

Cross-cutting introduction to Maternity/Paternity (Table IV)

Financial support for working mothers has a long history and may be traced back to developments in the immediate aftermath of the First World War when there was need to encourage women into the labour market and provide support so that they might remain there. On the one hand was the emergence of family allowances (Table IX) and on the other the provision of maternity benefits.

Among the relatively common provisions were that the mother should be away from employment for at least 3 months, commencing six weeks before the expected date of confinement and that she had a right to return to work and be allowed to nurse her new baby.

In the last half century the ‘package’ of benefits has been extended to differing degrees in differing countries, to allow for up to a year’s paid maternity leave and in many countries for the benefit to be available to the child’s father. Some countries allow for maternity benefits in the event of a miscarriage or stillbirth and there may be special support for mothers with disabled children.

The conditions of entitlement are varied and distinctions may be drawn between benefits in kind (mostly health care in conjunction with pregnancy and childbirth), cash benefits (maternity, paternity and adoption benefits) and employment protection (leave with the right to re-engagement – outside the scope of MISSOC). In some cases entitlement is established simply on the basis of residence (mostly for health care) but in other instances it may be necessary to have been previously insured for a specified period of time. In some countries employers are primarily responsible for paying earnings related benefit during the period of leave. For those women who do not satisfy the criteria of entitlement to an insurance based benefit a maternity allowance may be payable.

In recent years there has been a commitment to increased flexibility and greater sensitivity. Fathers may now claim (or share) parental leave (this is covered in Table IX); and benefits may be paid when a child is adopted.