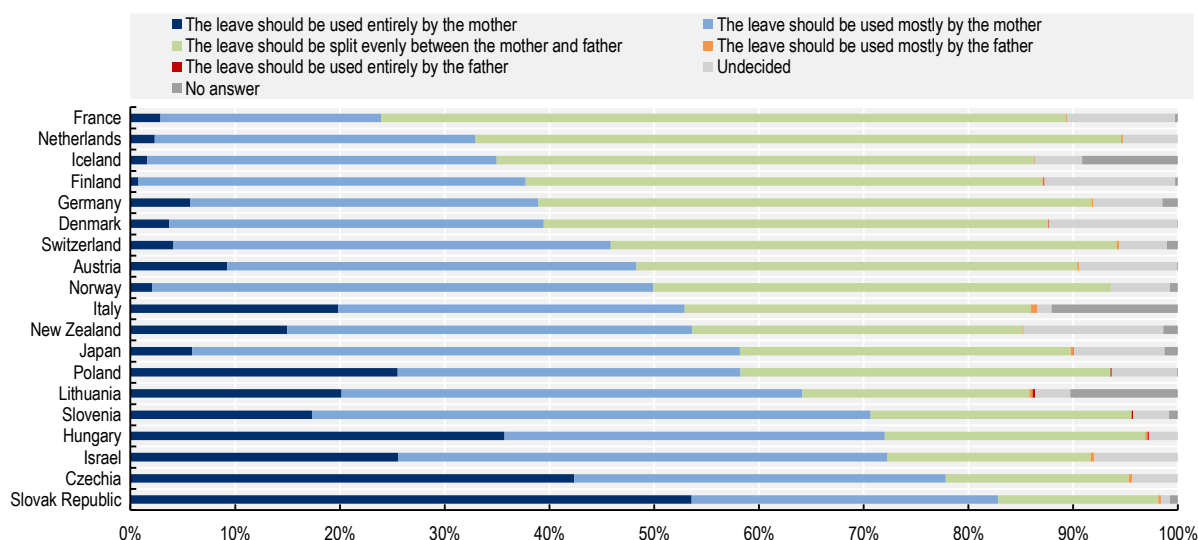
Gender norms, workplace cultures and financial considerations discourage fathers from taking parental leave

Three key factors help explain why paid parental leave is still mostly used by mothers. First, traditional gender roles related to childcare and unpaid work continue to shape behaviour. A cross-national survey shows that many respondents – broadly in equal measure among men and women, see ISSP 2022 - still believe that paid leave should be used mostly or entirely by the mother in OECD countries (Figure 4). Second, workplace cultures play a role; some fathers avoid taking leave out of concern that it might harm their careers. Third, financial considerations influence household decisions. Since women often earn less than men even before having children (Ciminelli, Schwellnus and Stadler, 2021^[10]), the loss of household income is usually smaller when the mother takes leave (OECD, 2011^[11]).

Policy design also affects family decisions. In OECD countries, paid parental leave is often a shareable family entitlement, meaning only one parent is eligible for income support at a time. In such cases, it is typically the mother who takes the leave, due to the factors mentioned above (OECD, 2023^[12]). However, individual entitlement may not necessarily provide a complete solution. Even when leave is provided as non-transferable individual entitlements, similar patterns may still emerge, especially when both parents are allowed to take leave simultaneously as the couple still ends up deciding which parent (or both) actually takes it during that period.

Figure 4. Many people believe that parental leave should be used mostly or entirely by the mother

Distribution of responses to the question “Consider a couple who both work full-time and now have a newborn child. Both are in a similar work situation and are eligible for paid leave. How should this paid leave period be divided between the mother and the father?” among respondents who believe that paid leave should be available, 2022



Source: OECD estimates based on the International Social Survey Programme: Family and Changing Gender Roles V – ISSP 2022 (First partial data), <https://issp.org/>.

Fathers’ leave can benefit their families and promote gender equality at work

Despite the low average take-up, fathers’ leave brings significant benefits for fathers, mothers and children. For instance, fathers who take leave are more likely to be involved in unpaid work at home, including both childcare and household tasks – an effect that persists well beyond the leave period (Tamm, 2019^[13];

Knoester, Petts and Pragg, 2019^[14]). This impact is particularly strong when fathers take longer or solo leaves (Bünning, 2015^[15]; Huerta et al., 2014^[16]). Greater paternal involvement also contributes to improved communication and stronger emotional bonds between fathers and their children (Petts, Knoester and Waldfogel, 2020^[17]). The provision of leave specifically earmarked for fathers also enhances overall life satisfaction for both parents, especially mothers (Korsgren and van Lent, 2022^[18]).

In addition, fathers' leave promotes gender equality at work. When male co-workers take parental leave, there are positive peer effects that encourage others to do the same (Carlsson and Reshid, 2022^[19]). Normalising fathers' use of parental leave can help reduce gender-based discrimination in the workplace and lower the risk that only women take leave, thereby mitigating the "motherhood penalty", i.e. negative impacts on mothers' earnings, career progression, and economic self-sufficiency (OECD, 2023^[12]; Andersen, 2018^[20]; Rønsen and Kitterød, 2015^[21]).

