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PARENTAL EQUALITY IN POLAND

THREE YEARS AFTER THE TRANSPOSITION OF THE WORK-LIFE BALANCE DIRECTIVE

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REPORT

1. PURPOSE AND AUDIENCE

The year 2026 marks three years since the transposition of the work-life balance directive in Poland. The Social Insurance Institution (ZUS) and the Share the Care Foundation have been continuously collecting and analysing data gathered since the amendment of the Labour Code in April 2023. This enables us to reliably assess what has been achieved and which areas still need improvement.

This is particularly important given that in 2027 Poland – like other European Union Member States – must prepare and submit to the European Commission a report on the transposition of the directive, which is to include an appropriate set of indicators. The three-year period makes it possible to draw the first conclusions and take corrective action so that the introduction of the new legislation delivers the best possible social and economic outcomes.

This report presents the data and summarises what has been done to date to support parenthood and maintain work-life balance for mothers and fathers.

The publication is addressed to a broad audience of decision-makers – politicians, local government officials, representatives of public institutions, employers, and non-governmental organisations. These are the groups that have a real impact on shaping parental equality in Poland.

Our aim is to build a shared understanding of the need to support parents – both mothers and fathers – in the daily challenges of balancing care and work. Excluding fathers from systemic measures leads to limited outcomes and prevents the full potential of both women and men from being harnessed.

Equality in the labour market cannot be achieved without equality at home and a fair division of childcare. Such was the overarching purpose of the transposition of the work-life balance directive. And this is the perspective that guided us in preparing this report.



2. KEY FINDINGS

1. THE NUMBER OF FATHERS TAKING PARENTAL LEAVE CONTINUES TO GROW, BUT THE PACE OF GROWTH HAS SLOWED.

Solution:

A systemic approach to building fathers' involvement in childcare.

In 2025, the proportion of fathers who took up this entitlement was 24%. This represents an increase of 7 percentage points compared to the previous year. We are seeing the end of the 'novelty effect' phase, during which the first to take up the benefit were the leaders of change – individuals who were best informed and who had stable employment and the organisational

support needed to make such decisions. Although men have been able to take parental leave since 2013, before the transposition of the work-life balance directive only a negligible proportion of fathers – just 1% – chose to do so.

Scaling up men's involvement further requires systemic measures underpinned by reliable, precisely targeted information. It is important that we introduce a contextual information model that accompanies the father at the key moments of his journey towards parenthood and as a parent. The point is that knowledge about fathers' rights and the benefits of sharing parental leave and adopting a partnership-based childcare model should reach men as part of their everyday interactions with public institutions and the workplace.

This means an active informational presence in the places where a prospective or new father is likely to be: from healthcare facilities and antenatal classes, through HR processes in companies, to e-government services and nursery admission systems. If we ensure a consistent and reliable message at these strategic points of contact, we will be able to sustainably strengthen the role of fathers in family and social life.

2. THE GAP BETWEEN THE MOTHER'S AND THE FATHER'S ALLOWANCE IS NARROWING.

As the number of fathers on parental leave grows, the differences in the average allowance received by women

and men in respect of childcare are decreasing. In 2023, the ratio of mothers' allowances to fathers' allowances stood at 60%, while in 2025 it rose to 69%. However, differences in pay levels remain apparent.

Source: Own calculations based on data received from the Social Insurance Institution. To make these statistics more meaningful and comparable, we have adjusted both the mother's and the father's allowance to 100%.

3. THE NUMBER OF FATHERS TAKING PATERNITY LEAVE IS FALLING SHARPLY.

Solution:

Reliable education for parents about their rights, delivered at the central level.

The proportion of men who take paternity leave has dropped by 9 percentage points over three years – from 67% in 2023 to 58% in 2025. This phenomenon most likely results

from the convergence of two factors:

- the non-transferability principle was introduced (the use-it-or-lose-it mechanism for 9 weeks of parental leave),
- parents have an insufficient understanding of the differences between the various entitlements.

The hypothesis put forward – which, however, requires further verification – suggests that some fathers fear losing the 9-week portion of parental leave and therefore decide to take it first, unwittingly forgoing their paternity leave. This happens even though the window for taking paternity leave closes as early as when the child turns 1 year old. Meanwhile, parental leave is available for a much longer period – specifically, until the end of the calendar year in which the child turns 6.

What is particularly significant is that this trend sheds new light on the common argument about so-called

economic motivation. Fathers often state that the barrier to taking parental leave is the need to give up 30% of their pay (the allowance being set at 70%). The observed decline in the take-up of paternity leave shows, however, that men are forgoing a benefit paid at 100% in favour of one that is less well remunerated. This confirms that traditionally understood financial rationality gives way to the fear of permanently losing a 'new' entitlement. This stems directly from a lack of reliable information.

This trend clearly demonstrates that information and education for parents remains a critical and insufficiently addressed area.

4. 2027 IS WHEN TRANSPOSITION INDICATORS MUST BE REPORTED TO THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION.

Solution:

In-depth analysis and supplementing data that are not collected systematically.

In accordance with Article 18 of the work-life balance directive, Poland – like other Member States – is required to communicate to the European Commission detailed information on the degree of transposition of the new legislation. The deadline for preparing and submitting the report is 2 August 2027. This process requires the collection and reliable preparation of aggregated data on how Poles make use of leave: paternity, parental and carers' leave, as well as flexible working arrangements.

It is an absolute EU requirement that the data presented be disaggregated by sex. This will enable the Commission and the Member States to monitor precisely the impact of the legislation on actual equality between men and women in the labour market.

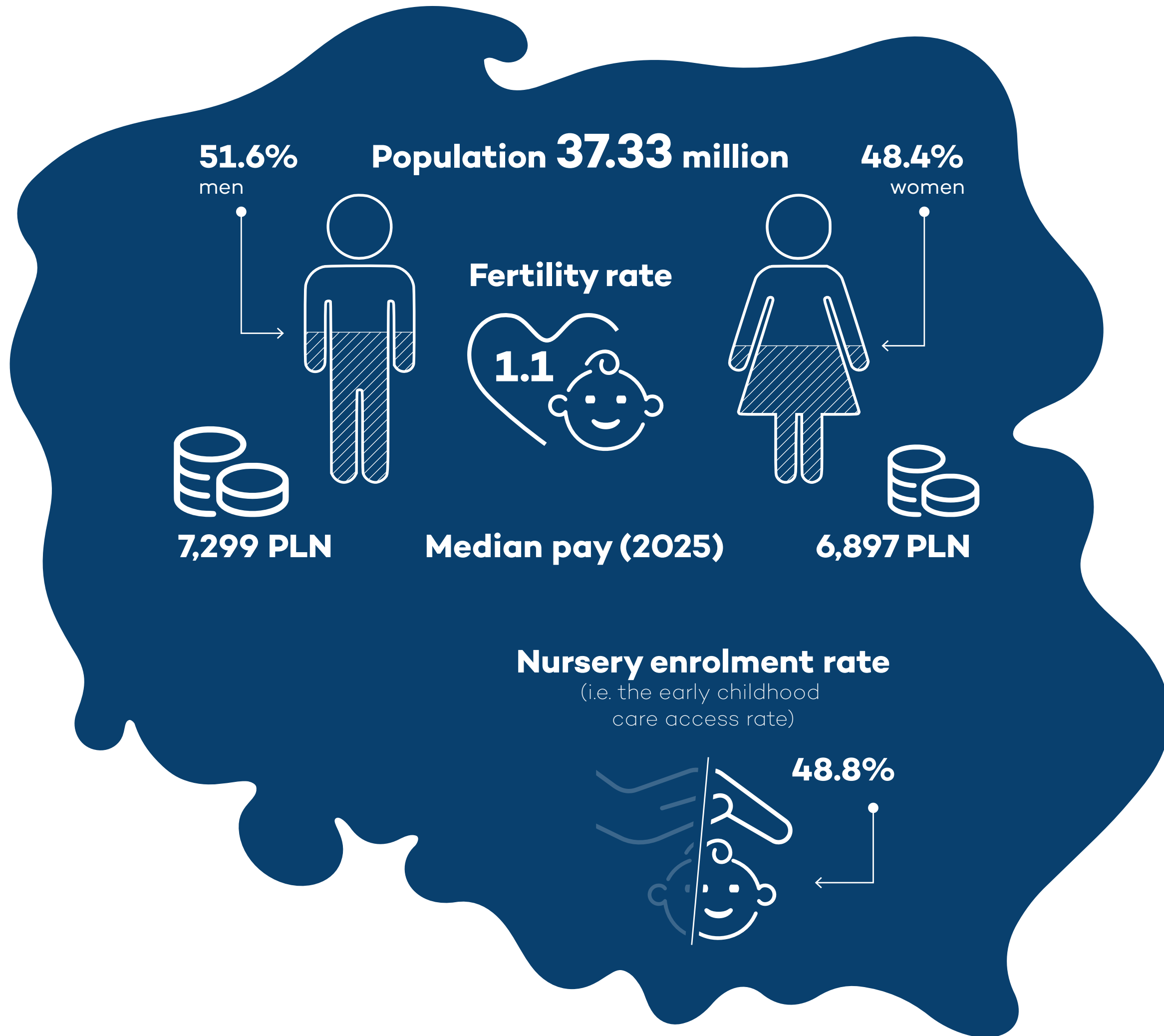
The joint reports by the Social Insurance Institution and the Share the Care Foundation analyse a significant portion of the required indicators. However, preparing the report for the European Commission will require the collection of data that are not currently gathered systematically, e.g. the number of requests for flexible working arrangements versus actual take-up.

Access to high-quality data is a key precondition for reliably assessing the extent to which the directive's theoretical assumptions translate into an actual improvement in the situation of parents in Poland. Only a coherent and transparent reporting system will allow constructive conclusions to be drawn

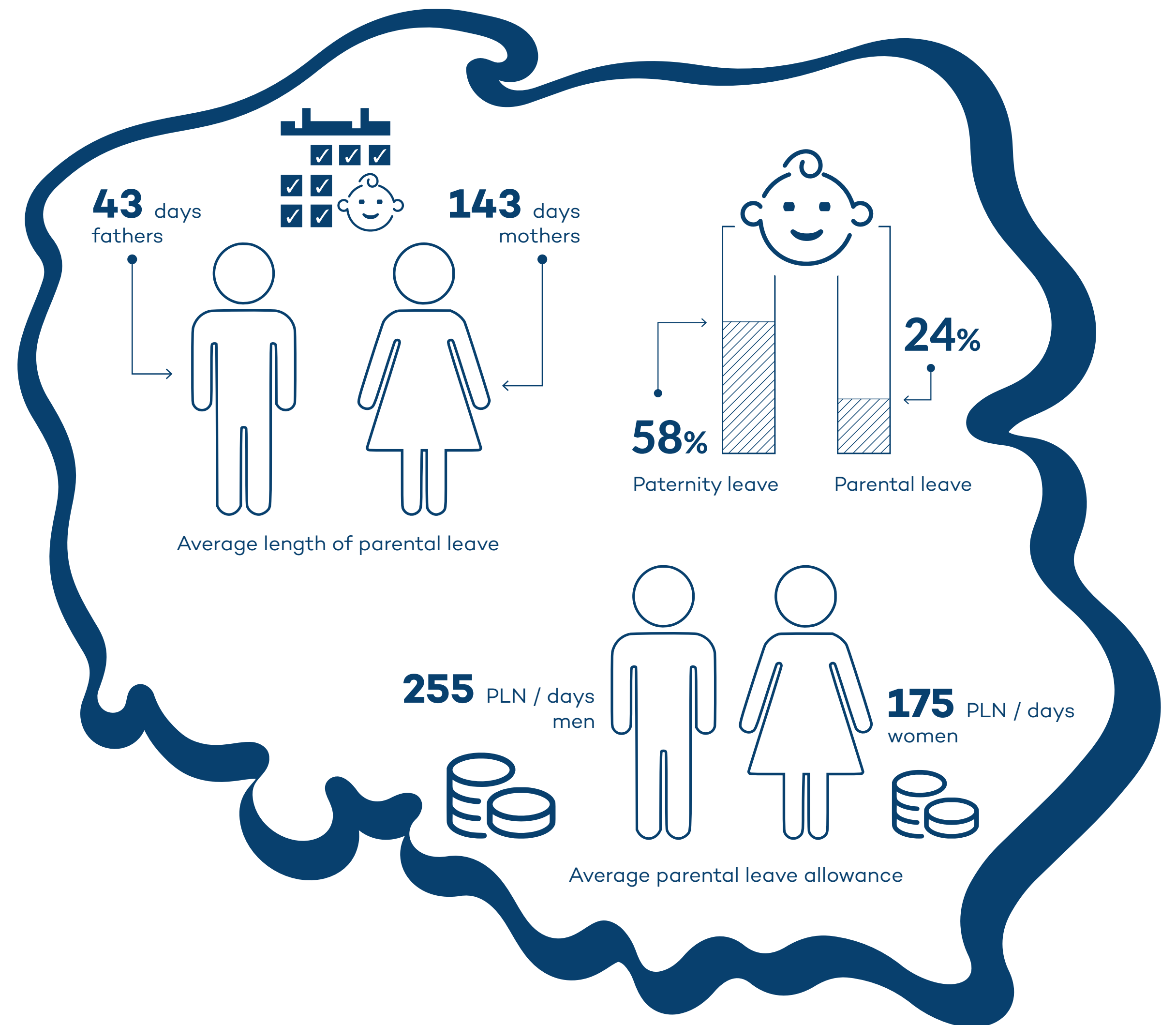
and, where necessary, family policy to be adjusted in the future.

