

## **PATERNITY BENEFIT IN EU COUNTRIES IN 2022: A COMPARATIVE STUDY WITH OECD DATA**

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### **Abstract**

Paternity leave is a specific type of leave that allows fathers to spend some time with their newborn child, to adapt to their newly acquired active role in parenthood, to support their partner and to adjust to living with their child. Paternity leave allows for a deeper promotion of gender equality in both working and private life and creates an important social tool to support the family as a whole. The aim of our paper is to compare selected criteria for the use of paternity leave in EU countries, based on OECD data and valid for 2022. The resulting differences in paternity leave settings are quite surprising and do not correspond to the economic as well as geographical aspects of these countries.

**Keywords:** 27 EU Member States, European Union, Paternity Benefit, Social Security

### **INTRODUCTION**

Paternity leave, together with paternity benefit, is one of the modern social policy instruments of developed welfare states. The social role of men and women in the family is more gender-balanced in the modern world in terms of parental responsibilities. Several important social factors have contributed to this, related to the position of women in the labour market, the economic factors of post-modern society in connection with the family and its function in the contemporary world. The introduction of paternity leave was intended to contribute to greater participation of fathers in the upbringing of their children at an early age and, at the same time, to give mothers partial relief in caring for their newborn child. The paternity benefit is provided under the social security system which replaces the father's salary during the period when he is caring for his newborn child or for a child who has been taken into care in lieu of parental care by the decision of the competent authority.

The aim of this short, summarizing and comparative article is to assess the systemic set-up of paternity leave in the 27 EU countries applicable in 2022, with input data obtained from the OECD's family database. The intention is to identify those countries that are active and supportive in terms of state support for parenting directed at fathers, and those that are not.

The article is structured in several parts. The first one introduces the reader to the authors' literature searches related to the topic of the article. It introduces the concept of paternity leave

from the perspective of different countries and from the perspective of the development of family policy in the international environment. Emphasis is placed on the social role of fathers and the importance of their involvement in early child-rearing and the strengthening of family ties. The following section briefly defines the status of the paternity benefit and paternity leave according to Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU. The empirical-analytical part focuses on the presentation of the data taken and adjusted in order to achieve the desired visual representation of the comparison made. The conclusion summarises the key findings from the synthesis of the theoretical and practical parts of this paper, identifies the possibilities for further research and its limitations, and highlights the emerging discrepancy between the application of the EU Directive and the data presented in the OECD Family Database.

### **Paternal postnatal care**

The topic of paternity leave and the position of fathers in childcare in general has been a debated topic in recent years not only in the public space but also in terms of scientific literature. With the birth of a child, the emergence of parenthood and the building of new family ties, the time parents devote to the family after the birth of a child is a major factor that determines the quality and quantity of their involvement in child rearing (Petts and Knoester, 2018). Behavioural patterns set at this critical time of family relationship building can persist for years, e.g., according to Nepomnyascha and Waldfogel (2007), fathers who took 2 or more weeks off work after childbirth were more involved in direct childcare (e.g., changing the baby) even after 9 months. Longer paternity leave was also associated with greater father involvement in caregiving and engagement in developmental tasks with the child not only during infancy but also during the first few years of the child's life (Petts and Knoester, 2018).

In addition to the impact of paternity leave on child rearing and development and family relationships, other traditional lines of research in the field of family policy and paternity leave can also be traced. These are mainly comparisons of the development of current policies, or research on the determinants of fathers' decisions on paternity leave from a geographical or economic perspective. Along these lines, Daly and Ferragina (2018) examined family policies since 1960, including paid and unpaid paternity leave, in 23 developed countries, with Sweden, Belgium, Luxembourg and Spain as pioneers. Marynissen et al. (2020) focused on the pioneering countries of Sweden and Belgium and compared fathers' behaviour in relation to paternity leave, finding that in Belgium fathers' decisions about paternity were determined by the micro-economic logic of cost minimization, while in Sweden it was the level of income of the father in question and the nature of his employment. Gender equality between partners in terms of contributing to the household budget was also a determinant for the use of paternity leave in Sweden. Eerola et al. (2019) examined fathers' attitudes towards paternity, and hence parental leave, in another Nordic country, Finland, and found that 80% of fathers in this country used some form of parental leave, with the key determinants of this choice being the man's job, the partner's education, family income, the man's desire to have some time off from work, and the man's desire to allow his partner to return to work or school. Berrigan, Schoppe-Sullivan,

