Family Friendly Legislation Review

Health and Social Security Scrutiny Panel

27th January 2026

S.R.2/2026

States of Jersey
States Assembly

États de Jersey
Assemblée des États

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Chair's Foreword

This review was undertaken at a time when the pressures facing families in Jersey are becoming increasingly visible. Declining birth rates, rising living costs, changing family structures and an ageing population all raise fundamental questions about how well the Island supports those raising the next generation. Against this backdrop, the Sub-Panel was clear that this review needed to place children, and the critical early years of life, at its heart.

The evidence gathered throughout this review consistently reinforced the importance of investing in the earliest stages of childhood. Testimony from parents, health professionals and family support organisations highlighted how the first 1,001 days of a child's life are fundamental to long-term health, wellbeing and opportunity. Where families are able to access time, stability and support during this period, the benefits for bonding, parental mental health and child development are strikingly clear. However, the review also showed that access to these benefits remains uneven, often shaped by income, employment type, family structure and housing security. Many Jersey families with very young children are really struggling to cope, through no fault of their own.

The Sub-Panel was equally committed to listening carefully to employers. Businesses across the Island engaged constructively with the review, and many spoke positively about the cultural shift created by family friendly employment legislation. Employers described improved staff loyalty, better retention and more inclusive workplaces, and many reported going beyond statutory requirements to support parents. At the same time, employers, particularly small businesses and charities, were candid about the operational and financial pressures they face. Their evidence has been essential in ensuring that the Panel's recommendations remain balanced, pragmatic and achievable.

We were also very keen that this review take an intersectional approach. The Sub-Panel heard clearly that family friendly rights are not experienced equally. Single parents, low-income households, shift workers, the self-employed, migrant families, parents of disabled children and LGBTQ+ families all face distinct and overlapping barriers. The review therefore sought to move beyond a one-size-fits-all model and instead recognise the diversity of modern family life in Jersey.

My Sub-Panel also looked beyond the Island, drawing on cross-jurisdictional evidence from comparable countries. International examples helped to illustrate both what can be achieved through sustained investment in early years and where policy design can unintentionally exclude or disadvantage certain groups. These comparisons have strengthened our understanding of which approaches may be most effective, equitable and sustainable for Jersey.

We also adopted a cross-generational lens. Grandparents and extended family members emerged as a vital but often unrecognised source of childcare and support, enabling parents to remain in work and families to cope with high childcare costs. Their contribution is increasingly central to family life on the Island and warrants greater recognition within policy making.

The evidence also captured important positives. Fathers spoke powerfully about the value of time spent with their babies, the impact on bonding, and the opportunity to share care more equally. Many employers were praised for their flexibility and understanding. Yet these positive experiences sat alongside stark reminders of inequality in household labour. One father described watching mothers “do it on their own” once parental leave ended, a sentiment echoed throughout the review and one that underlines the ongoing imbalance in unpaid care. If we are to make meaningful progress towards equity, it is critical that the outstanding recommendation from a previous scrutiny review to commission a time-use survey, is carried out in the next political term. This will give us high quality, reliable data upon which to base sensible policy decisions.

Finally, the Sub- Panel recognises that this review cannot, on its own, resolve all the challenges facing families in Jersey. Several submissions invited us to look beyond legislation and reflect more broadly on how we live, work and support one another as a community. In particular, evidence such as Lesley Katsande-Gwatidzo’s impactful submission, challenged us to consider whether families are increasingly living separate, pressured lives, and whether greater connection, flexibility and trust could help restore balance, taking inspiration from the diverse cultures around us.

I am hugely grateful to the hundreds of people who have contributed to this review, including those who completed the survey, or wrote to us, those who spoke to the panel at our pop-up events, and to our expert advisor. I also remain deeply appreciative of the officers who work so hard behind the scenes to facilitate the scrutiny process.

This report seeks not only to scrutinise existing legislation, but to contribute to a wider conversation about the kind of Island Jersey aspires to be, one that values families, supports caregiving, recognises diversity and invests in children as our shared future. The Sub-Panel’s recommendations are offered in that spirit.

Deputy Louise Doublet
Chair, Family Friendly Review Sub-Panel
Chair, Health and Social Security Scrutiny Panel

Executive Summary

The Family Friendly Legislation Review was established to evaluate how Jersey's 2018 and 2020 amendments to the Employment Law are operating in practice, and whether they continue to meet the needs of modern families and employers. Five years on from implementation, and against a backdrop of consistently decreasing birth rates[1], rising emigration, escalating living costs and growing pressure on family life, the Sub-Panel considered it timely and necessary to assess whether the legislation is achieving its intended aims, and what improvements are now required to support children during the critical early years of development.

The review examined both the function of the legislation – how it is implemented, complied with and communicated, and its impact - how it shapes real lives in Jersey. Central to the Sub-Panel's work was an exploration of whether family friendly rights are accessible, equitable and sustainable, for both parents and employers, and whether families feel supported to raise children in Jersey today.

Approach to Evidence Gathering

To capture a wide range of lived experience, operational insight and sector perspectives, the Sub-Panel used multiple methods:

A well promoted online survey, open for six weeks, generating 437 responses including hundreds of detailed free-text accounts from parents, carers and grandparents.

A programme of community pop-up events during June and July 2025 in libraries, supermarkets and parish settings, enabling candid, informal conversations with families across social and economic backgrounds.

Public hearings with key bodies involved in early years support or employer/employee relations:

- Family Nursing and Home Care (FNHC)
- Brighter Futures
- Jersey Child Care Trust (JCCT)
- Jersey Advisory and Conciliation Service (JACS)
- The Minister for Social Security.

Written submissions from unions, early years practitioners, charities, employers, small businesses, HR professionals, legal advisers, representative bodies, and individual families.

Open calls for evidence promoted through digital and community networks.

A broad working definition of "family", ensuring the experiences of single parents, same-sex parents, blended families, grandparents, kinship carers and multi-generational households were fully represented.

This mixed-method approach produced a rich, nuanced evidence base and ensured that both frontline experience and system-level insight shaped the Sub-Panel's findings.

[1] R-14-2025.pdf

Key Findings and Themes

Awareness and Understanding of Rights Are Inconsistent and Often Poor

A major finding of the review is that parents, employers and even professionals frequently do not understand the provisions of the legislation. Many families were unsure of:

- Entitlement to paid and unpaid leave
- Rights to attend antenatal or adoption appointments
- Breastfeeding rights
- Flexible working rules and processes
- Interactions between leave and the Parental Allowance
- How employment protection operates in practice.

Government has not implemented a coordinated, proactive communications strategy, and the system relies heavily on midwives, individual employers, charities and word-of-mouth. This results in uneven, sometimes inaccurate information, particularly for migrant workers, young parents, and those in precarious employment.

Affordability of Leave Severely Limits Real-World Access

Although the legislation provides up to 52 weeks' leave per parent, most families cannot afford to take it beyond the first six weeks of employer-paid leave.

For many:

- Mortgages, rent, food and fuel costs exceed household income during unpaid leave
- Returning to work early becomes a financial necessity
- Decisions about family size, timing of pregnancies or remaining in Jersey are shaped by economic pressures.

Low-income parents, single parents, shift workers, zero-hour workers and the self-employed are disproportionately affected, meaning the benefits of the legislation are not equally shared.

Childcare Costs and Availability Drive Parental Decision-Making

Childcare affordability emerged as one of the most critical issues affecting families, with fees of **£1,700–£2,000 per month** common for under-twos. Key concerns included:

- A severe shortage of childcare places, especially for babies and toddlers
- Long waiting lists requiring parents to register before birth
- Limited options for shift workers and children with additional needs
- Misalignment between childcare hours and working hours
- A structural “gap” between parental leave and the start of free nursery hours.

Many families described childcare expenditure as equal to, or greater than, their rent or mortgage, driving debt, hardship or choices to leave the workforce entirely.

Flexible Working is Unevenly Implemented Across Sectors

While most employers support the principles of flexibility, in practice:

- Responses to flexible working requests vary widely
- Some employers delay decisions or reject them without clear rationale
- Shift-based and manual sectors provide the least flexibility
- HR capacity strongly influences outcomes.

This inconsistency undermines job retention, breastfeeding continuation and parents' mental health, and contributes to the gender pay gap.

Fathers' Engagement is Improving but Cultural and Financial Barriers persist

The legislation has helped normalise fathers' involvement in early care. Many reported taking more time with their infants and attending appointments. However:

- Stigma remains in some workplaces
- Men fear career penalties for taking longer leave
- Financial pressures make equal leave uptake unrealistic
- Awareness of rights is lower amongst fathers than mothers.

Without structural and cultural reinforcement, equal parental leave remains an aspirational rather than achievable goal.

Some Families are Disadvantaged by the Current Framework

The review identified clear inequities:

- Single parents effectively receive half the total family leave available to two-parent households
- Grandparents and kinship carers, who play a significant caregiving role across Jersey, are not recognised within entitlements
- Parents of disabled children face higher costs and challenges, yet have equivalent statutory support
- Migrant families experience additional language, communication and employment vulnerabilities.

These inequities limit the legislation's inclusivity and undermine its underlying child-centred principles.

The System's Child-Development Potential is Strong but Unequally Accessible

Expert witnesses emphasised the importance of the **first 1,001 days** for attachment, brain development and early learning. Where families can afford to take extended leave, benefits include:

- Improved bonding
- Higher breastfeeding rates
- Better early years developmental outcomes.

However, because access depends heavily on income and employer practices, these developmental advantages are not shared equally across Jersey's population.

Employers Support the Intent but Seek Clarity and Practical Assistance

Employers highlighted:

- Difficulties providing cover for extended or multiple leave blocks
- Uncertainty interpreting notice periods and statutory processes
- Challenges maintaining service levels in small businesses
- The need for clearer guidance and case-study examples
- Concern about rising expectations from employees without reciprocal support for employers.

Many requested targeted financial or structural assistance if future reforms extend entitlements.

Government Lacks Data to Assess Impact or Compliance

The Minister confirmed that Government:

- Does not monitor employer compliance
- Does not collect data on uptake of leave or return-to-work patterns
- Only sees breaches that reach tribunal (a fraction of cases)
- Cannot assess whether the law is functioning as intended.

This lack of data seriously restricts evidence-based policymaking and leaves significant potential non-compliance invisible.

Overall Conclusions

The Sub-Panel concludes that Jersey's family friendly legislation has delivered meaningful cultural, developmental and social gains. It has strengthened protections for pregnant workers, improved parental bonding, and moved Jersey in the direction of international best practice.

However, the benefits are not reaching all families equally. Structural barriers, particularly affordability, childcare gaps, uneven employer practice and poor awareness, mean that the law's potential is not fully realised in practice.

The review finds that Jersey must now move from legislative ambition to operational effectiveness, ensuring that rights are:

- Accessible
- Equitable
- Clearly communicated
- Financially feasible
- Aligned with the realities of modern family life.

Forward Direction

The Sub-Panel will recommend reforms focused on:

- Improving communication and guidance
- Enhancing flexibility and accessibility of leave
- Supporting small employers
- Recognising diverse families
- Strengthening monitoring and compliance
- Addressing childcare affordability and availability
- Embedding early years policy within a coherent, cross-government strategy.

These measures will be essential to build a more family friendly Jersey that supports the early stages of child development and helps reverse the demographic and economic pressures currently facing the Island.

Findings and Recommendations

As part of this review, the Panel has identified 55 findings and put forward 22 recommendations.

The Sub-Panel has chosen to highlight 9 findings and 8 recommendations as key points. These are as follows:

Key findings and recommendations

FINDING 1: Key Finding
Despite the intended Ministerial action stemming from the 2024 Family Friendly post-implementation review, here remains a lack of a coordinated Government communications strategy to support understanding of the Family Friendly legislation.

FINDING 2: Key Finding
Studies have found that around 12 weeks of paid maternity leave is linked to decreased psychological distress among mothers, reduced intimate partner violence, lower infant mortality, better attachment between parents and the baby, and increased breastfeeding duration (Van Niel et al., 2020; Heshmati et al., 2023[2]).

FINDING 18: Key finding
Several parents noted that the cost of childcare alone determines family size, with many explicitly stating that they cannot afford to have a second child, and that the economics of family life in Jersey are unsustainable.

FINDING 21: Key finding
There is a strong, repeated theme from contributors of lack of clear information and guidance about parental rights, benefits, social security contributions, and available support. Many parents learn about key entitlements (such as Home Responsibility Protection or parental grants) through friends, charities or by chance.

FINDING 23: Key finding
Evidence from CAJ shows repeated cases of parents in construction, hospitality and agriculture facing dismissal, bullying or other detriment after requesting parental leave. Because most do not pursue tribunal claims, this non-compliance remains largely hidden, suggesting significant under-reporting in contrast to JACS' view that disputes are minimal.

FINDING 25: Key finding
Access to family friendly rights varies widely across Jersey, with the greatest problems in construction, hospitality and agriculture, where some employers discourage or penalise parents for using their entitlements. Despite universal statutory rights, compliance is inconsistent, and vulnerable workers often lack the confidence or means to challenge mistreatment, echoing patterns seen across survey and engagement feedback.

[2] The effect of parental leave on parents' mental health: a systematic review - PubMed

FINDING 30: Key finding
There is a structural 'early years gap' between the end of parental leave and the start of nursery education funding, leaving families with little support during a crucial developmental period.

FINDING 34: Key finding
20% of young families supported by FNHC are struggling with essential expenses such as food and accommodation.

FINDING 42: Key finding
Extended family, especially grandparents, often provide a lifeline, stepping in to offer childcare in the absence of affordable options, sometimes retiring early to provide support. Witnesses argued that the system should better reflect the reality of caregiving in these families and allow leave or support to be shared with the adults who actually provide care.

RECOMMENDATION 1: Key Recommendation
The Minister for Social Security must introduce a clear, centralised communications strategy to improve public understanding of family friendly legislation and address the gaps in knowledge and avoid reliance on ad hoc leaflets. This should include accessible, up-to-date tailored guidance for parents and employers, consistent messaging across all agencies and proactive dissemination through healthcare settings, workplaces, schools, Parishes, digital platforms and community organisations.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Key Recommendation
The Minister for Social Security should amend legislation and bring forward funding proposals in the next budget, to implement the outstanding 2017 Employment Forum recommendation to introduce a total of 12 weeks paid maternity leave, comprising six weeks' employer-funded and six weeks' State-funded leave, with a view to transitioning this entitlement into a universal parental leave framework.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Key Recommendation
JACS and Jersey Business should develop clearer, targeted guidance and training for employees and employers, tailored to recurring areas of misunderstanding and sector-specific issues, to ensure that the right information reaches the right audiences.

RECOMMENDATION 8: Key Recommendation
The Minister for Social Security should instruct a review of the language and terminology used on the legislation and associated guidance to ensure gender-neutrality and inclusive terminology and ensure the language reflects the breadth of familial relationships in Jersey.

RECOMMENDATION 13: Key recommendation
JACS should provide translated guidance and make efforts to ensure that minority ethnic families understand their rights and support pathways.

RECOMMENDATION 14: Key recommendation
The Minister for Social Security should amend the parental leave framework to ensure that single-parent families are not structurally disadvantaged and present an action plan by Q2 2027. This should include exploring additional paid leave, enhanced financial support, or supplementary benefits for sole carers so that a child in a single-parent household does not receive half the parental time and support available to children in two-parent families, so that parity of opportunity for single parents reflects modern family structures and promote fairness within the legislation.

RECOMMENDATION 15: Key recommendation
The Minister for Social Security should explore a progressive approach to the law by extending (using the Swedish model as a best practice example), existing leave entitlements to Grandparents, extended family members and trusted carers.

RECOMMENDATION 18: Key recommendation
The Minister for Social Security should extend the protections for breastfeeding and expressing under the current legislation to two years in line with WHO[3] recommendations to further support and encourage breastfeeding and align with established best practice policy.

Findings

FINDING 1: Key Finding
Despite the intended Ministerial action stemming from the 2024 Family Friendly post-implementation review, here remains a lack of a coordinated Government communications strategy to support understanding of the Family Friendly legislation.

FINDING 2: Key Finding
Studies have found that around 12 weeks of paid maternity leave is linked to decreased psychological distress among mothers, reduced intimate partner violence, lower infant mortality, better attachment between parents and the baby, and increased breastfeeding duration (Van Niel et al., 2020[4]; Heshmati et al., 2023[5]).

FINDING 3
Employers broadly support the intent and cultural value of Jersey's family friendly legislation, recognising its positive impact on workplace inclusivity and staff wellbeing. However, many report that the complexity of leave blocks, flexible working processes and administrative offsets has created significant HR strain, with disproportionate financial and operational pressures falling on SMEs and charities who lack the capacity to absorb these demands. While the legislation is viewed as socially beneficial, employer evidence highlights widespread administrative fatigue and indicates that the current framework's complexity, cost implications and implementation challenges now warrant careful review.

FINDING 4
Cultural acceptance is growing and despite challenges, a gradual shift toward normalising flexible working and parental leave is evident.

FINDING 5
Employer representatives suggest any future review of the legislation should consider a tiered or supported model, acknowledging the impact of new businesses and SMEs, combining fairness for families with sustainability for employers.

[3] Breastfeeding
[4] The Impact of Paid Maternity Leave on the Mental and Physical Health of Mothers and Children: A Review of the Literature and Policy Implications - PubMed
[5] The effect of parental leave on parents' mental health: a systematic review - PubMed

FINDING 6
IoD members view Jersey's family friendly legislation as a net positive for workplace culture, staff retention and gender equality, reporting that the reforms have supported more flexible and inclusive practices, strengthened employer branding, and enhanced Jersey's reputation as a fair and progressive place to work, aligning the Island more closely with international standards of social responsibility.

FINDING 7
Many Jersey employers already voluntarily exceed statutory requirements, offering enhanced parental leave, hybrid working, and wellbeing support, described as strategic investments, improving satisfaction, productivity, and retention rather than as regulatory burdens.

FINDING 8
Smaller organisations and those with specialist teams face particular difficulties in finding suitable cover, leading to pressure on remaining staff.

FINDING 9
The IoD identified several gaps in the current family friendly legislative framework, noting that it does not fully reflect modern family formation or provide sufficient practical guidance for employers. In particular, the legislation does not adequately support foster-to-adopt placements, does not recognise the emotional and practical impacts of fertility treatment, and offers limited guidance to employers on managing parental leave cycles in a way that balances employee rights with operational continuity.

FINDING 10
HR Now contends that the law's complexity, flexibility, and lack of procedural safeguards, has created confusion and difficulties in managing leave, staffing, and workplace morale, occasionally leading to misuse or misinterpretation of entitlements.

FINDING 11
HR Now suggests limiting leave to two blocks or reviewing whether three blocks provide any tangible benefit to parents.

FINDING 12
Virtual HR cautioned that any future extension of family friendly rights should be accompanied by targeted support, or differentiation for smaller employers to maintain business sustainability.

FINDING 13
Virtual HR, alongside Liberate, recommend a review of the language used in legislation and guidance, urging a shift toward fully gender-neutral and inclusive terminology to reflect modern family structures and promote equality.

FINDING 14
Family friendly legislation has had a positive impact on new parents employed within the education sector. Extended parental leave has strengthened bonding opportunities between parents and their babies, improved infant wellbeing, and contributed to a more caring and supportive employment environment.

FINDING 15
Schools, particularly secondary schools, face serious difficulties attracting suitably qualified replacement staff, especially subject specialists. Existing teachers and school leaders often absorb substantial additional workload when a colleague goes on leave. This places

considerable pressure on remaining staff, who may have to take on extra teaching, pastoral duties or leadership responsibilities.

FINDING 16
Small businesses, specialist providers and childcare settings, reported struggles in securing temporary staff, often resulting in reduced services or increased pressure on existing teams. The current framework can be disruptive to small operations; the administrative and staffing pressures associated with parental leave make it increasingly difficult for small firms to take on new employees or apprentices.

FINDING 17
Many parents described childcare fees as equivalent to, or greater than, a mortgage payment, leaving households with no disposable income or forcing one parent, most often the mother, to exit the workforce entirely.

FINDING 18: Key finding
Several parents noted that the cost of childcare alone determines family size, with many explicitly stating that they cannot afford to have a second child, and that the economics of family life in Jersey are unsustainable.

FINDING 19
Many parents describe the return to work as one of the most difficult periods of their lives, feeling forced back earlier than they wanted due to financial necessity.

FINDING 20
For shift workers, nurses, teachers and single parents, rigid workplace expectations often made family life unmanageable.

FINDING 21: Key finding
There is strong and repeated theme of lack of clear information and guidance about parental rights, benefits, social security contributions, and available support. Many parents only learned about key entitlements (such as Home Responsibility Protection or parental grants) through friends, charities or by chance.

FINDING 22
Most CAJ enquiries relating to the family friendly legislation come from working parents or parents-to-be, not employers.

FINDING 23: Key finding
Evidence from CAJ shows repeated cases of parents in construction, hospitality and agriculture facing dismissal, bullying or other detriment after requesting parental leave. Because most do not pursue tribunal claims, this non-compliance remains largely hidden, suggesting significant under-reporting in contrast to JACS' view that disputes are minimal.

FINDING 24
Wilful misinformation reflects gaps in employer awareness, weak compliance with the legislation, and lack of accountability in certain sectors.

FINDING 25: Key finding
Access to family friendly rights varies widely across Jersey, with the greatest problems in construction, hospitality and agriculture, where some employers discourage or penalise parents for using their entitlements. Despite universal statutory rights, compliance is inconsistent, and vulnerable workers often lack the confidence or means to challenge mistreatment, echoing patterns seen across survey and engagement feedback.

FINDING 26
When employers fail to uphold family friendly rights, the consequences extend beyond work and can significantly affect family stability and wellbeing.

FINDING 27
Nurseries are experiencing greater pressure on staffing and resources, often requiring one-to-one support even where children do not have formally identified additional needs, potentially impacting ability to operate a full service.

FINDING 28
Evidence from support services indicates that many low-income families cannot afford to take parental leave beyond the initial six weeks of full pay. As a result, the extended parental leave entitlement exists largely ***"on paper rather than in practice***" for a significant proportion of parents. Rather than reducing inequality, the current family friendly framework can inadvertently expose and reinforce existing cost-of-living pressures, with those on lower incomes least able to benefit from the rights available to them.

FINDING 29
Parents are "**playing tag team**", working alternating shifts to avoid unaffordable childcare costs, with this pressure contributing to exhaustion and emotional strain within households.

FINDING 30: Key finding
There is a structural 'early years gap' between the end of parental leave and the start of nursery education funding, leaving families with little support during a crucial developmental period.

FINDING 31
The Jersey Child Care Trust caution against any policy shift towards shared-leave models that might inadvertently reduce fathers' direct entitlement, stressing the importance of maintaining a system that encourages equitable caregiving roles.

FINDING 32
There are encouraging signs of positive cultural change, with more fathers attending antenatal education, participating actively in early caregiving and sharing responsibilities that historically fell solely to mothers.

FINDING 33
According to FNHC, there has been a significant increase in breastfeeding rates - a 4% rise in just six months that is "unprecedented" and strongly linked to growing parental confidence and supportive workplace attitudes.

FINDING 34: Key finding
20% of young families supported by FNHC are struggling with essential expenses such as food and accommodation.

