

# Background brief on fathers' leave and its use



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Throughout this document, the OECD and EU averages refer to the unweighted average for the relevant countries for which data are available

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Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs

# BACKGROUND BRIEF ON FATHERS' LEAVE AND ITS USE<sup>1</sup>

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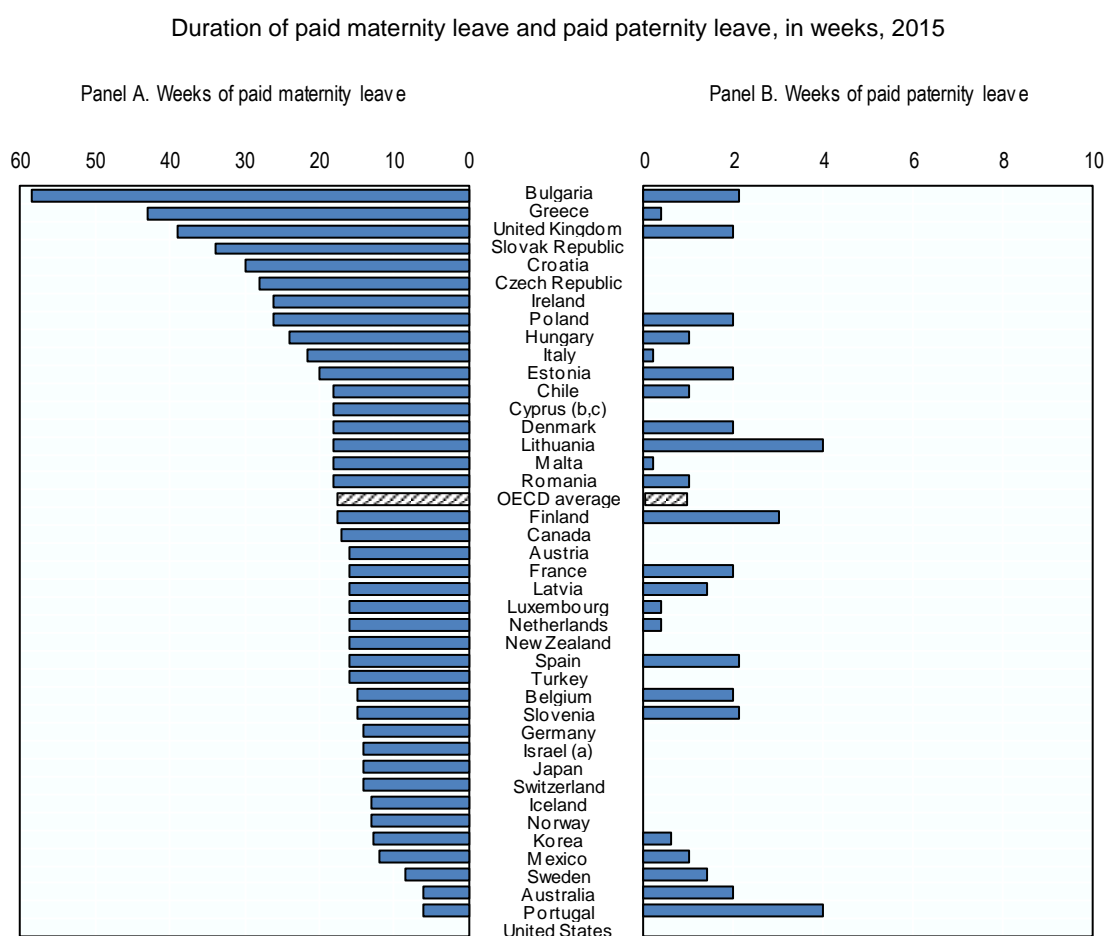
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<sup>1</sup> Background brief to the OECD Policy Brief "[Parental leave – Where are the Fathers](#)".

## Leave systems in a nutshell

1. Many OECD countries have developed comprehensive systems of paid leave for parents around childbirth. Almost all OECD countries provide mothers with a statutory entitlement to paid maternity leave (Figure 1, Panel A). In most cases this lasts for between 15 and 20 weeks—with the OECD average length of paid maternity leave 17.7 weeks— but in some countries (e.g. Greece and the United Kingdom) mothers are entitled to take paid maternity leave for 9 months or more. The United States is the only OECD country without national legislation on paid maternity leave. Some individual U.S. states do though provide mothers with income support during maternity leave through temporary or short-term disability insurance programmes (Adema et al, 2015).

**Figure 1: All OECD countries other than the U.S. offer paid maternity leave, and two-thirds provide paid paternity leave**



*Note:* Information refers to weeks of paid maternity leave - defined as an employment-protected leave of absence for employed women at around the time of childbirth, or adoption in some countries - and weeks of paid paternity leave - defined as an employment-protected leave of absence for employed fathers (or other relevant partners) for use at or directly around the time of childbirth, or adoption in some countries. For Iceland, Norway, Portugal and Sweden, 'weeks of paid maternity leave' includes weeks of paid parental leave that are reserved for the exclusive use of the mother. For more detail see the OECD Family Database Indicator PF2.1: [www.oecd.org/social/family/database.htm](http://www.oecd.org/social/family/database.htm)

a) The statistical data for Israel are supplied by and under the responsibility of the relevant Israeli authorities. The use of such data by the OECD is without prejudice to the status of the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem and Israeli settlements in the West Bank under the terms of international law.

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Source: OECD Family Database, Indicator PF2.1: [www.oecd.org/social/family/database.htm](http://www.oecd.org/social/family/database.htm)

2. About two-thirds of OECD countries also offer paid paternity leave—short but usually well-paid leaves for fathers for use immediately around or in the first few months after the arrival of the baby (Figure 1, panel B). Portugal provides the longest and most generous paid paternity leave—fathers can take up to 20 working days of paternity leave (10 of which are compulsory) paid at 100% of earnings without ceiling. In about half of OECD countries paternity leave lasts one or two weeks, although in some (e.g. Greece, Italy and the Netherlands) it lasts for only a few days.