and Kamp Dush (2021) examined the determinants of the length of both maternity and paternity leave in the USA and found that for men, longer paternity leave was associated with a higher proportion of paid paternity leave, fatherhood at an older age, less planned parenthood, and lower support for the principle of maternal essentialism, which holds that mothers are the primary and most important caregivers.

The topic of the development of family policy, including paternity policy, is also relevant in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, where it is set in the context of the historical development of social and family policy in post-communist countries. Thus, on the one hand, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe now constitute an interesting area for research on the development of social policy, but in the early 1990s, it was precisely the transformation, the highly fluid nature of policies and the rapid dynamics of reforms that discouraged some authors from systematically researching or clustering these countries (Szelewa and Polakowski 2008, p. 117).

Robila (2012) generally describes the direction of parental leave in Eastern Europe after the fall of communism as a departure from the attempt to combine motherhood and a woman's career, which was typical of the communist era. Authors such as Robila (2012) and Saxonberg and Szelewa (2007) refer to this direction of development as 'refamilialisation'. As part of this refamilialisation, public and widely available facilities for children under three began to be reduced and policy focused more on providing financial allowances and extending the length of parental leave so that women could be at home to care for their children. Thus, many countries in the region have adopted a model that puts men in the role of breadwinner and emphasizes motherhood, childcare and child-rearing as the role of women.

This general pattern of family benefits in Central and Eastern Europe, as described above, thus tended to promote a stereotypical division of labour between men and women and did not include incentives such as paternity leave. Since the 1970s, fathers in socialist countries have been able to be on parental leave with the mother's consent, but the process of introducing so-called „paternity leave” as an exclusive right of fathers started relatively late, mostly after 2000 during the negotiations on the accession of some countries to the EU (Dobrotić and Stropnik, 2020, pp. At the same time, Saxonberg and Sirovátka (2006) found that Czechs and Poles strongly support gender equality in the household and are positive about the idea that men should be more involved in housework and childcare, even more so than, for example, Western Europeans. According to Duda et al. (2022), one of the reasons for the higher interest of Polish fathers in paternity leave may be due to its introduction in 2010, whereas in the Czech Republic paternity leave was enacted only after eight years.

### **Paternity leave and paternity benefit in EU countries under the EU directive**

Increasingly, people are struggling with the decision of whether their private or professional life is more important to them. The main factor they look at is the fact that working life is financially rewarded while private life is not. In 2019, a new Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU (hereafter referred to as Directive

2019/1158) was issued. This Directive also imposes a date by which individual Member States must implement each provision into national law, which is no later than 2 August 2022 (European Council and Council of the European Union, 2022). This directive is based on the basic principle of EU law regarding the equality of men and women (Article 3(3) of the EU Treaty and Article 23 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU), which should be perceived as a real legal obligation and not as a mere ethical obligation (MacGregor Pelikánová et al., 2021).

One of the reasons for the introduction of the directive regulating paternity leave is that people have a problem with work-life balance. The greatest complications arise in the case of women, who have lower employment and remuneration than men. Women who have children may not only have to manage work and private life as such, but they have to incorporate caring responsibilities into all of this, which can make it impossible for them to manage full-time work. This directive is therefore intended to encourage men to become more involved in family responsibilities, thus making motherhood and parenthood easier for women. A second problem may be that paid paternity leave is completely absent in many countries, and so fathers in the EU make little use of this leave (Directive 2019/1158/EC).

According to Article 4 of Directive 2019/1158/EC, Member States shall take the necessary measures to ensure that fathers or equivalent second parents, if they are recognised by national law and to the extent they are recognised, are entitled to 10 working days of paternity leave to be taken on the occasion of the birth of a child. Member States may decide whether to allow paternity leave to be partly taken before or after the birth of the child and whether to allow it to be taken in flexible ways. The right to paternity leave may not be subject to a requirement of length of service or duration of employment. The right to paternity leave shall be granted irrespective of the personal or marital status of the worker as defined by national law.

