



Building better parenting leave survey data: A repository of survey questions for comparative policy analysis

September 2026

Authors

Cassandra Engeman (Stockholm University, Sweden)
Marie Valentová (LISER, Luxembourg)
Laurène Thil (KU Leuven, Belgium)
Anna Šťastná (Charles University Prague, Czechia)
Anne Hartung (STATEC, Luxembourg)
Alžběta Bártová (Leiden University, Netherlands)
Ivana Dobrotić (University of Zagreb, Croatia)
Ásdís A. Arnalds (University of Iceland, Iceland)
Stephan Köppe (University College Dublin, Ireland)
Elitsa Dimitrova (Bulgarian Academy of Science, Bulgaria)
Livia García-Faroldi (University of Málaga, Spain)
Armela Maxhelaku (University of Tirana, Albania)



Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research (LISER) for hosting a writing workshop to discuss and develop this document and the EU COST-Action network for funding our meetings at LISER and Charles University in Prague. Additionally, we appreciate Sofie Burman and Margaret O'Brien for reading the complete draft and providing comments. Work on this document by the first author was funded in part by a grant from the Swedish Research Council (VR 2023-01349).

Funding:

This document is based upon work from COST Action CA21150 – Parental Leave Policies and Social Sustainability (Sustainability@Leave), 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.

Any citation of this document should include the following reference:

Engeman, Cassandra, Marie Valentova, Laurène Thil, Anna Šťastná, Anne Hartung, Alžběta Bártová, Ivana Dobrotić, Ásdís A. Arnalds, Stephan Köppe, Elitsa Dimitrova, Livia García-Faroldi, and Armela Maxhelaku. 2026. *Building better parenting leave survey data: A repository of survey questions for comparative policy analysis*. COST Action Parental Leave Policies and Social Sustainability (Sustainability@Leave). DOI: https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/anr86_v1.

Content

1. Introduction	1
2. Definitions	3
3. Leave Eligibility	4
QUESTIONS 1.1: Perceived eligibility and application behaviour	5
QUESTIONS 1.2: Refusals	7
QUESTIONS 1.3: Leave payment	9
QUESTIONS 1.4: Eligibility-relevant characteristics	10
A role for administrative data	11
4. Leave Use and Non-use	11
QUESTIONS 2.1: Use of parenting leave	12
QUESTIONS 2.2: Length of parenting leave planned or used	13
Limitations	14
Calculating leave take-up rates	15
5. Reasons for Leave Non-Use	15
QUESTIONS 3.1: Reasons for non-use	16
Understanding barriers to leave-taking	19
6. Views about Parental Leave	20
QUESTIONS 4.1-4-3: Sharing of Care and Parental Leave	20
QUESTION 4.4: Adequacy of parental leave	22
Views: An important part of parenting leave use and development	22
7. Methodological notes	23
8. Conclusion	25
NOTE	26
Appendix: Repository of questions dealing with parenting leave	30
QUESTIONS 1.1: Perceived eligibility and application behaviour	30
QUESTIONS 1.2: Refusals	30
QUESTIONS 2.1: Use of parenting leave	31
QUESTIONS 2.2: Length of parenting leave planned or used	31
QUESTIONS 1.3: Leave payment	32
QUESTIONS 1.4: Eligibility-relevant characteristics	33
QUESTIONS 3.1: Reasons for non-use	33
QUESTIONS 4.1-4-3: Sharing of Care and Parental Leave	34
QUESTION 4.4: Adequacy of parental leave	35



1. Introduction

Parenting leave policies are care-related measures that provide parents with the right to make time to care for their children. Typically, parenting leave is an entitlement to take time-off from paid employment or, for parents outside the labour market, from active job-seeking, combining some level of income replacement with employment protection. Unlike other family benefits, parenting leaves are intrinsically linked to caregiving, granting parents the right, and in some cases, the obligation to take time for care.¹ Maternity, paternity, and parental leave - inclusively referred to as “parenting leave” - is embedded within a broader set of measures aimed at reconciling or balancing work and family obligations.² Depending on their design, leave rights and provisions can mitigate the potential negative impacts of parenthood on employment³ while encouraging child caregiving and strengthening bonds between parents and children.⁴ When parenting leave reforms target fathers, such policies can promote gender equality in the distribution of care responsibilities.⁵

The success of a parenting leave scheme depends on the extent to which it is used by parents. Measuring and evaluating leave use (among parents) and take-up (among eligible parents) are prerequisites for understanding how parents respond to policies and which groups of parents benefit most, or at all, from parenting leave arrangements. With the 2019 EU Directive on Work-Life Balance for Parents and Carers, the European Commission prioritized investment in parenting leave provisions across its member states (EU 2019/1158). In addition to setting a basic standard of rights and benefits, the directive requires member states to provide aggregated data on leave take-up by women and men to assess the effectiveness of their newly adopted and reformed provisions. Yet, at the time of this writing, comparative data on parenting leave use and uptake is lacking.⁶

This document presents a repository of questions that can be used in cross-national comparative surveys to collect data on parenting leave. With our collated and proposed questions, we aim to assist researchers and data collection agencies build better parenting leave data to understand when and how parents use such provisions. In the following sections, we present questions related to measuring (1) formal and perceived eligibility for leave provisions, (2) leave use and non-use, (3) reasons for non-use, and (4) views about parenting leave. While questions in the first three sections primarily measure behaviour, we include questions about parents’ views, because they can inform behaviour. Each of these four main sections includes our research- and theory-based motivations for the phrasing, inclusion and design of the questions as well as their shortcomings.

For the reader’s convenience, we list the full set of questions from the main text in an appendix. As a repository, questions are designed to fit within a core questionnaire that asks basic demographic questions. We therefore do not present a full survey but a list of question options with recommended filters. Most of our proposed questions can be incorporated independent of each other such that researchers can select the questions that best suit their interests. Additionally, this repository is written in a way to ease re-ordering and adaptation of questions for different research purposes. For example, it may make more sense to ask respondents about their views on parenting leave before asking about their behaviours. Overall survey design and target populations are also left to the survey administrators. Note that some of the phenomena measured may present methodological challenges, such as small or rare population groups (see Methodological notes section).

Drawing from our collective expertise as comparativists and specialists in a range of countries,⁷ this repository offers questions designed for application across diverse country contexts. Different leave policy designs may have different outcomes in different countries.⁸ For example, uneven policy responsiveness may be due to restrictive eligibility requirements or other factors that are insufficiently measured to date. Cross-national





comparative studies are therefore essential for uncovering potential barriers to leave use so that we can design more effective policies. However, collecting cross-nationally consistent information from parents is a challenge. Parents have access to different types and combinations of leave, and governments use different terminologies to describe what is essentially the same type of provision. Also, some countries do not systematically monitor or report data on leave take-up, limiting the availability and comparability of data on the actual use of leave policies.⁹ Our unique contribution is our comparative perspective, providing a repository of survey questions to monitor leave use and take-up with an aim toward supporting cross-national data harmonisation in Europe.¹⁰

Developing surveys on parenting leave use and related issues presents at least two challenges, particularly for cross-sectional surveys that are implemented at one time-point. First, retrospective questions are unavoidable. Existing large-scale surveys ask respondents whether they are currently on leave from work or include “on leave” as one of the response options for questions about the respondent’s current employment situation.¹¹ These questions yield information that is internally consistent with employment status definitions, but conceptual clarity comes at a cost; namely, the approach produces a narrow estimate of leave use.¹² Additionally, the rarity of parental leave among men leads to small sample sizes, large standard errors and insufficient data to conduct meaningful analysis about the motivations and barriers to parenting leave use. To address these problems, we recommend retrospective questions which provide information about leave use outside the observation period (i.e., the time of the survey). This approach yields larger sample sizes and allows greater disaggregation. However, retrospective questions run the risk of recall bias and potential consequences for the intended analysis should be considered.¹³

Second, measuring leave take-up rates requires knowledge about the leave-eligible population, and assessing eligibility requires a wide range of information. A prerequisite for taking time-off from work to care for children is paid employment. If employed, many policies additionally require a base level of employment or social insurance contributions for a set amount of time in order to qualify for job-protected leave rights or benefits. Yet some countries also provide citizenship-based entitlements to parents marginally connected to the labour market or to those outside of the labour market. Thus, assessing eligibility requires information on parents’ labour market status as well as the specific eligibility criteria, depending on the institutional design of the policy.¹⁴ For survey questions to work, they need to identify which requirements were met when the respondent’s child was born. To address this challenge, we propose questions related to typical eligibility criteria, and our proposed question about reasons for non-use includes unemployment, other forms of ineligibility and lack of affordability as response options.

The proposed questions focus on measuring parents’ responsiveness to leave policies and can be applied to assess who uses different types of parenting leave. We therefore leave other questions that measure, for example, broader gender norms, time spent with children or general career breaks, to other researchers. Additionally, questions refer to “mothers” and “fathers” given the well-documented gendered use of parenting leave provisions.¹⁵ Yet phrasing can be easily adapted to broader research aims by exchanging “mother” for “birthparent” and “father” for “partner” or “non-birthparent”. By using vignettes to measure views about gendered responsibilities for leave use, our proposed questions remain relevant to all survey participants regardless of their gender or sexuality.

This repository is the result of collaboration supported by EU COST-Action, which has the stated objective to offer “an inclusive, pan-European environment” to investigate a research problem. In our case, the Sustainability@Leave EU COST-Action aims to advance paid parenting leave research to promote socially sustainable societies. Previously, our working group identified gaps in paid parenting leave data and discussed the challenges in filling these gaps with representatives from the European Commission and data-collecting institutions, such as Eurostat (EU Labour Force Survey), the International Labour Organization, the





OECD, the Generations and Gender Survey and national statistics agencies, among others. The repository of questions presented here builds on our previous work by contributing to ongoing efforts to build better parenting leave data. Our hope is that these questions can be piloted and incorporated into new and existing surveys for the comparative study of parenting leave.

2. Definitions

The following terms are used in the proposed questions. While parenting leave may be defined more broadly, extending to all parents regardless of their position in the labour market, the definitions provided here pertain to their application in surveys interested in employment-based entitlements. Our focus is therefore aligned with the EU Directive (EU 2019/1158), which mandates leave rights and provisions that are employment-based. The definitions below should guide survey administrators to assure consistency across responses.

For the purposes of this repository, **“leave”** refers to job-protected time-off from paid employment to care for a newborn or young child, newly adopted or newly placed foster child. The respondent would therefore need to have been employed prior to the leave. Thus, employment breaks that do not involve formal leave-taking are not considered leave. Depending on national provisions, respondents may be able to access some parental leave, though not on a continual basis, until a child turns 12.

“Maternity” and “paternity/partner” leaves are linked to childbirth and can be used to care for newborn children and physically recover from childbirth or support the mother/birthparent and family during the recovery period.

“Parental leave” is an entitlement allowing parents to care for their child at a later stage, typically after the maternity/paternity leave period.

The terms used in the proposed questions – i.e., maternity/paternity(partner) and parental leave – could be complemented (or replaced) by country-specific explanations or terms relating to pertinent current and past legal provisions. Administrative terms should approximate conceptual distinctions to maintain comparability across countries and over time.

In line with the EU explanatory notes (IESS-FR, 2022), **“own child”** should refer to biological, adopted, foster and/or stepchildren and includes children born through assisted reproductive technology. While foster children are not legal relatives, care responsibilities for them are grounds for leave-taking. If other people, such as grandparents, siblings, aunts/uncles, have legal guardianship over a child, that child should be considered the respondent’s “own child.” To account for children of separated parents, the child does not need to be a current member of the household.

