

Parenting Leave Policies & Structural Inequalities in Poland



Executive Summary & Context

1. The Dual Nature of Polish Policy is well seen in generous statutory protections (long leave potential), but conservative gender patterns and institutional gaps.
2. Key Tension is advanced employee rights system that coexist with systemic precarity for non-standard workers.
3. Core Research Question still remains whether current Polish leave policies promote genuine social and gender equity, or do they reproduce traditional caregiving burdens and economic penalties.

Structure of Polish Leave Policy

Leave Type	Duration	Entitlement & Transferability	Wage Allowance Rate – % of sickness benefit base
Maternity (Macierzyński)	20/31/33/35/37 weeks (up to number of children born at the same delivery)	Mother (14w mandatory); 6w transferable to father, in some cases – also other members of closest family	100% (or 81.5% combined)
Additional maternity (Dodatkowy macierzyński)	Up to 8 or 15 weeks	Parents of premature babies / hospitalized infants (1w per 1 week in hospital)	100%
Paternity (Ojcowski)	Up to 2 weeks	Father only (Use-it-or-lose-it, to be used during 12 months after the delivery)	100% Base
Parental (Rodzicielski)	1. 41/43 weeks Total 2. 65/67 weeks Total	1. 32/34w shared; 9w non-transferable, also might be used other members of closest family 2. 65/67w when a child is (terminally) ill	70% (or 81.5% combined)
Childcare (Wychowawczy)	Up to 36 months	35m shared, 1m non-transferable, might be transferable under some conditions.	0%

Gender Care Gap & Pay Penalties

1. Within household bargaining, the lower earner takes the leave. Due to the gender pay gap (~4.5% raw, higher in corporate sectors), women default into full leave.
2. Long continuous absences (1–3 years combining parental + childcare leave) lead to:
 - a) Loss of human capital and slower wage progression.
 - b) Pension gaps (women's retirement capital significantly reduced).
3. Cultural expectations label fathers taking long leave as "uncommitted" to their careers
4. Families facing health complications (requiring complementary maternity leave) face elevated financial strain without specialized institutional care support post-hospitalization.
5. High dependence on paid private care or unpaid extended family care pushes middle-income parents to extend unpaid *wychowawczy* leave.

Contract Precarity & Inequality

The Standard vs. Non-Standard forms of employment:

1. Employment Contract (*Umowa o pracę*): Full statutory protections, wage continuity, guaranteed return to work, fixed % of wage paid to social insurance.
2. Civil Law Contracts (*Umowa zlecenia / o dzieło*): No mandatory sickness insurance (if no, then no maternity allowance); maternity allowances require opt-in voluntary contributions, fixed % of wage paid for social insurance
3. B2B / Self-Employed (*jednoosobowa działalność gospodarcza, JDG*): fixed amount paid for social insurance – benefits depend heavily on minimum contribution thresholds; often results in drastically lower financial support (or high if higher amount declared and paid for some period of time).

Social Inequality: Young, or precariously employed parents receive minimum support (so called *Kosiniakowe* flat rate: 1,000 PLN/month – about 220 EUR).

Institutional Barriers

1. Institutional childcare coverage for children under 3 (*Żłobki*) remains low in non-metropolitan regions.
2. High reliance on private nurseries or grandparents pushes middle-income mothers to extend unpaid leave, however in last years many *gmina* co-finance the nurseries.
3. Financial incentives like *Aktywny Rodzic* subsidize care, but structural availability of public spots still lags behind demand in rural municipalities (*gminy*).



Discussion & Key Conclusions

1. Polish policies have modernized legally (EU compliance), but structural inequalities linger.
2. Leave policy cannot achieve gender equality in isolation—it requires wage parity, accessible public childcare, and contract-neutral social security.

Thank You!

Dziękuję bardzo!

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