

Norway⁴²⁰

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For comparisons with other countries in this review on leave provision and early childhood education and care services, please see the [cross-country tables](#) at the front of the review (also available individually on the Leave Network website). To contact authors of country notes, see the [members page](#) on the Leave Network website.

1. Current leave and other employment-related policies to support parents

a. Mother's quota (*mødrekvoten*) (policy responsibility: Ministry of Children and Families; administration: Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration, NAV⁴²¹)

- There is no fully separate Maternity leave scheme; maternity-specific periods are integrated within the Parental leave system (see 1c). It is obligatory for women to take 6 weeks leave after delivery for health reasons, and 3 weeks may be taken before the expected birth date. These weeks are taken as part of Parental leave reserved for women before and after birth, and for which the term *mødrekvoten* or mother's quota is now used
- In addition, pregnancy leave (*svangerskapsperger*) is available for pregnant women who must stop work because of chemical, biological, or physical hazards, and if the employer is unable to offer alternative work. This benefit may be received from the point at which the mother must cease working due to risk and until 3 weeks before the expected due date. It is paid at a level equivalent to sickness benefit (i.e., 100 per cent of income up to a ceiling).

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⁴²¹ NAV (the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration) is the public agency responsible for administering the National Insurance Scheme and most welfare and employment-related benefits in Norway, including parental benefit, sickness benefit, unemployment benefit, pensions, and various care-related benefits.

b. Paternity leave (*omsorgspermisjon*) (regulated under labour law; policy responsibility shared across relevant ministries)

Length of leave (before and after birth)

- 2 weeks in connection with the birth (distinct from the 'father's quota', see 1c).

Payment

- No statutory payment (though compensation may be provided by employers).

Flexibility in use

- Paternity leave is flexible in a number of ways. Firstly, it can be used by another caregiver who will assist the mother (e.g., a grandparent) if the parents do not live together. Secondly, the law does not specify when the leave must be taken other than 'in connection with the birth.' This is generally interpreted as a short period before or after the birth. There is, however, some flexibility to adjust the timing if needed. Thirdly, the leave may be taken in parts. The father may, for instance, use one or two days to be present at birth, go back to work, and then take the rest when the mother and child come home from the hospital. Fourthly, it can be used by foster or adoptive parents when taking over care of the child.

Eligibility (e.g., related to employment or family circumstances)

- Employed fathers have the right to leave.
- Leave can also be taken by a co-mother (*medmor*).

Variation in leave due to child or family reasons (e.g., multiple or premature births; poor health or disability of child or mother; single parent) or delegation of leave to person other than the father.

- Leave can be taken by another caregiver if the father does not live with the mother, as the purpose of the leave is to assist the mother (see 'flexibility in use' above).

Regional or local variations in leave policy

- None.

Additional note (e.g., if leave payments are supplemented by collective agreements, employer exclusions, or rights to postpone)

- Payment depends on individual or collective agreements, and most employed fathers are covered by such agreements. Where such employer-paid leave is not available, fathers or co-mothers may instead use parental benefit (*foreldrepenger*) for this period. In this case, the days are deducted from their Parental leave entitlement and are paid according to the chosen compensation level (100 per cent or 80 per cent) for the overall Parental leave period.

c. Parental leave (*Foreldrepengeperioden*) (responsibility of the Ministry of Children and Families)

Length of leave (before and after birth)

- Parents can choose between 49 weeks or 61 weeks and 1 day, depending on payment level (see 'payment and funding' below). The choice of benefit rate made in the mother's application applies to both parents and cannot be changed subsequently.
- Of the post-natal period, 15 or 19 weeks are for mothers (*mødrekvoten* or mother's quota, see 1a) and 15 or 19 weeks are for fathers (*fedrekvoten* or father's quota); these are individual, non-transferable entitlements. The remaining 16 weeks (100 per cent option) or 20 weeks and 1 day (80 per cent option) constitute the family entitlement (*fellesperioden* or shared period) and may be taken by either parent. See 'flexibility' below for options available to parents.