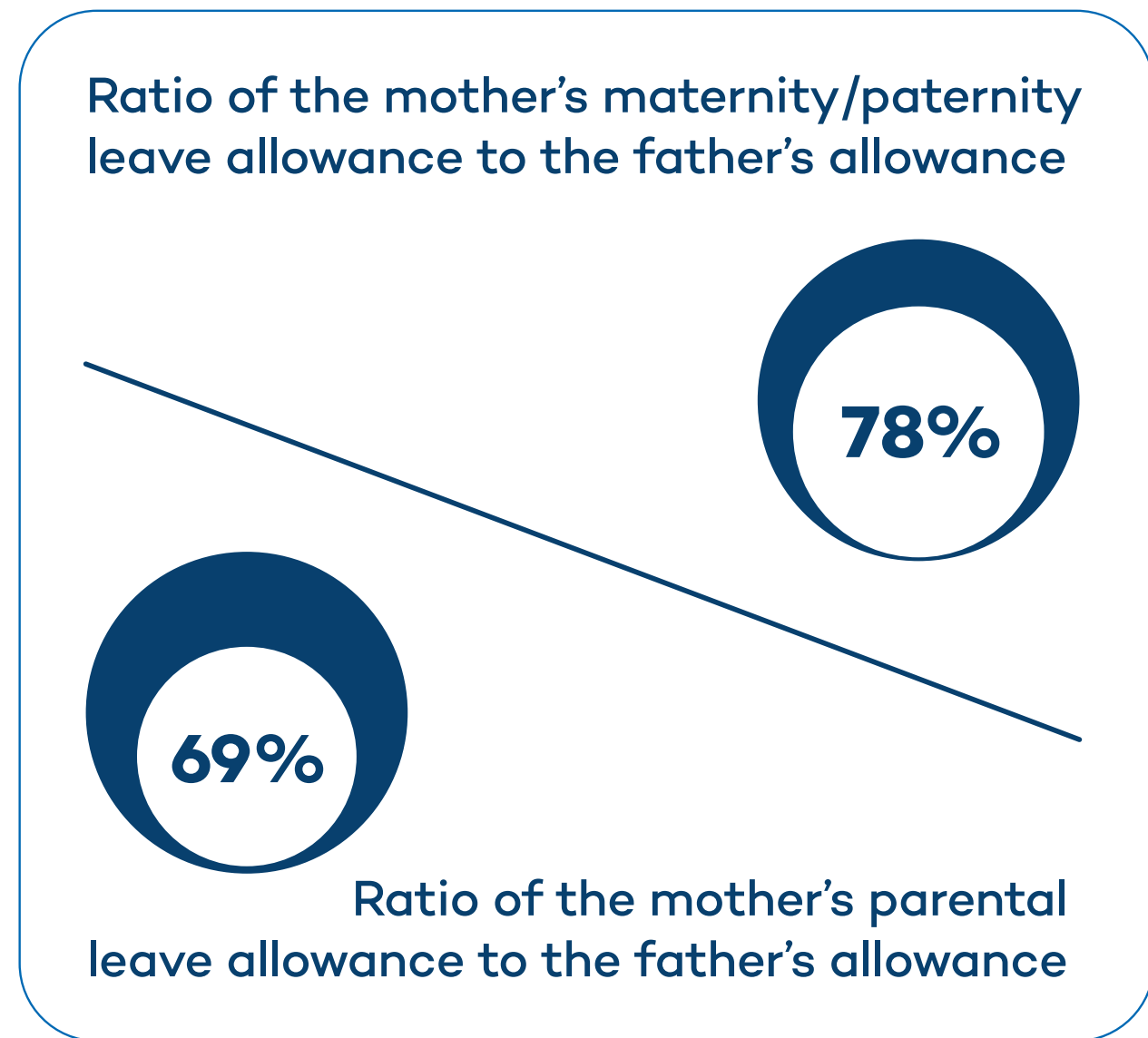
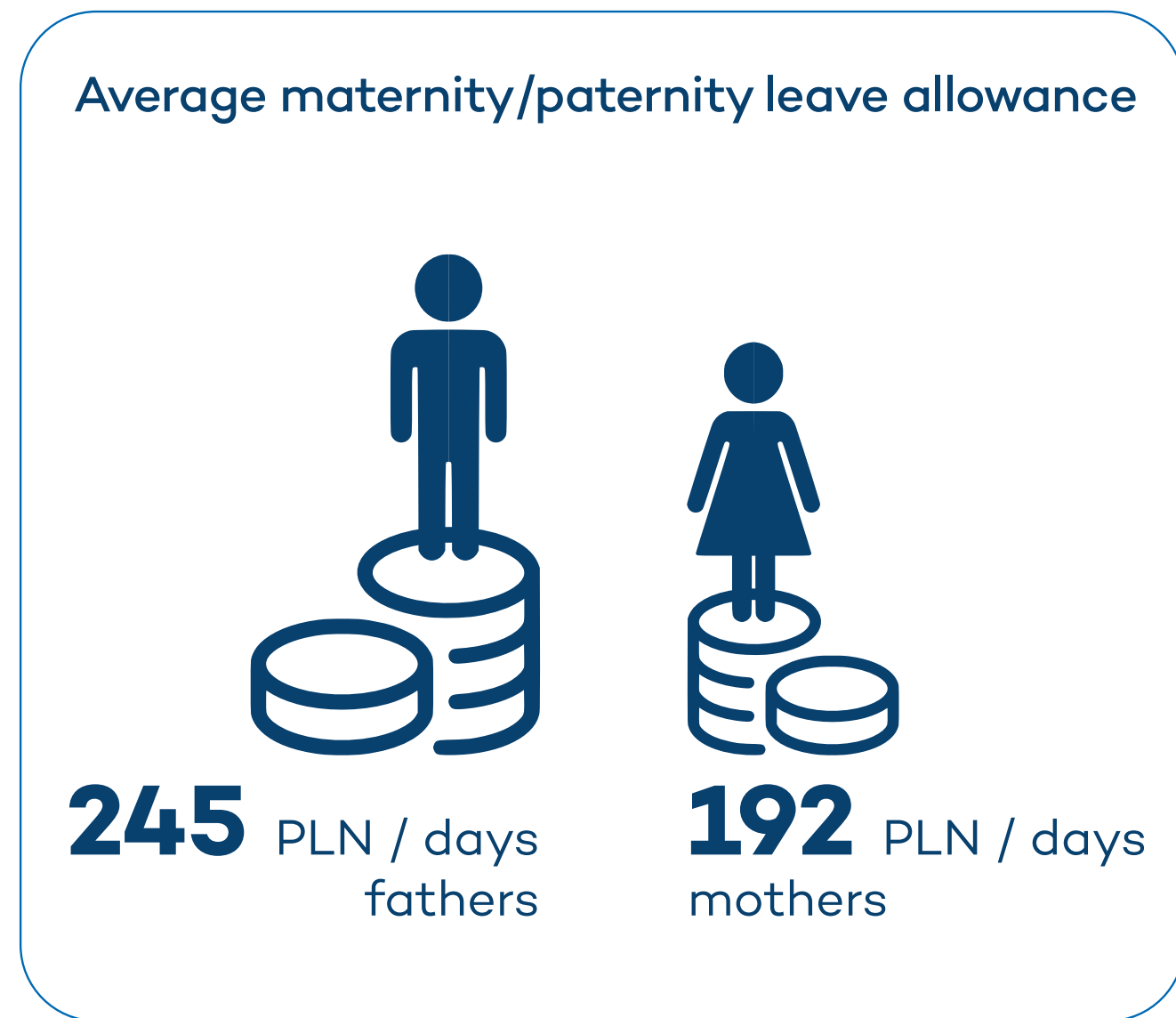
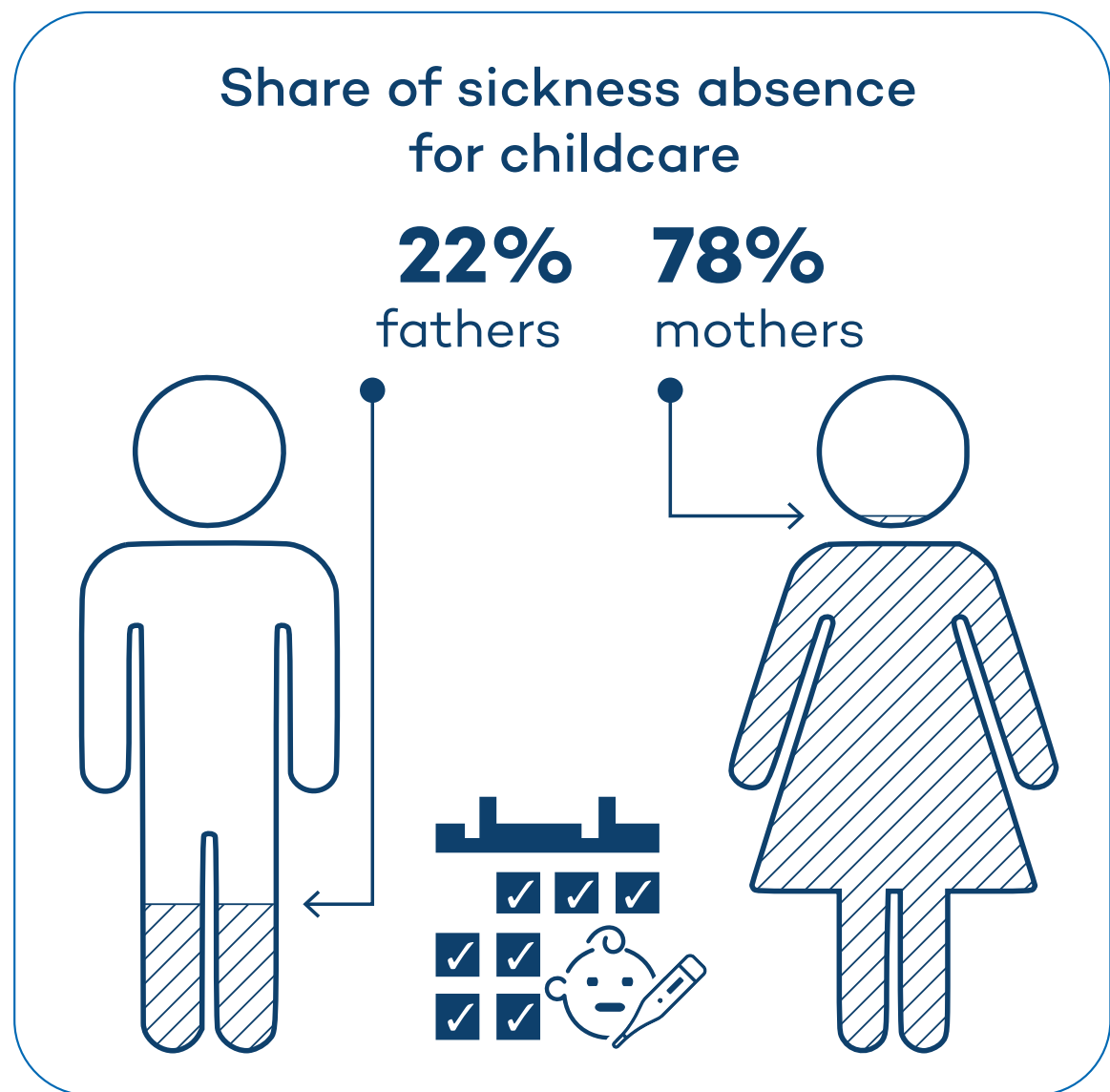
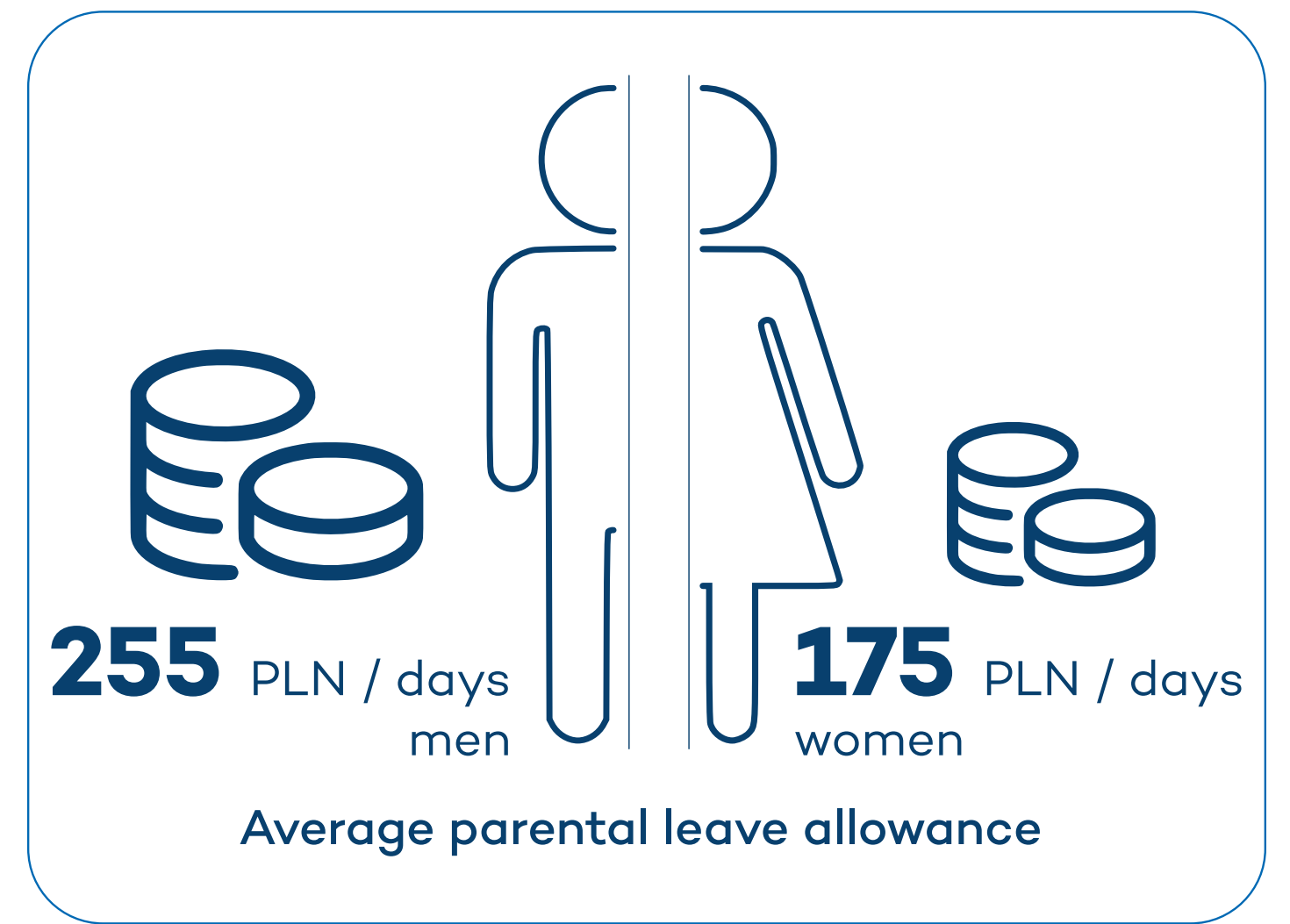
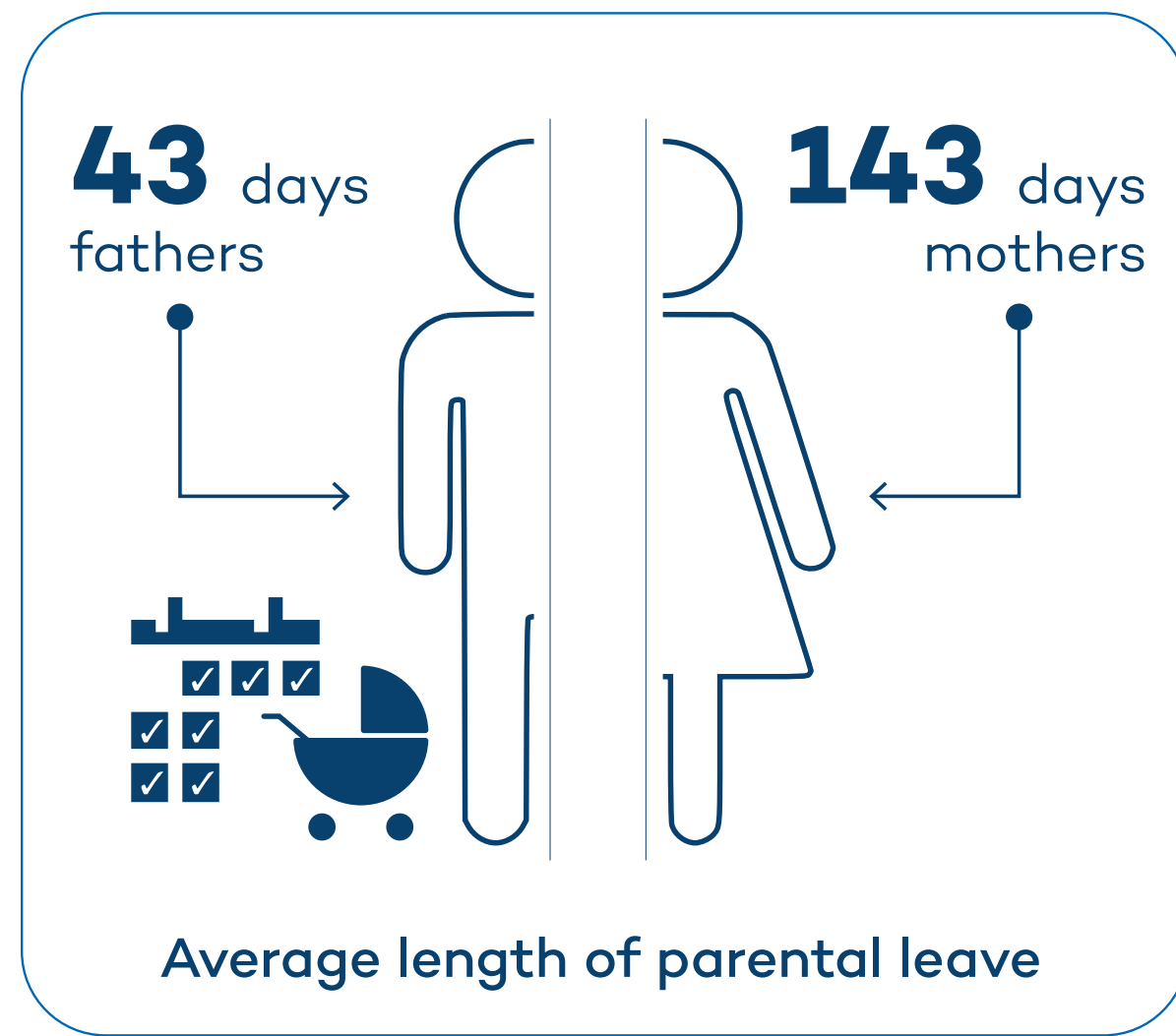
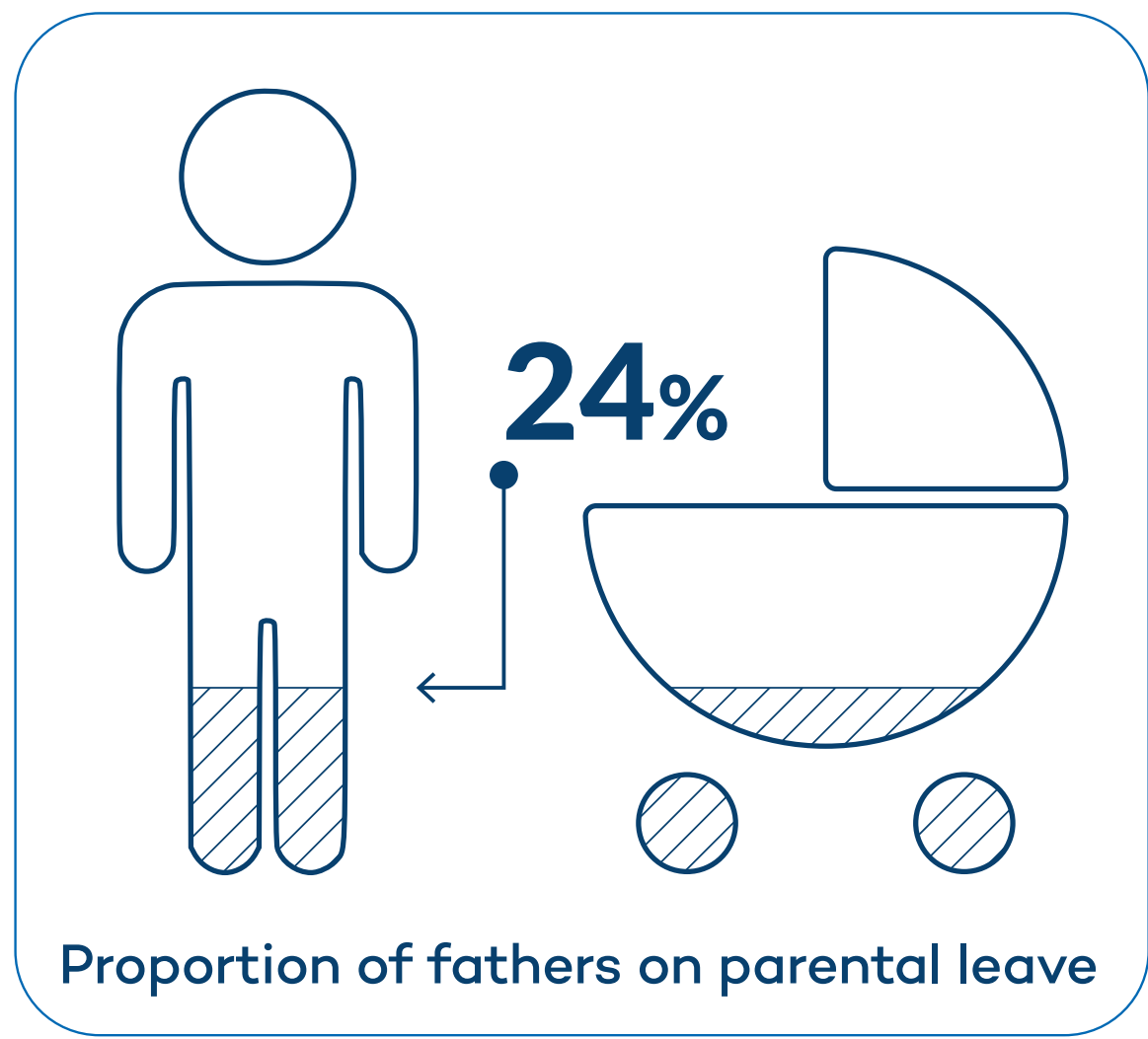
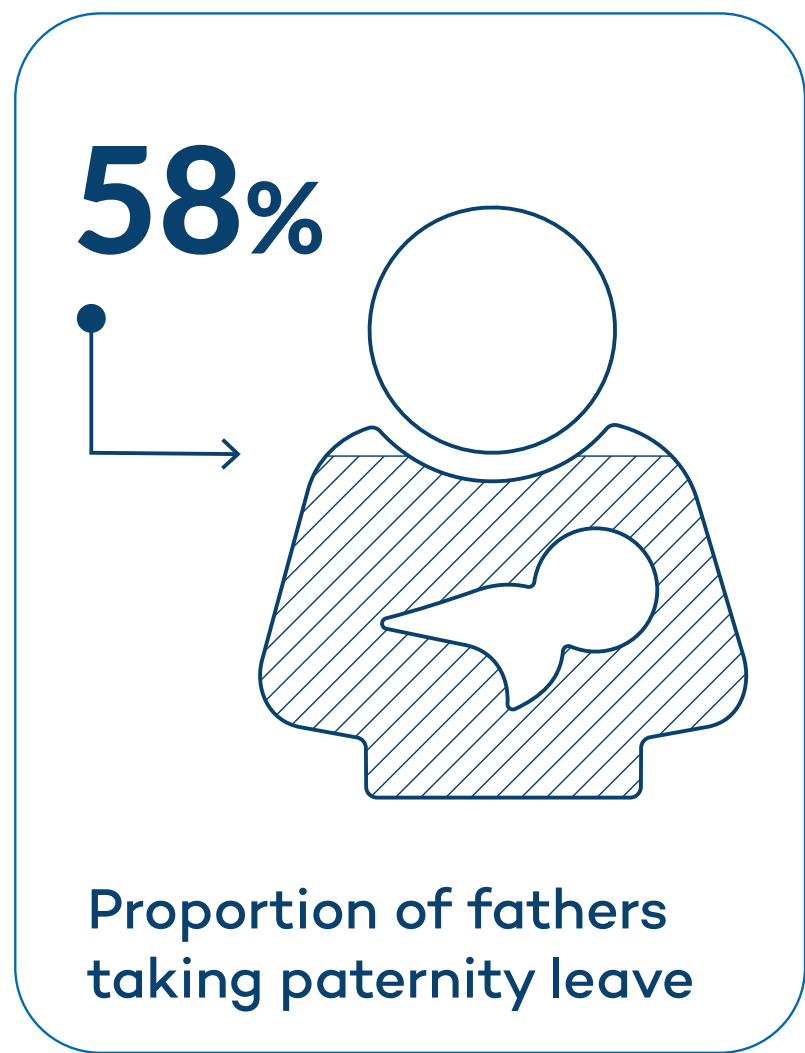