3. A growing number of countries now provide parents with paid parental leave (Figure 2, panel A)—longer periods of employment-protected paid leave, supplementary to specific maternity and paternity leave, that focus mostly on allowing parents to provide care for very young children, sometimes up to their second or third birthday. In many OECD countries the entitlement to paid parental leave is a sharable family entitlement<sup>2</sup>—each family has the right to a certain number of weeks of parental leave payments, which parents can divide among themselves as they choose. In Denmark, for example, families are entitled to 32 weeks of paid parental leave, to be shared among parents as they see fit. However, an increasingly common approach is to reserve at least some part of the parental leave period as a non-transferable right for one or both parents on a “use it or lose it” basis

4. Non-transferable parent-specific entitlements can take several forms. Most common are “mummy and daddy quotas”, or specific portions of the overall parental leave period that are reserved exclusively for mothers or fathers. These quotas are most often associated with the Nordic countries—Iceland, Norway and Sweden all reserve at least 8 weeks for both parents<sup>3</sup>, while Finland reserves 6 weeks for the father only. Other countries offer “bonus periods”, where a couple may qualify for some extra weeks of paid leave if both parents use a certain period of sharable leave. Germany, for example, provides two months of additional parental leave payments if both parents claim the parental leave allowance for at least two months, effectively reserving two months for each parent. Austria operates a similar system, providing a bonus of between two and six months when both parents claim the child-raising allowance associated with parental leave, depending on the exact payment model chosen. But some countries simply provide both parents with their own individual right to paid parental leave with no sharable period of paid leave at all. Belgium, for instance, has long provided paid parental leave on an individual basis, with each parent currently entitled to 4 months of non-transferable paid parental leave. More recently, both Japan and Korea have reformed parental leave so as to provide each parent with their own individual entitlement to up to one year of paid parental leave.<sup>4</sup> In both cases payment is offered for the duration, providing by far the lengthiest paid father-specific leave entitlements in the OECD (Figure 2, panel A).

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<sup>2</sup> In some countries (e.g. Australia, the Czech Republic, Denmark and Italy), the entitlement to parental leave itself is technically an individual right—with each parent having their own entitlement to a certain number of weeks of job-protected leave—but the entitlement to *paid* leave or to parental leave payments is a family entitlement only.

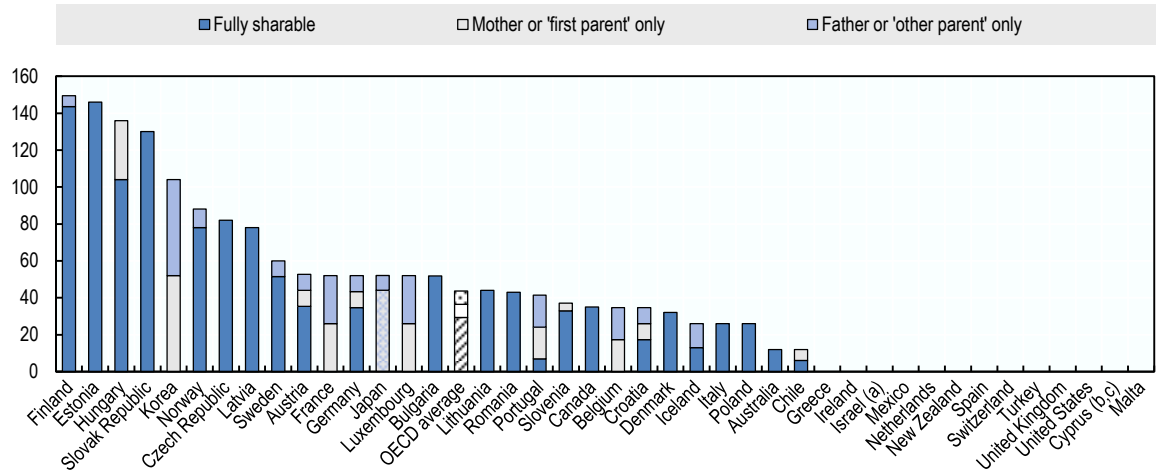
<sup>3</sup> For Iceland, Norway and Sweden, the mother’s part of the “mummy and daddy quotas” are not reflected in Figure 2 as they are treated here as maternity leave (see Figure 1).

<sup>4</sup> In Japan, both parents are entitled to use paid parental leave for 12 months until the child is 12 months old, or 14 months old if both parents take leave. The duration of the paid parental leave is shortened to 44 weeks for mothers as it cannot be claimed during the 8 post-birth weeks of maternity leave.

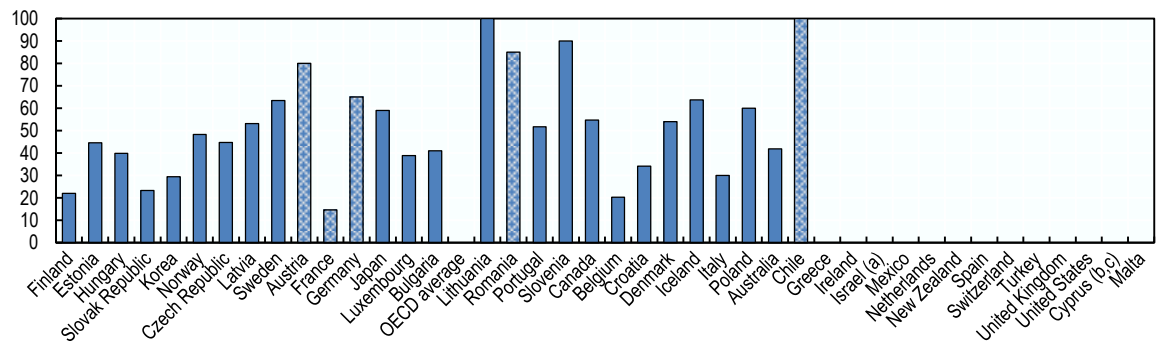
**Figure 2: Most paid parental leave is sharable, but countries frequently reserve parts for individual parents**

Number of weeks of paid parental and paid home care leave that are fully sharable, that are reserved for the mother or 'first parent', and that are reserved for the father or 'other parent', and the average payment rate across paid parental leave for an individual on national average earnings, 2015

Panel A. Weeks of paid parental and home care leave



Panel B. Average payment rate across all weeks of paid parental and home care leave (%)



**Notes:**

*Panel A:* Information refers to paid parental leave and subsequent periods of paid home care leave to care for young children (sometimes under a different name, for example, “childcare leave” or “child raising leave”, or the Complément de Libre Choix d’Activité in France), and do not include paid maternity and/or paid paternity leave. Periods that are labelled 'mother or first parent only' and 'father or other parent only' refer to individual non-transferable entitlements, 'mummy and daddy quotas' or periods of an overall leave entitlement that can be used only by one parent and cannot be transferred to the other, and any weeks of sharable leave that must be taken by one or both parents in order for the family to qualify for 'bonus' weeks of parental leave. All weeks of leave are additive (i.e. complementary) to those weeks of maternity and parental leave shown in Figure 1. For some countries (e.g. Japan) the individual 'mother or first parent only' and 'father or other parent only' periods must be used simultaneously if both parents are to use the entirety of their entitlement. These periods are represented by the cross-hatched bars. Information for Germany does not include weeks of leave covered by childcare benefits (Betreuungsgeld).