Payment and funding

- Parental benefit may either be taken for 49 weeks at 100 per cent of earnings or for 61 weeks and 1 day at 80 per cent of earnings, up to an upper limit of six times the National Insurance basic amount (*grunnbeløpet*), i.e., NOK780,960 [€70,726.32]⁴²² per year. The total amount paid over the leave period is approximately the same whether the 100 per cent or 80 per cent option is chosen.
- The minimum qualifying income is NOK65,080 (€5,893.86) per year, earned during at least 6 of the 10 months prior to the start of the leave period. Parents who do not meet this criterion receive a lump-sum benefit (*engangsstønad*) of NOK92,648 [€8,390.51] per child.
- Payments are made to parents by the National Insurance Scheme. Employers only pay directly to parents if they provide compensation above the upper limit of the parental benefit.
- Payments are taxed.
- Pension rights continue to accrue during leave.
- Funded from general taxation.

Flexibility in use

- For all the different parts of leave (e.g., mother's quota, father's quota), it is possible to choose a longer period of leave paid at 80 per cent of earnings, or a shorter period of leave paid at 100 per cent of earnings.
- After the first 6 weeks, it is possible for the mother to postpone parts of the parental benefit period, as long as it is taken during the first 3 years after the birth of the child, and the parent receiving the benefit is employed full-time during the postponement period. Hospitalisation, illness, and vacation may also qualify for postponement.
- After the first 6 weeks, it is also possible for one or both parents to combine all or part of the parental benefit period with part-time work. If parents take less than the full benefit payment, this will prolong the period of parental benefit. Both parents may choose to combine the parental benefit period

⁴²² Conversion of currency undertaken for 20 July 2026, using: <https://data.ecb.europa.eu/currency-converter>.

with part-time work (for instance, each working part-time) at the same time. A written agreement from the employer is required in both cases. There is also an activity requirement (*aktivitetskrav*) in some cases for the father or co-mother to use the shared part of the leave (see below).

- Father's quota and mother's quota: this period of leave (15/19 weeks) is not transferable to the other parent, except in certain circumstances, i.e., if the parent is ill or otherwise unable to care for the child, or if the parents do not live together.
- Part of the father's quota may be taken around the time of birth, while the first 6 weeks after birth are reserved for the mother for medical reasons. Otherwise, fathers are free to choose at what time to use it during the first 3 years after the child's birth. They can also choose whether to take the quota as part-time leave, as well as whether to take it as one continuous period or divided into several periods. This flexible use requires agreement with the employer.
- The family entitlement part may be taken as one continuous period or split into shorter periods within the three-year period.
- Both parents may take leave at the same time, except during the medically protected period immediately after birth (i.e., 6 weeks reserved for the mother) and during the period of shared leave, when mothers are required to return to work or studies for the father to take it. During the period of the father's quota, there is no requirement regarding the mother's activities (i.e., both parents may be on leave together). Taking leave simultaneously uses up the available benefit period more quickly.

Eligibility (e.g., related to employment or family circumstances)

- The main eligibility rules are the same for fathers and mothers. They must be employed for six of the last ten months prior to the birth and earn at least half the basic national insurance amount (*grunnbeløpet*) over the previous year. Self-employed workers are eligible for the same leave benefits as employees.
- The eligibility rules for the family entitlement and father's quota are somewhat different. The father may use the shared period even if the mother does not qualify, provided that she returns to approved activity such as work or study. By contrast, for the father's quota, the mother must have qualified for parental benefits but is not required to be in work or study while the father takes it. In cases where only the father has accrued parental benefit rights, he may take 10 weeks of parental benefit without any activity requirement for the mother. For additional weeks beyond those 10, the mother must be engaged in approved activity (e.g., work or education).
- Same-sex parents are eligible. When two women become mothers, the non-biological mother must be legally recognised as co-mother in order to have rights to leave benefits. Her rights are the same as a father's rights to leave. If two men have a child together through surrogacy, the biological father normally receives the whole leave entitlement if he is legally recognised as the father. The other father may receive paid Parental leave if he adopts the child (as a step-parent) and if there are leave days left. The 3 year period within which leave must be taken may present a challenge, as the step-parent adoption process cannot begin before the child is born and the adoption process may take a long time. If the second father does not use the leave entitlement, the biological father may in some cases use more of

the available leave. If both fathers are adoptive parents, they may choose which of them starts the leave period at the time of the transfer of care.