3. MOTHERS AND FATHERS IN NUMBERS



Fathers' involvement (2025):





Source: Own calculations based on data received from the Social Insurance Institution. To make these statistics more meaningful and comparable, we have adjusted both the mother's and the father's allowance to 100%.

4. FOREWORD



Karolina Andrian,
Founder and Member of the Management
Board of the Share the Care Foundation

We are pleased to present the third edition of the report on the involvement of fathers in childcare and the take-up of parental entitlements. This year's publication is of particular significance, as it marks three years since the transposition of the work-life balance directive in Poland. This is a relatively short time for assessing the effects of such a major systemic change, but long enough to identify the first trends, pinpoint barriers, and better prepare for formally reporting on its outcomes to the European Commission in 2027.

Although Poland is still not among the European leaders in terms of the proportion of fathers who take parental leave – currently 24% – the scale of the change remains substantial. Before the transposition of the new legislation, the figure was just around 1%. This represents a more than twentyfold increase in a very short time. At the

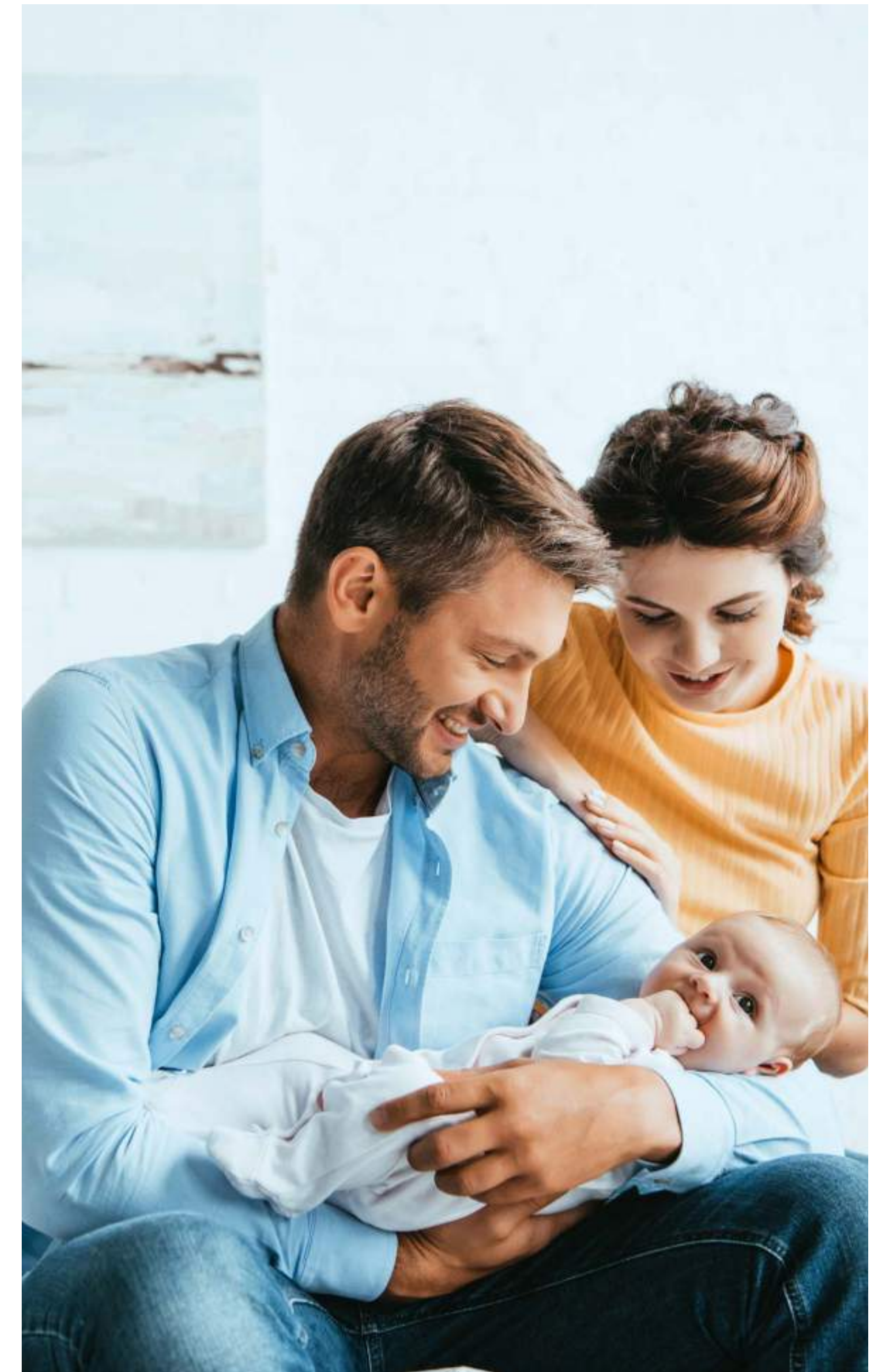
same time, we are seeing a clear slowdown in momentum – the phase driven by the most aware and privileged beneficiaries of the change is coming to an end. This is a natural transition point from a regulatory impulse to systemic action.

Today, the key challenge is no longer the mere existence of entitlements, but their actual accessibility, comprehension, and practical take-up by diverse groups of parents. Poland is one of the most digitally advanced countries in Europe. We have well-developed e-government systems and effective channels of communication with citizens. This is a significant advantage, but also a resource that has yet to be fully exploited in informing and supporting parents at the right moment – i.e. when they are making important decisions. It is time to move from having the tools to deploying them strategically.

Local governments must be more strongly involved in the next phase of building parental equality. They are the closest to families – they manage the care infrastructure and part of the healthcare system, they understand local needs, and they have direct channels of communication with residents. Alongside the legislature and employers, they are a key partner in building family well-being and creating real opportunities for combining work with childcare for both women and men.

We must also boldly move away from outdated assumptions about family roles. Social and demographic data clearly show that the model based on placing the burden of care solely on women and sole financial responsibility on men no longer corresponds to reality or to the needs of young families. Partnership between women and men – at work and at home – is becoming the foundation of economic and psychological security. This is not just a matter of equality. It is also about quality of life and social stability.

Therefore, the next step should be to strengthen cooperation between institutions, improve the flow of information between ‘silos’, and jointly design solutions. Parental equality and gender equality will not happen on their own – they require coordinated action. This report is an invitation to just such cooperation.





**Mariusz Jedynak,
Member of the Management Board of
the Social Insurance Institution (ZUS)**

Three years since the introduction of the work-life balance directive measures in Poland is a good moment for a first stocktake – not only of the figures, but also of how public institutions operate. From the perspective of the Social Insurance Institution, we can clearly see that changing the legislation is merely

the beginning of a process set against the country's broader demographic challenges. Falling birth rates and an ageing population mean that caring for families and supporting the economic activity of parents are becoming strategic issues.

Today, the Social Insurance Institution serves as a central support system for Polish residents at various stages of life: from family benefits, through sickness support, to pensions. Millions of users rely on our services every day. This scale gives us not only a unique analytical perspective, but above all a special responsibility for the stability and predictability of the social security system. Data collected by ZUS will be a key source for preparing Poland's report to the European Commission in 2027, in which we will assess the outcomes of the transposition of EU legislation.

We are proceeding in accordance with the objectives of the National Development Concept 2050. We place

emphasis on building systems that support economic activity and social security for all residents. We know, however, that entitlements alone are not enough. Real social impact emerges when legislation is accompanied by efficient service delivery, clear information, and the cooperation of many actors: public institutions, employers, and local governments. Modern public administration works in partnership to more effectively support families in key decisions concerning work and childcare.

The development of digital services and the automation of processes are important elements of this progress, but their ultimate purpose is always the individual. The report you are reading is a valuable contribution to the further improvement of the family support system – improvement grounded in facts, cooperation, and responsibility for the quality of life of present and future generations.

5. TAKE-UP OF LEAVE BY FATHERS – A DETAILED ANALYSIS

Paternity leave – the number of fathers taking this benefit is falling noticeably

Paternity leave remains the most commonly taken benefit by fathers after the birth of a child. In 2025, 58% of men took it. Unfortunately, the downward trend that began in 2024 persists and is intensifying. Compared to 2024, the take-up of paternity leave fell by 6 percentage points, and compared to 2023 – by 9 percentage points.

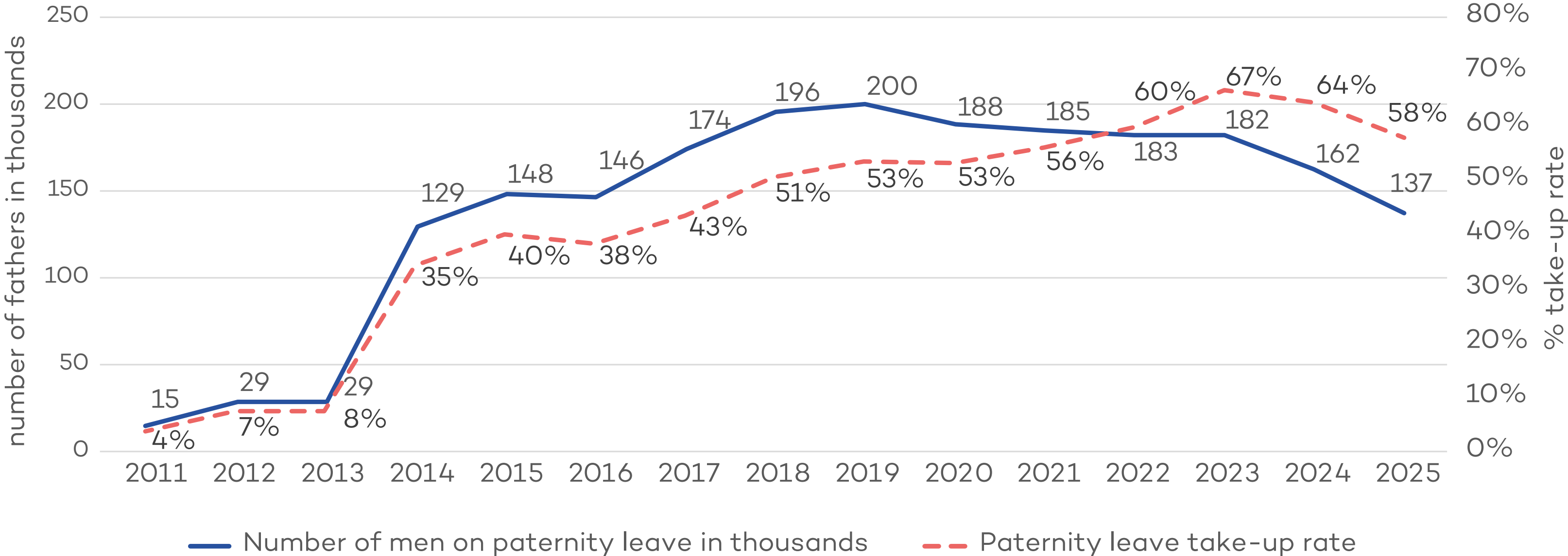


Chart 1. Men receiving maternity allowance in respect of paternity leave in 2011–2025, and the take-up rate.

