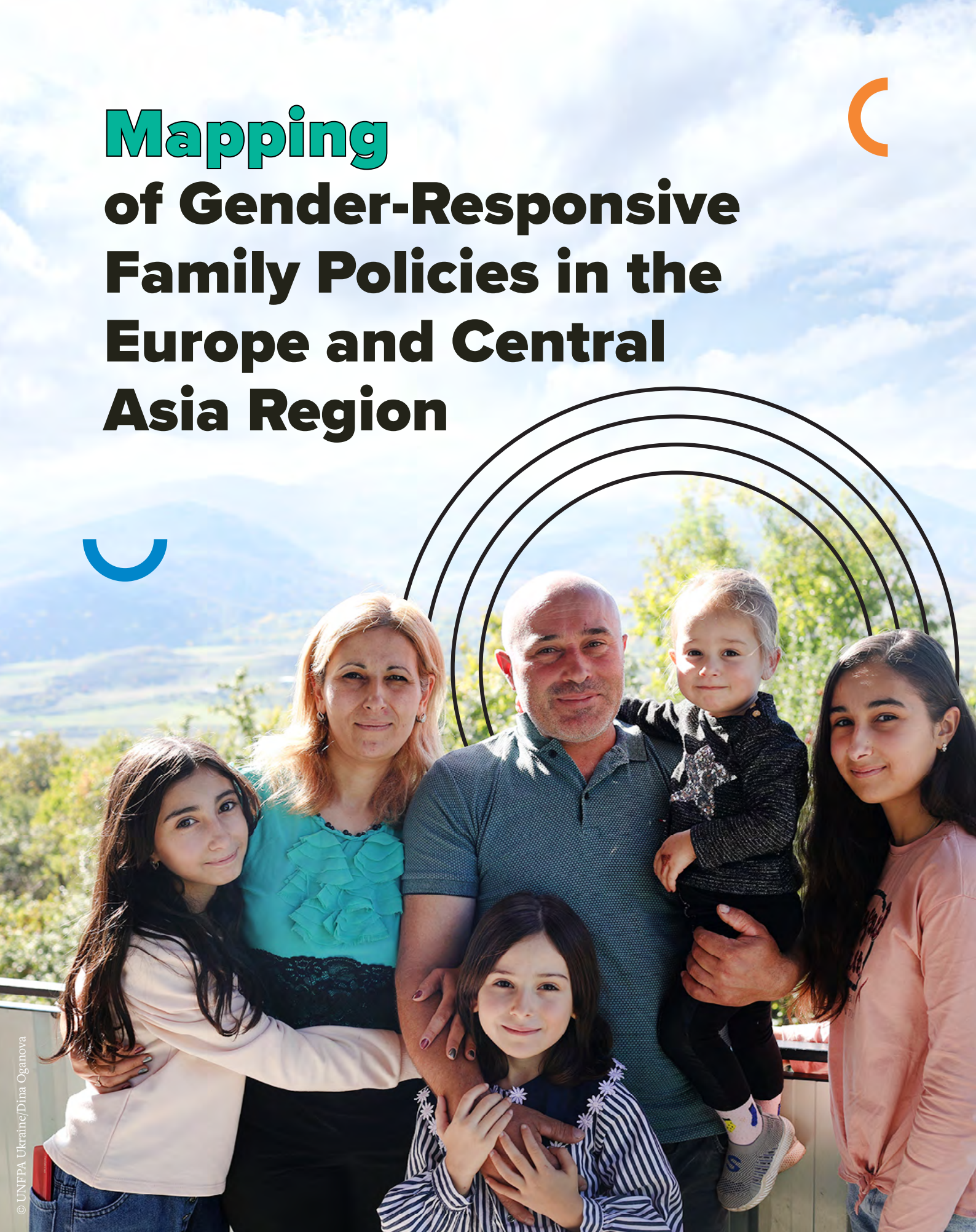


# Mapping of Gender-Responsive Family Policies in the Europe and Central Asia Region



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# Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Demographic shifts coupled with economic and social change and efforts by international organizations and feminist and women's movements have led more governments and private companies in the Europe and Central Asia region to put gender-responsive family policies on their agenda. Such policies have been gradually regarded as means to support women, men and couples in fulfilling their career and fertility aspirations, to redistribute the household and care burden more equally, and to promote child development. Gender-responsive family policies could also give men more opportunities to spend adequate time bonding with their biological or adopted children and to meet their children's health, nutritional and developmental needs.

Yet existing policy gaps as well as gender norms and stereotypes continue to hinder the achievement of a gender-balanced reconciliation between family and work responsibilities in all life phases. This is especially true for women after childbirth and during early child-rearing, many of whom are forced to choose between their career and their family. Today, women in the Europe and Central Asia region participate in the labour force less than men do, get paid less and bear a disproportionate share of the unpaid care and domestic work burden.<sup>2</sup>

A holistic mix of gender-responsive family policies can enable women and men to share parenting, caregiving and domestic responsibilities equitably, in turn making women less likely to drop out of the workforce, reducing the gender pay gap and improving economic productivity. These policies can also help to reduce parenting stress and promote well-being among parents and caregivers, which means better businesses, happier families and healthier children.<sup>3</sup>

Among employers and society at large, gender-responsive family policies have the potential to reverse deeply rooted gender norms and stereotypes that portray women as the primary caregivers and enhance men's role as breadwinners.<sup>4</sup> These discriminatory gender norms and stereotypes prevent women from accessing positions of power, limit decisions concerning their bodies and their sexual and reproductive health, and perpetuate various forms of violence against women and harmful practices.<sup>5</sup>

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1. This report is an update of the 2023 publication *The state of gender-responsive family policies in the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region*, published by the UNFPA Eastern Europe and Central Asia Regional Office. The current report updates the 2023 publication and expands the scope to include four new countries: Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. Furthermore, it provides an overview of additional legislative frameworks and benefits, covering areas such as sick leave, early childhood education and care systems, paid breastfeeding breaks, and family and child benefits.

2. Women in the Europe and Central Asia region earn on average 21.6 per cent less than men per month. See Guillem Fortuny Fillo and Ala Negruta, *Keep the Promise, Accelerate the Change: Taking Stock of Gender Equality in Europe and Central Asia 25 Years after Beijing* (New York, UN Women, 2020). In at least five countries or territories in the Europe and Central Asia region, women spend twice as much time as men on unpaid care work (Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kyrgyzstan, the Republic of Moldova and Serbia), and in another three women spend at least three times as much time as men on unpaid care work (Kazakhstan, North Macedonia and Kosovo), and in Albania and Türkiye, this discrepancy increases to at least five times. See UNFPA Eastern Europe and Central Asia Regional Office, *The Cost of Not Having Gender-Responsive Family Policies* (Istanbul, forthcoming).

3. UNFPA Eastern Europe and Central Asia Regional Office, *The Family-Friendly Workplace Model* (Istanbul, 2022).

4. Deepta Chopra and Meenakshi Krishnan, *Linking family-friendly policies to women's economic empowerment: An evidence brief* (New York, UNICEF, 2019).

5. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *SIGI 2023 Global Report: Gender Equality in Times of Crisis, Social Institutions and Gender Index* (Paris, OECD Publishing, 2023).



## Data sources and country coverage

This mapping uses the latest information available in national laws and policies as of July 2023 as well as reviews by international organizations to assess the status of 10 gender-responsive family policies: maternity leave, paternity leave, parental leave, carer's leave, flexible working arrangements, the early childhood education and care system<sup>6</sup>, the pre-primary education system<sup>7</sup>, paid breastfeeding breaks, sick leave, and family and child benefits.

The mapping covers 21 countries and territories in the Europe and Central Asia region: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Czechia, Georgia, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, North Macedonia, Poland, the Republic of Moldova, Serbia, Slovakia, Tajikistan, Türkiye, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and Kosovo.\*

The data presented in this study is derived from diverse sources, each with varying levels of detail, methodologies and reporting standards. As such, the mapping and comparisons made within this study are indicative and serve solely to inform the study's findings. It is important to note that, due to the dynamic nature of legislative frameworks, some data may no longer be accurate or up-to-date. Readers are advised to consult current, authoritative sources for the most recent and accurate legal information.

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\* Hereafter referred to in the context of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).

6. Childcare for children aged 0–2 years.

7. For children aged 3 and above.

## Mapping of gender-responsive family policies in the Europe and Central Asia region

This mapping confirms that the landscape of gender-responsive family policies in the Europe and Central Asia region is dynamic and diverse, continually evolving through reviews of national laws and policies to adapt to demographic, economic and social changes.