“Born” refers also to the time that an adopted or foster child was placed with the family.





3. Leave Eligibility

To use parenting leave entitlements, parents must first be eligible for them. Thus, eligibility is a central dimension of parenting leave policies, but it remains under-measured. In comparative research, eligibility presents a particular challenge: rules vary widely across countries, and survey respondents may struggle to correctly assess their own eligibility. Existing surveys often assume eligibility implicitly by restricting questions on leave take-up to employed respondents or recent parents. As a result, they conflate *non-use* with *ineligibility* and provide limited insight into exclusion mechanisms.

While statutory leave rights are typically defined in legislation, formal (or legal) eligibility does not guarantee effective access.¹⁶ Access depends not only on eligibility criteria (e.g. residency, employment status, contribution records, tenure) but also on parents' awareness, understanding and successful navigation of administrative procedures. To better understand inequalities in access to parenting leave, by gender, contract type, migration status or income, surveys must distinguish between formal eligibility, perceived eligibility and leave take-up.

We acknowledge that formal eligibility cannot be directly measured through survey questions alone, as it primarily depends on country-specific legislation and parents' employment status, contribution history and residence history. Thus, establishing formal eligibility requires combining administrative records and/or survey responses with detailed policy rules (often spanning several systems).¹⁷ Yet carefully designed surveys can substantially improve comparative evidence by capturing parents' perceptions of their entitlement, their experiences of applying for leave and the outcomes of their applications.

Existing large-scale surveys provide only partial information on parenting leave use and do not collect sufficient information to identify the leave-eligible population. The instruments also tend to focus on *outcomes* (use or non-use) rather than the processes and perceptions that shape access to leave, providing limited information on barriers to take-up.¹⁸ For example, the EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) collects information on social benefits received, which can be used to infer eligibility *ex post*. Information is similarly missing from the European Labour Force Survey ad-hoc modules and the European Social Survey. Each ask about parenting leave but assume rather than observe eligibility, limiting knowledge of exclusion or awareness gaps.¹⁹

Against this background, this section proposes survey questions designed to disentangle:

1. Perceived eligibility and application behaviour (what respondents believed they were legally entitled to),
2. Refusals (administrative outcomes, i.e. whether respondents were recognised as eligible in practice),
3. Leave payment (whether and the extent to which leave was paid) and
4. Eligibility-relevant characteristics (information to approximate formal eligibility *ex post* by applying country-specific rules).

We propose a modular approach to eligibility, combining perception-based questions with experience-based follow-ups. Surveys that use our recommended eligibility questions should move from Questions 1.1 to questions proposed in the subsequent section on leave use, which can be implemented without the eligibility questions if survey time and budgets are limited. The first set of questions address three analytically distinct stages: perceived eligibility (Qs 1.1a-b), application behaviour (Qs 1.1c-d) and actual leave use (Qs 2.1 & 2.2). The subsequent questions address different dimensions of eligibility. Questions 1.2 on refused applications allows identification of whether unsuccessful applications resulted from administrative decisions and the reasons given for refusal. Then, because the extent to which leave is paid mitigates access to leave even when parents are eligible, Questions 1.3 address whether the parenting leave taken was paid entirely, paid





partially, or entirely unpaid. Finally, Questions 1.4 address the most common eligibility requirements that restrict access to parenting leave rights, namely: employment, employment level and tenure, citizenship and residency status. Such questions can be used to assess eligibility, though doing so requires careful coding based on country-specific eligibility rules.

The full question sequence therefore traces a pathway from belief to behaviour to outcome, which is essential for disaggregating the many possible reasons why formal entitlements fail to translate into effective leave use. Non-awareness, voluntary non-application and unsuccessful application are analytically different pathways. With this information, researchers can locate precisely where in the process take-up drops off.

The phrasing of our proposed questions is deliberately simplified so that they can be applied consistently across different national contexts, where leave systems, terminology and eligibility conditions vary considerably. The questions focus on the three main parenting leave types (maternity, paternity, parental), which are present in some form across most national systems and thus support comparability. The phrasing also avoids requiring respondents to know or correctly interpret complex legal rules, reducing measurement error arising from legal literacy differences.

Finally, to limit recall bias, survey administrators should consider restricting the sample to respondents who have had a child within a defined recent period (e.g. previous five years). See section on methodological notes.

QUESTIONS 1.1: Perceived eligibility and application behaviour

Q1.1a

At the time your youngest child was born, did you believe you had the legal right to any form of maternity/paternity/partner or parental leave?

- (1) *Yes*
- (2) *No*
- (3) *Unsure/don't know*

Q1.1b

Filter label: If Q1.1a = 1

Which type(s) of leave did you believe you had the legal right to? Please check all that apply.

- (1) *Maternity leave*
- (2) *Paternity (partner) leave*
- (3) *Parental leave*
- (4) *Other, please specify: _____*

Q1.1c

Did you apply for any form of leave?

- (1) *Yes.*
- (2) *No, I did not apply.*





Q1.1d

Filter label: If Q1.1a = 1

Which type(s) of leave did you apply for? Please check all that apply.

- (1) Maternity leave
- (2) Paternity (partner) leave
- (3) Parental leave
- (4) Other, please specify: _____

Justifications

Questions 1.1a-d capture perceived eligibility and application behaviour, that is, whether respondents believed they were entitled to leave at the time of their child's birth or adoption, which type(s) of leave they believed they could access and whether they applied. The resulting measures are analytically distinct from formal eligibility: a respondent may be legally entitled to leave but unaware of it or may believe they are entitled when in fact they are not. Both scenarios are substantively important, since perceived eligibility, rather than formal eligibility, is what shapes actual behaviour. A parent who does not believe they are entitled to leave will not apply for it, regardless of their status.

Lack of awareness about available parenting leave provisions may present a barrier to leave take-up. Research suggests that this lack of awareness may be particularly prevalent among fathers,²⁰ migrants and those in non-standard employment (e.g. temporary contracts, self-employment, platform work).²¹ Awareness gaps are rarely captured by administrative data, which, by definition, only records those who applied. Survey data is therefore essential for identifying the "hidden" population of eligible non-applicants — a group that is structurally invisible to administrative sources but potentially large in size.

The proposed questions prompt respondents to distinguish between different types of leave, allowing analysis of awareness gaps by leave type (e.g. awareness of paternity leave versus parental leave). The "other" response option allows flexibility for respondents to adapt their answers to their understandings of national contexts, capturing country-specific schemes without requiring separate national instruments. These questions can then be linked with the set of questions addressing refusals (see Q1.2c-d) to distinguish awareness gaps from administrative exclusion.

With aims to assess parents' responsiveness to leave policies, we recommend using a reference child (i.e., the respondent's youngest child). Collecting this data together with data on the child's age (in the core questionnaire) enables linking eligibility information with the parenting leave provisions available at the child's birth, which is required for policy analysis. Surveys can specify leave take-up in relation to a named reference child (rather than "youngest child"), which increases measurement accuracy but adds complexity where a birth panel or roster is not otherwise collected. Teams with the capacity to collect data for each child are encouraged to adapt the wording accordingly. Asking about each child would, however, increase the response burden for larger families. See section below on "additional required data."

Additional considerations

Because these questions measure a respondent's perceptions, they are more vulnerable to recall bias than questions that address behaviour.²² Compared to behaviour, parents are more likely to misremember what they believed, especially where their understanding of their entitlement changed after the fact (e.g. following the outcome of an application). Given this greater potential for bias, survey administrators may want to restrict the questions to a sample of recent parents.

These questions also cannot assess whether respondents were correct in their beliefs. Gaps between perceived and actual eligibility can only be assessed indirectly, by comparing reported beliefs against country-





specific legal eligibility rules coded separately by researchers. To address this gap, our next set of questions addresses refusals and eligibility-relevant respondent characteristics.

QUESTIONS 1.2: Refusals

Q1.2a

Filter label: If Q1.1c = 1

Were any of your applications refused?

- (1) Yes
- (2) No
- (.) I don't know/don't remember.

Q1.2b

Filter label: If Q1.2a = 1

Which type(s) of leave application was refused? Please check all that apply.

- (1) Maternity leave
- (2) Paternity (partner) leave
- (3) Parental leave
- (4) Other, please specify: _____

Q1.2c

Filter label: If Q1.2a = 1

What was the main reason given for the refusal?

- (1) I was not eligible due to employment status (e.g. self-employed, type of contract, unemployed).
- (2) I did not work long enough before the leave started.
- (3) I did not earn enough before the leave started.
- (4) My employer did not approve the leave. [include only if applicable/if this legal condition exists in your country]
- (5) I did not meet administrative or procedural requirements (e.g. late application, missing documents).
- (6) My residence or work permit did not provide access to leave.
- (7) I had not lived in the country long enough.
- (8) The reason was unclear or not explained.
- (9) Other reason, please specify: _____
- (10) I don't know/don't remember.

Justifications

Questions 1.2a–c complement the previous questions by capturing refusal of leave applications resulting from administrative barriers. As such, they identify whether a leave application was refused, which type of leave was affected and the reason given for refusal. Refusal is conceptually distinct from non-awareness (Q1.1a-b) and voluntary non-application (only partially captured in Q1.1c but see Qs 3.1 on reasons for non-use).

By distinguishing refused applications by leave type (Q1.2b), we can learn which schemes are most exclusionary in practice and whether exclusion is concentrated in leave types (e.g. paternity leave, where eligibility conditions are sometimes stricter than for maternity leave). A refused application demonstrates the respondent actively sought to exercise a right they believed they held but was prevented from taking leave due to administrative or eligibility barriers. This population is of particular relevance to policy design, since it represents cases where formal legal entitlement, believed entitlement and effective access diverge.





The response options in Q1.2c capture a range of refusal grounds, covering both contributory and non-contributory eligibility conditions found across different national systems. Response options 5 and 8 capture administrative burdens rather than eligibility conditions, addressing learning and compliance costs that stand between a formal entitlement and its use.²³ This breadth is intentional, since restricting the list to a narrower set of "typical" conditions would risk systematically under-reporting refusal grounds in countries with less familiar eligibility architectures. Responses would be relevant for policy evaluation, particularly in identifying which groups face systematic administrative exclusion (e.g. migrants, workers on short-term contracts, low-earners). The "reason was unclear or not explained" and "I don't know" options acknowledge that refusal grounds are not always communicated to applicants, pointing to gaps in procedural transparency that could be targeted independently of eligibility rules themselves.

Administrative and eligibility barriers are largely missing from existing survey instruments, which typically ask only whether leave was taken and for how long, without probing unsuccessful attempts. Yet refusal patterns are critical for understanding why formal entitlement does not always translate into effective access and for identifying which groups face systematic exclusion from leave systems that are nominally open to them.

Additional considerations

Some respondents may not accurately recall the reason given for refusal, particularly when the event occurred some years prior, or where the reason was communicated informally (e.g. verbally by an employer rather than in writing). Additionally, administrative categories and eligibility conditions vary considerably across countries, which may affect how respondents interpret and select among the response options. For instance, contribution thresholds and tenure requirements are treated as a single condition in some systems and as two separate conditions in others.

Respondents refused on procedural or administrative grounds (e.g. late application, missing documents) may have subsequently reapplied successfully. The proposed questions do not capture reapplication, potentially overstating the extent of permanent exclusion among this group. A follow-up question on reapplication could be considered where survey length permits.

