

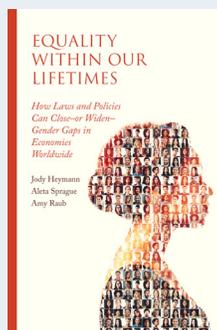
Paid Leave for Family Health Needs

Key Findings

- While nearly all countries ensure at least some support for workers after the birth of a child, caregiving needs at other stages in the life course are often grossly under-addressed.
- Only 42% of countries take some approach to paid leave that can be used to meet the health needs of adult family members, while just 55% provide leave that can be used for children’s health needs beyond infancy.
- Further, durations of paid leave are often inadequate to meet health needs. For example, only 25% of countries provide at least 2 weeks of paid leave for workers caring for a seriously ill parent, while just 39% provide at least 2 weeks for those caring for a seriously ill child.
- Moreover, routine health needs are also under-addressed. Only 37% of countries take any approach to providing paid leave that can be used to meet children’s routine health needs.

About Equality within Our Lifetimes

For more information and a full list of studies summarized in this brief, see Chapters 6 and 7 of the open-access book [Equality within Our Lifetimes: How Laws and Policies Can Close—or Widen—Gender Gaps in Economies Worldwide](#) (Jody Heymann, Aleta Sprague, and Amy Raub; University of California Press, 2023).



Building and analyzing a law and policy database that covers 193 countries, *Equality within Our Lifetimes* systematically examines how far we’ve come and how far we have to go in adopting evidence-based solutions to close gender gaps in employment, income, leadership opportunities, and more.

This brief examines the availability worldwide of paid leave for workers to meet the health needs of children and adult family members, a policy that is critical for both gender equality and the health of families.

Gender Disparities in Unpaid Care Work

Globally, women provide the majority of unpaid care for family members of all ages—which, while often invisible, has tremendous economic value.

- On average, women spend ~4.5 hours on unpaid care work daily—3 hours more than men.
- If compensated at the hourly minimum wage, unpaid care work would account for around 9% of global GDP, or over \$7 trillion in 2021.

Gender inequality in care across the life course undermines women’s economic outcomes.

- 606 million working-age women, and less than 1/10 as many men, are out of the labor force globally due to unpaid care work.
- Caregiving responsibilities also contribute to women’s overrepresentation in part-time work and high rates of involuntary early retirement, which often cause or exacerbate financial vulnerability.
- Workplace discrimination against caregivers and lack of supports for caregiving can lead to adverse work outcomes such as poor evaluations and termination.

In recent years, policymakers have devoted greater attention to how the design and availability of paid parental leave can shape gender equality at home and at work—yet leave to meet the health needs of older children and adult family members has received less attention.

- Well-designed paid leave policies for family health needs can encourage men to take on equal roles in caregiving, and ensure that caregiving needs do not disproportionately impact women’s employment.
- Important aspects of paid policy design include durations of leave, rules related to eligibility, rates of wage replacement, and incentives for men’s take-up of leave.

Paid Leave for Adult Family Members’ Health Needs

Around the world, 42% of countries take some approach to guaranteeing paid leave that can be used to meet adult health needs. These approaches include:

- Leave specifically for adult family members’ health needs (57 countries)
- General types of leave that are not specific to family health, such as discretionary, family needs, and emergency leave (25 countries)

Even where paid leave is available, policy design choices can limit workers’ eligibility and ability to provide adequate care.



● **Duration:**

- Only 12 countries provide at least 6 weeks of paid leave that workers can use to care for a seriously ill parent.
- An additional 6 countries guarantee at least 2 weeks of paid leave of this type.