Two main overlapping factors contribute to this phenomenon:

- 1. the non-transferability principle:** the introduction of the use-it-or-lose-it mechanism for 9 weeks of parental leave for fathers has become a strong incentive, as men, not wanting to lose this newly acquired entitlement, treat it as a priority;
- 2. failure to understand the differences:** many parents still do not fully distinguish between the different types of leave and their respective expiry dates.

Analysis of the data shows that a certain proportion of fathers fear losing part of their parental leave and therefore take it first, skipping paternity leave. This happens even though paternity leave is paid at 100% of remuneration, while parental leave is paid at 70%.

This undermines the simplistic assumption that parents make decisions about leave solely on the basis of financial calculation. In practice, it is clear that the principle of financial rationality gives way to the psychological mechanism of protecting the right to a benefit that expires irreversibly. On the positive side, this phenomenon shows that non-transferability is a very powerful instrument. If we want to further increase the involvement of fathers, it is precisely this component of entitlements that should be expanded. This is the standard in countries with the highest rates of care equality.

However, it should be stressed that the declining take-up of paternity leave is a concerning phenomenon. After all, this benefit serves a different purpose from parental leave. Its primary function is to enable the father to support the mother during the postpartum period and to care for the newborn.

The importance of this stage is confirmed by the new perinatal care standards, which enter into force in May 2026. The Share the Care Foundation advocated for them during the public consultation conducted by the Ministry of Health. These regulations make the father a direct addressee of perinatal education and officially sanction his role as a fully-fledged carer from the stage of preparation for the birth of the child. In this context, the take-up of paternity leave becomes not only a right, but also a strategic element in building the well-being of the new family.

The pay gap among working parents: paternity leave allowance versus maternity leave allowance

It is worth examining how the average maternity allowance paid in respect of paternity leave has compared with the maternity allowance received by women in respect of maternity leave. Both of these benefits are paid at 100% of remuneration, which makes it possible to compare the actual earnings of mothers and fathers.

In 2025, the ratio of mothers' allowances to fathers' allowances stood at 78% (an increase of 3 percentage points compared to the previous year, with the mothers' allowance adjusted from 81.5% to 100% for comparison purposes). This means that the difference in benefit levels is as much as 22%. This is considerably more than the declared overall national pay gap.

Given that the period of maternity allowance payment falls at an early stage of parents' working lives, these

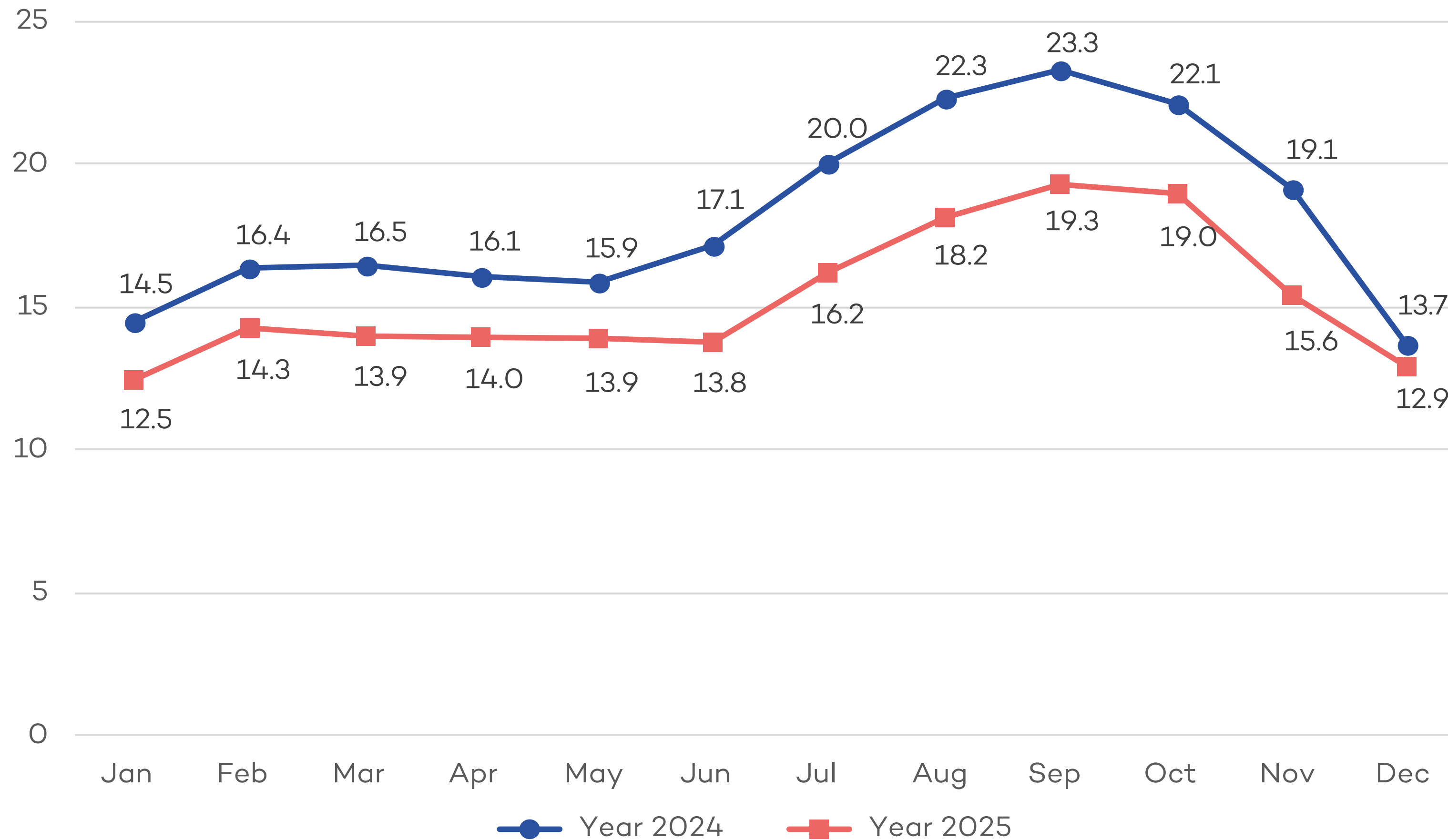


Chart 2. Men receiving maternity allowance in respect of paternity leave in 2024 and 2025 (in thousands).

data show how large the discrepancy between the earnings of mothers and fathers is from the very outset. Whereas an analysis of the overall pay gap or pension levels takes into account the majority of the population, comparing allowance levels gives us a precise picture of the earnings gap between working mothers and working fathers at the beginning of their careers. This disparity at the threshold of parenthood often determines the subsequent division of caring responsibilities and deepens economic inequalities in the years that follow.

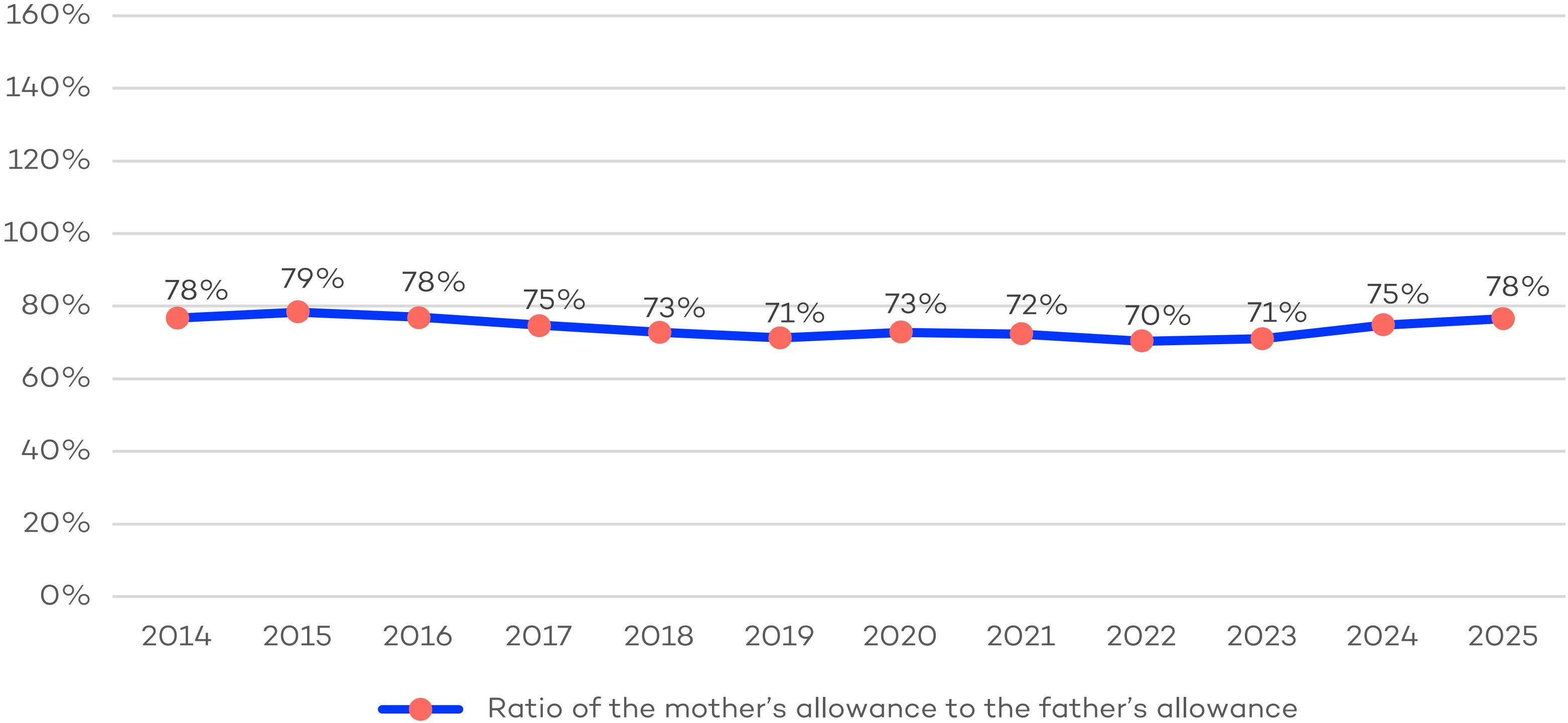


Chart 3. Ratio of the average daily maternity leave allowance of the mother (adjusted to 100%) to the average daily paternity leave allowance of the father in 2014–2025.

Figure 1. Paternity leave – cheat sheet

Duration	Pay rate	Time limit for use	Purpose
2 weeks	100%	until the child turns 1 year old	caring for the newborn and the mother during the postpartum period forming the father’s identity and building a bond with the child

Parental leave – the pace of growth is slowing

Men in Poland have been able to take parental leave since 2013. For years, the absence of a non-transferability mechanism meant this benefit functioned almost exclusively as an extension of maternity leave (take-up by fathers hovered around 1%).

The breakthrough came in 2023, when the work-life balance directive was transposed.

Take-up of the leave by men began to increase significantly: from 7% in the year of transposition to 24% in 2025. It should be noted, however, that the pace of this growth is slowing – in the last year, the increase was 7 percentage points, compared to 10 percentage points the year before.

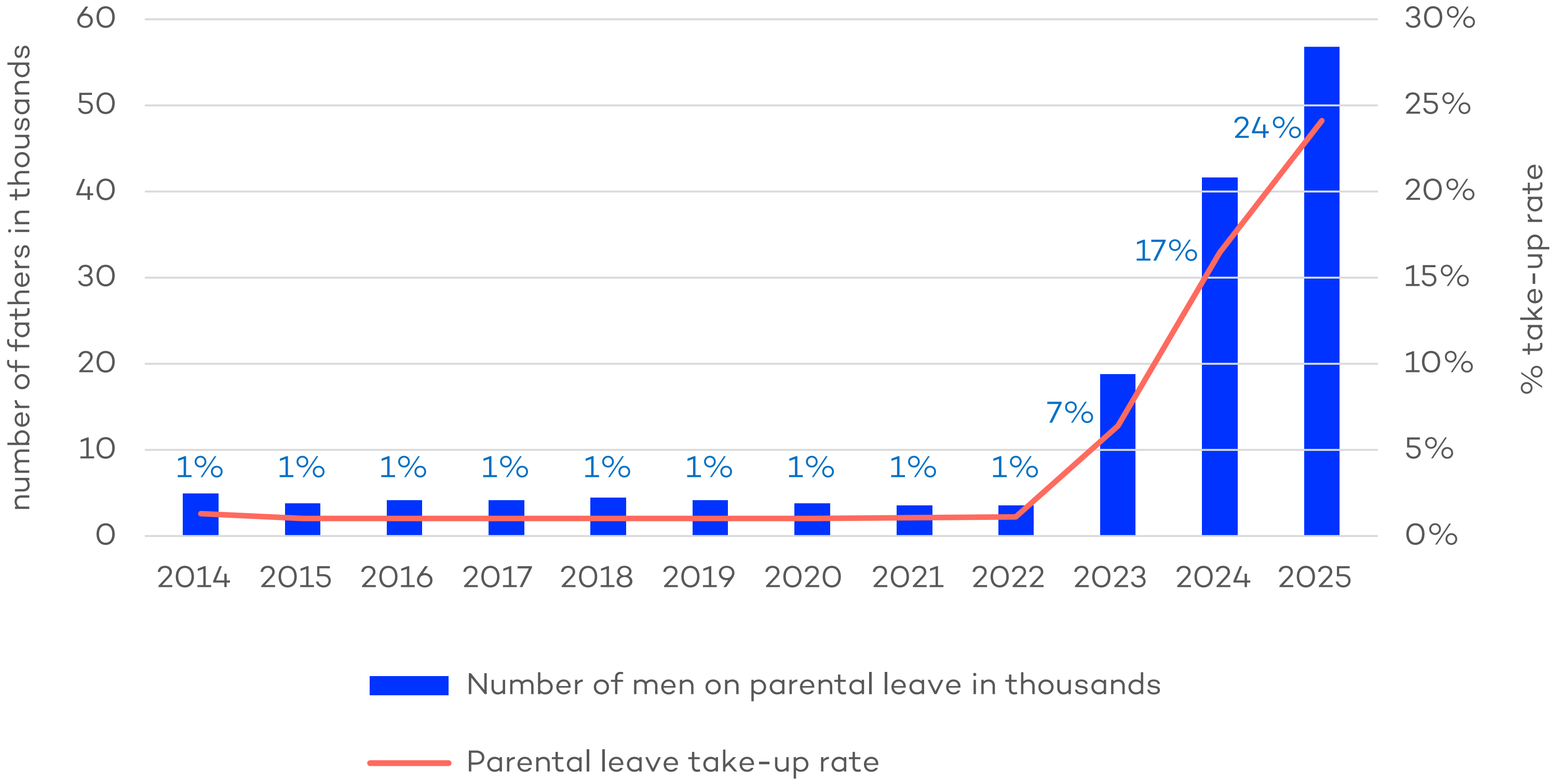


Chart 4. Parental leave take-up rate in 2014–2025.

A concerning trend is the continued decline in the average length of parental leave taken by fathers. In 2025, it was 43 days, compared to 48.6 days the year before. This means that fathers spend an average of 6 weeks on leave, even though the non-transferable portion reserved exclusively for them is 9 weeks. As a result, an average of 3 weeks of the entitlement go to waste. Two key barriers that may account for this are:

1. **insufficient awareness:** parents are often unaware that the leave can be divided into tranches and taken until the end of the calendar year in which the child turns 6;
2. **workplace pressure:** real or perceived pressure at the workplace associated with a longer absence by a male employee.