FINDING 35
52 weeks of leave for each parent is not realistically accessible for families on low incomes, who simply cannot afford prolonged periods of reduced or no pay.

FINDING 36
New parents often return to work exhausted and overwhelmed, with limited adjustment or phased-return options.

FINDING 37
There is a need for better communication and accessibility, especially for minority ethnic families, more multilingual, culturally sensitive information is needed to ensure all parents understand their rights and support pathways.

FINDING 38
There is widespread lack of awareness among parents about their rights and allowances, with many families relying entirely on charity workers to understand even basic entitlements.

FINDING 39
Parents consider leaving the Island, or even ending a pregnancy, because they cannot afford another child. They cite the combined impacts of childcare costs, the general cost of living, and unaffordable housing.

FINDING 40
Many fathers lack awareness of their entitlements and feel stigma about taking leave, but there are encouraging cultural shifts, with more fathers taking short periods of leave or seeking more time at home to support their partners and bond with their children.

FINDING 41
Single parents are one of the most disadvantaged groups as entitlement to leave is granted per parent, single parents have half the available leave of two-parent households and bear the full financial burden alone.

FINDING 42: Key finding
Extended family, especially grandparents, often provide a lifeline, stepping in to offer childcare in the absence of affordable options, sometimes retiring early to provide support. Witnesses argued that the system should better reflect the reality of caregiving in these families and allow leave or support to be shared with the adults who actually provide care.

FINDING 43
Childcare expenses often exceed or are equal to one parent's salary - many families feel forced to reduce working hours, delay returning to work, or leave the workforce entirely.

FINDING 44
Some grandparents would like school catchment rules to allow grandparents' Parish to be considered, particularly where the grandparent provides daily childcare or school pick-ups, easing logistical pressures, reduce travel for working parents, and support stability for children.

FINDING 45
Parents of twins and triplets highlighted additional financial pressures associated with multiple births and suggested that enhanced parental leave or increased financial support during the early months would make a meaningful difference.

FINDING 46
The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends breastfeeding until age two, yet current protections in Jersey legislation fall short of supporting this.

FINDING 47
Parents report an extended period at home has been invaluable in supporting their emotional, physical, and financial wellbeing, as well as in building a strong foundation for their child's early development, bonding with their baby, managing pre and post-natal anxiety, and recovering from birth complications such as emergency caesarean sections, with many stating that an earlier return to work would have been extremely difficult both physically and mentally.

FINDING 48
Evidence shows that Jersey's immigration framework does not recognise postnatal caregiving by close female relatives as a legitimate or necessary form of family support. As a result, many migrant women give birth and recover without the culturally embedded maternal care that is known to improve mental health, breastfeeding outcomes and infant wellbeing, creating avoidable isolation and public health risk.

FINDING 49
Current visa eligibility criteria reflect Western assumptions about individual financial independence and nuclear families, disadvantaging migrant households from collectivist cultures where caregiving and resources are shared across generations. There is no evidence that maternal carers overstay visas, indicating that existing restrictions are based on misperception rather than risk and unintentionally undermine Jersey's family-friendly objectives.

FINDING 50
Evidence from Brighter Futures indicates that the current eligibility rules for the Parental Grant exclude some of the families most in need, particularly recent migrants, young parents who have not yet entered employment, and mothers unable to work due to health or personal circumstances. These gaps create avoidable hardship at the point of birth and contradict the policy aim of ensuring all children receive a strong start in life.

FINDING 51
Fathers often learn more from peers regarding their parental entitlements than from official sources and community-led father engagement is currently filling a gap in formal communication.

FINDING 52
Stigma varies by industry and workplace type, male-dominated sectors appear to have stronger barriers and fewer role models of fathers taking leave, indicating that legal entitlements alone are insufficient unless workplace culture shifts to normalise fathers taking leave. Hospitality and retail are highlighted repeatedly as challenging sectors with poor communication and rigid conditions.

FINDING 53
Fathers in self-employment face the most significant constraints, often being unable to take leave at all because of immediate financial pressure.

FINDING 54
The system around caregiving is not always enabling or encouraging fathers to engage with it, despite the intention of Jersey's law.

FINDING 55
JACS is highly valued for its independent advice, but evidence shows that some of its public guidance on family friendly rights is unclear, or not effectively targeted, leading to inconsistencies in the information available to parents and employers.

Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 1: Key Recommendation
The Minister for Social Security must introduce a clear, centralised communications strategy to improve public understanding of family friendly legislation and address the gaps in knowledge and avoid reliance on ad hoc leaflets. This should include accessible, up-to-date tailored guidance for parents and employers, consistent messaging across all agencies and proactive dissemination through healthcare settings, workplaces, schools, Parishes, digital platforms and community organisations.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Key Recommendation
The Minister for Social Security should amend legislation and bring forward funding proposals in the next budget, to implement the outstanding 2017 Employment Forum recommendation to introduce a total of 12 weeks paid maternity leave, comprising six weeks' employer-funded and six weeks' State-funded leave, with a view to transitioning this entitlement into a universal parental leave framework.

RECOMMENDATION 3
The Minister for Social Security should explore increased support for small businesses, including bespoke guidance, and seek feedback from this group on the impact of the legislation.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Key Recommendation
JACS and Jersey Business should develop clearer, targeted guidance and training to support employers and employees, tailored to recurring areas of misunderstanding and sector-specific issues, to ensure that the right information reaches the right audiences.

RECOMMENDATION 5
The Minister for Social Security should review and address these identified gaps by exploring amendments and supporting guidance that: extend paid leave to cover foster-to-adopt placements from the start of fostering; introduce compassionate leave provisions for fertility treatment; and issue clear best-practice guidance to help employers plan and manage parental leave in a fair, predictable and operationally sustainable manner.

RECOMMENDATION 6
All official guidance should be reviewed in the Q1 and Q2 2026 to ensure the law is being communicated as effectively as possible.

RECOMMENDATION 7
The Minister for Social Security should instruct JACS to undertake a consultation to understand the value of the block leave system and the benefits and/or disadvantages of current leave structure and assess how remaining leave can be transferred when employees move employers.

RECOMMENDATION 8: Key Recommendation
The Minister for Social Security should revise the language and terminology used in the current legislation and associated guidance to ensure gender-neutrality and inclusive terminology and ensure the language reflects the breadth of familial relationships in Jersey.

RECOMMENDATION 9
The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning should undertake consultation to assess the effectiveness of the proposed 15-hour extension to nursery provision to consider the benefit

of extending this in line with standard part time contracts to support transition back into the workplace.

RECOMMENDATION 10

The Minister for Social Security should work with support agencies to develop a targeted programme to improve compliance with family friendly legislation in sectors where under-reporting appears most significant, namely construction, hospitality and agriculture. This should include proactive engagement with employers, clearer guidance, and confidential channels for workers to raise concerns without fear of reprisal. Strengthening monitoring and support in these sectors would help address hidden non-compliance and ensure that parents can safely exercise their rights.

RECOMMENDATION 11

The Minister for Social Security should ensure that any future reforms to parental or shared leave arrangements protect and strengthen fathers' individual, non-transferable entitlements. In line with the Jersey Child Care Trust's evidence, policy development should avoid models that dilute fathers' direct access to leave and instead reinforce equitable caregiving and shared responsibility in the early years.

RECOMMENDATION 12

The Minister for Social Security should introduce a clearer system for monitoring employer compliance with family friendly legislation and establish defined expectations and accountability measures for the handling of flexible working requests. This should include sector-specific guidance, improved reporting mechanisms, and proportionate oversight to ensure that employers apply the law consistently and transparently.

RECOMMENDATION 13: Key recommendation

JACS should provide translated guidance and make efforts to ensure that minority ethnic families understand their rights and support pathways.

RECOMMENDATION 14: Key recommendation

The Minister for Social Security should amend the parental leave framework to ensure that single-parent families are not structurally disadvantaged and present an action plan by Q2 2027. This should include exploring additional paid leave, enhanced financial support, or supplementary benefits for sole carers so that a child in a single-parent household does not receive half the parental time and support available to children in two-parent families, so that parity of opportunity for single parents reflects modern family structures and promote fairness within the legislation.

RECOMMENDATION 15: Key recommendation

The Minister for Social Security should explore a progressive approach to the law by extending (using the Swedish model as a best practice example), existing leave entitlements to Grandparents, extended family members and trusted carers.

RECOMMENDATION 16

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning should explore extending primary school catchment criteria to allow consideration of a grandparent's residential address, where this would support family stability and childcare arrangements.

RECOMMENDATION 17
The Minister for Social Security should explore extending financial and practical support for parents of multiple births and ensure clearer, more effective signposting to relevant support services.

RECOMMENDATION 18: Key recommendation
The Minister for Social Security should extend the protections for breastfeeding and expressing under the current legislation to two years in line with WHO[6] recommendations to further support and encourage breastfeeding and align with established best practice policy.

RECOMMENDATION 19
The Minister for Home Affairs, in collaboration with the Minister for Social Security and the Minister for Health and Social Services, should explore the introduction of a time-limited perinatal family carer visa to recognise postnatal caregiving as a legitimate reason for family visitation.

RECOMMENDATION 20
The Minister for Social Security should review the eligibility criteria for the Parental Grant to ensure that vulnerable new parents, regardless of contribution history, can access essential financial support at the birth of a child. This review should include options for a needs-based safety-net payment and clear, proactive communication so families do not fall through gaps in the system.

RECOMMENDATION 21
The Minister for Social Security should develop, as part of the centralised communications campaign messaging focused on fathers, ensuring that their parental entitlements are clearly explained and widely understood, and that employers are aware of, and consistently uphold, their obligations under family friendly legislation.

RECOMMENDATION 22
The Minister for Social Security should consider and reassess the remit of JACS, their capacity, and communications function, with a view to refocusing the organisation on its core strengths, ensuring clear accountability structures are put in place.

Introduction

Purpose and scope of the review

The Family Friendly Legislation Review was instigated by a Sub-Panel of the Health and Social Security Scrutiny Panel in order to examine how Jersey's family friendly employment legislation has been implemented, to assess its impact on families and employers, and its adequacy. The Sub-Panel undertaking this review sought to develop a comprehensive understanding of how the legislation has been received, communicated, and applied in practice, and to evaluate whether it is achieving its intended outcomes for Islanders.

The Sub-Panel considered that this review was both timely and necessary. Jersey's family friendly amendments to the Employment Law have now been in place since 2020, providing

[6] Breastfeeding

five years for the legislation to embed and for its practical effects to become evident across workplaces, families, and the wider community. This period has offered a meaningful window in which to observe how the rights are being understood, accessed, and implemented in real-life circumstances.

At the same time, the Island is facing a set of demographic and economic pressures that directly shape family life. Jersey is experiencing a record low birth rate[7], alongside increasing levels of emigration, particularly among young families. Coupled with a high cost of living, escalating housing costs, and rising childcare expenses, these factors have significant implications for parents' decisions about having children, returning to work, or remaining in the Island.

Against this backdrop, the Sub-Panel felt it was essential to assess whether current policies are supporting families effectively and whether improvements could be made to create a more family-friendly Jersey. The early years of a child's life, the critical first 1,001 days in particular, are known to have a profound and lasting impact on health, wellbeing, and development. Ensuring that parents and carers have the financial, practical, and workplace support needed during this period is therefore essential, not only for individual families but for the long-term social and economic wellbeing of the Island.

This review was undertaken with the intention of identifying where the legislation is functioning well, where gaps remain, and what further steps could help strengthen Jersey's appeal as a place to raise children, support early development, and encourage families to stay, thrive, and contribute to the community.

The overarching aim has been to identify practicable recommendations for improving the effectiveness of the existing legal framework, ensuring that it continues to promote a healthy balance between family life and work, and that it supports the wellbeing of children and parents while remaining sustainable for employers. The review seeks to determine whether these legislative changes have achieved their intended outcomes: supporting parents and carers in balancing work and family responsibilities, enabling children to have the best possible start in life, and promoting gender equality and family wellbeing within Jersey's workplaces.

In addition, the Sub-Panel has examined how effectively the Government has implemented and monitored the legislation, including its response to the findings of the Minister for Social Security's 2024 post-implementation survey. The review also considers how Jersey's provisions compare to those in other jurisdictions and whether further measures may be required to strengthen family friendly policy across the Island.

In undertaking this review, the Sub-Panel recognised that family life in Jersey is shaped by a wide range of pressures that extend far beyond the scope of employment law alone. Accordingly, the Panel sought, where practicable, to take a holistic view of the wider policy environment affecting parents, carers and children. Alongside the legislative framework for parental leave and workplace rights, the Sub-Panel considered the intersecting challenges of childcare affordability and availability, housing costs and stability, and the wider cost-of-living pressures that influence parents' decisions around work, family planning and wellbeing. These broader factors form an essential backdrop to understanding how family friendly legislation operates in practice and where further support may be needed to enable families to thrive in Jersey.

[7] R-14-2025.pdf

What is meant by ‘family’ and ‘family friendly’ for the purposes of this review

In undertaking this review, the Sub-Panel adopted a progressive and inclusive understanding of what constitutes a “family” in Jersey today. The Sub-Panel recognised that family structures are diverse and increasingly varied, and that effective family friendly policy must reflect this reality rather than rely solely on traditionally defined models.

For the purposes of the review, the Sub-Panel sought to consider evidence from and relating to all those involved in raising children in the Island, including married and unmarried parents, single parents, blended families, same-sex parents, kinship carers, foster and adoptive parents, surrogate parents, and extended family members, such as grandparents, who are providing significant or full-time childcare. The guiding principle was not the traditional form of the family unit, but the fact that children are being raised, supported and cared for in Jersey, and that those caring for them are directly affected by family friendly legislation and associated policies. This inclusive approach aimed to ensured that the review captured the full range of lived experiences and reflected the needs of modern families in all their forms.

By using a definition centred on who is actively raising and supporting a child, rather than on traditional status alone, the Sub-Panel was able to capture a wider range of lived experiences and identify how policy interacts with the everyday circumstances of modern families. This approach aimed to strengthen the evidence base and ensured the review’s findings were meaningful, representative, and grounded in the realities of family life in the Island.

What Is Family Friendly Policy and Legislation?

Family friendly policy and legislation refer to the range of laws, workplace rights, public services and support measures designed to help people balance work, caring responsibilities and family life, particularly during pregnancy, early parenthood and the early years of a child’s development. These policies aim to ensure that families, however they are structured, can raise children in safe, stable and supportive environments without facing undue financial or employment pressures.

Family friendly legislation commonly includes:

- Parental leave entitlements (maternity, paternity/partner leave, parental leave and adoptive leave)
- Rights to request flexible working or adjustments to working patterns
- Breastfeeding and expressing rights, and associated workplace facilities
- Protections from discrimination, particularly for pregnant women and new parents
- Financial allowances or benefits linked to pregnancy, birth and early childhood
- Health and safety protections for pregnant or breastfeeding employees.

In a broader policy context, family friendly measures may also include:

- Affordable childcare and access to early years services
- Support for parents’ mental health and wellbeing
- Flexible access to nursery education or early learning entitlements
- Housing, tax or social security policies that ease pressure on families
- Support for grandparents or extended family members who provide childcare.

The overarching goal of family friendly policy is to remove barriers that make it difficult for parents and carers to work, support early childhood wellbeing, and create a society where families can thrive. Well-designed policies help employers retain staff, reduce workforce inequalities, and contribute to positive outcomes for children, particularly in the critical early years.

The lens of the First 1,001 Days: Why This Matters for Family Friendly Policy

The 1,001 days framework, now widely used in early years policy, draws on decades of neuroscience and child development research, and was formally introduced as a policy concept by the UK's cross-party "1001 Critical Days" initiative in 2013[8].

The first 1,001 days, from conception through to a child's second birthday, are widely recognised in early years research, neuroscience, public health and child psychology as a critical window of development. During this period, a child's brain develops at its fastest rate: more than one million neural connections form every second, and the foundations for emotional security, language development, physical health, social skills and resilience are established. What happens during these first months and years has long-lasting effects on a child's future outcomes, including educational attainment, mental health, physical wellbeing and social development.

The quality of a child's early environment, particularly their relationships with caregivers, the stability of their home life, and their access to responsive, nurturing care, plays a decisive role during this period. Positive early experiences support healthy development and reduce the likelihood of later difficulties, while adversity experienced during this time (such as high parental stress, unstable childcare arrangements or limited caregiver availability) can have effects that persist into adulthood. Because of this, policymakers across multiple jurisdictions, including Jersey, increasingly use the 1,001 days framework to design early-years strategies, family support systems, and employment legislation affecting parents of young children.

Why the Sub-Panel Adopted This Lens

The Sub-Panel chose to structure its evidence-gathering around the concept of the first 1,001 days to ensure that the review focused not only on employment rights and legislative compliance, but on the real-life needs of infants and young families. This developmental lens enabled the Sub-Panel to:

- Centre the wellbeing of children, recognising that the purpose of family friendly legislation is not solely to support employees, but to create stable, supportive environments during the most formative stage of childhood.
- Understand the pressures on parents and carers within the context of this crucial period, including recovery from childbirth, early bonding, infant feeding, maternal mental health, and the challenges of returning to work.
- Ensure that the voices of families with very young children were prioritised, as they are the group most directly affected by the provisions of the law.
- Recognise the cumulative impact of cost of living, childcare affordability, housing pressures and workplace flexibility on child development and family stability.

[8] The_best_start_for_life_a_vision_for_the_1_001_critical_days.pdf

- Examine the adequacy of support for different care models, including parental care at home, informal care by grandparents, and early-years childcare providers.

Using the 1,001 days framework allowed the Sub-Panel to take a holistic, child-centred approach that captured the interconnected nature of employment rights, social security eligibility, childcare costs, parental wellbeing and early child development.

A Foundation for Evidence-Based Recommendations

By grounding the review in the science of early childhood development, the Sub-Panel hoped to ensure that its findings and recommendations are informed not only by legal analysis or employer capability, but by what matters most for children's healthy development. This approach reflects international best practice and aligns Jersey's review with the growing understanding that supporting families during the first 1,001 days is one of the most effective investments a society can make, delivering long-term social, economic and health benefits for the whole community.

Methodology, evidence gathering and engagement

The Sub-Panel's aim was to ensure a comprehensive and inclusive approach to gathering evidence, designed to capture the views and experiences of a wide range of stakeholders affected by the family friendly legislation. The methods used combined quantitative and qualitative techniques to ensure that both statistical data and lived experiences were represented in the review's findings.

Public Engagement

A key element of the review involved direct engagement with the public to understand the real-world impact of the legislative changes on families and carers. The Sub-Panel conducted a survey specifically aimed at parents and carers, which was open for a period of six weeks and received 437 responses. The survey sought to capture first-hand experiences of how the legislation has influenced parental leave, workplace flexibility, childcare arrangements, and the balance between work and family life.

To complement the survey and to facilitate more informal dialogue, the Sub-Panel organised a series of public consultation "pop-up" events at community locations across the Island, including libraries and supermarkets. These sessions provided opportunities for members of the public to speak directly with Panel members, share personal experiences, and raise concerns or suggestions in a relaxed, accessible setting.

Stakeholder Engagement

In addition to public consultation, the Sub-Panel undertook extensive engagement with a broad range of stakeholders representing both employees and employers. Direct requests for written submissions were issued to:

- Parenting and family support organisations
- Childcare providers and early years services
- Third sector organisations and community groups
- Leadership and professional development bodies
- Trade unions and employee representatives
- Employer and business representative groups
- Human resources firms and consultancies
- Employment law specialists
- Minister for Sustainable Economic Development
- Minister for Social Security

These written submissions provided valuable insights into the operational, cultural, and economic dimensions of the legislation’s implementation.

Public Hearings

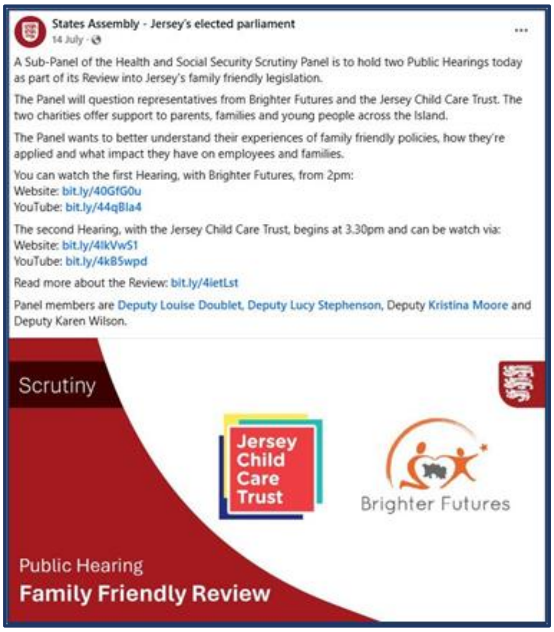
The Sub-Panel also held a series of public hearings to further examine key issues identified during the consultation process. These included sessions with the Minister for Social Security and officials from the Government of Jersey to discuss the monitoring, communication, and enforcement of the family friendly legislation, as well as with key stakeholders such as employer representatives, advocacy organisations, and service providers.

The hearings enabled the Sub-Panel to test evidence received through written submissions and the public survey, and to clarify areas where policy intent and practical experience diverged.

Open Calls and Communications

To ensure maximum participation, the Sub-Panel made multiple open calls for evidence through social media and official States Assembly communication channels. These invitations encouraged members of the public, businesses, and community groups to contribute their perspectives, either through written feedback or by taking part in the survey and public events.

Through this wide-ranging and multi-faceted evidence-gathering process, the Sub-Panel sought to ensure that its findings and recommendations are grounded in a diverse body of evidence that reflects the lived experience of families, the realities faced by employers, and the perspectives of those organisations and professionals responsible for supporting them.


States Assembly - Jersey's elected parliament
14 July
A Sub-Panel of the Health and Social Security Scrutiny Panel is to hold two Public Hearings today as part of its Review into Jersey's family friendly legislation.
The Panel will question representatives from Brighter Futures and the Jersey Child Care Trust. The two charities offer support to parents, families and young people across the Island.
The Panel wants to better understand their experiences of family friendly policies, how they're applied and what impact they have on employees and families.
You can watch the first Hearing, with Brighter Futures, from 2pm:
Website: bit.ly/40GfG0u
YouTube: bit.ly/44qBla4
The second Hearing, with the Jersey Child Care Trust, begins at 3.30pm and can be watch via:
Website: bit.ly/4lkVwS1
YouTube: bit.ly/4kB5wpd
Read more about the Review: bit.ly/4ietLst
Panel members are Deputy Louise Doublet, Deputy Lucy Stephenson, Deputy Kristina Moore and Deputy Karen Wilson.
Scrutiny
Jersey Child Care Trust
Brighter Futures
Public Hearing
Family Friendly Review


States Assembly - Jersey's elected parliament
23 July
A Scrutiny sub-panel has been told that around a fifth (20%) of families are struggling financially due to the high costs of food, housing and childcare.
The evidence was presented to the Panel, which is reviewing the family friendly elements of Jersey's Employment Law, by local charities during a series of recent Public Hearings.
Analysis is also being carried out on more than 430 responses to a survey asking Islanders for their views to establish common themes that will be used as evidence in the Panel's final report, which is due to be presented to the States Assembly in September.
Read more: bit.ly/4INJYam
The sub-panel reports to the Health and Social Security Scrutiny and consists of the following Members: Deputy Louise Doublet, Deputy Lucy Stephenson, Deputy Kristina Moore and Deputy Karen Wilson.


