



15 May 2014. The more active role of fathers in caregiving is “likely to be one of the most significant social developments of the twenty-first century,” according to a [new ILO Report](#) . There are, however, numerous obstacles to gender equality in the work place and one of the main challenges is that only one third of countries fully meet the requirements of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) convention on maternity leave.

The ILO’s report *Maternity and paternity at work: Law and practice around the world* offers a rich international comparative analysis of law and practice relating to maternity protection at work in 185 countries and territories.

[Today](#) marks the twentieth anniversary of the [International Year of Families](#) and provides an opportunity to promote awareness of issues relating to families and the role of families in development. Developed maternity protection laws are fundamental to ensuring equality of women in the work place as well as promoting maternal and child health. The equal treatment of women in the work place is one of the

[MDG’s](#) aimed to be achieved in 2015. This requires an effective combination of their reproductive and productive roles, ensuring enough time for caregiving to children without penalization or discrimination.

The ILO report finds that only 34% of countries fully meet the requirements of ILO convention

No. 183 on the duration of maternity leave, cash benefits and source of funding.

One of the main challenges today lies in improving the length of maternity leave with reducing the reliance on employers for payment of leave benefits. Though much progress has been made towards ensuring equality and protection of women's rights in the workplace, the measures and often inadequate and developing countries are still trying to catch up. The report finds that 830 million women in the world still lack adequate maternity protection, with the majority living in Africa and Asia. Only 28.4% of employed women worldwide would receive cash benefits in the case of maternity.

As the UN strives to ensure balance for women in the workplace, a new kind of perspective is also developing, that of paternity leave. The ILO reports states that, "Recognition of men's right to parenthood, as well as their responsibility to share unpaid care and household work, will help to break down traditional social attitudes, resulting in greater equality for both men and women at work and home." The necessity for fathers to be involved in the care and raising of their child, beyond simply providing the "bread on the table", is a relatively new concept but it is gaining ground."

Still the world is adapting slowly to this new concept. In the ILO report, a list of countries and the time off they provide shows that often fathers are granted anywhere from a few days to a maximum of two weeks paid paternity leave. Sometime these provisions don't even mention paternity leave but are called "emergency" or "compassionate" leave. A long road ahead remains to balance work and family life, both for men and women. In order for our social policies to change, we must first change our social perspective of gender roles in the workplace and family life.