Overall, however, entitlements around childbirth and child-rearing do not tend to benefit working parents and their children equally. Instead, these remain mostly focused on mothers and do not promote the full involvement of fathers in caregiving, which reinforces traditional gender roles and adds to women's unpaid workloads.<sup>8</sup>

While all 21 countries and territories have adopted statutory provisions for maternity leave in their legislation, many mothers are likely to see their earnings diminish during maternity leave. Women are entitled to paid breastfeeding breaks in all countries and territories, but breastfeeding facilities remain largely unavailable in the public and private sector. In eight countries, paternity leave lasts up to only seven working or calendar days, and there are no stipulations for paternity leave in the national legislation of three countries. Fathers are granted paid paternity leave in only 9 of the 18 countries with legal provisions on paternity leave. The availability of parental leave and related monetary entitlements remains inadequate in many contexts. More often than not, parents in same-sex relationships, adoptive parents and self-employed workers are either denied their rights to these entitlements or may access them only with specific restrictions.

Legal provisions for paid carer's leave that specifically target working parents are in place in just 6 of the 21 countries and territories covered in this report. In nine others, national legislation supports the uptake of unpaid leave for family-care purposes by the general worker population. Legal provisions enabling parents to work part-time until their children reach adolescence or during

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8. Chopra and Krishnan, *Linking family-friendly policies to women's economic empowerment*.

parental leave are common (14 out of 21 countries and territories), while those regulating home-based work (10 countries) and flexible working schedules (7 countries) are less widespread.

Many children in the Europe and Central Asia region lack access to affordable and quality early childhood education and care services in the first years of their lives, particularly after their parents' exhaustion of childcare-related leave. And while pre-primary education systems targeting children aged 3 or older have been established in 19 out of 21 countries and territories, this service may be part-time, lack sufficient capacity and come at a cost for parents. These childcare policy gaps push women into a primary caregiving role to the detriment of their career aspirations.

Workers in the Europe and Central Asia region are entitled to a certain number of paid sick days per year, but many are not fully compensated. Lastly, social transfer programmes, though modest, are increasingly common as countries and territories continually review social spending priorities.

Supporting women's fertility and career aspirations in the Europe and Central Asia region therefore requires a shift from maternalistic policies to gender-responsive family policies that reduce and redistribute women's unequal responsibility for care work with men, employers, the state and private service providers. Not only do gender-responsive family policies pay off in greater gender equality, but they also contribute to human development and particularly to early childhood development, since they allow mothers, fathers and caregivers to balance their work and personal lives and the responsibilities to care for their children.<sup>9</sup>



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9. Ibid.

## Maternity leave

Paid and job-protected maternity leave has a host of benefits for mothers, children and their families in the areas of health, safety and economic security.<sup>10</sup> ILO Maternity Protection Convention No. 183 (2000),<sup>11</sup> ratified by 12 out of the 21 countries and territories covered by this study (Albania, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Czechia, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Montenegro, North Macedonia, the Republic of Moldova, Serbia and Slovakia),<sup>12</sup> mandates a minimum maternity leave period of 14 weeks and requires that maternity leave cash benefits amount to at least two thirds of a woman's previous earnings. ILO Maternity Protection Recommendation No. 191 (2000) recommends increasing maternity leave to at least 18 weeks to ensure an adequate rest and recovery time and, where practicable, raising maternity leave cash benefits to 100 per cent of women's previous earnings.<sup>13</sup> Current EU legislation specifies a minimum of 14 weeks of maternity leave, with two mandatory weeks.<sup>14</sup>

All 21 countries and territories covered by this study have legal provisions on maternity leave in place, ranging from 16 weeks in Serbia, Türkiye and Turkmenistan to 52 weeks in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo (see Table 1). Most countries, however, grant working mothers with newborns maternity leave of either 18 weeks (Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Uzbekistan) or 20 weeks (Armenia, Poland and Tajikistan). In Czechia, Hungary, North Macedonia and Slovakia, the duration of maternity leave ranges from 24 to 39 weeks.

Mothers in only 7 out of the 21 countries and territories covered by this study can transfer part or the entirety of their maternity leave period to the father of their children (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Czechia, Georgia, North Macedonia, Poland and Kosovo).<sup>15</sup> Four of these grant the longest maternity leave periods to working mothers with newborns (Albania, 52 weeks; Bosnia and Herzegovina, 52 weeks; Kosovo, 52 weeks; North Macedonia, 39 weeks).<sup>16</sup> This may serve to compensate for the absence of a parental leave entitlement (Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo) or the ineligibility of fathers for parental leave (Albania and North Macedonia).<sup>17</sup> In contrast, legislation in 11 countries allows for the transfer of maternity leave to the father only under exceptional circumstances, such as the mother's death or imprisonment, or in the case of a maternal illness or abandonment (Azerbaijan, Belarus, Hungary, Kyrgyzstan, the Republic of Moldova, Serbia,

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10. International Labour Organization (ILO), *Care at Work: Investing in Care Leave and Services for a More Gender Equal World of Work* (Geneva, 2022).

11. ILO, Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183).

12. ILO, 'Ratifications of C183 - Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183)'.

13. ILO, Maternity Protection Recommendation, 2000 (No. 191).

14. European Parliament, "Maternity and paternity leave in the EU", March 2022.

15. ILO, *Care at Work*.

16. Ibid.

17. UNFPA Eastern Europe and Central Asia Regional Office, *The state of gender-responsive family policies in the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region* (Istanbul, 2023).

Slovakia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan), while this legal provision is altogether absent in three other countries (Armenia, Kazakhstan and Türkiye).<sup>18</sup>

Adoptive mothers can also take maternity leave across all countries and territories covered by this study, albeit with a shorter duration than biological parents in six countries.<sup>19</sup> Thus, adoptive mothers in Türkiye have access to a maternity leave period of 3 working days, compared with a minimum of 28 days in Albania, 56 working days in Kazakhstan, 56 calendar days in the Republic of Moldova, 70 calendar days in Tajikistan and 6 months in North Macedonia, respectively.<sup>20</sup>

**Table 1. Duration of maternity leave and amount of maternity leave cash benefits available as a percentage of previous earnings**

Country/Territory	Duration	Maternity leave cash benefits available as a percentage of previous earnings
Albania	52 weeks	80% for the first 185 days; 50% for the remaining days
Armenia	20 weeks	100% up to a ceiling
Azerbaijan	18 weeks	100%
Belarus	18 weeks	100% up to a ceiling
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska: 52 weeks; Brčko District: 12 consecutive months	Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina: 50%–80% of the reference wage; Republika Srpska: 100%; Brčko District: 100%
Czechia	28 weeks	70% up to a ceiling
Georgia	18 weeks	Public sector: 100% of the mother's salary Private sector: Maximum allowance of US\$400 received from the state; salary remuneration percentage depends on the employer
Hungary	24 weeks	70%
Kazakhstan	18 weeks	100%
Kyrgyzstan	18 weeks	100% for the first 10 days; flat rate for the remaining 116 days
North Macedonia	39 weeks	100%

18. ILO, *Care at Work*.

19. Ibid; Kosovo, Law on Labour of the Republic of Kosovo, Law No. 03/L-212 (18 November 2010). Available at <http://old.kuvendikosoves.org/common/docs/ligjet/2010-212-eng.pdf> (accessed on 28 July 2024).

20. ILO, *Care at Work*.



Poland	20 weeks	100%
Republic of Moldova	18 weeks	100%
Serbia	16 weeks	Employed women continuously insured for six months before the start of maternity leave cannot receive a benefit lower than the national minimum wage. Self-employed women, women farmers and owners of agricultural farmsteads and female casual workers receive a benefit consisting of two thirds of their gross base earnings in the previous 18 to 24 months.
Slovakia	34 weeks	75% up to a ceiling
Tajikistan	20 weeks	100%
Türkiye	16 weeks	100%
Turkmenistan	16 weeks	100%
Ukraine	18 weeks	100%
Uzbekistan	18 weeks	100%
Kosovo	52 weeks	First 26 weeks: 70% of the annual basic salary the mother was receiving at her place of employment, paid by the employer Subsequent 13 weeks: 50% of the average annual salary in Kosovo, paid by the government Final 13 weeks: unpaid

Source: Compiled by the author based on national laws and policies and reviews by international organizations.

