

Case Study

AN ARGUMENT FOR PATERNITY LEAVE AND PROGRESSIVE MATERNITY POLICIES: LESSONS FROM COUNTRY GOVERNMENTS AND PRIVATE SECTOR IN THE CARIBBEAN

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SUMMARY

Evidence has shown that parental involvement from a young age, starting from birth, has a positive impact on overall child development and health. Since 2018, the USAID Applying Science to Strengthen and Improve Systems (ASSIST) Project has worked to strengthen health systems, specifically newborn, well-baby, and psychosocial support services, as part of USAID's Zika emergency response program in the Caribbean region. WI-HER, LLC, the gender partner for this initiative, has led the gender technical area, integrating gender into service delivery and mainstreaming a gender perspective throughout the health system. This case study pulls from the global evidence base to illustrate the benefits of paternity leave on children and families, detailing current leave policies in the five ASSIST-supported English-speaking Caribbean countries related to pregnancy, immediate after-birth care, and well-child care. The document highlights progressive initiatives that have been implemented, presents results from the public and private sector, and provides lessons learned for Caribbean stakeholders interested in strengthening family health and well-being. Research indicates that all five countries - Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Vincent and the Grenadines - have maternity leave policies at the national level, but none currently have paternity leave policies. However, Jamaica has initiated conversations at the national level and some private sector companies in the Caribbean, influenced by trailblazers in the global arena, are starting to make shifts in their parental leave policies to contribute to a better work-life balance that supports family well-being and, at the same time, contributes to both increased gender equality and improved productivity. In addition to the global literature, this case study is also influenced by two ASSIST-supported desk reviews (Eastern and Southern Caribbean and Jamaica), two gender analyses (Antigua and Dominica), and learning across the English-speaking Caribbean which have indicated that examining parental leave is a trending topic relevant to global health.

INTRODUCTION

Gender equality advocates across the world push for greater equality in policies and programs, in access to education and health, in workplace opportunities, and in roles and responsibilities at home. A policy that spans across almost all of these agendas is family leave, including maternity and paternity leave. Family leave is increasingly recognized as a beneficial policy for parents and their newborns, but the formulation and implementation of these policies varies greatly across the world, including across the Caribbean islands. This case study focuses on paternity leave and explores the challenges and considerations affecting paternity policies; outlines the current policies in place in Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines; explains private sector policies being implemented in these countries; and presents opportunities for learning to inform policy improvements. Text boxes throughout also highlight the impact of policy reforms in select countries outside of the Caribbean region.

BACKGROUND

Paternity leave allows fathers the opportunity to bond with their newborns and can foster gender equality in the home by allowing men to support their partners with childcare (or do it alone in the case of single-family households). Evidence shows that when men bond with a baby from the beginning, they are more likely to be present and involved throughout the child's life, more consistently and evenly

"Part of the rationale for paternity leave is if men are able to be very involved early on in the care of their children, they're going to be more involved ever after, and it will translate to more equal sharing and equal roles."

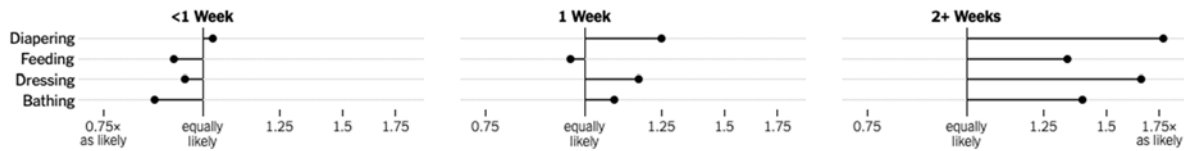
- Ms. Waldfogel, Professor of social work
(<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/09/upshot/paternity-leave-the-rewards-and-the-remaining-stigma.html>)

sharing child-rearing responsibilities between the parents.¹ In Quebec, Canada, a new paternity leave policy (offering five weeks paid leave) resulted in men increasing their time spent on household chores by 23% after taking paternity leave.² As shown in **Figure I**, men who take more than two-weeks leave are more likely to help with chores compared to men who do not take leave, which can lead to a more equitable distribution of household responsibilities

Figure I:

A Longer Leave, a More Involved Father

Fathers who take longer paternity leaves are more likely to perform certain daily child care tasks nine months later than those who take no leave, even when controlling for variables such as the father's prior parental involvement.