Variation in leave due to child or family reasons (e.g., multiple or premature births; poor health or disability of child or mother; single parent); or delegation of leave to person other than the parents

- For multiple births or adoptions, the Parental leave period is prolonged. Parents of twins receive 66 weeks at 100 per cent compensation or 82 weeks and 2 days at 80 per cent compensation; parents of 3 or more children receive 95 weeks at 100 per cent compensation or 118 weeks and 4 days at 80 per cent compensation.
- If the child dies during the Parental leave period, parents may receive parental benefits for up to 30 benefit days after the child's death, or for the remaining benefit period if fewer than 30 days is left.
- Mothers with sole custody who are eligible for Parental leave receive the full parental entitlement, including the father's quota. However, if the parents agree, they may apply for the father who does not live with the child to use the father's quota.

Regional or local variations in leave policy

- None.

Additional note (e.g., if leave payments are supplemented by collective agreements, employer exclusions, or rights to postpone)

- Many collective agreements and individual contracts provide that employers top up parental benefits to 100 per cent of earnings.

d. Childcare leave or career breaks (*Ulønnet permisjon*)

- Each parent has the right to 1 year of unpaid leave after the parental benefit period.
- Parents can receive a cash-for-care benefit (*kontantstøtte*) for children from the month they turn 13 months up to and including the month they turn 19 months. The full benefit is NOK7,500 [€679.22] per month for parents who do not use a full-time place in a publicly funded Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) service. Children who use ECEC on a part-time basis receive a reduced benefit (e.g., if parents do not use a place, they receive 100 per cent of the benefit; if they use a place for up to 20 hours per week, they receive 50 per cent of the full benefit). The main criteria for eligibility, therefore, is that parents do not use a publicly funded ECEC place full-time.

e. Other types of leave and flexible working

Adoption leave and pay

- The same regulations apply as for parents having their own children, except for the 3 weeks of leave reserved for mothers before birth. The period is divided into non-transferable mother's and father's quotas and a shared family entitlement. Parents adopting children may decide when to start the Parental leave period from the date of care transfer (*omsorgsovertakelse*).

Parents adopting children who are not eligible for Parental leave may receive a lump-sum benefit (engangsstønad) of NOK92,648 [€8,390.51].

Time off for the care of dependants

- Each parent of 1 or 2 children under 12 years of age has the right to ten working days' leave per year when the **child is sick** (or when the childminder or grandparent who normally provide care is ill and the child cannot attend kindergarten); parents with more than two children have the right to 15 working days' leave per year each. Single parents have the right to 20/30 days' leave per year. For severely or chronically sick children, extended rights to leave apply until the child turns 18 years old. The leave is compensated at the sickness benefit rate (*sykepengegrunnlag*), which is normally 100 per cent of earnings up to the sickness benefit ceiling of six times the basic national insurance benefit i.e., NOK780,960 [€70,726.32] per year. It is normally paid by the employer, who covers the first 10 days before reimbursement from NAV applies for subsequent days.
- A **care benefit** (*pleiepenger*) is available for parents whose child requires continuous supervision and care due to illness, injury, or congenital conditions, including both somatic and mental health conditions; no specific diagnosis is required. It is both a leave entitlement and a cash benefit, securing income when parents cannot work because their child is hospitalised or under the care of specialist health services. The need for continuous supervision must be directly linked to the child's condition and exceed what is normally expected for a child of that age, such that the child cannot be left without supervision. The benefit is paid by NAV at the sickness benefit rate.
- Employees who care for **terminally ill family members at home** have the right to care leave for up to 60 days. There is also a right to 10 days' leave per year to provide necessary **care for sick parents, spouses, or partners**. Leave is compensated at the sickness benefit rate.

Specific provision for (breast)feeding

- The Working Environment Act grants breastfeeding mothers the right to breastfeeding breaks of up to 1 hour per working day for children under 1 year of age. These breaks are paid by the employer when the agreed working hours are 7 hours or more per day; otherwise, the breaks are unpaid.