The overarching objective of the directive was to support women's labour market participation through greater

involvement of fathers in childcare. Why, then, do they not use 'their' 63 days?

In 2025, the average length of the mother's leave was 143 days, and the father's – 43 days. The only positive signal is that the overall share of days used by fathers in the total pool of parental leave taken rose from 4% to 6%.

The need for further education

To educate the public and break down numerous barriers stemming from stereotypes about men in the workplace, several campaigns promoting engaged fatherhood and parental leave for fathers have been conducted since the directive was transposed:

- **'Facet na 100 Pro'** (100% Man) (2023, 2024 and 2025 editions) – the flagship campaign of the Share the Care Foundation;

- **'Tata na etacie'** (Working Dad) (2024) – a campaign by [Onet.pl](https://www.onet.pl) with the support of the Share the Care Foundation;
- **'Praca z korzyścią dla wszystkich'** (Work for the Benefit of All) (2024) – a campaign by OLX under the slogan 'Let's share childcare to grow at work', with the support of the Share the Care Foundation;
- **'Mamy czas na zdrowie'** (We have Time to Heal) (2024, 2025, 2026) – a campaign by the Theraflu brand in partnership with the Share the Care Foundation, highlighting among other things the role of partnership between women and men in parenting;
- **initiatives of the State Labour Inspectorate** (2025) – education for employers and parents;
- **'Prawa Taty'** (Dad's Rights) – a campaign by the Share the Care Foundation delivered in partnership with local governments (Warsaw, Krakow, Wroclaw, Gdansk, Lodz).

Thanks to these initiatives, fatherhood is becoming visible in the media, and leave is being perceived as a shared parental right. However, long-term, continuous institutional efforts are still lacking. The target group – i.e. prospective parents – is in constant flux, which is why education must be permanently available and should reach these individuals at the pregnancy stage, or perhaps even at the stage of planned parenthood. Only then does it fall on fertile ground, and may even become an argument that tips the scales in favour of the decision to have a child.

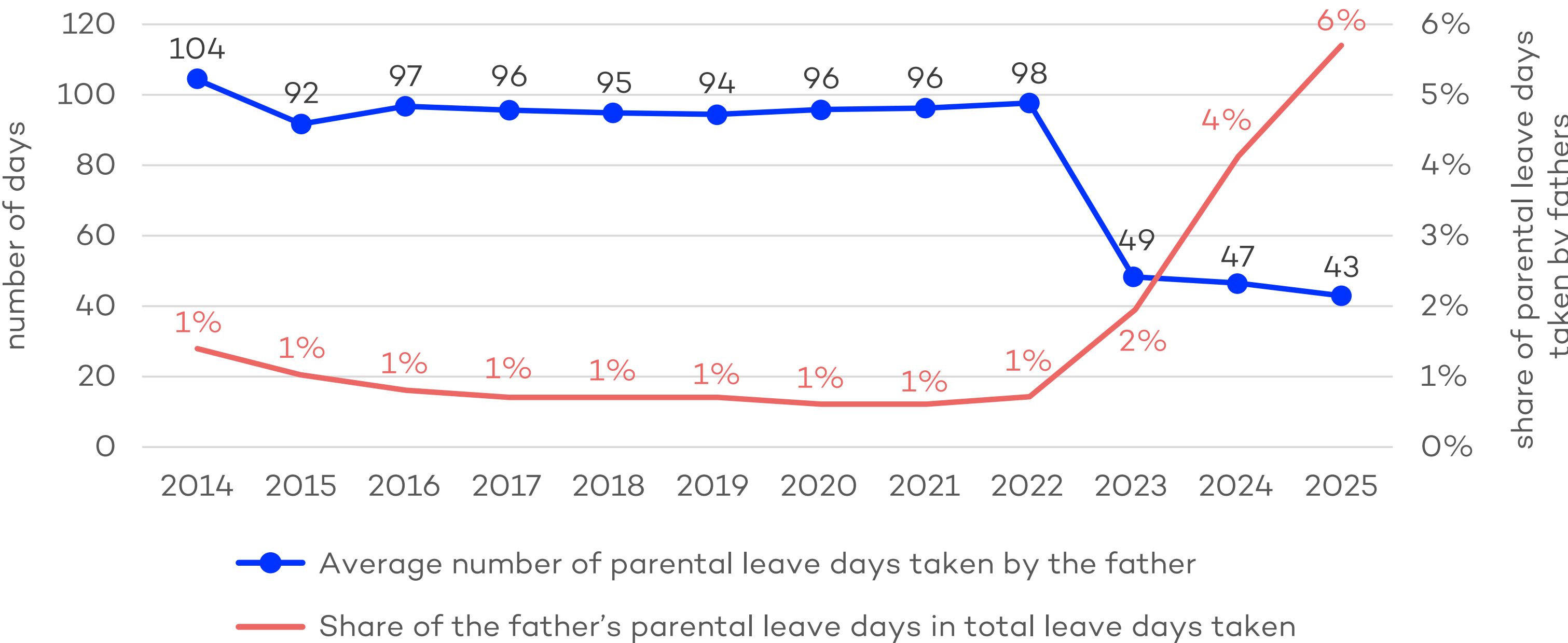


Chart 5. Share of fathers' parental leave days in total leave taken by parents and the average number of days per father receiving an allowance in 2014–2025.

The ratio of mothers' parental leave allowances to fathers' allowances has been rising steadily and reached 69% in 2025. When we compare these differences in allowance levels with the difference in maternity and paternity leave allowances, which stood at 78% in 2025, we can conclude that parental leave is currently being taken by higher-earning fathers. As the proportion of fathers on parental leave increases, this ratio should converge with that of maternity/paternity leave.

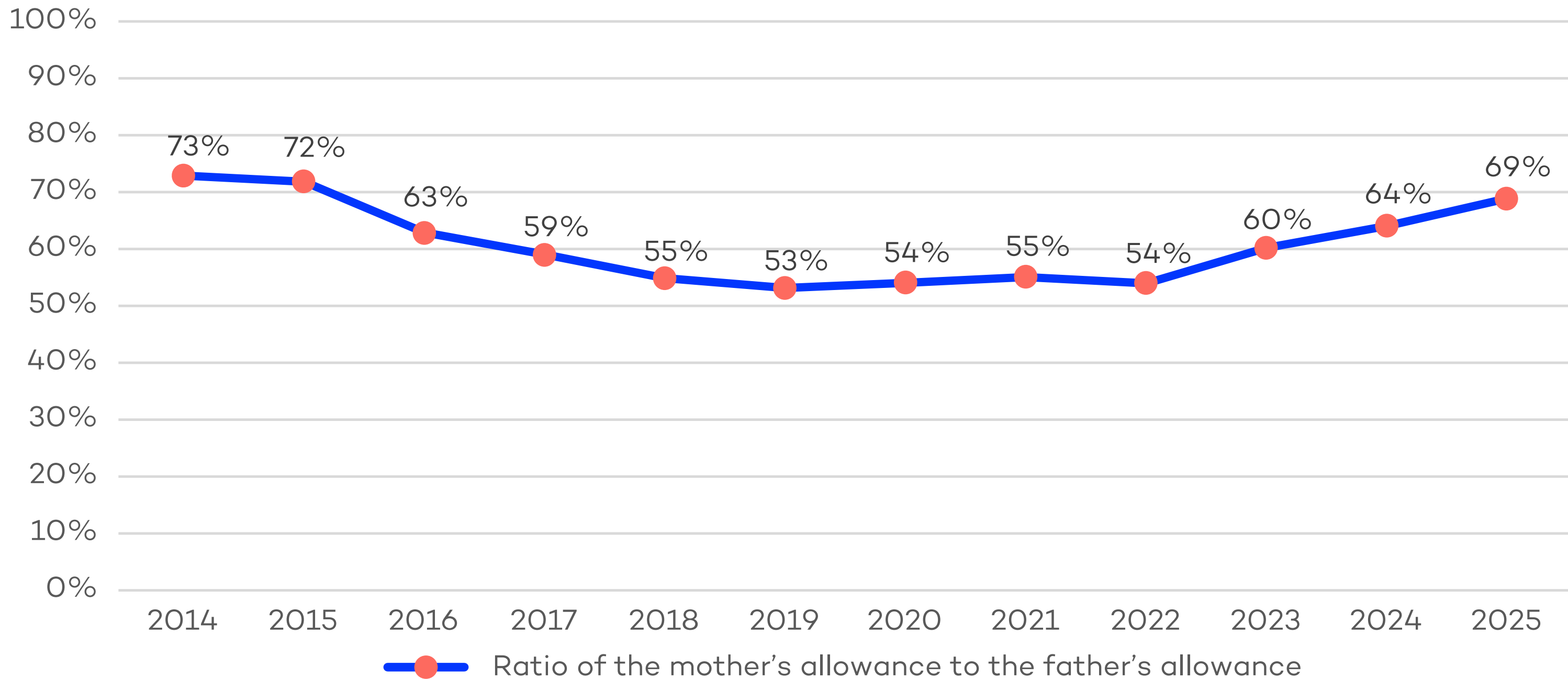


Chart 6. Ratio of the mother's parental leave allowance to the father's allowance in 2014–2025 (both allowances adjusted to 100%).

Figure 2. Parental leave – cheat sheet

Duration (for a single child)	Pay rate	Time limit for use	Purpose
41 weeks, of which: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 9 weeks non-transferable for the father, – 9 weeks non-transferable for the mother, – 23 weeks to be shared between the mother and the father; may be taken in a maximum of 5 parts	70% or 81.5% if the mother of the child submits a request to average the allowance. Important! The 9 non-transferable weeks for the father are always paid at 70%	until the end of the calendar year in which the child turns 6 years old	caring for the child building a bond with the child supporting the mother's return to economic activity – equalising labour market opportunities for women and men

6. TAKE-UP OF OTHER CARE-RELATED BENEFITS BY FATHERS

Childcare does not end when maternity or parental leave does. It is only the beginning of a long and demanding stage of organising everyday family life.

A child falling ill after a few days at the nursery, the need to deliver a costume for a school play, a friend's birthday party, or arranging transport to and from the childcare facility – all of this makes up the so-called invisible logistics of parenting. What do the figures tell us about fathers' involvement? They point to enormous disparities between working mothers and fathers in this area. The impact of these inequalities on women's economic activity is obvious.

Time budget of fathers and mothers

Data from Statistics Poland on the time budget of Polish citizens clearly show that disparities in the time devoted by men and women to caring and work-

related duties persist. The greater burden of responsibilities on women results in less time devoted to other activities, including work and rest. However, a trend towards equalising this disparity is visible. Over the course of 10 years, the time devoted by fathers to domestic and caring duties increased by 20 minutes per day.

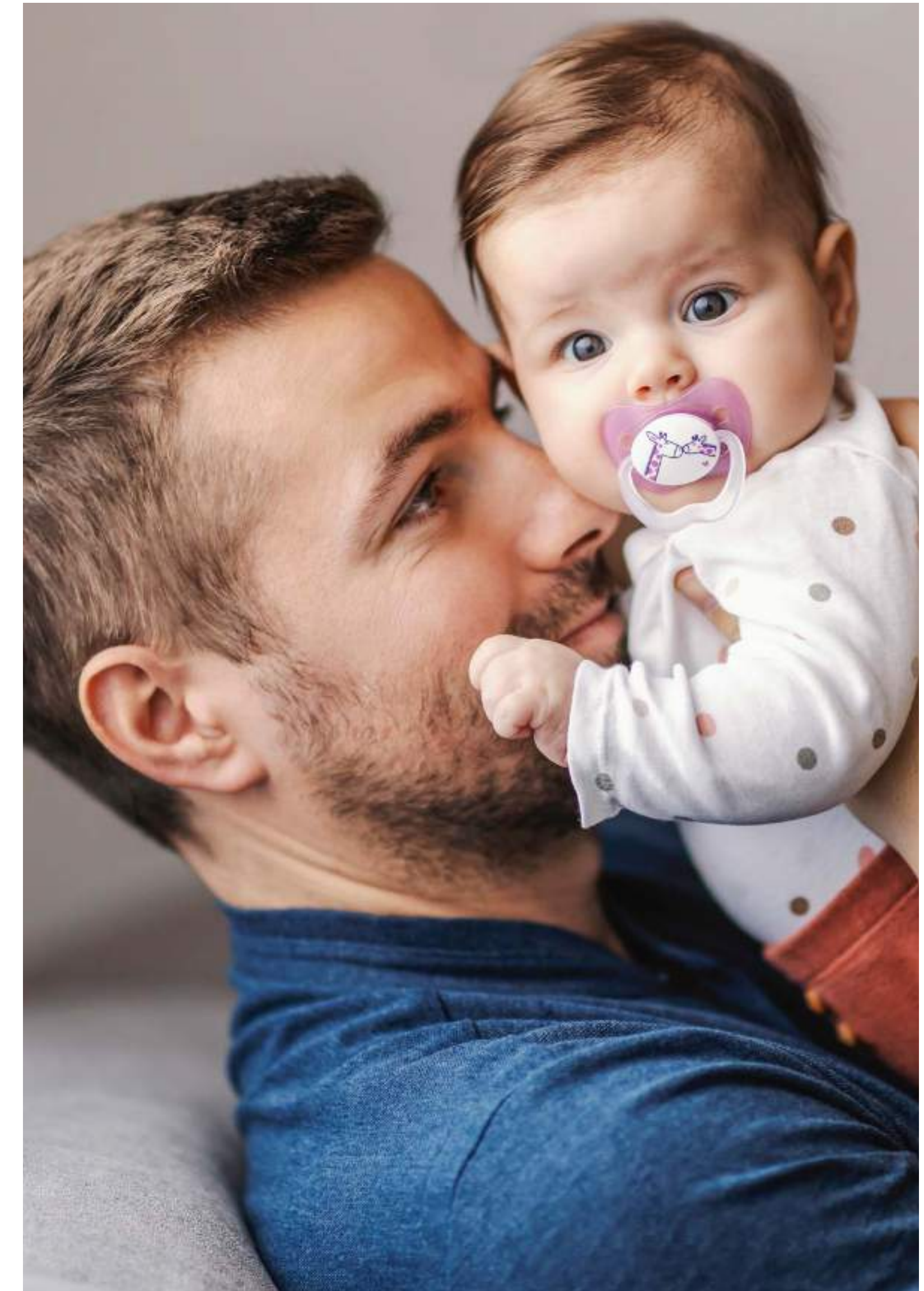
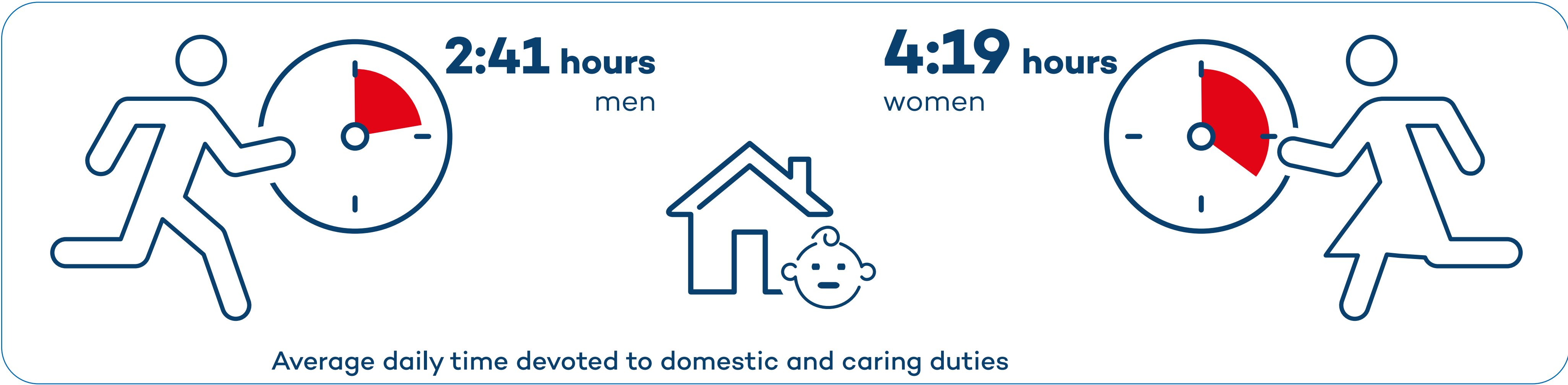
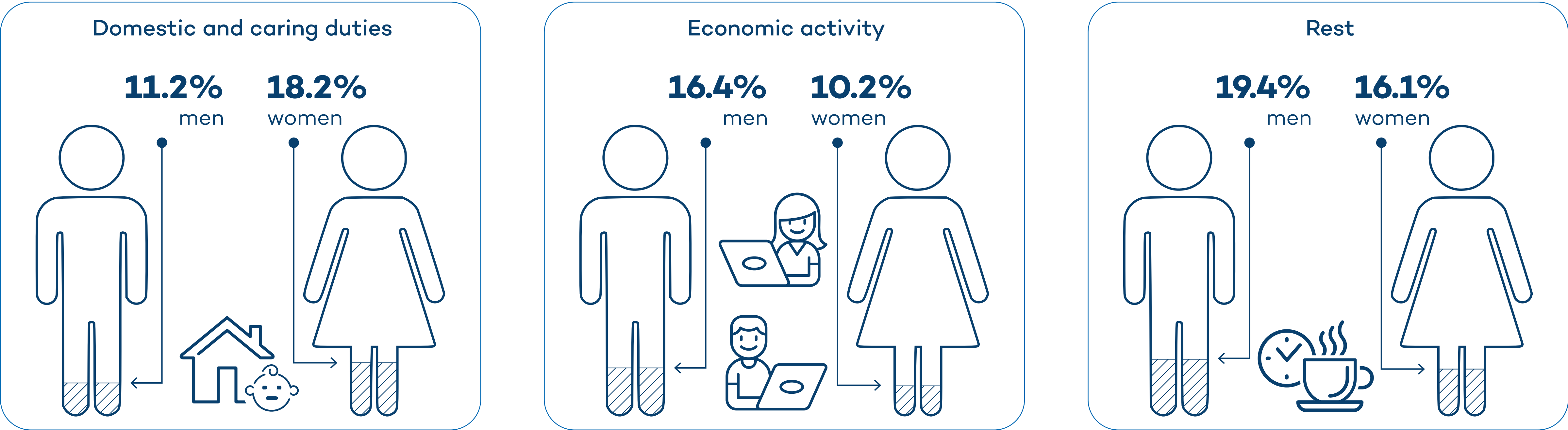