Source: Lenna Nepomnyaschy and Jane Waldfogel

“Positive and meaningful interaction with mothers and fathers from the very beginning helps to shape children’s brain growth and development for life, making them healthier and happier, and increasing their ability to learn. It’s all of our responsibility to enable them to fill this role,” - UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta H. Fore
<https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/2-3-infants-live-countries-where-dads-are-not-entitled-single-day-paid-paternity>

Mothers benefit from paternity leave as well – in the first couple of months after giving birth, mothers experience incredible sleep deprivation and emotional strain, yet women whose partners take leave have lower rates of depression and higher lifetime earnings.

While true that mothers and fathers benefit from leave in the first couple of months after having a child where they may experience significant sleep deprivation and emotional strain, there are also benefits for the child. Male involvement has positive effects on children’s psychological

health, self-esteem, and life-satisfaction in the long-term.⁶ Further, one 2008 study that examined impacts of father involvement in infant cognitive outcomes found that father involvement (stimulating activities, warmth, physical care, and caregiving) improves cognitive development, and involvement was consistently associated with a lower likelihood of negative cognitive outcomes.⁷ Additionally, the same study showed that the “positive influence of father involvement on cognitive outcomes was stronger for children with special needs compared to those without”. The findings support previous research that fathers play an important role in the lives of infants and children with special needs and their contributions enhance functioning and development.⁸

Allowing paternity leave is also a smart economic choice. **First**, when men take time off, the gender wage gap decreases as women’s employment increases and their income security is enhanced. According to the World Economic Forum, countries that offer paternity leave more successfully close the wage gap between men and women. This is because men taking time off reduces the discrimination against young women and helps normalize the practice of taking time off after the birth of a child.⁹ **Second**, retention rates may increase as a result of parental leave. In California, a new parental leave policy increased retention rates (of male workers) for low-skilled jobs by 12%. Companies affected by this new policy said that it generated either a neutral or positive effect on profitability and employee job performance.¹⁰

Yet according to UNICEF, 90 million or two-thirds of the world’s children under 1-year-old live in countries where their fathers are not entitled by law to any paid paternity leave. Ninety-two countries do not have national paid paternity leave policies or policies in place that ensure new fathers get adequate paid time off with their newborn.¹¹ Richer countries tend to provide more generous paternity leave (see **Table I**). Of course, there are exceptions. For example, the United States is one of only eight countries in the world that does not have a national law guaranteeing paid parental leave for mothers **or** fathers. Tajikistan, on the other hand, is the only low-income country to provide more than 14 weeks paid leave to fathers (and 52 weeks to mothers).¹² The tides are turning in the direction of more leave and over the past decade alone, a handful of African countries have introduced paid paternity leave.

And what about parents who don’t work in the formal labor sector? Women working in the informal sector in work such as street vendors or domestic workers often face economic pressures and lack of income security, and cannot afford to reduce their workload.¹³ They are also much more vulnerable to unsafe and insecure working conditions, have fewer legal protections, are limited in accessing public services, and receive lower pay. As a result, many continue working too far into pregnancy or return to work too soon after childbirth, exposing themselves and their child to health risks. While it is difficult to measure the informal economy due to some participating individuals not wanting to be identified and several different approaches to defining and estimating its size, causes, and impact, one recent 2017 study that estimated the size of informal economies in Caribbean states found that populations engage in informal economic activities – 20-30% in The Bahamas, 30-40% in Barbados, 29-33% in Guyana, 35-44% in Jamaica, 35-45% in Suriname, and 26-33% in Trinidad and Tobago.¹⁴ An earlier 2008 study estimated that the informal economy accounts for 24.2% of the GDP in St. Kitts and Nevis, 31.2% in Antigua and Barbuda, 34.2% in Dominica, and 50.6% in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.¹⁵ One option that some countries such as Chile, Costa Rica and South Africa have pursued is to extend existing social insurance schemes (including maternity benefits) to informal workers.

