



Family-Friendly Policies in Rich Countries:

How Canada Compares

UNICEF RESEARCH BRIEF
Canadian Companion

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Family-Friendly Policies in Rich Countries: How Canada Compares

This Canadian Companion distils and interprets data from UNICEF Research Brief, *Family-Friendly Policies in Rich Countries*. Visit oneyouth.unicef.ca/en/public-policy for this report. Data sources and full references are cited in the UNICEF Research Brief.

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ABOUT THIS REPORT

Family-friendly policies including paid parental leave and high-quality early child education and care (ECEC) help parents reconcile their child care, employment and other responsibilities. They should also, and primarily, be good for children. Canada has been advancing family-friendly public policies at all levels of government for decades, including significant changes over the past few years. How good are our policies? International comparison can help answer that question.

The UNICEF Research Brief reviews key family-friendly policies in 41 countries that are part of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and/or the European Union (EU). The analysis draws on the most recent

comparable data and focuses on childcare-related leave for parents and centre-based early childcare and education services for children. The focus is on four basic dimensions of these public policies. A lack of data prevents measuring countries in relation to important employment and parenting reconciliation policies such as support for breastfeeding, and important policy dimensions such as the quality of early childcare and education. The review does not include other important, public, child-focused policies such as income benefits and compassionate care benefits, or broader public policies that directly affect families and children such as those shaping employment and income inequality¹. Likewise, it does not review private services and policies.

This Canadian Companion to the UNICEF Research Brief, *Family-Friendly Policies in Rich Countries*, finds that significant gaps remain between Canada and its peer countries in key family-friendly policies, and too many Canadian children are left out of the benefits of these policies and services. Canada ranks in the middle among other rich countries in the provision of parental leave available to mothers (19th of 41) and in the provision of dedicated leave available to fathers and second parents (16th* of 41). We lack sufficient data to report on early childcare and education, but it is fair to say with the data we have that Canada falls far behind. Many of the world's richest countries fail to offer comprehensive solutions for all families.

*Estimated ranking based on the 2019 policy that introduced paid leave reserved for fathers; it is not directly comparable to other countries given the 2016 base year for their policies

CANADA'S RANKING IN KEY FAMILY-FRIENDLY POLICIES IN 41 COUNTRIES

Parental leave available to mothers:
RANK: 19TH

Dedicated leave available to fathers and second parents:
RANK: 16TH

WHY FAMILY-FRIENDLY POLICIES MATTER

Family policies matter for children, their families and their societies. Maternity leave allows mothers to recover from pregnancy and childbirth and to bond with their children. It also facilitates breastfeeding, which has many positive, long-term benefits for children's nutrition, health and development (Baker and Milligan 2008). A well-paid, protected leave from work also helps female employees maintain earnings and attachment to the labour market, and lifts children out of poverty, particularly if other supportive policies and social norms are in place. If taken up, leave reserved for fathers and second parents can promote the equitable distribution

of care in the home and help both parents to bond with their children. After the end of parental leave, most children attend early childhood education and care (ECEC), but some infants also require ECEC. High quality ECEC can foster children's socialization and skill development (Silva 2014), improve later education achievement and help parents to reconcile their private and professional roles while helping close gaps for disadvantaged children (Pronzato 2009; Brilli et. al., 2016). This is good for children, good for parents and good for the social and economic vitality of their societies. These policies also tend to generate more economic benefit than they cost.

¹ For a more detailed comparison of a range of public leave policies, see <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318324882>

THE LEAGUE TABLE OF FAMILY-FRIENDLY POLICIES

Rich countries use different combinations of parental leave and childcare and education services to help children and families and advance social and economic goals. The league table ranks each country on four indicators (see figure 1):

1. Duration of paid leave available to mothers (even if the father or second parent can take some of it);
2. Duration of paid leave reserved specifically for fathers (i.e. only the father or second parent can use it);
3. The share of children below the age of 3 attending centre-based care; and
4. The share of children between the age of 3 and compulsory school age attending preschool or centre-based care.

A country's overall ranking is based on the average of these four rankings.

Figure 1: League Table: Indicators of family-friendly policies (2016)

Rank	Country	Paid leave available to mothers (weeks, full-rate equivalent)	Paid leave reserved for fathers (weeks, full-rate equivalent)	Childcare enrolment, under 3 (%)	Childcare enrolment, between age 3 and school age (%)
1	Sweden	34.7	10.9	51.0	96.7
2	Norway	45.0	9.8	52.1	89.5
3	Iceland	15.5	7.8	64.7	99.0
4	Estonia	85.0	2.0	30.2	92.8
5	Portugal	20.4	12.5	49.9	92.0
6	Germany	42.6	5.7	32.6	91.8
6	Denmark	26.8	1.1	70.0	95.9
8	Slovenia	48.4	2.6	39.5	89.9
9	Luxembourg	26.0	10.4	50.9	87.1
10	France	18.8	5.6	48.9	94.0
11	Austria	51.2	6.9	20.5	88.8
12	Finland	40.6	5.7	32.6	83.9
13	Belgium	13.1	5.0	43.8	98.6
14	Spain	16.0	2.1	39.3	95.2
15	Netherlands	16.0	0.4	53.0	93.5
16	Lithuania	62.0	4.0	15.2	78.4
16	Hungary	71.8	1.0	15.6	86.8
16	Latvia	53.3	1.1	28.3	81.9
19	Italy	25.2	0.4	34.4	92.6
20	Bulgaria	65.5	1.7	12.5	74.7
20	Romania	48.2	4.7	17.4	60.8
22	Croatia	38.7	2.9	15.6	51.3
23	Poland	41.6	2.0	7.8	61.0
24	Czech Republic	53.1	0.0	4.7	80.9
25	Malta	15.7	0.2	31.4	88.1
26	Slovakia	53.7	0.0	0.5	77.3
27	Ireland	8.9	0.0	28.6	92.8
28	United Kingdom	12.1	0.4	28.5	73.4
29	Cyprus	13.5	0.0	24.9	78.5
30	Greece	23.3	0.4	8.9	55.5
31	Switzerland	7.9	0.0	29.8	66.0
	Japan	35.8	30.4		
	Republic of Korea	25.0	17.2		
	Chile	30.0	1.0		
	Canada	27.4	0.0		
	Mexico	12.0	1.0		
	Turkey	10.6	1.0		
	Israel	14.0	0.0		
	Australia	7.6	0.8		
	New Zealand	7.7	0.0		
	United States	0.0	0.0		