● **Availability based on type of health need:**

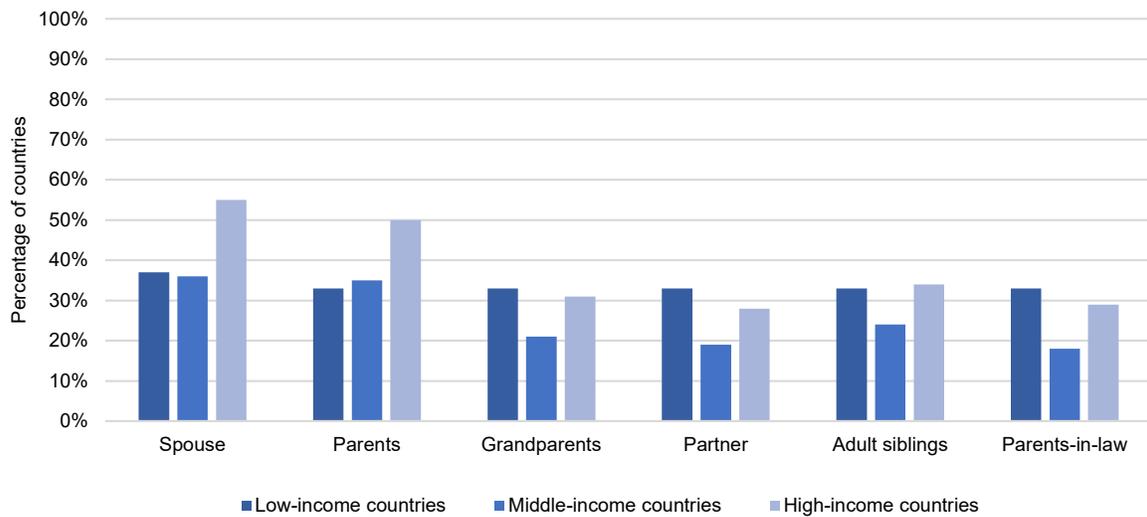
- 2 countries limit paid leave to end-of-life care.
- 8 countries provide paid leave for adult family members' general health needs and additional leave for specific cases, such as serious illness or end-of-life care.

● **Availability based on caregiver relationship:**

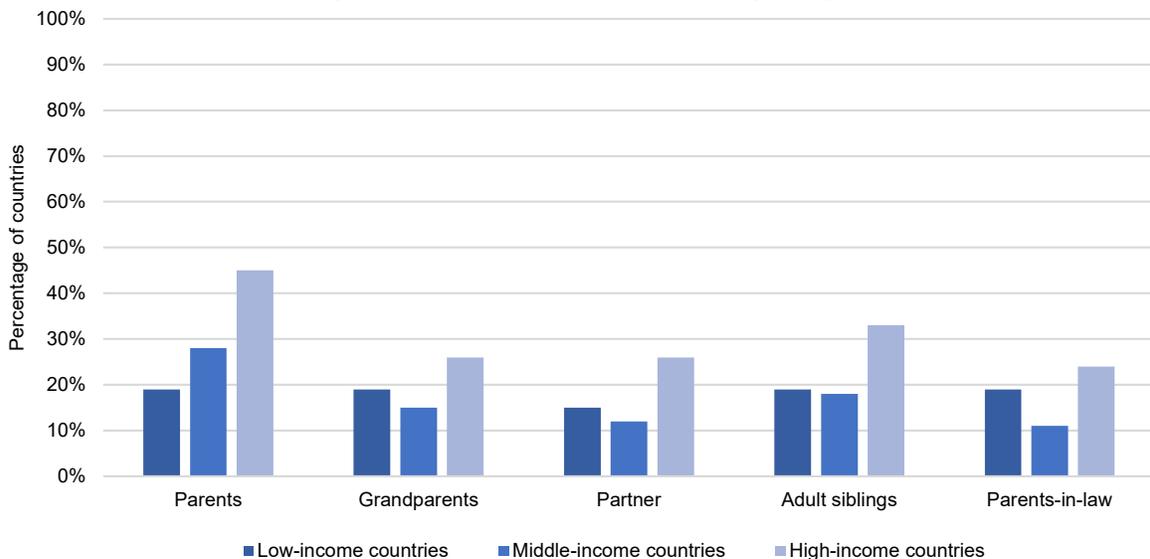
- While most countries with paid leave of this type allow for the care of spouses or parents, far fewer allow for care for siblings, parents-in-law, or unmarried partners.
- 15 countries that have paid leave available for parents' health needs require that they be living in the worker's household.
- 3 countries lack provisions allowing workers to broadly take paid leave for parents but do allow for paid leave to care for dependent family members, which may create barriers to leave-taking for parents who are still able to live independently.

Is paid leave available to meet the health needs of all adult family members?

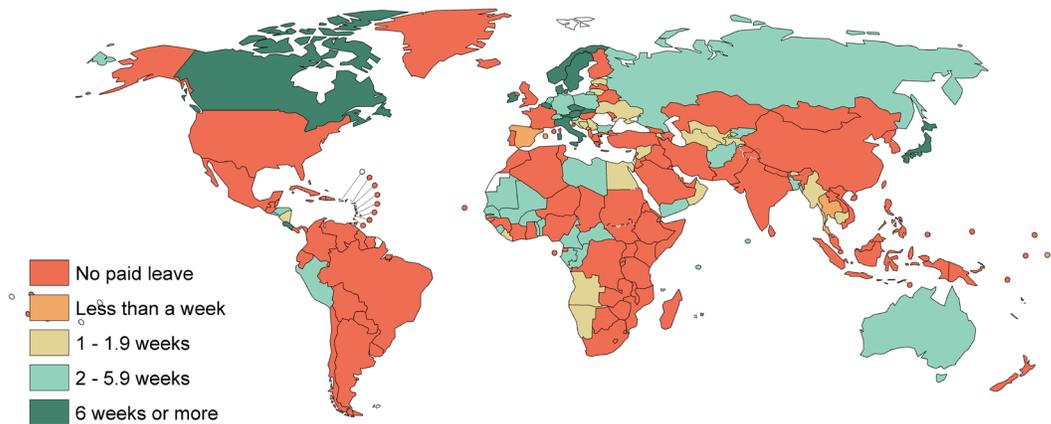
Living in the same household as the working caregiver



