

The wellbeing of workers and their families

A global study of family-friendly workplace policies

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To advance business action on family-friendly policies, UNICEF undertook a global study of business policies. This survey is the first with significant geographic scope and a comprehensive approach that includes a wide range of family-friendly policies – from parental leave and breastfeeding support to childcare solutions.

The objective of the survey was to:

- Understand the current situation of business action on a comprehensive package of family-friendly policies and explore the policies across a wide range of businesses;
- Understand the key drivers of business action;
- Learn more about the challenges businesses face in implementing these policies.

The findings of the study provide important conclusions on how business action on family-friendly policies can be strengthened. It can guide the businesses themselves, but also governments and other actors who seek to influence business policies for families. [3]

In 2018, over 75 per cent of men and 48 per cent of women worldwide were employed or looking for work. [1]

The private sector accounts for most of these jobs, sometimes up to 90 per cent in developing countries. [2]

The conditions of employment can have a huge impact on the wellbeing of workers, their children and families. It is therefore critical that any discussion of family-friendly workplace policies considers business action and engagement on the issue as well as the regulatory environments that can influence them.

Extract of the writing paper 'Family-Friendly Policies - A Global Survey of Business Policy' (Subajini Jayasekaran and Alice Faudot Miguet, UNICEF 2020).

Original available at <https://uni.cf/3ud4lOK>

PARENTAL LEAVE

Paid Maternity Leave

Paid leave for mothers is the most widely implemented of the family-friendly policies, although its duration and remuneration are often inadequate. The survey findings suggest that, while many businesses have maternity leave policies, their duration and remuneration fall far below UNICEF policy recommendations.

Of all the family-friendly policies, maternity leave is the policy most widely implemented by businesses in their own workplaces; 86 per cent of respondents indicated having a policy on paid maternity leave.

Variation in the duration of this maternity leave is significant, with responses ranging from a minimum of four weeks to a select few providing as much as 90 weeks. However, over half of the surveyed companies do not meet the maternity leave provision of 18 weeks. Thus, many companies are below UNICEF's policy recommendation of 18 weeks' maternity leave and a combined parental leave of at least six months.

Importantly, the length of maternity leave provided by businesses typically follows standards defined by national legislation. For example, in Sri Lanka, India and Viet Nam, where the legal minimum leave is higher than in the other countries studied, businesses reported higher maternity leave provisions in line with national legislation. The reverse was also true, and businesses in countries with low legislative requirements typically reported lower rates of maternity leave provision. This is problematic as, according to an ILO study, only just over half of the countries that have ratified ILO Convention 183 on maternity protection meet the ILO minimum standard requiring at least 14 weeks of maternity leave, let alone the ILO recommended duration of 18 weeks. [4]

There was one exception: multinational businesses headquartered in countries or territories with low legal requirements. For example, in Hong Kong, China, half of the businesses surveyed provide 14-16 weeks' paid maternity leave, while the national minimum is 10 weeks. In New Zealand, the businesses surveyed offer on average double the national minimum leave of 14 weeks. New Zealand is ranked among the lowest on family-friendly public policies among Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) member countries and compared to European Union (EU) countries. [5] One reason may be that many of the businesses surveyed from these countries are multinational entities competing for global talent and thus need to stay competitive with standards offered by other multinational businesses in high-income countries.

With regard to remuneration during maternity leave, 66 per cent of the companies surveyed stated that their employees' maternity leave is paid at a level equivalent to two thirds of employees' previous earnings. This is in line with the ILO recommendation to grant employees maternity leave cash benefits amounting to at least two

thirds of employees' previous earnings. [6] This means that for the remaining companies, the remuneration received by mothers on maternity leave is likely inadequate to support them and their families.

The case study of Jordan provides an interesting alternative: maternity leave is funded through the national social security system, and almost all businesses surveyed stated that their employees are covered at a rate of 100 per cent of their previous earnings as a result. This further supports the argument for publicly supported systems.

Finally, the survey also explored business policies to protect pregnant and nursing working mothers. Employment protection, non-discrimination policies and occupational health and safety protections for pregnant and nursing women are important measures to safeguard both child and maternal health. Excessive hours, arduous work and exposure to hazardous chemicals can have severe effects on prenatal and postnatal health. Discrimination against women due to their real or perceived pregnancy can significantly reduce their earnings and negatively impact the nutrition, health and well-being of both mother and child. Overall, the study found that many surveyed businesses include some reference to protections for pregnant and nursing women in their company policies. Protections against discrimination and returning to the same position after leave were the most cited, closely followed by occupational safety and health provisions aimed at protecting pregnant or breastfeeding women workers by assigning them work that ensures that they and their child are safe from any harms.

Paid Paternity Leave

Fewer than half of businesses provide paternity leave, which is often of very limited duration.