States Assembly - Jersey's elected parliament
26 August
Calling all local businesses - have your say on how the 'family friendly' elements of Jersey's Employment Law are impacting you.
Since 2020, parents have been able to claim up to 52 weeks of parental leave - of which 6 weeks is paid in full by their employers.
A Health and Social Security Scrutiny sub-panel wants to hear how this entitlement has effected local businesses.
Share your views and experiences by emailing scrutiny@gov.je
Read more: bit.ly/4ietLst
Scrutiny
Family Friendly Review
Share your views


How would you improve family life in Jersey?
We're reviewing laws that impact young families, and we want to hear from you!
States Assembly


How would you improve family life in Jersey?
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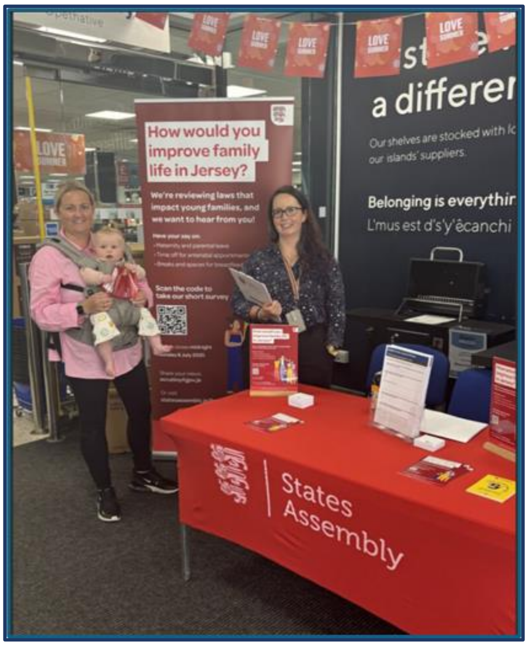
How would you improve family life in Jersey?
We're reviewing laws that impact young families, and we want to hear from you!
Have your say on:
Scan the code to take our short survey
States Assembly

Legislative Background

2017 Employment Forum Review

In 2017, the then Minister for Social Security, directed the Employment Forum, a non-political consultative body, to review the existing family friendly employment rights, with a view to making recommendations to extend protective elements within the law.

The 2017 Employment Forum's *Review of Family Friendly Employment Rights* provided the blueprint for the major reforms introduced in 2018 and 2020. The report set out an ambitious, staged programme of expansion based on extensive consultation with parents, employers, HR professionals, unions, and specialist organisations. It marked a significant shift in Jersey's policy direction, moving the Island toward a more equitable, inclusive, and early-years-focused family support system.

The report presented a detailed review of Jersey's family-friendly employment rights, evaluating the impact of legislation introduced in 2015, and recommending staged expansion of rights for parents, adoptive parents, and intended parents in surrogacy situations. It drew on extensive consultation with employers, employees, unions, professional bodies, charities, and advisory organisations.

The themes and recommendations spanned maternity leave, parental leave, adoption/surrogacy rights, antenatal/adoption appointment rights, breastfeeding rights, flexible working, and health and safety provisions.

Purpose and Context of the Review

The 2015 legislation had introduced:

- Paid time off for antenatal appointments (for birth mothers)
- 2 weeks' paid compulsory maternity leave
- Additional unpaid maternity leave (with a qualifying period)
- 2 weeks' unpaid parental leave
- Adoption leave
- Flexible working for those with caring responsibilities
- Protection against detriment or dismissal.

The Employment Forum's review evaluated the real-world impacts on employers and families and assessed whether rights should be expanded, including possible introduction of shared leave and breastfeeding rights.

Consultation Approach

The Forum undertook a wide consultation (331 responses) including:

- Employers and employer bodies
- Trade unions
- Employees and parents
- Sector groups (agriculture, hospitality, childcare)
- Policy advisors and legal professionals
- Organisations supporting parents and children.

It also held stakeholder meetings with 25 participants across sectors.

Major themes from the consultation

Strong Support for Expanding Leave Rights

Across most respondent groups, there was clear support for significantly enhancing maternity, parental, and adoption leave, both in length and pay, reflecting:

- Challenges of returning to work early
- Desire for parity between mothers and fathers
- Need to align with UK and international standards
- Recognition of the importance of bonding and infant development (including references to the *1001 critical days*).

Financial Worries and Employer Impact

Employers, especially small businesses, expressed concerns about:

- Long periods of leave creating staffing pressure
- Administrative complexity of temporary cover
- The cost of paid leave
- Potential discrimination risks if obligations become burdensome.

Recruitment agencies stressed difficulties managing shared or highly flexible leave arrangements.

Gender Equality and Shared Parenting

Employee respondents strongly emphasised:

- Equality between parents
- Allowing fathers/partners to take meaningful leave
- Reducing the gender pay gap by normalising men's caregiving roles
- Preventing career penalties for women returning from leave periods.

Complexity of Shared Parental Leave (SPL)

Many respondents liked the concept of SPL, a model of family leave that allows parents to share a single pool of post-birth or post-adoption leave between them, rather than having separate entitlements for each parent. It is designed to give families more flexibility over how they divide caring responsibilities in the baby's first year, and to encourage a more equal distribution of care between parents. However, the UK's experience has highlighted:

- Very low take-up
- Administrative difficulty when parents work for different employers
- Issues determining eligibility and coordinating pay
- Recognition that defined individual entitlements may be more effective.

This led to the Forum recommending against implementing shared leave.

Recognition of Diverse Family Types

The report advocates equal treatment for:

- Birth parents
- Adoptive parents
- Intended parents via surrogacy
- Mixed-gender and same-sex couples.

The Forum recommended removing disparities across these categories.

Breastfeeding Rights and Maternity Length

Many respondents linked workplace breastfeeding support with longer maternity leave, noting that:

- Jersey's breastfeeding rates remain low
- Returning to work early directly hinders breastfeeding continuation
- Employers should provide reasonable facilities and rest breaks.

Need for Flexibility and Notice Requirements

Respondents supported greater flexibility in how leave could be taken, but also clear notice periods to help employers plan.

Key recommendations

Maternity Leave

- Increase to 26 weeks (2018) then 52 weeks (2019)
- Provide 6 weeks paid at 100% by employer from 2018
- By 2019, total 12 weeks' paid (6 employer + 6 State-funded)
- Remove qualifying periods with rights available from day one
- Allow taking leave in blocks by 2019.

Parental Leave (For All Parents)

- Substantial shift from 2 weeks unpaid to:
    - 26 weeks (2018)
    - 52 weeks per parent (2019)
- With 6 weeks paid at 100% for each parent by 2019 (mirroring maternity).
- Entitlements apply from day one of employment.
- Leave may be split across blocks over 3 years.

Adoption Leave

- Align fully with maternity and parental leave entitlements.
- Provide paid and unpaid elements equivalent to birth parents.
- Provide rights to attend adoption appointments with paid hours for the primary adopter.

Surrogacy

- Intended parents to have adoption-equivalent rights, including paid parental leave and paid time off for appointments.

Antenatal/Appointments Rights

- Fathers/partners: unlimited appointments, with up to 10 hours paid.
- Adoptive and surrogate parents granted equivalent appointment rights.

Breastfeeding

- Right to request reasonable breaks.
- Employers must take reasonable steps to provide facilities.
- Breaks paid during the period when statutory leave could still have been taken.

Flexible Working

- Extend right to request to all employees with no qualifying period.

Health & Safety Protections

- Right to paid absence if pregnant or breastfeeding employees cannot safely perform duties.

Overall Themes and Policy Direction

The Review strongly signalled Jersey's intent to create a progressive, inclusive, and equitable system of family-friendly employment rights that:

- Centres child welfare and the first years of life
- Recognises the changing nature of family structures
- Supports both parents' caregiving roles
- Reduces inequality and gender-based workplace penalties
- Balances parental rights with business sustainability

The recommendations aimed to create a clear long-term framework that employers could plan for, while strengthening support for families at pivotal early developmental stages. Overall, the Forum advocated a completely gender-neutral, inclusive parental leave system, grounded in equality and early child development.

What was implemented in 2018 and 2020

The States Assembly adopted the majority of the Forum's recommendations in two waves:

2018 Amendments

- Equalised rights between parents
- Introduced 6 weeks paid leave at 100%
- Introduced up to 26 weeks' leave
- Strengthened breastfeeding protections
- Introduced antenatal/adoption appointment rights for partners
- Applied rights from day one of employment.

2020 Amendments

- Extended parental leave to 52 weeks (total) per parent
- Maintained 6 weeks paid for each parent
- Allowed leave to be taken in up to three blocks over a three-year period
- Extended protection from detriment
- Applied the framework to birth, adoption and surrogacy.

These reforms aligned Jersey with the Forum's vision and placed it significantly ahead of many other jurisdictions in terms of parity between parents and gender-neutrality.

Where implementation differs from the 2017 blueprint

Despite broad alignment, there are areas where actual implementation diverges from or falls short of the Forum's recommended direction:

Proposed Funding Model

The 2017 Review anticipated a shared funding model between employers and Government.

Implementation:
- Employers must fund the full 6 weeks' paid leave
- Government provides a *separate* parental allowance, resulting in confusion and occasional double-payment.

This is one of the major concerns raised by employers in the Sub-Panel's review.

Practicality of Leave Blocks

The Forum supported block-based leave but did not fully anticipate:
- operational pressures in sectors like education and small businesses
- financial constraints preventing full uptake
- unpredictability caused by three blocks over three years

These concerns have been raised consistently in this review.

Inclusivity of Guidance Language

While the 2017 Review strongly emphasised inclusion, guidance documents have remained inconsistent, with some still using terms such as "father", "husband", and "civil partner." Liberate and others have identified this as problematic.

Limited Awareness Despite Legislative Change

The Forum expected employers and employees would quickly understand and adapt to the new rights.

However, evidence from the Citizen's Advice Jersey, Brighter Futures and parents shows:

- many do not know what they are entitled to
- fathers in particular remain unaware of appointment rights and parental leave

- cultural stigma persists around taking leave.

Childcare Considerations

While the 2017 Review acknowledged childcare pressures, it did not foresee the degree to which childcare affordability and housing costs would limit the practical use of parental leave in later years.

How this context informs this review

Although Jersey implemented an ambitious, progressive family friendly framework, real-world experience has revealed new pressures that were not fully anticipated in 2017, including:

- affordability barriers preventing full uptake of leave
- employer capacity challenges, especially in micro-businesses
- inconsistent guidance and communication
- discrimination or poor practice occurring in pockets of the workforce
- uneven experiences for LGBTQ+ families or non-traditional family structures
- childcare and cost-of-living pressures shaping family decisions
- the need for better support for fathers and equal parenting.

Understanding these issues against the backdrop of the 2017 design helps identify where the legislation is working well, and where refinements are needed to reflect today's realities.

Summary

The 2017 Employment Forum Review laid the foundation for Jersey's modern parental leave system and progressed gender-neutral family friendly rights. The 2018 and 2020 amendments broadly delivered the Forum's recommendations.

The Sub-Panel's review aims to build on that legacy. Understanding what the 2017 Review recommended, and how those recommendations translated into practice, helps clarify where the current legislation has achieved its aims, where gaps remain, and where further refinement may be needed.

2024 Post Implementation Review

In 2024, the Minister for Social Security undertook a post-implementation survey[9] to evaluate how the changes had been received by employers and employees. The survey identified several areas for improvement, notably the need to raise awareness of the rights introduced and to review the rules concerning parental allowance to ensure fairness and clarity.

In response to these findings, the Health and Social Security Scrutiny Panel established a Sub-Panel to undertake a focused review of the legislation's implementation and effectiveness.

The Sub-Panel's Terms of Reference were:

[9] R-68-2024.pdf

- **Assessing the progress of the Government's response to the 2024 post-implementation survey**
- **Evaluating the effectiveness of communication and awareness of the legislative changes among both employers and employees**
- **Considering how Jersey's family friendly provisions compare with those in other jurisdictions; and**
- **Examining the impact of the legislation on families, employers, and wider society.**

Through this review, the Sub-Panel aimed to build a clear, evidence-based understanding of how the legislation is functioning in practice and to determine whether it is delivering on its policy objectives.

The Sub-Panel's objective throughout was to ensure that the family friendly legislation is fit for purpose, clearly understood, and effectively implemented. By examining both the policy and practical dimensions of the law, the review sought to make pragmatic, tangible recommendations, ones that can lead to meaningful improvements for families, while maintaining fairness and workability for employers.

Jersey's current family friendly legislation

Jersey's family-friendly rights sit primarily within the Employment (Jersey) Law 2003, as amended in 2018, 2020 and 2024, and are supported by Government of Jersey guidance and the Jersey Advisory & Conciliation Service (JACS) materials. Together, they cover parental leave and pay, time off for ante-/pre-adoption appointments, pregnancy and breastfeeding protections, flexible working, protection from detriment/dismissal, and since 18 March 2024, parental bereavement leave[10].

Core entitlements (day-one rights unless stated)

Parental leave (birth, adoption, surrogacy)

- 52 weeks' total leave for each parent, which may be taken in up to three blocks across two years; each block must be at least 2 weeks. Leave can begin no earlier than 11 weeks before birth/placement. Notification deadlines apply (for birth, typically 15 weeks before the expected week of childbirth; for adoption, within 7 days of match/arrival notification).
- 6 weeks' employer-paid leave at normal salary (offset against any Social Security payments; if no State payment is due, the employer pays in full). Zero-hours pay is based on a 12-week average.
- Right to return to the same job after leave; continuous employment rights preserved; "keeping in touch" (KIT) work is permitted without extending leave.

Time off for appointments

- Pregnant employees: paid time off for all ante-natal appointments.
- Partners/second parents (including adoptive/surrogate intended parents): time off for unlimited appointments with up to 10 hours paid; additional time is unpaid.

[10] MD-SOSEC-2024-194 PBL - Payment Scheme - Guidelines.pdf

- Adoption appointments: same unlimited entitlement with up to 10 hours paid.

Pregnancy & breastfeeding protections

- Paid suspension on health & safety grounds if risks cannot be removed or suitable alternative work provided for a pregnant or breastfeeding employee.
- Temporary variation to terms (hours, times, location) to enable breastfeeding/expressing.
- Employer duty to take "reasonable steps" to provide suitable breastfeeding facilities (private, hygienic, not a toilet); duration agreed with the employee.

Parental bereavement leave (from 18 March 2024)

- Two weeks' unpaid leave, a day-one right, for the death of a child under 18 or stillbirth after 24 weeks; may be taken in separate blocks within 56 weeks of the bereavement.
- A Government payment scheme provides financial support (including for self-employed), administered by the Government of Jersey. This bereavement entitlement is transferable between employers, unlike general parental leave.

Flexible working

- All employees, not only parents, may request flexible working, with two requests permitted in any 12-month period. Requests can cover hours, times, and place of work.

Protections & enforcement

- Protection from detriment or dismissal for exercising family-friendly rights (including taking/trying to take parental or bereavement leave). Claims may be brought to the Jersey Employment and Discrimination Tribunal; pregnancy/maternity and sex discrimination protections also apply.
- Complaints: employees may complain where rights are refused or hindered; remedies include reinstatement, compensation, and specific awards set out in the Employment Law and guidance.

Summary of Key Legislative Developments to Date

Pre-2018: Limited and Unequal Provision
Before 2018, Jersey's employment law offered only basic maternity rights, with **no** equivalent leave for partners, adoptive parents or surrogate families. Entitlements were short and out of step with international norms. A 2016 Employment Forum review highlighted strong public demand for modern, gender-neutral and more flexible family rights.

2018 Reform – Employment (Amendment No. 8)
The 2018 amendment marked the first major shift toward inclusive family policy.
It introduced:

- Paid parental leave for both parents.
- Rights for adoptive and surrogate intended parents.
- Paid time off for antenatal appointments.
- Protections and reasonable adjustments for breastfeeding mothers.
- Enhanced health and safety protections.
- A universal right to request flexible working.

These changes aimed to modernise Jersey's framework and promote shared caregiving.

2020 Reform – Employment (Amendment No. 10)
In July 2020, the law was expanded into a comprehensive, gender-neutral parental leave system, establishing:

- 52 weeks' parental leave per parent, including 6 weeks' paid leave funded by employers.
- Flexibility to take leave in up to three blocks over two years.
- Stronger job-protection rights and clearer notification rules.
- Full parity for adoptive and surrogate families.

This was the most substantial advancement in equality since the 2013 Discrimination Law.

2024 Reform – Parental Bereavement Leave
The Employment (Amendment No. 15) Law introduced statutory bereavement leave, providing:

- Two weeks' leave (unpaid in law), from day one of employment.
- Eligibility following the death of a child under 18 or stillbirth after 24 weeks.
- Flexibility to take leave in up to three blocks within 56 weeks.
- A Government financial support scheme for affected employees, including the self-employed.

2024 Family Friendly post-implementation review: report and ministerial conclusions

Overview and Purpose of the Review

The 2024 Post-Implementation Review[11] (PIR) was instructed by the Minister for Social Security to assess how the tranche of family friendly employment rights, introduced through amendments to the Employment (Jersey) Law 2003 in 2018 and 2020, were operating in practice.

The review sought to gather feedback from employees and employers to determine:

- The extent to which the new rights were being used;
- How effectively they were communicated and understood; and
- Whether any practical or policy adjustments were required to improve outcomes.

The survey ran between 15 November and 22 December 2023, distributed via SmartSurvey and publicised through employer and employee organisations (e.g. Chamber of Commerce, JHA, IoD, Unite the Union) as well as public-interest bodies like the Jersey Childcare Trust, Best Start Partnership, and Citizens Advice Jersey.

During the course of this review the Sub-Panel particularly wanted to look at the adequacy of this PIR, to date the only formal review of the impact of the amendment to the Employment (Jersey) Law 2003 and review the progress of the Ministerial Conclusions and the commitments made following the PIR to address issues highlighted by the consultation.

[11] R-68-2024.pdf

Survey Design

The PIR survey gathered:

- Employee responses (135) – mainly from parents who had used the new rights since July 2020.
- Employer responses (approximately 35) – across different sectors and business sizes.

Questions explored usage of rights, awareness levels, problems encountered, and suggestions for improvement.

Key Findings: Employees

High usage and broad satisfaction

- 129 of 135 respondents had used the new rights.
- Most valued the extended leave and the ability for both parents to share time off, describing it as “a totally different birth experience” compared to earlier children.

Positive cultural shift, but ongoing barriers

- Employees praised increased flexibility and recognition of partners.
- However, they cited employer unawareness, miscommunication, and cultural resistance (e.g. comments about men taking “holiday”)

Common issues identified

- Lack of understanding of new rights by some employers and employees.
- Financial barriers to taking unpaid leave beyond the six paid weeks.
- Rigid structure: only three leave blocks (minimum two weeks each) allowed.
- Calls for greater flexibility and transferability between partners.
- Concerns that mothers returning to work still faced inflexibility or discrimination.

Most frequent suggestions for change

- Extend paid element beyond six weeks (many suggested 12–26 weeks).
- Increase parental allowance and its duration.
- Allow unused leave to be transferred between partners.
- Improve public awareness and employer training.
- Address disparities between public and private sector entitlements.

Key Findings:

Limited operational impact

- Majority reported no major problems implementing new rights.
- Some updated handbooks and HR policies.
- Small businesses reported difficulty covering roles during long absences.

Challenges and concerns

- Financial strain on small firms providing six weeks' paid leave.
- Calls for government co-funding or subsidies if paid leave is extended.
- Shortage of affordable childcare affecting parents' ability to return to work.

Employer requests

- More flexibility during return-to-work phase.
- Simplification of the "blocks" structure for parental leave.
- Clearer guidance on rights and payroll obligations.

Broader Policy Issues Raised

Social Security Parental Allowance

- Benefit does not cover full 52-week leave period.
- Qualification depends on contributions record, excluding some parents (especially self-employed).
- Employers sometimes left bearing full cost when staff were ineligible for State allowance.

Self-Employed Parents

- Expressed feeling "neglected" by current framework - excluded from leave rights despite paying higher contributions.

Affordable Childcare

- Both employees and employers highlighted shortage and high cost of nursery provision.
- Parents unable to use full leave entitlement or return to work due to childcare gaps.

Overall Ministerial Conclusions

Employment Law

- Legislation broadly successful and well received.
- Main challenge: lack of awareness and inconsistent understanding among employers.

- Calls for more flexibility acknowledged but Minister cautious about reopening the Law.

Social Security Law

- Minister agreed to review parental allowance rules, especially contribution requirements, but recognised financial implications for the Social Security Fund.

Self-Employed Islanders

- No immediate legislative changes proposed; family-friendly rights remain for employees only.

Childcare Provision

- Not within the Minister's portfolio but findings shared with relevant colleagues (Children and Education; Economic Development).

Ministerial Actions Agreed

The Minister for Social Security committed to:

1. **Develop a communications strategy** to raise awareness of family-friendly rights among employers and employees.
2. **Maintain current structure** of parental leave to preserve gender parity and manage employer impact.
3. **Explore improvements to parental allowance** and related Social Security contribution rules.
4. **Share childcare findings** with relevant ministries to inform future early-years policy.

The PIR concluded that Jersey's family friendly reforms are progressive and broadly effective, providing a modern, gender-equal legal framework. However, cultural adaptation, communication, and financial accessibility remain critical challenges. The Minister's response emphasised education and awareness over immediate legislative change, while acknowledging the need for continued cross-departmental work on childcare affordability and parental support.

Progress of Ministerial Actions

At the onset of this review the Sub-Panel wrote[12] to the Minister for Social Security to ascertain the status and outcomes of the Ministerial actions detailed in the PIR. The letter requested an update on the progress, timelines, costs and outcomes of several Ministerial actions.

[12] 2025-03-24-MSS-to-HSS-Panel-re-Review-of-Family-Friendly-Legislation-(1)_1.pdf

The Minister for Social Security responded to the Panel's request for updates:

Employment Law – Awareness and Guidance

The Minister states that significant work has been undertaken, primarily by advisory bodies rather than Government, to raise awareness of family-friendly rights:

- **JACS** has delivered online training, radio campaigns, updated parental leave handbooks, and newsletter information.
- **Citizens Advice Jersey** provides direct guidance to parents and signposts to JACS.
- **Jersey Business** offers HR toolkits for small businesses, including parental rights guidance.
- **gov.je** hosts information about the rights and financial allowances available.

The Minister does *not* currently intend to amend Employment Law further, stating that existing collaboration between government, business and advice bodies is functioning effectively. However, further action may be considered should the Panel identify gaps.

Social Security Law – Home Responsibility Protection (HRP) and Parental Allowance

A major development has been confirmed regarding **Home Responsibility Protection credits**:

- The Minister introduced changes to HRP credits in April 2025[13], that enabled eligibility for parental benefits, not just pension and survivor benefits.
- Public communication will follow so that parents on HRP know they should apply for parental allowance when planning or expecting a further child.

The Minister notes that any wider changes to Social Security parental allowance rules may have financial implications for the Social Security Fund.

Childcare Provision

The Minister clarifies that childcare and nursery provision are not within her portfolio, but:

- She has shared survey findings with relevant Ministers, including the Ministers for Education and Lifelong Learning and Children and Families.
- She notes that expanding childcare and nursery access is a priority within the Common Strategic Policy 2024–2026[14].