For migrants in particular, refusal may reflect conditions not fully captured by the current options, for example, lack of registration with healthcare or social security systems, or conditions tied to permit type rather than employment status alone. The "other reason" option should explicitly invite elaboration to help researchers identify these cases.

As the refusal of leave applications is likely to be a relatively rare phenomenon affecting a relatively small population, it may be difficult to measure through a survey. Survey administrators should take this into account and adapt their survey strategy and sample selection accordingly.

[Insert QUESTIONS 2.1 & 2.2 as presented in the next section on leave use]

As a repository, this document is designed for survey administrators to choose the questions that best suit their survey aims and budget. Budgets – and thus survey time and space – may be limited; in which case, questions about leave use should be prioritized. These questions are presented in the next section. If eligibility questions are implemented, questions about leave use (Qs 2.1 & 2.2) should be placed here.





QUESTIONS 1.3: Leave payment

Q1.3a

Filter label: If Q2.1b = 1 or 3

Was the maternity/paternity/partner leave paid?

- (1) Yes, part of the leave was paid.*
- (2) Yes, the entire leave was paid.*
- (3) No, the entire leave was unpaid.*
- (.) Don't know/No answer*

Q1.3b

Filter label: If Q2.1b = 2 or 3

Was the parental leave paid?

- (1) Yes, part of the parental leave was paid.*
- (2) Yes, the entire parental leave was paid.*
- (3) No, the entire parental leave was unpaid.*
- (.) Don't know/No answer*

Justifications

Questions 1.3 records whether the leave taken was paid – fully or partially – or unpaid. Formal availability of a leave scheme does not guarantee its practical usability. Leave that is unpaid or poorly compensated is well-documented in research as a significant deterrent to take-up among fathers.²⁴ Within couples, leave use often falls disproportionately on whichever parent earns less, commonly the mother, reinforcing gendered patterns of leave use even where parental leave itself is formally available to both parents.²⁵

Q1.3, as phrased, can potentially capture benefit payments from other sources, namely employers or collective bargaining agreements, which can include benefit top-ups. The question does not ask the respondent to identify the source(s) of their paid benefits, and responses may therefore include benefits that are hard to measure with knowledge of state provisions only. Overall, the question poses little burden on the respondent, since this is a direct, low-inference question about lived experience rather than legal understanding.

The sequence of questions now follows a respondent's journey from belief (Qs 1.1a-b), through application (Q1.1b-c), addressing potential refusal (Qs 1.2), to eventual use (Qs 2.1 & 2.2 in the next section) and its payment (Qs 1.3). This allows researchers to construct a small number of mutually exclusive respondent categories, for example, "aware and used," "aware, applied, refused," "aware but did not apply," and "unaware", which can then be compared across countries and demographic groups as a single, comparable outcome typology.

Additional considerations

Q1.3 does not capture the level or duration of payment (e.g. percentage of prior earnings replaced, number of weeks paid at full versus reduced rate), which limits its usefulness for detailed policy analysis. Survey administrators wishing to capture this would need additional, country-specific items. In countries where parenting leave is, by design, always either fully paid or fully unpaid with no partial-payment option, Q1.3 could be simplified to a binary item. However, retaining the three-category version preserves comparability with countries where partial payment is common.





QUESTIONS 1.4: Eligibility-relevant characteristics

Q1.4a

At the time of your youngest child's birth, which of the following best described your employment situation?

- (1) *Employed full-time*
- (2) *Employed part-time*
- (3) *Self-employed*
- (4) *Unemployed and seeking work*
- (5) *In education or training*
- (6) *On leave from work (e.g. sick leave, previous parental leave)*
- (7) *Not in paid work (e.g. caring, homemaking)*
- (9) *Other, please specify: _____*

Q1.4b

Filter label: If Q1.4a = 1, 2 or 3

At the time of your youngest child's birth, for how long had you been continuously in paid work before the birth?

- (1) *Less than 3 months*
- (2) *More than 3 months up to 6 months*
- (3) *More than 6 months up to 12 months*
- (4) *More than 1 year up to 2 years*
- (5) *More than 2 years*
- (6) *I was not in paid work before the birth.*
- (.) *I don't know/don't remember.*

Q1.4c

At the time of your youngest child's birth, what was your legal residency status in [country]?

- (1) *Citizen of [country]*
- (2) *EU/EEA citizen living/working in this country*
- (3) *Non-EU/EEA citizen with permanent residence*
- (4) *Non-EU/EEA citizen with temporary residence/work permit*
- (5) *Other*

Q1.4d

At the time of your youngest child's birth, for how long had you been living continuously in [country]?

_____ year(s)

Justifications

Questions 1.4 capture common eligibility-relevant characteristics using an indirect approach, collecting the information needed to approximate eligibility through country-specific policy coding. The questions therefore avoid asking respondents to interpret legal criteria, reducing the burden on respondents and facilitating harmonised comparative coding. Together, the questions also address both employment-based and citizenship-based eligibility conditions. Researchers using these questions, however, would need to match responses with detailed policy coding to assess respondent eligibility.²⁶

Note that for Q1.4a, we choose not to define part-time employment. This decision is consistent with the EU Labour Force Survey, which allows respondents to assess their own employment levels.²⁷ For a definition,





the EU LFS instead follows resolutions from the International Labour Organization, which defines a part-time worker as “an employed person whose normal hours of work are less than those of comparable full-time workers.”²⁸

A role for administrative data

Survey-based measures of eligibility are necessarily imperfect. Formal eligibility typically depends on detailed contribution histories, contract classifications or employer-reported information that many respondents are unlikely to know with precision. Survey responses are self-reported and may be subject to social desirability bias, particularly where refusal is perceived as reflecting poorly on the respondent's employment situation.

Where feasible, linking survey data to administrative records offers the most robust approach to establishing formal eligibility, and researchers should pursue such linkages wherever possible. Linkage is nonetheless conditional on respondent consent, which is itself selective,²⁹ possibly of the very groups whose exclusion this section sets out to capture. Linking survey and administrative data would also enable cross-validation of self-reported refusals and an assessment of the extent of under- or over-reporting.

Even with possibilities to use administrative data, there remains a need for surveys. Perceived eligibility and administrative outcomes are important measures of leave access in their own right and not merely proxies for legal entitlement. A parent who is formally eligible but unaware of their rights, or who is deterred by administrative complexity or prior refusal, is effectively excluded from leave, regardless of what the law provides. The questions proposed here are designed to make these dimensions visible. Capturing them is essential for a fuller understanding of inequalities in access to parenting leave across gender, employment status, migration background and income level.

4. Leave Use and Non-use

The evaluation of parenting leave policies requires indicators measuring usage rates. The usage rate can be calculated in two ways that are distinguished by the denominator of the formula. First, usage rates can be measured per birth by linking the number of parenting leaves taken to the number of children born within a specified timeframe. For example, the OECD reports a childbirth-related usage rate defined as the number of parental leave beneficiaries per 100 live births and further disaggregates these usage rates by gender.³⁰ Second, leave usage rates can be calculated based on the number of mothers (birth-parents) and/or fathers/partners (non-birth-parents) who used parenting leave within a defined period (e.g. one year).³¹

Usage rates are helpful for comparisons across countries and over time and for capturing the extent to which parenting leave provisions benefit the general parent population. While usage rates primarily measure take-up, they also indirectly reflect key features of policy design, such as the level of income replacement, eligibility conditions and the degree of flexibility, which shape parents' incentives and ability to take leave. However, usage rates alone do not allow for in-depth analysis of parents' responsiveness to different leave policy designs. For example, they cannot tell us how individual parents' leave use varies by their education, occupation or their partner's employment or working hours. Thus, to move beyond leave-usage rates, we need additional information about parents. Surveys can provide such information.

We recommend the below set of retrospective questions adapted from questions in the EU Labour Force Survey (LFS) ad-hoc module³² and improved. The EU LFS repeated modules on the reconciliation between work and family life are designed to capture individuals' self-reported experiences using reconciliation instruments, including parenting leave. In the 2010 module, the questions refer to the youngest child, but the 2005 survey asks respondents about leave use in the previous 12 months, which results in a loss of





information about leave used for children who are older than one year at the time of the survey. The 2018 and 2025 modules ask about cumulative breaks and leave without reference to a specific child: “*Since the beginning of your career, have you taken parental or maternity/paternity leave, considering all your own children?*” Questions lacking a reference child produce a long reference period (i.e., the respondent’s lifetime leave use), which prohibits linking leave use with the leave provisions available at the birth of a child. This linkage then becomes impossible when there are multiple children. Additionally, the approach is imprecise, because it risks reporting under-usage in the case of multiple children. Potential under-reporting is also an issue with the LFS module’s follow-up question on leave duration (i.e., the number of months the parent was on-leave). With the following questions, we offer some improvements.

QUESTIONS 2.1: Use of parenting leave

Q2.1a

Considering your own, youngest child, which statement describes your situation best?

- (1) I am currently on maternity/paternity(partner)/parental leave.*
- (2) Planning to take maternity/paternity(partner)/parental leave.*
- (3) I took maternity/paternity(partner)/parental leave.*
- (4) None of the above*
- (.) Don’t know/No answer*

Q2.1b

Filter label: If Q2.1a = 1 or 3

Considering your own, youngest child, did you take parental leave and/or maternity/paternity/partner leave?

- (1) Only used maternity/paternity/partner leave (taken directly before/after the birth)*
- (2) Only used parental leave*
- (3) Used a combination of both*
- (.) Don’t know/No answer*

Justifications

We recommend using a reference child (i.e., the respondent’s youngest child) to examine parents’ policy responsiveness. By linking leave use to a specific child, birth timing is the reference point, rather than a defined time period (e.g., calendar year), which is used reports of the number of beneficiaries in a year, for example. A survey implementing our proposed questions would also need to ask the birth month-year of the respondent’s youngest child (or each child should the question be expanded). See section below on “additional required data.” If time and budgets permit, survey administrators could also extend this question to pertain to each child in turn, though doing so increases response burden.

These questions make no distinction between paid and unpaid leaves, and the phrasing of the question intentionally does not specify the source of leave provisions (i.e., employer, collective bargaining agreements, the state or a combination). Because the extent of payment can limit access to leave provisions, we recommend additional questions, which are proposed and discussed in the prior section on leave eligibility, Qs 1.3.





QUESTIONS 2.2: Length of parenting leave planned or used

Q2.2a

Filter label: If Q2.1a = 1 or 2 (currently on leave or planning to take leave)

Considering your own, youngest child, how long do you plan to take maternity/paternity(partner) and parental leave in total?

Filter label: If Q2.1a = 3 (took leave in the past)

Considering your own, youngest child, what was the total length of the maternity/paternity(partner) and parental leave taken?

- (1) Up to 10 days
- (2) More than 10 days up to 2 months
- (3) More than 2 months up to 6 months
- (4) More than 6 months up to 1 year
- (5) More than 1 year up to 2 years
- (6) More than 2 years
- (.) Not stated
- (9) Not applicable

Q2.2b

Filter label: If Q2.1a = 1 or 2 (currently on leave or planning to take leave) & Q2.2a != "." or 9

How much of this leave do you plan to take alone with the child, for example, while the child's other parent is working or going to school?

