



► ILO Country Brief

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Care at work in Bahamas

Investing in care leave and services for a more gender equal world of work

Background and contents

The [Resolution concerning decent work and the care economy](#) (ILO 2024a) was adopted by the International Labour Conference during its 112th Session in June 2024 and is the first international tripartite agreement on this topic. To advance decent work in the care economy, the Resolution calls on governments, employers' and workers' organizations to design and implement integrated care policies and systems guided by the 5R Framework for Decent Care Work (recognition, reduction and redistribution of unpaid care and reward and representation of care workers) and grounded in international labour standards and social dialogue (Point 30.a). It also urges constituents to "ensure appropriate responses to the needs of all workers with care responsibilities by ensuring comprehensive maternity protection and care leave and protection policies, including paternity, parental leave and long-term care leave", "strengthen policies and measures facilitating work-life balance, paid work and care responsibilities", and "invest in and make available high-quality, affordable, adequate and accessible care services, including childcare, health care and long-term care for all workers"(Points 30.g, h, and k). In addition, "ratification and implementation of the international labour standards relevant to the care economy are central to a rights-based approach to care" (Point 19).

To support these steps to advancing decent work in the care economy, this brief draws on the findings of the [ILO Care at Work report](#) (ILO 2022), which synthesizes the results of the ILO legal survey of 185 countries and reviews progress made around the world while assessing the persisting and significant legal gaps in care policies and services, as well as the [ILO Global Care Policy Portal](#) (ILO n.d.-a) and the Investment Simulator (ILO n.d.-b).

Drawing on these resources, this country brief:

- provides a review of the status and progress of legislation on care policies in Bahamas;
- highlights regulatory gaps that may limit access of working women, their partners and family to care benefits.

Maternity leave is a universal human and labour right, and yet it remains unfulfilled

The **ILO Maternity Protection Convention (No. 183) and related Recommendation (No. 191)** mandate a minimum maternity leave period of 14 weeks and recommend increasing it to at least 18 weeks to ensure adequate rest and

recovery time for the mother. As of April 2025, Bahamas has not yet ratified Convention No. 183¹, still, eight countries in the region of the Americas have already ratified Convention No.183. The **ILO Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention (No. 156)** provides guidance to enable persons with family responsibilities, who are engaged or wish to engage in employment, to fully enjoy equality of opportunity and treatment without being subject to discrimination, and without conflict between their employment and family responsibilities. It has been ratified by 13 countries in the Americas; Bahamas is not part of this group. At the 2023 International Labour Conference, the Committee on the Application of Standards invited Member States to consider the possibility of ratifying these conventions and availing themselves of ILO technical assistance to assess potential obstacles to the ratification and effective implementation of the conventions, and ways to overcome them (ILO 2023a; 2023b).²

In the Americas³, the average **duration of maternity leave** is 14.4 weeks, and specifically in the Caribbean⁴ the average duration is 14.2 weeks. There are three countries in the Caribbean that meet or exceed the minimum 14 weeks of maternity leave standard mandated in Convention No. 183 (Cuba, Dominican Republic and Trinidad y Tobago). **In the case of the Bahamas, the current law mandates 12 weeks of maternity leave.**

ILO standards require the **amount of cash benefits** during maternity leave to be at least two-thirds (67 per cent) of the woman's previous earnings and recommend increasing it to 100 per cent, when possible. In the Caribbean, 7 countries (including **Bahamas**⁵, Barbados, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago) offer fully paid maternity leave. The rest of the countries offer maternity cash benefits of at least 60 per cent.

ILO standards require that employers should not be individually liable for the direct cost of maternity leave and these cash benefits shall be provided through **compulsory social insurance** or public funds or non-contributory social assistance to women who do not qualify for benefits out of social insurance. In most countries of the Caribbean, 8 out of 12, maternity leave cash benefits are funded by social insurance; while in Jamaica it is paid by the employer and in the rest three countries it is paid through mixed schemes. In the Bahamas, a mixed scheme is set in place so that two-thirds of maternity leave cash benefits are paid by social insurance for 13 weeks while one third is paid by the employer.

Currently, Bahamas is not aligned with the three key requirements of Convention No. 183 on maternity leave,⁶ because the duration of maternity leave is 12 weeks, below the 14 weeks required by Convention No. 183. **Moreover, gaps remain for the Bahamas to fully align to ILO Convention No. 183 on other dimensions,** as according to World Social Protection Data Dashboard, the percentage of women giving birth receiving cash benefits is 60.5 per cent (ILO, n.d.-d).