Flexible working for carers

- Parents have the right to reduced working hours to care for children until they are 10 years old. Working hours may, for example, be reduced through shorter working days, fewer working days per week, or work-free periods during the year. Reduced working hours mean reduced pay, but employees also have the right to return to their original working hours after the agreed period.
- The Working Environment Act (*arbeidsmiljøloven* § 10-2(4)) gives employees the right to reduced working hours for a period if the arrangement does not cause significant inconvenience to the employer. The scheme primarily aims to meet parents' wishes for more time with young children or needs arising from difficulties obtaining childcare during working hours. Parents with children under 10 years of age and single parents are

- generally considered to have valid grounds for requesting reduced working hours.
- Regulations governing home office work in Norway mainly concern the rights and obligations of employees and employers. Caring for young children is not explicitly recognised as a legal basis for home office arrangements. This is likely connected to Norway's extensive kindergarten coverage and parents' right to paid leave when children are ill and require care at home.

Time off for antenatal appointments and care

- Pregnant employees are entitled to paid time off to attend antenatal check-ups.

Other provisions of leave

- None reported.

2. Relationship between leave policy and early childhood education and care policy

The maximum period of post-natal leave is just over three years. Earnings-related parental benefits are paid for approximately 14 months. There is an entitlement to ECEC from 1 year of age, available on a full-time basis at kindergartens (though if the child is born later than 1 September, there may not be a place available until the next main intake in August). There is, therefore, in theory no gap between the end of well-paid leave and an ECEC entitlement, though in practice many children experience a short waiting period until the main admission date in August, and children born in December may face a longer gap until the following year, since under current law, children born in December are entitled to a kindergarten place only from the following August. A parliamentary decision has been adopted to extend this entitlement so that these children will also have the right to a place from the month they turn 1 year old; however, the necessary legislative changes have not yet entered into force.

For ECEC attendance levels, see 'relationship between leave and ECEC entitlements' in the [cross-country tables](#) at the front of the review.

3. Changes in policy since April 2025 (including proposals currently under discussion)

No major policy changes have been introduced since April 2025. The National Insurance basic amount increased on 1 May 2025 to NOK130,160 (€11,787.72), raising the annual parental benefit ceiling to NOK780,960 (€70,726.32). In the ECEC area, Parliament has requested legislative changes to extend the right to a kindergarten place to children born in December, so that they would be entitled to a place from the month they turn 1 year old. However, the necessary legislative amendments have not yet entered into force.

4. Uptake of leave

a. Maternity leave

Norwegian administrative statistics show that a high and increasing share of mothers receive earnings-related parental benefits at birth. Recent figures⁴²³ indicate that the proportion of mothers receiving parental benefits increased from about 70 per cent in 2000 to 83 per cent in 2023, while the proportion receiving the lump-sum grant declined from 24 per cent to 13 per cent. Together, these developments indicate that the vast majority of mothers are now covered by either parental benefits or the lump-sum grant, with only a very small share receiving neither.

This development reflects both increased labour market participation among mothers and reduced reliance on the lump-sum grant, meaning that most mothers are now covered by earnings-related parental benefits.

Among Norwegian-born mothers, the share receiving parental benefits is higher (around 93 per cent), indicating stronger labour market attachment. The gap between all mothers and Norwegian-born mothers suggests that immigrant mothers are more likely to lack entitlement to earnings-related parental benefits and therefore more often rely on the lump-sum grant.

b. Paternity leave

There is no separate official registration of short leave periods taken by fathers at the time of birth. This leave (*omsorgspermisjon*) is typically taken either as employer-paid leave or, where such coverage is not available, through the use of parental benefit days, and is therefore not recorded as a distinct category in administrative statistics. As a result, systematic data on the uptake of this short leave is limited, while fathers' use of Parental leave is well documented.

c. Parental leave

In the years prior to the introduction of the father's quota, fewer than 4 per cent of fathers took any Parental leave. Only a few years later, uptake had risen to over 70 per cent. More recent evidence indicates that leave-taking is now close to universal: the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development reports that around 90 per cent of Norwegian fathers take Parental leave (based on cohort data from 2022).⁴²⁴

⁴²³ NOU 2026: 2 *Politikk for nye generasjoner: Årsaker, konsekvenser og tiltak knyttet til lave fødselstall* [Policy for new generations: Causes, consequences, and measures related to low birth rates]. Barne- og familiedepartementet. Available at: <https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/a931edce166d4f5fb0dd282e5149784b/no/pdf/s/nou202620260002000dddpdfs.pdf>

⁴²⁴ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2025) *Paid leave for fathers*. OECD Publishing. Available at: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/paid-leave-for-fathers_07442bed-en/full-report.html

National statistics provide more detailed insight into how this leave is used.⁴²⁵ According to Statistics Norway, 67.5 per cent of fathers took the full father's quota or more of the parental benefit period before the child reached 3 years of age, based on the 2020–2021 cohorts, an increase from 59.1 per cent in 2013.