Notes:

- A light blue background indicates a place in the top third of the ranking; medium blue denotes the middle third; and dark blue the bottom third. The blank cells indicate there are no data available for this comparison.
- Canada is not included in the overall ranking (column 1) because the 2019 policy that introduced paid leave reserved for fathers post-dated the 2016 base year for the other countries (column 4), and because Canada does not collect comparable childcare data (columns 5 and 6).

Sources: See Box 1.

Box 1: Data definitions

This brief covers nationwide statutory entitlements only. There may be additional provisions within countries that vary across and within regions and employment sectors.

Maternity leave includes job-protected leave for employed women, typically starting just before the time of childbirth (or near the time of adoption, in some countries).

Paid leave available to mothers combines maternity leave and paid parental leave (or homecare leave) that can be used by the mother (i.e., not reserved for the father or second parent), expressed in full-rate equivalent (FRE) weeks. Unpaid leave is not included. Source: OECD Family Database, Table PF2.1.A (updated 26.10.2017).

Paternity leave refers to job-protected leave for fathers or second parents/caregivers at the time of childbirth or soon after.

Paid leave reserved for fathers combines paid paternity leave and paid parental leave reserved exclusively for

fathers or second caregivers, expressed in full-rate equivalent (FRE) weeks. Unpaid leave is not included. Source: OECD Family Database, Table PF2.1.B (updated 26.10.2017).

Parental leave (as well as homecare/childcare leave) includes job-protected leave for employed parents.

Childcare enrolment is the percentage of children in their age group (under 3 or between the age of 3 and compulsory school age) who attend centre-based childcare or preschool education services. Source: Eurostat (last update 23.01.2019; ilc_caindformal; EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions 2016; latest data for 2014 used for Switzerland).

Father refers to the father, or second parent/caregiver in the household in some country policies including Canada.

FRE is the duration of leave in weeks * average payment rate (as percentage of average national earnings) received by the claimant over the duration of leave.

OVERALL, HERE IS HOW THE WORLD'S RICHEST COUNTRIES STAND FOR THEIR YOUNG CHILDREN:


Sweden, Norway and Iceland occupy the top three places in the league table of family-friendly policies.

Cyprus, Greece and Switzerland are the only countries that placed in the bottom third in three out of four indicators.

The **Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia** rank in the bottom third of the summary ranking, despite their generous leave provisions for mothers. Their low ranking is primarily due to poor access to ECEC.

The **United States** is the only OECD country without nationwide statutory paid maternity leave, paternity leave or parental leave.

No country ranks consistently high or low on all four indicators. This suggests that some countries facilitate young children's care in the home (some predominantly by mothers), while others prioritize accessible and affordable centre-based services.

 **Canada** is excluded from the overall ranking because federal, provincial and territorial governments do not collect, coordinate and report data for ECEC in the same way that most rich countries do. However, we can compare Canada's parental leave policies, which earn a middle ranking.

HOW DO RICH COUNTRIES STAND?

PAID LEAVE FOR MOTHERS

Canada Ranks:

19TH

Top performer:

ESTONIA

On duration of paid leave available for mothers (typically combined maternity and parental leaves), Canada ranks a middle 19th of 38 countries, with 27.4 statutory FRE weeks available to mothers (figure 2). Quebec would rank 17th with 35 statutory FRE weeks available to mothers.

Paid leave for mothers averaged around 18 weeks across the OECD and 22 weeks across EU in 2016. At the top of the league table, the full-rate equivalent of paid leave available to mothers (maternity leave plus parental leave not reserved specifically for the father) is 85 weeks in Estonia, followed by

Hungary's 72 weeks. These countries, along with Finland and Slovakia, allow mothers to stay at home until the child is three years old.

Focusing on remuneration, female employees in Estonia – the country with the longest leave for mothers – can take job-protected leave around the birth of a child and continue to receive their full salary until the child is 18 months old (comprising 20 weeks of fully paid maternity leave plus the first 62 weeks of parental leave paid up to a ceiling). Then the payment rate drops to just 38 euros (\$57 CAD²) a month until the end of parental leave (around the child's third birthday). The entitlements in Hungary are nearly as generous in full-rate equivalent terms but are structured differently: 24 weeks of maternity leave are paid at 70 per cent of previous earnings followed by parental leave paid at 70 per cent of previous earnings up to a ceiling until the child's second birthday (similar to

Quebec's rate of remuneration for the Basic Plan). Then a flat-rate benefit (28,500 HUF or \$134 CAD per month) until the child's third birthday³. In Sweden, the first 390 days of parental leave are paid up to 80 per cent of salary, and leave time can be taken up until the child is eight.

Only 27 out of 41 countries offer paid parental leave (available to either parent). In 14 of the 27 countries (about half of countries) this leave is fully paid (i.e., at 100 per cent of previous earnings), in contrast to 55 per cent in Canada and 70 per cent in Quebec. Parental leave tends to be longer than maternity leave in rich countries but is usually paid at a lower rate, if at all. If Canada remunerated its leave available to mothers at 100 per cent, it would rank 9th instead of 19th. Mothers are more likely to take parental leave even in the countries where a portion of parental leave is reserved for fathers (OECD 2016).

