

Assessing National Action on Work and Caregiving



Over 65 years ago, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights established that all people, regardless of sex, “are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” A series of treaties in the following decades—most notably the U.N. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women—created more specific guarantees for the world’s women and girls. In 1995, 189 nations reaffirmed their commitments to advancing women’s and girls’ civil, social, political, and economic rights through the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a landmark document that laid out a detailed strategy for addressing remaining gaps and barriers. To mark its 20th anniversary, this fact sheet series by the WORLD Policy Analysis Center examines countries’ progress toward enacting laws and policies to achieve gender equality.

Background

- The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action called on countries to create “opportunities for women and men to take job-protected parental leave and to have parental benefits; [and] promote the equal sharing of responsibilities for the family by men and women, including through appropriate legislation, incentives and/or encouragement.”
- Advancing gender equality both at work and at home requires policies that enable and encourage men’s participation in caregiving. Paternal leave increases men’s involvement with their infants, leads to more equitable sharing of child care responsibilities after the leave is over, and is associated with lower rates of post-partum depression among mothers.
- Both mothers and fathers also need access to leave to tend to their children’s health needs beyond infancy.
- Similarly, men and women need occasional time off work to meet the health needs of adult family members, such as elderly parents.
- Absence of leave to care for the health of children and adults is particularly costly to the work and income of women, who still disproportionately carry this responsibility.

Findings

Leave for Infant Care

- 95% of countries provide either maternal leave reserved for mothers, or parental leave that is available to both mothers and fathers. Since 1995, eight countries newly enacted paid maternal leave, more than 50 approved an increase in leave duration, and 20 raised payment rates.
- By contrast, only 49% of countries make paid leave available to new fathers.
- Some countries offer gender-neutral paid leave that parents can share as they choose. Yet even when this leave is available, men may not take it due to longstanding cultural expectations. To counteract this, 8% of countries reserve more than two weeks of leave specifically for fathers or provide incentives for both parents to take leave.

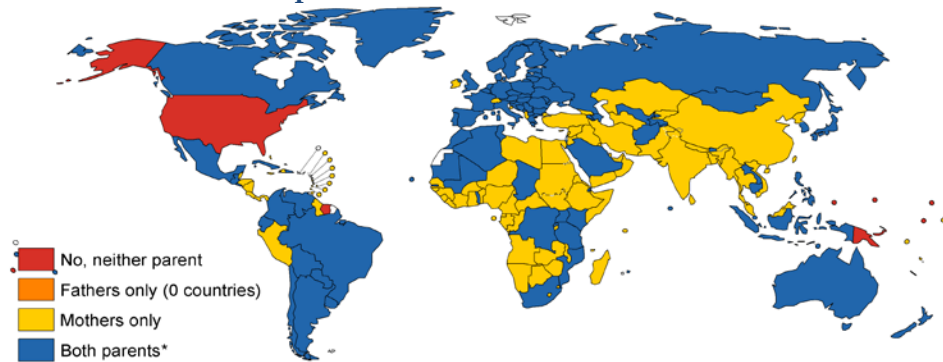
Leave for Other Health and Education Needs

- Family caregiving doesn’t end with infancy. Yet many countries lack policies to help enable workers to meet essential family needs:
 - 46% of countries do not make leave available to parents to address children’s health needs;
 - 76% provide no form of leave for parents to support a child’s education;
 - Over half (52%) don’t allow leave to meet the health requirements of an adult family member.

Gender Disparities in Caregiving Policies

- When it comes to caring for infants, the world does not give men and women equal chances, which reflects and reinforces an assumption of unequal roles at work and at home.
- Even beyond infancy, some countries only make leave available to women: five countries only provide leave for children’s health needs to women, while two countries only provide leave for children’s educational needs to women.

