1. Introduction to the Research Handbook on Leave Policy: Parenting and Social Inequalities in a Global Perspective

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FROM THE ORIGINS OF ‘LEAVE POLICY’ TO A WIDE RANGE OF POLICIES AND ENTITLEMENTS

The origins of modern ‘leave policy’ can be traced back to the late nineteenth century, when maternity leave started to be introduced as a health-related measure addressing women workers to protect their health and the health of their newborn infants (Moss & Kamerman, 2009). Gradually over time, of the 185 countries monitored by the International Labour Organization (ILO), all but three (United States, Papua New Guinea, Tonga) have introduced some form of national-level statutory paid maternity leave for at least some eligible workers. Still, there is a remarkable cross-country variation in maternity leave coverage and leave scope, with only half of countries meeting the minimum requirements of the ILO Maternity Protection Convention 2000 (No. 183) that asks for at least 14 weeks of leave paid at the level of two-thirds of previous earnings. Around a third of countries meet or exceed the current ILO 18-week standard (ILO, 2022).

At a slower pace and with even more variety, leave provisions have become open also to fathers – since the 1970s, countries have begun to introduce parental leave and paternity leave. However, it was not until the 1990s that (some) countries started to provide fathers with individual and non-transferable leave entitlements and thus initiated a move away from endorsing a primary caregiver approach to parenting (Moss & Kamerman, 2009; Daly & Ferragina, 2018; Dobrotić & Stropnik, 2020). A recent ILO report (2022) shows that paternity leave has been a subject of considerable expansion in the last decade: in 2021, 115 (out of 185) countries offered some paternity leave rights, and 102 countries had paid paternity leave (78 and 70 in 2011, respectively). Yet ILO also points out a considerable global ‘gender leave gap’ of 16.7 weeks. That is, paternity leaves are relatively short (1.3 weeks on average), which is much less than the average duration of maternity leave of 18 weeks. Moreover, there was little progress in the same period regarding parental leave or other care leaves that are still largely absent in many parts of the world (cf. Part IV in this Handbook). For example, in 2021, only 68 countries provided parental leave rights (66 in 2011). In addition, growing attention has been paid to the problem that even when available, parenting leave provisions are not guaranteed to all parents. In particular, parents in nonstandard or insecure employment, parents in the informal economy, migrants, adoptive or LGBTQI+ parents are disadvantaged with regard to leave rights (ILO, 2022; cf. McKay et al., 2016; Dobrotić & Blum, 2019, 2020; O’Brien et al., 2020).

‘Leave policies’ – including such maternity, parental and paternity leaves, but also other forms of leave (see below for definitions) – are embedded in a much broader context: that is, they show intersections with other areas of the welfare state (family policy, labour market...
policy, employment protection law, etc.). In terms of policy instruments, leave policies are in some respects distinct as they install ‘time rights’ alongside the social right to cash benefits, in addition to explicit job protection, resulting in a complex and multi-layered character. The latter is even more pronounced when the leave rights’ scope (i.e., for instance, the leave duration and benefit level) is considered in combination with entitlements and eligibility criteria that differ along numerous lines such as gender, employment type and status, family status, ethnicity, disability, etc. Moreover, leave policies are closely interrelated with benefits-in-kind, in particular, the early childhood education and care (ECEC) services. Leave policies for parents are therefore often treated together with ECEC as the two main pillars of ‘childcare policies’ (see, e.g., Szelewa & Polakowski, 2008; Javornik, 2014; Ciccia, 2017), or, as Daly and Rake (2003, p. 51) argued: ‘The two measures most telling of how public policies treat care are parental leave, as distinct from maternity, and public childcare facilities.’ Yet they are rarely considered in combination with flexible working arrangements or working time regulations (see, e.g., Gornick & Meyers, 2008) or broader welfare provisions.