The international standard for maternity leave in the 2000 Maternity Protection Convention is a minimum of 14 weeks at no less than two-thirds (close to 70%) of pay.

² Based on a conversion rate of CAD * 1.5 EUR

³ Based on a conversion rate of CAD * 0.0047 HUF

Box 2: Leave for parents and children in Canada

Canada offers 15 weeks of maternity benefits (available exclusively to birth mothers); 35 weeks of parental benefits (available to either parent); and, beginning in 2019, 5 weeks of paternity benefits (available exclusively to the father or second parent) for a total of 55 weeks. These are remunerated at a rate of 55 per cent of average weekly insurable earnings to a maximum adjusted annually. To qualify, the parent must have worked a minimum of 600 hours in the last 52 weeks (or \$6,888 CND in earnings if self-employed, along with other qualifications), and there is a one week waiting period to receive benefits. There is a flexible duration option in that parental benefits can extend to 61 weeks and dedicated father's leave to 8 weeks at a remuneration rate of 33 per cent.

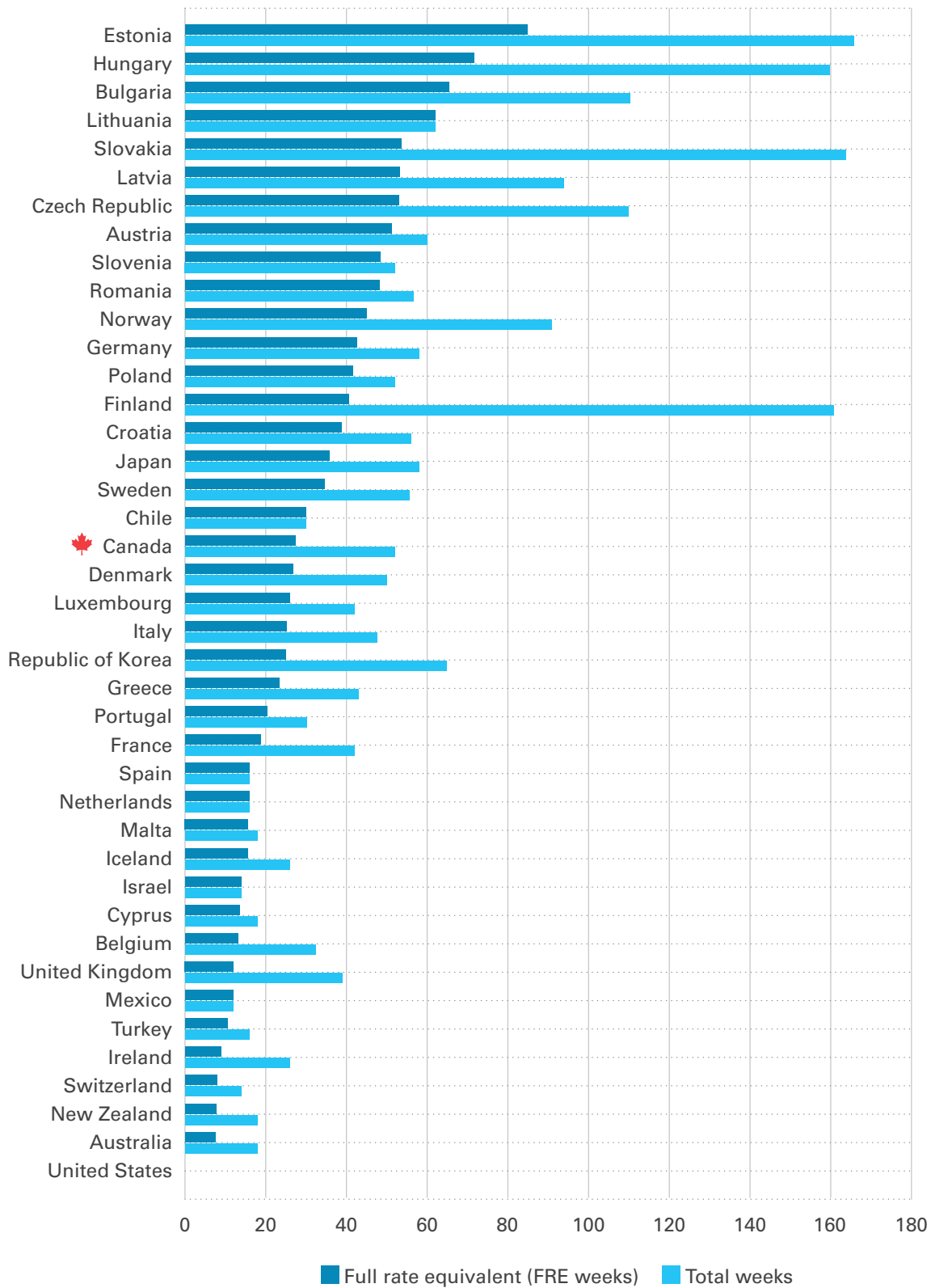
In Quebec, a distinct Parental Insurance Plan provides a Basic Plan of 18 weeks of maternity benefits; 32 weeks

of parental benefits; and 5 weeks of paternity benefits for a total of 55 weeks, remunerated at 70 per cent. It is more generous in remuneration (by an additional 15 per cent) than the standard Canada program. The Special Plan provides 15 weeks of maternity benefits; 25 weeks of parental benefits; and 3 weeks of paternity benefits for a total of 43 weeks at a higher rate of remuneration (75 per cent). Quebec also provides a more flexible and accessible qualifier of \$2,000 earned income (CND), a much higher maximum benefit, and no waiting period.