Paid leave for fathers has recently been expanded in OECD countries

To encourage fathers to take paid leave, non-transferable leave entitlements for fathers were increased significantly. Over the past decade (2014-24), the number of OECD countries offering paid leave earmarked for fathers increased from 28 to 35 (out of 38), and the average duration rose from 9 weeks to 12.7 weeks (OECD, 2024^[22]). This change has been driven primarily by the EU Work-Life Balance Directive of 2019, which required EU member states to implement, by August 2022, at least ten working days of paternity leave and four months of paid parental leave per parent, with at least two months being non-transferable (EU, 2019^[23]).

Paid paternity leave has recently been introduced or extended not only among EU member states but also in non-EU OECD countries (e.g. Colombia, Costa Rica, Japan, Korea and Switzerland). In many of these countries, paternity leave is generally well paid, typically covering 67% to 100% of previous earnings. Additionally, France introduced mandatory paternity leave for private sector employees in July 2021. While part of maternity leave is typically compulsory for health and safety reasons, only four OECD countries currently mandate (at least part of) paternity leave: France, Italy, Portugal and Spain.

Paid parental leave reform has followed three main approaches among OECD countries. These approaches share a common feature: if the father does not take parental leave, the couple's total leave duration or benefits are significantly reduced.

- The first approach involves introducing non-transferable leave periods earmarked for each parent ("mother and father quotas") alongside a family shareable entitlement. This approach was initially associated with Nordic countries, but many EU countries have recently introduced or expanded non-transferable paid leave entitlements in line with the EU directive. These non-transferable leave periods are well paid in some countries, while others offer only low, flat-rate benefits.
- The second approach provides parents an additional paid leave period ("bonus periods") granted if both parents take a certain portion of the family shareable entitlement. This mechanism effectively "reserves" part of the leave for each parent. Countries such as Austria, Germany, Italy and Portugal adopted this approach. In 2019, Canada introduced a sharing benefit that provides an additional five weeks of leave under the standard option, or eight weeks under an extended option (paid at a lower rate), when both parents take parental leave.
- The third approach grants fully non-transferable individual entitlements (e.g. Belgium, Luxembourg, Japan and Korea) instead of the family entitlements described above. Japan and Korea have recently introduced new bonus benefits with higher replacement rates for both parents, granted on the condition that both parents take parental leave for a certain period – Korea in 2022 and Japan in 2025 (OECD, 2024^[24]; OECD, 2025^[25]). These measures help incentivise not only mothers but also fathers to use parental leave by conditionally increasing the replacement rate.

Policy takeaways to promote a more balanced parental leave use among parents

To achieve a better balance in parental leave use by fathers and mothers, policy makers can adopt a holistic approach, including the following elements:

Ensure adequate pay and well-designed incentives for fathers to take parental leave

Adequate pay and well-designed incentives for fathers are essential. Some OECD countries offer fathers unpaid leave or leave with only a low flat-rate payment, but research suggests that fathers are more likely to take parental leave when it is well-paid (Robbins, 2024^[26]). However, offering well-paid leave alone is not sufficient; well-designed incentives such as “father quotas” and “bonus periods” are also needed to encourage take-up. Germany provides a good example of reforming parental leave to be not only well-paid but also well-designed. In 2007, Germany increased fathers’ use of parental leave by introducing an earnings-related benefit (replacing a low, means-tested flat-rate allowance) for ten months, with an additional two “bonus” months if both parents each take at least two months of leave (OECD, 2017^[27]).

Promote and design flexible parental leave that supports fathers’ involvement

Flexible parental leave arrangements can boost fathers’ uptake, especially when they align with their needs. In many OECD countries, parental leave can be taken in various forms – such as part-time, in multiple blocks, or simultaneously by both parents (Dobrotić et al., 2025^[4]). However, flexible arrangements may lead fathers to take only short or occasional periods of leave, reinforcing their role as helpers rather than as primary caregivers (Brandth and Kvande, 2019^[28]; Axelsson, 2014^[29]; González, Guirola and Hospido, 2024^[30]). When promoting greater flexibility to encourage fathers to take parental leave, it is also important to ensure a more equitable division of unpaid work and enhance fathers’ involvement—for example, by encouraging them to take a continuous period of leave or some solo leave.

Raise awareness of parental leave rights to support changes in gender norms and workplace culture

Changing both parental norms and employer attitudes toward parental leave is important, even if it takes time. While the decision to take leave ultimately rests with families, it can be influenced by social norms and workplace culture. Awareness campaigns and timely recourse procedures in case of discrimination can help normalise fathers’ use of leave and promote a more equitable sharing of caregiving responsibilities between parents. Employers also play a key role in driving this shift. Some countries require larger companies to report not only on employees’ gender pay gaps but also on their use of parental leave once or twice a year (e.g. Australia, Italy, Japan, Norway and Spain) (OECD, 2023^[31]; Nakazato, Takezawa and Nishimura, 2023^[32]). Such transparency measures can create pressure for change and foster accountability.

Enhance efforts to monitor and collect data on parental leave uptake by each parent

Better data on parental leave usage by each parent can support broader research and more effective policies on fathers’ leave. The OECD collects administrative data on the number of recipients and days of parental leave benefits in each country, but such data are available for only a limited number of countries (OECD, 2025^[7]). Research on paternity and parental leave for fathers has grown significantly in recent years (André, Cammu and Meuleman, 2025^[33]; Pizarro and Gartzia, 2024^[34]; Dobrotić et al., 2025^[4]). However, more cross-national data on fathers’ use of parental leave – including by socio-economic status, could help identify factors influencing uptake and its effects, providing evidence to support policies that promote a more balanced sharing of leave between parents.

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