The Minister considers the current multi-agency approach to information and support to be effective but remains open to adjustments in response to any issues emerging from the Sub-Panel's review.

Despite the Minister's responses, since publication of the Ministerial Conclusions and intended Actions, the Sub-Panel has found only limited evidence of a coordinated, government-led communications strategy aimed at addressing the significant gaps and confusion in public understanding of the family friendly legislation.

Throughout the evidence-gathering period, the absence of clear, centralised communication was highlighted by contributors, many of whom stated that they did not fully understand the

[13] Government expands Social Security support for parents and students
[14] Common Strategic Policy 2024 to 2026.pdf

current legal provisions, their rights or their obligations**.** The Sub-Panel has consistently found that confusion around parental leave entitlements and associated financial provisions is widespread, extending beyond parents to include support services, HR professionals and employers themselves. While the Sub-Panel recognises that family friendly legislation is inherently complex and challenging to communicate, the evidence makes clear that the current approach is not meeting the needs of those expected to navigate and apply it. Effective implementation of these rights depends on clear, accurate and accessible information. It is therefore imperative that parental leave provisions are communicated through clear, consistent and centrally coordinated channels that are trusted by families and employers alike, to ensure entitlements are understood, applied fairly and able to deliver their intended benefits.

This reoccurring theme demonstrates that the actions identified in the PIR have not translated into a visible or effective public information campaign, leaving families and workplaces reliant on inconsistent guidance from individual organisations rather than a unified Government approach. Moreover, the evidence gathered during this review closely mirrors the concerns raised by stakeholders in the 2024 Post-Implementation Review, indicating that little meaningful progress has been made. Many of the same issues persist, suggesting that the feedback provided has not been fully acted upon or translated into tangible improvements for families or employers.

FINDING 1: Key Finding
Despite the intended Ministerial action stemming from the 2024 Family Friendly post-implementation review, here remains a lack of a coordinated Government communications strategy to support understanding of the Family Friendly legislation.

RECOMMENDATION 1: Key Recommendation
The Minister for Social Security must introduce a clear, centralised communications strategy to improve public understanding of family friendly legislation and address the gaps in knowledge and avoid reliance on ad hoc leaflets. This should include accessible, up-to-date tailored guidance for parents and employers, consistent messaging across all agencies and proactive dissemination through healthcare settings, workplaces, schools, Parishes, digital platforms and community organisations.

International comparisons and best practice

As part of this review the Sub-Panel engaged Dr Merve Uzunalioğlu, a postdoctoral researcher for the rEUsilience project at the Department of Social Policy and Intervention at Oxford University. Dr Uzunalioğlu's research focuses on families and how they interact with social policies. Leave and care policies lie at the core of her research, and the interplay between different family policies, how resilience in families is exercised and how all these elements together could be conceptualised through a social sustainability lens.

The Sub-Panel was particularly keen to understand international comparisons in relevant family friendly legislation and explore best practices in other jurisdictions in order to comprehensively assess the adequacy of Jersey's current legislative provision and crucially be able to make recommendations based on working examples. This pragmatic approach was a core consideration for the review, with the Sub-Panel focused on careful consideration of the evidence, maintaining a balance, and understanding the views and experiences of both new parents *and* employers with the express aim to make viable suggestions that can improve family life in Jersey and be workable and practically applicable for employers. Dr Uzunalioğlu's report, alongside the Sub-Panel's own research and evidence gathering, support this core approach.

The report was commissioned to provide an independent, evidence-based review of Jersey's parenting-related leave framework, situating it in an international context and identifying best-practice features from comparable jurisdictions.

It is organised in two parts:

1. A comparative analysis of international leave policies and literature on what constitutes effective parental leave design.
2. A review of Jersey's current leave provisions, assessing adequacy, inclusiveness, and implementation gaps.

International Comparisons — Overview and Key Insights

Evolution and EU Minimum Standards

The report traces the development of European leave policy since the late 19th century, from maternity protection laws in Germany (1880s) to the modern EU Work-Life Balance Directive (2019/1158). Current European minimum standards are:

- 14 weeks of maternity leave (2 weeks compulsory)
- 2 weeks of paternity leave
- 4 months of parental leave per parent, with at least 2 months non-transferable

Cross-National Comparison (Eight Countries)

A comparative table (Table 1) contrasts Australia, Belgium, Iceland, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Portugal, Spain, and the UK.

Table 1 A comparison of parenting-related leave provision (2024/2025)

Country	Types of Leaves	Funding Mechanism	Duration (Paid/Unpaid)	Eligibility	Compensation Level	Shared/Transferable	Bonuses/Penalties
Australia	Parental Leave (paid & unpaid), employer-provided maternity/paternity leave	General taxation (Parental Leave Pay), employers for additional leave	20 weeks paid (Parental Leave Pay), up to 24 months unpaid job-protected leave	Employees with 12 months continuous service; universal access to paid parental leave with work test	Parental Leave Pay at national minimum wage rate; employer leave usually wage replacement	Unpaid leave can be split/shared, paid leave primarily mother but flexible	Employer discretion, some additional top-ups
Belgium	Maternity, Paternity, Parental, Career Breaks	Social security (ONEM/RVA), some employer top-ups	Maternity 15 weeks paid, Paternity 20 days paid, Parental 4 months per parent, Career break up to 1 year (allowances)	Employees with contributions, universal for maternity, parental leave eligibility criteria apply	Maternity 82% of earnings, Paternity flat-rate, Parental allowance (flat-rate), Career break allowance	Parental leave is individual, but transferable under some conditions	Career break allowances, possible bonus for longer use
Iceland	Maternity, Paternity, Parental (all under fæðingarorlof system)	Funded through social insurance (Labour/Social Affairs)	Each parent has individual paid entitlement (several months), can transfer part	All employed/resident parents with contributions	Earnings-related benefit with ceiling	Yes, leave entitlements divided between parents; some transfer possible	Design encourages both parents to use quotas ('use-it-or-lose-it' principle)
Luxembourg	Maternity, Paternity, Parental	Social security funds	Maternity 20 weeks paid, Paternity 10-20 days paid, Parental 4–6 months (full-time) or part-time/fractioned versions	All employed mothers (mandatory maternity), insured/self-employed for paternity, parental leave	100% earnings for maternity, Paternity at replacement, Parental flat-rate allowance	Parental leave sharable and available to both parents, uptake increasing among fathers	No bonuses, reforms encourage uptake (esp. fathers)

				open to both parents			
New Zealand	Primary Carer Leave, Extended Leave, Partner's Leave	Government via Inland Revenue	Up to 26 weeks paid + additional unpaid options	Employees with 6 or 12 months service, carers, adoptive parents	Earnings-related up to a cap	Yes, can be transferred to partner or other carers	None explicit
Portugal	Maternity, Paternity, Parental, Gestational mourning leave	Social security, with employer involvement	Maternity 120 days (30 before, 90 after, paid), Paternity/Parental up to 150 days shared, Gestational mourning 3 days paid	Employees with social contributions, universal coverage for some provisions	Maternity/paternity at 100% earnings (within caps), parental partly paid	Yes, parental leave can be shared between parents	Gestational mourning leave; incentives to encourage uptake of shared leave
Spain	Birth & Childcare Leave, Parental Leave (2 types), Career Breaks	Social security (INSS), some employer role	Maternity/Paternity (equalized) 16 weeks each paid, Parental leave up to 3 years (mostly unpaid)	All employed parents; contributory basis	100% earnings (maternity/paternity equal), Parental leave mostly unpaid or with allowance	Maternity and paternity leaves equalized; parental leave individual but both parents eligible	Equalization as incentive, no explicit bonuses
UK	Maternity, Paternity, Shared Parental, Parental, Adoption, Neonatal Care (2025)	Statutory pay (government, via employers), some employer enhancements	Maternity 52 weeks (39 paid), Paternity 2 weeks paid, Shared Parental up to 50 weeks (37 paid), Parental leave 18 weeks unpaid, Neonatal leave planned	Employees with qualifying period (26 weeks), adopters and same-sex couples included	Maternity 90% then flat rate, Paternity flat rate, SPL flat rate, Neonatal flat rate planned	Maternity transferable to SPL (except 2 weeks), SPL sharable, adoption leave aligned	Neonatal leave (2025) added, redundancy protection extended
Source: leavenetwork.org							

Key findings:

Policy scope and structure

- Nordic systems (e.g. Iceland) integrate maternity, paternity, and parental leave into a single gender-equal system, each parent having an individual, paid entitlement.
- Southern European reforms (notably Spain 2021–24) now guarantee 16 weeks fully paid to each parent, with the first equalised paternity/maternity scheme in Europe.
- Continental European models (Belgium, Luxembourg, Portugal) preserve distinct leave types but provide strong maternity coverage and growing shared-parent options.
- Anglo-Saxon models (UK, Australia, New Zealand) retain long durations but rely on flat-rate or unpaid components, leading to low paternal take-up and persistence of gender gaps.

Funding mechanisms

- Social insurance financing dominates in continental Europe (Belgium, Luxembourg, Spain, Portugal).
- General taxation funds the schemes in Australia and New Zealand, often at minimum-wage levels.
- Employer funding plays a supplementary role, except where statutory pay is low (e.g. UK top-ups).

Compensation levels

- High earnings-replacement (80–100 %) strongly correlates with higher male uptake and faster maternal return to work.
- Flat-rate benefits, as in the UK or Australia, tend to entrench gendered leave patterns because men find leave financially unviable.

Transferability and incentives

- Use-it-or-lose-it quotas (Iceland, Spain) drive male participation and normalise paternal caregiving.
- Shared/transferable leave systems without incentives (UK Shared Parental Leave) see very low take-up due to design complexity and poor pay.
- Bonuses or special leaves (e.g. Portugal's gestational-mourning leave; Belgium's "career breaks") signal policy attention to exceptional family needs.

Best-performing models

- Iceland and Spain emerge as exemplars of gender-equal, inclusive, well-compensated systems that combine individual entitlements with state-funded benefits.
- Nordic models demonstrate that earnings-related pay + non-transferable quotas + flexibility yield the greatest equality outcomes.
- By contrast, the UK, Australia, and New Zealand illustrate that generous total durations are ineffective if poorly paid or complex to access.

Broader comparative lesson

The report highlights a persistent policy tension:

"Between universalism and conditionality, fiscal restraint and gender equality, and the division of responsibility between state and employer."

Systems that resolve this through state-backed, earnings-related, non-transferable leave achieve both high utilisation and gender balance.

Best-Practice/ recommended themes

Drawing on this international evidence, the report distils several design principles regarded as "best practice" for family-friendly legislation:

1. **Universal accessibility** – Leave should cover all parents regardless of employment type, including the self-employed and those in non-standard work.
2. **Earnings-related remuneration** – Adequate compensation is the single most powerful driver of uptake, especially for fathers.
3. **Individual, non-transferable entitlements** – Each parent must have personal leave quotas to disrupt gendered caregiving norms.
4. **Flexible structure** – Allowing blocks or part-time leave increases participation without reducing total care time.
5. **State-funded schemes** – Reducing the direct cost to employers promotes compliance and inclusivity across firm sizes.
6. **Integration with childcare policy** – Affordable early-years care ensures that leave rights translate into sustained labour-market participation.

7. **Cultural normalisation –** Visible managerial support and national communication strategies are crucial for making parental leave a "normal" act rather than a career risk.

Relevance to Jersey

When benchmarked against these standards, Jersey's model, 52 weeks per parent, six weeks' employer-paid leave, remainder unpaid, is progressive in scope *but* falls short on compensation, inclusiveness, and state support.

The report concludes that aligning Jersey's framework with leading European practice would require:

- Introducing longer paid periods funded jointly by the State and employers
- Extending eligibility to self-employed and lone parents; and
- Embedding "use-it-or-lose-it" incentives to encourage fathers' leave-taking.

"Policy design determines not only whether leave is taken, but who takes it, and under what economic and cultural conditions."

In essence, the report situates Jersey within a continuum of evolving welfare states, showing that while the Island's reforms have modernised its statutory framework, the next frontier lies in financial adequacy, inclusiveness, and workplace culture, areas where Nordic and Iberian models provide the clearest evidence of best practice.

FINDING 2: Key Finding

Studies have found that around 12 weeks of paid maternity leave is linked to decreased psychological distress among mothers, reduced intimate partner violence, lower infant mortality, better attachment between parents and the baby, and increased breastfeeding duration (Van Niel et al., 2020[15]; Heshmati et al., 2023[16])

RECOMMENDATION 2: Key Recommendation

The Minister for Social Security should amend legislation and bring forward funding proposals in the next budget, to implement the outstanding 2017 Employment Forum recommendation to introduce a total of 12 weeks paid maternity leave, comprising six weeks' employer-funded and six weeks' State-funded leave, with a view to transitioning this entitlement into a universal parental leave framework.

[15] The Impact of Paid Maternity Leave on the Mental and Physical Health of Mothers and Children: A Review of the Literature and Policy Implications - PubMed

[16] The effect of parental leave on parents' mental health: a systematic review - PubMed

Impact on Employers

Feedback from locally based businesses

In undertaking this review, the Sub-Panel was conscious of the importance of capturing a balanced and representative picture of how Jersey's family friendly legislation has been received and implemented. While much of the public discussion around the reforms has focused on the benefits for employees and families, the Sub-Panel recognised that employers can play a central role in bringing the legislation to life by embedding new rights and responsibilities into workplace culture, policy, and daily practice.

The Sub-Panel therefore sought to understand, from an employer's perspective, what aspects of the legislation have worked well, what challenges have arisen in practice, and what improvements or refinements might make the framework more effective and sustainable for all parties. The review aimed to go beyond compliance and to consider how employers in Jersey are adapting to support parents and carers returning to work, balancing business continuity with fairness and flexibility.

To achieve this, the Sub-Panel ensured that key business and employer stakeholders were fully engaged in the evidence-gathering process. Written submissions and oral evidence were sought from a wide range of organisations including employer and industry representative bodies, business associations, trade unions, HR professionals, legal specialists, and individual employers across multiple sectors and scales of operation. The Sub-Panel also held targeted discussions with stakeholders in small and medium-sized enterprises, who often face distinct operational pressures when implementing new statutory requirements.

The Sub-Panel's approach was underpinned by a commitment to listening to all voices and ensuring that the experiences and views of employers were accurately reflected and fairly represented within this report. Their insights provide a critical counterpart to the evidence gathered from families and employees and have informed the Sub-Panel's assessment of how the current legislation operates in practice, and how it might evolve to better meet the needs of Jersey's community and economy.

Jersey Chamber of Commerce Submission

The Sub-Panel received a detailed submission from the Jersey Chamber of Commerce, representing the Island's largest cross-section of employers. The Chamber had undertaken a survey of 45 member businesses across multiple sectors, including finance, retail, hospitality, construction, health, and professional services, ranging in size from small charities and SMEs to large corporate employers.

The Chamber reported broad support for the principle and intent of Jersey's family friendly employment legislation, recognising its role in improving employee wellbeing, retention, and workplace culture;

> *'Chamber recognises and supports the principle of family-friendly policies and the importance of enabling parents to balance work and family life. Our members value the wellbeing of their employees and understand the benefits of supportive workplace practices'*[17].

[17] Submission-Family-Friendly-Legislation-Review-Chamber-of-Commerce-29-August-2025.pdf

However, the evidence also highlighted significant operational and financial pressures, particularly for small and medium-sized businesses and charitable organisations, which often lack the capacity or resources of larger employers to absorb extended absences or manage complex administrative requirements.

Survey findings indicated that most businesses had experienced increased costs (71%), greater workload pressures during absences (67%), and challenges in restructuring operations to cover leave (62%). Over half (53%) of respondents found it difficult to manage extended absences of up to 52 weeks, while 40% reported difficulties accommodating a rise in flexible working requests. Only 18% reported no significant impact.

While some employers noted positive effects, such as improved morale, staff satisfaction, and work-life balance, the Chamber emphasised that the current framework is already stretching many employers to their limits. It warned that further legislative expansion without additional support could risk undermining the sustainability of smaller enterprises.

The Chamber recommended that the Government and the States Assembly adopt a measured, evidence-based approach to any future amendments. In particular, it called for:

- No further extensions without accompanying support mechanisms, such as grants or subsidies.
- Targeted assistance for smaller employers to help them meet statutory obligations sustainably.
- Improved guidance and practical tools for managing flexible working, parental leave, and breastfeeding facilities; and
- Ongoing monitoring of economic and operational impacts, to ensure that unintended consequences are promptly identified and addressed.

The Chamber concluded that the spirit and purpose of family friendly legislation should be preserved, but stressed the need for a balanced, proportionate, and pragmatic approach that safeguards the wellbeing of families while ensuring the framework remains workable and sustainable for the Island's diverse business community.

The Chamber of Commerce's evidence portrays a business community broadly supportive of family-friendly principles but under strain from implementation realities. Employers, particularly smaller ones, seek clarity, proportionality, and support, not a reversal of rights. The findings underline the need for ongoing dialogue between Government, employers, and employees to ensure the legislation remains both socially progressive and economically sustainable.

Survey Methodology

- 45 businesses participated, spanning finance, retail, hospitality, construction, health, and professional services.
- Respondents ranged from small charities and SMEs to large corporate employers.
- Findings therefore reflect a broad cross-section of Jersey's business community.

Key Quantitative Findings

Issue	Percentage of Businesses Reporting Impact
Increased costs (paid leave & admin)	**71%**
Harder workload management during absences	**67%**
Need to restructure staff or operations	**62%**
Difficulty managing extended absences (up to 52 weeks)	**53%**
Rise in flexible working requests causing challenges	**40%**
No significant impact	**18%**

This data indicate that the majority of employers have faced material operational or financial consequences because of the new provisions.

Reported Benefits

Although most feedback focused on costs and disruption, a minority of employers acknowledged positive outcomes:

- Improved employee morale and work-life balance.
- Enhanced staff satisfaction and productivity, especially from flexible working arrangements.
- Recognition that family-friendly culture aids retention and employee loyalty.

However, these positives were secondary to concerns about sustainability for smaller employers.

Challenges and Unintended Consequences

The submission outlines several systemic difficulties emerging from the legislation:

Disproportionate impact on small employers and charities

- Smaller entities cannot easily absorb long absences or duplicate salaries:

> "It is very difficult for a small business or a charity to be down a member of the team but still having to cover their wages and then to pay a further person to cover their role."

- The law “***does not distinguish between small and large companies***”, creating inequity in its effect.
- Larger firms with dedicated HR capacity are better positioned to comply without disruption.

Cost pressures and inflationary effects

- Rising wage and cover costs have led some employers to increase prices, potentially contributing to wider inflationary effects.

Administrative burden

- Many businesses, especially those without in-house HR, face significant paperwork and compliance complexity.
- Some rely on external advisers, incurring additional financial outlay.

Workforce management and staffing shortages

- Difficulty finding temporary cover during long absences, particularly in specialist roles.
- Existing staff often absorb extra work, causing stress and burnout risks.

Perceived misuse or misunderstanding of entitlements

- Reports of unrealistic expectations or misinterpretation of eligibility, including from staff not entitled to parental leave under the law.

Conclusions

The Chamber’s submission reiterates support for family-friendly objectives but urges that any future developments be tempered with practical safeguards for employers. Its recommendations are as follows:

1. **No further extensions without support**
    - ➢ The framework is already stretching employer capacity.
    - ➢ Any additional rights should be accompanied by financial assistance or a differentiated approach reflecting business size.
2. **Targeted assistance for small employers**
    - ➢ Suggests grants, subsidies, or cost-sharing schemes to help SMEs and charities meet statutory obligations sustainably.
3. **Improved guidance and practical tools**
    - ➢ Clearer advice on managing flexible work requests, long absences, and breastfeeding facilities, with model policies or templates.
4. **Ongoing monitoring of impacts**
    - ➢ Regular evaluation of cost pressures, staffing strain, recruitment and retention challenges, and other unintended outcomes to inform future amendments.

The Chamber concludes that the spirit of family-friendly legislation should be preserved, but its implementation must remain workable, affordable, and equitable across the full spectrum of Jersey employers.

FINDING 3
Employers broadly support the intent and cultural value of Jersey's family friendly legislation, recognising its positive impact on workplace inclusivity and staff wellbeing. However, many report that the complexity of leave blocks, flexible working processes and administrative offsets has created significant HR strain, with disproportionate financial and operational pressures falling on SMEs and charities who lack the capacity to absorb these demands. While the legislation is viewed as socially beneficial, employer evidence highlights widespread administrative fatigue and indicates that the current framework's complexity, cost implications and implementation challenges now warrant careful review.

RECOMMENDATION 3:
The Minister for Social Security should explore increased support for small businesses, including bespoke guidance, and seek feedback from this group on the impact of the legislation.

FINDING 4
Cultural acceptance is growing and despite challenges, a gradual shift toward normalising flexible working and parental leave is evident.

FINDING 5
Employer representatives suggest any future review of the legislation should consider a tiered or supported model, acknowledging the impact of new businesses and SMEs, combining fairness for families with sustainability for employers.

Institute of Directors (IoD) Jersey Submission

The Sub-Panel also received evidence from the Institute of Directors (IoD) Jersey, representing senior leaders and employers across multiple sectors. The IoD expressed broad support for the aims and intent of Jersey's family friendly legislation, recognising its contribution to modernising workplace culture, improving retention, and supporting gender equality. Members reported that the reforms had helped to embed more flexible, inclusive employment practices and enhanced the Island's reputation as a fair and progressive place to work.

However, the IoD also identified a number of practical and policy challenges. Employers noted that extended absences, particularly when multiple employees take leave concurrently, can create operational pressures and resource strain, especially for smaller firms and specialist teams. The organisation further highlighted several gaps in the current framework, including the lack of statutory recognition for foster-to-adopt placements, fertility treatment, and baby loss.

The IoD recommended a series of targeted amendments to improve inclusivity and balance within the legislation. These included extending paid leave to foster-to-adopt families, introducing compassionate leave for fertility and baby loss, providing a more equitable split of paid parental leave between parents, and allowing greater flexibility in the use of "keeping in touch" days to support parents returning to work. The submission also emphasised that many

Jersey employers already voluntarily exceed statutory requirements, offering enhanced parental leave, hybrid working, and wellbeing support.

Overall, the IoD's evidence, authored by the People Leadership & Strategy Sub-Committee, demonstrates a constructive and balanced employer perspective, one that endorses the social and cultural value of family friendly policy while calling for measured, practical refinements to ensure the framework remains inclusive, flexible, and sustainable for both employees and employers. IoD members support the principle and purpose of family-friendly legislation, recognising its role in promoting inclusive workplaces, employee wellbeing, and gender equality. However, the submission also highlights practical challenges and gaps in the existing legal framework, particularly in how it reflects modern family structures, operational realities, and evolving workforce expectations.

The IoD's position can be summarised as constructively supportive but reform-oriented: the organisation welcomes the direction of policy but advocates targeted amendments to ensure fairness, inclusivity, and practicality for both employees and employers.

Key Themes

Positive Cultural Impact

The amendments have helped to embed modern workplace values, such as flexibility, inclusion, and respect for parental responsibility.

Many IoD members reported benefits including greater employee engagement, enhanced retention, and improved organisational reputation among jobseekers, especially working parents.

