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Parenting Leave Policies in Italy and gender inequalities





Parenting Leaves in Italy: Types of Leave and Design Elements



Parenting Leave Policy in Italy

- **Maternity Leave:** It is obligatory to take all the leave

Length: 5 months, at least 4 weeks can be taken before the birth.

Eligibility: All employees and self-employed women with social security membership

Payment: Eighty per cent of previous earnings with no upper limit for salaried workers



Parenting Leave Policy in Italy

■ Paternity Leave

It is a **mandatory right** that **fathers can claim**. The employee must apply through the National Institute for Social Security or give a written notice to the employer on the intention to use the leave, at least 5 days in advance. If the employee does not request it, the employer is not obliged to offer the leave or force the employee to take it.

Length: 1 day in 2013 thereafter increased to 2 days in 2016; 4 in 2018; 5 in 2019; 7 in 2020. **The 2021 Budget Law** increased them to **10 working days** and 1 day of optional leave if the mother transfers part of her Maternity leave. Leave can be used from 2 months preceding the expected date of childbirth until 5 months after childbirth.

Eligibility: All biological, adoptive, and foster fathers who are employees.

Payment: 100 per cent of earnings with no upper limit



Parenting Leave Policy in Italy

- **Parental Leave:**

It is an individual, non-transferable entitlement

Length: 10 months per parent, but the total leave per family cannot exceed this duration unless the father takes leave for a period in which case the duration of leave can be extended to 11 months. Single parents are entitled to 11 months of Parental leave, out of which 9 months are paid

Eligibility: Leave can be taken at any time by father and mother until a child is 12 years old.* For self-employed persons, however, parental leave is shorter than for employees and subject to more constraints. Same-sex couples are eligible **The 2026 Budget Law extends the period during which parents may take parental leave from 12 to 14 years since January 2026 only for employees*

Payment: 3 months of leave is paid at 80 per cent of earnings, 6 months at 30 per cent, while 2 months are unpaid. After 9 months of paid Parental leave, parental benefit is means-tested, i.e., it is paid only if the worker's individual income is less than 2.5 times the amount of the minimum pension or in cases when parents use extended Maternity leave for severely disabled children.



Parenting Leave Policy in Italy: recent changes

- The 2026 Budget Law extends the period during which parents may take parental leave from 12 to 14 years since January 2026 only for employees





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



What do we know about take-up rates in Italy?

- Maternity leaves in 2024 : 171,713 beneficiaries amongst employees in the private sector, 9,452 self-employed and 5,260 para-subordinate
- Paternity leaves: In 2024, 181,777 fathers in the private sector took Paternity leave (i.e., about 1,084 beneficiaries more than the previous year)
- Parental leaves amongst employees in the Private Sector in 2024: 124,286 male beneficiaries for an average of 22 days and 289,409 women for an average of 53 days.

Source: Italian National Institute of Social Security (INPS) <https://servizi2.inps.it/servizi/osservatoristatistici>



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What do we know about take-up rates in Italy?

- Parental leaves:

During the first year of the child 62,64% of mothers & 8,33% of fathers use parental leaves, 80% of fathers who use them do so for less than 90 days while 41% of mothers using them do so for 180 days and 37.5% for 90 to 180 days.

Source: INPS (2025)



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What do we know about take-up rates in Italy?

■ Paternity Leaves:

Take-up increased from 20% in 2013 to 64% in 2022 stabilizing afterwards (64,8% in 2024). 66% of those who take the leave use it for at least 7 days, while 30% use less than a half of the available days. The length of the leave decreases the higher the earnings, is higher for white collar/manager than for blue collar; and in the North of Italy. 60% of fathers who take it do so in the first month of the child life (INPS, 2025)



Parental leaves and Early childhood education and care in Italy

■ ECEC:

ECEC for children under three coverage rate is 31.6% at national level [below the EU 2010 target at 33% and far from the EU target for 2030 at 45%] with a high regional heterogeneity from a minimum of 19% in the South to a maximum of 40.4% in the Centre (ISTAT, 2026)



Gender Inequalities in Italy - Unpaid work

- Italy is characterized by a high asymmetry in the distribution of unpaid work with women still bearing the most of it [Istat, 2026, Rapporto Annuale sulla Situazione del Paese] especially if with a lower level of education
- In the Time dimension of the EIGE Gender Equality Index Italy scores 59.4% in 2025 against 65% EU average showing higher inequality in the allocation of time by gender



Gender Inequalities in Italy – Paid Work

- In 2025, in the work dimension of the EIGE Gender Equality Index Italy scores 61% against 69.3% EU average and it is still at the last position of the EU rank [EIGE], in 2025 the gender gap in employment for age 25-54 is about 12% with no children and increases to 35% when the youngest child is aged less than 6 in Italy [Eurostat lfst_hheredch accessed on 31/08/2026], mothers have a high probability of exit from paid work during the year of the first child birth especially in the Private Sector (INPS, 2025) and for them the prevalent motivations for resignations are difficulties related to challenges in the work-life balance [Macchioni, Crespi, 2026; INEL, 2026]
- The unadjusted gender pay gap
$$\frac{\text{Mean (gross) hourly earnings of men} - \text{Mean (gross) hourly earnings of women}}{\text{Mean (gross) hourly earnings of men}}$$
 in 2024 is higher in the Private Sector is (17.4) Eurostat on SES data [Eurostat Gender Pay Gap statistics accessed on 31/08/2026]
- The gender overall earnings gap including gap in average hourly earnings, in the monthly average of the number of paid hours and in the employment rate, in 2022 is 39.9 in Italy and 32.8 in EU27 [Eurostat Gender Statistics accessed on 31/08/2026]

Gender gap in employment rates by level of education in Italy

Age 20-64 - Year 2025	Italy			EU-27		
	M	F	M-F	M	F	M-F
Up to lower secondary education	70,9	37,5	33,4	68,5	46,2	22,3
Upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary	78,1	58,7	19,4	80,4	69,3	11,1
Tertiary	86,3	80,4	5,9	89,4	84,7	4,7
Total	77,1	58	19,1	80,9	71,3	9,6
Source Eurostat: Employment by educational attainment level - annual data (lfsi_educ_a)						



Parenting Leave Policy and Gender Equality in Italy

- Parenting leaves allowances mitigates the child penalty affecting women's earnings (Biasi and De Paola, 2025)
- The design of parenting leaves can have a different impact on gender equality and on the development of the capability of care and work (Addabbo, 2026)





Final Discussion



Parenting Leave Policies in Italy and Inequalities.

- Research on the impact of parental leaves design can benefit from the use of administrative data (on this regards see INPS, 2025; Biasi, De Paola, 2025) also estimating longitudinal model.
- Need of dedicated qualitative and quantitative surveys on the take-up of parental leave, use of ECEC and paid and unpaid work within the family taking into account regional heterogeneity, workplace practices and organizational culture.



Parenting Leave Policies in Italy and Inequalities

- Italy is characterized by high and persistent gender inequalities in paid and unpaid work
- Need of gender sensitive policies aiming at improving the social infrastructure and affect the organizational context
- Reform the current unequal system of maternity/paternity leaves [note that in 2026 the Chamber of Deputies rejected the opposition's joint proposal for equal parental leave. The proposal provided for five months (during the first eighteen months of their child's life) of compulsory, non-transferable leave for each parent, paid between 80 and 100 per cent, and the inclusion of self-employed workers and VAT-registered individuals].



Parenting Leave Policies in Italy - References

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Thank for your attention!

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