Living outside the household of the working caregiver



How much paid leave is available to workers to meet a parent's serious health needs?



Source: WORLD Policy Analysis Center, Adult Labor Database, 2022

- **Wage replacement:** In 10 of the 82 countries with paid leave available for adult family members' health needs, payments are just 40–59% of wages or set at a low flat rate, making leave-taking unaffordable for many.

discretionary needs, or family needs (24 countries)

- Leave that is generally available for children's health (24 countries)
- Paid leave that is available only when a child has a serious illness, injury, or disability or is hospitalized (29 countries)
- Paid leave entitlements for both general and serious health needs (29 countries)

Paid Leave for Children's Serious Health Needs

55% of countries—including a greater share of high-income than low- or middle-income countries—take some approach to providing paid leave that can be used to meet the health needs of children with serious illnesses, injuries, or chronic conditions. These approaches include:

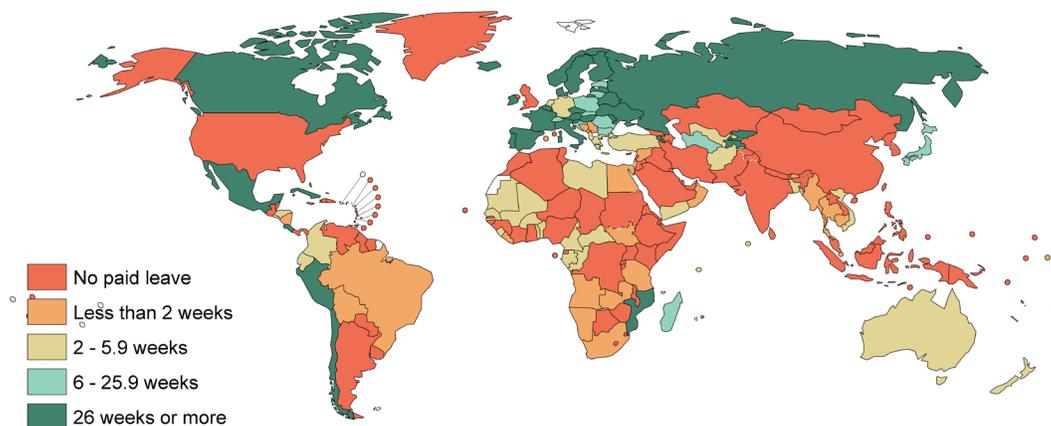
Even where paid leave is available, policy choices may limit workers' eligibility and ability to provide adequate care.

- Broader types of leave, such as leave for emergencies,

- **Duration:**

- Only 22% of countries guarantee at least 6 weeks of

How much paid leave is available to meet a five-year-old child's serious health needs?



Source: WORLD Policy Analysis Center, Adult Labor Database, 2022



paid leave to meet a 5-year-old child's serious health needs.

- Only 18% of countries guarantee 4 weeks or more of paid leave that can be used to meet children's ongoing disability-specific needs.
- **Availability based on children's age:** Whereas 55% of countries guarantee paid leave that can be used to meet a 2-year-old's serious health needs, only 49% do so for 15-year-olds.
- **Wage replacement:** In 14 of the 106 countries with paid leave available for children's serious health needs, payments can be less than 60% of wages or set at a low flat rate.

Even where paid leave is available, various limitations can make it insufficient to meet the routine health needs of all children.

- **Duration:** Only 1 in 4 countries guarantee at least 2 weeks of paid leave to meet a 5-year-old child's everyday health needs.
- **Availability based on children's age:** Whereas 37% of countries guarantee paid leave that can be used to meet a 2-year-old's everyday health needs, only 28% do so for 15-year-olds.

While paid leave for children's routine health needs is equally available to men and women in most countries providing it, other elements of policy design can shape whether leave-taking is gender-equal.