*Panel B:* Payment rates are calculated as the weighted average payment rate across paid fully sharable parental and home care leave, paid mother or 'first parent' only parental and home care leave, and paid father or 'other parent' only parental and home care leave. The "average payment rate" refers to the proportion of previous earnings replaced by the benefit over the length of the paid leave entitlement for a person earning 100% of average national (2014) earnings. In most countries benefits are calculated on the basis of gross earnings, with the "payment rates" shown reflecting the proportion of gross earnings replaced by the benefit. In Austria, Chile, Germany and Romania (parental leave only) benefits are calculated based on net (post income tax and social security contribution) earnings, while in France benefits are calculated based on post-social-security-contribution earnings. Payment rates for these countries reflect the proportion of the appropriate net earnings replaced by the benefit, and are represented by the cross-hatched bars. Additionally, in some countries maternity and parental benefits may be subject to taxation and may count towards the income base for social security contributions. As a result, the amounts actual amounts received by the individual on leave may differ from those shown in the figure.

a) See note a) to Figure 1



b) See note b) to Figure 1

c) See note c) to Figure 1

Source: OECD calculations based on OECD Family Database, Indicator PF2.1: [www.oecd.org/social/family/database.htm](http://www.oecd.org/social/family/database.htm)

## Fathers' use of leave across OECD and EU countries

5. Child-related leaves are generally well used by mothers. Almost all employed women take maternity leave, at least in the period immediately around birth (Moss, 2015). In fact, in several OECD countries (e.g. Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, and Slovenia) it is obligatory for the mother to use at least some of her maternity leave entitlement in the period immediately before and/or after childbirth. Many mothers then choose to prolong this period by taking at least some paid parental leave (Moss, 2015; see below).

### Box 1. Data issues when measuring use of leave and comparing use of leave across countries

Comparable data on parents' use of child-related leave are relatively scarce. Household surveys—which are a frequent source of information on matters relating to families and employment—are generally poorly suited to identifying when and where parents use leave entitlements. In large part this is because they tend to ask for the individual's employment status in a given specific reference week, and as a result capture only those individuals that are on leave at that specific point in time. Leave that is taken outside of the reference week is missed entirely. Fathers, who in many cases use only a few weeks of leave, are particularly likely to be missed when using survey data.

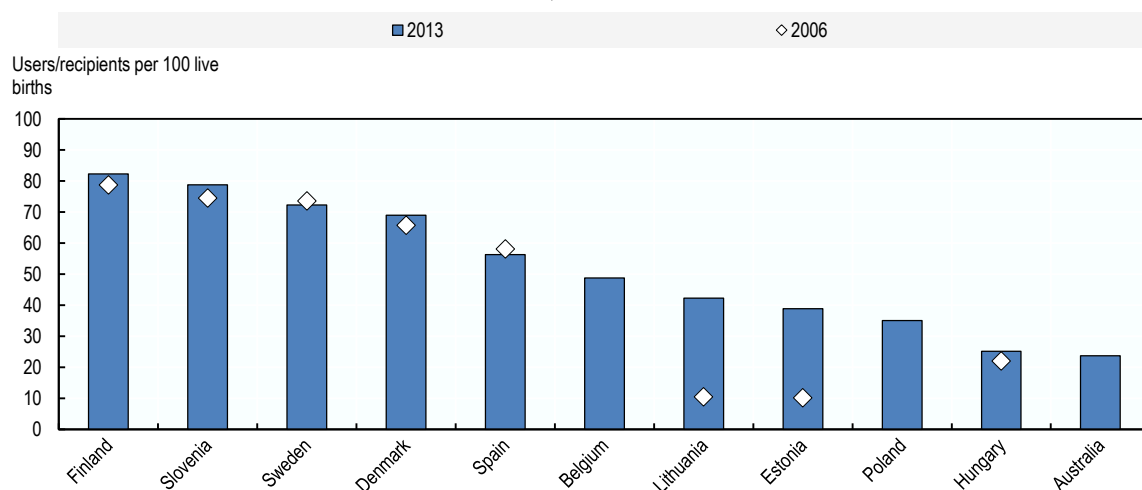
National administrative records provide more reliable data, but come with their own limitations. Administrative data are available in the first instance only where there exists some publicly-administered paid leave scheme, so are generally not available for countries without statutory paid leave or with statutory schemes that are processed directly by the employer (e.g. paternity leave in Korea, maternity and paternity leave in the United Kingdom). They also do not cover individuals using employer-provided schemes, so are likely to underestimate take-up even in countries with statutory schemes.

Most of the data presented here is drawn from administrative sources, where definitions and availability allow. These data generally come in the form of the number of users of the given publicly-administered leave or the number of recipients of publicly-administered benefits attached to a given leave, so need to be standardized before they can be compared across countries. Because information on eligible populations is not available, indicators are presented either as the number of leave users/recipients per 100 live births in the given year or, for parental leave only, through the gender distribution of leave users/recipients.

6. The picture looks very different, however, for fathers. It is not unusual for men to take a few days of leave right after a baby arrives, and use of statutory *paternity* leave is generally quite high across most OECD countries (Figure 3). In a majority of those countries for which data are available, paternity leave recipient rates are above 50 per 100 live births—in other words, there are more than 50 individuals claiming publicly-administered paternity benefits or using publicly-administered paternity leave for every 100 children born. In Slovenia and Sweden this rises to above 70 recipients per 100 live births, while in Finland the rate is a little over 82 per 100 live births. Given that some new fathers will not be eligible for statutory paid paternity leave for various reasons, these rates reflect widespread take-up in most of these countries. In some countries (e.g. Australia), fathers may also be using employer-provided leave rather than low-paid statutory leave.

**Figure 3: The use of statutory paternity leave is high in Nordic countries**

Recipients/users of publicly-administered paternity leave benefits or publicly-administered paid paternity leave per 100 live births, 2006 and 2013



*Note:* Data refer to recipients/users of publicly-administered paternity leave benefits or paid paternity leave only, and do not include individuals using only employer-provided paternity leave or unpaid leave. Data for Australia, Denmark, Finland, Hungary, Poland, Spain, Sweden and Lithuania refer to the number receiving paternity benefits or equivalent. For Australia, data refer to the number of fathers and other partners who received the full two weeks of 'Dad and Partner Pay'. For Finland, data refer to the number receiving the portion of the paternity allowance that is available while the mother is on maternity or parental leave, only. For Sweden, data refer to the number using the 10-day 'temporary parental benefit in connection with the birth of a child or adoption', only. For Belgium, Estonia and Slovenia, data refer to the number using paid paternity leave or equivalent. For Slovenia, data refer to the number using the initial 15 day paid paternity leave only. Data for Australia refer to 2013-14, for Belgium to 2008, and for Poland to 2014. For Spain, data for 2006 refer to 2008.