The remuneration or paternity benefit is intended to provide an income at least equal to that which the worker concerned would have had if he had stopped work for reasons linked to his state of health, up to any limit set by national law. Member States may make the right to remuneration or an allowance conditional on a period of service of no more than six months immediately preceding the expected date of birth of the child (Article 8 of Directive 2019/1158/EC).

### **The empirical section on paternity benefits in EU countries and methodology**

The empirical part is designed in the form of an analysis of regional disparities in the indicators (1) duration in weeks, (2) average payments rate in % and (3) full-rate equivalent in weeks. The comparative appropriateness of the indicators is effectively ensured by converting the different durations of paternity into a classical (seven-day) weekly cycle; the difference in benefit percentages for different periods of taking paternity across some countries has been unified into a single average value that reflects the size of the percentage entitlement over the full duration of paternity; and finally, it is a recalculated indicator that gives us the duration of paternity benefit in weeks for which the father of the child would draw the maximum, i.e. 100% of the benefit. The data are taken from the OECD and are valid until 2022 (see Table 1). On

average across the 27 EU countries, paternity leave lasted less than 3 weeks, the benefit was 75% of the assessment base and 100% of the rate would be equivalent to two and a half weeks. Finally, if we abstract from individual preferences, all three parameters tend to be higher the more important the paternity setting in a country's social system.

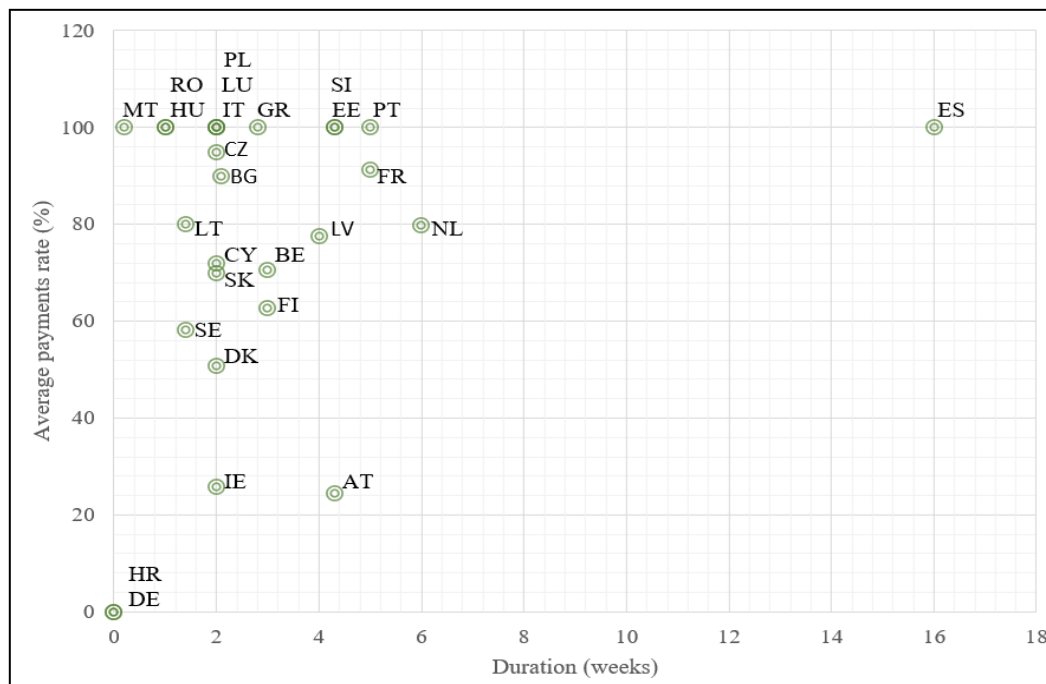
**Table 1: Paid paternity leave in 27 EU countries, in weeks, 2022**