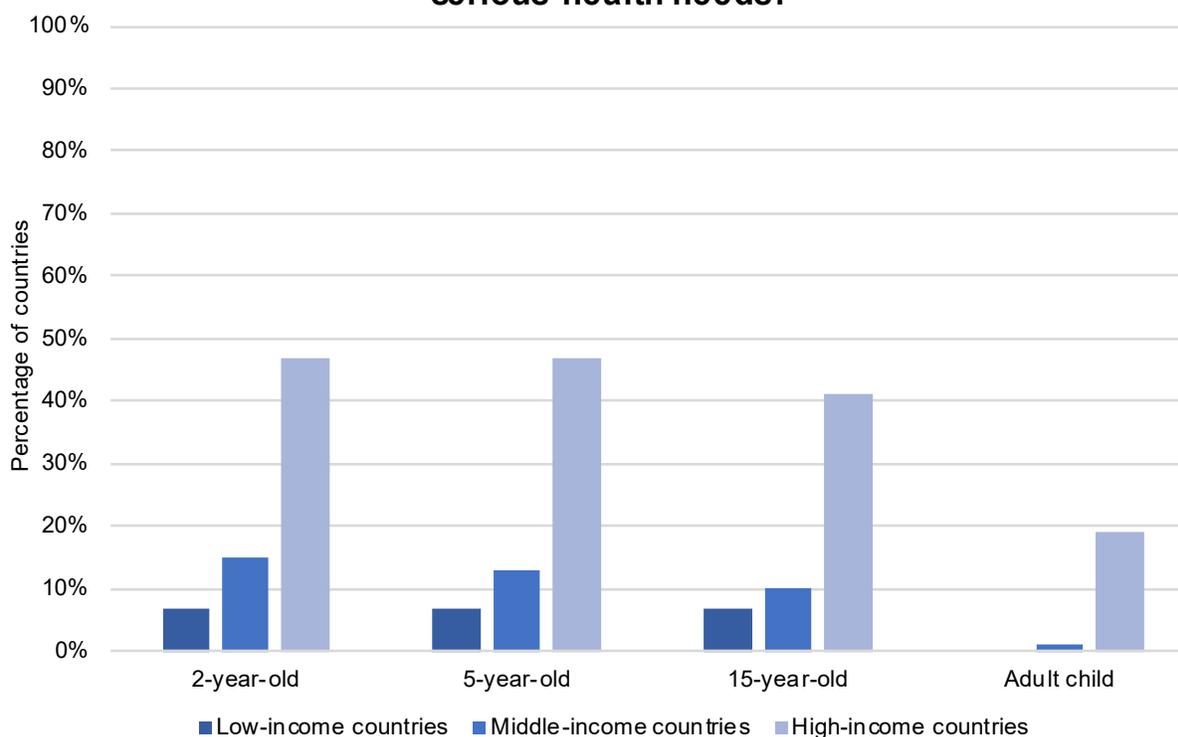
- **Entitlement structure:** Hardly any countries incentivize gender equality in leave-taking, and 4 countries provide leave to each family rather than each individual, which may decrease the likelihood that both parents take leave.
- **Availability to single parents:** Only 5 countries have measures to ensure that single parents, predominantly women, can take the same amount of leave as two-parent families.
- **Affordability:** 19 of 71 countries with leave for children's everyday health needs have set the wage replacement at a rate below 80%. Due to gender pay gaps, when workers receive a lower share of their usual earnings while on leave, many two-parent households decide that it makes more sense for the woman to take it.

Paid Leave for Children's Routine Health Needs

Overall, a minority of countries guarantee workers paid leave for children's everyday health needs, including preventive doctor's appointments and care during routine illnesses.

- 37% of countries take some approach to providing paid leave that parents can use to meet children's everyday health needs.
- 11% of countries only guarantee unpaid leave of this type.
- 3 additional countries reinforce gendered norms in caregiving by making paid or unpaid leave available only to mothers.

Is at least 6 weeks of paid leave available to meet a child's serious health needs?



Duration of leave for adult child is based on leave available for adult children still living in the same household as their parent.



Additional Resources

For more information related to the contents of this brief, see:

- Fact sheet: “[Paid Leave for Children’s Health Needs](#)”
- Fact sheet: “[Paid Leave for Adult Family Members’ Health Needs](#)”

For information about how other labor laws and policies, workplace accommodations, and national investments in caregiving infrastructure can help meet caregiving needs and prevent disparate impacts on women’s employment, see:

- [Chapter 7, Equality within Our Lifetimes: How Laws and Policies Can Close—or Widen—Gender Gaps in Economies Worldwide](#) (Jody Heymann, Aleta Sprague, and Amy Raub; UC Press, 2023)



WORLD Policy Analysis Center

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