Both Canada and Quebec programs provide a low-income subsidy of up to 80 per cent and exclude adopted children and their parents from maternity leave. Leave must be taken very close to the birth of the child.

Half the world's rich countries offer at least six months of leave at full pay for mothers.

Figure 2: Paid leave available to mothers (2016)



Source: OECD Family Database Table PF2.1.A (last updated 26/10/2017).

PAID LEAVE FOR FATHERS

Canada Ranks:

41ST

Top performer:

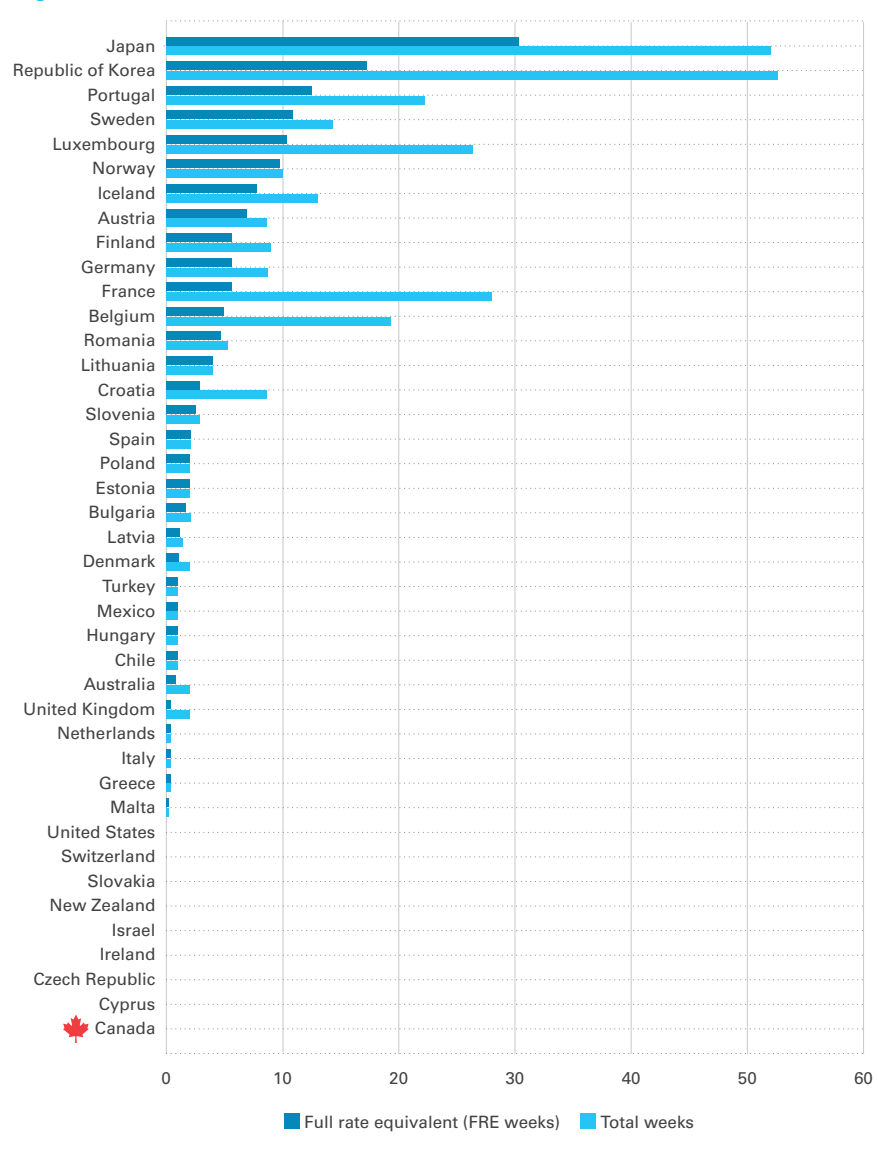
JAPAN

On the second of the four indicators, paid leave for fathers (or second parents in some countries including Canada), Canada tied for last in the league table, which is based on 2016 policies, as it was one of the countries that did not provide paid leave specific to fathers or second parents (outside of Quebec) (figure 3). However, Canada introduced a “dedicated” leave option in 2019 that provides 5 weeks exclusively for their use at a remuneration rate of 55 per cent (or 8 weeks with a lower rate of remuneration at 33 per cent).

This would earn Canada a middle rank of 16th in the league table based on a FRE of 2.75. Quebec would also rank in the middle at 15th based on its Basic Plan (5 weeks at a remuneration rate of 70 per cent and an FRE of 3.5). This ranking is indicative only, because we base it on a 2019 policy for Canada (2006 for Quebec), while the policies for other countries are based on 2016.

Out of 41 countries, 32 offer statutory paid leave for fathers through dedicated paternity leave and/or through parental leave. If available, dedicated paternity leave tends to be shorter than maternity leave but is often paid at a higher rate. While only 26 out of 41 countries

Figure 3: Paid leave reserved for fathers (2016)



Source: OECD Family Database Table PF2.1.A (last updated 26/10/2017).

provide paid, dedicated paternity leave, 16 of these countries guarantee 100 per cent salary replacement.

In 14 of these countries, fathers are entitled to two weeks of paid leave or less. Japan offers the longest entitlement with 30 weeks of leave at full pay. Only in four countries – Iceland,

Japan, Korea and Portugal – does the leave reserved for fathers make up at least a third of all available paid leave. In Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Norway, Spain and Sweden the father’s share is more than a tenth of the total allocated time. Norway provides 10 weeks and Sweden reserves 90 days for fathers.

In the remaining 19 countries with any fathers' leave, including Canada, the father's share can be considered symbolic, as it covers less than 10 per cent of total time. In some countries, such as Iceland, the leave reserved for fathers was short at the time of its introduction but has been incrementally extended to the point of parity with the leave reserved for mothers.