*Source:* OECD Family Database, Indicator PF2.2: [www.oecd.org/social/family/database.htm](http://www.oecd.org/social/family/database.htm)

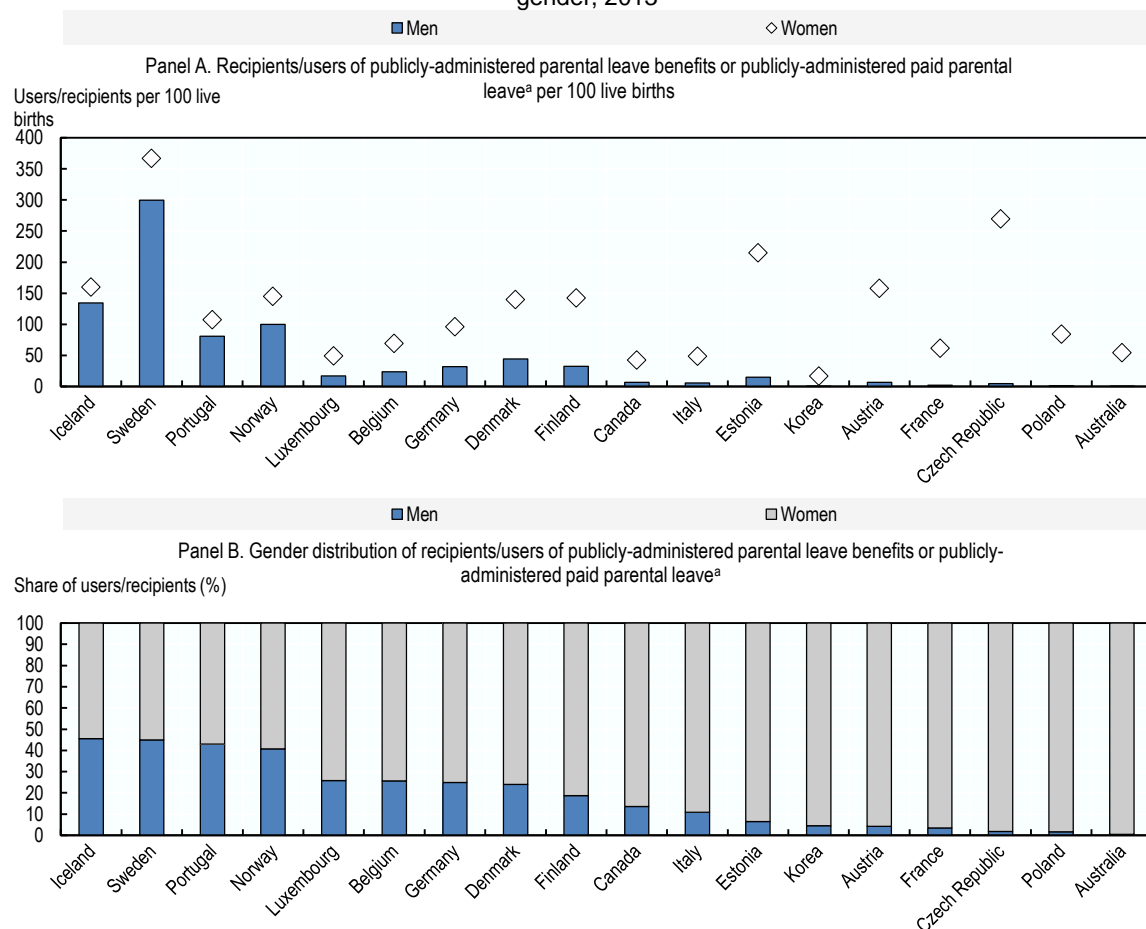
7. However, men's use of statutory paid *parental* leave is generally much lower, although it does vary considerably across countries (Figure 4, panel A). In some of the Nordic countries, male recipient rates exceed 100—in Sweden, for example, there are just under 300 male recipients of publicly-administered parental leave benefits for every 100 children born. These exceptionally high rates reflect both high take-up and/or the ability of parents to take leave in multiple separate periods over several years.<sup>5</sup> But in most OECD countries fewer than 50 men claim publicly-administered parental leave benefits per 100 live births. In 8 countries (Australia, Austria, Canada, the Czech Republic, France, Italy, Korea, and Poland) the rate is below 10 per 100 live births.

8. Regardless of *how many* men take leave, they are always less likely than women to take paid parental leave (Figure 4, panel B). In some countries the disparity is only small—in Portugal, for instance, around 43% of those claiming publicly-administered parental leave benefits are men, while in both Iceland and Sweden this is 45%. In most other countries, however, men make up only around one in five of those parents using paid parental leave. In Australia, the Czech Republic and Poland this falls to no more than one in fifty.

<sup>5</sup> In Sweden, parents can take leave in multiple separate blocks—limited only at up to three blocks per year—until the child turns 12 years old. The very high recipient rate likely reflects mothers and fathers taking leave multiple times over multiple years.

**Figure 4: Fathers are less likely to take paid parental leave than mothers**

Recipients/users of publicly-administered parental leave benefits or publicly-administered paid parental leave<sup>a</sup>, by gender, 2013

