

Protect the Future: Maternity, Paternity and Work- Gender equality at the heart of decent work, Campaign 2008-2009

Maternity protection for employed women is an essential element in equality of opportunity. It seeks to enable women to combine their reproductive and productive roles successfully, and to prevent unequal treatment in employment due to women's reproductive role. Historically, maternity protection has been a central concern of the ILO since its creation and among the first international labour standards to be adopted in 1919 was Convention No. 3 concerning the employment of women before and after childbirth.

The elements of maternity protection covered by the most recent standards concerned with maternity protection, Convention No. 183 and Recommendation No. 191 (2000), are maternity leave (the mother's right to a period of rest in relation to childbirth); cash and medical benefits (the right to cash benefits during absence for maternity); protection of the health of mother and child during pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding; the mother's right to breastfeed a child after her return to work; and employment protection and non-discrimination (guaranteeing the woman employment security and the right to return to the same job or an equivalent one with the same pay). Convention No. 183 also broadened the scope of coverage to include women working in the informal economy and in atypical forms of dependent work. These women have often not received any legal protection, and it is their maternal health that is most at risk.

National laws designed to protect the health of mother and child and the employment rights of working women figure prominently in the legislation of almost every ILO member State. There are, however, significant variations in the scope of coverage, the extent of protection, the complexity of the schemes in force, and the respective responsibilities of the State and of individual employers for the provision of cash benefits.

Paternity leave is seen as an important reconciliation of work and family life for men, as well as an assistance to women. Paternity leave is a short period of leave taken by a father around the time of the birth of his child. Paternity leave provisions are becoming more common around the world, reflecting evolving views of fatherhood and parenting roles and the needs of men as well as women for reconciling work and family life. This shift in relationships and perceptions may herald more gender-balanced approaches to caregiving and unpaid work.

In June 2004, the International Labour Conference adopted a Resolution on Gender Equality, Pay Equity and Maternity Protection, which links maternity protection to non-discrimination by calling on all governments to ratify and apply Conventions Nos. 100 and calling on all the social partners to contribute actively to the elimination of gender discrimination and the promotion of gender equality.

Find out more:

- [ILO-Conditions of Work and Employment Programme \(TRAVAIL\)](#)
- [ILO- Social Security Department \(SECSOC\)](#)
- [ILO- Bureau for Employers' Activities on gender equality \(ACT/EMP\)](#)
- [ILO- Bureau for Workers' Activities \(ACTRAV\) on gender equality and maternity protection](#)
- [ILO Conventions and Recommendations on maternity protection](#)
- [Gender Equality and Decent Work - Selected ILO Conventions and Recommendations Promoting Gender Equality](#)