Table I: Paternity Leave on the Global Scale (income level as classified by the World Bank, GNI per capita)

Country	Income Level	Paternity Leave Benefit	Status
Spain	High-income economy	Two weeks of paid paternity leave	A recent study in Spain showed that offering two-weeks paid paternity leave to men resulted in delays to future pregnancies (which we know has positive repercussions for health and gender equality). ^{16 17} This shift in fertility may have been due to a perceived increase the opportunity cost of an additional child or that men reportedly had lower desired fertility after the reform (which could possibly be due to their increased awareness of the costs of child rearing). ¹⁸
Sweden	High-income economy	30-days paid paternity leave	Sweden recently reformed their paternity leave policy with the goal of promoting gender equity, greater father-baby bonding, and improving mothers’ postpartum health. Swedish law allows men to take up to 30 days of paid leave. Research around this policy has found that giving fathers (or the second parent in same-sex couples) paid leave (even just a couple of days) and the flexibility to use it when the mother needs support greatly improves the mother’s health. There was a 26 percent decrease in anti-anxiety prescriptions and a 14 percent

			reduction in hospitalizations for mothers who benefited from the reform, compared to mothers who gave birth before the policy took effect. The flexibility allowed by Swedish law has proved essential-- fathers can take intermittent days of leave and the data shows they most often use it when the mother seeks health care, which enables mothers to seek the care they need in a timely fashion. According to Persson and Rossin-Slater (2019), "The typical father in Sweden took only a couple of extra days. It wasn't the length that seemed to matter most, but his flexibility to take time when the mother needed it." ¹⁹
Philippines	Lower-middle income economy	105 days of paid maternity leave; 7 days of paid paternity leave; mothers allowed to transfer up to 7 of her days to the father	The Philippines recently passed an act to expand maternity leave and allow up to 14 days of paid leave for fathers. Fathers are automatically entitled to 7 days, but this policy is unique in that mothers are allowed to transfer up to an additional 7 of her 105 days paid leave to the father, regardless of marital status. If the father is not involved, the mother can choose to transfer these days to another relative or support person. ²⁰
Chile and Uruguay	High-income economies	Shared paternity/maternity leave Leave for mothers with informal employment Chile: mothers receive 6 months; fathers receive 5 days; mothers allowed to transfer up to 6 weeks of her days to the father. Uruguay: Mothers and fathers may have paid part time off for up to six months.	Chile and Uruguay have both introduced shared parental leave policies that compliment maternity and paternity leave policies. They also have leave provisions for female informal workers who are self-employed or working outside the formal labor market. In Chile, mothers get six months of leave and men get five days, but mothers can transfer up to six weeks of their leave to the father. Uruguay also offers paid time off and allows mothers and fathers to work part time for up to six months. However, the uptake of these benefits for men is still low (women are not transferring their time to men at a high rate and there is low usage of paternity leave). According to UN Women, "the European experience suggests that to advance men's effective use of parental leave, it is necessary to introduce non-transferable quotas, that is, a proportion of parental leave that is reserved for the use of the father and is lost to the couple, in the case that he does not use it." ²¹

Policy Challenges

According to Kavell Joseph in her 2019 article, no Caribbean country today has "adequate national legislation for paternity leave".²² However, creating a paternity leave policy is not always straightforward. In the Caribbean region, as in other parts of the world, governments are grappling with a culture in which many couples do not get married and men may have multiple children with different women, begging the question of who should be allowed to take leave, under what conditions, and for how long. If paternity leave were to be offered to unmarried men, would they be entitled to the benefit for each of their children? What if they have multiple children in a year? How can employers verify that men are the father and that they will use their leave to care for the child? This is further complicated in settings

where informal labor is common. While many countries mandate or incentivize the private sector to accommodate and cover the costs of family leave, for economies such as those in the Caribbean with a large informal labor force, it could be complicated and costly for governments to track and pay for such leave. Furthermore, countries are increasingly grappling with how to be inclusive of same-sex couples, adoptive parents, and other nontraditional situations. These are all questions and topics that need to be explored before establishing an updated paternity leave policy. In Latin America and the Caribbean, cohabitation is becoming more popular, and now three-fourths of women in a committed relationship aged 25-29 are cohabitating.²¹ According to UN Women, many family laws are out of touch with a reality that is seeing increasingly complicated relationships and shifting gender and socio-cultural dynamics. Furthermore, the United Nations' International Labor Organization (ILO) claims that many policies which qualify individuals based on marital status are contrary to their non-discrimination principle which is embedded in several ILO Conventions.²³ There is, therefore, a need to ensure that parents in all kinds of relationships have social protections and rights. First, we will explore the current policies in place in five Caribbean nations and the rationale behind each of the current policies.