However, having a policy does not translate into take-up. In Canada, 12 per cent of fathers outside Quebec have been taking parental leave (as of 2015), prior to the introduction of dedicated leave in 2019. This compared to 86 per cent in Quebec where a dedicated father's/second parent's leave has been available since 2006 (McKay et. al., 2016). It remains to be seen how many fathers and second parents will take up Canada's new dedicated leave.

Low take-up is widely attributed to perceived peer pressure, cultural norms and gender roles. It can be influenced by type of employment, workplace culture and policies and stage of career. In countries with wider income inequality, there can also be job security concerns that limit uptake. Participation is much higher where the leave is exclusive to fathers.

The statutory duration and pay of parents' leave is just one aspect of parental leave that indicates how countries give priority to children and families. The participation of children and parents varies widely, in part because there are variations in leave policies based on eligibility and remuneration, and in part due to other policies and social norms related to parenting, gender roles and employment.

While the longest leave durations may be good for children, it is debatable whether they are the most desirable public policies for women, families or societies if the leave is not shared relatively equitably between parents or excludes many children.

Considering Canada's middle ranking, there is room to improve and to move up the league table, particularly by increasing the rate of remuneration, though this should be done in tandem with expanding inclusivity and equity. Norway, Germany, Japan, Finland and Sweden have more generous FRE leave provisions for mothers than does Canada. In contrast, leave is less than 10 FRE weeks in Australia, Ireland, New Zealand and Switzerland. If Canada sustained a 50-week leave entitlement for mothers but remunerated it at 70 per cent, its FRE would be 35 (like Quebec) and its ranking would be 17th, up from 19th of 41 countries. **At a remuneration rate of 100 per cent for mother's leave entitlements, Canada's ranking would be 9th (with a FRE of 50). If both Canada and Quebec provided a 100 per cent salary replacement for paternity leave, they would rank 12th along with Belgium (with a FRE of 5).**

However, even the strongest FRE policies can exclude too many children, and disproportionately disadvantage some groups of children. In Canada, parents who qualify use almost all of the parental leave they are entitled to (Doucet et. al., 2017). However, adopted children, Indigenous children and children with low-income, precariously or non-standard employed parents are disproportionately excluded because of narrow eligibility requirements (Robson

2017). Close to 40 per cent of mothers in Canada outside Quebec are excluded from maternity and parental benefits in contrast to about 10 per cent of Quebec mothers; and 56 per cent of low-income families are excluded outside Quebec in contrast to 15 per cent in Quebec (McKay et. al., 2016). About 25 per cent of parents in Canada outside Quebec did not work enough hours to qualify for parental leave benefits in recent years studied (McKay et. al., 2016). Women and non-standard workers were less likely to qualify than men and full-time workers, even though many are contributing to Employment Insurance.

For many families, insufficient remuneration limits their ability to take up available leave time. Despite a family supplement that raises the wage replacement rate to 80 per cent for low-income parents, short leave-takers (who return to work after five months) are more likely to have low incomes (McKay et. al., 2016). A new Statistics Canada survey on Early Learning and Child Care Arrangements found that about one-quarter of children under the age of one year old were in child care (Statistics Canada 2019), which in formal settings tends to be more expensive than in informal settings. The published survey results did not report why infants were in child care, but the availability of affordable infant and child care is a concern for parents excluded from leave. Where leave is unequal for parents, the policy is also unequal for their children. Quebec has a higher rate of remuneration and fewer qualifying hours, as well as broader public policies and social norms that support both higher and more equitable participation in parental leave.

EARLY CHILDCARE AND EDUCATION

Canada does not report data about childcare enrolment for the age ranges measured by the OECD, on which the league table is based. Therefore, we cannot make accurate, direct comparisons. However, based on the data we have, children in Canada do not have the best opportunities to participate in early childcare and education.

There is wide international variation in younger children’s participation in early learning programs. Overall, more than 50 per cent of children age 3 and older attend preschool in most wealthy countries. But at least 80 per cent

attend in two-thirds of rich countries, with near-universal enrolment in Belgium, Denmark, Iceland, Spain and Sweden. For children under age 3, enrolment rates are below 50 per cent in nearly all rich countries. In only six countries do enrolment rates for under-threes exceed 50 per cent: Luxembourg and Sweden (51 per cent), Norway (52 per cent), Iceland (65 per cent) and Denmark (70 per cent).