During maternity leave, working mothers with newborns can expect to receive 100 per cent of their previous earnings in only 9 out of the 21 countries and territories covered by this study (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, North Macedonia, Poland, the Republic of Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan). Women employed in the public sector in Georgia also receive 100 per cent of their previous earnings, while those in the private sector receive an allowance from the state and variable salary remuneration from their employer. Armenia and Belarus provide mothers with 100 per cent maternity leave cash benefits but up to a ceiling. In Belarus, for instance, the cap is established at three times the national average monthly wage.<sup>21</sup> In Czechia and Slovakia, mothers receive 70 per cent and 75 per cent of their previous earnings, respectively, but up to a ceiling. In contrast, Hungarian and Turkish mothers receive 70 per cent and two thirds of their previous earnings,

21. Ibid.

respectively.<sup>22</sup> In Bosnia and Herzegovina, maternity leave cash benefits range from 50 to 80 per cent of the reference wage in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina to 100 per cent of earnings in the Republika Srpska and the Brčko District. In Serbia, employed women who have been continuously insured for six months before the start of maternity leave cannot receive a benefit lower than the national minimum wage. However, self-employed women, women farmers and owners of agricultural farmsteads and female casual workers receive a benefit consisting of two thirds of their gross base earnings in the previous 18 to 24 months.

In Albania, Kyrgyzstan and Kosovo, mothers' earnings decrease progressively throughout the maternity leave period. For example, women in Albania receive 80 per cent of their previous earnings during the first 26 weeks and 50 per cent during the next 26 weeks. In Kyrgyzstan, mothers receive 100 per cent of their earnings for the first 10 days of maternity leave and a flat rate for the remaining 116 days.

In four countries, maternity leave cash benefits are not available to self-employed mothers (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan).<sup>23</sup> All countries and territories covered by this study rely on social insurance mechanisms to finance maternity leave with the exception of Kosovo, which relies on an employer liability model, which means that employers are mandated to finance maternity leave.<sup>24</sup>



© UNFPA Georgia/Dina Oganova

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid; UNFPA Eastern Europe and Central Asia Regional Office, *Expanding Choices through Family-Friendly Policies: Kosovo Analytical Report* (Istanbul, 2022).

## Paternity leave

Paternity leave ensures that fathers can take a short period of leave immediately following the birth of a child to support the mother and the newborn, bond with their baby and equitably share the unpaid care burden.<sup>25</sup> Statutory provisions for paternity leave are central to challenging conventional gender norms that cast women as caregivers and men as breadwinners.<sup>26</sup> Paternity leave is associated with increasing fathers' long-term involvement in unpaid care work, in turn promoting women's participation in the labour force.<sup>27</sup> Although international labour standards do not explicitly regulate paternity leave,<sup>28</sup> in the European Union the Directive on Work-Life Balance for Parents and Carers, No. 1158 (2019), recognizes the right to paternity leave of 10 working days to be taken upon the birth of a worker's child.<sup>29</sup> The Directive calls on EU Member States to determine the timing and flexibility of paternity leave and encourages the provision of paternity leave cash benefits that are equal to maternity leave cash benefits, as both paternity and maternity rights pursue similar objectives.

All countries and territories covered by this report have legal provisions on paternity leave in place with the exception of Georgia, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan (see Table 2). In these three countries, fathers can be involved in early child-rearing only by making use of their parental leave entitlement, which varies widely (Georgia, 84 weeks plus an additional 12 weeks until the child turns 5; Turkmenistan, 156 weeks until the child turns 3; and Uzbekistan, 104 weeks until the child turns 2).

Statutory provisions on paternity leave, however, do not benefit all fathers equally. Adoptive parents can enjoy paternity leave in just 10 out of the 21 countries and territories covered by this study (Armenia, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Czechia, North Macedonia, Poland, Slovakia, Türkiye, Ukraine and Kosovo), while Armenia is the only country to grant paternity leave to same-sex parents.<sup>30</sup>

National legislation stipulates the duration of paternity leave in either working or calendar days. In eight countries, fathers are granted paternity leave lasting up to just 7 working or calendar days (Albania, 3 working days; Armenia, 5 working days; Bosnia and Herzegovina, 7 working days in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 3 working days in the Republika Srpska and the Brčko District; Kazakhstan, 5 working days; North Macedonia, 7 working days; Serbia, 7 working days; Tajikistan, 7 calendar days; and Türkiye, 5 working days for private sector employees, 10 working days for civil servants). In Hungary and Kyrgyzstan, fathers are granted 10 working days and 10 calendar days, respectively. Meanwhile, the duration of paternity leave stands at 14 calendar days in Azerbaijan, Belarus, Poland, the Republic of Moldova, Slovakia and Ukraine. In Czechia, fathers are granted 14 working days, while in Kosovo their leave amounts to 16 calendar days – 2 days for childbirth and 14 days for paternity leave.

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25. ILO, *Care at Work*.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.

29. European Union, Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU, *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 188/79, 12 July 2019.

30. ILO, *Care at Work*; Law on Labour of the Republic of Kosovo.

**Table 2. Duration of paternity leave and amount of paternity leave cash benefits available as a percentage of previous earnings**

Country/Territory	Duration	Paternity leave cash benefits available as a percentage of previous earnings
Albania	3 working days	100%
Armenia	5 working days	0%
Azerbaijan	14 calendar days	0%
Belarus	14 calendar days	0%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina: 7 days; Republika Srpska and Brčko District: 3 days	100%
Czechia	14 working days	70%
Georgia	Not available	-
Hungary	10 working days	100%
Kazakhstan	5 working days	0%
Kyrgyzstan	10 calendar days	100%
North Macedonia	7 working days	100%
Poland	14 calendar days	80%
Republic of Moldova	14 calendar days	100%
Serbia	7 working days	100%
Slovakia	14 calendar days	70%
Tajikistan	7 calendar days	0%
Türkiye	Civil servants: 10 working days; private sector: 5 working days	100%
Turkmenistan	Not available	-
Ukraine	14 calendar days	100%
Uzbekistan	Not available	-
Kosovo	16 calendar days: 2 calendar days for childbirth; 14 calendar days for paternity leave	2 calendar days: 100%; 14 calendar days: unpaid

Source: Compiled by the author based on national laws and policies and reviews by international organizations.



Fathers receive 100 per cent of their previous earnings in only 9 of the 18 countries and territories that have legal provisions on paternity leave (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary, Kyrgyzstan, Republic of Moldova, North Macedonia, Serbia, Türkiye and Ukraine). This figure stands at 80 per cent in Poland and at 70 per cent in Czechia and Slovakia. In Kosovo, fathers receive their full earnings during the two days granted for childbirth, but the following two-week paternity leave period is unpaid. At the other end of the spectrum, five countries grant unpaid paternity leave (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan). Self-employed fathers have access to paternity leave cash benefits in only 5 of the 13 countries and territories that grant paid paternity leave (Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Tajikistan).<sup>31</sup>



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31. ILO, *Care at Work*.

## Parental leave

Parental leave, usually available to either parent, allows mothers and fathers to take care of their child after their maternity and paternity leave entitlements have expired.<sup>32</sup> Paid and job-protected parental leave is particularly relevant where universal and free early childhood education and care services are lacking, since it allows working parents to keep their jobs while caring for their children.<sup>33</sup> Men are much less likely than women to use parental leave, although evidence points to similar benefits for women, men and societies to those provided by paternity leave.<sup>34</sup> The ILO Workers with Family Responsibilities Recommendation, No. 165 (1981), and the ILO Maternity Protection Recommendation, No. 191 (2000), emphasize the need to make parental leave available to either parent after maternity leave, while safeguarding employment and protecting employment rights. Both recommendations call on ILO Member States to determine its duration, the payment of benefits and the distribution of parental leave between parents, among other conditions.

In contrast, the European Union Directive on Work-Life Balance for Parents and Carers recognizes the individual right of workers who are parents to parental leave of a minimum of four months, including two months that cannot be transferred from one parent to the other. The Directive stresses that parental leave is to be taken before the child reaches a specified age, up to the age of 8, and calls for “adequate” compensation for the minimum non-transferable period of parental leave.

Legal provisions on parental leave are in place in all 21 countries and territories covered by this report except for the Republika Srpska and the Brčko District in Bosnia and Herzegovina (see Table 3). In three countries, only mothers are granted parental leave, with leave periods varying significantly (North Macedonia, 13 weeks; Türkiye, 26 weeks; and Tajikistan, 156 weeks). Mothers in Tajikistan receive 100 per cent of their previous earnings until their child reaches 18 months and no further income until their child turns 3. In North Macedonia and Türkiye, this entitlement is partially paid and unpaid, respectively. In addition, Türkiye is the only country covered by this study where adoptive mothers cannot access parental leave.<sup>35</sup>

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32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid.

