



Sustainability@Leave
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Successful Final Conference of Sustainability@Leave Action



On 26 May 2026, Sustainability@Leave held its **Final Conference** at Charles University in Prague, marking the conclusion of four years of collaborative research on the role of paid parental leave in building more equal and socially sustainable societies. The hybrid event brought together around 90 researchers, policymakers, and stakeholders on site, with additional participants joining online.

The day opened with keynotes from **Dr Tomáš Sobotka** (Vienna Institute of Demography) and **Prof. Anne Lise Ellingsæter** (University of Oslo) on fertility decline and work-family policy in Europe. The Action's five Working Groups then presented their key outputs followed by a stakeholder panel bringing together voices from research and policy, including representatives from **Population Europe** (Dr. Andreas Edel), **EIGE** (Dr. Jolanta Reingarde), **UN Women** (Majlinda Nesturi), **ELFAC - European Large Families Confederation** (Raúl Sánchez), **UNFPA** (Dr. Visare Mujko-Nimani), **COFACE Families Europe** (Sven Iversen), and a **former Czech Minister of Labour and social Affairs**, Michaela Marksová Tominová.

The afternoon featured the launch of the book *Care Leaves and Care Time for All: Towards Caring Democracies, Economies, and Worlds* authored by **Prof. Andrea Doucet** (Brock University, Canada) and **Prof. Peter Moss** (UCL), alongside the official release of the Czech **Generations and Gender Survey** (GGS) data led by **Prof. Martin Kreidl** (Masaryk University Brno) and a presentation of the **Generations and Gender Programme** by **Prof. Solveig Cunningham** (Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute). The day closed with a panel discussion on future research directions and international cooperation including **Prof. Rense Nieuwenhuis** (Stockholm University), **Dr. Andreas Edel** (Population Europe), **Dr. Thordis Reimer** (Hamburg University of Technology), **Prof. Ivana Dobrotić** (University of Zagreb) and **Prof. Ann-Zofie Duvander** (Stockholm University).

You can watch all presentations [here](#).

Stakeholder Workshop at Ghent University



Over the past year preparation of Working Group's 3 White paper on Children involved consultation with key stakeholders culminating in a Workshop on **18th March 2026** at **Ghent University** hosted by **Prof. Jochen Devlieghere**.

We were delighted that some of these stakeholders were able to join us: **Chris Cuthbert**, early childhood development specialist; **Fred Deven**, independent consultant in family policies and social cohesion; **Mihaela Ionescu**, program director at the International Step by Step Association (ISSA); **Christian Morabito**, international expert on inequalities in early childhood education and care; **Akvilė Motiejūnaitė-Schulmeister**, education policy and

systems analyst at the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA); and **María Pomés-Jiménez**, founder and managing director of Public Policy Studio.

Our ambition was to take a rights-based approach to exploring leave designs that supported child wellbeing in the broadest sense and to collate the evidence on how take-up of parental leave could improve early childhood development.

An early draft was discussed at the Workshop where the stakeholders commended the originality of this ambition, recommending: the need to foreground and articulate a child-centred approach; to stress the policy ecosystem in which parenting leave policies are embedded; and to explicitly link evidence of the different leaves to child benefits. Their advice guided production of the final report **Paid parenting leave from a child perspective: a pillar of sustainable development** (see below).

New White Paper on Parenting Leave from a Child Perspective



Paid parenting leave from a child perspective: a pillar of sustainable development

Authors: Margaret O'Brien, Thordis Reimer, Guðný Björk Eydal, Anna Escobedo, Cristina Castellanos-Serrano, Jochen Devlieghere, Marc Grau Grau, Philip Hwang

This white paper reframes parenting leave as more than a workplace benefit - it's a matter of child rights and early development. Drawing on evidence from 37 European countries, it shows that the first 1,000 days of child's life are a uniquely sensitive window for health and brain development, and that leave policy design shapes the conditions - parental time, income

security, stable care - under which children experience it.

Key findings include:

- Well-paid leave shorter than six months may not be enough to support healthy child development.
- Well-paid, non-transferable leave for fathers (or co-parents) is linked to stronger father-child bonds and more balanced caregiving.
- Access still depends on formal employment, so children of parents in precarious work benefit far less than others.

As the authors put it, children don't choose their parents' employment status - yet it continues to shape how much parental time and care security they receive early in life.

The paper calls for parenting leave to be recognised as a child-rights policy in its own right, with eligibility that reaches beyond standard employment.

Read the full white paper [here](#).



New Policy Brief on Parenting Leave Policies and Inequalities

Policy Brief: Parenting Leave Policies and Social Inequalities in Europe: Evidence, Blind Spots and Policy Directions

Developed by: Thordis Reimer, Johanna Lammi-Taskula

This policy brief shows that European research on parenting leave has focused overwhelmingly on gender, while other inequalities shaping who benefits from leave policies remain largely unexamined. Drawing on a review of over 400 publications from 24 countries, it finds that formal entitlements alone don't guarantee equal outcomes - access and take-up are shaped by income, employment status, and migration



background, often reinforcing rather than reducing existing inequalities.