Country	Duration (weeks)	Average payments rate (%)	Full-rate equivalent (weeks)	Country	Duration (weeks)	Average payments rate (%)	Full-rate equivalent (weeks)
Austria (AT)	4.3	24.4	1.1	Italy (IT)	2.0	100.0	2.0
Belgium (BE)	3.0	70.5	2.1	Latvia (LT)	1.4	80.0	1.1
Bulgaria (BG)	2.1	90.0	1.9	Lithuania (LV)	4.0	77.6	3.1
Croatia (HR)	0.0	0.0	0.0	Luxembourg (LU)	2.0	100.0	2.0
Cyprus (CY)	2.0	72.0	1.4	Malta (MT)	0.2	100.0	0.2
Czech Republic (CZ)	2.0	94.9	1.9	Netherlands (NL)	6.0	79.9	4.8
Denmark (DK)	2.0	50.7	1.0	Poland (PL)	2.0	100.0	2.0
Estonia (EE)	4.3	100.0	4.3	Portugal (PT)	5.0	100.0	5.0
Finland (FI)	3.0	62.8	1.9	Romania (RO)	1.0	100.0	1.0
France (FR)	5.0	91.4	4.6	Slovak Republic (SK)	2.0	70.0	1.3
Germany (DE)	0.0	0.0	0.0	Slovenia (SI)	4.3	100.0	4.3
Greece (GR)	2.8	100.0	2.8	Spain (ES)	16.0	100.0	16.0
Hungary (HU)	1.0	100.0	1.0	Sweden (SE)	1.4	58.2	0.8
Ireland (IE)	2.0	25.7	0.5	<b>Average</b>	<b>2.99</b>	<b>75.86</b>	<b>2.52</b>

Source: OECD Family Database (adjusted)

The ranking of EU countries within the first two indicators is shown in Chart 1. If we start from the general assumption that longer paternity leave periods and higher benefit percentages are more socially desirable, then the further away from the origin of the axes a particular country is, the better it is in terms of setting the paternity leave. In our case, the best paternity leave conditions are set in Spain, where paternity leave lasts for 16 weeks and fathers are entitled to a benefit equal to 100% of the assessment base. By contrast, Germany and Croatia have no paternity status at all under the social security system. Surprisingly, it is not possible to determine at first sight any similarities in the distribution of countries within the scheme, neither in terms of geographical proximity nor in terms of economic development of the countries, population size or historical and Trans regional implications.

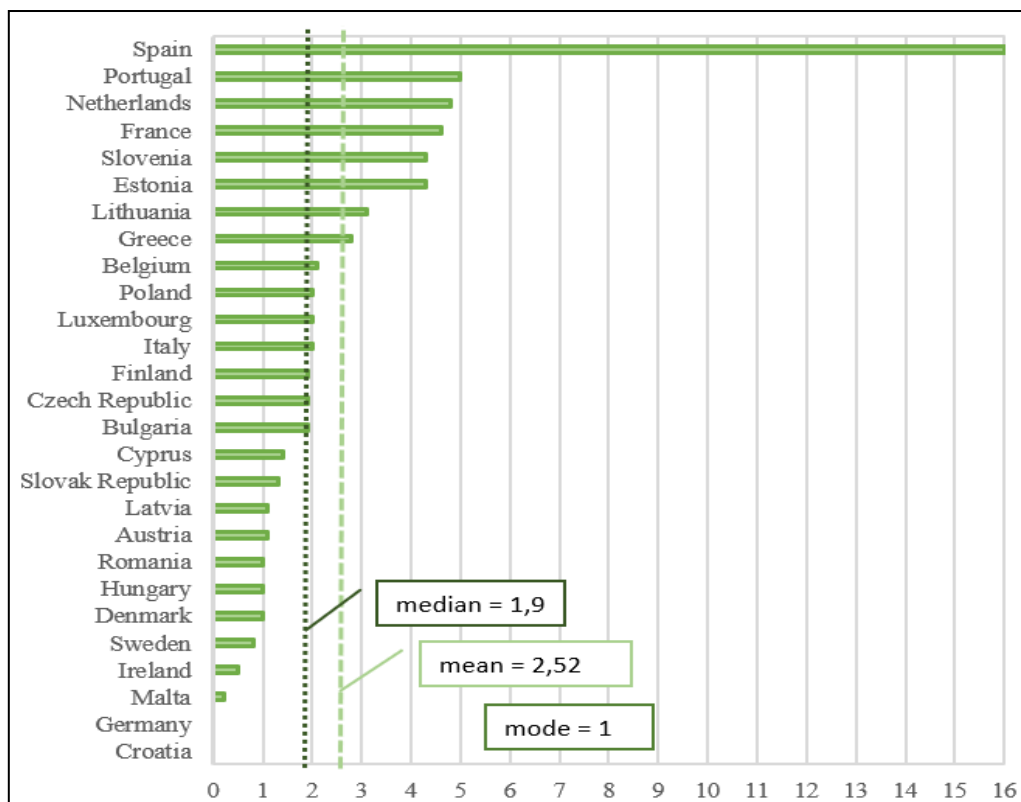
**Scheme 1: Duration (in weeks) and average payments rate (%) of paternity leave in 27 EU countries, 2022**