The developments in ‘leave policies’ have been of different timing as well as intensity and character. This has brought about a tremendous diversity in leave policy design around the world and created a vibrant research field (e.g., Kamerman & Moss, 2009; Moss & Deven, 2015; Koslowski et al., 2019; Moss et al., 2019; Doucet et al., 2020; Blum & Dobrotić, 2021). Substantial differences in leave policy design among the countries and regions of the world, but also difficulties in reaching common, minimum international standards (see, e.g., discussion on the EU legislation development in Moss & Deven, 2020) point at the importance of politics behind leave policymaking, and, above all, diversity and multiplicity in leave policy rationale and goals. For example, in some countries (e.g., Norway, Sweden; Duvander et al., 2019a), there is a strong commitment to gender equality as well as to child wellbeing, which has led, among other changes, to more advanced fathers’ entitlements. Meanwhile, other countries (e.g., many former socialist countries; Dobrotić & Stropnik, 2020) still rely on ‘maternalist’ (Orloff, 2006) leave policy design, which remains highly gendered and assumes that care is the primary responsibility of mothers. Similarly, some countries tended to develop inclusive leave entitlements (cf. Dobrotić & Blum, 2019, 2020; Blum & Dobrotić, 2021), which are available to all parents regardless, for example, of their position in the labour market, citizenship or other criteria based on family status, gender or another personal characteristic. Other countries rely on more selective approaches, for instance, favouring parents in (stable) employment or heterosexual couples (McKay et al., 2016; Jou et al., 2018; Dobrotić & Blum, 2019, 2020; Wong et al., 2019; O’Brien et al., 2020; Marynissen et al., 2021; Son & Böger, 2021; Whitehouse & Nakazato, 2021; cf. Part IV in this Handbook).

As regards the outcomes of leave policies, numerous studies have documented effects of paid leave entitlements for health-related outcomes (for an overview, see Riley Bowles et al., 2022), women’s employment (for an overview, see Ferragina, 2020), fertility (Duvander et al., 2019b), father involvement and child relations and gender equality in care work and housework (e.g., O’Brien & Wall, 2017), among others. These studies also pointed at a complex relationship between leave policy design and its outcomes, which is also related to the multifaceted nature of leave policies. Leave policy design consists of several interrelated policy elements such as leave length, benefit level (including floors and ceilings), leave flexibility, leave transferability and eligibility criteria (see, e.g. Ray et al., 2010; Ciccia & Verloo, 2012; Javornik & Kurowska, 2017; Dobrotić & Blum, 2019, 2020). Depending on the configurations of those policy elements in a particular country or time, but also its relationship with other
policy areas (e.g., ECEC, labour market provisions), leave policy can have different (and often contradictory) effects.

These complexities and their implications and outcomes are at the centre of leave policy research, which is continuously growing. It pertains in different and interconnected theoretical fields (e.g., care, welfare state regimes, the gendered division of labour, fathering), policy sectors (e.g., family policy, work-care policy, family and parenting support, anti-poverty policy, education), as well as academic disciplines (e.g., Demography, Education, Labour Economics, Law, Political Science, Public Policy, Sociology, Social Policy, Social Work). In addition to academics and (non)government policymakers, global companies are also contributing to international knowledge on parenting leaves as highlighted by campaigns such as #ShowUsYourLeave on social media.

RATIONALE AND TERMINOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH HANDBOOK

Rationale

This Research Handbook on Leave Policy: Parenting and Social Inequalities in a Global Perspective aims to deepen the understanding of complexities inherent to both leave policy research and leave policy development. It provides a comprehensive and contemporary overview of conceptual and methodological trends and challenges in leave policy research, state-of-the-art findings on leave policy determinants and outcomes, as well as up-to-date knowledge on leave policy developments in different regions around the world. The Research Handbook brings together scholars – many of them members of the International Network on Leave Policies and Research (ILPN) – from various disciplines and different countries and regions, allowing for a diversity of perspectives and voices. Chapters engage with both past and future leave policy developments across the globe and, most importantly, encourage a critical debate on how leave policies should respond to the challenges posed by permanent (politics of) austerity, the rise of right-wing populism, new economies marked by increasingly precarious, underinsured and nonstandard employment, informal economies, migration flows, the social and economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, growing financial strains on parents and widening (global) inequalities in general.