- (1) All of it
- (2) More than half of it
- (3) Half of it
- (4) Less than half of it
- (5) None of it
- (9) Don't know
- (.) Not stated

Filter label: If Q2.1a = 3 (took leave in the past) & Q2.2a != "." or 9

How much of this leave did you take alone with the child, for example, while the child's other parent was working or going to school?

- (1) All of it
- (2) More than half of it
- (3) Half of it
- (4) Less than half of it
- (5) None of it
- (9) Don't know
- (.) Not stated

Justifications

We recommend response categories to measure leave duration. From a statistical perspective, a continuous measure on leave duration would be desirable, because it lends higher precision. In practice, however, responses about duration tend to be rounded³³ and may be less accurate than categories of the type we propose.³⁴ Categories may therefore serve as a recall aid. The first response category, "up to 10 days," reflects the length of paternity leave mandated by the EU Directive on Work-Life Balance for Parents and Carers (2019/1158). The two-month threshold is also informed by the EU Directive, which requires member states





to provide two months of non-transferable parental leave for each parent. Six months is the recommended duration by the World Health Organization for exclusive breastfeeding³⁵ and is recognized as a key point at which the health benefits of parenting leave diminish and negative labour market consequences become more likely.³⁶ The one-year threshold is important for measuring longer relative leave use among mothers, and the two-year threshold adds a discriminative threshold in countries where long leaves are common.

As with the questions about leave use (Qs 2.1), we propose limiting questions about leave duration only to the youngest child. This restriction reduces complexity and response burden, which improves accuracy. The phrasing also allows linking the extent of leave use to a given policy. A disadvantage, at least for analyses of labour market outcomes, is that this approach cannot measure the overall length of career breaks or absences from the labour market.³⁷

Researchers may choose to specify the reference child name through appropriate routing and replace the term “parental leave” with the national legal term to improve validity.

Adapting questions for different research aims

With our interest in policy responsiveness, the main questions included in this repository have a narrow focus on respondents and parenting leave, but they can be adapted for other or additional purposes. For example, researchers may want to know the respondent’s partner’s behaviour with regard to leave-taking. In this case, the proposed questions could be easily revised and added. For a life-course perspective, the proposed questions could be adapted to measure cumulative leave use in a way similar to the EU LFS modules on the reconciliation of work and family life. For example, the question could read as follows:

Including any time spent on parental and maternity/ paternity/partner leave, around how long in total have you taken leave to care for your child(ren)?

- (1) Up to 1 month
- (2) More than 1 month up to 2 months
- (3) More than 2 months up to 6 months
- (4) More than 6 months up to 1 year
- (5) More than 1 year up to 2 years
- (6) More than 2 years
- (.) Not stated
- (9) Not applicable

If the researchers are interested in career breaks and how they, for example, affect employment outcomes, the length of time the respondent stopped working may be of more interest than whether the break was officially or technically job-protected parenting leave. In this case, questions can ask whether the respondent has ever taken a “career break” to care for children (or family, depending on the research aims) and about the length of time the respondent “stopped working.”

Limitations

There are at least three limitations to our proposed survey questions. First, our questions may not fully overcome problems with misclassification of different types of leave provisions from a survey respondent’s perspective. Cross-country comparability is challenged by differences in national policy designs and the terminology used to identify the same or similar rights and provisions. Such differences can lead to variation in how respondents interpret the concept of parenting leave in surveys and in relation to national schemes. We return to this issue in the section on “methodological notes”.





Second, our questions do not address flexibility in leave use or ask when parental leave was taken. Rather, analysis of responses would link leave use with the provisions available when the youngest child was born. However, parents have access to leave provisions for many years after childbirth. The EU Directive on Work-Life Balance for Parents and Carers (2019/1158) mandates all EU Member States to guarantee workers an individual right to four months of parental leave that can be used before a child reaches a specified age, up to eight years-old (Article 5.1). In some countries, parental leave is available (in restricted duration) until a child turns 12. Survey respondents may therefore count parental leave taken long after childbirth, which may complicate comparability, depending on the research purpose.

Finally, part-time schemes may complicate the measurement of leave duration. Survey administrators should provide instructions for respondents on how to classify part-time leave. Respondents can be prompted to report duration in full-time-equivalent months or report their duration of leave irrespective of the part-time or full-time extent. The concept of part-time parental leave is inherently ambiguous, as it may be interpreted either as an absence from work or as continued participation. Complexity may further vary with the flexibility of the leave design across countries. For example, a leave of one day per week over several years may be difficult to sum to a meaningful full-time equivalent. Conversely, reporting only the overall duration of leave independent of the extent (i.e. part-time or full-time) may severely bias comparisons. The objective of the survey should guide the decision. In some cases, it might be preferable to record the overall duration of all parenting leaves taken (for analysing the career impact, for example) and adapt the question accordingly. In any case, survey administrators should implement methods such that including a set of precise questions would enable the calculation of comparable measures.

Calculating leave take-up rates

Indicators measuring leave use, when paired with information about leave eligibility, can be used to calculate leave take-up rates, or the proportion of parents who take parenting leave among parents who are legally entitled to do so. Take-up rates therefore offer better information about actual policy responsiveness among parents. Unlike usage rates, which include all parents regardless of eligibility, take-up rates highlight the fact that some parents do not have access to the policy due to eligibility criteria. Differences between the usage rate and the take-up rate may therefore reveal the degree to which a policy is more or less inclusive.

5. Reasons for Leave Non-Use

Survey data is a valuable source for capturing personal reasons for not taking parenting leave. Such reasons may include a lack of information about social rights, perceived or actual ineligibility, employer resistance, workplace cultures or individual preferences possibly related to gender roles. Additionally, paid leave entitlements often only cover part of a beneficiary's prior earnings, and some parents are unable to afford a reduction in wages during leave and therefore do not take it.³⁸ Some constraints to leave use are already covered by questions proposed under the eligibility section of this repository. However, self-reported reasons for non-use can also provide insights into the causal pathways in leave use patterns.³⁹

Understanding the reasons why parents do not take parental leave requires carefully designed survey questions that capture diverse circumstances. If well-designed, responses to such questions may demonstrate that non-use cannot be attributed to one single factor. Rather, multiple confounding mechanisms are likely relevant.⁴⁰

Other surveys have explored reasons for non-use.⁴¹ Our proposed survey questions share similarities with the Euro FlashBarometer 470, which asks, "Which are the main reasons for not taking or not thinking of





taking parental leave?” with a link to a reference child.⁴² In this section, we offer improvements to this question, followed by our justifications. A special, break-out section reports an experience in survey development and implementation in Iceland to share lessons about measuring leave non-use. We conclude with making a case for understanding why parents do not use leave provisions.

QUESTIONS 3.1: Reasons for non-use

Q3.1a

Filter label: If Q2.1a = 4 (non-use of any leave)

What were the main reasons for not taking maternity/paternity(partner)/parental leave for your own, youngest child? Please select up to three.

- (1) Unaware of my entitlement to parental leave*
- (2) Application process too complicated or time-consuming*
- (3) Ineligible for leave, e.g. because I was not employed, not employed long enough or other reasons*
- (4) Financial reasons, e.g. income loss, low levels of benefits*
- (5) Concerns about negative effects on my career*
- (6) Concerns about employer reactions or impact on coworkers/workplace*
- (7) Was not necessary, e.g., childcare provided by other family members or childcare facilities*
- (8) Other reasons, please specify: _____*
- (.) I don't know/prefer not to say.*

Q3.1b

Filter label: If two or three items ticked in Q3.1a & Q3.1a ≠ (.)

Which of these reasons was the most important?

[List selected items from Q3.1a]

Q3.1c

Filter label: If three items ticked in Q3.1a & Q3.1a ≠ (.)

Which of these reasons was the second most important?

[List selected items from Q3.1a]

Justifications

We improve the Eurobarometer question and its response categories in a few ways. First, given the advances in online surveys and the response burden of long survey questions,⁴³ we propose a more concise list of response categories than provided in the Eurobarometer, while still covering a comprehensive range of reasons for non-take-up. The response categories correspond to four analytical dimensions:

- (1) Policy design-related reasons: “ineligible for leave” and “financial reasons”
- (2) Workplace-related reasons⁴⁴: negative career impacts and concern about employer’s or colleague’s reactions or the impact of absence on the employer or colleagues
- (3) Information and administrative reasons: “unaware of my entitlement” and “application process too complicated or time-consuming”
- (4) Personal reasons: leave was deemed unnecessary; respondents may include additional personal reasons with the open-ended prompt to share other reasons

Our recommended response categories therefore enable a distinction between imposed non-use (e.g. perceived ineligibility or lack of affordability) and voluntary non-take-up due to preferences (e.g. deeming





the leave unnecessary). We therefore cover reasons related to perceived barriers and choice, while recognizing that choice is often constrained.

Second, a distinctive feature of our proposed question is that it includes perceived ineligibility as a reason for non-use. Actual ineligibility would need to be measured elsewhere in the survey (e.g. using the first set of survey questions on eligibility) or by linking survey responses to administrative data. Yet perceived ineligibility is a valid reason for parenting leave non-use and, like knowledge of parenting leave rights, important for understanding how to effectively implement policies.

Finally, we recommend allowing the respondent to select more than one reason for not taking leave from a predefined list and prompting them to rank these reasons. Parents have multiple reasons for not taking advantage of social rights or provisions, and some may be simultaneously relevant.⁴⁵ However, allowing respondents to select several reasons from the same battery of responses without ranking them may also lead to a loss of information as their relative importance could not be assessed.

Additional considerations

We recommend displaying response items as a multiple-choice battery on a single page. When questionnaires involve a long list of response options, survey designers have a choice between presenting items as we propose or displaying one item per page and asking respondents to identify the relevance of each of them (e.g. “yes” or “no” for each reason). In the case of parenting leave, presenting a multiple-choice battery is preferable. This approach reduces response burden and leads naturally to follow-up questions prompting respondents to rank their choices. A one-item-per-page format may improve focus and reduce measurement error but increase item non-response.⁴⁶

Explaining why fathers do not claim benefits:

Lessons from the Icelandic Case

The Icelandic survey on *Parental Employment and Care for Children Under the Age of Three*, designed by Guðný Björk Eydal, Ingólfur V. Gíslason, and Ásdís Arnalds, provides a useful case study of how such questions can be posed and how they can be refined.

The survey has been carried out four times, and its purpose is to assess parental leave use and examine how patterns of leave use are associated with parents’ participation in the labour market and with the way they arrange care for their young children. An invitation letter, with an URL to an online survey, is sent to the home address of all children born in a certain year, addressed to both parents in two-parent households, and the residential parent in single-parent households. Parents can choose which one of them answers the survey, or if they answer it together. In the 2023 Icelandic survey, all respondents were asked: “Did the father receive any payments from the Parental Leave Fund?” (If the child’s parents were two mothers, the question wording was adjusted accordingly). The response categories were (1) Parental leave payments (proportion of previous salary, payments made to employees or self-employed); (2) Parental grant for parents outside the labor market (fixed amount paid to parents in less than 25% employment); (3) Parental grant for students; (4) No, none of the above. Among the 3,557 valid responses, 449 parents (12.6%) reported that the father received no payments of any kind, neither the income-related parental leave benefit for employed parents, nor the two types of parental grants. These respondents were subsequently asked about the reasons for non-receipt.

The follow-up question presented a closed list of reasons, with the option to mark all that applied and an additional open category (“Another reason, what?”). A total of 439 respondents answered this question





(97.7% of those who received it), and 40 provided an open-ended explanation that did not fit the predefined categories.