MATERNITY AND PATERNITY BENEFITS IN THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING CARIBBEAN

Antigua and Barbuda

According to the Antigua and Barbuda Social Security Board, the national maternity benefit is provided to an insured woman who has given birth to a child and is in the form of an allowance, grant, or both.²⁴ A **maternity allowance** (paid time off) is granted for a maximum of 13 weeks and may start up to 6 weeks before confinement (a term used in the Caribbean region that refers to the period starting immediately after the birth of a child) or when confinement starts. This paid time off is given to a woman for a living child or stillbirth child that was born after 28 weeks. During this time, the benefit covers 60% of the insured person's average insurable weekly earnings; the claimant must have worked for at least 26 weeks to gain this benefit. A **maternity grant** is also available to a woman if she or her husband has paid 26 weeks of contributions to social security in the year immediately before confinement. This is a one-time lump sum valued at \$560 per child delivered at confinement that can be used to help meet some expenses when having a baby. To qualify for the maternity benefit a claimant must:

- 1) Have given birth to a child;
- 2) Be between 16 and pensionable age;
- 3) Must have worked for 26 weeks, during which mother or husband has paid into the social security system;
- 4) Complete a three-part application and submit to the Social Security Office, the application has sections for the doctor, claimant, and employer; and
- 5) After confinement, complete a two-part certification and submit to the Social Security Office, the certification has sections for the doctor/midwife and claimant. In the case where the husband claims the maternity grant for his wife only the certification is needed.



There is no official (national) paternity leave policy for men in Antigua and Barbuda. However, during one focus group discussion with antenatal couples as part of a recent gender analysis activity in Antigua, three of the four male participants noted that if you are married you may get seven to 10 days depending on your employer; these men worked in construction and at hotels in in maintenance and cleaning.

Dominica

Similar to Antigua and Barbuda, the Dominica Social Security Administration grants women maternity leave for a maximum period of 3 months.²⁵ During this time, the benefit covers 60% of her average weekly insurable earnings. She also must complete an application for benefit and a certification that confirms her pregnancy and expected due date. In Dominica, women must have been insured with social security for at least 30 weeks (been in insurable employment for at least 20 weeks in the last 30 weeks immediately prior to the commencement of maternity leave) to receive the benefit. The **maternity grant** is also available in Dominica at a value of \$500. Where a woman does not have enough from contributions (or she is uninsured), the combined contributions of a husband and a wife (or spouses living in association for 3 years) may be used.



There is no official paternity leave policy for men. However, during one focus group discussion with men as part of a recent gender analysis activity in Dominica, one of the six male participants revealed they were able to take paternity leave. That man, who worked for the government, shared that he was given four days leave. The other group participants stated that they were not aware of any entitled paternity leave.

Jamaica

According to Jamaica's Ministry of Labour and Social Security, a maternity benefit is available to women who have satisfied the qualifying conditions. Governed by the *Maternity Leave Act*²⁶, a 12 week leave benefit (8 weeks paid, 4 weeks unpaid) is available to a woman - at least 18 years old and who is not a "domestic worker" as defined in the *National Insurance Act* - who has been with the employer for at least a year and is payable as a lump sum (**maternity pay**) equal to eight weeks at the existing national minimum wage (as of July 2018, MW = \$7,000 Jamaican dollar per 40-hour work week). The benefit starts 8 weeks from when the claim was made or from the date of childbirth, whichever is later. An employer may request a certification of confinement signed by a medical professional. If the woman or child gets sick as a result of the pregnancy/birth then the woman may be eligible for an additional 14 weeks after the initial 12 weeks with certification from a medical professional. The maternity benefit however only provides pay for the first three pregnancies, and for any subsequent pregnancies, women can take leave but with no pay. For women who are considered "domestic workers" (and not included in the *Maternity Leave Act*) an 8-week maternity benefit is still provided under the *National Insurance Act* providing that they contribute 26 weeks of the 52 weeks prior to their pregnancy.^{27 28} The maternity allowance is linked to the national minimum wage.