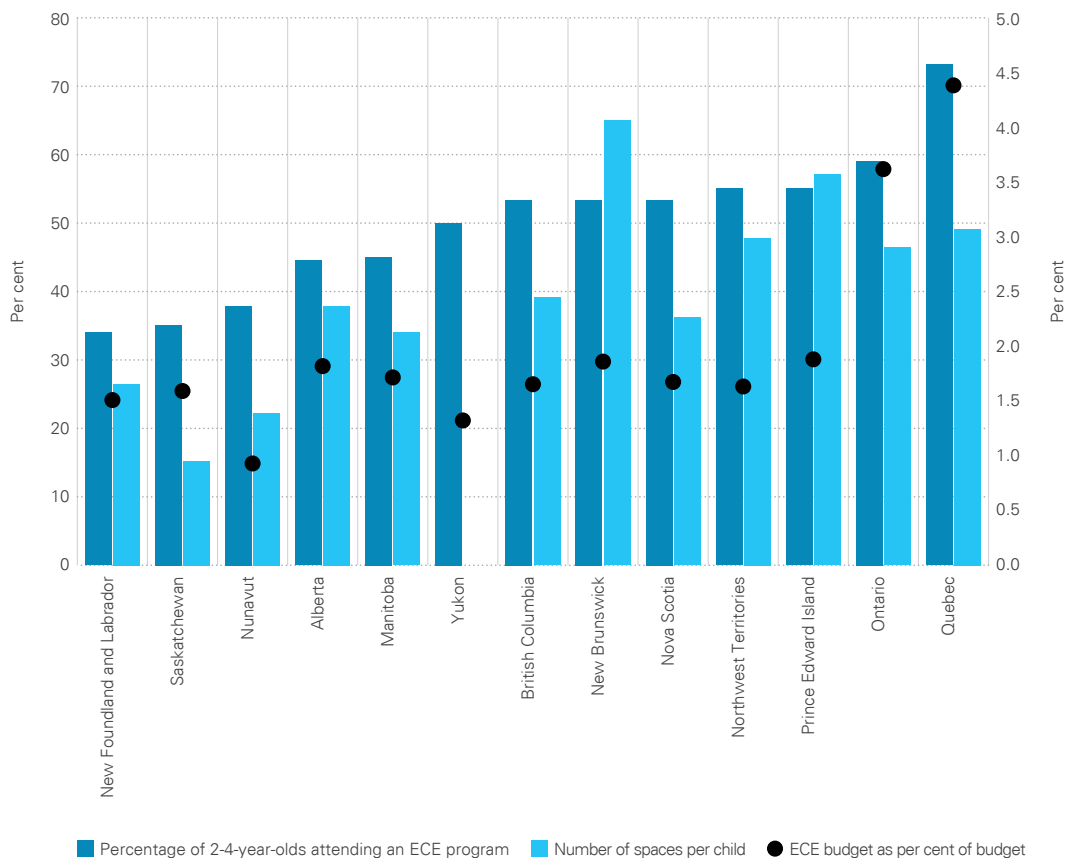
In Canada, 54 per cent of 2-4-year-olds attend centre-based early childhood education and care, but this figure hides substantial variation between the

provinces and territories. The enrolment rate ranges from just 34 per cent in Newfoundland to 73 per cent in Quebec.⁴

Although variation in centre-based childcare enrolment rates may partly be due to differences in parental preferences, cultural norms and availability of informal care options (e.g., by grandparents), there are also differences in the availability and affordability of formal services. Where early childcare and education is a legal entitlement for every child, regardless of the income or employment status of

4 Akbari, E. and McCuaig, K. (2018) Early Childhood Education Report 2017. Toronto: Atkinson Centre/University of Toronto. <http://ecereport.ca/en/report>.

Figure 4: Early child education enrolment rates (preschool and childcare) and spending vary across Canadian provinces and territories (2016)



their parents, participation is higher.

The gaps in preschool participation in Canada are mainly due to the lack of a universal approach, with access limited by the availability and affordability of spaces. The affordability of childcare is a crucial barrier to access in Canada and elsewhere where preschool is not a universal, public system. In most countries, cost is the most important reason for the unmet need of centre-based services reported by parents of children under the age of 3. In the Czech Republic, Denmark and Sweden, affordability is an issue for less than one per cent of parents. On the other hand, it is an issue for more than one in five parents (22 per cent) in the United Kingdom; more than one in six in Spain and Ireland; and more than 10 per cent of parents in four other countries.

Without a public, universal system of child care and education for young children, availability is also inequitable. In Canada, provinces that spend a

greater share of their budgets on early childhood education and care tend to ensure higher enrolment rates in preschool and more childcare spaces for children 2-to-4-years old (figure 4).

Children aged 3 and older are less likely to attend if they live in the lowest income households in about half of the countries for which data are available, yet these children typically benefit most from access to high quality early learning and care. Thousands of young children in Canada start school without the long-term advantages of early learning that could put many on a better trajectory for school and for life. By the start of primary school, there are already large differences in children's development.⁵ This is measured by the Early Development Instrument in Canada, which shows a wide variation in physical, social, emotional, language and communication skills and behaviour among Canada's children at Kindergarten. There is a well-established body of research identifying

language, memory and other academic skill gaps, as well as neurological differences, between children from high and low family affluence at school entry (e.g. Buckingham et. al., 2013; Hair et. al., 2015; Morgan et. al., 2009).

The Sustainable Development Goals embody a vision that all children benefit from quality preschool education (Target 4.2). Universal, public provision of high-quality early learning programs is not only necessary to give children a good start when their parents work, but also to provide a stimulating social and learning environment.⁶ Most children benefit from some access to high quality, organized play-based learning before the start of compulsory school. Early child education also helps counteract the unequal starting conditions of children from different families, and the benefits can last through their school journey and throughout life.

BREASTFEEDING

Breastfeeding has substantial immediate and longer-term health benefits for children (Gartner et. al., 2005). Up-to-date, accurate estimates of breastfeeding rates are not readily available for all rich countries⁷. Data from a range of sources, published in the Lancet in 2016 (figure 5), indicates the proportion of infants who are

breastfed at six and 12 months for 20 OECD/EU countries. However, some of this data stretches as far back as 2003. The total length of the bars in the chart show the percentage of infants being breastfed at six months; the blue part of each bar shows the percentage who are still being breastfed at 12 months.

Norway had the highest breastfeeding rate at six months, meeting the World Health Assembly target of 70 per cent, but Japan had the highest rate at 12 months. Four countries achieved a rate of more than 60 per cent at six months: Norway, Japan, Switzerland and Republic of Korea. Canada's rate is about half that, at around 30 per cent.

5 See Bradbury, B., Corak, M., Waldfogel, J., & Washbrook, E. (2015). *Too Many Children Left Behind: The U.S. Achievement Gap in Comparative Perspective*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

6 See Blossfeld, H-P, Kulic N., Skopek, J. and Triventi, M. (2017) *Childcare, early education and social inequality: An International Perspective*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.

