



IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. POLICY OF THE WORK, FAMILY, AND EQUITY INDEX

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How Does the U.S. Measure Up?

As part of the Project on Global Working Families, with the support of the Ford Foundation, the **Work, Family, and Equity Index** has been developed to measure governmental performance around the world in meeting the needs of working families. The elements in the Index have been selected to comprise an evidence-based set of policies that have achieved widespread recognition based on the weight of the research evidence and consensus in global policy and international agreements.

Where the U.S. Has Strong Work Protections

The U.S. performs well in having policies that ensure an equitable right to work for all racial and ethnic groups, regardless of gender, age or disability. U.S. social insurance policies have had marked success in lowering the poverty rates of the elderly, but they have been far less successful than other affluent nations in protecting children from poverty.

Where the U.S. Lags Behind

Leave around childbearing

- Out of 173 countries studied, 169 countries offer guaranteed leave with income to women in connection with childbirth; 98 of these countries offer 14 or more weeks paid leave.
- The U.S. guarantees no paid leave for mothers in any segment of the work force, leaving it in the company of only 3 other nations: Liberia, Papua New Guinea, and Swaziland.
- 66 countries ensure that fathers either receive paid paternity leave or have a right to paid parental leave; 31 of these countries offer 14 or more weeks of paid leave.
- The U.S. guarantees fathers neither paid paternity nor paid parental leave.

Support for breastfeeding

- At least 107 countries protect working women's right to breastfeed.
- One hour or more per day is provided in 100 of the countries guaranteeing the right to breastfeed.
- The U.S. does not guarantee the right to breastfeed, even though breastfeeding has been proven to reduce infant mortality.

Leave for illness and family care

- At least 145 countries provide paid sick days for short- or long-term illnesses, with 136 providing a week or more annually. More than 81 countries provide sickness benefits for at least 26 weeks or until recovery. The U.S. provides only unpaid leave for serious illnesses through the FMLA, which does not cover all workers.

Work hours

- At least 126 countries require employers to provide a mandatory day of rest each week. The U.S. does not guarantee workers this 24-hour break.
- 137 countries mandate paid annual leave. 121 countries guarantee 2 weeks or more each year. The U.S. does not require employers to provide paid annual leave.
- While only 28 countries have restrictions or prohibitions on night work, 50 countries have government-mandated evening and night wage premiums. The U.S. neither restricts nor guarantees wage premiums for evening or night work.

Why Does it Matter?

Paid leave for childbearing and childrearing

- Improves children's health outcomes by making more time available to parents to provide essential care for children, facilitates breastfeeding which reduces the risk of infections, and increases the likelihood that children will receive necessary immunizations, all of which contribute to lower infant mortality and morbidity rates.
- More time for parents also allows for the formation of bonds between parents and children, fostering positive emotional development of children.
- Improves economic conditions of families by increasing the long-term employment and earning prospects of working parents, especially by reducing the wage "child penalty."
- Benefits employers by reducing staff turnover, which can lower recruitment and training costs and improve workers' productivity.

Support for breastfeeding

- Breast-feeding results in lower infant and child mortality, with studies finding a 1.5- to 5-fold lower relative risk of mortality among breast-fed children.
- Breast-fed children have lower rates of gastrointestinal infections, respiratory tract infections, meningitis, and other infections. A higher fatality rate from diarrhea has been documented among bottle-fed children in the U.S., Canada, and the United Kingdom, as well as in developing countries.

Leave for illness and family care

- Please see *The Importance of the Healthy Families Act to the Health of American Children*, Issue Brief II.

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