The survey data demonstrate that many companies around the world have a long way to go to fulfil UNICEF policy recommendations to increase leave for fathers. Only 48 per cent of the surveyed businesses have a policy on paternity leave and, more often than not, the paternity leave amounts to only a few days. While some pioneering companies provide 52 weeks of leave for fathers, the average is 3.2 weeks, declining to as low as two days. In contrast, UNICEF's new investment case on family-friendly policies calls for combined parental leave for caregivers of at least six months and encourages up to nine months.

In many interviews, it was clear that businesses conflate annual leave and paternity or secondary caregiver leave; often there is no separate paternity leave entitlement for working fathers beyond what is available as annual leave. This indicates the need to raise awareness of the concept of paternity leave or secondary caregiver leave as separate from annual leave, and of the benefits for working fathers and children of taking this dedicated leave in the first days, weeks or months after

birth. In addition, efforts are needed to change norms in the workplace so it is more culturally accepted for fathers to be involved in the care of their children and to take time to do so.

Just five of the 14 countries in the survey have national legislation on paternity leave. This means that, in contrast to maternity leave, many businesses are providing at least a few days of paternity leave despite the absence of a national legal minimum. [7] This is likely an indication that, in many countries, legislation may be lagging societal norms and the shifting expectations of fatherhood, and leading businesses are adapting accordingly. In Botswana, for example, most companies

surveyed offer paternity leave of between one and four weeks, despite the absence of legislation. In Sri Lanka, no legislation on paternity leave exists, yet one third of the companies surveyed offer paternity leave to their employees.

As it is the case with maternity leave, however, as one business noted, "Making paternity leave a legal obligation would create a better work-life balance, increase employee engagement and improve gender equality and diversity within the workplace and ultimately in society." Accordingly, as seen in other key policy areas, legislation for paternity leave could drive greater implementation across all businesses in a country.

BREASTFEEDING SUPPORT

Only 39 per cent of surveyed businesses offer any support for breastfeeding, usually in the form of breaks. More comprehensive programmes to support lactating mothers are absent. Only 39 per cent of surveyed businesses have one or more policies supporting breastfeeding; the most common workplace policy observed is paid breastfeeding breaks, which 59 businesses offer.

A similar number (57) of businesses provide a room for breastfeeding or expressing breastmilk, while fewer businesses (20) provide information and other nutritional support, such as the services of a lactation consultant for breastfeeding women. Some interviewees mentioned that it can be challenging to provide a dedicated room for breastfeeding, or a clean space for storing expressed breastmilk, as physical space is costly.

Again, as with maternity leave policies, the survey evidence highlights the clear link between national or mandatory legislation on breastfeeding in the workplace and business action. In countries and territories with specific legal requirements for supporting breastfeeding in the workplace, surveyed businesses comply and have workplace policies in line with those requirements. Where no legal obligation exists, businesses with policies to support breastfeeding mothers are the exception rather than the rule.

Given that almost half of countries do not grant more than the ILO standard of a legal minimum maternity leave of 14 weeks, and that UNICEF and the World Health Organization recommend exclusive breastfeeding for at least six months after childbirth, the survey findings show a global gap in supporting working mothers who are breastfeeding. [8]

CHILDCARE SUPPORT

Childcare support is the least implemented policy, with cash support the most common arrangement. Only a handful of businesses provide on-site childcare facilities. The survey findings indicate that supporting parents with childcare needs is the policy least adopted by businesses; only 24 per cent of surveyed businesses provide such support.

Typically, this support takes the form of cash or other assistance for parents to access community and government-run childcare centres or to make their own care arrangements with private individuals or organizational providers. Of the 307 businesses surveyed from around the world, only seven had on-site childcare facilities for employees. Combined with the fact that only 24 per cent of surveyed businesses provide any form of childcare support, the survey thus reveals a childcare crisis and the significant momentum needed to shift business policies.

In some of the interviews, businesses explained that traditional care roles mean that an on-site childcare policy is inefficient in practice. For example, in densely populated Hong Kong, China, where parents and

grandparents traditionally live close by and where there is access to cheap labour for domestic work (typically migrant workers from South East Asia), one business reported that childcare services are not a popular choice for parents.

Another challenge reported during the interviews is the fact that some workplaces are simply not appropriate for safe childcare services. In workplaces with hazardous chemicals, noise and/or dangerous machinery, children in the workplace, even in a dedicated space, could put them at risk of harm. For example, integrated companies in agribusiness may provide childcare services in their offices but cannot replicate this service in their factories or plantations for health and safety reasons. This creates unequal opportunities for childcare benefits among employees, depending on their type of work and level of skills. This difficulty could explain why businesses might opt to provide financial support to their employees rather than childcare services. In Viet Nam, 25 per cent of the businesses surveyed provide support to their workers to help them access childcare services, but only 6 per cent have on-site childcare facilities.

FAMILY-FRIENDLY POLICIES OF MULTINATIONAL ENTERPRISES

Multinational enterprises (MNEs) have limited adoption of family-friendly policies. Global policies are rare and application varies depending on the legislation in the country or territory of operation. Supply chain standards rarely include family-friendly policy support.

