



Sustainability@Leave

CA21150



COST Action Parental Leave Policies & Social Sustainability

Are you interested in more detailed results of CA21150 research? Scan the QR code to access our website.



Contacts

Action Chair | Prof. Jiřina Kocourková
jirina.kocourkova@natur.cuni.cz

Action Vice Chair | Prof. Margaret O'Brien
m.obrien@ucl.ac.uk

SC Coordinator | Dr. Alžběta Bártová
a.bartova@law.leidenuniv.nl

Grant Awarding Coordinator | Prof. Tatjana Zorcec
tzorcec@gmail.com

WG1 Leader | Prof. Ann-Zofie Duvander
ann-zofie.duvander@sociology.su.se

WG2 Leader | Dr. Johanna Lammi-Taskula
johanna.lammi-taskula@thl.fi

WG3 Leader | Prof. Guðný Björk Eydal
ge@hi.is

WG4 Leader | Dr. Pedro Romero Balsas
pedro.romero@uam.es

WG5 Leader | Dr. Cassandra Engeman
cassandra.engeman@sofi.su.se

Parental leave policies can strengthen social sustainability – but their effects are not guaranteed. They depend on how policies are designed, who can access them, and whether parents can actually afford and use them.

Across Europe, parental leave shapes how care, work and inequalities are distributed. The COST Action CA21150 brings together researchers in sociology, social policy and demography from 40+ countries to understand how these policies can better support families, gender equality and long-term societal resilience.

👉 Main contribution of the project:

We move beyond describing policies to explaining *how and for whom they work* – and how they can be redesigned to support more inclusive and sustainable societies.

💡 WG1 – Theoretical innovation

Rethinking parental leave through the lens of sustainability

WG1 delivers a **major international volume** *Caring for the Future: Parental Leave and Pathways to Sustainability*, bringing together leading scholars from 16 countries.

👉 What makes it innovative:

- First systematic attempt to connect **parental leave research with social sustainability and SDGs**
- Integrates perspectives across **demography, sociology, economics and policy research**
- Moves beyond traditional debates to ask: *What does a sustainable parental leave system actually look like?*

👉 Key contribution:

It reframes parental leave from a labour-market tool to a **core mechanism shaping care, wellbeing and future societies**.



**Funded by
the European Union**

**DEPARTMENT OF DEMOGRAPHY
AND GEODEMOGRAPHY**



**Faculty of Science
Charles University**

◆ WG2 – Inequalities

Parental leave can reduce inequalities – but often reproduces them

WG2 delivers a **major report and policy brief** *Mapping the Unknown: Research Gaps in Parenting Leave Inequality Research in Europe* to show that parental leave is a powerful but uneven policy tool.

👉 Key findings:

- Inequalities arise at **three levels**:
 - access to leave
 - take-up
 - long-term outcomes
- Policies often benefit **already advantaged groups** (stable jobs, higher income)
- Gender gaps persist: **fathers still use only a minority of leave**
- Effects strongly depend on:
 - income replacement
 - individual (non-transferable) rights
 - workplace conditions

👉 What is new:

- Shift from gender-only focus to **intersectional inequalities** (socio-economic status, migration, family type)
- Identification of **major research and data gaps** limiting effective policymaking

👉 Key message:

Formal rights are not enough – real equality depends on access, affordability and actual use.

◆ WG3 – Children

Child-centred perspective on parental leave

WG3 has built a strong European collaboration with Children's organisations linking research, policy and stakeholders.

👉 Key outputs:

- Delivers a **White Paper on parental leave from the child's perspective** *Paid parenting leave from a child perspective: a pillar of sustainable development*
- High-impact publication on **child wellbeing and parental leave**
- Strong involvement of **early-career researchers and international teams**

👉 Added value:

- Introduces the **"First Thousand Days" and Child Rights perspective**
- Connects parental leave to **child development and long-term wellbeing**

👉 Distinct contribution:

Brings the child back into the centre of parental leave debates *No child left behind*.

◆ WG4 – Terminology

Why terminology matters: from "parental" to "parenting" leave

WG4 highlights a fundamental but overlooked issue: we often compare policies that are not conceptually comparable.

👉 Key outputs:

WG4 delivers a **major report** *Towards a comprehensive terminology on paid parenting leave* and a **policy brief** *Why does paid parenting leave terminology matter*.

👉 Key insight:

- Terms like *parental leave* are used inconsistently across countries
- This leads to **confusion in research and misleading comparisons**

👉 Proposed solution:

- Introduce the umbrella concept of **"parenting leave"**
 - includes all leave types available to parents (maternity, paternity and parental)
 - recommends that naming a specific policy within parenting leave improves cross-country comparability and precision

👉 Key message:

Better concepts → better measurement → better policy design.

◆ WG5 – Data + tools

Closing the data gap in parental leave research

WG5 addressed one of the biggest barriers in the field: lack of comparable data.

👉 Key outputs:

- WG5 delivers a **major report and several policy briefs** *Parenting leave policy data gaps: a comparative critical analysis; Methodological Challenges in Paid Parental Leave Research & Policy; Monitoring the implementation and impact of the EU Work-Life Balance Directive*.
- Mapping of **data gaps in Europe**
- Collaboration with **18 international data institutions**
- Development of a **cross-national survey question repository**

👉 Main findings:

- Data across Europe are:
 - fragmented
 - non-comparable
 - often insufficient for inequality analysis

👉 What is new:

- New items for measuring:
 - leave use
 - eligibility
 - reasons for non-use

👉 Key contribution:

Provides the **infrastructure needed for evidence-based policy**.

This document is based upon work from COST Action CA21150 Parental Leave Policies and Social Sustainability supported by COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology).

COST is a funding agency for research and innovation networks. COST Actions help connect research initiatives across Europe and enable scientists to grow their ideas by sharing them with their peers. This boosts their research, career and innovation.

Visit <https://sustainable-leave-policies.eu/> for access to publications and to our unique open online 30-minute lectures by our national experts from 17 European countries "Parenting Leave Policies and Inequalities", streaming on YouTube.