The topic of inequalities is put at the centre of the Research Handbook, aiming to strengthen the global debate and broader thinking about the interconnection of leave policy design and developments and social inequalities and ask whether there is a case to reconfigure leave policy as a social right. This is highly relevant in the context of still prevalent gendered care and employment practices, increasingly precarious, underinsured and nonstandard employment, widely present informal economies, migrations, family changes and growing financial strains put in front of the parents (cf. Vaughan-Whitehead, 2012; Hewison, 2016; Blofield & Martínez Franzoni, 2018). The term ‘social inequalities’ is used in a broader sense in this book, capturing any inequalities in leave developments and provisions, that is, inequalities that may arise along various lines such as gender, position in and characteristics of employment, socioeconomic status, nationality/ethnicity or as a consequence of colonialism, family status, one’s position in the life-cycle, territory, etc. Country-specific structural and cultural circumstances as well as (lack of) implementation could additionally condition the resources...
and opportunities the leave policy produces for various parents. Besides, there are multiple and intersectional inequalities embedded in leave policies (cf. Dobrotić, 2022a, 2022b) with disadvantages and privilege twisting one into the other, producing provisions and practices that favour some while marginalizing others.

Therefore, this Research Handbook aims to contribute to a better understanding of ‘the complexity and multiplicity of social locations in the distribution of policy resources, and therefore of disparities in opportunities of various groups of mothers and fathers to engage in care and work’ (Dobrotić, 2022a, p. 14). It does so by putting the issue of inequalities as a recurrent thread throughout the Handbook chapters, and by taking a global perspective on leave policies, whereas most research has so far focused on the higher-income countries of the OECD world. We therefore hope to contribute to and stimulate further research and discussions in these directions with the Research Handbook.

**Leave Policy Terminology**

Leave policy types and terminology vary across countries and studies, with maternity, paternity and parental leave being the most commonly named forms (cf. OECD, 2011; Koslowski et al., 2019; ILO, 2022). *Maternity leave* is typically understood as a health-related right available to mothers, to be taken just before, during, and immediately after childbirth. *Paternity leave* is also usually granted around childbirth but to fathers (or co-parents). ‘Parental leave’ is used more ambiguously, as both an umbrella term denoting different types of leaves and a distinct type of leave. For terminological clarity, this Research Handbook follows the latter approach, that is, *parental leave* is understood here as a care-related right available to both mothers and fathers after the initial maternity/paternity leave. Parental leave allows parents to take time off from work to focus on care, but it also imposes a duty of care on them, as parents are usually not allowed to work (full-time) while on paid leave. It also shifts the emphasis away from a primary caregiving approach to parenting. Finally, although commonly referred to as the right of employed parents, inactive or unemployed parents may also be covered by parental leave benefits that allow them time off from active job search or training to focus on care (Dobrotić & Blum, 2020).