The legislation is seen as a net positive for employer branding and staff loyalty, helping Jersey align with international best practice on social responsibility.

Operational and Workforce Challenges

Extended absences, particularly when multiple employees take leave concurrently or during busy periods, have created significant strain on business continuity and workload distribution.

Smaller organisations and those with specialist teams face particular difficulties in finding suitable cover, leading to pressure on remaining staff.

While many employers support flexible working in principle, they caution that uncoordinated or clustered leave periods (for example, during summer months) can disrupt operations and client service.

The IoD suggests that better planning and guidance could mitigate these issues while preserving flexibility for parents.

Unintended Gaps in the Legislation

Members identified several policy blind spots where the law does not yet reflect contemporary family realities:

Foster-to-Adopt Placements

Under current rules, statutory paid parental leave starts only at the point of legal adoption, excluding the critical bonding period that begins when a child is first placed with prospective adopters.

Fertility Treatment

There is no statutory entitlement for employees undergoing fertility treatment. The IoD argues this omission adds emotional and administrative stress for affected families and uncertainty for supportive employers.

Paternity Leave Clustering

Some organisations report instances of long paid leave periods (3–6 months) being taken simultaneously by multiple employees or concentrated in specific months, creating operational disruption and workforce imbalance.

Balancing Employee and Employer Needs

The IoD recognises that the legislation has improved flexibility and parental choice but notes that affordability limits uptake. Many families cannot take full advantage of their entitlements because only six weeks of leave are paid.

Voluntary Best Practice Among Employers

Many IoD members already go beyond statutory minimums, offering:

- Enhanced paid parental leave policies
- Hybrid or flexible working options
- Phased return-to-work schemes
- Mental health and wellbeing support.

These practices are described as strategic investments, improving satisfaction, productivity, and retention rather than as regulatory burdens.

Assessment of the Legislative Framework

The IoD views the current Employment Law as a solid foundation but argues that it could be more inclusive and practical. Specific areas for enhancement include:

- Targeted recognition of non-traditional family experiences (fertility, loss, fostering); and
- Greater flexibility in re-entry to work, such as adaptive "keeping in touch" (KIT) days to ease reintegration.

FINDING 6
IoD members view Jersey's family friendly legislation as a net positive for workplace culture, staff retention and gender equality. Employers report that the reforms have supported more flexible and inclusive practices, strengthened employer branding, and enhanced Jersey's reputation as a fair and progressive place to work, aligning the Island more closely with international standards of social responsibility.

FINDING 7
Many Jersey employers already voluntarily exceed statutory requirements, offering enhanced parental leave, hybrid working, and wellbeing support, described as strategic investments, improving satisfaction, productivity, and retention rather than as regulatory burdens.

FINDING 8
Smaller organisations and those with specialist teams face particular difficulties in finding suitable cover, leading to pressure on remaining staff.

FINDING 9
The IoD identified several gaps in the current family friendly legislative framework, noting that it does not fully reflect modern family formation or provide sufficient practical guidance for employers. In particular, the legislation does not adequately support foster-to-adopt placements, does not recognise the emotional and practical impacts of fertility treatment, and offers limited guidance to employers on managing parental leave cycles in a way that balances employee rights with operational continuity.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Key Recommendation
JACS and Jersey Business should develop clearer, targeted guidance and training to support employers and employees, tailored to recurring areas of misunderstanding and sector-specific issues, to ensure that the right information reaches the right audiences.

RECOMMENDATION 5
The Minister for Social Security should review and address these identified gaps by exploring amendments and supporting guidance that: extend paid leave to cover foster-to-adopt placements from the start of fostering; introduce compassionate leave provisions for fertility treatment; and issue clear best-practice guidance to help employers plan and manage parental leave in a fair, predictable and operationally sustainable manner.

Human Resources

As part of its evidence gathering the Sub-Panel sought the views of Human Resource organisations, in order to understand the practicalities of the implementation of the current law, asking particularly how the legislative changes have been received and implemented; their practical impact on employees and employers; and whether further adjustments or improvements are needed.

Stakeholders were specifically asked to provide feedback on benefits or challenges experienced as a result of the amendments; any unintended consequences that have arisen; and suggestions for further improvement or refinement of the legislation.

Six companies were contacted, with submissions received from HR Now and Virtual HR.

The Sub-Panel also contacted nine Jersey based law firms who specialised in employment law, seeking engagement from multiple practitioners within each firm. They did not receive a response to their request for submissions to the review.

HR Now

HR Now have operated in Jersey for 16 years, has nine employees and provides a variety of people and change management services. Their submission provides a front-line HR consultancy perspective, drawing on direct experience advising a broad range of Jersey employers on the implementation of the Island's family friendly amendments to the Employment Law. The evidence offers a candid assessment of how the legislation operates in practice, highlighting challenges around administrative complexity, operational disruption, and unintended behavioural consequences.

While clear support for the principle and purpose of family-friendly rights is expressed, the submission argues that the practical burden on employers, particularly small businesses and schools, has been significant, and in some cases counterproductive to the legislation's wider aims. It contends that the law's complexity, flexibility, and lack of procedural safeguards, have created difficulties in managing leave, staffing, and workplace morale, occasionally leading to misuse or misinterpretation of entitlements.

They therefore call for measured and balanced reform, advocating simplification of procedures, limits on the number of leave blocks, qualifying periods for new employees, and clearer rules governing the timing of parental leave. These adjustments, it argues, would help to restore equilibrium between supporting parents and maintaining sustainable business operations, ensuring that Jersey's family friendly framework remains fair, effective, and workable for both employers and employees.

The policy is described as "complex", with numerous deadlines, options, and procedural requirements that create confusion and impose heavy administrative workloads on employers. The flexibility afforded to parents, such as multi-block leave, day-one entitlements, and unstructured parental sharing, is said to come at a high operational and financial cost to businesses. The difficulty of finding temporary cover in a tight recruitment market has compounded these challenges, especially for small employers and sole traders.

A key example is cited of a two-person retail business that closed its physical shop after struggling to absorb parental leave absences, illustrating what the HR Now calls a "real-world consequence" of well-intentioned policy design.

Key Issues Identified

Multi-Block Leave Arrangements

- The provision allowing up to three blocks of leave is seen as impractical and disruptive.
- Employers cannot recruit temporary cover for short intermittent periods, resulting in other staff being overworked or businesses operating below capacity.
- The author suggests limiting leave to two blocks or reviewing whether three blocks provide any tangible benefit to parents.

Impact in Education

- The education sector is highlighted as particularly affected, with claims that some staff "manipulate" leave timing to coincide with end-of-term or exam periods, disadvantaging pupils and colleagues.
- The submission alleges that this behaviour contributes to staff turnover and disruption in schools.
- Private schools are noted as having introduced conditional enhanced parental leave policies, aligning leave with school term dates to improve planning and continuity.
- Recommendation: mandate similar term-aligned leave rules for all schools (e.g., mothers return at the start of a term; partners take leave only at term boundaries).

Low Uptake and Misuse of Leave

- Most Parent 2 (secondary parent) employees only take the six paid weeks; fewer than 10% take unpaid leave.
- Some secondary parents reportedly curtail or reschedule leave due to practical difficulties caring for newborns.
- The author suggests that shared leave is often used separately by parents to maximise childcare coverage rather than joint family time—undermining the policy's stated intent.
- Anecdotal cases of misuse or confusion (e.g., questions over who qualifies as "Parent 2") are cited, with a recommendation that parental identities be confirmed earlier via official documentation before benefit payment.

Day-One Entitlement Concerns

- The "day-one" right to parental leave is flagged as highly problematic for employers, particularly where new hires request leave immediately after starting a job.
- The author cites multiple client cases where secondary parents sought six weeks' paid leave within their first month of employment, creating tension, low morale, and probation failures.
- Recommendation: introduce a six-month qualifying period for Parent 2 leave entitlement in new roles.

Emerging Employer Workarounds

- Some larger employers are reportedly offering incremental leave alternatives, e.g. allowing secondary parents to take their six weeks' entitlement as one day per week over six months.
- This is described as less disruptive to business operations and beneficial to families but may inadvertently establish new customary work patterns or future flexible working claims.

Return-to-Work and Flexible Working Issues

- Adjusting to part-time or flexible hours at the end of leave remains difficult for many businesses.
- The author recommends requiring earlier notice (well before the current 42 days) for employees wishing to change their work pattern on return, allowing employers more planning time.
- The letter also raises concerns about the misuse of flexible working applications (FWAs), describing a trend of FWAs being "weaponised" as dispute tools in employment conflicts.
- HRNow's position is that employers now tend to refuse formal requests on legal grounds first, then offer informal trials to avoid legal risk.
- Suggestion: JACS should publish data on FWA success rates to better assess the balance between legitimate flexibility and procedural misuse.

Illustrative Anecdotes and Examples

The submission includes several anecdotal examples illustrating perceived flaws or misapplications of the law:

- A retail shop closure linked to parental leave pressures.
- Teaching staff using leave opportunistically near school holidays.
- A rumoured misuse case involving a parent exploiting Jersey's paid leave rules for personal convenience.

While anecdotal, these examples are used to underline the argument that the current policy is vulnerable to misuse or unintended consequences.

FINDING 10
HR Now contends that the law's complexity, flexibility, and lack of procedural safeguards, has created confusion and difficulties in managing leave, staffing, and workplace morale, occasionally leading to misuse or misinterpretation of entitlements.

RECOMMENDATION 6
All official guidance should be reviewed in the Q1 and Q2 2026 to ensure the law is being communicated as effectively as possible.

FINDING 11
HR Now suggests that limiting leave to two blocks or reviewing whether three blocks provide any tangible benefit to parents.

RECOMMENDATION 7
The Minister for Social Security should instruct JACS to undertake a consultation to understand the value of the block leave system and the benefits and/or disadvantages of current leave structure and assess how remaining leave can be transferred when employees move employers.

Virtual HR

The Sub-Panel received a submission from Virtual HR, an independent consultancy representing employers across a broad range of sectors including finance, hospitality, construction, technology, and professional services. The submission reflected the experiences of predominantly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), offering a balanced, evidence-based view of how Jersey's family friendly legislation is operating in practice.

Virtual HR reported that the legislation is generally effective and well-received, with most employers describing it as fair, workable, and supportive of employees at key stages of family life. Employers highlighted positive impacts on staff morale, retention, and workplace culture, noting that enhanced rights for parents had fostered goodwill and strengthened employer–employee relationships.

However, the submission also identified practical challenges, particularly for smaller businesses that face difficulties covering long parental absences or accommodating flexible working requests within limited staffing structures. While these challenges were described as manageable, employers cautioned that any future extension of family friendly rights should be accompanied by targeted support or differentiation for smaller employers to maintain business sustainability.

Virtual HR also recommended a review of the language used in legislation and guidance, urging a shift toward fully gender-neutral and inclusive terminology to reflect modern family structures and promote equality. Overall, the submission concluded that Jersey's current framework strikes an appropriate balance between employee protection and employer practicality, and that future reforms should prioritise inclusivity, clarity, and proportionality rather than further expansion of entitlements.

FINDING 12
Virtual HR cautioned that any future extension of family friendly rights should be accompanied by targeted support or differentiation for smaller employers to maintain business sustainability.

FINDING 13
Virtual HR, alongside Liberate, recommend a review of the language used in legislation and guidance, urging a shift toward fully gender-neutral and inclusive terminology to reflect modern family structures and promote equality.

RECOMMENDATION 8: Key Recommendation
The Minister for Social Security should revise the language and terminology used in the current legislation and associated guidance to ensure gender-neutrality and inclusive terminology and ensure the language reflects the breadth of familial relationships in Jersey.

National Education Union Jersey

The National Education Union (NEU) Jersey reports that Jersey's family friendly legislation has had a positive cultural impact within the education sector, particularly by strengthening parent–infant bonding, supporting staff wellbeing and creating a more caring employment environment. These benefits are viewed as significant and aligned with a broader shift towards more compassionate workplace practices.

However, the Union highlights serious operational challenges for schools when staff take parental leave. Education settings, especially secondary schools, struggle to secure qualified temporary cover, most acutely for specialist subjects. As a result, existing teachers and school leaders frequently absorb additional workload, taking on extra teaching, pastoral duties, or leadership responsibilities, sometimes without additional support. This places substantial pressure on staff and can affect both wellbeing and the continuity and quality of education for pupils.

While many employers across sectors reported difficulties covering extended leave, these pressures are amplified in schools due to the need for subject specialists, fixed timetables, statutory pupil–teacher ratios, and safeguarding requirements. Schools also have a predominantly female workforce of child-bearing age, increasing the likelihood of concurrent leave and flexible working requests, further compounding staffing challenges.

Unlike other sectors that proposed tightening the legislation or adjusting leave structures, the NEU's primary recommendation is to increase overall staffing capacity in education. They argue that expanding the pool of qualified teachers, improving supply pipelines and increasing resourcing would help schools manage parental leave more sustainably and reduce the workload burden on remaining staff, many of whom are parents themselves.

In summary, the education sector strongly supports the aims of the family friendly legislation but faces uniquely acute operational pressures that directly affect both staff and pupils. Their evidence underscores the need for sector-specific solutions that address workforce shortages and capacity constraints, ensuring that family friendly rights can be delivered without compromising educational quality or staff wellbeing.

FINDING 14
Family friendly legislation has had a positive impact on new parents employed within the education sector. Extended parental leave has strengthened bonding opportunities between parents and their babies, improved infant wellbeing, and contributed to a more caring and supportive employment environment.

FINDING 15
Schools, particularly secondary schools, face serious difficulties attracting suitably qualified replacement staff, especially subject specialists. As a result, existing teachers and school leaders often absorb substantial additional workload when a colleague goes on leave. This places considerable pressure on remaining staff, who may have to take on extra teaching, pastoral duties or leadership responsibilities, sometimes without additional support.

FINDING 16
Small businesses, specialist providers and childcare settings, reported struggles in securing temporary staff, often resulting in reduced services or increased pressure on existing teams. The current framework can be highly disruptive to small operations; the administrative and staffing pressures associated with parental leave make it increasingly difficult for small firms to take on new employees or apprentices.

Personal experience*: small business owner*

A small business owner provided a submission expressing significant concerns about the practical impact of Jersey's family friendly legislation on very small employers and sole traders. They described the current framework as highly disruptive to small operations, highlighting that the administrative and staffing pressures associated with parental leave make it increasingly difficult for small firms to take on new employees or apprentices. They noted that this sentiment is shared by other small business owners they have discussed the issue with, and reported that some employers are now reluctant to hire young staff due to perceived risk and uncertainty.

The submission emphasised the financial strain of providing six weeks' paid leave without government support, combined with the need to keep a position open for up to a year of unpaid leave, which may be taken in blocks over a two-year period. The employer explained that covering a prolonged absence requires hiring and training another member of staff, only to potentially dismiss them when the original employee returns, which they viewed as unworkable for small teams.

The employer also questioned the absence of a qualifying period before new employees become entitled to parental leave. They expressed concern that staff could theoretically announce a pregnancy very soon after starting work, which they feel creates additional risk for very small workplaces that rely on stable staffing.

The submission also raised concerns about how some employees have chosen to use the paid parental leave. The business reported that two fathers had opted not to take the six-week period immediately after the birth, instead taking two weeks at the time of birth and then using the remaining entitlement later as what the employer viewed as extended holiday. They felt this created tension among other staff and did not reflect the intention of the leave. They argued that if the six-week leave entitlement remains in place, it should be mandated to be taken at the time of birth and not split or deferred.

They stressed the need for the submission to remain anonymous, noting that perceptions around parental leave can be contentious. While strongly supportive of long leave periods for mothers, the employer expressed the view that extended paternal leave should not come at significant cost to small businesses.

Personal experience: *small business owner*

A small construction company, employing fewer than ten staff, provided evidence describing the severe financial and operational strain caused by the introduction of six weeks paid parental leave. As a very small employer, the business reported that having two employees take parental leave within the same year, equating to one-third of their workforce, placed them under significant pressure, leaving them short staffed for an extended period and struggling to meet workload demands.

The employer explained that, although the Government parental allowance provided some support, it did not come close to covering the employees' full salaries, especially given the high cost of living in Jersey. To ensure staff could afford to take the leave, the company felt compelled to top up the Government payment to each employee's usual wage. This resulted in the business paying for staff who were not generating any revenue during their absence, creating a substantial financial burden.

The submission highlights that this level of cost is unsustainable for very small businesses, with the employer stating that experiencing another period of parental leave of this scale "***would risk the company folding***." They stressed that while they recognise the value of enhanced parental leave for families, the current model places disproportionate strain on micro-businesses.

The employer suggested that a more workable approach would be for Government to fund the full salary of employees during the paid parental leave period, rather than only providing a partial allowance. They emphasised that their experience may not reflect all businesses, but for companies of their size, the current arrangements are extremely challenging.

Personal perspective: *workplace practices*

Deputy Elaine Millar contributed to the review and shared perspectives about the practical challenges and cultural dynamics surrounding flexible working and family friendly policies in Jersey. Deputy Millar emphasised broad support for improving the working conditions of parents, particularly women, but also highlighted concerns about fairness, workplace cohesion, and the unintended pressures placed on colleagues.

A key theme was the perception of inequity when flexibility is granted predominantly to parents. Deputy Millar noted that in some workplaces employees without children, including many men, feel they are taking on additional workloads to compensate for colleagues working reduced or adjusted hours. This was described as a growing source of frustration and a risk to workplace harmony, stressing that flexibility should be available more consistently to all staff, including those with other caring responsibilities or personal pressures, and not limited to parenting alone.

Deputy Millar also explored the practical barriers employers face when implementing flexible working. While recognising the benefits, it was acknowledged that making flexibility the "default" could be difficult for some organisations, particularly where business needs restrict part-time or compressed-hour arrangements. The discussion highlighted the need for clearer, more authoritative guidance, potentially from Government or JACS, to help employers apply flexibility fairly and transparently, while also safeguarding employees from overwork, particularly when compressed hours lead to excessively long days.

The Deputy highlighted the importance of ensuring that family friendly policies are fair, inclusive, and sustainable, supporting parents while also maintaining equity for colleagues, clarity for employers, and cohesion in the workplace.

Summary of themes

Across all submissions received from employer organisations and HR professionals, there was broad and consistent support for the principles underpinning Jersey's family friendly employment legislation. Employers recognised the social value and cultural importance of policies that enable parents to balance work and family life, and many noted that the reforms had improved staff morale, retention, and workplace inclusivity. Larger employers and those with established HR functions described the framework as manageable and broadly effective, and several reported voluntarily offering enhanced leave or flexible working arrangements beyond the statutory minimum.

At the same time, employers emphasised the need for balance and proportionality in how family friendly rights are applied and developed. Common concerns included the financial and operational strain placed on small and medium-sized enterprises when covering extended absences, the complexity and administrative burden of the current provisions, and the practical challenges of accommodating multiple or flexible leave blocks. Several submissions also raised issues around day-one entitlements, staffing shortages, and the potential for inconsistent or opportunistic use of leave in certain sectors such as education.

Employers were generally aligned in cautioning against further extensions to statutory entitlements without accompanying support measures for smaller businesses, such as financial assistance, guidance, or scaled obligations. Both the IoD and Virtual HR also highlighted the importance of inclusive and gender-neutral language within the legislation to ensure it reflects modern family structures and supports gender equality.

Overall, the employer evidence reflects a constructive and pragmatic consensus: that Jersey's family friendly legislation has been successful in intent and positive in cultural impact, but that its complexity, cost implications, and implementation challenges warrant careful review. Future refinements, they argued, should focus on clarity, inclusivity, and practical sustainability to ensure the framework continues to work effectively for both families and the Island's diverse business community.

Experience of Parents/Employees

Engagement with Families, Parents and Carers

From the outset, the Sub-Panel was determined that this review should reflect the real-world experiences of those directly affected by Jersey's family friendly employment legislation. Recognising that policies of this kind can only be properly evaluated through the voices of those living and working under them, the Sub-Panel made it a priority to hear from as many families, parents, and carers as possible, representing the full breadth of Jersey's community.

To achieve this, the Sub-Panel undertook a comprehensive and inclusive programme of engagement, combining formal evidence gathering with direct outreach into the community. A six-week public survey specifically targeted at parents and carers was launched to capture the lived experiences of Islanders navigating parental leave, flexible working, childcare, and workplace support. This was complemented by a series of public pop-up events held in community spaces such as libraries and supermarkets, designed to provide an accessible and informal forum where Islanders could share their views openly and honestly.

Alongside these initiatives, the Sub-Panel made extensive use of social media and public communications to encourage participation and to ensure that Islanders from all backgrounds had an opportunity to contribute. The Panel also reached out directly to parenting groups, family support organisations, childcare providers, and third-sector services that work with new and expectant parents, inviting written submissions and holding public hearings with groups that play a key role in supporting families across the Island.

This approach was guided by the Sub-Panel's commitment to achieving a balanced and representative evidence base, ensuring that the perspectives of both employees and employers were heard and fairly reflected. In particular, the Sub-Panel sought to understand the challenges and pressures of raising a family in Jersey, alongside the aspects of the legislation and wider social infrastructure that are working well.

By prioritising engagement with those directly impacted by the law, the Sub-Panel aimed to ground its findings in authentic, lived experience and to highlight how family friendly policies operate in practice - not just on paper. The voices and stories shared through this process have been invaluable in shaping the Sub-Panel's conclusions and recommendations.

The Sub-Panel wishes to acknowledge the openness and honesty of those who took part, whose contributions have ensured that this report provides an evidence-based and realistic assessment of the legislation's impact and offers constructive feedback to the Minister with the shared goal of achieving positive and practical change where it is needed most.

Survey responses

A central element of the Sub-Panel's evidence-gathering process was a survey aimed at parents and carers, designed to capture first-hand experiences of family life and employment since the introduction of the 2018 and 2020 amendments to Jersey's Employment Law. The Sub-Panel felt strongly that this method provided the most effective and inclusive way to reach a broad section of Jersey's families, provided it was well promoted and widely disseminated across the Island.

The survey was therefore publicised through multiple channels, including social media, community groups, parenting networks, and family support organisations, to ensure that all parents and carers had an opportunity to share their views. The Sub-Panel's intention was to enable Islanders to freely express their experiences, positive or negative, without constraint, ensuring that their voices and perspectives could meaningfully inform the review.

The survey ran from 9 June to 21 July 2025 and received a total of 437 responses. It was open to parents and carers who had children born since the introduction of the legislative changes and sought to understand how the amendments had affected their experiences of parental leave, flexible working, workplace support, and childcare.

The survey consisting of 27 questions, designed to be balanced, accessible, and comprehensive while avoiding an onerous process for respondents. The survey combined quantitative questions with open-ended sections to allow participants to elaborate on their experiences in their own words. These written responses proved particularly valuable, offering authentic insight into how the family friendly legislation is working in practice for families across Jersey.

A total of 428 respondents reported having at least one child aged between newborn and seven years old, meaning their experiences directly relate to the period since the legislation was introduced. The survey also sought examples of good employer practice, recognising that effective family friendly policies rely on collaboration and understanding between employers and employees.

The survey was written in clear, inclusive language to encourage open and honest participation. Its conversational tone and straightforward format helped ensure broad engagement, including from those who may not usually take part in formal consultations. A mix of multiple-choice questions and free-text opportunities enabled the Sub-Panel to gather both measurable data and rich narrative evidence.