**Table 3. Parental leave cash benefits available as a percentage of previous earnings**

Country/Territory	Duration	Paternity leave cash benefits available as a percentage of previous earnings
Albania	35 weeks	0.0%
Armenia	156 weeks	A flat rate is paid to a parent who takes time off work to care for a child under 2.
Azerbaijan	156 weeks	Partially paid social leave in the amount determined by legislation: AZN 44 (\$25) a month is paid for each eligible child younger than 18 months; AZN 28 (\$16) a month for each child aged 18 months to 3 years
Belarus	156 weeks	35.0% of the national average wage from the relevant quarter is paid for the first eligible child; 40.0% for the second and subsequent eligible children
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina: 156 weeks; Republika Srpska and Brčko District: N/A	Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina: 0.0%
Czechia	156 weeks	70.0% up to a ceiling of CZK 300,000 (\$12,850) for one child, and CZK 450,000 (\$19,250) for two or more children
Georgia	84 weeks	Public sector: 57 days, 100.0% Private sector: 57 days up to a ceiling of GEL 1,000 (\$370)
Hungary	44 working days	68.0%
Kazakhstan	156 weeks	100.0% for 52 weeks; 0.0% up to 156 weeks
Kyrgyzstan	312 weeks	Flat rate of KGS 700 (\$8) (available only to the mother)
North Macedonia	13 weeks (only mothers)	Partially paid
Poland	32 weeks	Fathers: 60%–70% of base salary; mothers: 81.5%

Country/Territory	Duration	Paternity leave cash benefits available as a percentage of previous earnings
Republic of Moldova	156 weeks	30.0% for the whole duration of parental leave, or 60.0% for the first 12 months and 30.0% for the following 12 months, or 90.0% for the first 12 months
Serbia	52 weeks	66.7%
Slovakia	156 weeks	65.0%
Tajikistan	156 weeks (only mothers)	100.0% paid to the mother until her child reaches 18 months; unpaid until the child reaches age 3 years of age
Türkiye	26 weeks (only mothers)	0.0%
Turkmenistan	156 weeks	65.0%
Ukraine	156 weeks	Income-tested benefits up to a maximum of UAH 1,841 (\$45)
Uzbekistan	104 weeks	Relies on an employer liability model
Kosovo	At least 4 months	N/A

Source: Compiled by the author based on national laws and policies and reviews by international organizations.

The duration of parental leave also varies widely in the countries and territories where both parents are eligible for parental leave. In 10 of these countries, parents are entitled to parental leave of 156 weeks – that is, until their child reaches the age of 3 (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Czechia, Kazakhstan, the Republic of Moldova, Slovakia, Turkmenistan and Ukraine). Among these, Czechia is the only country covered by this study that grants parental leave to same-sex parents.<sup>36</sup> Shorter parental leave is granted in seven other countries and territories (Uzbekistan, 104 weeks; Georgia, 84 weeks; Serbia, 52 weeks; Albania, 35 weeks; Poland, 32 weeks; Kosovo, at least 4 months; and Hungary, 44 working days).

The availability of parental leave cash benefits also differs in all of these countries and territories. For instance, parents in Kazakhstan receive 100 per cent of their previous earnings during the first 52 weeks of parental leave but no further cash benefits up to the maximum 156-week parental leave period. In Serbia, this threshold is set at 66.7 per cent of previous earnings throughout the 52-week parental leave period. In Armenia and Kyrgyzstan, a flat rate is paid to parents taking parental leave. In the Republic of Moldova, parents can opt to receive either 30 per cent of their previous earnings during the three years of parental leave, 60 per cent for the first 12 months and 30 per cent for the

<sup>36</sup>. Ibid.



following 12 months, or 90 per cent for the first 12 months. In Ukraine, parents receive an income-tested benefit up to a maximum of UAH 1,841 (\$45). Belarus provides 35 per cent of the national average wage for the first eligible child and 40 per cent for the second and subsequent eligible children. Since exercising the right to parental leave often entails income losses for households, a central part in expanding its uptake, and particularly among fathers, is ensuring that it is adequately remunerated. Self-employed parents do not have access to parental leave cash benefits in seven countries (Albania, Armenia, Kazakhstan, North Macedonia, Tajikistan, Türkiye and Uzbekistan).<sup>37</sup> In countries where parental leave is paid, it is generally funded by either social security, social assistance or employers (public sector self-governing bodies pay parental leave).<sup>38</sup>



© UNFPA Republic of Moldova/Ludmila Bizgu

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid; UNFPA Eastern Europe and Central Asia Regional Office, *The state of gender-responsive family policies in the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region*.

## Carer's leave

Carer's leave provides women and men with caring responsibilities across generations with greater opportunities to remain in the workforce and share the care burden more equally. As societies continue to age, care needs are projected to increase. Middle-aged workers, and women in particular, increasingly become first responders to the care needs of their relatives, such as parents and siblings, in addition to caring for their children and remaining engaged in the labour force. Older workers play a key role in the provision of care to younger generations too when prime-age adults have migrated abroad. At the same time, working parents may need to take time off work temporarily if their child falls sick.<sup>39</sup> The European Union Directive on Work-Life Balance for Parents and Carers recognizes the right of each worker to carer's leave of five working days per year and encourages Member States to introduce compensation for carer's leave in order to support its uptake, particularly among men.

Albania, Azerbaijan, Czechia, the Republic of Moldova, Serbia and Slovakia have in place legal provisions on carer's leave that specifically target working parents with children (see Table 4). Eligibility varies, however, by the sex of the worker and household composition, and cash benefits differ. In Albania, workers are granted 12 paid days a year to care for their dependent children, and up to 15 paid days to care for children up to 3 years old. In Azerbaijan, women with children under the age of 16 or single parents are entitled to unpaid carer's leave of up to 14 calendar days. Czechia grants carer's leave of 16 calendar days to single parents of children under the age of 16, and 9 calendar days in all other cases, which is compensated at 60 per cent of the daily assessment base.

In the Republic of Moldova, women and single parents who have two or more children up to 14 years of age are entitled to unpaid carer's leave for a duration of at least 14 calendar days. Employees also have the right to suspend their employment contract contingent on agreement with the employer to look after a sick child of up to 10 years of age. In Serbia, workers are entitled to care for a sick or injured immediate family member up to age 6 for up to 15 days per illness episode, which may be extended up to a maximum of 30 days for justified reasons. In addition, Serbian employees are also entitled to paid leave of seven working days a year to care for a seriously ill immediate family member. In Slovakia, employees are entitled to 10 calendar days per year to care for ill or injured children younger than 10. A benefit is paid at the level of 55 per cent of the assessment base, which considers gross earnings in previous years, with a ceiling of 1.5 times the monthly average wage.

Nine countries have legal provisions in place that support leave for family-care purposes and that target the general worker population (Armenia, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary, Kyrgyzstan, Poland, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Ukraine). In Armenia, employees may be granted unpaid leave to care for ill family members up to 30 days per year. Belarus has a similar legal provision to support employees to meet their family and domestic needs. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, workers are granted seven paid days of leave in one calendar year to care for an immediate family or household member who is sick. In Kyrgyzstan, workers may be granted unpaid

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39. Ibid.

leave for family reasons, the duration of which is agreed with the employer. Hungarian and Polish employees are entitled to five calendar days of unpaid leave to care for sick family members. In Tajikistan, employees caring for ill family members are granted up to 14 calendar days of unpaid leave, while in Turkmenistan leave without pay in excess of 10 days may be provided to care for a sick family member. In Ukraine, workers may be granted unpaid leave of up to 15 calendar days per year for family reasons.

Three countries (Georgia, Kazakhstan and North Macedonia) have legal provisions in place that support unpaid leave for unspecified uses and that target the general worker population. The duration of such leave, which could be used for care purposes, can be of at least 15 days in Georgia and should not exceed three months in one calendar year in North Macedonia. In Kazakhstan, the employee and the employer must agree on the duration of unpaid leave.

Lastly, Turkish legislation stipulates that employers may grant other types of paid or unpaid leave to employees, which could be used for care purposes. In Uzbekistan and Kosovo, no specific legal provisions supporting the uptake of carer's leave by working parents or the general worker population were identified.