Furthermore, employment protection and non-discrimination are essential to make the right to maternity leave a reality. In Bahamas, there is mandatory coverage of self-employed workers, but maternity leave is not available for adoptive parents. Moreover, the law in Bahamas guarantees protection from dismissal for women during the pregnancy and

¹ The Bahamas ratified Maternity Protection Convention, 1952 (No. 103) in 2001 which precedes Convention No.183. This Convention sets out the basic principles of protection by establishing the right to 12-week minimum of maternity leave, medical care and cash benefits funded by either compulsory social insurance or by means of public goods, the right to protection against termination of employment and the right to breastfeed at the workplace.

² The Standards Review Mechanism Tripartite Working Group classified Convention No.183 as an up-to-date standard, while classifying Conventions No.3 and No.103 as outdated.

³ According to ILO grouping and available data, countries the Americas in this brief include the following: Argentina, Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, British Virgin Islands, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Haiti, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Paraguay, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay, United States of America, and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).

⁴ According to ILO grouping and available data, countries the Americas in this brief include the following: Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, British Virgin Islands, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago.

⁵ At least one third is paid by the employer and 66.6% is covered by social insurance.

⁶ The main requirements of maternity leave legislation set out in the ILO Convention No. 183 are: (i) leave should be not less than 14 weeks; (ii) cash benefits should be not less than two-thirds of previous earnings; and (iii) maternity leave cash benefits should preferably be provided through compulsory social insurance or public funds.

leave period, in addition, the legislation guarantees the mother's right to return to the same position when returning to work after maternity leave and the employer has the burden to prove the reason for dismissal, however, there are no prohibitions against pregnancy tests in employment.

Paternal leave is key to enabling men's care rights and responsibilities

In 20 out of 34 countries in the Americas, fathers have the right to paternity leave and more specifically, 3 out of 12 countries in the Caribbean (Bahamas, Dominican Republic, and British Virgin Islands) offer paternity leave. On average, the duration of paternity leave among the 20 countries with paternity leave in the Americas is six days. In the case of the Caribbean, paternity leave ranges from two days of paid paternity leave in the Dominican Republic up to one month of unpaid paternity leave in the British Virgin Islands. **In the Bahamas, after the birth of a child, employees with at least six months of continuous service are entitled to one full week of unpaid family leave per year.**⁷

The ILO Resolution concerning the second recurrent discussion on social protection (social security) (ILO 2021) calls for Member States to foster income security during maternity, paternity and parental leave as part of gender-responsive social protection systems. Paternity leave is fully paid in 18 out of the 20 countries with paternity leave provisions in the region and employers are the main source of financing of paternity leave.

All fathers, without discrimination, should have a right to paternity leave. Plus, employment protection and non-discrimination connected with paternity leave could improve paternity leave take-up rates. In the Americas, this entitlement is largely not available to many categories of working fathers, especially self-employed and in less than half of the countries for the case of adoptive fathers. Greater availability of a universal right to longer, well-paid and compulsory paternity leave funded through social protection with adequate job protection and non-discrimination measures will prompt an increase in paternity leave take-up rates, thereby recognizing men's care rights and responsibilities, promoting an equal sharing of family responsibilities between mothers and fathers, and offering children the best start in life.

Parental leave and other special care leave can also help balance the work and family responsibilities of mothers and fathers over their life course

ILO standards⁸ call for a period of parental leave – determined by national laws – to be available to either parent after maternity leave without their having to relinquish employment and with their employment rights being protected. Statutory parental leave is available in six countries in the Americas (Canada, Chile, Cuba, Ecuador, Uruguay and the United States). The duration of parental leave among these countries ranges from six-month part-time parental leave allowing both parents to opt for a reduction in working hours while maintaining full earnings, up to 40 weeks in Cuba where the parental leave can be shared between both parents after the initial 18 weeks of maternity leave or Canada as well with 40 weeks of standard parental leave to be shared between parents (but one parent cannot receive more than 35 weeks) with the possibility to extend it to 69 weeks (one parent cannot receive more than 61 weeks). **Bahamas does not provide statutory parental leave.**

The 7 days of paternity leave, compared to the 12 weeks of maternity leave results in a **“gender leave gap” in the Bahamas**. This gap can reinforce societal gender norms that childcare is the responsibility of the mother, whereas the care role of the father is considered supplementary.

⁷ This leave can also be used for the death or illness of a spouse or parent.

⁸ The Workers with Family Responsibilities Recommendation, 1981 (No. 165), para 22; and Maternity Protection Recommendation, 2000 (No. 191), para 10.

With ageing societies, paid care, and particularly long-term care leave can play a key role in supporting new and increasing care needs. In the Americas, six countries (Canada, Chile, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico and the United States) provide long-term care leave and it is paid in four out of the six countries.