Figure 3. Work, care and rest for mothers and fathers – daily breakdown ('Time Budget of Polish Citizens', Statistics Poland 2023) Domestic and caring duties:



In 2025, the share of absence days taken by men in respect of caring for a sick child was only 22%. This represents another year-on-year increase of 1 percentage point compared to the previous year. In practice, nearly 78% of care-related absence days still fall on women.

Years	Number of sickness absence days in thousands			
	total	men	women	percentage of fathers' absence days
2020	8 091.2	1 632.4	6 458.6	20%
2021	9 683.9	1 998.2	7 685.6	21%
2022	11 788.3	2 420.5	9 367.4	21%
2023	10 919.5	2 282.0	8 636.9	21%
2024	10 902.7	2 324.3	8 577.9	21%
2025	9 834.0	2 125.3	7 708.2	22%

Table 1. Number of medical certificate days in respect of caring for a sick child, broken down by sex, and the share of fathers' absence days in the total in 2020–2025.

It is also worth examining this breakdown by the age of the child. The highest level of fathers' involvement falls in the first two years of the child's life – 26% of care-related absence days. However, in subsequent years this indicator declines, reaching just 17% for children aged 9 and over.

Age of the child in years	Number of sickness absence days in thousands			
	total	men	women	percentage of fathers' absence days
TOTAL , of which	9 834.0	2 125.3	7 708.2	22%
1 year	1 035.6	266.4	768.9	26%
2 years	837.1	215.5	621.5	26%
3-4 years	2 289.3	540.9	1 748.4	24%
5-6 years	1 966.9	425.7	1 541.2	22%
7-8 years	1 394.8	273.8	1 121.0	20%
9 years and over	2 309.7	403.0	1 906.7	17%

Table 2. Sickness absence in respect of childcare in 2020–2025 – breakdown by the age of the child.

7. SHARED RESPONSIBILITY AND A SYSTEMIC APPROACH TO BUILDING PARENTAL EQUALITY: STATE AUTHORITIES – LOCAL GOVERNMENTS – EMPLOYERS

Three years have passed since the Labour Code amendments concerning leave for fathers and the introduction of the non-transferable period of parental leave entered into force. This is sufficient time to observe the first lasting effects, but also a moment at which the potential of regulatory ‘novelty’ is being exhausted. The growth in the take-up of parental leave by fathers is clearly decelerating. This does not mean, however, that men in Poland do not want to be involved in childcare.

Social research shows the opposite – a partnership-based family model, in which both parents work and share care, is the preferred model in our country today. Fathers increasingly want to be present, engaged, and to build a lasting relationship with their child from the first

months of life. To sustain the upward trend, a systemic approach is needed – one that recognises fathers as equal carers and creates an environment that supports this premise.

Yet many elements of the current system still rest on the archaic assumption that the mother is the ‘default’ primary carer and that giving up or reducing economic activity is a natural cost of motherhood for women. This is evident both at the European level – where the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union provides protection explicitly in respect of maternity rather than parenthood – and in national public policies and institutional language, as exemplified by the concept of a ‘maternity allowance’ paid also to fathers.

It is hard not to address the issue of demography and fertility data in Poland at this juncture. It is clear that the consequences of this state of affairs are reflected in the procreative decisions of young Polish women. Are we ‘doomed’ to such a scenario?

In the report ‘The Future Begins at Home’, prepared for the Share the Care Foundation, Kacper Nosarzewski, a partner at the foresight firm 4CF, argues that contemporary sociology – including research conducted by the Danish sociologist Prof. Gøsta Esping-Andersen (Families in the 21st Century) – challenges the old theories predicting the decline of the family as a result of women’s emancipation and points to the need for state intervention in care systems.

Esping-Andersen diagnoses that the dynamic of the family in relation to the gender-role revolution resembles a U-shaped curve. It encompasses two phases:

Phase 1 – erosion: Women enter the labour market, but social norms governing each sex remain traditional. This generates conflict (women’s ‘second shift’ at home), causing a sharp decline in fertility rates and a rise in divorce rates. Poland is currently stuck in this volatile phase.

Phase 2 – new equilibrium: Adaptation takes place – men take on a significant share of domestic duties (the ‘feminisation of male roles’), and the state provides high-quality care services. This is the so-called Scandinavian model. The family becomes stable again, and fertility rates rise.

The forecast is unequivocal – the stabilisation of the family will occur

only where a fully egalitarian model is successfully implemented. This requires two pillars:

- men engaged at home (a share of over 40% in domestic work strongly correlates with fertility rates),
- a welfare state that, through universal nursery and pre-school education, reduces inequalities in children’s starting positions.

Interestingly, today the trend of ‘return to the family’ (stable relationships, two children) is driven precisely by the best-educated elites, who have adopted the partnership model. Instability and single parenthood are becoming the domain of less educated and poorer families (diverging destinies). In the face of demographic collapse, this may become a mass phenomenon if the system does not support egalitarianism.

The system of parental equality is co-created by three key groups:

- state authorities,
- local governments,
- employers.

Each of them plays a distinct but complementary role in Poland’s transition to Phase 2 – the new equilibrium.

Figure 4. Model of systemic support for parental equality



Legislature and government

The role of the legislature and the government is to create a legal framework that not only enables mothers and fathers to exercise their entitlements, but also clearly defines the social function of care as an inalienable right of every parent. This perspective assumes that fathers are autonomous participants in family life and that their right to provide care is a value in its own right.

Well-designed support for men's involvement in childcare is not merely a matter of technical access to leave. Above all, it makes it possible to build a safe space for fatherhood. The state has the competence, through legislation and the active shaping of norms, to ensure that men do not need to fear a negative reaction from their superiors or their professional environment if they decide to take a break from work to devote time to their child. When the system recognises care as a value in its own

right, exercising one's rights ceases to be an act of courage and becomes a social norm. Such a change delivers positive outcomes for all:

- it supports the well-being of children,
- it equalises labour market opportunities for women,
- it allows men to fully fulfil their parental role.

In this context, harnessing the potential of fathers as carers should be viewed as a fundamental measure for eliminating the care gap. Under the current leave structure, if both parents fully exercise their rights, the child can remain in the direct care of the immediate family for at least 61 weeks from birth.

Government programmes aimed at investing in high-quality nursery and pre-school care are very important. However, it is worth recognising the role of engaged fatherhood as the first and most important pillar of family stabilisation.

This confirms the aforementioned forecast by Esping-Andersen, who maintains that family stabilisation will occur only where a fully egalitarian model is successfully implemented. This requires two pillars:

- men engaged in childcare,
- a welfare state that, through universal pre-school education, reduces inequalities in children's starting positions.

The system should treat these two directions as complementary elements of a single, coherent strategy.

Local governments

Enormous, yet still untapped potential lies in the role of local governments. They co-create the local care ecosystem, manage a significant part of the care and health infrastructure, maintain direct communication with residents, and have the best understanding of their needs and the barriers they face.

For parental support to be effective, the timing of its delivery is crucial. Assistance should reach parents at exactly the moment when a specific decision-making or care-related need arises. Thanks to their close relationship with residents and their access to local services, local governments are able to identify these moments and channel adequate support to mothers and fathers at the right time. This applies both to perinatal education and to the parent's return to the labour market.

Local government family policy cannot be limited to infrastructure alone. It

is important to build a local culture that supports engaged parenting, to promote partnership models in local media and institutions, and to create family-friendly spaces. A priority challenge for local governments is to ensure that the system genuinely supports both parents, rather than perpetuating the archaic stereotype of the mother-as-carer. This requires sensitivity to a shift in narrative – a transition from communication addressed by default to mothers (e.g. 'programmes for mums', 'zones for mums') to language focused on the engaged presence of both parents in the child's life.

Such a change requires evolution across many areas of governance: from the wording of application forms in public offices, through information campaigns, to the training of staff in local health and care institutions. The local government assumes the role of a 'host' – one that cannot be replaced by central measures and that is worth

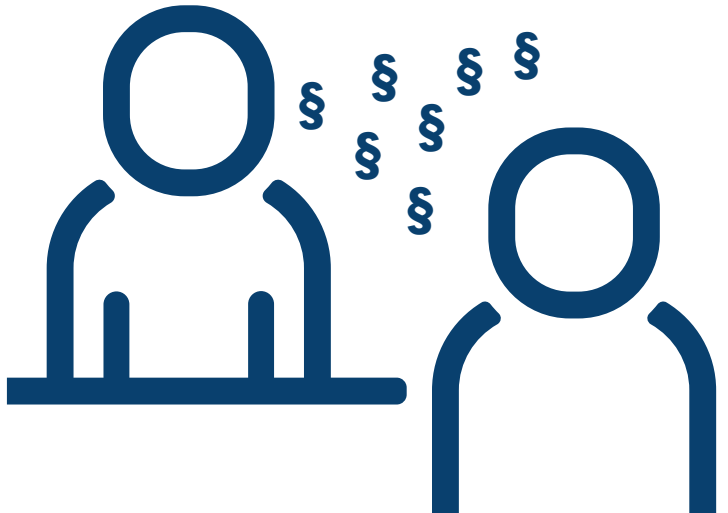
consciously incorporating into the system of building parental equality. It is, after all, its key link.



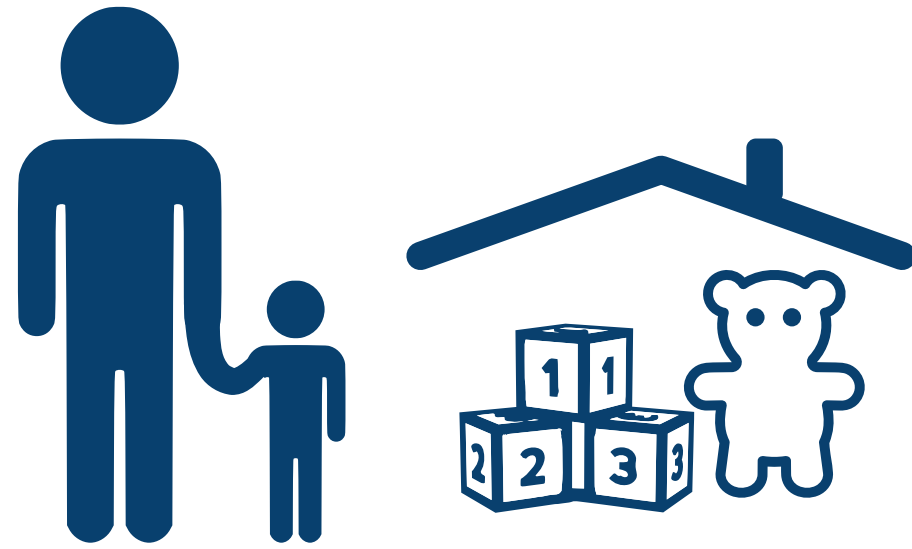
Figure 5. Building fathers' involvement at key life moments over which local governments have influence



Antenatal classes – including fathers in perinatal education



Birth registration – informing fathers of the rights to which they are entitled



Admission to nursery and pre-school – building fathers' involvement through education and clear procedures



Local health programmes – including fathers in the child's healthcare



Family and social support – supporting fathers in their daily challenges of combining childcare with working life

Local governments interested in promoting the right to parental leave for fathers are invited to join the 'Tata, kiedy urlop?' (Dad, when will you take a leave) social campaign. The campaign is scheduled to launch in July 2026.

More information: <https://sharethecare.pl/category/projekt-z-niw-crso/>



Tata, kiedy bierzesz urlop rodzicielski?

Bo tata Hani już wziął.

URLOP RODZICIELSKI TO CZAS DLA CIEBIE I TWOJEGO DZIECKA. NIE POZWÓL, ŻEBY PRZEPADŁ.

Wejdź na tatakiedyurlop.pl i sprawdź, do kiedy możesz go wykorzystać.

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Employers

Supporting parents in reconciling work and family life requires a strategic approach on the part of employers. It can be framed in three complementary tiers of engagement – from basic procedural measures, through building an organisational culture, to financial reinforcement of the support system.

TIER 1: Foundations – processes, procedures, reliable information

This is the baseline without which any further measures lack credibility. It includes:

- a review and update of internal procedures concerning parental and paternity leave in the light of the work-life balance directive,
- the development of clear guidance – separately for mothers and separately for fathers – presenting realistic leave-sharing scenarios,

- actively informing both groups of the rights to which they are entitled,
- training HR and personnel staff to avoid substantive errors and to support mothers and fathers through the leave application process,
- training managers on how to hold conversations with parents and how to plan cover.

As much as 68% of maternity allowances are paid by employers, which makes them a key link in the smooth implementation of the law.

TIER 2: Organisational culture and supportive leadership

At this tier, the company recognises parental equality as an integral element of its gender equality strategy through:

- training for senior management that demonstrates the impact of engaged parenting on the well-being and effectiveness of teams,
- onboarding programmes for parents returning from leave, with designated buddies,
- creating support networks and maintaining contact with those on leave,
- promoting role models and equality ambassadors among engaged fathers and mothers,
- workshops that challenge stereotypes by presenting competencies acquired through childcare (empathy, multitasking, resilience) as genuine professional assets.