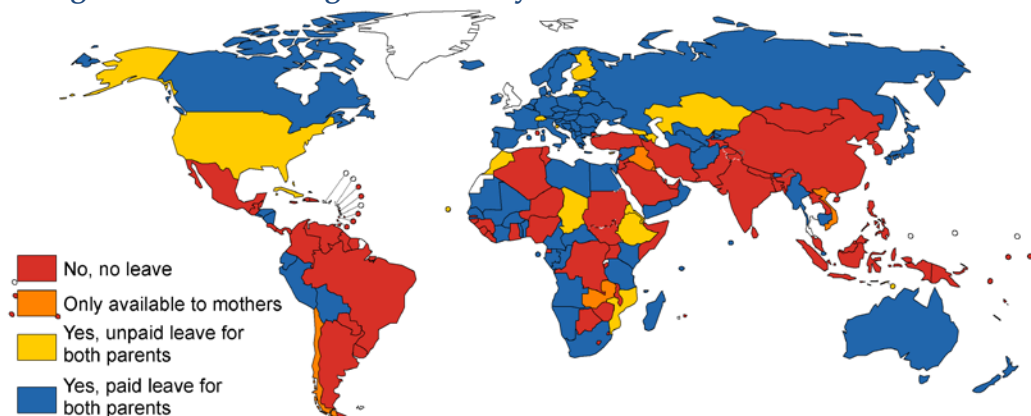
Map 1: Is paid leave available for both parents of infants?



*Both parents includes leave available for either parent to take, whether it is through maternity or paternity leave specifically for mothers or fathers, gender-neutral parental leave that can be used by either parent, or a combination of these types of leave.

Source: WORLD Policy Analysis Center, *Adult Labor Database*, 2014

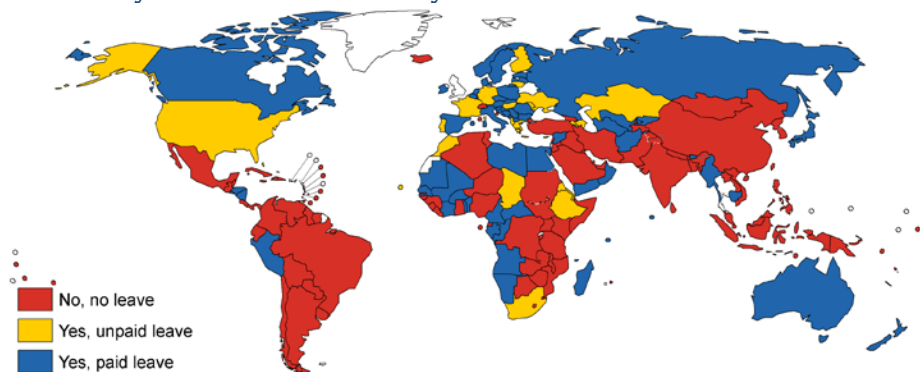
Map 2: Are working men and women guaranteed any leave for children's health needs?



Any leave for children's health needs includes leave specifically for children's health needs, as well as discretionary, family needs, and emergency leave which may be used for health needs. It also includes cases where leave is available only for serious illnesses, hospitalization, or urgent health needs.

Source: WORLD Policy Analysis Center, *Adult Labor Database*, 2014

Map 3: Can workers take any leave for adult family members' health needs?



Leave for adult family members' health needs includes leave specifically designated to care for adult family members' health needs, as well as discretionary, family needs, and emergency leave which may also be used for adult family members' health needs. It also includes cases where leave is available only for serious illnesses, hospitalization, or urgent health needs, and cases where leave is only available to care for a spouse's health needs.

Source: WORLD Policy Analysis Center, *Adult Labor Database*, 2014

For more information, see WORLD and MACHEquity's brief, "Labor Policies to Promote Equity at Work and at Home: Findings from 197 Countries." This work was made possible through the support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, in partnership with the Bill, Hillary & Chelsea Clinton Foundation's No Ceilings Initiative, as well as the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. Unless otherwise specified, all data analyses in No Ceilings products were based on 197 countries and Beijing Platform signatories.

About WORLD: The WORLD Policy Analysis Center aims to improve the quantity and quality of globally comparative data on policies affecting human health, development, well-being, and equality. With this data, WORLD informs policy debates, facilitates comparative studies of policy progress, feasibility, and effectiveness, and advances efforts to hold decision-makers accountable.