There is currently no official paternity leave policy in Jamaica. However, the government has been facilitating discussions (November 2018) on the introduction of a *Paternity Leave Act* to encourage shared

parenting, support, and mentoring.²⁹ According to the Ministry of Culture, Gender, Entertainment, and Sport, the Act is in line with the recommendations of the National Policy for Gender Equality. While consultations with stakeholders are ongoing, news of the proposed Act has received support across the Island. The Human Resource Management Association of Jamaica (HRMAJ), for example, endorsed the Act and according its President, it would be a welcomed step forward:

“The introduction of an NPL [national paternity leave] policy would constitute a significant advancement in gender equality, which would benefit both parents and child since it would allow for bonding with the newborn and increase the probability of the father’s sustained support/influence in the child’s development... Having a National Paternity Leave Policy would be an important provision to encourage fathers to share childcare responsibilities. This policy would, therefore, be a positive step in the right direction, not only from a national perspective but also in support of building-up family structures.”³⁰ (Karl Williams, President, HRMAJ)

The HRMAJ recently surveyed Jamaican adult males (18 yrs. and older) on whether Jamaica needs a national paternity leave policy. Feedback from 98% of the 176 respondents indicated that the country should have such a policy.

St. Kitts and Nevis

Similar to Antigua and Barbuda and Dominica, the St. Christopher and Nevis (the official name of St. Kitts and Nevis) Social Security Board grants women maternity leave for a maximum period 13 weeks.³¹ During this time the benefit covers 65% of her average weekly wages. A woman claiming a benefit must have a certification from a registered medical professional stating the expected or actual date of confinement. In St. Kitts and Nevis, a woman must have been insured with social security for at least 39 weeks (and contributing for 20) to receive the benefit. Similar to Jamaica, an age category stipulates that the benefit applies to women between the ages of 16 and 62. If a woman in St. Kitts and Nevis satisfies the qualifications for maternity allowance, she automatically qualifies for the maternity grant at a value of \$450 per child born during one pregnancy. If a woman does not meet the conditions for maternity allowance but her husband does, she may be able to receive the grant based on his contributions.



The Social Security Board does not currently provide paternity leave to fathers citing that “according to the normal practice at this time in our society, fathers do not cease work for reasons related to the birth of their children.”³²

St. Vincent and the Grenadines

Similar to Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, and St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Vincent and the Grenadines through its National Insurance Services (NIS), grants women maternity leave for a period up to 13 weeks.³³ NIS specifies that this is for women who are not receiving a full salary from their employer while on leave. If they are receiving a full salary, then the allowance is paid to the employer. A certification from a doctor relating to the pregnancy is required. In St. Vincent and the Grenadines and similar to Dominica, women must have been employed for at least 30 weeks (contributing to insurance at least 20 weeks) to receive the benefit. Similar to Jamaica and St. Kitts and Nevis, an age category

stipulates that the benefit applies to women between the ages of 16 and pensionable age.

A woman or her spouse may also qualify for a **maternity grant** of \$660 per each live child birth if the woman or her spouse has contributed 20 of 30 consecutive weeks before the child’s birth (the benefit does not apply to stillbirth babies). Only one partner can claim a spouse/common law contribution at any time, the relationship must be established for 3 years (defined as they must be living together).



While paternity leave does not currently exist in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, it is one of the issues currently up for discussion as conversations on the Employment Protection Act are in progress. At a July 2019 Chamber of Commerce meeting, stakeholders discussed that paternity leave may be added to current policy updates “as an entitlement with specific conditions”.³⁴ Conversations are ongoing.

Table 2: Summary Maternity and Paternity Benefits in Five Caribbean Countries

	Maternity Leave for Insured Women*	Amount of maternity leave cash benefits (% of previous earnings) paid by social security	Maternity Grant	Paternity Leave
Antigua & Barbuda	13 weeks	60%	\$560	None
Dominica	12 weeks	60%	\$500 for an insured woman or spouse (including spouse by association if together 3 years)	None
Jamaica	8 weeks (up to 12 for non-domestic workers)	(domestic workers) 100% of national legal weekly minimum wage for 8 weeks (other employed) 100% for 8 weeks, 0% for additional 4 weeks	None	None (discussions for a Paternity Leave Act were initiated on November 2018)
St. Kitts & Nevis	13 weeks	65%	\$450 for an insured woman or her legal husband	None
St. Vincent & the Grenadines	13 weeks	65%	\$660 for an insured woman or spouse (including common law if together 3 years)	None

*Insured qualification only applies to domestic workers. Under Jamaica’s Maternity Leave Act a woman only needs to be with her employer one year to receive maternity.