More recent data from NAV show that, in 2025, 68,300 fathers received parental benefits, an increase of 6.4 per cent from 2024. In the same year, 37.4 per cent of fathers receiving benefits at the 100 per cent rate and 25.3 per cent of those receiving benefits at the 80 per cent rate took the full father's quota or more, both representing a decline from 2024. This may be related to the increase in the share of parents choosing the 80 per cent compensation option following the extension of the benefit period in 2024. Uptake varies by region, with fathers in Oslo and Akershus taking the most leave and fathers in Agder taking the least.^{426,427}

Beyond these descriptive patterns, Kvande and Bungum (2025) highlight the role of the father's quota in shaping fathers' leave-taking behaviour and contributing to greater gender equality in the care of young children.⁴²⁸ By granting fathers an individual, earmarked and non-transferable right, the welfare state has helped establish leave-taking as a norm of modern fathering, while the relatively high level of compensation has strengthened it as an accepted right in working life. This pattern is also observed among Polish migrant fathers' use of the Norwegian Parental leave system.⁴²⁹ Among this group, the father's quota is understood as a statutory and employer-accepted right, and earmarked leave is experienced as an important opportunity to care for their children. Compared with leave arrangements in their countries of origin, these provisions are seen as enabling greater involvement in childcare and closer father–child relationships.

Despite the widespread uptake of the father's quota, important gender inequalities remain in the overall distribution of leave.⁴³⁰ Results from the Parental Benefit Survey 2021 show that parents largely follow the statutory quota structure, with fathers taking approximately one third of the total parental benefit period (the father's quota) and mothers taking two thirds (the mother's quota plus most of the shared period). Mothers also take unpaid leave more often and for longer periods: 48 per cent of mothers and 11 per cent of fathers took unpaid leave after

⁴²⁵ Statistics Norway (2024) *How many fathers take paternity leave?* Available at: <https://www.ssb.no/en/befolkning/likestilling/statistikk/indikatorer-for-kjonnsligestilling-i-kommunene/Articles%20for%20Indicators%20for%20gender%20equality%20in%20municipalities/how-many-fathers-take-paternity-leave>

⁴²⁶ NAV (2025) *Quarterly parental benefit statistics*. Available at: <https://www.nav.no/no/nav-og-samfunn/statistikk/familie-statistikk/foreldrepenger-engangsstonad-og-svangerskapsperger>

⁴²⁷ These annual figures should be interpreted with caution, as fathers often take leave across multiple years.

⁴²⁸ Kvande, E. and Bungum, B. (2025) 'Leave policies in Norway', in Duvander, A.-Z., Arnalds, Á. A. and Lammi-Taskula, J. (eds.) *Paid Parental leave and social sustainability in the Nordic countries* (TemaNord 2025:547). Nordic Information on Gender.

⁴²⁹ Bungum, B. and Kvande, E. (2022) 'Polish migrant fathers using Parental leave in Norway', *Journal of Family Research*, Vol.34, 4: 912–931. <https://doi.org/10.20377/jfr-753>

⁴³⁰ Bakken, F. (2022) *Ulønnet og lønnet foreldrepermisjon — mødre og fedres bruk og vurderinger* [Unpaid and paid Parental leave — use and assessments by mothers and fathers]. *Arbeid og velferd*, (1). NAV.

the paid parental benefit period, with mothers averaging 16 weeks and fathers 11 weeks. The imbalance between mothers and fathers in overall leave-taking is therefore greater than figures for paid leave alone suggest.

This pattern is closely linked to the design of the Parental leave system itself. Bakken (2023) shows how the Norwegian parental benefit scheme, with its mother's quota, father's quota and shared period, functions as a normative framework shaping how parents allocate time at home.⁴³¹ The number of paid days taken by mothers and fathers shows little association with their stated satisfaction with the distribution, suggesting that policy design and quota structures exert a strong influence on how leave is divided.