The development of the closed categories in 2023 was informed by earlier qualitative material. Five years earlier, respondents who indicated that the father had not used his independent right to parental leave were asked an open-ended question about the reasons. In that earlier survey, 246 respondents provided answers out of the 260 who received the question (94.6%). These open responses were coded and formed the empirical basis for the refined list of closed response options used in the 2023 instrument.

Although the earlier version of the questionnaire, based on open-ended responses, did not cause substantial non-response, the later closed-question format greatly reduced the time and resources needed for coding. The 2023 question set therefore offers a useful starting point for measuring non-use in future comparative surveys, though it will require adaptation to national contexts, as not all countries provide, for instance, student loans.

Question wording in the 2023 survey:

Why did the father not receive any payments from the Parental Leave Fund (i.e. neither income-related parental leave payments nor a parental grant)? Please mark all that apply.

- ☐ *Was not entitled to payments due to living abroad*
- ☐ *Receives a disability pension and therefore did not apply*
- ☐ *Did not apply for income-related parental leave payments as full salary is not paid during parental leave*
- ☐ *Did not apply for the parental grant (fixed amount) because the amount is too low*
- ☐ *Was studying and continued on student loans*
- ☐ *Was unemployed and continued to receive payments from the Unemployment Benefit Fund*
- ☐ *Did not apply for parental leave as it was difficult to take a break from work*
- ☐ *Did not apply for parental leave because the employer or supervisor was against it*
- ☐ *It was too complicated to apply for payments or a grant from the Parental Leave Fund*
- ☐ *Did not apply due to health reasons*
- ☐ *Not interested in taking parental leave*
- ☐ *Another reason, what? _____*
- ☐ *Don't know*
- ☐ *Choose not to answer*

Insights from the open-ended responses

Those who provided open-ended responses to “Another reason, what?” described a wide variety of circumstances. Several mentioned employment transitions, gaps between study and work, or self-employment situations in which they had not paid the required insurance contributions, leaving them formally ineligible. Others reported receiving full pay or using accumulated leave from their employer, making Parental Leave Fund benefits unnecessary. A number of respondents were simply unaware that they could apply. Some fathers were on notice periods or working in highly flexible arrangements that allowed them to care for the child without taking formal leave. A few pointed to family circumstances, including limited involvement with the child or asylum-seeking status, which shaped their non-use.





Understanding barriers to leave-taking

Identifying reasons for non-take-up allows policymakers to distinguish between voluntary and constrained non-use. This distinction is crucial for policy evaluation. If non-take-up is driven primarily by a lack of (perceived) affordability or (perceived) workplace barriers, policy adjustments such as higher wage replacement rates, non-transferable or mandatory parental leave or stronger employment protections may be warranted. If, however, non-take-up reflects a lack of awareness or administrative complexity, information campaigns and a simplification of the administrative steps to claim benefits may be more effective.⁴⁷ Finally, if non-use is explained by ineligibility or perceived ineligibility, then eligibility requirements should be loosened or governments should invest in educating employers, employees and their representatives about available leave entitlements and their eligibility criteria.





6. Views about Parental Leave

Public attitudes toward parenting leave constitute an important analytical lens for understanding broader social norms and values related to gender, work and family life. Here we focus on parental leave, because the main research and policy gap is in understanding shared parental leave preferences. A substantial body of sociological research shows that preferences regarding parental leave are closely linked to gender role attitudes, expectations about caregiving and institutional contexts.⁴⁸ Support for more generous or gender-equal leave arrangements tends to be associated with more egalitarian views on the division of paid and unpaid work, whereas traditional attitudes reinforce more asymmetric caregiving patterns.

At the same time, attitudes toward parental leave are not only shaped by existing norms but also contribute to their reproduction and transformation. Recent cross-national research suggests that family policies themselves can function as normative signals, influencing norms about how childcare should be shared between mothers and fathers.⁴⁹ Experimental and policy-based evidence further indicates that exposure to parental leave arrangements, particularly those encouraging fathers' participation, can shift normative beliefs toward more gender-equal models of parenting.⁵⁰

Against this background, it is important to monitor views about parental leave, as they provide insight into how gendered expectations are maintained or transformed. The questions included in this repository are organized around two key themes: attitudes toward the sharing of care and the perceived adequacy of parental leave arrangements. Many of these questions use a vignette, i.e. a short description of a hypothetical person, situation or event that respondents are asked to evaluate, to capture these phenomena.

QUESTIONS 4.1-4-3: Sharing of Care and Parental Leave

Introductory vignette:

Consider a mother and father who work full-time and have similar earnings. They just had a newborn child and are considering parental leave.

Q4.1

In your opinion, for how long should the mother stop working to care for the child?

- (1) Up to 1 month
- (2) More than 1 month up to 2 months
- (3) More than 2 months up to 6 months
- (4) More than 6 months up to 1 year
- (5) More than 1 year up to 2 years
- (6) More than 2 years
- (7) Should not stop working at all

Q4.2

In your opinion, for how long should the father stop working to care for the child?

- (1) Up to 1 month
- (2) More than 1 month up to 2 months
- (3) More than 2 months up to 6 months
- (4) More than 6 months up to 1 year
- (5) More than 1 year up to 2 years
- (6) More than 2 years
- (7) Should not stop working at all





Q4.3

[Note: Drawn from the International Social Survey Programme]

Thinking of the same couple. Consider that they have access to one year of parental leave. How should parental leave be divided between the mother and father?

- (1) The mother should take the entire leave period, and the father should not take any leave.*
- (2) The mother should take most of the leave period, and the father should take some of it.*
- (3) The mother and father should each take half of the leave period.*
- (4) The father should take most of the leave period, and the mother should take some of it.*
- (5) The father should take the entire leave period, and the mother should not take any leave.*

Justifications

Question 4.3 is drawn from the International Social Survey Programme.⁵¹ Compared to the original phrasing, our proposed question specifies a leave period of one year to standardise the reference period, instead of a period defined by the respondent. The response options, however, remain the same.

The questions we propose allow for the analysis of gender normative expectations about parental roles and the division of childcare within heterosexual couples, particularly the extent to which care is perceived as a responsibility of mothers versus fathers. Therefore, the vignette refers to a “mother” and “father” but can be adopted to different types of couples, for example, using “birthparent” and “partner” instead or referring only to “two parents” or a “couple.” Such decisions depend on the main aims of the survey. By directly comparing preferred lengths of work interruption for each parent, the questions capture attitudes toward gender roles, the acceptance of fathers’ involvement in early childcare and broader preferences for family policy models ranging from traditional male-breadwinner arrangements to more gender egalitarian dual-earner/dual-carer systems.

The vignette specifies that both partners are in a similar full-time work situation to control for differences in earnings, job flexibility and career importance that might otherwise influence respondents’ answers. By holding labour market conditions constant, the design ensures that responses primarily reflect gender norms and expectations regarding caregiving roles rather than economic considerations. This phrasing therefore increases the internal validity of the measure and allows for a clearer assessment of attitudes toward the division of childcare responsibilities between mothers and fathers.

Reference to “stop working” is used deliberately to denote a temporary withdrawal from paid employment. This formulation provides a clear and unambiguous measure of work interruption and avoids the interpretative variability associated with broader terms such as “taking time off work,” which could be understood as referring to sick leave, holiday or other forms of short-term absence. Thus, phrasing improves measurement validity and consistency across responses.

Using “should” regarding behaviours is designed to capture respondents’ normative attitudes and prescriptive beliefs about gender roles in childcare. In contrast, alternatives such as “appropriate for the mother” would primarily measure perceptions of social acceptability rather than normative expectations. Using “should” therefore ensures that the item directly taps into normative judgments about how childcare responsibilities ought to be divided between mothers and fathers.

The inclusion of the response option, “should not stop working at all”, enables identification of strong market-orientation or work devotion, and differences in responses regarding mothers and fathers can be used to construct indicators of gender inequality in work and care, revealing the degree to which respondents support or challenge existing structural disparities in work–family arrangements.





QUESTION 4.4: Adequacy of parental leave

Now we focus on parental leave.

Q4.4

If a parent is earning an average salary, how much of their salary should be covered while on parental leave?

- (1) Leave should be unpaid.*
- (2) At least 50% of previous salary*
- (3) At least 75% of previous salary*
- (4) Full salary*
- (.) Don't know*

Justifications

Question 4.4 is adapted from the Flash Eurobarometer 470 question: “Thinking about the financial aspects, please tell me which proportion of your salary you would take/have taken leave? If it was paid.” The revised wording addresses more clearly the income replacement rate for an average income earner as a reference point. The response items draw on the Eurobarometer options (50/75%) and add the option for coverage of full salary.

Additional considerations

To improve response validity in Q4.4, we recommend adding a short informational statement describing the general structure of parental leave in the respondent’s country. This addresses potential knowledge heterogeneity and ensures that responses reflect evaluative judgments rather than differences in awareness of existing policy arrangements. We propose the following options for flat rate and earnings-related benefits:

- a) Flat rate: Currently, parental leave [insert legal term] is paid at the rate of [national currency amount] per [week/month depending on standard reference period] for all claimants.
- b) Earnings-related: Currently, parental leave [insert legal term] replaces [amount] percent of income. For an average income earner this equals [amount] per [week/month depending on standard reference period].

The analytical use of this module is enhanced when additional contextual information is available, as it improves the precision and interpretability of within-family comparisons of work interruption related to childcare. For relevant considerations for the core questionnaire, please see the break-out box in the “Methodological notes” section below.

Views: An important part of parenting leave use and development

In research on the causes and consequences of parenting leave policy developments, views play a crucial, yet underexamined, role. To use parenting leave provisions, a parent must believe they should use them and prioritize using them. Such beliefs about leave-taking are shaped in part by views about which parent is primarily responsible for child and infant caregiving.⁵² Views about parenting leave also have policy relevance, shaping future policy developments as policymakers respond to the changing needs and interests of their constituents.⁵³ Changing policy may then change parents’ views about who is primarily responsible for taking leave,⁵⁴ creating a feedback loop that is difficult to disentangle given the current lack of comparative, longitudinal data on views about parenting leave and related questions.





7. Methodological notes

When measuring parenting leave use through surveys, several methodological challenges must be considered. A central challenge relates to the small or rare population problem, which is especially pronounced when questions on eligibility and usage are embedded in general population surveys.⁵⁵ Parents of young children constitute a relatively small analytical domain, and fathers reporting parental leave use represent an even rarer subgroup.⁵⁶ This leads to high sampling variance, unstable country-level estimates and sparse or empty cells when disaggregating by characteristics such as sex, child age or employment status. Consequently, direct estimates may be unreliable or uninformative, particularly when based on small denominators (e.g., fathers taking leave).

Related issues concern weighting, calibration and the limits of what survey weights can achieve. In most surveys, weights are constructed using a combination of design weights, non-response adjustments and calibration to known population margins such as age, sex and region. While these procedures are effective in restoring representativeness for key population totals, they are not optimised for narrow analytical domains such as fathers of young children who were eligible for and have used parental leave. As a result, estimates for these domains may exhibit substantial weight variability, inflating variance and increasing sensitivity to a small number of observations. Furthermore, if non-response or coverage errors are correlated with parental leave use (for example, if leave-taking parents are systematically harder to reach due to working-time arrangements), calibration on standard socio-demographic variables may not fully correct the resulting biases. Hence, survey designers should carefully estimate the size of the surveyed population and consider using a narrower definition of the target population, for example, focusing on younger respondents who are more likely to have had children in the relatively recent past.