EMERGING THEMES

Several common themes come out of a deeper look at parental leave policies. **First**, all five countries in this case study have some sort of paid maternity leave policy available to women who contribute wages to their national social security/insurance programs lasting on average 12 weeks (see **Table 2**). **Second**, in the Lesser Antilles (the smaller islands of Antigua & Barbuda, Dominica, St. Kitts & Nevis, and St. Vincent & the Grenadines) there is an additional benefit of a one-time maternity grant that can be

awarded to an insured woman, or at times her insured spouse or common law partner. **Third**, at least two of the countries (St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Jamaica) have a minimum age in place to receive maternity benefits (16 and 18 respectively). **Finally**, not one of the countries currently has an official paternity leave policy in place.

In their present state, the national policies appear to not reflect the current evidence by only providing parental leave benefits to mothers (and to some extent married or common law fathers) at a time when marriage rates are declining, and father and partner involvement is increasing. In St. Kitts for example, as mentioned above, paternity leave is not currently provided because it is not considered the “normal practice at this time in our society”. However, these types of policies do not align with the goals that some countries (Jamaica and St. Vincent and the Grenadines for example) in the region have started to lay out in promoting improved child health, positive child development, and strengthened families. What is more is that by continuing to provide women with maternity benefits (such as the St. Kitts policy), fathers are left out of the picture from the beginning including, understanding the workload of being a new parent, providing emotional support for partners, and of course bonding with baby and contributing to child development. This perpetuates gender inequalities at the home and establishes a norm that mothers are to be the primary caregiver. Governments like St. Kitts have an opportunity now to facilitate a shift in societal norms.

*“Our system in the Caribbean doesn’t support fathers to play an active role in the child’s life- for example, mothers are given maternity leave to help with bonding and I get that but fathers on the other hand, what incentive do they have from the system to be active in the child’s life at that point.” - Male care seeker, Antigua
(Gender Issues Influencing Zika Response in Antigua, USAID ASSIST Project)*

*“It is an amazing thing to see how it grows a man to grow his child and to be involved in every aspect of his child’s development. Paternity leave is extremely important, because we want to shift the paradigm that says it is the mother’s job. It is both parents’ job.” - Professor Opal Palmer Adisa, Director for the Institute of Gender and Development Studies
(<https://jis.gov.jm/discussions-on-paternity-leave/>)*

THE ROLE OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR

While Caribbean governments may be starting to think about how to fit emerging trends and shifting socio-cultural dynamics on paternity into their laws, some private sector actors are already paving the way. Flow, for example – the trade name for the telecommunications group Cable & Wireless Communications (CWC) that operates in 15 countries across the Caribbean, including the five mentioned in this report – is taking strides to improve parental leave for their employees. A new company policy, that took effect June 1, 2019, now provides parental leave benefits to both mothers **and** fathers including, up to 16 weeks paid maternity leave and 8 weeks paid paternity leave. Further, the policy applies whether employees become parents biologically, through surrogacy, or adoption. As the text of the policy has not been made publicly available online it is difficult to determine whether unmarried fathers get this benefit or if it applies to same-sex couples.

The new policy – under the banner of “Paid Parental Leave for Everyone” – incorporates the global standard being set by its parent company (Liberty Latin America) and reflects the deep understanding that expectant parents also need time to spend and grow with their families. According to its 2018 Annual Report, Liberty Latin America employs 10,800 people across its subsidiaries. Flow team members across

the Caribbean have expressed their enthusiasm for the new policy and the company’s efforts to center business operations around its employee and customer needs (**Table 3**).

Table 3: Reactions to Flow’s New Leave Announcement in the Caribbean

Antigua & Barbuda	<i>“Flow has a proven history of supporting the communities where we operate and one of the most valuable of those communities is our team members and their families.” (Kizzy Grant, Retail Sales Supervisor, Flow Antigua and Barbuda)³⁵</i>
Dominica	<i>“This is a great differentiator for us. We recognize the benefits of parental leave and we believe that this bold step will allow our people to have more time to build stronger connections with their newborns. The policy is a progressive one that aligns with our philosophy and culture.” Jeffrey Baptiste, General Manager, Flow Dominica)³⁶</i>
St. Kitts & Nevis	<i>“Flow has always had a strong culture where family units are considered as a vital support system for our team members, and spending quality time with loved ones as essential. I am happy that it is now reflected in this new parental leave policy.” (David Lake, Country Manager, Flow St. Kitts and Nevis)³⁷</i>
St. Vincent & the Grenadines	<i>“I think this is a great initiative by the company. I am especially impressed by the increase in paternity leave from three days to eight weeks for a father to bond with his new-born. This step really speaks volumes to how much precedence Flow places on the overall wellbeing of employees and their families.” (Consumer Sales Manager, Andrea Liverpool, Flow St. Vincent and the Grenadines)³⁸</i>
Regional	<i>“Evolving our parental leave policy, quite simply, is the right thing to do! We recognize that diversity drives success, and family dynamics and structures have changed. Our new policy demonstrates our commitment to a culture of diversity and inclusion and one that puts our people at the heart of our success.” (Kerry Scott, Chief People Officer, Liberty Latin America)³⁸</i>