Next to these three technically distinct types of leave, we use the term *parenting leaves* as an umbrella term to encompass all types of leaves, which allow parents to take care of (younger) children. Such an umbrella term is necessary in the face of the actual variety of both terms and forms of leave we find in different national settings. While a growing number of countries align with the three distinct leave policy types and terms described above, others do not. For example, in the United States, only unpaid ‘family and medical leave’ exists at the national level, which can be used for various purposes. In New Zealand, ‘primary carer leave’ is available. At the same time, some countries (e.g., Iceland, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden) use an overarching, gender-neutral term for all leave entitlements around childbirth or adoption (e.g., birth or parental leave) to avoid discriminating based on gender or sexual orientation, but also maintaining the possibility for co-parenting with parts of the leave still being reserved for either parent (see Koslowski et al., 2019). In addition, former socialist countries have tended to use the term ‘childcare leave’ (or ‘additional maternity leave’) to denote the leave period that follows after the maternity leave. In the latter case, it is not only a difference in terminology when compared to parental leave, but also in the right itself – although both parents were eligible for ‘childcare leave’, it is usually defined as a primary mothers’ right that could
be transferred to the father (sometimes under certain conditions; Dobrotić & Stropnik, 2020). ‘Childcare leave’ is also used to refer to unpaid or low paid leave that can be used after the parental leave (Koslowski et al., 2019). In research, it has also been used as an umbrella term to capture all types of leave aimed at parents (besides ‘parental leave’ or ‘family leave’; Ray et al., 2010).

Finally, it is important to note that while the primary focus of this Research Handbook is on parenting leaves that aim to support parents with smaller children (maternity, paternity, parental), as discussed by Baird et al. (Chapter 26 in this Handbook), they are not sufficient to incorporate care over the life course (cf. Deven & Moss, Chapter 2 in this Handbook; Ciccia, Chapter 3 in this Handbook). The Research Handbook will therefore also touch upon other forms of leave – outside parenting leaves – such as caregiving leaves for other family members but also other forms of career breaks for various purposes, sometimes beyond care.

THE RESEARCH HANDBOOK: THEMES AND CHAPTERS

The Research Handbook is divided into five main sections: Part I on conceptual and analytical challenges in leave policy research; Part II on analysing the politics and ideas of leave policies; Part III on assessing leave policy outcomes; Part IV on leave policies in comparative perspective; Part V on gaps and the future of leave policy research and development. The Research Handbook provides both a comprehensive overview of the field of leave policy research and in-depth analyses of particular countries around the globe.

Conceptual and Analytical Challenges in Leave Policy Research

In Part I, authors address how leave policy is conceptualized, operationalized and measured. Reflecting on the last three decades of research and leveraging their immense involvement and expertise in the field – especially through the International Network on Leave Policies and Research4 – Deven and Moss (Chapter 2) point out many lessons we have learned but also the importance to expand research focus ‘to encompass the relationship between care, employment and gender in the broadest sense’ (p. 22). The need to focus more on the embeddedness of leave policies within a broader socioeconomic and political context, and culture and practices (particularly concerning the workplace), as well as their complementarity with a more comprehensive ‘work-care policy package’ across the life course, are some of the aspects stressed.

Their discussion is followed by two chapters focusing more explicitly on how leave policy has been conceptualized. First, Ciccia’s (Chapter 3) insightful discussion of leave policy analysis across thirty years of comparative gender and welfare state research shows that while leave policy research progressively developed and became more sophisticated, the three streams of literature – welfare regimes, care regimes and care policy instruments – need greater integration. The same holds for a more profound ‘consideration of intersectionality and the pervasiveness of care needs along the life course in the analysis of leave policies’ (p. 28). Then, Kurowska (Chapter 4) engages in more detail with the strengths and weaknesses of the main analytical approaches that proved useful to grasp the (changing) character of parenting leave policies embedded in welfare states, including (de)commodification, (de)familialization, inclusiveness of leave benefits, and the realness of opportunities that the benefits create for
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mothers, fathers, and children. Kurowska concludes that more studies are needed to understand better the various parents’ real opportunities of using leave entitlements.

The latter point also asks for new comparative leave policy indicators, which brings us to the final chapter in this section. Namely, the growth of comparative studies – many of them focusing on leave policy outcomes – and the growing interest in the heterogeneity of parents’ experiences raised a question of the pros and cons of comparative leave policy indicators. Against this background, Otto, Bártová and Van Lancker (Chapter 5) provide an overview of various comparative indicators and related data sources available, focusing on their operationalization, measurement and suitability for different foci in leave research. They argue that improvement of indicators is needed for making further progress in the field.