The 27 questions followed a logical flow, moving from general to specific themes, including:

- Demographics and awareness of family friendly legislation.
- Knowledge of employment rights, such as parental leave and breastfeeding provisions.
- Experiences of leave, employer communication, and government benefits.
- Challenges and barriers when planning or taking leave.
- Employer support and workplace culture, including flexibility and facilities.
- Suggestions for policy improvement.
- Reflective questions, including prompts about what respondents wished they had known before starting leave.

Free-text sections throughout the survey were deliberately included to capture nuance and context, allowing parents and carers to describe their real-life experiences, challenges, and suggestions in greater depth. This combination of statistical evidence and personal testimony has significantly strengthened the review's evidence base.

The Sub-Panel extends its sincere gratitude to all participants. Their willingness to share candid reflections has ensured that the review is rooted firmly in real-world experiences, highlighting both the successes and the ongoing challenges of family life and employment under Jersey's current legislation.

Survey Limitations and interpretation

As with all voluntary surveys, responses reflect the experiences of those who chose to participate, and individuals with particularly positive or negative experiences may have been more inclined to respond. The findings therefore provide meaningful insight but should not be taken as representative of all families in Jersey.

The Sub-Panel carefully distinguished between quantitative trends and qualitative accounts. While the free-text responses are not statistically representative, they offer powerful illustrative evidence, highlighting recurring themes and helping to contextualise the quantitative data. Given the wide variation in family circumstances, employment sectors, childcare access, and workplace cultures, analysis of these comments focused on identifying consistent patterns rather than treating any single account as typical.

Overall, the Sub-Panel approached the survey's findings with balance and caution, ensuring that both data-driven trends and lived experiences informed the conclusions and recommendations presented in this review.

Main themes

The survey responses reveal a consistent and compelling picture of the pressures faced by families in Jersey when navigating maternity/parental leave, childcare, and the return to work. Across hundreds of detailed comments, parents repeatedly described an environment where structural constraints, particularly the high cost of childcare, limited availability of places, inflexible working arrangements, and gaps in government communication, shape family decisions and frequently determine whether, when, and how parents return to work at all.

Childcare availability and cost are the most dominant concerns

Across the responses, one theme overshadows all others: the affordability and availability of childcare for children under 3. Many parents described childcare fees as equivalent to, or greater than, a mortgage payment, leaving households with no disposable income or forcing one parent, most often the mother, to exit the workforce entirely. Parents reported:

- paying *£1,700–£2,500 per month* per child for nursery care
- waiting lists exceeding *12–18 months*
- needing to register for places while still pregnant
- no affordable or flexible options for shift workers
- financial strain so severe that some families are leaving Jersey altogether

Several parents noted that the cost of childcare alone determines family size, with many explicitly stating that they cannot afford to have a second child.

Reliance on grandparents is widespread - but not universal

A very large proportion of respondents rely heavily on grandparents to make childcare viable. For many, grandparent support is what enables them to work at all. However, the responses also highlight inequity: those without family on-island are at a significant disadvantage. These parents frequently described exhaustion, financial strain, and a sense of being "penalised" by policies that implicitly assume extended family availability.

This finding supports the arguments for:

- transferable or extended leave to grandparents
- tax allowances or recognition for informal caregivers
- more universal childcare solutions.

Returning to work is extremely challenging, logistically, emotionally, and financially

Parents consistently described the return to work as one of the most difficult periods of their lives. Many felt forced back earlier than they wanted due to financial necessity. Challenges included:

- juggling nursery hours that do not align with working hours
- lack of paid leave for child illness (frequent in the first year of nursery)
- significant stress, sleep deprivation, and mental health strain
- needing to condense hours, work evenings or weekends, or take multiple part-time jobs

- feeling pushed out by employers unwilling to accommodate flexible working.

For many mothers, especially, the return to work brought feelings of guilt, burnout and emotional distress, with some reporting anxiety, PTSD or postnatal depression.

Workplace flexibility varies dramatically - and is often absent

Experiences of flexible working were highly inconsistent. Some respondents reported supportive employers, particularly within parts of the public sector. However, many others, especially in teaching, finance, hospitality and healthcare, reported:

- rigid refusal of part-time or flexible requests
- fear of discrimination or negative treatment after maternity leave
- managers lacking knowledge of parental rights
- expectations to work “as normal” despite caring responsibilities.

For shift workers, nurses, teachers and single parents, rigid workplace expectations often made family life unmanageable.

Complexity and confusion around entitlements is a recurring problem

A strong and repeated theme is lack of clear information and guidance about parental rights, benefits, social security contributions, and available support. Many parents only learned about key entitlements (such as Home Responsibility Protection or parental grants) through friends, charities or by chance. Several described:

- receiving conflicting information
- having no roadmap or guidance at the start of maternity leave
- not understanding how leave affects pensions or social security
- being unaware of support available for childcare or low-income households.

This reinforces the Sub-Panel’s finding that no coordinated Government communications strategy exists to ensure families understand their rights.

Nursery policies (closures, sickness rules, term-time funding) exacerbate hardship

Parents frequently raised issues such as:

- paying full nursery fees even when the child is ill
- nurseries closing between Christmas and New Year
- term-time only NEF funding disadvantaging children born later in the year
- nurseries reducing opening hours without compensation
- no provision for shift workers
- lack of regulation or consistent standards.

These issues significantly amplify the cost of childcare and deepen work-life pressures.

Families report deep financial strain, even when both parents work full time

A clear narrative emerges of parents working full-time or multiple jobs yet still struggling. Themes included:

- nursery fees absorbing an entire salary
- mortgage increases compounding childcare costs

- reliance on food banks or income support despite being employed
- delaying or abandoning plans for additional children
- being unable to save, travel, or maintain a basic quality of life

Several respondents explicitly stated that the economics of family life in Jersey are unsustainable.

Strong demand for expanded government support—especially earlier subsidised childcare

Parents overwhelmingly called for:

- free or subsidised childcare starting from 1 or 2 years old, not 3
- earlier access to NEF hours
- more nursery spaces
- tax relief or vouchers
- employer incentives for onsite or partner-provided childcare
- extended or better-paid parental leave
- transferable leave for grandparents
- more flexible working rights
- paid leave for child illness

These requests reflect a universal desire for a more modern, affordable, flexible system like those in Sweden, the UK (9 months childcare expansion), Norway or New Zealand.

Mental health impacts on parents, especially mothers, are significant

Many respondents described:

- postnatal depression
- anxiety or PTSD
- overwhelming stress from balancing work, childcare and sleep deprivation
- lack of adequate postpartum mental health support

Several felt they returned to work long before they were emotionally or physically ready, often due to financial pressure.

Inequities between employers are stark

Some parents enjoyed six months' full pay, flexible hours and supportive reintegration. Others:

- received minimal statutory pay
- were pressured, sidelined or pushed out
- had requests ignored
- experienced poor breastfeeding support
- were denied flexible working
- faced discrimination or stigma

This inconsistency resulted in dramatically different experiences across the Island.

Overall Summary

The survey responses paint a clear and consistent picture: Jersey's parents are experiencing severe strain when balancing childcare, family life and employment. While parental leave rights are widely valued, the system that surrounds them, particularly childcare affordability, flexible working, and clear communication of entitlements, is failing many families. The cumulative effect is reduced workforce participation, delayed or abandoned family planning, and a growing sense that raising young children in Jersey is becoming economically and emotionally unsustainable.

The evidence strongly suggests that substantial early-years investment, expanded childcare support, improved employer guidance, and enhanced communication of rights are essential to improving family life and retaining young families on the Island.

FINDING 17
Many parents described childcare fees as equivalent to, or greater than, a mortgage payment, leaving households with no disposable income or forcing one parent, most often the mother, to exit the workforce entirely.

RECOMMENDATION 9
The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning should undertake consultation to assess the effectiveness of the proposed 15-hour extension to nursery provision to consider the benefit of extending this in line with standard part-time contracts to support transition back into the workplace.

FINDING 18: Key finding
Several parents noted that the cost of childcare alone determines family size, with many explicitly stating that they cannot afford to have a second child, and that the economics of family life in Jersey are unsustainable.

FINDING 19
Many parents describe the return to work as one of the most difficult periods of their lives, feeling forced back earlier than they wanted due to financial necessity.

FINDING 20
For shift workers, nurses, teachers and single parents, rigid workplace expectations often made family life unmanageable.

FINDING 21: Key finding
There is strong and repeated theme of lack of clear information and guidance about parental rights, benefits, social security contributions, and available support. Many parents only learned about key entitlements (such as Home Responsibility Protection or parental grants) through friends, charities or by chance.

Evidence from family support services

Best Start Partnership

The Best Start Partnership work together for babies, young children and their families to ensure that every child has the opportunity to thrive in their earliest years. They work across traditional boundaries between government departments and partner agencies in the public, private, voluntary, and community sectors. Together, drawing on the voices of babies, young children and their families, they aim to drive change in early years, implement new approaches, deliver pilot programmes, and develop new ways for different departments and services to work together.

Best Start Partnership provided a submission emphasising the importance of aligning Jersey's family friendly policies with the growing body of evidence on the critical developmental period of the first 1,001 days of a child's life. They expressed support for the recent changes to parental leave and flexible working rights but stressed that these reforms do not yet go far enough to meet what research and best practice indicate young children and families need.

> "If we truly want to give children the best start in life, parental leave must reflect what we know about the first 1,001 days, Familles need real choice, financial security, and the ability to be at home during this critical developmental window. No parent should be penalised for doing what is best for their child."

The Partnership strongly advocated for a significant extension of parental leave, recommending that parents be offered the genuine option to remain at home with their children for up to two years, supported by financial measures that would make this feasible for ordinary families. They suggested that this should include protection of parents' Social Security contribution records during this period so that staying at home does not adversely affect future entitlements. The intention, they explained, is to ensure that families do not have to choose between financial security and providing home-based care during the most formative stage of a child's development. The submission also acknowledged the pressures families face, including the cost of living, employment demands and the desire to maintain career progression, and argued that giving parents flexibility and support to choose the best form of early care is crucial.

Although the Partnership does not yet hold its own data on the impact of extended leave or flexible working, they highlighted their involvement in launching a Parental Childcare Survey, which is intended to generate new evidence on family needs and experiences in Jersey. They also supported further work to examine barriers affecting fathers and parents with protected characteristics in accessing their rights.

Overall, the submission underscores a perspective rooted in child development and early years research, calling for more ambitious parental leave provision and wider financial and social supports to ensure that families can provide stable, nurturing care during the earliest and most important stage of their child's life.

Key Themes

The First 1,001 Days as a Critical Window of Development

A central theme of the submission is the importance of the first 1,001 days, a theme underpinning this review, from conception to age two, as a period of rapid neurological, emotional and social development. The Partnership emphasised that family friendly policies must reflect the scientific understanding that these early experiences have profound and lasting consequences for a child's health, wellbeing and life outcomes. This framing positions parental leave and early childcare options not simply as employment matters, but as significant public health and early years priorities.

Need for Substantial Extension of Parental Leave

Reflecting this child-development focus, the Partnership advocated for significantly longer parental leave, ideally allowing parents the choice to remain at home with their child for up to two years. They argued that this would help ensure emotional security, strong attachment, and early stability for infants, while reducing parental stress. This theme aligns with feedback elsewhere in the review from parents who reported returning to work earlier than they felt ready due to financial pressure.

Recognition of Diverse Family Needs

The Partnership acknowledged that families face a range of competing pressures, including cost of living, job security, and career progression, which affect decisions about childcare and returning to work. They argued that flexibility and choice are essential so that families can select arrangements that best meet their child's needs and align with their circumstances. This theme resonates with broader evidence across the review that families in Jersey often feel constrained rather than supported in the early stages of parenthood.

Future Data and Research from Ongoing Work

The Partnership noted its involvement in delivering a Parental Childcare Survey, which will provide new data on family needs, childcare arrangements and early years experiences in Jersey. This demonstrates a commitment to improving the evidence base and supports the Sub-Panel's conclusion that more local, robust data is essential for shaping effective family friendly policy.

Supporting Fathers and Underrepresented Groups

A further theme is the importance of addressing barriers that prevent fathers and parents with protected characteristics from fully accessing their rights. The Partnership expressed interest in further research in this area and highlighted the importance of equitable access to family friendly provisions.

The Best Start Partnership's submission places early child development at the centre of the discussion about family friendly legislation. It calls for more ambitious policy, longer parental leave, and financial structures that enable parents to make decisions based on what is best for their child rather than on economic necessity. This perspective adds an important child-focused lens to the review and complements the lived experiences shared by many parents across Jersey.

Citizens Advice Jersey

The Citizens Advice Jersey (CAJ) reported that most enquiries they receive relating to the family friendly legislation come from working parents or parents-to-be, rather than employers. Their role is often to help individuals understand their rights under the Employment Law and, where appropriate, signpost them to JACS for more detailed employment advice.

CAJ highlighted that parents working in construction, hospitality and agriculture appear to benefit the least from the amended legislation. They described a pattern of cases in which some employers in these sectors have penalised or disadvantaged workers who request or take parental leave. According to their experience, several individuals have faced dismissal, bullying, or poor treatment connected directly to their use, or attempted use, of family friendly rights.

CAJ emphasised that this behaviour has, in some cases, resulted in parents experiencing significant stress, deterioration in mental health, or strain on personal relationships. They also noted that affected workers rarely pursue matters through the Jersey Employment and Discrimination Tribunal, suggesting that these issues may be under-reported and not visible through formal dispute mechanisms.

The submission included anonymised examples illustrating these concerns, such as:

- an employee dismissed shortly before taking paternity leave, allegedly due to "insufficient work"
- a pregnant employee refused time off for antenatal appointments, who later went into early labour
- a partner told incorrectly by a small employer that paternity rights only applied to larger firms.

CAJ stressed that such misunderstandings, and in some cases, wilful misinformation, reflect gaps in employer awareness, weak compliance with the legislation, and lack of accountability in certain sectors.

Overall, the CAJ submission provides important insight into the lived experiences of vulnerable workers, highlighting pockets of poor practice, employer non-compliance, and the uneven accessibility of family friendly rights across Jersey's workforce.

The submission adds a unique and important dimension to the review, complementing the perspectives of parents, carers, support organisations and community groups. While many individuals described personal experiences of juggling childcare, financial pressure, and workplace responses to parental leave, the CAJ evidence provides a broader, system-level view of patterns of issues faced by vulnerable workers who seek help when things go wrong. This enables a comparison between individual experience, frontline support insight, and structural trends.

Consistency With Other Evidence: Uneven Access to Rights

Across survey responses, pop-up events, and written submissions, many parents reported that their experience of family friendly rights depended heavily on:

- the sector they worked in
- the attitude of their employer
- the availability of HR guidance
- the presence or absence of workplace culture that values families.

The CAJ's evidence strongly reinforces this pattern, particularly in identifying construction, hospitality and agriculture as the sectors where rights are least accessible, mirroring what parents themselves mentioned in pop-up engagement and free-text survey comments.

CAJ's cases show that in some of these sectors, lack of access is not just accidental or cultural but may involve active discouragement, misinformation, or punitive treatment of employees seeking to assert their rights.

Stronger Emphasis on Employer Non-Compliance

Unlike most parent submissions, which tend to focus on personal experiences, financial pressures, and challenges around returning to work, CAJ offers multiple examples of clear breaches or attempted breaches of the Employment Law, including:

- dismissal linked to parental leave
- refusal to allow statutory antenatal appointments
- misrepresentation of legal entitlements
- bullying or poor treatment of pregnant employees.

Other organisations, such as Brighter Futures, have raised similar concerns about poor employer behaviour, but CAJ is the clearest in providing repeated evidence that a minority of employers are not complying with the law, either through ignorance or intentional avoidance.

This perspective highlights that while the legislation sets out universal rights, actual compliance varies widely, and vulnerable workers often lack the confidence or resources to challenge mistreatment.

Overlap With Community Pop-Up Themes: Mental Health Impacts

Parents who attended the Sub-Panel's pop-up sessions spoke about the emotional strain of returning to work early, financial pressure, and the stress of navigating childcare amplifies this theme by providing real-world cases where:

- employment disputes
- insecure working arrangements
- improper denial of rights
- fear of job loss.

have directly contributed to anxiety, stress, and deteriorating mental health. This creates a clear consistency across the evidence base: when employers fail to uphold family friendly rights, the consequences extend beyond work and can significantly affect family stability and wellbeing.

Lack of Formal Dispute Resolution: A Hidden Problem?

CAJ notes that many of the problematic cases they see never reach the Employment and Discrimination Tribunal, either because:

- workers fear retaliation,
- they cannot afford prolonged disputes,
- they lack legal confidence,
- or they simply want to move on.

This suggests that official statistics may under-represent the scale of parental leave-related disputes. This contrasts with submissions from professional HR bodies and employer groups (JACS, IoD, Chamber of Commerce, HR consultancies) which generally view the legislation through a more formal, compliance-oriented lens. CAJ's evidence shows that vulnerable workers can fall through the cracks, and that good policy is not always matched by good practice.

Distinct Focus on Low-Paid and Precarious Workers

While many parents who responded to the Sub-Panel's survey were from a range of income groups, CAJ's client base largely comprises:

- low-paid workers
- shift workers
- migrant employees

- those with insecure contracts.

This perspective adds critical balance to the review by highlighting forms of disadvantage that are less visible in employer submissions or from families with more secure employment.

Whereas many survey respondents reported struggles with childcare costs or accessing flexible working, CAJ's clients often struggle with baseline rights enforcement, revealing a different tier of challenge within the workforce.

Alignment With Other Frontline Organisations

There is strong convergence between CAJ's insights and those from:

- Brighter Futures (particularly regarding misinformation and inconsistent employer practice)
- The Best Start Partnership (regarding barriers to mental health and early attachment)
- Community organisations who reported examples of parents being treated unfairly when requesting leave or flexibility.

Together, these frontline perspectives indicate that while the statutory framework is sound, implementation and employer education remain inconsistent, especially in male-dominated, low-wage or small-business sectors.

The Citizens Advice Jersey's evidence provides a valuable corrective to the assumption that all employers understand, comply with, and support family friendly legislation. Compared with other parent and employee evidence, CAJ highlights:

- **greater levels of employer non-compliance**
- **more severe consequences for vulnerable workers**
- **sector-specific issues in hospitality, construction and agriculture**
- **under-reporting of disputes**
- **the mental health and relationship impact of poorly handled parental leave**

This submission reinforces the need for improved communication, employer guidance, enforcement, and proactive support, particularly for workers in insecure or low-paid roles who are least empowered to assert their rights.

FINDING 22
Most CAJ enquiries relating to the family friendly legislation come from working parents or parents-to-be, not employers.

FINDING 23: Key finding
Evidence from CAJ shows repeated cases of parents in construction, hospitality and agriculture facing dismissal, bullying or other detriment after requesting parental leave. Because most do not pursue tribunal claims, this non-compliance remains largely hidden, suggesting significant under-reporting in contrast to JACS' view that disputes are minimal.

RECOMMENDATION 10
The Minister for Social Security should work with support agencies to develop a targeted programme to improve compliance with family friendly legislation in sectors where under-reporting appears most significant, namely construction, hospitality and agriculture. This should include proactive engagement with employers, clearer guidance, and confidential channels for workers to raise concerns without fear of reprisal. Strengthening monitoring and support in these sectors would help address hidden non-compliance and ensure that parents can safely exercise their rights.

FINDING 24
Wilful misinformation reflects gaps in employer awareness, weak compliance with the legislation, and lack of accountability in certain sectors.

FINDING 25: Key finding
Access to family friendly rights varies widely across Jersey, with the greatest problems in construction, hospitality and agriculture, where some employers discourage or penalise parents for using their entitlements. Despite universal statutory rights, compliance is inconsistent, and vulnerable workers often lack the confidence or means to challenge mistreatment, echoing patterns seen across survey and engagement feedback.

FINDING 26
When employers fail to uphold family friendly rights, the consequences extend beyond work and can significantly affect family stability and wellbeing.

Jersey Early Years Association (JEYA)

JEYA, representing childcare and early years settings across the Island, provided detailed evidence on the impacts of the family friendly legislation on young children, parents, and the early years sector. Their submission recognises the benefits the reforms have provided for families while also highlighting significant operational pressures and emerging developmental concerns among children.

JEYA noted that the extended parental leave provisions have allowed many families to spend a full year together, supporting secure attachments and enabling parents to make decisions based on their own needs and circumstances. The flexibility of the leave system is viewed as positive, with parents appreciating paid time off for antenatal care and the choice to stagger or share leave. However, the Association reported that many parents do not take their full entitlement, primarily due to financial constraints, which continues to impact decisions about returning to work.

Childcare providers have observed marked changes in children's developmental and emotional needs over the past several years. JEYA highlighted a rise in separation anxiety among children starting nursery, with children now typically entering childcare at around 12 months old rather than six months as was more common previously. They report that settling periods have become longer, with children showing increased difficulties in emotional regulation and social development. These changes, they argue, may reflect both the later age of entry and more protective parenting styles influenced by extended early caregiving. As a result, nurseries are experiencing greater pressure on staffing and resources, often requiring one-to-one support even where children do not have formally identified additional needs.

From a business perspective, the Association explained that family friendly rights create several operational challenges for early years providers. With the sector experiencing a workforce shortage, settings struggle to recruit temporary cover for parental leave. Employers are required to hold posts open for 12 months, resulting in vacancies being carried for extended periods and additional workload being absorbed by the existing team. Furthermore, because early years work is generally low-paid, many staff do not return after parental leave due to the cost of childcare outweighing their salary. This contributes to significant staff losses in a sector already under strain. Some settings attempt to support returning staff through discounted childcare, but JEYA notes that this is financially unsustainable for many providers.

JEYA emphasised that further extensions to parental leave could place nurseries at risk of financial instability, as later entry ages reduce revenue and threaten the viability of some settings. They argue that the greatest benefit to children, parents, and the economy would come from extending funded nursery hours to 30 hours per week for two-year-olds, rather than lengthening parental leave. In their view, enhanced childcare funding would support children's development, enable more parents to work, and provide stability for early years businesses.

Finally, JEYA requested that any future amendments to the legislation involve direct consultation with the sector, ensuring that reforms balance the needs of families with the operational realities faced by childcare providers.

FINDING 27
Nurseries are experiencing greater pressure on staffing and resources, often requiring one-to-one support even where children do not have formally identified additional needs, potentially impacting ability to operate a full service.

Jersey Child Care Trust

The Sub-Panel heard evidence from the Jersey Child Care Trust (JCCT) during a public hearing on the 14th July with the Trust's Executive Director Fiona Vacher.

JCCT plays a central role in supporting families through the earliest and most formative years of a child's life. As both a direct provider of programmes for families and a key support organisation for the early years sector, they help parents navigate childcare, strengthens the workforce through training and guidance, and advocates for children's and families' voices to be embedded in the design of local services. Guided by a vision that every child in Jersey should have access to the nurture, care and learning they need to thrive, JCCT's work is rooted in a mission to put families first and ensure that all children have the best possible start. Their strategic focus, identifying the needs of families, meeting those needs, and raising the resources required to do so, positions JCCT as a critical partner in understanding how family friendly legislation interacts with the lived experiences of children and parents across the Island.