Emergency leave is a special leave of short duration for urgent family reasons. Sixteen countries in the Americas provide emergency leave and in most of the countries the entitlement is paid (including Argentina, British Virgin Islands, El Salvador and Paraguay). **Bahamas is among these countries providing up to one week for the death or illness of a child, spouse or parent.**

The workplace is an important entry point to promote safety and health and save lives

All workers should have the right to a safe and healthy working environment, including pregnant or nursing women. ILO standards mandate that provisions relating to the protection of persons working under dangerous or unhealthy conditions should be aimed at protecting the health and safety of both men and women at work, while taking into account gender differences in regard to specific health risks.^{9,10} Moreover, time off for prenatal examinations and adequate maternal healthcare, as called for by ILO standards on maternity protection and social security, can save lives by tackling preventable maternal mortality and morbidity.

In Bahamas there is **no restriction providing night work protection** to pregnant and breastfeeding workers and there are **no statutory protections against dangerous or unhealthy work** for pregnant and breastfeeding workers. At the same time there are **no provisions of time-off for prenatal medical examinations**.

Breastfeeding-friendly workplaces provide time, income security and space to enable positive nutrition and health outcomes

All women should have the right to paid working time for breastfeeding, as called for by ILO Convention No. 183. Additionally, workplace nursing facilities are a key ingredient of breastfeeding-friendly workplaces. **In Bahamas women are not entitled to nursing breaks.**

Childcare services are vital to child development, women's employment and job creation

Child benefits can play a critical role in improving children's development and well-being, helping them attain their full potential and supporting family livelihoods and care needs, while also reducing the prevalence of child labour (ILO 2024c; ILO and UNICEF 2022). In addition, a continuum of care leave policies and care services is essential to guarantee the best early start for children and income security for families, enabling women to maintain employment participation and helping to prevent them from falling into poverty. Childcare services offer many benefits by promoting child development, creating jobs, reducing parents' unpaid care work and promoting women's employment and income over the life course.

In the Americas, there are 12 countries with presence of statutory early childhood educational development (ECED) programmes for children aged zero to two years, but **Bahamas is not one of these countries**. Legal provisions on pre-

⁹ ILO. 2012. Giving Globalization a Human Face: General survey on the fundamental conventions concerning rights at work in the light of the ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization, 2008, ILC.

¹⁰ Convention No. 183 (Art. 3) sets out the right of pregnant or nursing women not to be obliged to perform work that is prejudicial to their health or that of their unborn or newborn child. Recommendation No. 191 (Para. 6(3)) promotes the assessment of workplace risks related to safety and health, especially where conditions involve arduous manual work; exposure to hazardous biological, chemical or physical agents; situations requiring special equilibrium; or situations requiring standing or sitting for prolonged periods, particularly in extreme temperatures or close to vibration. In addition, in a significant number of countries the legislation still forbids all women from working under certain conditions considered as dangerous or unhealthy. The ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR) considers these blanket bans on dangerous work (as well as on night work and overtime) to be: a) based on stereotypes regarding women's professional abilities and role in society; b) contrary to the principle of equality of opportunity and treatment in employment and occupation; and c) contributing to gender-based discrimination at work.

primary education services for children between three years and the start of primary education are more available as 23 countries in the region provide the service **including Bahamas** as there exists a Government universal pre-school initiative from age three.

Due to the lack of a statutory national and widely available ECCE service system in addition to a very short childcare-related leave for parents, the resulting “childcare policy gap”¹¹ in Bahamas is close to three years if not more until children go to primary school. Over this extensive period, care needs are solely covered by unpaid care work or family paid care solutions, such as domestic workers.

Long-term care services are essential to ensure the right to healthy ageing in dignity

The demand for long-term care services for older persons and persons with disabilities who need care and support has been rising steeply due to increased life expectancy. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted people who rely on long-term care and those who provide it (both paid and unpaid care work), predominantly women. ILO international labour standards on social security and the ILC resolution (2024a) call for the overall and primary responsibility for care service provision to lie with the State. Funding mechanisms for long-term care services should ensure the principles of universality, adequacy, solidarity and non-discrimination, among others.

In the Americas, a total of 20 countries (including Argentina, Barbados, Costa Rica, Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago) have a public long-term care system for older persons in their national legislation, although in most cases the provision may be considered sporadic or of limited availability. **Bahamas has a statutory long-term care system for older persons managed by the Ministry of Health and Wellness¹². The provision of health costs and home nursing care is universal, while residential care is means tested and the system is funded through taxation.**

¹¹ The childcare policy gap is the difference (in months or years) between the starting age of universal and free ECCE or primary education and the duration of paid childcare-related leave (maternity, paternity and parental leave) available to households.

¹² Ministry of Health and Wellness: [Homes and facilities in Bahamas](#).