Analysing the Drivers of Leave Policies: Politics and Ideas

Part II attends to the drivers of leave policies, engaging with two aspects in particular – politics and ideas behind the leave policy development. O’Brien and Uzunalioglu (Chapter 6) trace the role that international organizations have played in the development of leave policies over time and place. Taking a historical perspective, both the role of leave policymaking at global and supra-national levels and the impact of dominant discourses on the development of policy over time are considered. They show how international organizations’ leave policy discourses – and therewith policy goals – have expanded beyond protecting the health and safety of working mothers. Nowadays, these would typically include women’s economic empowerment and/or gender equality, and more recently social protection for informal workers, but still less so child wellbeing perspective (at least explicitly). While one cannot ignore the role of international standards, there are also other drivers of leave policy development, as discussed by Blome (Chapter 7). After providing a brief overview of scholarship on political explanations of leave reforms, Blome focuses on ‘new’ politics of leave policymaking, pointing out the role of voters and the dynamics of party competition, and women in political office, which play out differently in various political and institutional contexts.

The two chapters that follow engage in more detail with the role of politics and ideas in leave policymaking, illustrating their importance with case studies. First, Szelewa and Szikra (Chapter 8) analyse the politics of parenting leave reforms of populist and illiberal political regimes. As illustrated by Hungarian and Polish cases, populist right-wing governments did not introduce paradigmatic changes to parenting leave schemes; however, they have been instrumental in changing a discursive framing behind leave policymaking emphasizing separate gender roles and mothers’ care as a path towards increased fertility rates. Finally, Nygård and Nyby (Chapter 9) further disentangle the importance of (changing and) underlying ideas that are shaping parenting leaves, and gender equality in particular. Early on, gender-equality ideas have shaped the Nordic parenting leave systems, and these ideas have ‘travelled’ internationally – yet their implementation ‘has not looked the same across the Nordic countries, nor has the meaning of this idea or the discourses […] been unanimous or undisputed’ (p. 115), as is exemplified by the Finnish case.

Assessing the Outcomes of Leave Policies

In Part III, outcomes of leave policies are discussed from different perspectives. This section begins with an overview of how to proceed in assessing the outcomes of leave policies as

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Doucet and Duvander (Chapter 10) consider the issues that arise when we try to define, measure and assess the impacts of parenting leaves. They present us with four particular complexities to consider: the challenges which arise from using mixed methods, the difficulties of finding similar units of analysis across comparative studies, the issue of how to study leave policies in conjunction with other related policies (such as ECEC) and, finally, how to hold back as academics from presenting ‘magic bullets’ for bringing about gendered change, unless we are really certain we have such evidence. Schober and Büchau (Chapter 11) then engage with the question of how parenting leaves impact parental employment, family work, and gender norms. Narrowing the focus on impact evaluations of high-income countries, but of a considerable time span – by providing a literature review of research articles published in the 1990–2020 period – they conclude that parenting leave policies have shown rather moderate effects on a more gender-equal division of paid and family work but relatively fast changes in norms and beliefs.

Mussino (Chapter 12) makes use of excellent empirical data to consider the broader question of whether leave policies impact fertility, but considering the specific case of immigrants from low-fertility countries in Sweden. She indeed finds evidence to suggest that leave policies may have some modest impact on fertility. Finally, Brandth, Bungum and Kvande (Chapter 13) provide a critical overview of scholarship on fathers and parental leaves. Focusing on the impacts of parental leaves on fathers and fathering rather than gender equality, they point out that ‘time alone with the baby may be transformative’ (p. 182) for fathers’ caring practices.

Within Part III, we originally planned to include a chapter on the child’s perspective in parenting leave policies and, in general, children’s rights, but despite various efforts, we were not able to find someone to author such a chapter. This points to a critical gap in current leave policy research (see also Blum et al., Chapter 28 in this Handbook). Yet this may also reflect ongoing trends in leave policymaking – including those at the international level (see also O’Brien & Uzunalioglu, Chapter 6 in this Handbook) – as the emphasis is predominantly on female labour market participation and work–family reconciliation.