In cross-national surveys, additional challenges arise from terminological ambiguities. Respondents may confuse parental leave with maternity or paternity/partner leave, particularly given cross-country variation in policy design and institutional frameworks. Differences in how individuals interpret survey concepts in relation to national schemes can undermine comparability. To address this, precise wording and comprehensive guidance for respondents are necessary to avoid conflating different types of leave. Vignettes could also be added to introduce and clarify distinctions. Alternatively, survey administrators could replace the terms used in the proposed questions with country-specific legal names for the provisions. For cross-national comparative surveys, it would then be important to make sure that the different legal names in each country measure the same type of provisions across countries to maintain comparability. The aim is to achieve conceptual rather than literal equivalence across countries while maintaining comparability of the underlying leave categories.

Sampling considerations and additional required data

The questions proposed in this repository are designed for implementation into larger surveys. Survey administrators will need to consider the purpose of the larger survey and on that basis determine the sample. For the questions about parenting leave, survey administrators may want to restrict the age of the respondent (e.g., 18-54) or the age of the reference child (e.g., under age 9) to reduce potential problems with recall bias. As the age of the youngest child increases, so will problems with recall accuracy. However, if the core questionnaire is administered to a large representative population - rather than targeted to parents, for example - filtering the parenting leave questions on the age of the respondent or the child may produce small samples or potentially exclude countries with longer eligibility periods.





Regardless of the survey's main purpose, some additional questions are required to analyse responses to the questions we propose in this repository:

Respondent's gender. While it is standard practice for surveys to collect basic information regarding the respondent's gender, it is essential to distinguish between genders to identify trends specific to each group. Mothers and fathers typically start from different positions in the labour market and respond differently to family policies. They are also often eligible for different types of leave, with different durations and benefit levels.

Birth month and year for youngest child. For responses to the proposed questions to have any use, a survey instrument would also need to collect information on the timing of the youngest child's birth. At the very least, a survey would need to collect information on the child's birth year, but birth month-year is advisable. Because parenting leave policies are continually changing in many countries, it is important to collect information about the birth month and year such that responses can be linked to the leave provisions in place at the time of birth. An alternative would be to ask about the youngest child's age at the time of the survey, but this approach leads to an approximate birth month-year calculation. Child age is therefore less ideal than asking for the child's birth month-year.

Marital status. In some countries, a legally recognized partnership is an eligibility condition for non-birth parents with same-sex partners.⁵⁷ To best analyse retrospective information about leave use and eligibility conditions, the respondent's legal partnership with the reference child's parent at the time of childbirth would be more relevant than the respondent's partnership status at the time of the survey given that partnership can change.

Partnership context, partnership histories (co-resident vs. non-resident other parent).

Knowing whether the "other parent" refers to a current co-resident partner or an ex-partner helps ensure that comparisons of caregiving-related employment interruption are interpreted correctly, as family structure may influence both the opportunity and reporting of shared childcare responsibilities.

Number of children, their ages and relationship to the respondent (biological, adopted or stepchild) and whether they are shared with the current partner.

Information on the number of children allows for better interpretation of reported durations of work interruption, as longer cumulative periods may reflect higher parity rather than longer interruptions per child. This improves comparability across respondents with different family sizes.

The proposed survey questions are designed to work both in cross-sectional (one time-point) and longitudinal (repeated time-points) studies. While comparative cross-sectional surveys would already fill a crucial data gap, we emphasize the added value of longitudinal designs that would enable assessments of policy changes over time. However, we acknowledge that longitudinal studies, especially repeated surveys that recruit the same respondents at different points in time, require greater and stable investment than is typically available.

Finally, we emphasize the document's focus on statutory parenting leave and do not recommend adding other or detailed types of care leaves as response categories. Like other data sources,⁵⁸ we do not address employer-provided leave arrangements. As a result, we may underestimate actual leave use. However, distinguishing leave by its sources places burdens on respondents who may not know or remember such details about the leave they used. We also do not distinguish between non-transferable and transferable parental leave entitlements. While interesting to researchers, such questions would require technical knowledge about leave policies and present a burden for respondents and survey administrators. Restricting the focus on maternity, paternity(partner) and parental leave provisions prevents confusion of distinct complex and interculturally sensitive terms and ensures internal validity. If researchers are interested in





other types of leave provisions, such as carers' leave (i.e., time to care for a spouse, parent or older child), other questions are more suitable.

8. Conclusion

Information on parenting leave use is limited. Implementing the survey questions proposed in this repository would solve some problems in our current understanding of leave policy responsiveness among parents. Survey data can also advance our understanding beyond socio-economic and contextual drivers of parenting leave use. Measuring parents' perceptions of leave eligibility, views on parenting leave and other reasons for non-uptake, would facilitate a better understanding of the multi-faceted barriers to taking time-off to care for children. Such barriers could then be addressed through policies and programs that support parents' relationships with their children and center child well-being in the reconciliation of work and family life.

Administrative data, which measures information on public beneficiaries and their children, are the most appropriate data source for measuring actual leave usage and take-up rates.⁵⁹ An additional lack of data on unpaid or employer-provided leave would persist, because such leave does not involve state benefit entitlements. However, administrative data is superior for allowing linkages between parents, couples, multiple children and benefit usage information. Administrative data also has sufficient information to determine eligibility for parenting leave entitlements, such as employment status and histories. With such data, we can calculate leave take-up rates in a country. Unfortunately, such administrative data is not available across all EU countries, and they are not harmonized for cross-national comparisons. Until such data is available, surveys using the retrospective questions we propose can fill our gap in knowledge.

More broadly, questions about parenting leave use are highly relevant for research on social inequalities. Such data reveal which segments of the population benefit from policies designed to support the reconciliation of family responsibilities and paid work. Population groups that use reconciliation policies systematically and to a significant extent, such as women, highly educated parents and employees in certain economic sectors, are more likely to engage in childcare and to develop stronger relationships with their children compared to groups who do not or cannot access such policies. When the take-up of parenting leave is more evenly distributed across different groups of parents, disparities between family responsibilities and paid work, as well as the associated advantages and disadvantages, are also reduced. Consequently, understanding inequalities in parenting leave take-up also contributes to identifying and explaining the sources of other social inequalities.

Given the dearth of information about leave use and related issues, we have focused our questions on addressing parenting leave. Yet there are more expansive ways to think about how states can make time for caregiving. Throughout life, a person will likely need time to care for aging parents or sick partners or spouses, a need which is heightened in the current context of aging populations. The EU recognized this need in its 2019 Directive on Work-Life Balance for Parents and Carers (2019/1158). In addition to parental leave, the EU mandated that Member States adopt five days of carers' leave per year to "provide personal care for a relative, or to a person who lives in the same household as the worker, and who is in need of significant care or support for a serious medical reason as defined by each Member State." People may also have self-care needs to address, e.g. illnesses or injuries. Beyond direct caregiving for self and others, people have responsibilities to the environment and their communities. Such needs have led scholars to call for care leave that is inclusive in its conceptualization of care responsibilities, including care for close friends, neighbors, communities and the environment.⁶⁰





Our proposed questions additionally focus on employment-based rights to leave provisions. We apply this focus to fill an urgent data gap regarding a relatively common social right across Europe and the type of leave mandated by the European Commission (EU Directive 2019/1158). However, there are more expansive ways to define social rights.⁶¹ A few countries extend leave rights to students, giving them breaks from studies. Governments may also offer child benefits (regular, flat-rate payments to support parents) or home care allowances that pay parents to care for children at home rather than use state-funded childcare.⁶² Such benefits are citizenship-based - rather than employment-based - rights that apply monetary value to care work regardless of prior or current employment.⁶³ While such provisions can exacerbate gender inequalities,⁶⁴ they address social inclusion, making state-supported care time more accessible to the under- and un-employed.

This repository was produced by members of the Sustainability@Leave EU COST Action as a follow-up to our previous outputs, which identified gaps in paid parenting-leave data and challenges involved in filling these gaps. With this document, we aim to encourage and support social policy researchers in collecting much-needed data on parenting leave use and related issues from a European comparative perspective. To move beyond our focus, researchers and policymakers should continue to consider the diversity of family caregivers and caregiving needs and the broader valuation of caregiving as an essential part of economies and societies. Such endeavors enable policy evaluation and support the development of future policies and reforms that reduce social inequalities.

NOTE

¹ Dobrotić, I. & Blum, S. (2020). Inclusiveness of Parental-Leave Benefits in Twenty-One European Countries: Measuring Social and Gender Inequalities in Leave Eligibility. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, 27(3): 588-614. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxz023>; Doucet, A. & Moss, P. (2026). *Care leaves and care time for all: Towards caring democracies, economies, and worlds*. Bristol: Policy Press.

² For more information on policy terminology, including efforts to harmonize terminologies cross-nationally, see: Moss, P. (2011). International Review of Leave Policies and Related Research 2011, available at: https://www.leavenetwork.org/fileadmin/user_upload/k_leavenetwork/annual_reviews/2011_annual_review.pdf; Dobrotić, I., Blum, S. & Koslowski, A. (2022). Introduction to the Research Handbook on Leave Policy: Parenting and Social Inequalities in a Global Perspective. In Dobrotić, I. et al. (eds). *Research Handbook on Leave Policy: Parenting and Social Inequalities in a Global Perspective*. Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781800372214.00008>; Meil, G., & Romero-Balsas, P., eds. (2025). *Towards a comprehensive terminology on paid parenting leave*. COST-Action Parental Leave Policies and Social Sustainability (Sustainability@Leave), DOI: https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/wkuam_v1.

³ Ferragina, E. (2020). Family policy and women's employment outcomes in 45 high-income countries: A systematic review of 238 comparative and national studies. *Social Policy & Administration* 54(7):1016-66.

⁴ Petts, R.J., Knoester, C., & Waldfogel, J. (2020). Fathers' paternity leave-taking and children's perceptions of father-child relationships in the United States. *Sex Roles* 82(3): 173-88.

⁵ Kvande, E., & Brandth, B. (2020). Designing parental leave for fathers - Promoting gender equality in working life. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*. 40(5-6): 465-77.

⁶ Dobrotić, I., & Arnalds, A.A., eds. (2023). *Parenting leave policy data gaps: a comparative critical analysis*. COST Action Parental Leave Policies and Social Sustainability (Sustainability@Leave), DOI: 10.31235/osf.io/8g25k, available at: <https://osf.io/preprints/socarxiv/8g25k>; Engeman, C., Bartova, A., Burman, S., Köppe, S., & Maxhelaku, A. (2025). *Methodological challenges in paid parental leave research and policy: Post-workshop report*. COST Action Parental Leave Policies and Social Sustainability (Sustainability@Leave), DOI: 10.31235/osf.io/tqwfb_v1. Available at: https://osf.io/preprints/socarxiv/tqwfb_v1.

⁷ Collectively, the authors have leave-policy expertise in: Albania (Maxhelaku), Belgium (Bártová and Thil), Bosnia and Herzegovina (Dobrotić), Bulgaria (Dimitrova), Croatia (Dobrotić), the Czech Republic (Štašná, Bártová), France (Thil), Germany (Köppe), Iceland (Arnalds), Ireland (Köppe), Luxembourg (Hartung, Valentova), the Netherlands (Bártová), Montenegro (Dobrotić), Serbia (Dobrotić), Slovenia (Dobrotić), Spain (García Faroldi), Sweden (Engeman) and the United States (Engeman).