7 The situation is different in many low- and middle-income countries as data is available through the Multiple Indicators Cluster Surveys and Demographic and Health Surveys.

The lowest rates were 3 per cent in Denmark at six months and 0.5 per cent the United Kingdom at 12 months. A recent study reported on a survey of breastfeeding policies in 11 European countries (Theurich et. al., 2019). There were only three countries where more than one in five children were exclusively breastfed at six months – the Netherlands (39 per cent), Belgium and Spain (both 28 per cent). The lowest rates were in Switzerland (10 per cent) followed by Denmark (13 per cent).

Although the quality of breastfeeding data is not consistent, national strategies and policies for breastfeeding have been developed in many high-income countries to respond to the low rates, including:

- Targets and monitoring of breastfeeding rates
- National breastfeeding committees
- Mechanisms for the support,

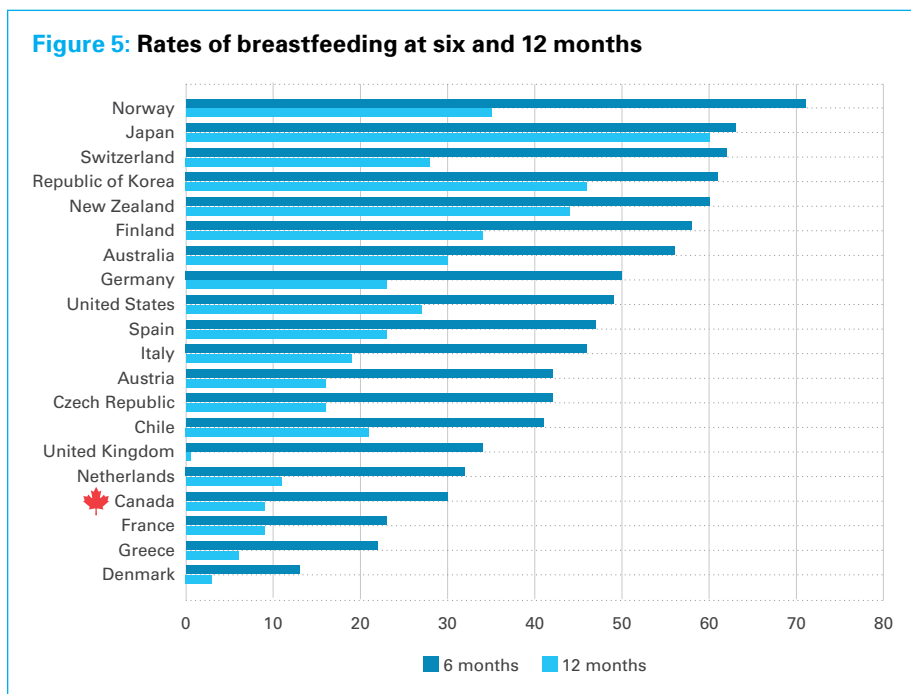
protection and promotion of breastfeeding

- Baby-friendly hospital initiatives
- Breastfeeding support from professionals
- National legislation for parental leave
- Workplace support of breastfeeding
- Human milk banking
- Regulation of infant formula marketing

There are considerable variations and gaps in support for breastfeeding across rich countries. In the European study (Theurich et. al., 2019), breastfeeding support from health professionals was not reported to be widely available in the 11 countries studied, apparently due to cost. On the other hand, all 11 countries except Denmark had legally secured breastfeeding breaks during work or school at least until infants were one

year old. The countries surveyed had adopted few legal provisions to regulate infant formula marketing.

UNICEF facilitates the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) to support breastfeeding in hospitals and health centres around the world. Co-founded by UNICEF Canada, the Breastfeeding Committee of Canada administers the BFHI in Canada, a program endorsed by the Canadian Paediatric Society and supported by the Public Health Agency of Canada. Canada has more than 50 health facilities that operate with the gold standard in breastfeeding promotion, with strong commitments from provincial governments such as Quebec, Ontario and Manitoba. Two countries in the European study (Croatia and the Netherlands) had over 90 per cent of health facilities certified under the global Baby-friendly Hospital Initiative by WHO and UNICEF.



Sources: Victora et. al. (2016). Data relate to: 2003 (Switzerland); 2005 (Czech Republic); 2006 (Austria and New Zealand); 2006-8 (Netherlands); 2007-8 (Greece); 2009 (Japan); 2005-10 (United Kingdom); 2010 (Australia and Finland); 2011 (Spain and the United States); 2011-12 (Canada); 2012 (Chile and Republic of Korea); 2012-13 (France); 2013 (Denmark, Italy and Norway) and 2014 (Germany).

FAMILY-FRIENDLY POLICIES SUPPORT THE WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN

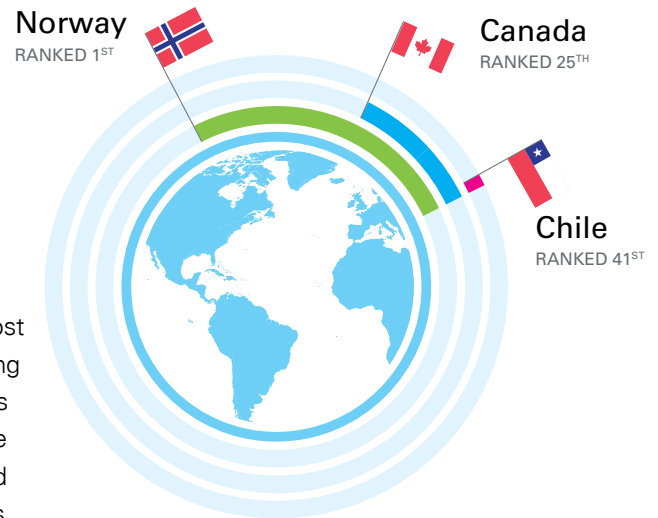
Iceland, Norway and Sweden occupy the top three places in the league table of family-friendly policies. These countries also rank highly in overall child and youth well-being, measured in UNICEF's Index of Child and Youth Well-being and Sustainabilityⁱ. Canada ranks 25th among the world's 41 richest countries in overall child and youth well-being, a middle position that has persisted unchanged for more than a decade (figure 6)ⁱⁱ. Canada lags farthest behind in child health (including infant mortality and unhealthy weight); levels of violence (including child homicide and bullying); poverty; and young people's own sense of life satisfaction.