**Table 4. Duration of carer's leave and amount of carer's leave cash benefits available as a percentage of previous earnings**

Country/Territory	Duration	Paternity leave cash benefits available as a percentage of previous earnings
Albania	12 days per year; up to 15 days per year to care for children up to 3 years old	100%
Armenia	Up to 30 days per year	0%
Azerbaijan	Up to 14 calendar days for women with children under 16 and single parents	0%
Belarus	Up to 30 days	0%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	7 days per year	100%
Czechia	9 calendar days; 16 calendar days for single parents of children under 16	60% of the assessment base
Georgia	15 days per year	0%
Hungary	5 days per year	0%
Kazakhstan	Employer and employee must agree on duration	0%

Country/Territory	Duration	Paternity leave cash benefits available as a percentage of previous earnings
Kyrgyzstan	Duration agreed with the employer	0%
North Macedonia	Up to 3 months	0%
Poland	5 calendar days	0%
Republic of Moldova	At least 14 calendar days for women and single parents who have two or more children up to 14 years of age	0%
Serbia	Caring for a sick or injured immediate family member younger than 7: up to 15 days per illness episode; extendable to a maximum of 30 days  Caring for a sick or injured immediate family member 7 or older: up to 7 days per illness episode; extendable to a maximum of 14 days	100%
Slovakia	Up to 10 calendar days per year	55% of the assessment base
Tajikistan	Up to 14 calendar days	0%
Türkiye	Employer and employee must agree on duration	Paid or unpaid
Turkmenistan	Up to 10 days per year. More days can be provided if it is to care for a sick family member.	0%
Ukraine	Up to 15 calendar days per year	0%
Uzbekistan	Not available	-
Kosovo	Not available	-

Source: Compiled by the author based on national laws and policies and reviews by international organizations.



## Flexible working arrangements

Flexible working arrangements can support the work–life balance of workers caring for younger and older generations, enabling them to remain in the labour force. In some instances, such arrangements may also serve to increase the productivity of companies. The adoption of a range of flexible working modalities has gained momentum since the COVID-19 pandemic, including flexible working hours, compressed hours, outcome-based commissioning, remote work, mobile work, term-time work and part-time work.<sup>40</sup> The European Union Directive on Work-Life Balance for Parents and Carers recognizes that both parents and caregivers have the right to request flexible working arrangements for the purpose of adjusting their working patterns, including, where possible, through the use of remote working arrangements, flexible working schedules or a reduction in working hours, in order to provide care. In line with the Directive, this report focuses on part-time work, remote work and flexible working hours.

Entitlements regarding flexible working arrangements vary across countries, benefiting pregnant women, mothers and fathers to various degrees (see Table 5). Legal provisions regulating part-time work – through either a shorter workweek or a shorter working day – are available in 14 countries and territories covered by this study (Armenia, Azerbaijan, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Brčko District in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Czechia, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Republic of Moldova, Tajikistan, Türkiye, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and Kosovo).

In Armenia, pregnant women and working parents with children under the age of 1 can engage in part-time work. In the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Brčko District, one working parent has the right to work part-time after the end of maternity leave and until the child turns 1, while in the Republika Srpska one working parent of a child up to 2 years of age is entitled to work half-time if the child needs special care. In Kosovo, one of the parents can work part-time after the expiry of maternity leave and until the child turns 2 years old only if their child requires special care due to poor health. In Türkiye, after the end of maternity leave and parental leave, which are available to mothers only, one working parent can work half their normal weekly working hours for 60 days for the first birth, 120 days for the second birth and 180 days for subsequent births. Afterwards, one parent can request a further period of part-time leave until their child starts compulsory primary education at 6 years, provided that the other parent is employed. In Czechia, employers are required to support employees caring for a child under the age of 15 or caring for a dependent by reducing the employee’s fixed weekly working time, while in Hungary employees with at least six months of service may request part-time work.

In Kazakhstan, pregnant women and parents of children under the age of 3 are eligible to work part-time. In Azerbaijan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan, part-time work is restricted to pregnant women

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40. ILO, *Working from Home: From Invisibility to Decent Work* (Geneva, 2021); ILO, “Teleworking arrangements during the COVID-19 crisis and beyond”, paper prepared for the 2nd Employment Working Group Meeting under the 2021 Italian Presidency of the G20, April 2021; ILO, *Working Time and Work-Life Balance around the World* (Geneva, 2022).

or women with children under the age of 14. In Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan, this entitlement is also extended to fathers with children under the age of 14, while in the Republic of Moldova mothers and fathers with children up to the age of 10 are eligible to work part-time. In Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan, however, both fathers and mothers may work part-time during parental leave, an entitlement that is available only to mothers in Tajikistan.

Ten countries covered by this study have legal provisions in place enabling parents to work from home (Belarus, Czechia, Hungary, Kyrgyzstan, Poland, the Republic of Moldova, Slovakia, Tajikistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan). In Czechia, pregnant employees and employees caring for a child under the age of 15 or caring for a dependent may request permission to work outside their workplace. In Hungary, employees with at least six months of service may request telework. In the Republic of Moldova, this entitlement targets mothers and fathers of children between the ages of 3 and 6, while in Belarus it is addressed to mothers and fathers of children under the age of 16. In Poland and Slovakia, parents of children up to 8 years of age can enjoy workplace flexibility. Mothers and fathers on parental leave may work from home in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

Seven countries covered by this study have legal provisions in place supporting flexible working schedules (Czechia, Hungary, Kazakhstan, North Macedonia, Poland, the Republic of Moldova and Slovakia). In Czechia, employers are required to support employees caring for a child under the age of 15 or caring for a dependent by making the necessary adjustments to their working time. In Hungary, employees with at least six months of service may request flexible working arrangements with respect to their hours of work. In North Macedonia, employers are mandated to support employees in coordinating family and professional obligations through flexible work formulas. Workers in Kazakhstan may be entitled to a flexible working schedule in order to combine social and other personal needs of workers with the interests of production. In the Republic of Moldova, employers can establish, with the employee's written agreement, individualized labour contracts with flexible working hours if this possibility is stipulated in the entity's internal regulations or in the collective agreement or individual labour contract. The duration of the working day may also be divided into two segments: a fixed period, during which the employee is at their workplace and a variable (mobile) period, during which the employee chooses when they arrive and leave, while respecting the normal duration of the working day. Poland and Slovakia support flexible working arrangements for both parents of a child up to 8 years of age.

Lastly, no specific legal provisions supporting flexible working arrangements for working parents were identified in Albania, Georgia or Serbia.

**Table 5. Flexible working arrangements by type**

Country/Territory	Flexible working arrangements
Albania	No legal provisions identified
Armenia	Part-time work – pregnant women and working parents with children under 1 year old
Azerbaijan	Part-time work – pregnant women and women with children under 14 years old
Belarus	Remote work – mothers and fathers of children under 16 years old
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Part-time work – Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Brčko District: After ending maternity leave and until the child turns 1 year, mothers may work part-time. In the case of twins, a third or any subsequent child, mothers may work part-time until the child reaches 2 years of age. The father can also use this right if the mother works full-time. Republika Srpska: Upon the expiry of maternity leave, one working parent of a child up to 2 years may work half-time if the child needs special care.
Czechia	Part-time work – parents of children under the age of 15 or caring for a dependent Flexible working schedules – parents of children under the age of 15 or caring for a dependent Remote work – parents of children under the age of 15 or caring for a dependent
Georgia	No legal provisions identified
Hungary	Part-time work – employees with at least six months of service Flexible working schedules – employees with at least six months of service Remote work – employees with at least six months of service
Kazakhstan	Part-time work – pregnant women and parents of children under 3 years old Flexible working schedules: In order to combine the social and other personal needs of workers with the interests of production, a flexible working schedule may be established for workers.
Kyrgyzstan	Part-time work: Pregnant women and parents of children under the age of 14. Parents can work part-time while on parental leave. Remote work: Parents can work at home while on parental leave.
North Macedonia	Flexible working schedules: Employers are mandated to support employees in coordinating family and professional obligations through flexible work formulas.

Poland	Flexible working schedules – parents of children up to 8 years of age Remote work – parents of children up to 8 years of age
Republic of Moldova	Part-time work – parents of children up to age 10 Flexible working schedules – flexible working hours available to employees subject to agreement with the employer Remote work – parents of children between the ages of 3 and 6
Serbia	No legal provisions identified
Slovakia	Flexible working schedules – parents of children up to 8 years of age Remote work – parents of children up to 8 years of age
Tajikistan	Part-time work: Mothers can work part-time while on parental leave. Remote work: Mothers can work at home while on parental leave.
Türkiye	Part-time work: After the end of maternity leave and parental leave, which are available to mothers only, one working parent can work half their normal weekly working hours for 60 days for the first birth, 120 days for the second birth and 180 days for subsequent births. Afterwards, one parent can request a further period of part-time leave until their child starts compulsory primary education at 6 years of age provided that the other parent is employed.
Turkmenistan	Part-time work – pregnant women and parents of children under 14 years old
Ukraine	Part-time work – pregnant women and mothers of children under 14 years old Parents can work part-time while on parental leave. Remote work: Parents can work at home while on parental leave.
Uzbekistan	Part-time work – pregnant women and mothers with children under 14 years old Parents can work part-time while on parental leave. Remote work: Parents can work at home while on parental leave.
Kosovo	Part-time work: One parent can work part-time until the child turns 2 if the child requires special care due to poor health.