⁸ Karu, M., & Tremblay, D.G. (2018) Fathers on parental leave: An analysis of rights and take-up in 29 countries. *Community, Work & Family* 21(3):344-62.





⁹ For more details see: Dobrotić, I., & Arnalds, A.A., eds. (2023). *Parenting leave policy data gaps: a comparative critical analysis*. COST Action Parental Leave Policies and Social Sustainability (Sustainability@Leave), DOI: 10.31235/osf.io/8g25k, available at: <https://osf.io/preprints/socarxiv/8g25k>.

¹⁰ While the questions are designed for comparative research in a European context, they may also be useful for national statistics institutes and applicable to survey research outside Europe. In the latter case, researchers will have more freedom to cater questions to more detailed aspects of policy design, such as eligibility or parenting leave duration.

¹¹ Such questions are used, for instance, in the core questionnaire of the European Labour Force Survey, where leave use is included as the main reason for absence from work in a particular reference week.

¹² Measuring leave status at the time of the survey poorly captures short parental leaves or leave concentrated in specific weeks or months. For example, the respondent may have taken maternity, paternity or parental leave that year but returned to work by the time of the survey.

¹³ As time since the event elapses, respondents are less likely to accurately remember past behaviours; See: Hipp, L., Bünning, M., Munnes, S., & Sauermann, A. (2020). Problems and pitfalls of retrospective survey questions in COVID-19 studies. *Survey Research Methods* 14(2): 109-114.

¹⁴ Dobrotić & Blum (2020), reference in note #1.

¹⁵ For example, see Marinova, D.M., & León, M. (2025). Paternity leave take-up in a segmented labor market: A cautionary tale of rapid policy expansion in Spain. *Journal of European Social Policy* 35 (4):349-61.

¹⁶ This distinction between formal eligibility and access is reflected in the EU recommendation on access to social protection (2019/C 387/01).

¹⁷ See: EIGE (2020). Eligibility for parental leave in EU Member States, available at: https://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/mh0219002enn_002.pdf

¹⁸ See: Dobrotić & Arnalds (2023), referenced in note #9.

¹⁹ Focused national and cross-national family surveys (e.g. Generations and Gender Survey) sometimes ask whether respondents *received* parental leave benefits and tend to provide more detailed information on leave use, but coverage differs across countries and leave types, limiting cross-national comparability. They also rarely ask about failed applications or uncertainty about eligibility. For an assessment of existing data, please see our prior publication, Dobrotić & Arnalds (2023), referenced in note #9.

²⁰ de la Porta, C., Im, Z., & Szelewa, D. (2023). An examination of 'instrumental resources' in earmarked parental leave: The case of the work-life balance directive. *Journal of European Social Policy* 33(5):525-39; but see: Kurowska, A., & Suwada, K. (2026). The bumpy road from a well-paid earmarked parental leave to engaged fatherhood: Externally driven reform in a persistently gendered culture. *Gender, Work & Organization*: 1-15.

²¹ Antonucci, L. (2025). The lived experiences of the welfare state of platform workers: The barriers to accessing social protection in Italy, Sweden and the United Kingdom. *International Journal of Social Welfare* 34(1):e12708; See also the EU Council recommendation to address social exclusion (2019/C 387/01).

²² See: Hipp, L., Bünning, M., Munnes, S., & Sauermann, A. (2020). Problems and pitfalls of retrospective survey questions in COVID-19 studies. *Survey Research Methods* 14(2): 109-114.

²³ Moynihan, D., Herd, P., & Harvey, H. (2015). "Administrative burden: Learning, psychological, and compliance costs in citizen-state interactions. *Journal of public administration research and theory* 25(1):43-69.

²⁴ Hobson, B., Fahlén, S., & Takács, J. (2011). Agency and capabilities to achieve a work-life balance: A comparison of Sweden and Hungary. *Social Politics: International Studies on Gender, State & Society* 18(2):168-198; Kaufman, G. (2018). Barriers to equality: Why British fathers do not use parental leave. *Community, Work & Family* 21(3):310-325.

²⁵ For a comprehensive overview see: Dobrotić, I. et al. (eds). *Research Handbook on Leave Policy: Parenting and Social Inequalities in a Global Perspective*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

²⁶ On what coding requires in practice, see: Bártoová, A., & Emery, T. (2018). Measuring policy entitlements at the micro-level: Maternity and parental leave in Europe. *Community, Work & Family* 21(1):33-52; Bruzelius, Cecilia. (2019). Freedom of movement, social rights and residence-based conditionality in the European Union. *Journal of European Social Policy* 29(2):70-83.

²⁷ See Eurostat's Statistics Explained: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Part-time_and_full-time_employment_statistics&stable=0&redirect=no.

²⁸ International Labour Organization C175 – Part-time Work Convention, 1994 (No. 175). Available: https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C175

²⁹ Jäckle, A., Burton, J., Couper, M.P., Crossley, T.F., & Walzenbach, S. (2024). Survey consent to administrative data linkage: Five experiments on wording and format. *Journal of Survey Statistics and Methodology* 12(5):1174-99; Sala, E., Burton, J., & Knies, G. (2012). Correlates of obtaining informed consent to data linkage: Respondent, interview, and interviewer characteristics. *Sociological Methods & Research* 41(3):414-39.

³⁰ OECD (February 2025) Parents' use of childbirth-related leave https://webfs.oecd.org/Els-com/Family_Database/PF2-2-Use-childbirth-leave.pdf.





- ³¹ For example, see: Köppe, S. (2023). Ireland's Paternity Leave: Sluggish Benefit Take-up and Occupational Inequalities. *Journal of Family Studies*, 29(6), 2524–2539. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13229400.2023.2179527>.
- ³² Eurostat. (2022). Explanatory notes: Reconciliation of work and family life. LFS 2025 ad hoc module (IESS-FR, Version 13 July 2022).
- ³³ Tourangeau, R., Rips, L. J., & Rasinski, K. (2000). *The Psychology of Survey Response*. Cambridge University Press.
- ³⁴ This is especially true for questions that ask respondents to sum their leave use for multiple children, which we do not recommend.
- ³⁵ See: https://www.who.int/health-topics/breastfeeding#tab=tab_2. Accessed 19 September 2026.
- ³⁶ See summary (pages 167-180) in Kaufman, G. (2020). *Fixing parental leave: The six month solution*. NYU Press.
- ³⁷ For the purpose of constructing retrospective leave histories, we refer to the Gender and Generations Programme (GGP) Harmonised Histories project, although this has not been applied to parenting leaves (<https://www.ggp-i.org/data/harmonized-histories/>).
- ³⁸ Kaufman, G. (2018). Barriers to equality: Why British fathers do not use parental leave. *Community, Work & Family* 21(3):310-25.
- ³⁹ van Oorschot, W. (2002). "Targeting welfare: On the functions and dysfunctions of means testing in social policy," In Townsend, D. & Gordon, D., eds. *World Poverty: New Policies to Defeat an Old Enemy*. Bristol University Press, pp. 171-94.
- ⁴⁰ van Oorschot, W. (1991). Non-take-up of social security benefits in Europe. *Journal of European Social Policy* 1(1):15-30.
- ⁴¹ Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, BMG Research, Institute for Employment Studies. (2024). *Parental Rights Survey, 2019*. UK Data Service. SN: 9206, <http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-9206-1>
- ⁴² European Commission. (2018b). *Flash Eurobarometer 470 (Work-Life Balance)*, ZA6964 Data file Version 1.0.0 GESIS Data Archive. <https://doi.org/10.4232/1.13167>
- ⁴³ Peytchev, Andy. (2009). Survey Breakoff. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 73(1): 74-97; Yan, T., & Tourangeau, R. (2008). Fast times and easy questions: The effects of age, experience and question complexity on web survey response times. *Applied Cognitive Psychology* 22(1): 51-68.
- ⁴⁴ Workplace related reasons are of particular importance for analysing gender-specific leave use behaviour. For example, see Samtleben, C., Bringmann, J., Bünning, M., & Hipp, L. (2019). What Helps and What Hinders? Exploring the Role of Workplace Characteristics for Parental Leave Use and Its Career Consequences. *Social Sciences*, 8(10), 270. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci8100270>
- ⁴⁵ van Oorschot, W. (2002). "Targeting welfare: On the functions and dysfunctions of means testing in social policy," In Townsend, D. & Gordon, D., eds. *World Poverty: New Policies to Defeat an Old Enemy*. Bristol University Press, pp. 171-94.
- ⁴⁶ Olson, K. M., Smyth, J. D., & Phillips, A. (2024). Display of battery items in web and mail surveys: Grids versus item-by-item and radio versus wide buttons. *International Journal of Market Research*, 66(1), 27–45. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14707853231210223>.
- ⁴⁷ Dobrotić, I., & Blum, S. (2019). A social right? Access to leave and its relation to parents' labour market position. In *Parental leave and beyond* (pp. 261-280). Policy Press.
- ⁴⁸ Knoester, Ch., Li, Q., & Petts, R. J. (2021). *Attitudes about paid parental leave: Cross-national comparisons and the significance of gendered expectations, family strains, and extant leave offerings*. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 62(3), 181–202. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00207152211026705>; Petts, R. J., Kaufman, G., & Mize, T. D. (2023). *Parental leave-taking and perceptions of workers as good parents*. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 85(1), 261–279. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12875>
- ⁴⁹ Schindler, S., Schuster, C., Olsson, M. I. T., Froehlich, L., Hübner, A.-K., Block, K., Van Laar, C., Schmader, T., Meeussen, L., van Grootel, S., Croft, A., Sun, M. S., Ainsaar, M., Aarntzen, L., Adamus, M., Anderson, J., Atkinson, C., Avicenna, M., Babel, P., ... Martiny, S. E. (2025). Policy as normative influence? On the relationship between parental leave policy and social norms in gender division of childcare across 48 countries. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 64, e12806. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12806>
- ⁵⁰ Philipp, M.-F., Büchau, S., Schober, P. S., & Spiess, C. K. (2023). Parental Leave Policies, Usage Consequences, and Changing Normative Beliefs: Evidence From a Survey Experiment. *Gender & Society*, 37(4), 493-523. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08912432231176084>
- ⁵¹ ISSP Research Group (2021). *International social survey programme: Family and changing gender roles V - ISSP 2022*. GESIS, Cologne. https://issp.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/ISSP2022_final-source-questionnaire.pdf
- ⁵² Duvander, A.-Z. (2014). How long should parental leave be? Attitudes to gender equality, family, and work as determinants of women's and men's parental leave in Sweden. *Journal of Family Issues* 35(7): 909-26; Evertsson, M., Boye, K., & Erman, J. (2018). Fathers on call? A study on the sharing of care work between parents in Sweden. *Demographic Research* 39: 33-60.
- ⁵³ Ellingsæter, A.L. (2021). Conflicting policy feedback: Enduring tensions over father quotas in Norway. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society* 28(4):999-1024.
- ⁵⁴ Omidakhsh, N., Sprague, A., & Heymann, J. (2020). Dismantling restrictive gender norms: Can better designed parental leave policies help? *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy* 20(1):382-96; Tavits, M., Schleiter, P., Homola, J., & Ward, D. (2024). Fathers' leave reduces sexist attitudes. *American Political Science Review* 118(1): 488-94.