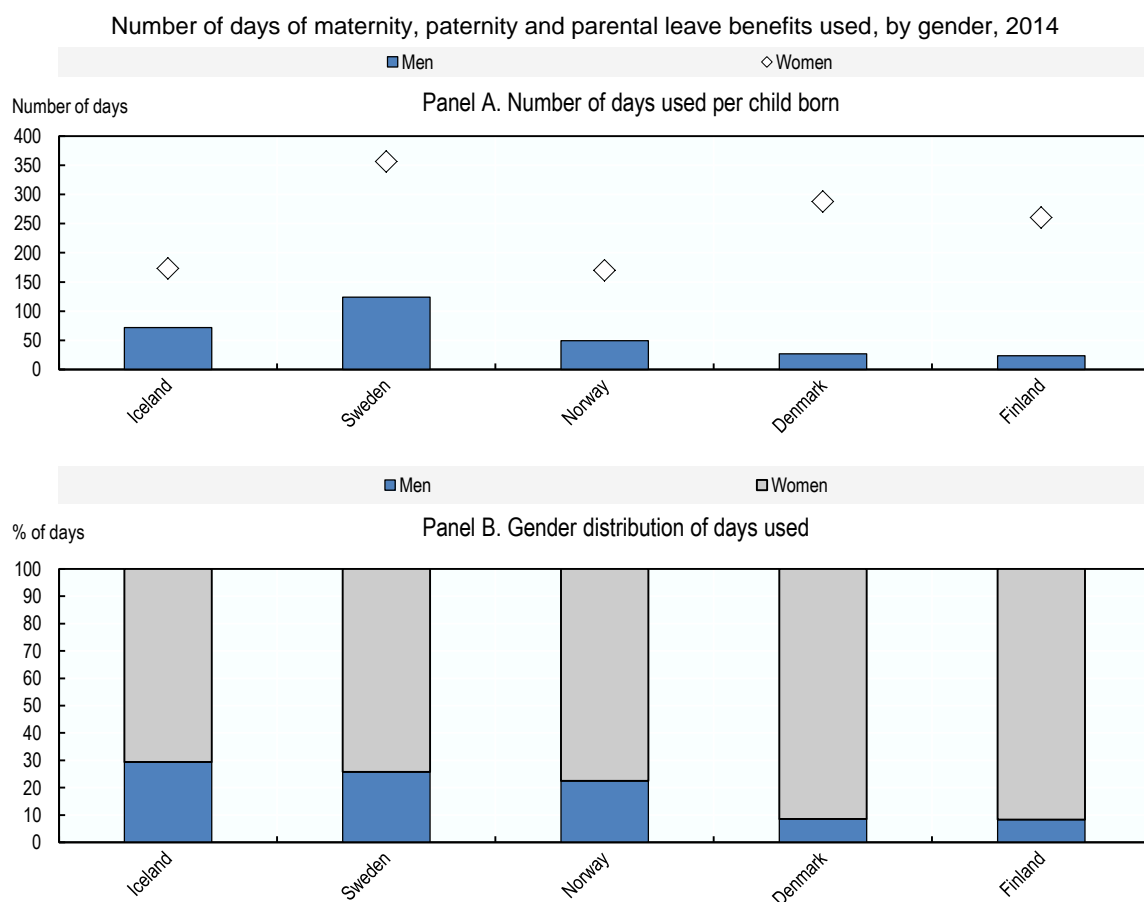


*Note:* Data refer to recipients/users of publicly-administered parental leave benefits or publicly-administered paid parental leave, and do not include users of maternity or paternity leave unless the country in question does not make a distinction between the different leaves (e.g. Iceland, Portugal). Data for Belgium, Italy and Korea refer to users of statutory paid parental leave (or equivalent). Data for Australia, Austria, Canada, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Luxembourg, Norway, Poland and Sweden refer to recipients of statutory parental leave benefits (or equivalent). For Australia, data refer to recipients of 'Parental Leave Pay' only. For Austria, data refer to recipients of 'Kinderbetreuungsgeld' (childcare allowance). For Denmark, data refer to recipients of benefits for the 32 week 'common leave' period only. For Finland, data refer to the male share of recipients of the parental allowance only, and do not include recipients of the paternity allowance (either that available during or after the parental leave period). For France, data refer to recipients of CLCA (Complément de libre choix d'activité). For Germany, data refer to recipients of 'Elterngeld' (parental allowance) for those with children born in the given year. For Iceland, data refer to recipients of any benefits in relation to maternity/paternity (i.e. benefits paid during either the mother or father-quota or during the sharable period of parental leave). For Portugal, data refer to recipients of benefits for 'Initial Parental Leave' only. In all cases data refer only to those using statutory schemes and do not include individual's using only employer-provided parental leave or parental leave pay.

*Source:* OECD Family Database, Indicator PF2.2: [www.oecd.org/social/family/database.htm](http://www.oecd.org/social/family/database.htm)

9. Moreover, even when the *incidence* of leave-taking is fairly evenly shared between women and men, the *intensity* of use is much higher for women (Figure 5). Comparable information on the length of paid parental leave taken by men and women is available for only a few countries, but where it exists, it suggests that men account for less than one-third of days used. Of those countries for which data is available, the highest male share of days used is in Iceland, where men account for just under 30% of the days for which parental benefits are drawn. In Denmark and Finland this falls below 10% with men making up 8.6% and 8.3% of days used, respectively.

**Figure 5: Men account for less than one-third of paid parental leave days**



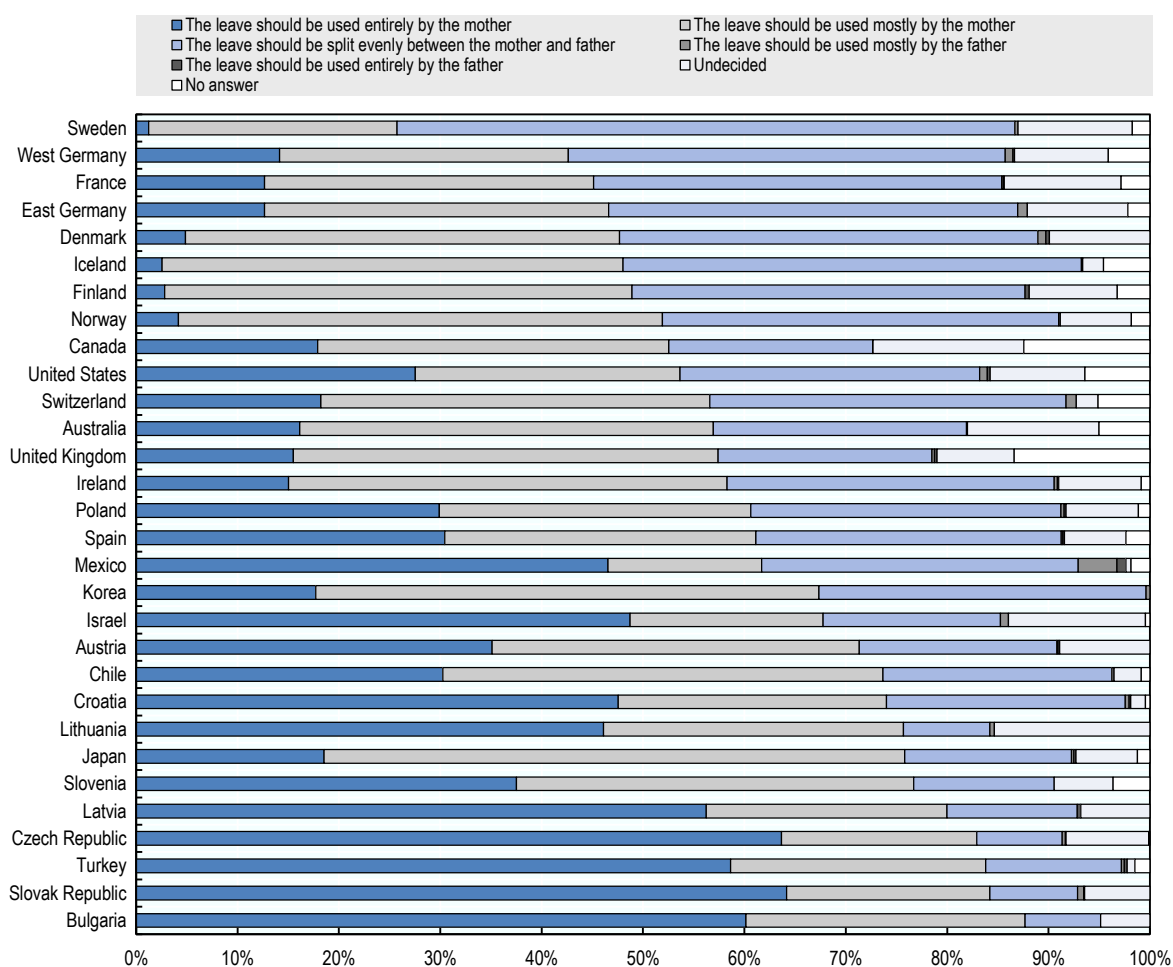
Source: Nordic Social Statistical Committee (NOSOSCO), <http://nowbase.org/da>