Source: Compiled by the author based on national laws and policies and reviews by international organizations.



## Early childhood education and care system

### (a) Childcare (children aged 0–2 years)

Universal and free quality early childhood education and care has far-reaching benefits. Access to such services forms the foundation for lifelong learning and success, making them an integral part of education systems with significant returns for societies and nations.<sup>41</sup> Besides having long-term benefits for children’s development, early childhood education and care reduces parents’ unpaid care burden, which is primarily shouldered by women, supports their participation in the job market and generates jobs in the care sector.<sup>42</sup>

Yet access barriers persist in the form of governments’ limited capacity to serve all children, age restrictions and cost. Large policy gaps between childcare-related leave – in particular, maternity, paternity and parental leave – and childcare services mean that childcare needs are primarily met by women at the expense of their engagement in the labour force or by domestic, migrant or other care workers who lack labour and social protection rights.<sup>43</sup> In many contexts, such policy gaps extend throughout the child’s first years of life up to the start of primary education.

Only 11 out of the 21 countries and territories covered by this report have established a national childcare system targeting children below 2 years old (Albania, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Hungary, Kazakhstan, North Macedonia, Poland, Serbia, Ukraine and Kosovo), while this service is not available in 10 others (see Table 6). Albania, Belarus, North Macedonia and Ukraine run a universal funding scheme, where the full, or nearly full, cost of services is absorbed by the state. In Hungary, Kazakhstan, Poland and Serbia, parents and the state share the cost of this service according to means tests and without causing financial hardship to the former, while in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia and Kosovo parents have to pay for this service out of pocket, potentially incurring financial hardship.

The starting age of early childhood education and care varies significantly across countries and territories. In Albania, Belarus and North Macedonia, this service is available from birth, while in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary, Poland and Serbia children need to be at least 5 or 6 months old. At the other end of the spectrum, early childhood education and care services are available to children aged 9 months or 1 year in Georgia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Kosovo. Two countries and territories offer full-day programmes (Georgia and Kosovo); in seven others, children may enrol part-time or full-time (Albania, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kazakhstan, North Macedonia, Poland and Serbia). Hungary and Ukraine offer programmes lasting up to 10 hours per day and 9 hours per day, respectively.

41. European Commission, “Early Childhood Education and Care: Providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow”, COM(2011) 66 final, 17 February 2011.

42. Saniye Dedeoğlu, Aslı Şahankaya Adar and Yasemin Sıralı, *Supporting Women’s Employment through Institutional Collaboration on Early Childhood Care and Education* (Ankara, ILO, 2021); Sara Cantillon and Nina Teasdale, *Empowering women through reducing unpaid work: A regional analysis of Europe and Central Asia* (Geneva and New York, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and UN Women, 2021).

43. ILO, *Care at Work*.

**Table 6. Characteristics of the early childhood education and care system (childcare for children below 2 years old)**

Country/ Territory	Provision of a national early childhood education and care system	Type of funding scheme	Starting age	Guaranteed hours of service
Albania	Yes	Universal	From birth	Half-day or full day
Armenia	No	-	-	-
Azerbaijan	No	-	-	-
Belarus	Yes	Universal	From birth	Part-time: 6 hours per day; full-time: 12 hours per day
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Yes	Out of pocket	6 months	Half-day or full day
Czechia	No	-	-	-
Georgia	Yes	Out of pocket	1 year	Full day
Hungary	Yes	Targeted	5 months	Up to 10 hours per day
Kazakhstan	Yes	Targeted	1 year	Full day or part- time
Kyrgyzstan	No	-	-	-
North Macedonia	Yes	Universal	From birth	Half-day or full day
Poland	Yes	Targeted	5 months	Full day or part- time
Republic of Moldova	No	-	-	-
Serbia	Yes	Targeted	6 months	Half-day or full day
Slovakia	No	-	-	-
Tajikistan	No	-	-	-
Türkiye	No	-	-	-
Turkmenistan	No	-	-	-

Ukraine	Yes	Universal	1 year	9 hours per day
Uzbekistan	No	-	-	-
Kosovo	Yes	Out of pocket	9 months (6 months in private nurseries)	Full day

Source: Compiled by the author based on national laws and policies and reviews by international organizations.

Note: Information in the table is based primarily on a review undertaken by ILO between mid-2020 and mid-2021,<sup>44</sup> and so it may not represent the current picture in some countries and territories. During the preparation of this report, several UNICEF country offices provided information that differs from the information provided in this table. This may be due to different definitions, or it may be because of changes in legislation and provisions since ILO completed its analysis.



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44. The information on the ILO Global Care Policy Portal states that, since the analysis that led to the publication of an initial report in March 2022, “the ILO has incorporated legal updates in the ILO Global Care Policy Portal for several countries”. Available at <https://webapps.ilo.org/globalcare/> (accessed on 30 July 2024).

## (b) Pre-primary education system (children aged 3 years or above)

Nineteen out of 21 countries and territories covered by this report have established a national pre-primary education system targeting children aged 3 or older, while Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan currently lack such a service (see Table 7). Funding schemes exhibit heterogeneity. In eight countries, the full, or nearly full, cost of services is paid by the state or general taxation (Albania, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Czechia, Hungary, North Macedonia, Poland and Ukraine). This contrasts with six countries where the cost of services is shared between parents and the state according to means tests and without causing financial hardship to parents (Kazakhstan, the Republic of Moldova, Serbia, Slovakia, Türkiye and Turkmenistan), and in five other countries and territories the full, or nearly full, cost of services is paid by parents with no or very limited public subsidies, potentially causing financial hardship to parents (Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Uzbekistan and Kosovo).

The starting age for this service varies. It is set at age 3 in 17 out of 19 countries and territories, while it is available from age 2 in Serbia and from age 5 in Türkiye. The guaranteed hours of this service vary widely. Three countries offer children full-day programmes (Czechia, Georgia and Slovakia), four countries and territories provide the opportunity to enrol in half- or full-day programmes (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Kosovo), and six others guarantee a fixed number of hours per day, ranging from four to nine hours (Belarus, Hungary, Poland, Serbia, Türkiye and Ukraine).

**Table 7. Characteristics of the pre-primary education system (children aged 3 years or above)**

Country/ Territory	Provision of a national pre-primary education system	Type of funding scheme	Starting age of entitlement	Guaranteed hours of services
Albania	Yes	Universal	3 years	Half-day or full day
Armenia	Yes	Out of pocket	3 years	No regulation; public provision tends to offer fewer hours as a cost- cutting measure
Azerbaijan	Yes	Universal	3 years	No indication of hours per week
Belarus	Yes	Universal	Ages 3 and 5	Part-time: 6 hours per day; preschool: 12 hours per day
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Yes	Out of pocket (at age 5, the service is free)	3 years	Half-day or full day



Czechia	Yes	Universal	3 years	Full day
Georgia	Yes	Out of pocket	3 years	Full day
Hungary	Yes	Universal	3 years	At least 4 hours
Kazakhstan	Yes	Targeted	3 years (compulsory at age 5)	No indication of hours per week
Kyrgyzstan	No	-	-	-
North Macedonia	Yes	Universal	3 years	Half-day or full day
Poland	Yes	Universal	3 years	5 hours
Republic of Moldova	Yes	Targeted	3 years	No indication of hours per week
Serbia	Yes	Targeted	2 years (compulsory preschool programme starts at age 5 until children enter primary school at age 7)	4 hours (free); full-time for an additional fee
Slovakia	Yes	Targeted	3 years	Full day
Tajikistan	No	-	-	-
Türkiye	Yes	Targeted	5 years	6 hours per day
Turkmenistan	Yes	Targeted	3 years	No indication of hours per week
Ukraine	Yes	Universal	3 years	Up to 9 hours per day
Uzbekistan	Yes	Out of pocket	3–5 years	No indication of hours per week
Kosovo	Yes	Out of pocket	3 years	Half-day or full day

*Source:* Compiled by the author based on national laws and policies and reviews by international organizations.

*Note:* Information in the table is based primarily on a review undertaken by ILO between mid-2020 and mid-2021,<sup>45</sup> and so it may not represent the current picture in some countries. During the preparation of this report, several UNICEF country offices provided information that differs from the information provided in this table. This may be due to different definitions, or it may be because of changes in legislation and provisions since ILO completed its analysis.