► Legal indicators on Care Policies in Bahamas

Maternity leave											
Duration of maternity leave in national legislation	Transfer of the maternity leave period to fathers	Amount of maternity leave cash benefits (% of previous earnings)	Source of funding of maternity leave cash benefits	Ratification of Convention 183	Alignment with main provisions of C183	Maternity leave cash benefits coverage for self-employed workers	Maternity leave availability for adoptive parents	Maternity leave length of protection against dismissal	Burden of proving the reasons for dismissal are not related to maternity leave	Right to return to the same or equivalent position	Prohibitions against pregnancy test in employment
12 weeks	No	100	Social insurance only	-	Not aligned	Yes	No	Pregnancy, leave	Employer must prove	Same position or equivalent	No prohibition
Paternity leave											
Duration of paternity leave in national legislation	Amount of paternity leave cash benefits (% of previous earnings)	Source of funding of paternity leave cash benefits	Legal coverage of paternity leave for self-employed workers	Paternity leave availability for adoptive parents	Paternity leave length of protection against dismissal	Burden of proving the reasons for dismissal are not related to paternity leave	Right to return to the same or equivalent position				
7 days (1 week)	0	n/a	No	No	No explicit protection	Employer not required to prove	Not guaranteed				
Parental leave											
Duration of parental leave in national legislation	Amount of parental leave cash benefits (% of previous earnings)	Source of funding of parental leave cash benefits	Legal coverage of parental leave for self-employed workers	Parental leave availability for adoptive parents	Parental leave length of protection against dismissal	Burden of proving the reasons for dismissal are not related to parental leave	Right to return to the same or equivalent position				
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-				
Long-term care leave				Emergency leave							
Presence of long-term care leave	Source of funding of long-term care leave cash benefits	Legal coverage of long-term care leave for self-employed workers	Presence of emergency leave in weeks	Source of funding of emergency leave cash benefits	Legal coverage of emergency leave for self-employed workers						
No	-	-	Yes, unpaid	n/a	No						
Health and nursing											
Night work protection	Time off for prenatal medical examinations	Provisions on dangerous or unhealthy work	Alternatives to dangerous or unhealthy work								
No restriction	Not provided	No protection	No alternatives								
Breastfeeding											
Entitlement to paid nursing breaks	Number of daily nursing breaks	Total daily nursing break duration	Months during which nursing breaks are allowed by law	Statutory provisions of working nursing facilities							
Not provided	-	-	-	-							
Childcare service system (children aged 0-2 years)				Pre-primary education system (children aged 3 years and above)							
Presence of a national childcare service system	Government support	Starting age	Guaranteed hours	Presence of national pre-primary education system	Government support	Starting age	Guaranteed hours				
No	-	-	-	Yes	Universal	Age 3	No information found				
Long-term care											
Presence of long-term care service system	Family obligations to care for relatives in law	Statutory provision of in-home personal care services	Statutory provision of community day centre services	Statutory provision of residential care services	Source of funding of long-term care services	Government support for long-term care services					
Yes	Not found in law	Yes	No	Yes	Taxation	Both universal and means tested					
Childcare policy gap											
Starting age of free ECCE or primary education (months)	Starting age of free ECCE or primary education (years)	Childcare related paid leave reserved to households (months)	Childcare related paid leave reserved to households (years)	Childcare policy gap (months)	Childcare policy gap (years)	Childcare policy gap - full rate equivalent (months)	Childcare policy gap - full rate equivalent (years)				
36.0	3.0	2.8	0.2	33.2	2.8	33.2	2.8				

Sources: ILO 2022 and ILO, n.d.-a.

Sources: ILO. 2021. Resolution concerning the second recurrent discussion on social protection (social security), ILC.109/Resolution III. ILO. 2022. Care at work: Investing in care leave and services for a more gender equal world of work. ILO. 2023a. Achieving gender equality at work, General Survey. ILO. 2023b. Draft outcome of the discussion by the Committee on the Application of Standards of the General Survey: Achieving gender equality at work. ILO. 2024a. Resolution concerning decent work and care in the economy. ILO. 2024b. ILO Care policy investment simulator: Technical note - version 2.0. ILO. 2024c. Decent work and the care economy. ILO. n.d.-a. ILO Global Care Policy Portal, available at: <https://www.ilo.org/globalcare/>. ILO. n.d.-b. ILO Care Policy Investment Simulator, available at: Investment simulator (www.ilo.org/globalcare/). ILO. n.d.-c. ILOSTAT database. Available at: <https://ilostat.ilo.org>. ILO. n.d.-d. World Social Protection Data Dashboards. Available at: [ILO | Social Protection Platform](https://www.ilo.org/globalcare/). De Henau, Jerome. 2022. "Costs and Benefits of Investing in Transformative Care Policy Packages: A Macrosimulation Study in 82 Countries", ILO Working Paper Series.

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