### Factors influencing fathers' use of paid parental leave

10. Decisions around childcare and who does what at home are, naturally, taken by families themselves, and leave behaviour is influenced by different factors. For example, prevailing social norms and societal attitudes towards the roles of mothers and fathers are likely to contribute to women rather than men taking leave. Attitudes in line with traditional gender roles still prevail in many OECD countries, particularly among men (see Annex Figure 1), and in most OECD countries many continue to believe that parental leave should be used mainly by mothers (Figure 6). According to data from the International Social Survey Programme, in all but 6 OECD countries at least 50% of people who believe that paid leave should be available to parents also believe that the leave should be taken 'entirely' or 'mostly' by the mother. In some countries (such as the Czech Republic, the Slovak Republic and Turkey) this is as high as 80%.

**Figure 6: Except in France, Germany and most Nordic countries, more than 50% of people believe that parental leave should be used mostly by the mother**

Distribution of responses to the question "Consider a couple who both work full-time and now have a new born child. Both are in a similar work situation and are eligible for paid leave. How should this paid leave period be divided between the mother and the father?" among respondents who believe that paid leave should be available, 2012



Source: OECD calculations based on International Social Survey Programme 2012, [www.issp.org/](http://www.issp.org/)

11. Employer attitudes towards taking leave also matter. Absent workers are costly for employers, especially when leave periods involve more than a few days, and taking leave for a long period may be perceived by the employer as demonstrating a lack of commitment to the job. In view of the perceived potential career implications, many fathers are unwilling to use paid leave for a prolonged period (OECD, 2003 and 2007). In Japan and Korea, only a small group of fathers use paid parental leave as they are concerned it would have negative effects on their career and their relationships with colleagues. Such workplace attitudes may be less pronounced in many other OECD countries, but even in Sweden, working in a small workplace or in one with a long-hours culture can keep fathers from using parental leave (Bygren and Duvander, 2006; Haas, Allard and Hwang, 2002).

12. Take-up by fathers may also be constrained by financial considerations. Fathers often earn more than their partners (OECD, 2007; OECD, 2016), so unless income support during leave replaces 100% of previous earnings then the income loss of taking leave to the household is, in most cases, smaller when the

mother takes leave. Given that the period around childbirth is often a time of considerable stress on household budgets, many families may feel that they cannot afford to sacrifice the additional income associated with the father's use of leave (OECD, 2007).

### **Promoting fathers' use of paid parental leave**

13. Policy and policy design can though still play a role in encouraging fathers to take leave. To promote a more gender equitable division of leave and encourage fathers to spend more time with their children, countries can pursue (a mix of) different options.

#### *Increase individual non-transferable entitlements to paid leave:*

14. Individual, non-transferable entitlements to paid leave are one of the most important tools available to policymakers looking to promote father's use of leave. A father-specific entitlement means that the father's decision to use leave is not dependent on the partner and the use of leave by the father does not directly detract from the mother's ability to take leave (McKay and Doucet, 2010). Moreover, explicitly labelling leave as 'for the father' legitimises the idea of fathers taking parental leave (O'Brien, 2009), so easing potential objections from third parties.

15. Parent-specific entitlements have been largely successful in encouraging take-up among fathers. Looking across countries with available data, the 7 countries with the highest male shares of parental leave users (Iceland, Sweden, Portugal, Norway, Luxembourg, Belgium, and Germany) all have father-specific (or partner-specific) entitlements to paid parental leave. The introduction of "mummy and daddy quotas" in some of the Nordic countries has proved particularly successful. In Sweden, for instance, the introduction of one-month "mummy and daddy quotas" in 1995 was followed not only by an increase in the number of fathers using *any leave*, but also a steady but consistent increase in the share of days of paid leave used by men (Figure 7; Duvander and Johansson, 2013; Ekberg et al., 2013). Similarly, in Iceland, the introduction in 2001 of three-month parent-specific periods of parental leave saw the share of paid leave days taken by fathers increase from around 3% to just over 34% at its peak in 2008 (Figure 7; see below on the subsequent decline). Other forms of parent-specific entitlements have been successful too. In Germany, the proportion of children with a father that used parental leave increased dramatically—from 8.8% for children born in 2007 to 32% for all children born in 2013—following the introduction in 2007 of the two-month "bonus period" when both parents take at least two months of leave (Reich, 2010; Destatis, 2015).

16. Non-transferable entitlements are not a panacea. Austria, for example, has effectively reserved at least some part of the parental leave or parental allowance period for fathers since 1995, yet relatively few take advantage<sup>6</sup> (Figure 4). Similarly, as discussed earlier, both Japan and Korea provide fathers with an individual entitlement to one year of paid parental leave (see Figure 2) but take up remains low. In Japan only about 2% of employed fathers with a new-born child make use of parental leave<sup>7</sup> (Nakazato and Nishimura, 2015). In Korea take-up by fathers has been increasing but men still make up only 4.5% of