At a broader level, cross-national evidence further indicates that Parental leave policies are associated with social norms regarding the division of childcare. A study across 48 countries finds that the availability of Parental leave is linked to more egalitarian norms, particularly regarding what individuals believe parents should do, while changes in perceptions of actual behaviour appear to emerge more gradually over time.⁴³²

At the same time, cross-national research on leave intentions shows that gender differences persist.⁴³³ A study of 13,942 young adults across 37 countries finds that women intend to take longer leave than men in every country surveyed, including those with generous, non-transferable father's quota systems such as Norway. The gender gap in leave intentions is larger in more gender-egalitarian policy contexts, driven primarily by women intending to take more leave rather than men intending to take less.

Taken together, these findings suggest that while Parental leave policies are associated with more egalitarian normative contexts, gender differences persist in both leave intentions and actual leave-taking.

Annex: The Importance of Studying Registered Uptake vs. Actual Use: Implications for Gender Equality

High rates of fathers' leave uptake are often cited as evidence of progress towards gender equality in the distribution of care. Recent research from Norway suggests that uptake rates alone are insufficient indicators. The ways in which leave is taken, including its timing, flexibility, and conditions of use, are also consequential for gender equality outcomes.

Evidence from Norwegian register data supports this point. Andresen and Nix (2026) find that Parental leave reforms, despite very high uptake among fathers, do not reduce the child penalty for women.⁴³⁴ Fathers who take leave under a non-transferable quota are more likely to take leave during summer holidays, when children are already in formal care, and to take part of their leave on a part-time

⁴³¹ Bakken, F. (2023) *Tatt av kvinnen — eller hvem bestemmer egentlig mest i fordelingen av foreldrepengeperioden?* [Taken by the woman — or who really decides the most in the distribution of the parental allowance period]. *Arbeid og velferd*, (1–2023). NAV.

⁴³² Schindler, S., Schuster, C., Olsson, M.I.T., Froehlich, L., Hübner, A.-K., Block, K., et al. (2024) '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*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12806>

⁴³³ Olsson, M.I.T., van Grootel, S., Block, K., Schuster, C., Meeussen, L., Van Laar, C., et al. (2023) 'Gender gap in Parental leave intentions: Evidence from 37 countries', *Political Psychology*, Vol. 44, 6: 1163–1192. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12880>

⁴³⁴ Andresen, M. E., and Nix, E. (2026) 'You cannot force me into caregiving: Paternity leave and the child penalty', *The Economic Journal*, Vol.136(674): 780–797. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ej/ueaf057>

basis. These patterns may reflect efforts to reduce career disruption. Descriptive evidence further indicates that mothers' child penalties are almost 10 percentage points smaller in families where fathers voluntarily take leave than in families where fathers are induced to take leave through Parental leave quotas. This suggests that the conditions under which leave is taken may shape its consequences for gender inequality.

One important condition shaping Parental leave use is the work setting. Halrynjo and Kitterød (2025) explore how different workplace dynamics, especially the degree of individual competition, interact with fatherhood ideals and fathers' actual leave practices.⁴³⁵ They find strong adherence to the ideals of 'involved fatherhood' and the father's quota across educational levels and workplace contexts, but substantial variation in actual practices. Their analyses show how *childcare responsibility* and *absence from work responsibilities* do not necessarily correspond, and how *formal leave uptake* and *actual leave practices* may differ. The findings indicate that non-transferable fathers' leave may dissolve former attitude-based divisions, as fathers across educational levels in collectively organised jobs support and practice child-centred leave. Still, fathers in competitive jobs may continue to practice 'work-centred fatherhood' despite strong gender-egalitarian beliefs and formal leave uptake. Hence, workplace dynamics—especially the degree of *individualized competition* and the *fear of becoming replaceable*—may be more relevant than fatherhood ideals for understanding and enhancing fathers' actual leave use and involved fatherhood practices.