The brief highlights several **key concerns**:

- Gender dominates the literature, while health and disability are barely studied - despite evidence that leave design affects maternal and child health.
- Research largely assumes stable, standard employment, leaving the self-employed, gig workers, and migrants largely invisible in the evidence base.
- Migrant and ethnic minority parents consistently take shorter, less compensated leave than native-born parents - a pattern rarely studied in depth.

These gaps limit our ability to assess whether the EU Work-Life Balance Directive is closing inequalities or mainly benefiting parents already in stable, well-paid jobs.

The brief calls for research and data that reach beyond the standard-employment model, plus stronger monitoring of the Directive's real-world distributional effects — not just legal compliance.

Read the full policy brief [here](#).

The Policy Brief is based on the findings published in Sustainability@Leave Report [*Mapping the Unknown: Research Gaps in Parenting Leave Inequality Research in Europe*](#), edited by Johanna Lammi-Taskula and Thordis Reimer.

Workshop on Parenting Leave Questionnaire

On 23–24 April 2026, WG5 members met at the **Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research (LISER)** in Esch-sur-Alzette for a workshop dedicated to continuing their work on the **Parenting Leave Questionnaire**.

The questionnaire is a repository of survey questions designed to measure how parents use parenting leave, and why some don't, across different national contexts. It aims to address

the scarcity of comparable cross-national data on parenting leave take-up. The repository contains questions that cover four areas: eligibility for leave, leave use, reasons for non-use, and parents' views on parenting leave. The questions are designed so that researchers and data collection agencies can adapt or select from them to suit their needs yet ensure comparability across countries.

The workshop was hosted by **Dr. Marie Valentová** (LISER) and led by **Prof. Cassandra Engeman** (Stockholm University). The participants also included **Dr. Ásdís Arnalds** (University of Iceland), **Dr. Alžběta Bártová** (Leiden University), **Dr. Elitsa Dimitrova** (Bulgarian Academy of Sciences), **Armela Maxhelaku** (Tirana University), **Dr. Anna Šťastná** (Charles University Prague), and **Dr. Laurène Thil** (KU Leuven). They were joined by **Dr. Anne Hartung**, an economist at the National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg (STATEC) and an expert on survey data collection.



Sustainability@Leave Open Online Course Continues

Since its launch on 12 November 2025, the Sustainability@Leave Open Online Course, co-ordinated by Johanna Lammi-Taskula, Thordis Reimer, and Laurène Thil, has brought together national experts from across Europe for weekly sessions on the design and implications of parenting leave policies. The course offered a platform for comparative exchange and critical reflection on how leave policies shape social inequalities, running through 25 February 2026 with lectures covering more than 20 countries.

We are grateful to all national experts and Sustainability@Leave members for their commitment to sharing their expertise and contributing to knowledge exchange throughout the course.

The course will conclude with a final round of sessions at the beginning of September 2026:

Tuesday, 1 September

10:00 – 10:30	Austria – Eva-Maria Schmidt
11:00 – 11:30	Ireland – Dorota Szelewa & Stephan Köppe
13:30 – 14:00	Bosnia and Herzegovina – Jasmina Berbić
14:30 – 15:00	Poland – Barbara Godlewska

Use this [link](#) for all Tuesday sessions.

Wednesday, 2 September

10:00 – 10:30	Italy – Tindara Addabbo
11:00 – 11:30	Norway – Maria Olsson & Brita Bungum
13:00 – 14:00	Luxembourg – Marie Valentova

Use this [link](#) for all Wednesday sessions.

Further information about the Online Course is available [here](#).

Job Opportunity: two researchers wanted at Stockholm University

Exciting news for anyone working on care leave, trade unions, or comparative welfare state research: the Swedish Institute for Social Research (SOFI) at Stockholm University is hiring **two full-time researchers** for the ERC-funded project [MakingTime: Organized Labour and the Politics of Care Leave](#), led by our own WG5 leader, Associate Professor **Cassandra Engeman**.

The project explores a fascinating and underexamined question: what role do trade unions play in shaping care leave policy? Through case studies in Ireland, France, and the Netherlands, the team is digging into the archives, interviewing policymakers and union leaders, and tracing how leave legislation actually gets made.

Two positions are open now, one for the French case study and one for the Dutch case study, and applicants can indicate their preference. These are full-time positions based in Stockholm, with fieldwork in France or the Netherlands as part of the case study work - offering the chance to join a genuinely international, mixed-method research environment at one of Europe's leading social policy institutes.

If you know someone in your network who might be a great fit, please share this opportunity with them!

Applications close **13 August 2026**.

Full details and how to apply can be found [here](#).

Correction

In our previous newsletter, we reported that Sustainability@Leave members **Prof. Alison Koslowski** (UCL), **Prof. Mara Yerkes** (Utrecht University), and **Prof. Anna Escobedo** (University of Barcelona) participated in the expert session on paid parental leave in the Netherlands. The event took place on 22 January 2026 and was organised as part of an ongoing policy evaluation led by the Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment. We would like to correct this information: **Dr Thordis Reimer** (University of Hamburg) and **Prof. Ann-Zofie Duvander** (Stockholm University) also took part in the session. We apologise for the earlier omission and thank all five members for their contribution to this evidence-informed policy process.