Source: OECD Family Database (adjusted)

The last relevant indicator (Full-rate equivalent of paternity leave) is visually elaborated in the graph below (see Figure 1) and refines the position of the 27 EU countries within the paternity leave framework, as it reflects both the duration and the percentage entitlement to the benefit, linking them into one indicator. The chart is complemented by the values of the mean of the data (2.52), their median (1.9) and the value of the mode (1). Due to the dispersion of the data (the extreme in the form of Spain), a comparison between countries with the median is more appropriate than with the mean. Thus, it is possible to determine the ranking of EU Member States in terms of their positive approach to the setting of paternity leave within their own social security system. In addition to the previously mentioned Spain, other countries that are in favour of paternity leave include Portugal, the Netherlands, France, Slovenia, Estonia, Lithuania and Greece. The opposite is true for countries such as Malta, Ireland, Sweden, Denmark, Hungary and Romania. Germany and Croatia, which do not have paternity leave at all according to OECD data, cannot be left out.

**Graf 1: Full-rate equivalent of paternity leave in 27 EU countries, in weeks, 2022**



Source: OECD Family Database (adjusted)

## CONCLUSION

The topic of paternity benefit and paternity leave has been highly relevant in recent years. It is one of the instruments of family policy that enables both parents to care for the newborn child in the family together. At the same time, it is also about linking the work and private lives of parents in today's hectic times. This is one of the reasons why a new EU directive was issued in 2019. While the specifics of social policy oriented towards paternity leave vary considerably from country to country, the basic concept of giving fathers time off work to intensively care for a newborn child is becoming an increasingly accepted and valued practice in many parts of the world. This is also the case in the group of countries analysed.

Given the fact that neither geographical nor economic causality to the benchmark index (the full-rate equivalent of paternity leave) has been demonstrated at first glance, there is room to consider, for example, the partial incentives that led to the introduction of paternity leave into the social security system of individual countries, or whether there is statistical significance between the "generosity" of paternity leave in a given country and its wealth, and trends in the concept of paternity as such and the spread of this concept to other countries around the world. Analysis of men's use of this social "support" across countries and regions and the determinants

of whether or not they are encouraged to take (and use) paternity leave cannot be overlooked. At the same time, when processing the secondary data for this initial research, a certain discrepancy was identified in the uniformity of data from the OECD database used and other sources, mostly information based on legislative or implementation documents of individual EU countries. Validating the relevance of the data for paternity leave provision will be the next step in our research, as will the development of sub-indicators of paternity leave over time and space.

Finally, let us add that the current trend is worldwide recognition of the social, moral, ethical and gendered imperative to apply this important component of social policy to the overall social security system, and there is a general drive to make paternity leave as accessible and acceptable as possible to fathers. It is a valuable addition to modern society with the potential to improve family ties as such and deepen the quality of society as a whole.

#### Acknowledgment

This paper was supported by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports within the Institutional Support for Long-term Development of a Research Organization Silesian University in Opava, School of Business Administration in Karvina in 2023.

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