In every category, the United States lags behind the rest of the world in guaranteeing paid family and medical leave. The United States is the only industrialized nation that does not guarantee universal paid leave for new mothers. The United States and South Korea are the only Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries that do not universally offer temporary income support in some form to workers with a serious medical condition. Many countries also provide national paid leave to employees engaged in family caregiving.

That greater support for caregiving translates into higher workforce participation among women. For example, workforce participation among women is 14 points higher in Sweden and 5 points higher in Canada, both countries that provide more consistent support.

### Limited Access to Paid Leave

About 30 percent of the U.S. labor force lives in states with comprehensive paid leave programs.[1]

Just 21 percent of American workers have access to employer-provided paid family leave (i.e., parental and caregiving leave) and just 42 percent of American workers have access to paid medical leave (including short-term disability) through an employer-provided plan.[2]

There are significant inequities in access to paid leave for a wide array of Americans, including women, lower-income families, part-time workers, and people of color. For instance, the highest-paid workers are over 6 times more likely to have access to paid leave than the lowest-paid workers (see Figure below).

### Increasing Need for Paid Leave

Among married-couple families with children, 64.2 percent had both parents employed, and nearly three-quarters of all women with children are in the labor force.

The senior population is a growing share of the United States population, driven in large part by the aging of the baby boomers into retirement. Families are facing mounting demands, work-related strains, and costs as a result of caregiving to the older population. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, over half of Americans turning 65 today will develop a disability serious enough to require long-term care.
Fact Sheet: Paid Family and Medical Leave

Benefits of Paid Leave

Businesses
Improves business productivity and delivers benefits by boosting employee morale, reducing worker turnover, and making it easier to attract skilled workers.

Health
Has significant positive effects on the health of the mother, the father, and the child to be able to bond in the early months of the child’s life.

Economy
Grows and strengthens the labor force and provides income security to families who might otherwise need public assistance to make ends meet, and helps women stay in the workforce.

Current Federal Law: Unpaid Leave

The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA) provides eligible employees with up to 12 weeks per year of unpaid, job-protected comprehensive leave.

- FMLA only applies to businesses with 50 or more employees, and to be eligible, employees must have worked 1,250 hours in the past year (about 24 hours per week) and with the same employer for at least a year.

- According to a Department of Labor funded survey, about 56 percent of all employees report meeting these three eligibility conditions for the FMLA. That survey also found most leave taken is for the employee’s own serious health condition (51 percent), Leave for pregnancy or a new child (25 percent) and for illness of a qualifying relative (19 percent) is less common.