45. Ibid.

### (c) Childcare policy gap

Table 8. Childcare policy gap

Country/ Territory	Starting age of free early childhood education and care or primary education (months)	Childcare-related paid leave reserved for households (months)	Childcare policy gap (months)
Albania	0	12.1	0.0
Armenia	72	24.0	48.0
Azerbaijan	60	40.2	19.9
Belarus	0	40.2	0.0
Bosnia and Herzegovina	72	12.2	59.8
Czechia	36	18.5	17.5
Georgia	72	24.0	48.0
Hungary	36	41.8	0.0
Kazakhstan	72	12.0	60.0
Kyrgyzstan	84	40.2	43.9
North Macedonia	0	9.2	0.0
Poland	36	48.5	0.0
Republic of Moldova	84	40.2	43.9
Serbia	84	16.9	67.2
Slovakia	72	43.9	28.2
Tajikistan	84	18.0	66.0
Türkiye	72	3.9	68.1
Turkmenistan	72	39.7	32.3
Ukraine	12	40.2	0.0
Uzbekistan	84	28.2	55.9
Kosovo	Not available		

Source: ILO, Global Care Policy Portal. Available at <https://webapps.ilo.org/globalcare/> (accessed on 31 July 2024).

Fourteen out of 21 countries or territories present a childcare policy gap, where neither parental leave nor statutory childcare is available to parents or carers (see Table 8). This gap ranges from around 17 months in Czechia to 68 months (more than 5.5 years) in Türkiye.

On the other hand, when this mapping was conducted, six countries (Albania, Belarus, Hungary, North Macedonia, Poland and Ukraine) showed no policy gap, meaning that both parental entitlements and early childhood education and care services were available to caregivers at the same time. This overlap amounted to roughly 28 months in Ukraine and around 40 months (or more than three years) in Belarus.



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## Paid breastfeeding breaks

Legal provisions in support of paid breastfeeding breaks for mothers have been identified in all 21 countries and territories covered by this study. However, there is a significant degree of variation in the number of daily nursing breaks available, their duration and the period during which they are permitted by law in relation to the child's age (see Table 9).

In six countries covered by this study, women are entitled to a 60-minute breastfeeding break every three hours during the workday (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and the Republic of Moldova), while in four others women are entitled to a 30-minute breastfeeding break at this same interval (Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan). In Poland, women are entitled to a total of 60 minutes of breastfeeding time, which is split into two breaks, while in Slovakia they are entitled to one daily 60-minute break for children aged under 6 months and one daily 30-minute break for children aged 6 to 12 months. In Georgia, women are entitled to one daily nursing break of at least 60 minutes, and in Czechia women are entitled to two daily 30-minute breastfeeding breaks until their child turns 1 and to one daily 30-minute break during the following three months.

In the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Brčko District, women are entitled to two daily 60-minute breastfeeding breaks, compared with two daily 30-minute breastfeeding breaks in the Republika Srpska. In Albania, women are entitled to one daily 120-minute break, while this time is limited to 90 minutes in North Macedonia (one break), Serbia and Türkiye (number of daily breaks unspecified). In Hungary, women are entitled to a total of 120 minutes of breastfeeding time for children aged under 6 months (split into two breaks) and to 60 minutes (split into two breaks) for children aged 6 to 9 months. Similarly, women in Kosovo are entitled to 120 minutes to breastfeed children under the age of 1 and to 60 minutes to breastfeed children between the ages of 1 and 2.

In nine countries covered by this study, mothers are provided with paid nursing breaks until their child turns 1 (Albania, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Czechia, Georgia, North Macedonia, Serbia, Slovakia and Türkiye), while in seven others this period is extended until the child is aged 18 months (Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Ukraine). In Hungary, women are entitled to nursing breaks until their child turns 9 months, which contrasts significantly with the entitlements in Uzbekistan (age 2), Kosovo (age 2) and the Republic of Moldova (age 3). Polish law does not explicitly specify the period during which paid breastfeeding breaks are available to mothers in relation to the child's age.

Statutory provisions for working nursing facilities have been identified in only five countries covered by this study (Czechia, Slovakia, Türkiye, Turkmenistan and Ukraine). In Czechia, Slovakia and Ukraine, all employers are requested to provide nursing or childcare facilities at or near their workplaces regardless of the number of workers they employ. This provision is set at 10 female workers in Türkiye, while legislation in Turkmenistan does not make reference to a specific threshold.



**Table 9. Duration and frequency of paid breastfeeding breaks**

Country/Territory	Duration and frequency
Albania	120 minutes, in 1 daily break, until the child is 1 year old
Armenia	60 minutes, every 3 hours, until the child is 2 years old
Azerbaijan	60 minutes, every 3 hours, until the child is 1 year old
Belarus	60 minutes, every 3 hours, until the child is 18 months
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Brčko District: 120 minutes, in 2 daily breaks, until the child is 1 year old; Republika Srpska: 60 minutes, in 2 daily breaks, until the child is 1 year old
Czechia	60 minutes, in 2 daily breaks, until child is 1 year old, then 30 minutes, in 1 daily break, until the child is 15 months
Georgia	At least 60 minutes, in 1 daily break, until the child is 1 year old
Hungary	120 minutes, in 2 daily breaks, until the child is 6 months 60 minutes, in 2 daily breaks, until the child is 9 months
Kazakhstan	60 minutes, every 3 hours, until the child is 18 months
Kyrgyzstan	60 minutes, every 3 hours, until the child is 18 months
North Macedonia	90 minutes, in 1 daily break, until child is 1 year old
Poland	60 minutes, in 2 daily breaks, breastfeeding period not specified
Republic of Moldova	60 minutes, every 3 hours, until the child is 3 years old
Serbia	90 minutes, number of daily breaks not specified, until the child is 1 year old
Slovakia	60 minutes, in 2 daily breaks, until the child is 6 months 30 minutes, in 1 daily break, until the child turns 1
Tajikistan	30 minutes, every 3 hours, until the child is 18 months
Türkiye	90 minutes, number of daily breaks not specified, until the child 1 year old
Turkmenistan	Break duration unspecified, every 3 hours, until the child is 18 months
Ukraine	Break duration unspecified, every 3 hours, until the child is 18 months
Uzbekistan	Break duration unspecified, every 3 hours, until the child is 2 years old
Kosovo	120 minutes, number of daily breaks unspecified, until the child is 1 year old 60 minutes, number of daily breaks unspecified, until the child is 2 years old

Source: Compiled by the author based on national laws and policies and reviews by international organizations.

## Sick leave

Sick leave policies play a crucial role in ensuring the well-being of workers and supporting them in times of illness or incapacity. These policies provide financial security and contribute to employee retention, productivity and overall health in the workplace. ILO social security standards provide essential guidance on sickness benefits, most notably the Income Maintenance Recommendation, No. 67 (1944);<sup>46</sup> the Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, No. 102 (1952);<sup>47</sup> the Medical Care and Sickness Benefits Convention, No. 130 (1969);<sup>48</sup> and the Medical Care and Sickness Benefits Recommendation, No. 134 (1969).<sup>49</sup>

Workers in all 21 countries and territories covered by this study are entitled to a certain number of paid sick days per year, ranging from a few days to several weeks (see Table 10). The duration of sick leave comprises up to 15 days in 11 countries (Armenia, 1–5 days; Ukraine, 5 days; Turkmenistan, 5–14 days; Türkiye, 7 days; Kyrgyzstan, 10 days; Slovakia, 10 days; Belarus, 12 days; Albania, 14 days; Azerbaijan, 14 days; Czechia, 15 days; and Hungary, 15 days), while it ranges from 20 to 42 days in 6 other countries and territories (Kosovo, 20 days; Georgia, 30 days; North Macedonia, 30 days; Serbia, 30 days; Poland, 33 days; and Bosnia and Herzegovina – Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 42 days; Republika Srpska, 30 days; Brčko District, 42 days). In Kazakhstan, the Republic of Moldova, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, the duration of sick leave is not specified in legislation.

In Kazakhstan, social allowances for temporary incapacity are paid by employers from the first day of incapacity until the day of recovery of working capacity or until the establishment of disability.