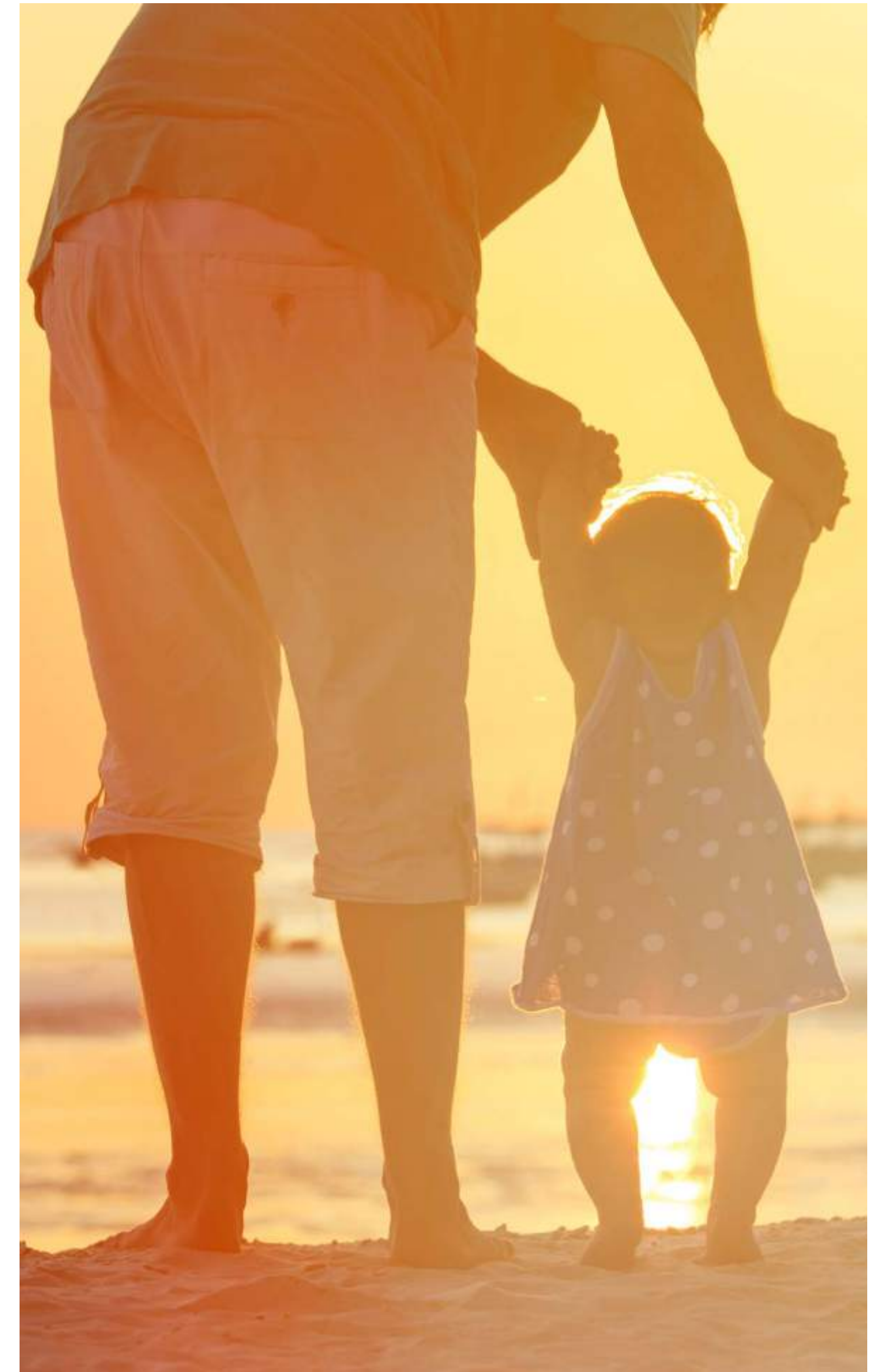
TIER 3: Financial support and equalising opportunities

This is the most advanced tier, one that genuinely eliminates economic barriers. Its key elements are:

- topping up the allowance to 100% for fathers who take the 9 non-transferable weeks of parental leave,
- full pay for part-time work during the first month of the parent's return following the birth of a child,
- regular pay audits and the elimination of the pay gap between women and men,
- a guarantee of equal opportunities for promotion, regardless of career breaks for caring purposes.

In companies that consciously and strategically address all three tiers of engagement, a partnership culture becomes the natural standard. In such organisations, the vast majority of fathers take parental leave in the first

year of the child's life. A case in point is the company that was the first in Poland to implement and systematise the support standards described above – as many as 76% (versus 24% – the national average) of fathers employed there choose to take parental leave in the initial period of the child's life. This constitutes clear evidence that appropriate employer support genuinely removes barriers to men's decisions to take on childcare responsibilities.



8. BUILDING ENGAGED FATHERHOOD AT THE SYSTEMIC LEVEL – DEMANDS OF THE SHARE

THE CARE FOUNDATION

The Share the Care Foundation announced 10 demands for measures to advance parental equality, which were presented in the 2024 edition of the report. All of them remain valid, although their implementation is currently at various stages of progress. Three years after the transposition of the work-life balance directive in Poland, this is the right time to take stock of achievements to date and to review what has changed since 2024. This perspective makes it possible to separate the effect of the regulatory change itself from the real, systemic implementation measures.



1. EQUAL PAY RATE FOR THE NON-TRANSFERABLE PORTION – A DEMAND THAT REMAINS VALID BUT IS DIFFICULT TO IMPLEMENT

The Share the Care Foundation maintains its position that the allowance for the 9 non-transferable weeks of parental leave for each parent should be set at 100% of the assessment base. This demand is fully justified both socially and economically.

The European Commission, in the work-life balance directive, clearly stated that when setting the level of the allowance for the non-transferable period of parental leave, Member States should take into account the fact that the take-up of leave often results in a loss of income for the family. First earners can only decide to take the leave if it is sufficiently well remunerated and allows for a decent living standard.

In the Foundation's assessment, the level of 70% is insufficient. Moreover, before the transposition of the directive, fathers in Poland were able to take parental leave at a pay rate of 80% (if they submitted the 'advance request' that was required at the time). The current arrangements have in practice worsened the financial situation of many families, despite the fact that their declared aim was to support equality and engaged fatherhood.

Raising the pay rate to 100% for the 9 non-transferable weeks of leave would:

- increase the accessibility of this solution for fathers on medium and lower incomes,
- reduce the financial barrier that currently excludes many men from taking leave,
- contribute to a more partnership-based family model,
- be in line with the spirit and intent of the EU directive.

Under the current budgetary constraints and amid fiscal pressures in Poland, a full increase of the pay rate to 100% for all entitled persons may be very difficult to implement in the short term.

The Foundation therefore recommends an alternative solution – a system of financial incentives for couples who share the leave.



2. INTRODUCING FINANCIAL INCENTIVES FOR COUPLES WHO SHARE LEAVE EQUALLY

Nine non-transferable weeks are an important step, but they do not exhaust the potential for change. The experience of other countries shows that the more balanced the division of leave between parents, the greater the benefits for the entire family.

Research conducted in Ireland, among other countries, shows that the longer the father spends on leave with the child, the:

- faster mothers return to the labour market,
- less their pay decreases,
- more the pay gap between women and men narrows.

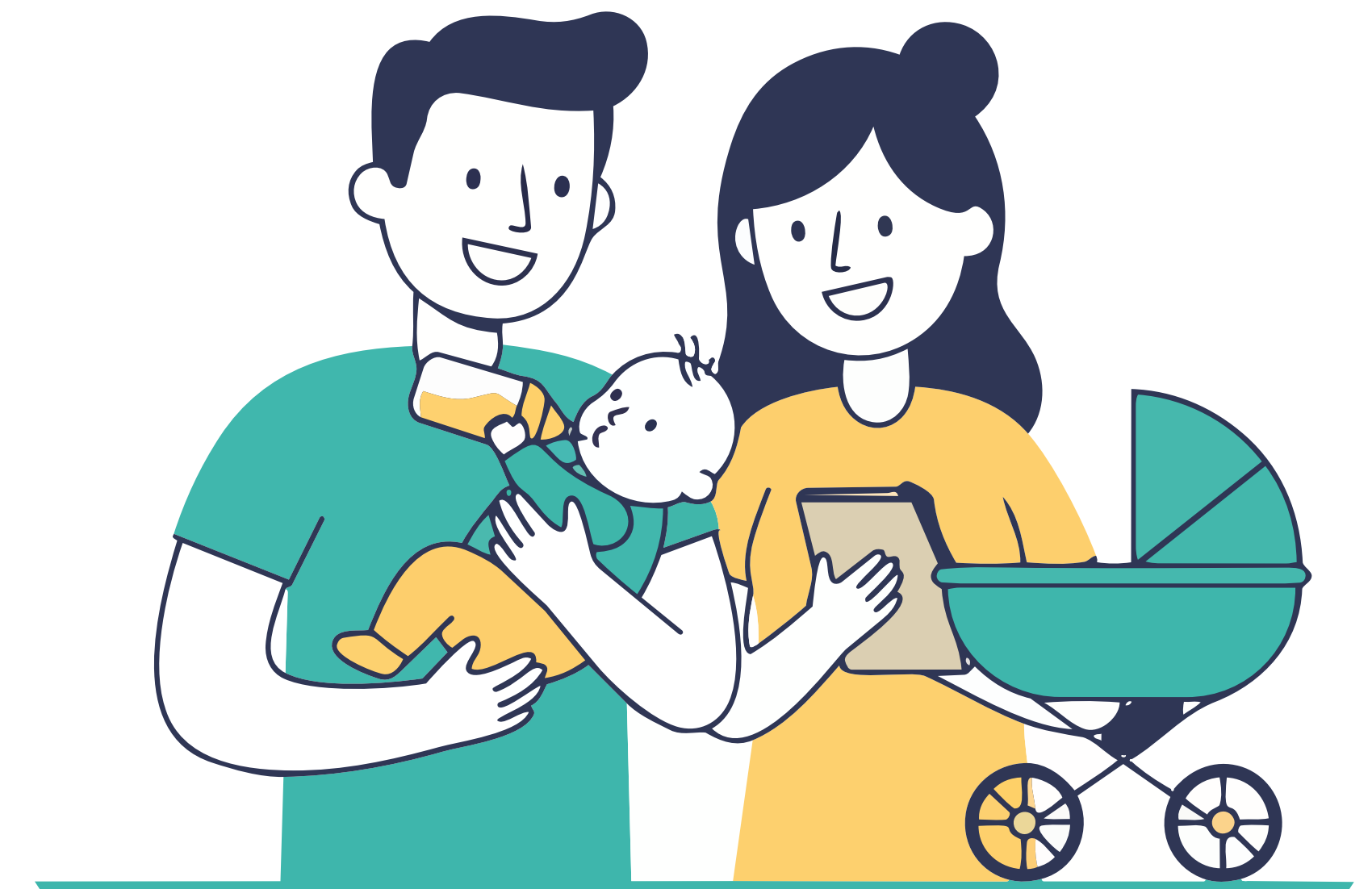
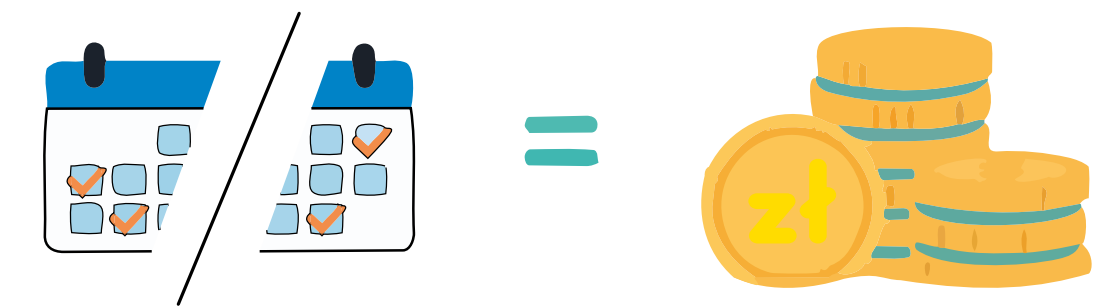
We propose the introduction of a financial bonus for couples who share parental leave on a roughly equal basis (e.g. fifty-fifty or meeting a specified minimum share for each parent).

The bonus could take the form of:

- a top-up of the allowance to 100% for a specified portion of the leave, provided both parents take a sufficiently long period of care,
- a one-off financial supplement for families that meet the criterion of a partnership-based division.

It is worth adding that in some OECD countries, supplements to parental leave allowances are financed by local governments. They seek to distinguish themselves as places that are good for families with children.

Introducing a financial incentive for parents who share parental leave equally would motivate them to consider this scenario and encourage fathers to take longer periods of parental leave, rather than only the non-transferable portion.



3. EDUCATION ON MODEL WAYS OF USING PARENTAL LEAVE

Parental leave may be divided into five parts and taken simultaneously by the mother and the father. In the Share the Care Foundation's view, for these regulations to genuinely support the building of parental equality, it is crucial to promote a model in which the father takes part of the leave independently – following the period in which the mother was on leave – and takes it in one continuous block. It is also important for men to take paternity leave immediately after the birth of the child. The observed 9-percentage-point decline in the take-up of this benefit clearly points to information gaps and an urgent need for education among fathers.

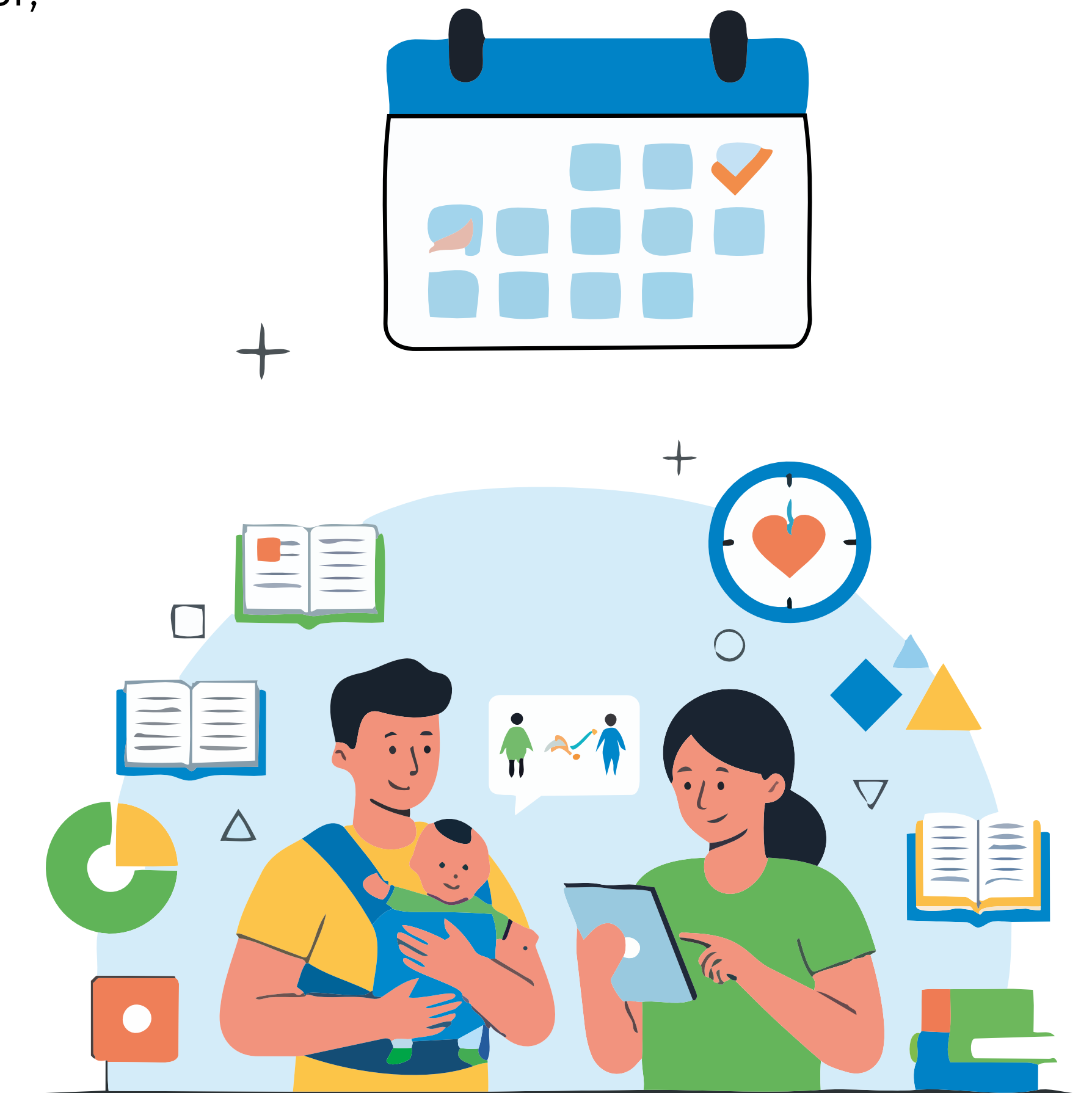
Parental leave taken independently by the father serves not only the purpose

of caring for the child and building a bond with the child, but also:

- facilitates the mother's return to economic activity,
- strengthens the man's sense of competence in the role of father,
- develops practical care skills.