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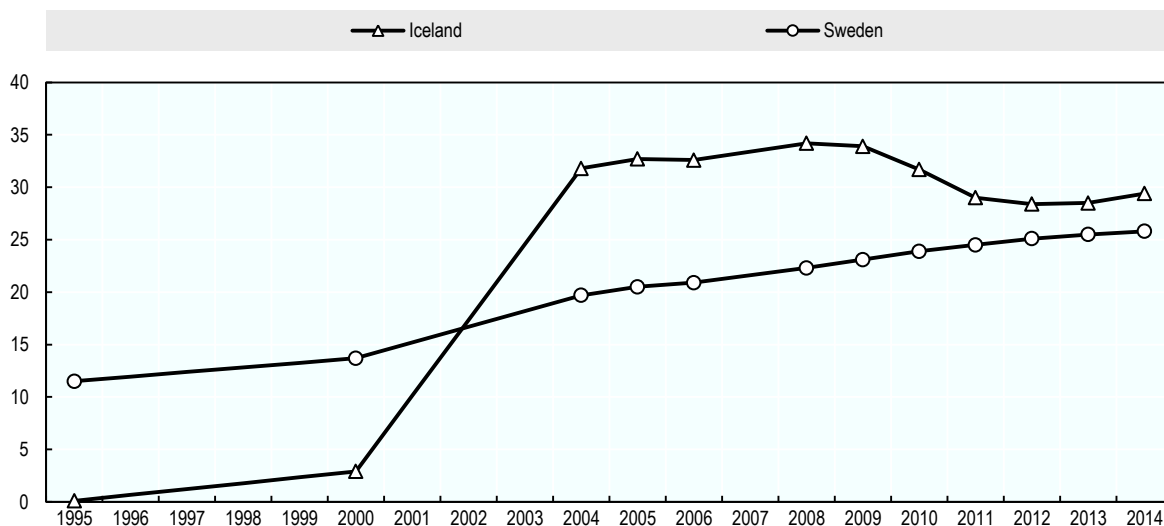
<sup>6</sup> This may be because many Austrian families still prefer the option of taking the parental allowance in its longer but lower-paid forms. Data from the Federal Ministry for Family and Youth suggest that the longest parental allowance option—the 30+6 model, with payments spread over 30 months plus a further 6 if both parents claim—remains by far the most popular option with Austrian families (OECD, 2015). The length and low payment rate attached to this option means that it is unlikely to be used by fathers regardless of whether or not it carries a bonus.

<sup>7</sup> About 2% of male employees with a partner that had given birth between October 2011 and September 2012 had taken parental leave by October 2013 (Nakazato and Nishimura, 2015)

parental leave users<sup>8</sup> (Figure 4). Nonetheless, the success of parent-specific entitlements across most OECD countries suggests they are important instruments for the promotion of the use of leave by fathers.

**Figure 7: “Daddy quotas” led to increases in father’s use of paid leave in Iceland and Sweden**

Male share of number of days of maternity, paternity and parental leave benefits used, Iceland and Sweden, 1995-2014



Source: Nordic Social Statistical Committee (NOSOSCO), <http://nowbase.org/da>

*Increase payment rates and remove financial disincentives for use by fathers:*

17. Payment of any kind is important for the use of leave by fathers. Many OECD countries have long provided fathers with non-transferable entitlements to *unpaid* parental leave, but take up has almost always been very low. However, fathers’ use of parental leave tends to be highest not just when leaves are paid, but rather when leaves are well paid. The four OECD countries with the most gender-equal distributions of parental leave users (Iceland, Norway, Portugal and Sweden; Figure 4), for instance, all offer leave benefits that replace over 50% of previous earnings for an average earner for at least part of the parental leave period<sup>9</sup> (Figure 2; see *OECD Family Database* Indicator PF2.1 for more detail). Many of those countries with the lowest male share of users (e.g. Australia, the Czech Republic, France, Italy, and Korea), in contrast, provide benefits that replace less than 50% of previous earnings for an average earner (Figure 2). In France, the payments available under CLCA replace less than 15% of average earnings. This may help to explain why so few men take leave despite generally favourable attitudes towards fathers’ use of parental leave (Figure 6).

<sup>8</sup> Data for Korea cover private sector employees only. The gender distribution of public sector employees using leave is similar to in the private sector—in 2014, 41132 national and municipal officials employees used parental leave, of which 38997 were female and 2315 male. This produces a male share of users of about 5.2%.

<sup>9</sup> The payment rates shown in Figure 2 reflect the average payment rate across all of paid parental and paid home care leave. In some countries, payment rates differ between the parental and home care leaves or across different parts of the parental leave period. In Norway, for example, parental leave itself is paid at 100% of previous earnings up to an earnings ceiling of NOK 530,222 per year (2015), equivalent to a payment rate of about 99% for an average earner (2014 average earnings). The payment rate shown in figure 2 is lower than this because it also includes the lower flat-rate payments made across the home care leave period.

18. The structure of the payment scheme matters too, particularly in the extent to which payment schemes produce incentives or disincentives for the use by the father. Parental leaves that are paid through flat-rate benefits, for instance, contain strong disincentives for use by the partner on higher earnings—often the father—since the flat-rate payment will always replace a higher proportion of earnings for the partner with lower earnings—usually the mother. Payment ceilings on earnings-related benefit payments have a similar effect, unless they are set at a high level.

19. The experience of Iceland provides a good illustration of the effects of both payment rates and payment ceilings on the use of parental leave by fathers. Following the economic crisis in 2007/08, the ceiling on the Icelandic earnings-related parental benefit—which nominally replaces 80% of previous earnings—was cut by almost half<sup>10</sup>, reducing the actual proportion of earnings received for an average earner from 80% in 2008 to just under 59% at its lowest point in 2012. Despite the cut, the number and share of fathers taking *any* paid leave in Iceland has remained impressively high (Figure 4). However, the *share* of paid leave days used by fathers has fallen, from just over 34% in 2008 to just over 28% in 2012 (Figure 7).

20. Higher payment rates come with higher costs. But countries can limit the additional fiscal burden by tying higher payments rates to shorter leave periods. For example, as part of the 2007 reform Germany switched from a low-paid, income-tested, two-year flat-rate payment to a higher-paid, earnings-related parental leave benefit payable for 10 months, plus a further two if both parents use at least two months. The reform did lead to a moderate increase in direct public expenditure on leave, from about EUR 4.3 billion in 2006 to EUR 5.1 billion<sup>11</sup> in 2011 (OECD, 2014). However, because under the new scheme parents (mostly women) return to work sooner and in greater numbers, much of any additional cost is likely to be offset by increases in tax receipts and decreases in other public expenditures associated with inactivity (RWI, 2015). Estimates by the research institute RWI suggest that even in its first few years as much as 25% of the additional cost was cancelled out by increases in government revenues and decreases in other expenditure. In the medium-to-long-term, the reform is expected to be close to fiscally-neutral (RWI, 2015).