**Table 10. Duration and compensation of sick leave**

Country/ Territory	Duration	Compensation as a percentage of previous earnings
Albania	14 days	70% of the insured worker's average wage if the contribution period is less than 10 years; 80% of the average wage if the contribution period is 10 years or longer
Armenia	1–5 days	80%
Azerbaijan	14 days	100% of the insured's average gross monthly earnings in the previous 12 months is paid with at least 12 years of employment; 80%, with 8 to 11 years of employment; 60%, with less than 8 years of employment

46. ILO, Ro67 - Income Security Recommendation, 1944 (No. 67).

47. ILO, C102 - Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102).

48. ILO, C130 - Medical Care and Sickness Benefits Convention, 1969 (No. 130).

49. ILO, R134 - Medical Care and Sickness Benefits Recommendation, 1969 (No. 134).

Belarus	12 days	80%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina: 42 days; Republika Srpska: 30 days; Brčko District: 42 days	Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina: 80%; Republika Srpska: 70%–90%; Brčko District: 80%–100%
Czechia	15 days	Ranges from 60% to 72% depending on the duration of incapacity
Georgia	30 days	100% of the insured's previous salary and any allowances
Hungary	15 days	60% of the insured's average daily gross earnings for individuals with more than two years of coverage; 50%, with less than two years of coverage or if hospitalized
Kazakhstan	Not specified	A temporary disability benefit is paid out by an employer beginning from the first day of unemployment until the day of rehabilitation or until disability confirmation. The amount should not exceed 25 times the amount of the monthly calculation index for the relevant year.
Kyrgyzstan	10 days	60%–100% depending on the total qualifying period
North Macedonia	30 days	85% of the established basis as salary compensation, which increases to 100% for specific cases such as work-related injuries
Poland	33 days	80% of the insured's average earnings in the 12 months before incapacity
Republic of Moldova	Not specified	Average earnings are based on earnings in the 6 months before the onset of the incapacity; if the working period is less than 6 months, average earnings are based on the full calendar months worked within the period; if less than a calendar month is worked, average earnings are based on the total hours worked; if no earnings have been received within the 6 months before the onset of the incapacity, the benefit is calculated according to a reference wage established for each particular job.
Serbia	30 days	65% of the calculation base
Slovakia	10 days	55% of the insured's average daily earnings in the year preceding the incapacity

Tajikistan	Not specified	The benefit rate varies between 60% and 100% of wages, depending on the category of beneficiaries.
Türkiye	1 week	66.7% of the insured's average daily earnings in the three months before incapacity (50% if hospitalized)
Turkmenistan	5–14 days <sup>50</sup>	With less than 5 years of uninterrupted work, the benefit is equal to 60% of earnings; with between 5 and 8 years, 80%; or with more than 8 years (or with three or more children younger than age 16; age 18 if a student), 100%.
Ukraine	5 days	50% of the insured's average gross earnings in the three months before incapacity, increasing to 60%, 70% or 100% based on the insured's length of service or specific circumstances
Uzbekistan	Not specified	The sickness benefit amounts to 60% of the last month's wage before incapacity if uninterrupted employment is less than eight years and 80% if it is more than eight years.
Kosovo	20 days	100%

Source: Compiled by the author based on national laws and policies and reviews by international organizations.



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50. Social Security Administration Office of Retirement and Disability Policy Office of Research, Evaluation and Statistics, *Social Security Programs throughout the World: Europe*, SSA Publication No. 13-11801 (Washington, DC, 2018). Insured individuals may receive 5 days of paid leave to care for a sick family member; 7 days in exceptional cases or 14 days if caring for a child younger than age 14 (or for the duration if the sick child is hospitalized); 14 days of unpaid leave is provided to women caring for children younger than age 3, a woman or a single parent raising two or more children younger than age 14 or a man whose wife is on maternity leave; disabled workers are entitled to 30 days of unpaid leave.



## Family and child benefits

Countries and territories in the Europe and Central Asia region have tailored social transfer programmes that offer a mix of contributory and non-contributory benefits to support families and children, including birth grants, child benefits, and allowances for low-income and large families and persons with disabilities. Varying levels of accessibility characterize these programmes. In addition, their complex administration can contribute to exclusion and stigma.

Means-tested programmes are common, encompassing diverse initiatives targeting low-income families with varying designs and implementation. These include monthly social grants and compensation for low-income families with children. Eighteen out of the 21 countries and territories covered have such family allowances in place (see Table 11).

All countries and territories covered by this report offer a birth grant with the exception of Georgia and Kosovo. For instance, in the Republic of Moldova this grant amounts to around \$616 and can be requested within 12 months of a child's birth, while in Türkiye it is set at \$129 for a couple's first child, \$172 for the second child and \$259 for the third child.<sup>51</sup> In Ukraine, families can access a birth grant of \$1,473 paid in two parts: a lump-sum payment of \$368 in the two to three months after birth and the rest in monthly payments of \$31 for three years.<sup>52</sup> Armenia offers a birth grant of up to \$1,875 for the third child and the fourth child, and around \$2,800 for additional children.<sup>53</sup> Belarus provides payments for the third child and additional children, along with targeted assistance for large families.<sup>54</sup> Nonetheless, only five out of the 21 countries and territories covered offer adoption allowances to parents (Georgia, Hungary, Kyrgyzstan, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine).

Thirteen out of the 21 countries and territories covered have established child supplements, while 15 offer childcare allowances. All parents, regardless of their place of residence, receive a childcare benefit for children aged 0–2 years, with working parents in urban areas receiving a monthly benefit of \$89 for each child, and those in rural areas a monthly benefit of \$160 for each child.<sup>55</sup> The Republic of Moldova provides a monthly allowance of \$56 for all children up to age 2 regardless of the parents' social insurance status.<sup>56</sup> In Azerbaijan, social allowances are provided for children under the age of 18 who fall under a variety of distinct categories.<sup>57</sup> In Kazakhstan, childcare allowances range from \$59 to \$353 monthly, with additional benefits for mothers with six or more children.<sup>58</sup> In Kosovo, a

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51. Republic of Moldova, Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, “‘Family’ Programme – a set of governmental measures to support families and children in the Republic of Moldova”, 21 September 2022.

52. UNICEF, *Universal child benefit case studies: The Experience of Ukraine* (New York, 2019).

53. Betina Ramírez López and others, *Assessment of the Social Protection Floor in Armenia: Final Report* (UN Women, 2021).

54. President of the Republic of Belarus, “Concerning additional measures to support families with children”, 12 December 2014. Available at <https://president.gov.by/en/documents/decrees-no-572-of-9-december-2014-10417> (accessed on 17 October 2024).

55. ILO and UNICEF, *More Than a Billion Reasons: The Urgent Need to Build Universal Social Protection for Children*, Second ILO–UNICEF Joint Report on Social Protection for Children (Geneva and New York, 2023).

56. Government of the Republic of Moldova, “Moldovan Government approves mechanism of providing allowance of 1,000 lei for children up to age of 2 years”, 26 October 2022.

57. Baku Research Institute, “The social protection of mothers and children in Azerbaijan: The system's capability and scope”, 24 May 2018.

universal cash child benefit provides around \$20 per month for children aged 0–2 and \$11 for those aged 2–7.<sup>59</sup> North Macedonia offers a means-tested child allowance for children 0–17, ranging from \$21 to \$33, depending on the number of children in a household and their ages.<sup>60</sup> A means-tested educational allowance is also available for children who regularly attend primary or secondary school, ranging from \$12 to \$17, based on their education level.<sup>61</sup>

All countries and territories with the exception of Kosovo have established allowances for children with disabilities. In Georgia, parents of children with disabilities receive a monthly allowance of around \$66.

**Table 11. Availability of child and family benefits**

Country/ Territory	Birth grant	Child supplement	Childcare allowance	Family allowance	Allowance for children with disabilities	Adoption allowance
Albania	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Armenia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Azerbaijan	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Belarus	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Czechia	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Georgia	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Hungary	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Kazakhstan	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Kyrgyzstan	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
North Macedonia	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Poland	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Republic of Moldova	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

58. Gov.kz, “Allowance for large families”, last updated 11 March 2024. Available at <https://www.gov.kz/situations/419/1019?lang=en> (accessed on 17 October 2024).

59. Artan Mustafa, “Kosovo\* introduces a universal child benefit and extends maternity benefit to unemployed women”, ESPN Flash Report 2021/63 (Brussels, European Social Policy Network, 2021).

60. UNICEF, *Realising Children’s Rights through Social Policy in Europe and Central Asia: A Compendium of UNICEF’s Contributions (2014–2020)* (Geneva, 2020).

61. Economic Research and Policy Institute, “System of Social Protection in North Macedonia”.

Serbia	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Slovakia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Tajikistan	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Türkiye	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Turkmenistan	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Ukraine	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Uzbekistan	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Kosovo	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No

Source: Compiled by the author based on national laws and policies and reviews by international organizations.



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