It is one of the most effective routes to building a deep relationship with the child – a relationship that constitutes the foundation of a lifelong bond and increases the chance of maintaining it, including in the event of the parents' separation. The material prepared by the Share the Care Foundation, entitled 'Prawa taty' (Dad's Rights), provides a comprehensive

discussion of these aspects. It has been endorsed by the State Labour Inspectorate and is available both on the State Labour Inspectorate website and on the educational portal run by the Foundation (www.teamrodzina.pl).



4. AN OFFICIAL GOVERNMENT PORTAL WITH CONTENT WRITTEN IN PLAIN LANGUAGE

Parents' rights after the birth of a child are regulated by numerous pieces of legislation and administered by various institutions – including the State Labour Inspectorate and the Social Insurance Institution. Information on leave and benefits is dispersed and often written in complex language, which makes it difficult for both parents and employers to correctly interpret and apply it.

We therefore believe that an official government information portal for parents should be created, providing a structured and clear description, in plain and accessible language, of all the rights and available forms of support for parents after the birth of a child – regardless of which institution is responsible for their administration.

Such a tool should contain all essential information on:

- leaves,
- financial benefits,
- government programmes (e.g. Active Parents, 800+),
- procedures, and
- formal obligations.

A single, coherent point of access to knowledge genuinely increases the decision-making security of families. It also builds the sense that the state provides clear and predictable support at a key moment in life.

The portal should be designed in line with modern social principles – namely, those that recognise women and men as equal carers of the child. This means moving

away from reinforcing stereotypical roles in the language and structure of the message and presenting parental entitlements in a manner that is as gender-neutral and partnership-oriented as possible.



5. FULL INCLUSION OF FATHERS IN PERINATAL EDUCATION

Significant changes took place in this area in 2025. In the new organisational standards for perinatal care, which enter into force in May 2026, fathers are mentioned for the first time (alongside mothers) as fully-fledged addressees of perinatal education. This is a milestone in the systemic inclusion of men in the process of preparing for parenthood.

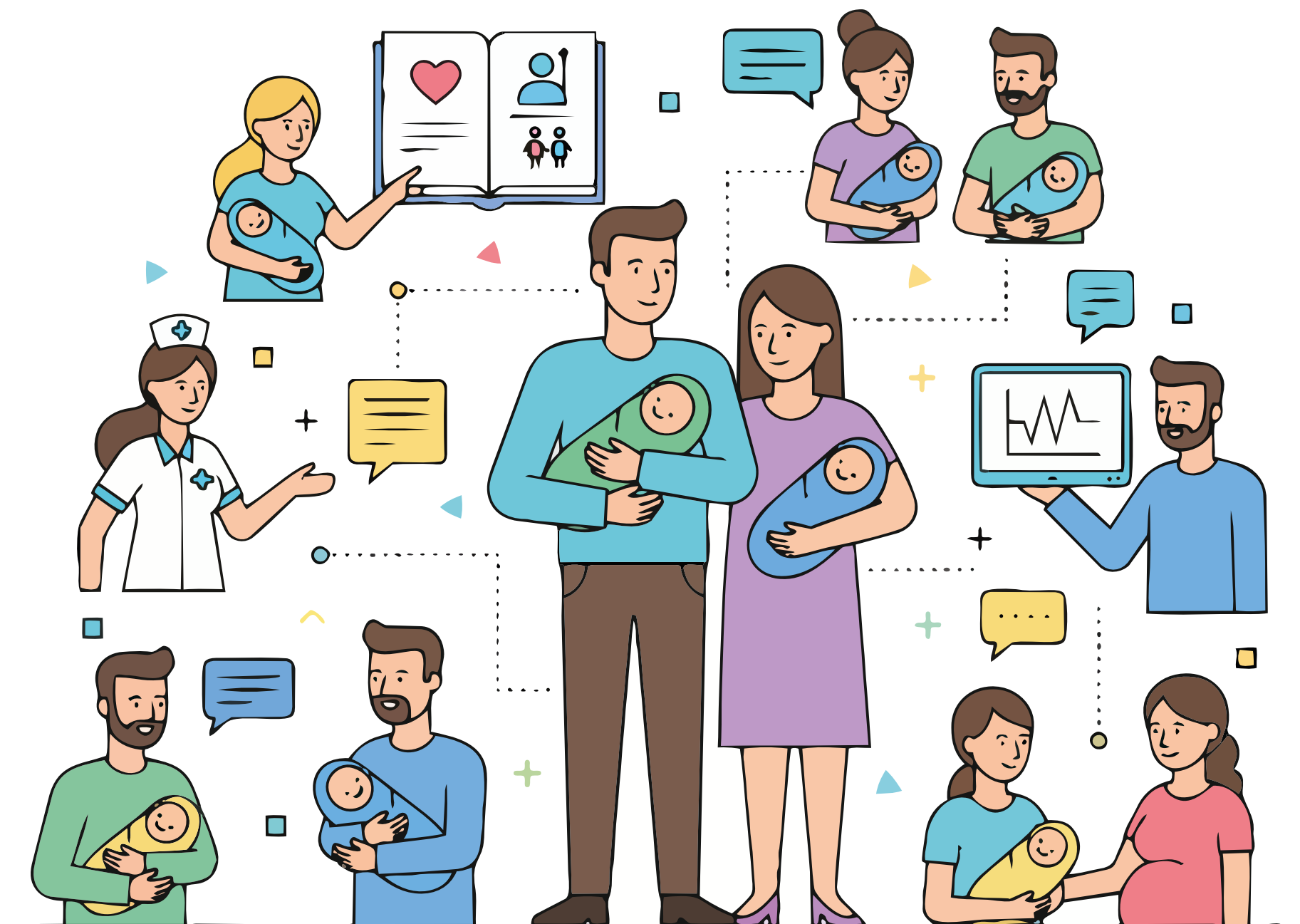
However, the mere inclusion of fathers in the standards is only the beginning. For this change to become a reality, perinatal education programmes, which still focus almost exclusively on the needs of women, need to be adapted. We call for antenatal class programmes to be supplemented with:

- substantive coverage of challenges and issues specific to fathers,

- content on the rights of fathers after the birth of a child and the related formalities,
- modules promoting partnership in parenting,
- information on how a man can support his partner during the postpartum period and in maintaining lactation,
- reliable knowledge about the benefits of the father's active involvement in care from the very first moments of the child's life.

An untapped resource is community midwife visits after the birth of the child. The authority and knowledge of midwives can translate into effective education of fathers and their greater involvement, which in turn means relieving mothers of the burden of childcare in the difficult initial postpartum period.

Updating the programmes and providing education during community visits will make it possible to fully harness the potential of the new standards and genuinely prepare both parents for partnership-based care.



6. PUTTING AN END TO LEAVE-SHARING DECISIONS BEING MADE BY EMPLOYERS

Despite the amendment of the Labour Code, many employers have not updated their HR processes and procedures with regard to the division of parental leave. This concerns above all the so-called long-form request (also known as the 'advance request'), which was officially abolished with the transposition of the work-life balance directive. Unfortunately, in practice it still happens that both employers and parents continue to use it. An employer who uses such a request is in effect making the decision on behalf of the parents and restricting their real choice in terms of the flexible division of leave.

The Share the Care Foundation advocated for the creation of specific and clear guidelines on submitting requests and for the dissemination of correct leave documentation templates. Through our cooperation with the State Labour Inspectorate, an official discussion of this issue was published on the State Labour Inspectorate's website. It constitutes key guidance for

employers on how to correctly interpret and apply the legal provisions, so that it is the parents who retain full autonomy in deciding how to divide childcare between themselves.



7. BUILDING AN ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE AMONG EMPLOYERS THAT IS CONDUCTIVE TO PARENTAL EQUALITY

Employers' receptiveness towards fathers who take parental leave is a key factor influencing family decisions. Mere knowledge of the entitlements available is not enough – the employee must feel that going on leave will not negatively affect their standing in the company.

In practice, one of the main barriers preventing fathers from taking leave is the employer's perceived disapproval. Men fear that upon return they will be regarded as second-class employees who chose family over full dedication to their work. They feel this may close the door to promotions, pay rises, or participation in important projects.

It is therefore essential that employers educate their staff and raise awareness of workers' rights. A syndicated study by the Share the Care Foundation shows that employees primarily expect to receive reliable and easily accessible information about the entitlements they are due, directly from their employer. The logic is straightforward: if a company publicly and clearly informs employees about parental entitlements, it signals that it accepts and supports them. In order to build a culture conducive to equality, we define the following minimum standards for employers:

- the use of correct and up-to-date request templates – discontinuing procedures that restrict parental choice (e.g. so-called advance requests),
- reliable information for expectant parents – proactively providing clear information

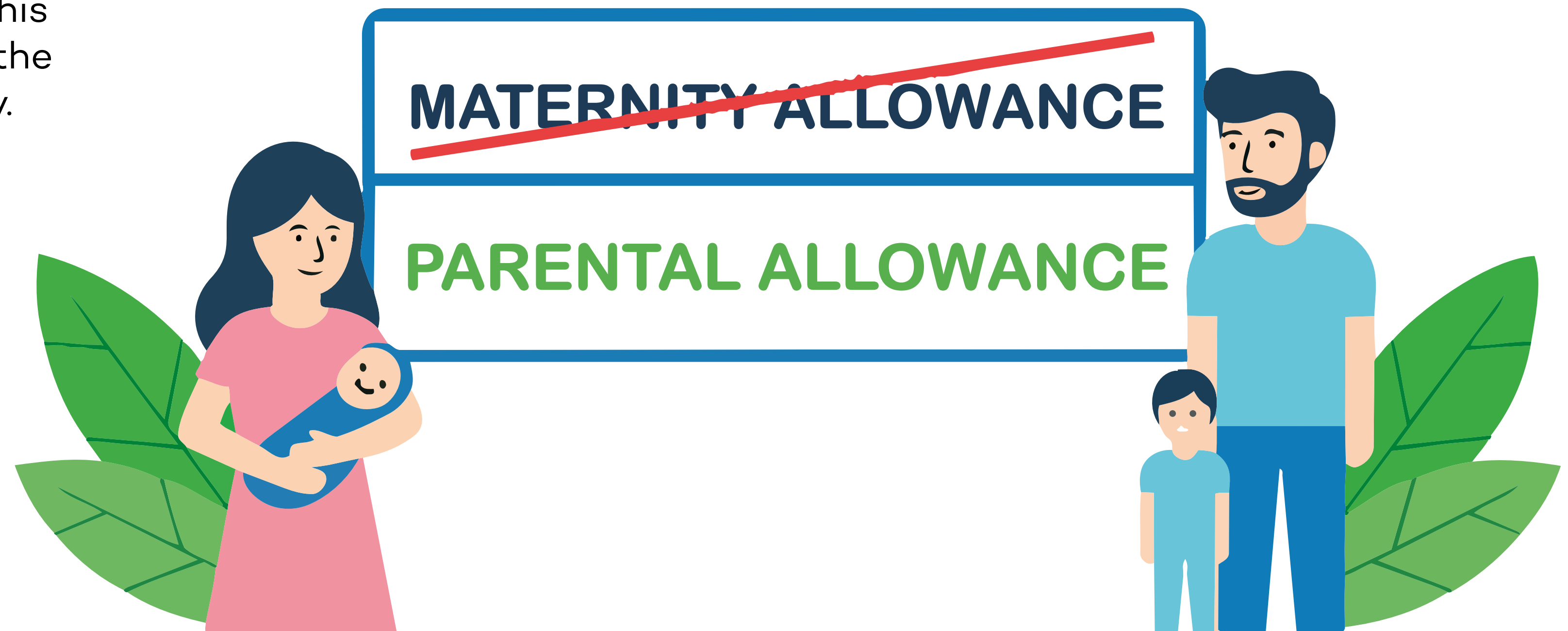
about rights and available leave-sharing pathways, which builds a sense of security and acceptance of the decision to take on childcare.



8. RENAMING THE MATERNITY ALLOWANCE TO PARENTAL ALLOWANCE

Currently, regardless of whether it is the mother (maternity leave, parental leave) or the father (paternity leave, parental leave) who takes care of the child, the benefit paid always bears the name of the maternity allowance. In the Share the Care Foundation's assessment, this terminology is wholly inadequate to the contemporary social and legal reality.

It is worth recalling here the words of the Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein: 'The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.' Using the name 'maternity allowance' in relation to fathers subconsciously cements the belief that childcare is the domain of women, and that a man's involvement is merely a form of substitution or the exercise of an entitlement belonging to the mother.



9. EDUCATION OF PROFESSIONALS WHO SUPPORT PARENTS IN CHILDCARE

Individuals who professionally support parents have an enormous influence on how fathers are perceived. From gynaecologists, midwives, nurses and paediatricians, through educational and care staff, to judges – the perception of the father as a ‘second carer’ or ‘mother’s helper’ remains widespread.

Fathers are just as important as mothers. Each has a unique, independent role to play in the child’s life. Appropriate education of those in the family’s broader environment will help break the stereotypical belief that fathers are second-class carers who stand in for mothers only in emergencies.

In the face of a demographic crisis, it is worth harnessing the potential of competent professionals within the education, care, and health systems. If these individuals are trained and well informed, they can provide real support to fathers and remove the everyday barriers they encounter in dealings with institutions. This will contribute to the lasting involvement of men in childcare.



9. ABOUT THE AUTHORS OF THE REPORT

About the Social Insurance Institution

The Social Insurance Institution (ZUS) is a state organisational unit whose responsibilities include collecting social insurance contributions, paying out benefits (e.g. old-age pensions, disability pensions, sickness or maternity allowances), maintaining individual accounts for insured persons, and referring individuals for rehabilitation treatment.

The Social Insurance Institution cooperates with approximately 28 million clients and several hundred institutions in Poland and abroad. In terms of the scope of its activities and the social significance of the tasks it performs, it is one of the most important public institutions in Poland. The Social Insurance Institution is one of the few organisations that combines two

functions that are fundamental to the country:

- a social security institution that carries out tasks related to universal social insurance,
- a financial institution that manages the Social Insurance Fund, the Demographic Reserve Fund, and the Bridging Pension Fund.

Website: www.zus.pl.



ZAKŁAD
UBEZPIECZEŃ
SPOŁECZNYCH



About the Share the Care Foundation

The Share the Care Foundation was established in 2019 as a response of sorts to the EU work-life balance directive. The organisation's mission is to create a world of equal opportunities by promoting a partnership-based family model and the sharing of parental leave. The Foundation regards the partnership-based division of caring responsibilities as the foundation for building work-life balance, which delivers tangible benefits for mothers, fathers, children, employers, and society as a whole.

The Foundation's work is underpinned by the belief that systemic support for women in the labour market is inextricably linked to greater involvement of fathers in childcare. The organisation strives to remove cultural and structural barriers so as to influence the legal and social environment in Poland.

Pillars of the Share the Care Foundation's work:

1. **Parents:** The Foundation prioritises education as the key to changing attitudes. It develops original programmes and educational materials, and runs webinars and workshops on law, psychology, and the practical implementation of partnership at home.
2. **Government and public institutions:** The Foundation maintains an active dialogue with decision-makers and conducts advocacy on modern public policies. The aim is to strengthen parental rights and provide systemic support for engaged fatherhood.
3. **Local governments:** The Foundation cooperates with local authorities to build family-friendly environments and promote the partnership model at the local level – from educational initiatives to specific community provisions.
4. **Employers:** The Foundation supports the business sector in building an organisational culture based on the principles of DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion) and work-life balance. It helps implement practices that make it easier for employees to combine their professional roles with parenting.
5. **The medical and perinatal sector:** The Foundation cooperates with maternity wards, antenatal classes, and midwives to ensure that perinatal education includes fathers from the very first moments of the child's life and to promote partnership at the threshold of parenthood.
6. **International cooperation:** The Foundation actively participates in the global exchange of experience and best practice in order to strengthen the Polish perspective in the debate on equality and responsible parenting.

In its work, the Share the Care Foundation is guided by the principle of the agency of all parties and a win-win strategy. The organisation provides reliable arguments grounded in the results of scientific research and case studies. It engages a broad range of stakeholders in the joint search for solutions and in building a narrative in which parental equality and the sharing of childcare are perceived as an opportunity for social and economic development.