Similarly, private sector companies in the U.S., U.K., and amongst multinational groups such as Amazon, Facebook, Ikea, Johnson & Johnson, and Virgin Group have blazed the way, driving policy change around both short-term (maternity/paternity/partner) and long-term (parental/child care) leave. One reason behind this is that companies have realized the increasing value that employees put on their families and home life. As a result, they look for the best ways to attract top talent including offering work schedules and benefits. In a 2015 survey by Ernst & Young, investigators found that “millennials around the world are more likely than other generations to cite paid parental leave as an important benefit”. Further, the benefits are clear for flexible leave (as described above) demonstrating either a neutral or positive effect on profitability and employee job performance. The impact of flexible policies such as these is well documented-- Facebook’s annual benefits survey, for example, which measures satisfaction and engagement with the benefits programs it offers, found that more than 90% of

- **Amazon** – four weeks of paid leave before giving birth and 10 weeks after, plus an additional six weeks that any new parent (mom, dad, biological, or otherwise) can use
- **Facebook** – four months (16 weeks) of paid maternity, paternity, and adoption leave
- **Ikea** – for employees who have been with Ikea for more than one year, three months of paid leave to be with their family, receiving 100% of their base wage for the first six weeks of parental leave and 50% for an additional six weeks; for employees who have been with the company three or more years, four months of paid leave, receiving 100% of their base wage for the first eight weeks and 50% for an additional eight weeks
- **Johnson & Johnson** – new parents - maternal, paternal and adoptive - worldwide can now take a minimum of eight additional weeks (on top of the company’s current policies) of paid leave during the first year of a child’s birth or adoption (for example, mom’s in the US can now take 17 weeks)
- **Virgin Group** – employees who take Shared Parental Leave legislation receive up to 100 per cent of their salary over 52 weeks (25% for 2 or less years of service, 100% for 4 or more years), available to working parents in the first year following the birth or adoption of a child

employees say that Facebook cares about them. In a blog series from Facebook on parental leave policies one employee wrote:

"Before my leave, I would have said that paternity leave was important to family, but I never really imagined how VITAL paternity leave is before I took this time. I have a level of comfort with my daughter that is only gained through solid blocks of time spent with her. I started to learn what my strengths and weaknesses are as a parent, how far my patience could be stretched, and how to express my needs to my partner."³⁹ (Facebook employee, Dad)

These policy updates have the potential to bring families great relief from financial burdens of child care, significantly contribute to emotional well-being and child bonding, and advance child development. Efforts such as these demonstrate the role the private sector can play and provide an opportunity for companies in the Caribbean such as FLOW to make an impact of family health and well-being.

OPPORTUNITIES

As Caribbean countries are reviewing and updating parental leave policies, they should consider the lessons learned from the progressive policies established by Flow across the region and trends that may be applicable globally. The implementation of these policies stands in contrast with the ones established by national governments and presents an excellent opportunity for research and learning. Governments, or partner research organizations, should explore the impact of the Flow policies on families and children, compared to the rest of the islands, where parental leave policies are not as flexible. The governments can learn if there is a positive impact on children's health and well-being with the additional leave for both parents, and if there is an impact to the gender gap and on the efficiency and profitability of the company. Governments can also gain from understanding how Flow handles benefits for non-traditional households and unmarried fathers with multiple children. These lessons can inform policy dialogue at the national level and catalyze positive change that will benefit the countries and their families. Further, improvements to parental leave policies could also leverage successes under international assistance projects such as ASSIST, which are working to strengthen and improve well-baby and well-child care. More flexibility in the home to take care of children and opportunities to provide additional psychosocial support can propel the overall health and well-being of families in the Caribbean.

For more information:

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