JCCT's work supporting vulnerable families and children with developmental needs places them at the frontline of early years provision. Their testimony painted a vivid picture of how family friendly legislation interacts with the realities of childcare availability, financial pressure, and the early developmental needs of children in Jersey.

Ms Vacher explained that they support two main groups of families: those living in poverty and those whose children have developmental delays or disabilities. For both groups, the first years of life are a period of intense need and rapid development, yet they continue to face significant barriers in accessing childcare and sustaining stable employment. It was highlighted that although the legislation has enabled some parents to stay at home longer, particularly those on higher incomes, this choice is not available to all. Many low-income families cannot afford to take more than the initial six weeks of full pay, meaning that the extended parental leave entitlement exists "on paper rather than in practice" for a significant proportion of the population.

The hearing also highlighted a shift in childcare patterns: babies are now entering nursery later, typically around nine to twelve months, which can have positive developmental effects but places additional pressure on nurseries to manage the transition of older, more attached infants. However, this shift is heavily dependent on household income. JCCT stressed that families on low wages, zero-hour contracts or in sectors such as hospitality and care have little access to flexible working and often face extremely difficult decisions about balancing work and home life. Many described parents "playing tag team", working alternating shifts to avoid unaffordable childcare costs, with this pressure contributing to exhaustion and emotional strain within multi-generational households.

> "... the insight that I would have would be around the families that we are supporting, there is a real lack of access to flexible working in any shape or form. A lot of the parents that we are supporting are working in very low paid jobs, often in zero-hour contracts, often playing tag team with each other."

[18]

"In the care industry, for example, a mum and a dad would be one doing a night shift and then one might work part-time. But a 24-hour period could be a 12-hour night shift for one and a 12-hour day shift for the other. And the night shift is then caring for their child in the day …we have seen an increase from 3 or 4 parents in those circumstances going up now in terms of an increase in the number of parents that are working but still living in poverty and then working in very difficult circumstances."

A central theme of the evidence was the critical lack of nursery places, particularly for two-year-olds and for children with additional needs. Ms Vacher emphasised that this lack of provision, rather than funding, leaves many vulnerable children without early years support at the time they need it most. They also highlighted the structural gap between the end of parental leave and the start of nursery education funding, leaving families with little support during a crucial developmental period.

JCCT also spoke positively about emerging cultural changes, noting an increase in the number of fathers involved in school drop-offs and early years care. They cautioned against any policy shift towards shared-leave models that might inadvertently reduce fathers' direct entitlement, stressing the importance of maintaining a system that encourages equitable caregiving roles.

Underpinning their evidence was a strong belief in the importance of the first 1,001 days, when a child's brain develops at unprecedented speed. Ms Vacher emphasised that parental leave, childcare provision and family support policies must be coherent and accessible if they are to genuinely improve early life outcomes. They noted that while Jersey's legislation is progressive, families' ability to benefit from it remains heavily determined by income, job security and the availability of childcare.

Overall, JCCT's evidence highlighted both the strengths and limitations of the current system: the legislation has the potential to support nurturing early environments and greater gender equality in caregiving, but the impact is constrained by financial pressures, uneven access to flexible working, shortages of childcare places and the persistent inequalities experienced by families in poverty. Their testimony underscores the need for a more integrated, accessible

[18] HSSP-Sub-Panel-Public-Hearing-JCCT-2025-07-14.pdf

and equitable early years support framework that ensures *all* families, regardless of income or circumstance, can benefit from the protections and opportunities the law intends to provide.

FINDING 28
Evidence from support services indicates that many low-income families cannot afford to take parental leave beyond the initial six weeks of full pay. As a result, the extended parental leave entitlement exists largely ***"on paper rather than in practice"*** for a significant proportion of parents. Rather than reducing inequality, the current family friendly framework can inadvertently expose and reinforce existing cost-of-living pressures, with those on lower incomes least able to benefit from the rights available to them.

FINDING 29
Parents are "**playing tag team**", working alternating shifts to avoid unaffordable childcare costs, with this pressure contributing to exhaustion and emotional strain within households.

FINDING 30: Key finding
There is a structural 'early years gap' between the end of parental leave and the start of nursery education funding, leaving families with little support during a crucial developmental period.

FINDING 31
The Jersey Child Care Trust caution against any policy shift towards shared-leave models that might inadvertently reduce fathers' direct entitlement, stressing the importance of maintaining a system that encourages equitable caregiving roles.

RECOMMENDATION 11
The Minister for Social Security should ensure that any future reforms to parental or shared leave arrangements protect and strengthen fathers' individual, non-transferable entitlements. In line with the Jersey Child Care Trust's evidence, policy development should avoid models that dilute fathers' direct access to leave and instead reinforce equitable caregiving and shared responsibility in the early years.

Family Nursing and Home Care (FNHC)

FNHC are a Jersey charity, that raise money through donations, fundraising activities and legacies and are contracted by the Government of Jersey for the provision of services. Their ethos is to help Islanders start well, live well and age well.

They provide expert prenatal and parental care and support children, young people, families and the members of the community who need healthcare or support in their homes.

Their services range from the Baby Steps programme, Community Children's Nursing, School Nursing, Child Accident Prevention, District Nursing, Health Visiting, Home Care, Rapid Response and Reablement, Palliative Care and end of life care.

Rosemarie Finley, the FNHC Chief Executive Officer attended a public hearing with the Sub-Panel on the 16th July, and provided significant insights into how families experience Jersey's family friendly legislation, drawing on their unique role as the Island's universal provider of antenatal, postnatal and early childhood health services. FNHC potentially work with every family from pregnancy through to school age, giving them an unparalleled perspective on the pressures and needs facing new parents, particularly those who are vulnerable, financially insecure or coping with additional needs.

Ms Finley reported encouraging signs of positive cultural change, with more fathers attending antenatal education, participating actively in early caregiving and sharing responsibilities that historically fell solely to mothers. They also highlighted a significant increase in breastfeeding rates, describing a 4% rise in just six months as “unprecedented” and strongly linked to growing parental confidence and supportive workplace attitudes.

However, the evidence also revealed major challenges. Ms Finley stressed that financial pressure is one of the most significant issues facing young families: housing costs, rent, and the high cost of living leave many parents, around 20% of those they work with, struggling with essential expenses such as food and accommodation. While the legislation offers up to 52 weeks of leave for each parent, Ms Finley emphasised that this is not realistically accessible for families on low incomes, who simply cannot afford prolonged periods of reduced or unpaid pay. Single parents are particularly disadvantaged, as the entitlement is per parent, giving them half the available leave of two-parent households.

Issues with flexible working were also clearly identified. Ms Finley reported that many families experience employers offering “lip service” rather than genuine flexibility, particularly during breastfeeding and when parents return to work. Parents often return exhausted and overwhelmed, with limited adjustment or phased-return options. Ms Finley suggested clearer expectations for employers and greater accountability around flexible working practice.

The hearing also emphasised the needs of families with disabled children, many of whom require significantly more time at home, specialist equipment and support beyond the standard 52-week leave period. Ms Finley noted that delays in equipment funding can place undue strain on these families and disadvantage the child’s early development.

Finally, Ms Finley highlighted the need for better communication and accessibility, especially for minority ethnic families. While they use interpreters, Ms Finley said that more multilingual, culturally sensitive information is needed to ensure all parents understand their rights and support pathways.

Overall, FNHC’s evidence underscores that while the legislation has brought valuable cultural and developmental benefits, particularly in terms of shared parenting and breastfeeding, its impact is uneven. The families with the greatest needs often face the greatest barriers to accessing support. FNHC’s testimony demonstrates the importance of ensuring that family friendly policy is grounded in the real social and economic pressures facing young families in Jersey.

FINDING 32
There are encouraging signs of positive cultural change, with more fathers attending antenatal education, participating actively in early caregiving and sharing responsibilities that historically fell solely to mothers.

FINDING 33
According to FNHC, there has been a significant increase in breastfeeding rates - a 4% rise in just six months that is “unprecedented” and strongly linked to growing parental confidence and supportive workplace attitudes.

FINDING 34: Key finding
20% of young families supported by FNHC are struggling with essential expenses such as food and accommodation.

FINDING 35
52 weeks of leave for each parent is not realistically accessible for families on low incomes, who simply cannot afford prolonged periods of reduced or no pay.

FINDING 36
New parents often return to work exhausted and overwhelmed, with limited adjustment or phased-return options.

RECOMMENDATION 12
The Minister for Social Security should introduce a clearer system for monitoring employer compliance with family friendly legislation and establish defined expectations and accountability measures for the handling of flexible working requests. This should include sector-specific guidance, improved reporting mechanisms, and proportionate oversight to ensure that employers apply the law consistently and transparently.

FINDING 37
There is a need for better communication and accessibility, especially for minority ethnic families, more multilingual, culturally sensitive information is needed to ensure all parents understand their rights and support pathways.

RECOMMENDATION 13: Key recommendation
JACS should provide translated guidance and make efforts to ensure that minority ethnic families understand their rights and support pathways.

Brighter Futures

The Sub-Panel received deeply powerful and often emotional evidence from Brighter Futures, during a public hearing on the 14th July, with staff and clients offered a compelling picture of how Jersey's family friendly legislation is experienced by vulnerable families.

Brighter Futures is a local charity supporting parents, families and young people in Jersey. They provide coordinator support alongside a number of free programmes and services to help support parents and carers. Since 2008, Brighter Futures has supported over 4,000 families, benefitting over 15,000 Islanders. Working alongside the main carer, their educational model provides them with ways to thrive. Supporting more than 160 families at any one-time, Brighter Futures works closely with parents facing poverty, language barriers, mental health challenges, and limited social networks. Their testimony highlighted both the value of the legislation and the profound inequalities in practice.

Brighter Futures described widespread lack of awareness among parents about their rights and allowances, with many families relying entirely on charity workers to understand even basic entitlements. This lack of knowledge often contributes directly to financial hardship. The theme of financial pressure ran throughout the hearing: from soaring nursery fees and rent to food insecurity, even families who own their homes reported struggling to meet basic costs. Witnesses recounted instances of parents considering leaving the Island, or even ending a pregnancy, because they simply could not afford another child.

The evidence also revealed how isolation and mental health challenges shape the early years, particularly for migrant families with no extended family support. Parents often experience significant shame and fear around seeking help. In terms of employment, experiences varied: while some employers were supportive, others were slow to agree flexible working or unclear in their processes, creating practical and emotional strain for families juggling work and childcare.

Brighter Futures reported mixed experiences among fathers. Many fathers still lack awareness of their entitlements, and some feel stigma about taking leave. However, the charity has begun to see encouraging cultural shifts, with more fathers taking short periods of leave or seeking more time at home to support their partners and bond with their children.

Single parents emerged as one of the most disadvantaged groups. Because the entitlement to leave is granted per parent, single parents have half the available leave of two-parent households and bear the full financial burden alone. Extended family, especially grandparents, often provide a lifeline, stepping in to offer childcare in the absence of affordable options. Witnesses argued that the system should better reflect the reality of caregiving in these families and allow leave or support to be shared with the adults who actually provide care.

Overall, the Brighter Futures hearing highlighted the difficult and, at times, precarious circumstances many families face. While the legislation has positive intentions and developmental benefits, the evidence showed that financial inequality, awareness gaps, childcare affordability, and uneven employer behaviour significantly limit its impact. The charity's testimony underscores the need for a more accessible, better communicated and more equitable system that supports the wellbeing of Jersey's families in the earliest years of life.

The Brighter Futures hearing provided some of the most vivid and human-centred evidence in the review, demonstrating:

- Deep financial barriers to using parental leave
- Wide variation in employer behaviour
- High levels of isolation, anxiety and hardship among families
- A major lack of awareness of rights and entitlements
- Positive but fragile cultural shifts in father involvement
- Structural inequities for single parents, grandparents, migrants and the self-employed.

This testimony is critical to understanding how Jersey's family friendly legislation is experienced at the most vulnerable and those experiencing poverty.

FINDING 38
There is widespread lack of awareness among parents about their rights and allowances, with many families relying entirely on charity workers to understand even basic entitlements.

FINDING 39
Parents consider leaving the Island, or even ending a pregnancy, because they cannot not afford another child. They cite the combined impacts of childcare costs, the general cost of living, and unaffordable housing.

FINDING 40
Many fathers lack awareness of their entitlements and feel stigma about taking leave, but there encouraging cultural shifts, with more fathers taking short periods of leave or seeking more time at home to support their partners and bond with their children.

FINDING 41
Single parents are one if the most disadvantaged groups as entitlement to leave is granted per parent, single parents have half the available leave of two-parent households and bear the full financial burden alone.

RECOMMENDATION 14: Key recommendation
The Minister for Social Security should amend the parental leave framework to ensure that single-parent families are not structurally disadvantaged and present an action plan by Q2 2027. This should include exploring additional paid leave, enhanced financial support, or supplementary benefits for sole carers so that a child in a single-parent household does not receive half the parental time and support available to children in two-parent families, so that parity of opportunity for single parents reflects modern family structures and promote fairness within the legislation.

FINDING 42: Key finding
Extended family, especially grandparents, often provide a lifeline, stepping in to offer childcare in the absence of affordable options, sometimes retiring early to provide support. Witnesses argued that the system should better reflect the reality of caregiving in these families and allow leave or support to be shared with the adults who actually provide care.

RECOMMENDATION 15: Key recommendation
The Minister for Social Security should explore a progressive approach to the law by extending (using the Swedish model as a best practice example), existing leave entitlements to Grandparents, extended family members and trusted carers.

Liberate

Liberate, Jersey's LGBTQ+ equality and inclusion charity, provided a significant and intersectional perspective on how the current family friendly legislation operates for LGBTQ+ parents, non-traditional families, and individuals facing overlapping vulnerabilities such as disability, migration status or low income. Their submission recognises the positive intent behind recent reforms but identifies several structural and practical gaps that limit the legislation's inclusiveness, clarity and real-world accessibility.

A major issue highlighted is the inconsistency and exclusionary terminology within statutory guidance, particularly JACS materials, where antenatal leave references "husbands," "civil partners," or "the father of the expected child." Liberate explained that this language fails to reflect the diversity of modern family life, excluding same-sex couples, non-binary partners, intended parents through surrogacy, and others who play a central caregiving role but may not have legal parental status at that stage. They recommended harmonising all guidance and legislation using terms such as *birth parent*. These concerns echo wider evidence heard about confusion and outdated messaging in the Government's communications.

Liberate also emphasised the need for Jersey's framework to recognise a broader range of family structures, including kinship carers, multi-parent families and "chosen family" networks that often support LGBTQ+ parents. Their evidence aligns with findings from community pop-ups, where families consistently described the vital role of grandparents and extended networks in early childcare.

Financial inequality was a recurring theme. Liberate highlighted the high cost of assisted reproduction for LGBTQ+ people, which remains a barrier to family formation. More broadly, they argued that six weeks of paid parental leave is insufficient in a high-cost jurisdiction like Jersey, especially for parents with limited access to informal support. They suggested exploring longer paid leave, as seen in Nordic countries, and allowing leave entitlements or credits to be shared with extended or chosen family members who provide day-to-day care.

Their submission also underscored the disproportionate challenges faced by LGBTQ+ parents with intersecting vulnerabilities, such as insecure employment, migration status, disability or lower income, making it harder to access rights, secure stability or navigate childcare. This perspective reinforces themes seen in evidence from CAJ and Brighter Futures regarding discrimination, precarious work and the greater risk of poverty among certain household types.

Finally, Liberate drew attention to the long-term financial impact of caregiving, particularly for women and marginalised groups, noting well-established international evidence that career breaks create pension gaps, lower lifetime earnings and deepen later-life inequality. They stressed the importance of designing family friendly policies that support long-term financial security, not just immediate care needs.

Overall, Liberate's submission highlights that for Jersey's family friendly framework to be effective and equitable, it must be fully inclusive in language and design, financially accessible, and capable of supporting the wide diversity of family forms in modern society. Their evidence reinforces broader review themes, communication gaps, affordability barriers, inconsistent practice, and adds a critical equality lens to the Sub-Panel's considerations.

Community Engagement events

To deepen its understanding of how family friendly legislation operates in practice, the Sub-Panel conducted a series of community pop-up events during June and July 2025. These sessions, held in accessible locations such as libraries, supermarkets and community centres, enabled parents, carers and extended family members to speak openly about their experiences. The events attracted a broad mix of Islanders, including new parents, single parents, carers, and a significant number of grandparents who provide regular or full-time childcare.

Across all venues, several strong and recurring themes emerged regarding the pressures shaping family life in Jersey. These concerns echoed the findings from the survey, written submissions, and engagement with family support organisations.

High Cost of Living and Childcare Affordability

The dominant themes raised were the high cost of living in Jersey and, in particular, the extremely high cost of childcare. Many parents described the pressure of trying to balance employment with childcare expenses that often exceeded or equalled one parent's salary. As a result, many families felt forced to reduce working hours, delay returning to work, or, in some cases, leave the workforce entirely.

Some new mothers spoke about being unable to build up sufficient Social Security contributions to qualify for parental benefits, especially when having a second child soon after the first. Many explained that they had either chosen to stay at home to care for their child or had been unable to afford childcare in order to return to work, both of which ultimately left them ineligible for allowances or grants during a subsequent pregnancy. Parents described feeling as though they were being penalised for circumstances that were either chosen in the interests of their child or dictated by affordability constraints, and in many instances said they were unaware that they would not be eligible for financial support due to having to remain off work to raise a family.

Housing Pressures and Families Considering Leaving Jersey

Many parents told the Sub-Panel that they were considering leaving the Island, citing the combined impacts of childcare costs, the general cost of living, and unaffordable housing. The cost and limited availability of appropriately sized accommodation was described by some as the "breaking point" for young families. Several grandparents also expressed concern that their adult children and grandchildren would eventually leave Jersey if affordability did not improve.

One grandparent described that their daughter and young family had already relocated to Stockholm, where, despite higher taxation, they experienced significantly better family friendly services, childcare support and overall quality of life.

Grandparents Providing Full-Time or Substantial Childcare

The Sub-Panel also heard from many grandparents who are now playing a central role in childcare, often providing full-time support or covering substantial hours each week. Several grandparents explained that they had retired earlier than planned, or reduced working hours, to enable their children to return to employment. They noted that while they were willing to help, the level of reliance placed on grandparents reflects underlying affordability and structural issues in Jersey's childcare system.

Many grandparents expressed a desire for family friendly policies to better reflect intergenerational caregiving, including the possibility of extending or sharing parental leave entitlements with grandparents or wider family members where they take on a primary caring role.

The role and importance of grandparents in child rearing in Jersey, was also discussed during the public hearings, particularly with Brighter Futures, when asked how they would amend the current law, one of their Senior Coordinator, working directly with families referenced grandparent support;

"I would say combining the existing support so that it is accessible to the family's wider support network. I know I have definitely worked with a client who would benefit for being allowed to share that parental leave with a parent because she has got additional needs herself and has not been able to return to work just after she had her baby, So she had had to move in and live with her parent who have taken over the responsibility of her children, but do not get any kind of support with that. So, mum and dad had to take time off their employment to support their daughter. So, I would definitely like to see that grandparents are included as well."[19]

This was also supported by evidence provided during a public hearing by Fiona Vacher, Executive Director of the Jersey Child Care Trust;

"[a] grandmother broke down and the pressure that they are under as a family to keep children healthy, safe and happy and keep earning around that. That was for all of them, mum, dad and grandmother were sort of juggling shift to make it work."[20]

This is further evidence by the response to the public survey carried out for the review, where grandparents and extended Family as the 'safety net'. Where grandparents or extended family are available, they are frequently described as the only reason a return to work was possible:

- Many respondents describe mixed arrangements: *"nursery 3 days, grandparents 2 days"*, or one day with a grandparent to reduce fees
- Several say explicitly that without family help, they would not be able to work, or would have had to leave their job or the Island
- Others note that they have no family on the Island, and that this makes balancing work and care "extremely difficult" and lonely.

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[19] Transcript-Family-Friendly-Legislation-Brighter-Futures-14-July-2025-(1).pdf

[20] HSSP-Sub-Panel-Public-Hearing-JCCT-2025-07-14.pdf

This underscores a clear inequality: families with nearby grandparents can just about cope; those without are pushed to the edge.

Additional Suggestions Raised by Grandparents and Parents

A number of practical suggestions emerged consistently across the pop-up events, including:

School catchment flexibility

Grandparents commented that school catchment rules could be more accommodating by allowing a grandparent's Parish to be considered, particularly where the grandparent provides daily childcare or school pick-ups. They explained that this would ease logistical pressures, reduce travel for working parents, and support stability for children.

Enhanced support for multiple births

Parents of twins and triplets highlighted the additional financial pressures associated with multiple births and suggested that enhanced parental leave or increased financial support during the early months would make a meaningful difference. Many said that caring for more than one infant simultaneously placed greater strain on time, energy and finances than is recognised under the current system.

Nursery entitlement from the point a child becomes eligible

Several parents expressed frustration that the free nursery entitlement only becomes available in the September after a child turns the eligible age. They argued that allowing children to access the entitlement immediately upon reaching eligibility, rather than waiting until a fixed term start, would provide greater flexibility and reduce the financial burden during a period when childcare costs are highest.

The community pop-up events provided the Sub-Panel with rich, first-hand insight into the realities facing families across Jersey. Parents, carers and grandparents spoke candidly about the pressures created by the high cost of living, childcare affordability, housing constraints and eligibility limitations within existing support systems. Their testimonies point to a picture in which many families feel financially stretched, reliant on intergenerational support and, in some cases, compelled to consider leaving the Island. At the same time, families offered practical and constructive suggestions, from improved support for multiple births to greater flexibility in school catchments, which could help ease everyday pressures and better reflect the lived experience of raising children in Jersey today.

FINDING 43
Childcare expenses often exceed or are equal one parent's salary - many families feel forced to reduce working hours, delay returning to work, or leave the workforce entirely.

FINDING 44
Some grandparents would like school catchment rules to allow grandparents' Parish to be considered, particularly where the grandparent provides daily childcare or school pick-ups, easing logistical pressures, reduce travel for working parents, and support stability for children.

RECOMMENDATION 16
The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning should explore extending primary school catchment criteria to allow consideration of a grandparent's residential address, where this would support family stability and childcare arrangements.

FINDING 45
Parents of twins and triplets highlighted additional financial pressures associated with multiple births and suggested that enhanced parental leave or increased financial support during the early months would make a meaningful difference.

RECOMMENDATION 17
The Minister for Social Security should explore extending financial and practical support for parents of multiple births and ensure clearer, more effective signposting to relevant support services.

Personal experience: *returning to work*

One respondent, a breastfeeding mother working in a service delivery role, shared her experiences of returning to work and the challenges she faced in navigating the family friendly legislation. She welcomed the increased parental leave provisions and the protections offered to breastfeeding mothers but felt that these measures remain insufficient and overly vague, leaving too much room for inconsistent interpretation by employers.

She described making requests for temporary adjustments to her working conditions, one to avoid anti-social hours while breastfeeding, another to be exempt from wearing certain PPE and a temporary change in responsibilities that would allow breastfeeding and/or the ability express breast milk. Both requests were refused, despite clear links to her breastfeeding needs and wellbeing. While her employer provided a suitable room for expressing milk and permitted breaks, these were not always timely and often caused her to work later than scheduled.

