

Thirty Successful Experiences of Redistribution, Reduction,
Recognition, Remuneration and Representation in Care Work

A Father from the Start (Padre desde el principio), Cuba



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Country and/or location of implementation: Cuba

Instances responsible for implementation: Ministry of Education and Ministry of Public Health under the Government of Cuba, with support from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in Cuba

Specific issue covered and beneficiaries of the action or policy

A Father from the Start (Padre desde el principio) is a joint initiative between the Cuban Ministries of Education and Health and UNICEF. Its aim is to engage fathers by informing them of their rights, their responsibilities and the benefits of equitably shared parenthood. This set of actions seeks to promote equal parental responsibility from birth, as when fathers are involved from the beginning, they are more likely to be involved throughout their children's lives. Fathers who are actively involved from the start not only show a greater commitment to protecting their children from violence and prioritizing their education and health, they also challenge deeply held beliefs and stereotypes of masculinity (Ministry of Education et al., 2019).

The campaign's dissemination document states that "equal parental involvement is an issue of social and economic justice, crucial for the full enjoyment of the rights of both men and women; all children have the right to a family and need the co-responsibility of both" (Ministry of Education et al., 2019, p. 4).

The enjoyment of paternity leave has great potential, both for the integral development of the baby and the strengthening of the father-son or father-daughter bond, as well as the full enjoyment and exercise of the man as a father and the reincorporation of the mother to public and professional life. Law 1263 "On the Maternity of the Working Woman", of 1974, first regulated the rights of the working woman during the maternity process, as well as the shared responsibility of the paternal figure. Since 2003, through Decree-Law 234, the mother can enjoy this leave for the first year of the child's life. Pursuant to this legislation, the mother and the father agree which of the two will take paid leave from the expiration of postnatal leave (the 12 weeks after the birth, dedicated to the mother's recovery and to ensure breastfeeding) and up to one year, in addition to other complementary and unpaid leave. With the issuance of Decree-Law 339 in 2017, which repealed all previous legislation, these rights were extended and may also be exercised by the grandmother or grandfather (both maternal and paternal) or

another family member until the minor reaches the first year of life (Ministry of Education et al., 2019, p. 24).

In terms of paid care time, this means:

Both the father and mother can take care of the baby up to the age of one year (or nine months), after the expiration of the Postnatal Leave (12 weeks after the birth, for the mother). The economic benefit for the father amounts to 60% of his average salary from the previous 12 months. (Ministry of Education et al., 2019, p. 26).

In addition, “the working parent is entitled to one day of paid leave per month to go to the pediatric center to ensure the care of the child up to the child’s first year of life” (Ministry of Education et al., 2019, p. 26). Moreover, “the mother or father who, due to special circumstances provided by law, is unable to return to work when the child reaches the first year of life, is entitled to an unpaid leave of absence (without financial remuneration) of up to 3 months” (Ministry of Education et al., 2019, p. 27).

This initiative, which goes beyond parental leave provisions, aims to accelerate cultural transformation in relation to childcare and child-rearing tasks by introducing co-responsibility in fatherhood and motherhood.

Results expected from and obtained with the action or policy

Since 2003, Cuban fathers may opt for paternity leave to stay at home and take care of their children during the first year of life while their wives work. Fathers may take postnatal leave to care for their children 90 days after birth. The expected results of this policy were that more and more fathers would opt to take this leave and mothers would be able to return to the labor market. However, between 2006 and 2014, only 125 men took paid paternal leave and most of them did so due to the mother’s illness or death, according to official data. Regardless of the fact the legislation provides for paternity leave, its use is still very unusual among men on the Island (López Fesser, 2019). María Machicado Terán, UNICEF representative in Cuba, “warned that in 2017 only seven fathers took the leave, as opposed to the 65 grandfathers who did use it since the initiative was extended in 2017 to these relatives if they are working” (Hernández, 2018).

Obstacles and challenges in the implementation of these policies and actions

María Machicado Terán, UNICEF representative in Cuba, believes the low demand for paternity leave is due to the fact that on the island “stereotypes and a patriarchal and macho culture still persist, which hinder men’s participation in domestic tasks” (Hernández, 2018). This means cultural barriers continue to be a major impediment for fathers to exercise co-responsible parenthood, despite the fact current regulations allow it and that the policy is promoted by the Cuban government.

Justification of compliance with the inclusion criteria

This policy seeks to recognize and redistribute the burden of care and child-rearing in Cuba. The policy, in its design, explicitly recognizes the importance and benefits of a father’s involvement from the time of pregnancy and all subsequent parenting. It does so with a strong gender focus: “a father who devotes time to parenting and who takes on domestic tasks can transform gender relations. When women have a greater say in how they spend their time, they participate more in their education, work and public life. Shared and engaged fatherhood contributes to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls” (Ministry of Education et al., 2019).

For more information, visit www.unicef.org/cuba/sites/unicef.org/cuba/files/2020-01/padre-desde-principio-cuba-2018.pdf