⁵⁵ For a systematic review, see Goedemé, T., & Janssens, J. (2020). The concept and measurement of non-take-up. An overview, with a focus on the non-take-up of social benefits. Deliverable 9.2 Leuven, InGRID-2 project 730998 H, 2020. The authors identify key issues that survey designers should consider, including undercoverage and non-response bias, measurement error, limited precision, mismatches with income reference periods, and the problem of small sample sizes or rare populations.

⁵⁶ Hipp, L., Schlüterm, C., & Molina, S. (2022). "The role of employers in reducing the implementation gap in leave policies," In I. Dobrotić, S. Blum, & A. Koslowski, eds. *Research Handbook on Leave Policy: Parenting and Social Inequalities in a Global Perspective*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 338-52; Mikucka, M., & Valentova, M. (2013) Does parental leave matter? Cross-national differences in coding of parental leave beneficiaries in the European Labour Force data. *Survey Research Methods*, 7(43):169-79.

⁵⁷ See the OED Family Database: https://webfs.oecd.org/els-com/Family_Database/PF2-6-same-sex-parents-leave-entitlements.pdf

⁵⁸ OECD Family Database, available here: <https://www.oecd.org/en/data/datasets/oecd-family-database.html>

⁵⁹ Dobrotić & Arnalds (2023), referenced in note #9.

⁶⁰ Doucet, A. & Moss, P. (2026). *Care leaves and care time for all: Towards caring democracies, economies, and worlds*. Bristol: Policy Press.

⁶¹ Read about "care time" in Doucet & Moss (2026). See endnote 43.

⁶² Dobrotić, I., Blum, S., Kaufmann, G., Koslowski, A., Moss, P. and Valentova, M. (eds.) (2025) 21st International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2025. DOI: [10.31235/osf.io/5c42d_v1](https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/5c42d_v1). Available at: <https://www.leavenetwork.org/annual-review-reports/review-2025/>

⁶³ Dobrotić & Blum (2020), referenced in note #1.

⁶⁴ Giuliani, G., and A.Z. Duvander (2017). Cash-for-care policy in Sweden: An appraisal of its consequences on female employment. *International Journal of Social Welfare* 26(1):49-62; Kosonen, T. (2014). To work or not to work? The effect of childcare subsidies on the labour supply of parents. *B.E. Journal of Economic Analysis & Policy* 14(3):817-48; Naz, G. (2004). The impact of cash-benefit reform on parents' labour force participation. *Journal of Population Economics* 17(2):369-83; Österbacka, E., and T. Räsänen. (2022). Back to work or stay at home? Family policies and maternal employment in Finland. *Journal of Population Economics* 35(3):1071-1101.





Appendix: Repository of questions dealing with parenting leave

QUESTIONS 1.1: Perceived eligibility and application behaviour

Q1.1a

At the time your youngest child was born, did you believe you had the legal right to any form of maternity/paternity/partner or parental leave?

- (1) Yes
- (2) No
- (3) Unsure/don't know

Q1.1b

Filter label: If Q1.1a = 1

Which type(s) of leave did you believe you had the legal right to? Please check all that apply.

- (1) Maternity leave
- (2) Paternity (partner) leave
- (3) Parental leave
- (4) Other, please specify: _____

Q1.1c

Did you apply for any form of leave?

- (1) Yes.
- (2) No, I did not apply.

Q1.1d

Filter label: If Q1.1a = 1

Which type(s) of leave did you apply for? Please check all that apply.

- (1) Maternity leave
- (2) Paternity (partner) leave
- (3) Parental leave
- (4) Other, please specify: _____

QUESTIONS 1.2: Refusals

Q1.2a

Filter label: If Q1.1c = 1

Were any of your applications refused?

- (1) Yes
- (2) No
- (.) I don't know/don't remember.

Q1.2b

Filter label: If Q1.2a = 1

Which type(s) of leave application was refused? Please check all that apply.

- (1) Maternity leave





- (2) *Paternity (partner) leave*
- (3) *Parental leave*
- (4) *Other, please specify: _____*

Q1.2c

Filter label: If Q1.2a = 1

What was the main reason given for the refusal?

- (1) *I was not eligible due to employment status (e.g. self-employed, type of contract, unemployed).*
- (2) *I did not work long enough before the leave started.*
- (3) *I did not earn enough before the leave started.*
- (4) *My employer did not approve the leave. [include only if applicable/if this legal condition exists in your country]*
- (5) *I did not meet administrative or procedural requirements (e.g. late application, missing documents).*
- (6) *My residence or work permit did not provide access to leave.*
- (7) *I had not lived in the country long enough.*
- (8) *The reason was unclear or not explained.*
- (9) *Other reason, please specify: _____*
- (10) *I don't know/don't remember.*

QUESTIONS 2.1: Use of parenting leave

Q2.1a

Considering your own, youngest child, which statement describes your situation best?

- (1) *I am currently on maternity/paternity(partner)/parental leave.*
- (2) *Planning to take maternity/paternity(partner)/parental leave.*
- (3) *I took maternity/paternity(partner)/parental leave.*
- (4) *None of the above*
- (.) *Don't know/No answer*

Q2.1b

Filter label: If Q2.1a = 1 or 3

Considering your own, youngest child, did you take parental leave and/or maternity/paternity/partner leave?

- (1) *Only used maternity/paternity/partner leave (taken directly before/after the birth)*
- (2) *Only used parental leave*
- (3) *Used a combination of both*
- (.) *Don't know/No answer*

QUESTIONS 2.2: Length of parenting leave planned or used

Q2.2a

Filter label: If Q2.1a = 1 or 2 (currently on leave or planning to take leave)

Considering your own, youngest child, how long do you plan to take maternity/paternity(partner) and parental leave in total?

Filter label: If Q2.1a = 3 (took leave in the past)

Considering your own, youngest child, what was the total length of the maternity/paternity(partner) and parental leave taken?

- (1) *Up to 10 days*





- (2) More than 10 days up to 2 months
- (3) More than 2 months up to 6 months
- (4) More than 6 months up to 1 year
- (5) More than 1 year up to 2 years
- (6) More than 2 years
- (.) Not stated
- (9) Not applicable

Q2.2b

Filter label: If Q2.1a = 1 or 2 (currently on leave or planning to take leave) & Q2.2a != "." or 9

How much of this leave do you plan to take alone with the child, for example, while the child's other parent is working or going to school?

- (1) All of it
- (2) More than half of it
- (3) Half of it
- (4) Less than half of it
- (5) None of it
- (9) Don't know
- (.) Not stated

Filter label: If Q2.1a = 3 (took leave in the past) & Q2.2a != "." or 9

How much of this leave did you take alone with the child, for example, while the child's other parent was working or going to school?

- (1) All of it
- (2) More than half of it
- (3) Half of it
- (4) Less than half of it
- (5) None of it
- (9) Don't know
- (.) Not stated

QUESTIONS 1.3: Leave payment

Q1.3a

Filter label: If Q2.1b = 1 or 3

Was the maternity/paternity/partner leave paid?

- (1) Yes, part of the leave was paid.
- (2) Yes, the entire leave was paid.
- (3) No, the entire leave was unpaid.
- (.) Don't know/No answer

Q1.3b

Filter label: If Q2.1b = 2 or 3

Was the parental leave paid?

- (1) Yes, part of the parental leave was paid.
- (2) Yes, the entire parental leave was paid.
- (3) No, the entire parental leave was unpaid.
- (.) Don't know/No answer





QUESTIONS 1.4: Eligibility-relevant characteristics

Q1.4a

At the time of your youngest child's birth, which of the following best described your employment situation?

- (1) Employed full-time
- (2) Employed part-time
- (3) Self-employed
- (4) Unemployed and seeking work
- (5) In education or training
- (6) On leave from work (e.g. sick leave, previous parental leave)
- (7) Not in paid work (e.g. caring, homemaking)
- (9) Other, please specify: _____

Q1.4b

Filter label: If Q1.4a = 1, 2 or 3

At the time of your youngest child's birth, for how long had you been continuously in paid work before the birth?

- (1) Less than 3 months
- (2) More than 3 months up to 6 months
- (3) More than 6 months up to 12 months
- (4) More than 1 year up to 2 years
- (5) More than 2 years
- (6) I was not in paid work before the birth.
- (.) I don't know/don't remember.

Q1.4c

At the time of your youngest child's birth, what was your legal residency status in [country]?

- (1) Citizen of [country]
- (2) EU/EEA citizen living/working in this country
- (3) Non-EU/EEA citizen with permanent residence
- (4) Non-EU/EEA citizen with temporary residence/work permit
- (5) Other

Q1.4d

At the time of your youngest child's birth, for how long had you been living continuously in [country]?

_____ year(s)

QUESTIONS 3.1: Reasons for non-use

Q3.1a

Filter label: If Q2.1a = 4 (non-use of any leave) or Q2.1b = 1 (non-use of parental leave)

What were the main reasons for not taking maternity/paternity(partner)/parental leave for your own, youngest child? Please select up to three.

- (1) Unaware of my entitlement to parental leave
- (2) Application process too complicated or time-consuming
- (3) Ineligible for leave, e.g. because I was not employed, not employed long enough or other reasons
- (4) Financial reasons, e.g. income loss, low levels of benefits





- (5) Concerns about negative effects on my career
- (6) Concerns about employer reactions or impact on coworkers/workplace
- (7) Was not necessary, e.g., childcare provided by other family members or childcare facilities
- (8) Other reasons, please specify: _____
- (.) I don't know/prefer not to say.

Q3.1b

Filter label: If two or three items ticked in Q3.1a & Q3.1a ≠ (.)

Which of these reasons was the most important?

[List selected items from Q3.1a]

Q3.1c

Filter label: If three items ticked in Q3.1a & Q3.1a ≠ (.)

Which of these reasons was the second most important?

[List selected items from Q3.1a]

QUESTIONS 4.1-4-3: Sharing of Care and Parental Leave

Introductory vignette:

Consider a mother and father who work full-time and have similar earnings. They just had a newborn child and are considering parental leave.

Q4.1

In your opinion, for how long should the mother stop working to care for the child?

- (1) Up to 1 month
- (2) More than 1 month up to 2 months
- (3) More than 2 months up to 6 months
- (4) More than 6 months up to 1 year
- (5) More than 1 year up to 2 years
- (6) More than 2 years
- (7) Should not stop working at all

Q4.2

In your opinion, for how long should the father stop working to care for the child?

- (1) Up to 1 month
- (2) More than 1 month up to 2 months
- (3) More than 2 months up to 6 months
- (4) More than 6 months up to 1 year
- (5) More than 1 year up to 2 years
- (6) More than 2 years
- (7) Should not stop working at all

Q4.3

[Note: Drawn from the International Social Survey Programme]

Thinking of the same couple. Consider that they have access to one year of parental leave. How should parental leave be divided between the mother and father?

- (1) The mother should take the entire leave period, and the father should not take any leave.
- (2) The mother should take most of the leave period, and the father should take some of it.





- (3) *The mother and father should each take half of the leave period.*
- (4) *The father should take most of the leave period, and the mother should take some of it.*
- (5) *The father should take the entire leave period, and the mother should not take any leave.*

QUESTION 4.4: Adequacy of parental leave

Now we focus on parental leave.

Q4.4

If a parent is earning an average salary, how much of their salary should be covered while on parental leave?

- (1) *Leave should be unpaid.*
- (2) *At least 50% of previous salary*
- (3) *At least 75% of previous salary*
- (4) *Full salary*
- (.) *Don't know*