#### *Increase opportunities to take parental leave on a flexible basis*

21. Many parents, particularly fathers, may be unwilling to take leave full-time for several months in one go. Providing flexible arrangements, such as the possibility to take leave part-time (e.g. one or two days per week) or in several separate blocks over different years, could promote take-up among these parents (OECD, 2007; OECD, 2011). Part-time leave, for example, allows the employee to remain connected to their job while still providing time to care for the child. And where the financial impact of taking leave is a concern, using leave for only a few days a week can help minimise or smooth the associated loss of income. The opportunity to take leave in multiple shorter blocks, meanwhile, could encourage use among those who want to take leave at particular specific times (e.g. around holidays) or who wish to organise their leave-taking around other responsibilities (e.g. specific work commitments). Employers may benefit from flexible leave arrangements too—in many cases they may feel less need to go to the expense of finding and hiring a (temporary) replacement worker if the employee is on leave only part-time or for a few weeks at a time.

22. Isolating the effects of flexible leave options on take-up is not straightforward, but where available these options in most cases appear popular. In Belgium, for example, around 75% of parental-

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<sup>10</sup> The payment ceiling on the earnings-related payment stood at ISK 535,700 per month in 2008. In 2009 this was cut to ISK 400,000 per month in 2009, and in 2010 to ISK 300,000 per month. It has since risen slightly to ISK 370,000 per month, but in real terms this remains well below the level seen in 2008.

<sup>11</sup> Expenditure expressed in constant (2005) Euros



leave-takers use it on a ‘one-fifth-time’ basis (i.e. for an average of one day per week), with part-time leave particularly popular among fathers (Merla and Deven, 2015). In Norway, about a quarter of eligible fathers choose to take their father’s quota on a part-time basis (Brandth and Kvande, 2015). Part-time leave is less popular in Finland—in 2014, only 109 parents claimed the partial (part-time) parental allowance (Kela, 2015). However, here the option is available only if both parents opt to use leave part-time and if the employer agrees.

23. Part-time and flexible leave does have its drawbacks. In particular, there is a risk that flexibility could lead to fathers taking leave only sporadically or in very short spells and, as a result, that fathers continue to act only as assistants to the mother rather than as independent care-givers (Axelsson, 2014). In this regard, at least in terms of paternal care, flexibility is likely to work best if it still encourages fathers to use at least a few weeks at a time or if it encourages fathers to use leave alone without the mother on a regular basis<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Indeed, as a more general point, leave is most effective at promoting the amount of time spent by fathers on childcare and unpaid work when fathers use at least a few weeks (Haas and Hwang, 2008; Huerta et al., 2013) and when they take it at a different time to the mother (Bünning, 2015). Leave systems can encourage father’s use of ‘solo leave’ by preventing both parents from using paid leave at the same time or by limiting the number of weeks that can be used by both parents simultaneously.

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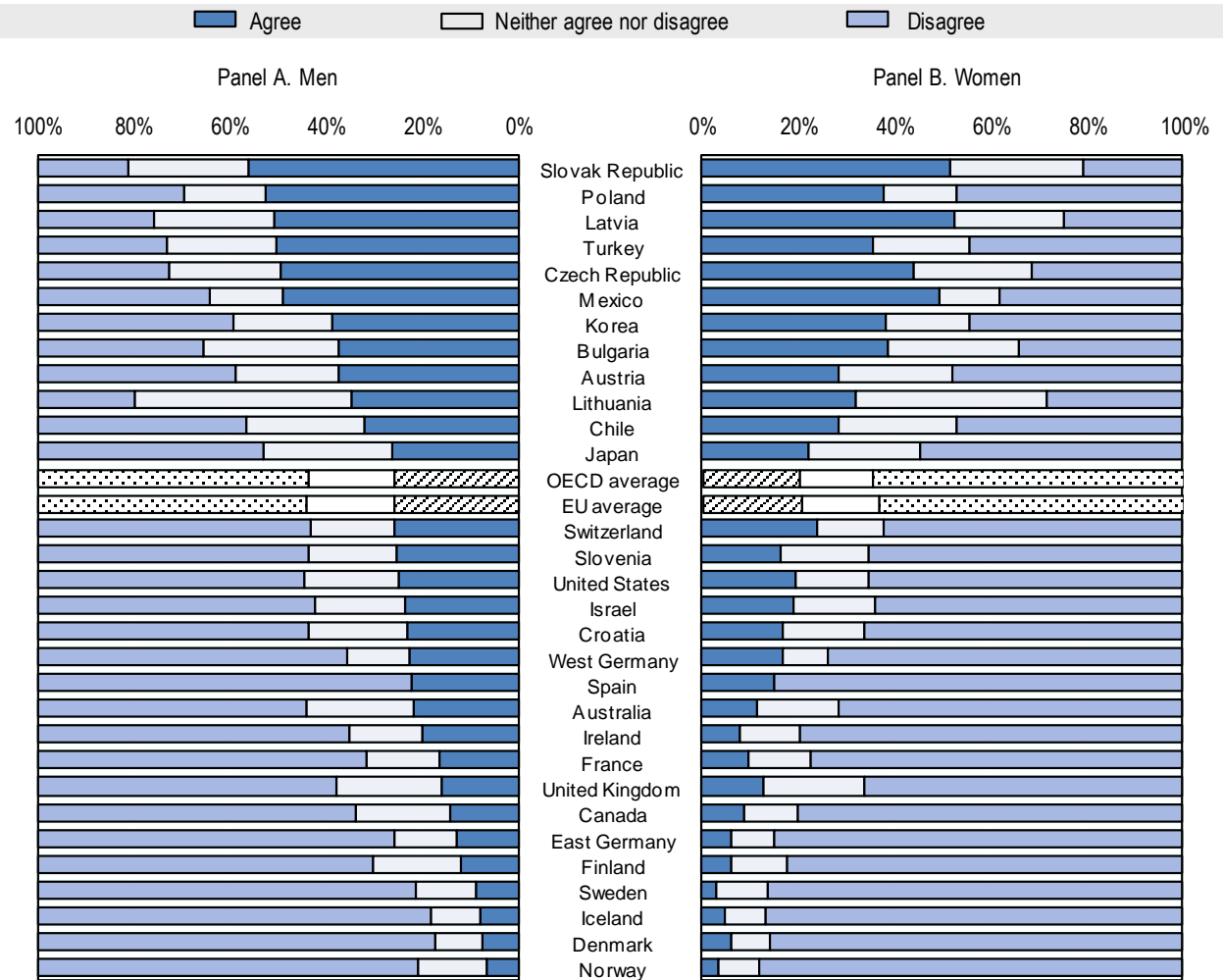
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## ANNEX 1. ATTITUDES TOWARDS TRADITIONAL GENDER ROLES

**Annex Figure 1: Traditional notions of gender roles remain important in about one-third of OECD countries**

Distribution of responses to the question "A man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family. To what extent do you agree or disagree?", by sex, 2012



Source: OECD calculations based on International Social Survey Programme 2012, [www.issp.org/](http://www.issp.org/)