Leave Policies in Comparative Perspective

The chapters in Part IV address the wide variety of leave policies across the globe. While all the chapters provide a brief historical perspective, situating a particular country or region in the broader comparative perspective, the main focus is on more recent developments. Nine chapters can by no means provide a fair representation of ‘global leave policies’; however, the chapters are carefully selected to stretch across all the continents and be of comparative character while speaking about the main challenges in recent leave policy developments from inequality perspectives. This section raises many common topics such as the multi-layered and complicated nature of leave policies, incremental advances and the importance of legacy for leave policy development; however, it primarily points to specifics of each country or the region.

The section starts by focusing on Europe, with Lammi-Taskula’s chapter (Chapter 14) ‘representing’ the Nordic region – considered to have one of the most developed parenting leave policies – pointing out variations between Nordic countries in both policy design and timing of reforms, highlighting the Finnish case which has been catching up slowly on gender aspects of leave policy development. Strongly institutionalized cash-for-care benefits are considered a major factor hampering more comprehensive fathers’ entitlements. The following
two chapters also stress the importance of legacy regarding a different pace of ‘modernization’ of parenting leave policies – that is, leave departure away from the male breadwinner model – next to the critical role of actors and/or culture. By focusing on continental countries, Yerkes, Pfau-Effinger and Van Lancker (Chapter 15) point out that at first view there has been considerable change (e.g., in Germany), but at closer look similarities between the continental countries prevail and changes towards ‘modern’ parenting leave policies are moderate. A more ‘radical’ departure from the ‘old’ model can be seen in two Southern European countries – Portugal and Spain – discussed by Meil, Wall, Atalaia and Escobedo (Chapter 16). Interestingly, while the introduction of fathers-only leaves was successful in both countries, fathers’ leave use and involvement in child-raising are to be achieved by different policy instruments, one imposing and the other incentivizing. The authors also raise the issue of inequalities in the access to leave provisions, a topic at the centre of the Baltic chapter where Karu (Chapter 17) points out less discussed aspects of leave policy design, illustrating the importance of giving more weight to the ‘small print’ in leave policies in comparative research. This primarily refers to terms and conditions under which leaves and benefits can be used, having important implications on who can actually use the right, what they can use and under what conditions.

The following group of chapters takes us outside Europe. Whitehouse, Baird and Morrissey (Chapter 18) investigate leave policy trajectories in Australia and New Zealand and how they are shaped by the legacies of the Antipodean model, expecting incremental advances as the most probable scenario for the future. The chapter highlights how the ‘legacy of settler colonialism […] continues to reproduce intersecting lines of social inequality’ (p. 245). Petts, Engeman, Gatenio Gabel and Kaufman (Chapter 19) present the interesting case of disparities in access to paid leave in the US, considering parenting but also other types of leaves. They highlight the particular nature of ‘family leave’ in the US that allows (some) workers to take leave for a variety of caregiving reasons. The chapter shows that access to paid leave is socially stratified in the US (as in many other jurisdictions). The latter is particularly the case in East Asia, Latin America and Africa, regions discussed in the final three chapters of Part IV, which also raise some additional issues. First, while discussing gender and social inequalities inherent to leave policies in Chinese, Japanese and Korean societies, Li and Eklund (Chapter 20) also touch upon the important – but often neglected – topic of implementation more explicitly. They show how the same leave provisions may be differently understood and implemented, creating even more inequalities in parents’ abilities to engage in employment and care than one could ‘read’ from policy design. High social inequalities in these countries also relate to the intensive parenthood culture. Second, these chapters question more explicitly the suitability of leave policies developed on social insurance principles attached to formal and salaried jobs, particularly due to a context characterized by the high informality of labour markets. Focusing on leave policies in Latin America in the past two decades, Marzonetto and Martínez Franzoni (Chapter 21) thus stress that although leave coverage expanded, reaching out to ‘outsiders’ through additional benefits, the success was limited as eligibility still excludes most mothers and leave generosity is often inadequate. As a result, the high informality of the labour market, which sidesteps social protection through employment, remains at the centre of leave policy challenges in this region. Son (Chapter 22) continues along a similar line with the chapter contributing to our knowledge about the development of paid maternity leave in 38 sub-Saharan African countries, showing that many of these countries have long provided generous but extremely narrowly entitled leaves, as part of their
colonial legacies. Therefore, also in this context, the majority of women workers are still not entitled to paid maternity leaves.