Canada's position among its economic peers is strongly related to the significant increase in income inequality over the past 15 yearsⁱⁱⁱ. Canada is one of a handful of rich countries where income

inequality has increased most markedly. The fallout of rising inequality affects all aspects of children's lives across the socioeconomic gradient and across the country. This has profound implications for Canada's future as a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable society.

Reducing income inequality is key to improving child and youth well-being. But family-friendly policies can work against inequality and improve the well-being of children. Many countries that have higher levels of child and youth well-being have more generous, accessible and flexible leave provisions than Canada including Norway, Germany, Japan, Finland and Sweden. Countries with paid statutory leave have lower infant mortality rates, and mothers who take paid leave are more

Figure 6: Canada's overall ranking in child and youth well-being (2014)



likely to breastfeed and to bond with their children, with short- and long-term benefits for children. Family-friendly policies can also reduce child poverty and increase social mobility (Gupta et. al., 2008). A 2016 OECD study found that children do better physically, mentally and emotionally when fathers take parental leave. These countries also tend to guarantee or provide universal access to high-quality early childcare and education, which can improve child well-being, especially for disadvantaged children.

FAMILY-FRIENDLY POLICIES MAKE PARENTS HAPPY

Countries with better family-friendly policies tend to have happier parents. While the research about what makes parents happy being parents, or happy as parents, takes in wide-ranging cultural and deeply personal attitudes and beliefs, comparing parental

happiness across countries yields some important policy insights. Parents tend to report lower levels of emotional well-being than non-parents in many rich countries, and this is true in all types of households. However, the disparity in happiness between them is smaller in

countries that provide more resources and supportive policies to families with children, especially paid leave and early education and childcare^{iv}. Couples are also happier when parents share childcare, according to a 2016 OECD study.



MAKING CANADA THE BEST PLACE TO GROW UP

Family-friendly policies including sufficient, paid parental leave and high-quality, universal early child education and care help give children a good start in life while helping parents manage their work and home commitments. Canada's parental leave policies have evolved over the past 50 years, and Canada has made recent strides in the provision of early education and childcare, but this report highlights the room for improvement. Canada's family-friendly policies still fall too far below the standards set by peer countries, lag behind changes in Canadian society, and leave too many children out (Robson 2017).

Unequal access to parental leave, breastfeeding support and childcare and early learning programs exacerbate the unequal starting conditions children have and contribute to wider inequality. Canada's parental leave and childcare policies and programs need to be universally accessible but designed to include the lowest-income, socially excluded children. The participation of parents in leave programs can be constrained when employment status is precarious, so they need to be inclusive and sufficiently remunerated. High-quality, universally accessible childcare can promote equitable

child outcomes and help reduce the stress and anxiety of parenting in an era of wider inequality and insecurity. Until Canada tops the league tables of child and youth well-being, we cannot check out on children; we need to keep investing in the policies and programs that are good for children and good for Canada.

By making improvements to these policies, Canada can give every child a better, fairer start toward our One Youth goal: that Canada is the best place to grow up by 2030.

PARENTAL LEAVE

- Increase the rate of income replacement of all forms of standard parental leave from 55 per cent of average weekly earnings to at least 70 per cent, up to the maximum amount (from 33 per cent to 50 per cent for extended flexible leaves).
- Increase the low income subsidy rate from 80 per cent to 100 per cent of the specified net annual income level.
- Decrease the qualifying income to a minimum of \$2,000 in insurable income during the qualifying period regardless of the number of hours worked.
- Extend attachment benefits equivalent to maternity leave for adopted children.
- Provide for a reserve of leave time that can be taken up until the child is five.

FAIRNESS FOR INDIGENOUS CHILDREN

- Permanently end funding shortfalls in federally funded public services provided to First Nations Children: adopt the Spirit Bear Plan proposed by the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society and endorsed by the Chiefs of the Assembly of First Nations.
- Ensure that First Nations, Métis and Inuit children have equitable access to early childcare and education and their parents to parental leave. Indigenous children have the right to equal access to services that are culturally appropriate.

EARLY CHILD CARE AND EDUCATION

- When children in some families benefit from preschool that others can't afford, inequality grows. For a big step toward closing childhood inequalities and countering the impacts of income inequality, guarantee every child in Canada access to high-quality early childhood education and care, including those with disabilities and special needs, irrespective of their parents' employment, migration status or income.
- To guarantee high-quality early learning and child care for every child who needs it, every jurisdiction should invest 6 per cent of their budgets for children under 6, who are 6 per cent of the population⁸.
- Offer full-day kindergarten to all children ages 4 and 5.
- Ensure every child below age 5 access to high quality childcare/early learning programs.
- Coordinate data collection and reporting across federal, provincial and territorial governments to see how Canada's investments and services for young children are developing in relation to norms and standards among peer countries.

⁸ The multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework federal contribution should include a condition that children with, and whose parents have, irregular migration status are eligible for publicly supported early child care and education services.

BABY-FRIENDLY INITIATIVE

- Set plans and targets to provide every newborn with access to Baby-Friendly designated birthing facilities and services, particularly for Indigenous communities and birthing centres.

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