The role of workplace context is further illustrated in a qualitative study of parents in the Norwegian finance and banking sector (Halrynjo and Mangset, 2022).⁴³⁶ The study documents systematic differences in leave use between mothers and fathers in a sector characterised by individual client portfolios and continuous competition. Fathers typically postpone, split, or compress leave to maintain client relationships, while mothers take longer uninterrupted leave periods and often return having lost clients to colleagues who substituted for them during their leave. As a result, gendered wage and career trajectories persist alongside supportive leave policies, reflecting the structural logic of client-based work.

Halrynjo and Mangset (2025)⁴³⁷ introduce the concept of substitutability structures to explain variation in career penalties, distinguishing between more individualised and more collective forms of organising responsibility and rewards. In roles based on individual client relationships or characterised by low substitutability, absence during leave may have lasting asymmetric consequences for women and men, given differences in leave duration and flexibility. This perspective highlights how structural features of labour markets may sustain the motherhood penalty, even

⁴³⁵ Halrynjo, S. and Kitterød, R. H. (2025) 'Child-centered versus work-centered fathers' leave: Changing fatherhood ideals versus persisting workplace dynamics', *Social Sciences*, Vol. 14, 2, Article 113. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci14020113>

⁴³⁶ Halrynjo, S. and Mangset, M. (2022) 'Parental leave vs. competition for clients: Motherhood penalty in competitive work environments', *Journal of Family Research*, Vol. 34, 3: 932-957. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.20377/jfr-751>

⁴³⁷ Halrynjo, S. and Mangset, M. (2025) 'Motherhood penalty—beyond bias? From stereotypes to substitutability structures', *Social Politics*, Vol.32, No.4: 729–755. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxae027>

in contexts with high levels of family-friendly policies and relatively low levels of discrimination.

Empirical studies across Norwegian professional sectors, particularly finance, provide further support for this perspective. In finance, Halrynjo and Myklebust (2025) explore how care responsibilities, particularly Parental leave, may create risks of being replaced and thereby losing clients, responsibilities, and rewards in portfolio-based careers.⁴³⁸ They identify three strategies used to manage the individual cost of substitutability and minimise career and pay setbacks while utilising Parental leave. The strategies show a clear gendered pattern:

1) Fathers often adapt their leave to less work-intensive periods and maintain partial availability for clients while on leave, thereby avoiding bonus reduction and client loss.

2) Mothers, constrained by pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding, and caregiving norms, take longer and less adjustable leave and therefore typically either accept the costs of substitutability, including loss of bonuses and clients, or transition to employee-based careers where the individual costs of substitutability are lower.

3) An emerging strategy for taking Parental leave with reduced substitutability costs is to share client relationships, responsibilities, and bonuses with selected colleagues before, during, and after leave. Strengthening collaboration and reducing dependence on individualised responsibility and bonuses may lower the personal costs of being replaced during Parental leave, sick leave, and other care-related absences. However, for this to become a sustainable and gender-equal strategy, it would need to be more widely adopted and involve men as well as women.

Finally, Moen (2026) highlights variation among fathers themselves.⁴³⁹ A qualitative study of two male-dominated organisations finds that leave uptake varies across institutional contexts. For fathers in temporary positions, continuous leave may be perceived as risky, as absence can reduce the likelihood of securing permanent employment. In such cases, flexibility may become important for enabling leave use.

Taken together, these studies indicate that uptake statistics alone do not capture how leave is used or its implications for gender equality. The effects of Parental leave depend on how leave is organised in practice, how it interacts with gender norms, and how workplace structures shape opportunities and constraints. Assessing the impact of leave policy therefore requires attention to both the quantity of leave use and the conditions under which leave is taken and experienced.

⁴³⁸ Halrynjo, S. and Myklebust, R. B. (2025) *Availability and substitutability in finance: Gender equality challenges when the dynamics of the global financial market meet the Norwegian work-family model*, Oslo: CORE/Institute for Social Research. Available at: <https://hdl.handle.net/11250/5328118>

⁴³⁹ Moen, L.V. (2026) *Fedrekvoten i grenseløst arbeid og i løsarbeid: Betydningen av ulike arbeidskontekster for bruk av fedrekvote* [The father's quota in borderless work and gig work: The significance of different work contexts for using the father's quota] (Doctoral dissertation, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Faculty of Social and Educational Sciences, Department of Sociology and Political Science), Trondheim: NTNU.