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Parenting Leave Policies in Germany and Inequalities





Parenting Leaves in Germany: Types of Leave and Design Elements



Parenting leave policy in Germany

- Two different legislations on Maternity Leave and Parental Leave
 - Maternity Protection Act (*Mutterschutzgesetz – MuSchG*)
 - Federal Parental Benefit and Parental Leave Act (*Bundeselterngeld- und Elternzeitgesetz – BEEG*)
- It sets out the legal protection of parents around childbirth, the conditions for protection (eligibility & scope), the duration of protection periods, and the benefits to which parents are entitled.

Maternity Leave

- 14 weeks of maternity protection: six weeks before childbirth (voluntary since 2024) and eight weeks after childbirth (mandatory)
- Protection against dismissal during pregnancy and for at least four months after childbirth; protection from workplace risks, including hazardous work, night shifts, overtime, and protection from deportation during pregnancy (for asylum seekers)
- Benefits: Full income replacement (100%), financed by the statutory health insurance fund and the employer; minimum €210/month

Parental Leave

- Unpaid parental leave (job protection; individual entitlement): until the child reaches three years of age
- Income-related parental allowance for full- or part-time leave (14/28 months)
 - *Basiselterngeld* (fulltime leave): up to 12 + 2 **partner months**, replacing 65% of prior net income (€300 - €1,800)
 - *ElterngeldPlus* (part-time leave): for part-time work (up to 32 hrs/week), paid longer at a reduced rate (€150 - €900), with possible **bonus months**
 - The combination of both is possible; family entitlement with exclusive entitlements for the 2nd parent

Parenting leave policy in Germany: recent changes

- 1 April 2025: No parental leave benefits for families with income above €175,000 per year
- 1 April 2024: Parents can receive parental leave benefits for a maximum of 1 month at the same time; previously it was 2 months
- Further changes since 2007 also to: eligibility criteria and calculation of benefits





Inequality-Reducing and Inequality-Generating Elements of Parental Leave Design in Germany



Who is eligible, who not?

- Maternity leave:
 - Independent from employment sector and type of employment, but depending on public health insurance
- Parental leave & benefits:
 - Eligibility depends on prior employment status
 - The second parent is only eligible if registered at the child's residence
 - No restrictions apply to adoptive parents or same-sex couples

What do we know about take-up rates (2023)?

- Maternity leave: 100% of eligible mothers
- Parental leave:
 - Average planned duration of parental benefits was significantly longer for women (14.8 months) than for men (3.7 months)
 - Fathers accounted for 26.2% of all parental benefit recipients
 - 57% of fathers receiving parental benefits claimed one month during for the period directly after childbirth
 - *ElterngeldPlus* was claimed by 40.9% of eligible mothers and 17.7% of eligible fathers

Parenting leave policy in Germany and Gender equality

- Policy goal: promoting gender equality in caregiving and employment
- Key challenge: men's average earnings remain higher than women's, shaping household decisions on parental leave
- Cultural context: (West) Germany has a long-standing tradition of the male breadwinner model
- Workplace norms: many organisations still follow the “unencumbered worker” ideal, making it difficult for both women and men to combine parental leave with career advancement



Inequalities written into German parenting leave policy

- Income: Families with higher incomes receive higher benefits from the (welfare) state
- Workplace factors: Depending on job position and company size, opportunities to take parental leave can vary widely
- Age: The current system tends to “reward” having children later in the life course



Final Discussion



Parenting Leave Policies in Germany and Inequalities

- What about inequalities between children?
 - Access to both parents
 - Financial situation / poverty
- Research gap /data gap
 - More longitudinal information needed
- Question
 - Which perspective to take to leave entitlements?