**Gaps and the Future of Leave Policy Research and Development**

While the Research Handbook started with a broad understanding of social inequalities, the main focus of scholarship is on gender inequalities and inequalities attached to one’s position in and characteristics of (in)formal labour markets, with ‘other’ inequalities such as those related to socioeconomic status, sexuality, nationality/ethnicity, family status, disability, colonialism, etc. being only (if at all) touched upon. In addition, the focus is predominantly on state-based provision rather than employer-based provision. Therefore, Part V highlights at least some of these gaps in leave policy research and development, though there is more work to be done.

Kaufman and their team (Chapter 23) make a valuable and timely contribution by considering the access that LGBTQ parents have to parenting leaves across six countries (Canada, Croatia, France, Iceland, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom). Specifically, the chapter considers the (in)equality of female and male same-sex parents in access to leave, and recognition of transgender and non-binary parents as well as multi-parent families. They conclude that efforts to make leaves more inclusive of LGBTQ families are present; however, broader issues such as restrictions in policies based on gender, paths to parenthood and views of family also contribute to inequalities in leave entitlements. The following three chapters extend the perspective on leaves for working parents beyond public policies, namely by attending to entitlements provided by employers. First, Hipp, Schlüter and Molina (Chapter 24) look at the role of employers in the implementation and for the actual take-up of public leave policies, showing that in many countries, mothers and in particular fathers do not take all the leave available to them. They further discuss that this ‘implementation gap’ may be connected to both low leave payments and structural and cultural workplace constraints. After that, Daiger von Gleichen (Chapter 25) explores which conditions determine the provision of leave by employers in the United States, uncovering, among other things, a clear and simple path to employer-provided maternity leave consisting of a combination of public leave policy, a high proportion of female employees and supportive supervisors. Baird and her team (Chapter 26) also highlight the role of employers, in addition to the state, in funding these leaves. More importantly, they seek to broaden our conception of leave, towards leave to care for self or others (not only infants), but also to emphasize the need for leaves across the life course. Faced with a ‘new reality’ – that is, the pandemic – at the time of writing this Research Handbook, the editors (Chapter 27) developed the chapter considering how leave policies have evolved during the COVID-19 pandemic to accommodate parents’ new needs to combine childcare during ECEC and school closures and very much changed employment conditions. Finally, the editors (Chapter 28) close the volume with a call for parenting leave research to anchor issues of leave and inequalities on its agenda for the next decade and beyond.

**NOTES**

1. Although Bosnia and Herzegovina could also be added to this group as maternity leave benefits there ceased to exist as a statutory right defined at the state level and are provided at the regional and
cantonal level. The latter have full responsibility for their regulation and implementation without an explicit obligation to do so producing gaps in the provision (see Dobrotić & Obradović, 2020).


3. That is particularly the case in Europe where the distinction between maternity, paternity and parental leave can be found also in the EU directives (cf. Council Directive 92/85/EEC; Directive (EU) 2019/1158).


5. Although it is important to highlight some valuable exceptions (see, e.g., Daly, 2020; Palme & Heimer, 2021).

REFERENCES


Introduction