The Corporate Human Rights Benchmark (CHRB) is a collaboration led by investors and civil society to create an open and public benchmark of corporate human rights performance. In 2018, CHRB assessed 101 of the world's largest publicly traded companies; these businesses were chosen because of their size (market capitalization) and revenues. In collaboration with CHRB, UNICEF conducted a complementary analysis of 60 of the apparel and agricultural businesses reviewed by CHRB, comparing them against indicators related to family-friendly policies in their operations and supply chains. The review was based on publicly available information.

Findings from the review of the MNEs echo the results of the online questionnaire and bilateral interviews; the scope of family-friendly policies is often restricted to parental leave. While close to 60 per cent of the MNEs reviewed have a public policy on parental leave, less than 30 per cent have childcare or breastfeeding provisions in their company policy. Where present, these provisions are mostly limited to headquarter offices. Of the 60 businesses reviewed, only 8 per cent have a 'global' parental leave policy that is applicable to all employees regardless of location. Several studies suggest that multinational businesses retain strong links with their respective home country's business environment, leading to what is termed a 'country-of-origin effect'.

[9] In the case of parental leave policies, such an effect remains elusive. Rather, the evidence indicates a stronger link between local regulation and attitudes in host countries and company policies. Many of the businesses reviewed have different policies on parental leave by country, each tailored to the specific local context. These national applications of policy seldom surpass the local legal regulatory requirements. The exceptions are among the big multinational businesses competing for global talent. This was echoed during the interviews with MNEs as well: many reported finding it challenging to have a one-size-fits-all policy applicable in all countries of operations, given the wide range of political, regulatory and cultural contexts in which they operate as well as the varying degrees of government involvement and support.

Evidence of MNEs' engagement on family-friendly policies within their supply chains is scarce. Of the 60 businesses reviewed, only 10 per cent have a maternity protection clause in their supplier codes of conduct. An estimated 450 million people minimum work in supply chain-related jobs. [10] Global businesses have the potential to use their influence and leverage to facilitate family-friendly workplaces across their global supply chains, complementing the efforts of national governments. One palm oil business interviewed for the survey noted that it provides maternity protection and leave to all its employees to meet the standards of the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil, the industry's largest sustainability initiative. Yet, as the review of the 60 businesses concludes, the potential for brands to leverage their influence in their supply chains is largely untapped.

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- [1] See United Nations Children's Fund, Family-Friendly Policies: Redesigning the Workplace of the Future, A Policy Brief, UNICEF, New York, July 2019, accessed 15 October 2019; International Labour Organization, World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends for Women 2018 – Global snapshot, ILO, Geneva, 2018, p. 7, accessed 18 October 2019.
- [2] See, for example, the International Finance Corporation's report Tackling Childcare: The Business Case for Employer-Supported Childcare, IFC, Washington, D.C., September 2017, which notes that 90 per cent of jobs in developing countries are in the private sector.
- [3] UNICEF's diamond approach to family-friendly policies outlines the "four key actors ... needed to advance family-friendly policies as four corners of a diamond: the State, businesses, families and communities (including civil society and international organizations, trade unions, community-based organizations, the non-profit sector and informal networks). This 'diamond of care' can come together in an integrated approach for family-friendly policies". Family-Friendly Policies, p. 3.
- [4] International Labour Organization, Maternity and paternity at work: Law and practice across the world, ILO, Geneva, 2014.
- [5] United Nations Children's Fund, Are the world's richest countries family friendly? Policy in the OECD and EU, UNICEF Office of Research, Florence, June 2019, accessed 15 October 2019.
- [6] ILO Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183).
- [7] The minimum length of paternity leave required by law remains very low in most countries, with the exception of Scandinavian countries. In 2014, the ILO found that 66 countries had national minimum paternity leave, predominantly in developed economies, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, and only rarely in other regions. The same study found that the uptake of leave is low and that when shared leave is offered, it is often used by women.
- [8] The World Health Organization and UNICEF recommendations on breastfeeding are as follows: "initiation of breastfeeding within the first hour after the birth; exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months; and continued breastfeeding for two years or more, together with safe, nutritionally adequate, age appropriate, responsive complementary feeding starting in the sixth month". They also state that: "Early and exclusive breastfeeding helps children survive, but it also supports healthy brain development, improves cognitive performance and is associated with better educational achievement at age 5. Breastfeeding is the foundation of good nutrition and protects children against disease." UNICEF, 'Breastfeeding', accessed 15 October 2019.
- [9] See, for example, Noorderhaven, Niels G., and Anne-Wil Harzing, 'The "country-of-origin effect" in multinational corporations: Sources, mechanisms and moderating conditions', June 2003, accessed 14 October 2019.
- [10] International Labour Organization, World Employment and Social Outlook 2015: The changing nature of jobs, ILO, Geneva, 2015.