The respondent explained that after the first year of her child's life, she would no longer receive protected or paid expressing breaks and would instead have to rely on TOIL or annual leave to accommodate them. This created significant stress, both because of the unpredictability of expressing needs and because using annual leave for this purpose reduced her ability to spend meaningful time with her baby. The respondent expressed concern that this stress could negatively impact milk supply and noted that WHO recommends breastfeeding until age two, yet current protections fall far short of supporting this.

She also highlighted the absence of a mandatory phased return to work, describing the abrupt transition from months of maternity leave to full-time hours as extremely challenging. She had used her personal leave to create a makeshift phased return, but felt that structured, employer-supported arrangements should be standard practice to support new mothers.

The respondent emphasised that stronger protections, clearer guidance and more supportive workplace practices would help breastfeeding mothers feel less pressured and more able to continue breastfeeding for as long as they choose. She hoped that future improvements to the legislation would better support mothers without negatively impacting their employment or their babies' wellbeing.

Key Themes Identified

Insufficient Support for Breastfeeding Mothers Returning to Work

The submission highlights a significant gap between the legislative intention to support breastfeeding and the practical realities of returning to the workplace. Although the respondent was entitled to protected expressing breaks and a dedicated room, these were not always provided at appropriate times, and breaks often resulted in extended working hours, which counteracted their intended benefit. The experience illustrates that timing, predictability and workplace culture are as important as the existence of facilities. These themes are echoed in the survey submissions.

Ambiguity and Inconsistency in Legislative Interpretation

A strong theme is the uncertainty and lack of clarity surrounding breastfeeding rights and employer responsibilities. The refusal of requests for adjustments, such as avoiding night shifts or protective gear—reflects how flexible wording in the law can lead to inconsistent decision-making. The respondent felt the legislation is “too vague,” creating loopholes that can disadvantage breastfeeding mothers, particularly in operational or frontline roles.

Limited Duration of Support and Misalignment with Health Guidance

The respondent expressed concern that breastfeeding protections effectively end after one year, despite public health recommendations encouraging breastfeeding until at least age two. The need to rely on annual leave or TOIL to accommodate expressing after this point was viewed as unfair, stressful, and potentially detrimental to the continuation of breastfeeding. This theme aligns with broader parental concerns that legislation does not sufficiently support longer-term infant feeding choices.

Challenging Transition Back to Work

The lack of a structured phased return to work was a major source of stress. Transitioning abruptly from extended maternity leave to full working hours created emotional and logistical difficulties. The respondent felt that employers should be required to offer a clear, supported pathway back into work, such as reduced hours or adjusted duties for an initial period.

Gendered and Operational Workplace Barriers

Assignments involving night shifts, heavy protective equipment, or frontline duties posed specific challenges for a breastfeeding mother. The refusal to adjust these responsibilities highlights how workplace policies and staffing models may not adequately reflect the physiological realities of postpartum recovery and breastfeeding, particularly in high-intensity occupations.

Impact on Maternal Wellbeing and Infant Health

Underlying these issues is a broader concern about the emotional and physical wellbeing of mothers returning to work. Stress related to expressing, navigating workplace obstacles, or risking reduced milk supply can affect both mother and child. The submission underscores the need for holistic support that promotes maternal mental health, infant nutrition, and workplace inclusion.

Desire for Legislative Strengthening and Clearer Guidance

The respondent called for improvements to legislation and clearer guidance for employers, advocating for stronger protections, better enforcement, and consistent interpretation across sectors. The themes suggest a need for more robust frameworks that prevent inconsistency and support breastfeeding mothers in both desk-based and operational roles.

FINDING 46
The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends breastfeeding until age two, yet current protections in Jersey legislation fall short of supporting this.

RECOMMENDATION 18: Key recommendation
The Minister for Social Security should extend the protections for breastfeeding and expressing under the current legislation to two years in line with WHO[21] recommendations to further support and encourage breastfeeding.

Personal experience: *the benefits of extended parental leave*

One parent shared their experience of having a baby in 2024 and reflected on the significant benefits of being able to access 20 weeks of paid parental leave, followed by additional unpaid leave, through their employment in the public sector. They explained that the extended period at home had been invaluable in supporting their emotional, physical, and financial wellbeing, as well as in building a strong foundation for their child's early development.

They described how the time away from work enabled them to form a deep, secure bond with their baby and provide consistent care during the crucial early months of life. Having experienced anxiety both before and after pregnancy, the parent stressed that returning to work earlier would have been extremely difficult and that the extended leave had given them the necessary space to manage their mental health effectively. Following an emergency caesarean section, the extended period of leave also allowed them to make a full physical recovery without the added pressure of returning to work prematurely.

Financially, the family benefited from not needing childcare during the first year, saving a substantial amount during a period of high costs and rising living expenses. The parent also highlighted the importance of being able to spend time with wider family members, helping their child form close relationships with relatives who would take on caregiving duties once the parent returned to work part-time.

While the experience was overwhelmingly positive, the parent noted that their partner, working in the financial sector, was entitled to only six weeks of paid leave, which they felt was insufficient. They believed that partners also need more paid time at home to bond with their children, to support mothers during recovery, and to share caring responsibilities more equally.

This testimony illustrates the positive impact of extended, well-paid parental leave on family wellbeing, postpartum recovery, infant development, and financial stability, while also highlighting ongoing disparities in partner leave entitlements across sectors.

FINDING 47
Parents report an extended period at home has been invaluable in supporting their emotional, physical, and financial wellbeing, as well as in building a strong foundation for their child's early development, bonding with their baby, managing pre and post-natal anxiety, and recovering from birth complications such as emergency caesarean sections, with many stating that an earlier return to work would have been extremely difficult both physically and mentally.

[21] Breastfeeding

Key Themes

Strong Positive Impact of Extended Paid Parental Leave

A central theme from the submission is the transformative benefit of having access to extended paid parental leave. The parent described this time as essential for bonding, stabilising early family life, and supporting both emotional and physical wellbeing. Their experience demonstrates how generous leave provision can create a secure, supportive start to parenthood, reducing stress and improving outcomes for both parent and child.

Importance of Mental Health Support During Early Parenthood

The parent emphasised that managing pregnancy-related anxiety and postpartum mental health challenges was significantly easier because they did not have to return to work quickly. This illustrates the critical role that time, rest, and reduced pressure play in supporting new parents' mental health—particularly for those recovering from complex or traumatic birth experiences.

Enhanced Physical Recovery Following Birth

Having undergone an emergency caesarean section, the parent highlighted the necessity of extended leave to allow proper physical recovery. Their testimony reinforces the point that physical recovery timelines vary, and standardised or minimal leave periods may not be sufficient for parents recovering from surgery or complications.

Financial Stability in the First Year

The parent explained that extended leave helped the family avoid childcare costs for the first year, offering vital financial stability during a period of high living costs. This aligns with broader evidence from the review showing that childcare affordability is one of the most significant pressures faced by families in Jersey.

Value of Time to Establish Wider Family Support Networks

The extended period at home also gave the family time to establish strong relationships with grandparents and other relatives who would later help with childcare. This underscores the importance of informal support networks and how adequate leave helps parents integrate family support into their long-term caring arrangements.

Inequity in Partner Leave Entitlement

The submission highlights a disparity between sectors: while the parent received 20 weeks' paid leave, their partner received only six weeks. The parent believed this imbalance limits partners' ability to bond with their child, support mothers' recovery, and participate equally in early caregiving. This theme reinforces wider calls throughout the review for greater equity in paid parental leave between parents.

The Value of Family Friendly Policy as a Retention Tool

Although not explicitly stated, the submission implies that supportive leave policies are important for organisational loyalty and positive workplace culture. The parent's experience indicates that generous entitlements can increase satisfaction and wellbeing, enhancing employers' ability to retain staff during major life events.

Comparative Summary of this Experience Against Wider Lived Evidence

This submission aligns strongly with many of the broader themes identified across the lived experience evidence gathered through the survey, written submissions, and community pop-up events. Like many parents, the respondent emphasised the significant benefits of extended time at home following birth, particularly in supporting mental health, physical recovery, and early bonding. Their account reinforces the widespread view that longer periods of paid leave provide stability and confidence during the early stages of parenthood, echoing sentiments expressed by numerous survey respondents who felt pressured or unprepared when returning to work too early. Which ultimately may result it absences from work due to periods of ill health.

Where this experience contrasts with many others is in the level of enhanced paid leave available through their public-sector employer. While this parent benefited from 20 weeks of paid leave, many others, particularly those in the private sector, on lower incomes or in smaller organisations, reported receiving only statutory minimum entitlements. This disparity underscores a consistent theme throughout the review: that access to family friendly support varies significantly by sector and employer, creating unequal experiences for families across Jersey.

The submission also reflects a broader concern raised by many parents regarding partner leave inequalities. The respondent's belief that their partner's six weeks of paid leave was insufficient mirrors the views of a large proportion of parents who feel that current arrangements place excessive pressure on mothers and limit the ability of partners to share caregiving responsibilities equitably.

Finally, this account highlights the importance of avoiding childcare costs in the first year, which aligns closely with the experiences of many families who described childcare as one of the most significant financial burdens in Jersey. The testimonial adds weight to the consistent finding that family friendly legislation and wider policy need to address childcare affordability, equitable leave, and early-years financial strain in order to meaningfully support Jersey's young families.

Personal experience: *Immigration, Cultural Wellbeing and Postnatal Support*

Wadzanai Lesley Katsande -Gwatidzo[22]

Ms Katsande -Gwatidzo's submission provides a powerful and culturally grounded perspective on how Jersey's current immigration policies affect migrant women during pregnancy, childbirth, and the postnatal period. Drawing particularly on Shona traditions from Zimbabwe, and comparing these with similar practices in China, India and Latin America, the author explains that childbirth is considered a communal experience in many cultures. Practices such as *Kusungira* involve an expectant mother being surrounded by her own female relatives, mothers, grandmothers, aunties, before and after birth to ensure emotional, spiritual and physical support. These traditions are not merely cultural rituals but recognised forms of protective maternal care, now supported by modern health research showing that structured social support reduces postnatal depression, improves breastfeeding rates, and promotes infant wellbeing.

The submission argues that for many migrant women in Jersey, this vital support system is effectively lost. Immigration rules do not provide a clear or accessible route for a mother, grandmother, or close female relative to visit Jersey for the purpose of postnatal care. As a result, many women give birth and recover in isolation, without the traditional and practical support that is integral to their cultures. The author stresses that this is not only culturally harmful but a public health concern, given well-documented inequalities in maternal outcomes for Black, African, Asian and Caribbean women.

Ms Katsande-Gwatidzo highlights several structural problems within Jersey's immigration framework. Current visa requirements often expect older female relatives to demonstrate savings, independent income or financial security, criteria that do not reflect the collective family structures common in many non-Western societies. In many communities, economic resources are pooled across generations, meaning that a daughter working in Jersey is the primary supporter of her mother, not the reverse. Rigid financial requirements, the author argues, unfairly exclude families whose cultural and economic practices differ from Western norms.

Concerns about potential overstaying were identified as another barrier, yet the submission states there is no evidence that grandmothers or maternal carers misuse visitor visas. Their visits are temporary, purposeful, and rooted in responsibility; they return to the homes, communities and dependants they have left behind. The author urges that policy should be based on evidence and compassion rather than assumptions.

Several detailed policy recommendations are proposed. These include amending immigration guidance to explicitly recognise postnatal caregiving as a legitimate reason for extended family visits, allowing stays of up to six months; piloting a specific "perinatal family carer visa"; and ensuring that immigration and maternity policy are informed by cultural competence. The submission calls for improved collaboration between Health, Social Security and Customs and Immigration so that Jersey's family friendly agenda fully reflects the cultural diversity of its population.

The submission concludes by emphasising that family friendly legislation must extend beyond employment rights to encompass the cultural, emotional and communal needs of new parents, particularly migrants who experience childbirth without the support systems taken for granted in their home countries. Recognising and facilitating these forms of care, the author argues, is

[22] Submission-Family-Friendly-Legislation-Review-Wadzanai-Lesley-Katsande-Gwatidzo-21-October-2025.pdf

not only compassionate but essential for maternal mental health, infant wellbeing, and the integrity of Jersey's ambition to be a truly family friendly Island.

This submission offers a powerful and deeply personal exploration of how immigration policy intersects with maternal health, family wellbeing, and cultural identity for migrant families living in Jersey. Drawing on the author's Zimbabwean heritage and wider global traditions, the paper highlights that in many cultures, childbirth is not an individual event but a communal rite of passage, supported by mothers, grandmothers, aunties, and female kin.

Practices such as the Shona tradition of *Kusungira*, China's *zuò yuè zi*, and similar postpartum customs across Asia and Latin America all emphasise rest, maternal care, emotional support, and guided recovery provided by older female relatives. Modern medical research increasingly affirms these traditional systems, showing that communal postpartum support reduces maternal mental health risks and improves infant outcomes.

For many migrant women in Jersey, however, this essential support is lost due to restrictive immigration policies. Visa rules, narrow definitions of "family", and significant financial evidence requirements often prevent mothers, grandmothers or close female relatives from travelling to Jersey to provide culturally appropriate postpartum care. As a result, women may experience loneliness, anxiety, delayed recovery, and poorer breastfeeding or mental health outcomes. The author emphasises that this loss is not merely cultural, it is also a public health issue, with downstream costs for health services and wider society.

The submission also challenges assumptions within immigration processes. Requirements for older relatives to demonstrate personal savings do not align with the economic structures of many African and Asian societies, where resources are collective rather than individual. The paper notes there is no evidence to suggest that grandmothers or caregiving relatives overstay their visas, and current policies reflect misconceptions rather than risk.

Key observations from this Submission

Jersey's immigration framework does not recognise or accommodate cultural models of postnatal care

Many migrant women give birth without the support networks that are fundamental to their cultural traditions and wellbeing. This gap heightens risks of postpartum depression, isolation and poorer health outcomes for mothers and babies.

Visa rules unintentionally discriminate against non-Western family structures

Financial criteria assume Western models of individual economic independence, disadvantaging families from collectivist cultures where financial resources are shared across generations.

Lack of a suitable visa route leaves mothers without essential support

There is currently no specific immigration route for mothers, grandmothers, or maternal relatives to visit Jersey for postnatal care, despite strong evidence that such support is beneficial for recovery, breastfeeding and mental health.

Allowing extended family caregivers into Jersey poses minimal migration risk

There is no data suggesting this group overstays visas. Excluding them is therefore based on misperception, not evidence.

Migrant families bear a disproportionate emotional and economic burden

Women face childbirth in isolation while contributing significantly to Jersey's workforce and economy. Lack of culturally informed policy intensifies inequity for Black, Asian, African and Caribbean families, groups already experiencing poorer maternal outcomes globally.

The submission contains several powerful statements that reveal the depth of cultural loss experienced:

- *"Motherhood is not an isolated experience; it is a communal and sacred passage."*
- *"For many migrant women… this sacred process is interrupted."*
- *"Professionals, however skilled, cannot replace the ancestral knowledge, spiritual comfort, and intimate support of a mother's presence."*
- *"To deny that presence through rigid visa processes is to misunderstand what family truly means to so many communities."*

Policy Recommendations Proposed

The author suggests practical and compassionate reforms:

1. Recognise postnatal caregiving as a valid reason for family visitation, allowing stays of up to six months.
2. Introduce a short-term Perinatal Family Carer Visa, enabling mothers/grandmothers to support new parents.
3. Improve cultural competence in both immigration and maternity services.
4. Strengthen cross-departmental collaboration to ensure family-friendly policy reflects the diversity of Jersey's population.

Overall Significance for the Review

This submission highlights an overlooked dimension of family friendly policy: the intersection between employment rights, immigration rules, culture, and maternal health. It shows that Jersey's current framework, while progressive in employment terms, still fails to meet the holistic needs of many migrant families.

The evidence reinforces the review's broader findings on isolation, inequality, the importance of early support, and the critical role of extended family networks in child development.

It also demonstrates a clear policy gap where immigration rules unintentionally undermine the aims of family friendly legislation, suggesting that a more integrated, culturally informed approach is needed for Jersey to truly become a family friendly Island.

FINDING 48

Evidence shows that Jersey's immigration framework does not recognise postnatal caregiving by close female relatives as a legitimate or necessary form of family support. As a result, many migrant women give birth and recover without the culturally embedded maternal care that is known to improve mental health, breastfeeding outcomes and infant wellbeing, creating avoidable isolation and public health risk.

FINDING 49
Current visa eligibility criteria reflect Western assumptions about individual financial independence and nuclear families, disadvantaging migrant households from collectivist cultures where caregiving and resources are shared across generations. There is no evidence that maternal carers overstay visas, indicating that existing restrictions are based on misperception rather than risk and unintentionally undermine Jersey's family-friendly objectives.

RECOMMENDATION 19
The Minister for Home Affairs, in collaboration with the Minister for Social Security and the Minister for Health and Social Services, should explore the introduction of a time-limited perinatal family carer visa to recognise postnatal caregiving as a legitimate reason for family visitation.

Personal experience: *Barriers to Accessing the Maternity Grant*

The Sub-Panel received evidence from Brighter Futures, which highlights significant inequities in access to the Maternity Grant, particularly affecting new parents who do not meet the Social Security contribution conditions. Brighter Futures describe supporting a number of families, both long-term Island residents and more recent arrivals, who have been unable to receive the grant despite being in acute financial need.

The evidence shows that women who are new to the Island, especially those who have lived in Jersey for fewer than five years, often fall through the gaps in support. Many have recently arrived, are pregnant or caring for infants, and therefore have been unable to work and make qualifying contributions. Without access to income support or the grant, these parents face severe hardship, with some relying on food banks and charitable assistance to meet basic needs like food, nappies and baby essentials.

The challenges also extend to young Jersey-born parents. One example involved a school leaver who became pregnant shortly after leaving education. Because she had not yet entered employment and had only just started claiming income support, she was not eligible for the one-off payment. Other women who had been unable to work due to personal or health circumstances were similarly excluded.

The submission emphasises the emotional toll of this exclusion. One parent described receiving the grant herself but watching friends struggle: "**Why isn't this one-off payment there for every lady in Jersey who has a baby**? … These babies are the future of Jersey so should get the best start in life possible." She highlighted the contradiction between Government's stated commitment to "putting Jersey's children first" and the reality that some newborns begin life in conditions of avoidable deprivation.

Overall, the submission illustrates how the current eligibility rules for the Parental Grant disproportionately disadvantage vulnerable mothers, such as those with low incomes, limited work histories, or recent migration backgrounds, at the exact moment when financial and emotional pressures are at their peak. The experiences shared underline the need for a more inclusive and equitable approach to supporting all families at the point of birth.

FINDING 50
Evidence from Brighter Futures indicates that the current eligibility rules for the Parental Grant exclude some of the families most in need, particularly recent migrants, young parents who have not yet entered employment, and mothers unable to work due to health or personal circumstances. These gaps create avoidable hardship at the point of birth and contradict the policy aim of ensuring all children receive a strong start in life.

RECOMMENDATION 20
The Minister for Social Security should review the eligibility criteria for the Parental Grant to ensure that vulnerable new parents, regardless of contribution history, can access essential financial support at the birth of a child. This review should include options for a needs-based safety-net payment and clear, proactive communication so families do not fall through gaps in the system.

Barriers to Equal Parenting: Insights for Jersey

Cultural expectation of fathers

As part of the Sub-Panel's consideration of how family friendly legislation affects parents and caregivers in practice, the Panel reviewed wider research on the barriers faced by fathers and partners in taking on equal parenting roles. Evidence from the Working Families report, *Barriers to Equal Parenting*[23], produced in partnership with Wates Group, saw 5,000 working fathers with at least one child age 0-17, living across the UK surveyed. They were asked about how they would like to balance parenting and work, their experiences in the workplace, and the changes they would want to see in the workplace provides a useful lens through which to understand the challenges that many families may also experience in Jersey, particularly as the Island seeks to encourage shared parental caregiving and greater workplace equality.

The research highlights that although most fathers wish to play an active role in caring for their children, especially younger fathers in Gen Z and the Millennial generation, there remain significant cultural, structural and economic barriers that inhibit equal parenting. Many of these themes were echoed in Jersey's own survey responses, submissions, and community engagement.

Cultural Expectations and Workplace Stigma

The report identifies persistent assumptions that mothers should be the default caregivers, with many fathers describing workplace attitudes that discourage them from taking leave or requesting flexibility. A substantial proportion of fathers feel nervous about asking for time off or flexibility, fearing that they will appear less committed or harm their career prospects. Younger fathers report this particularly acutely.

Similar sentiments emerged in the Sub-Panel's engagement with Jersey families, where several partners described feeling uncomfortable requesting flexible working or extended parental leave, and noted that workplace culture often shapes how confidently they can exercise their rights.

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23 Barriers to Equal Parenting - Working Families

Practical Barriers to Leave and Flexible Working

Despite strong desire from fathers to take parental leave, many report being unable to take the amount of leave they need due to financial pressures, insufficient paid leave, or a lack of employer support. The research shows that insufficient paternal leave can impact family wellbeing, maternal recovery, and child development, areas of concern also raised repeatedly by Jersey parents.

Flexible working was seen as vital for enabling fathers to share caregiving, but stigma remains a major barrier to its uptake. This mirrors evidence gathered in Jersey suggesting that while flexible working rights exist, their success depends heavily on workplace culture and managerial attitudes.

Structural and Economic Inequalities

The report also emphasises that wider labour market inequalities reinforce traditional parenting roles. Gender pay gaps, sectoral differences in parental leave entitlements, and the financial penalty mothers face when leaving work or reducing hours all contribute to entrenched divisions in parental caregiving.

Jersey survey respondents repeatedly highlighted these dynamics, particularly noting the disparity between leave rights offered in different sectors, the loss of Social Security contributions when stepping out of the workforce between children, and the financial pressures of childcare that often push families into traditional roles even when they would prefer more equal arrangements.

What Fathers Want in order to Support Equal Parenting

The findings suggest clear opportunities for policy development:

- More equitable parental leave between parents
- Normalisation of fathers taking leave and flexibility
- Greater workplace openness and communication
- Positive role modelling within organisations
- Better awareness among employers of the barriers fathers face

These preferences align closely with feedback the Sub-Panel received from Jersey parents, many of whom expressed a desire for partners to have more paid time at home, and for employers to better support shared caregiving responsibilities.

Relevance for Jersey's Family Friendly Legislation

The evidence reviewed reinforces the Sub-Panel's conclusion that while Jersey has made meaningful progress in improving parental rights, cultural barriers, workplace practices, and unequal approaches to leave structures continue to limit the ability of both parents, particularly fathers, to participate fully in early caregiving.

Understanding these barriers is essential to ensuring that family friendly legislation does not simply exist in principle but is supported by workplace culture, economic structures, and policy choices that genuinely enable shared parenting and early child wellbeing.

The Gender Pay Gap in Jersey: 2024 Data[24]

The Government of Jersey has committed to publish the gender pay gap data since 2019. Figures provided are based on a snapshot of data for 30 June 2024, with comparisons from 30 June 2023, and are representative of hourly rates of pay.

The gender pay gap shows the difference in the average pay between all men and women in a workforce. If a workforce has a particularly high gender pay gap, this indicates the need to explore and address issues.

Table 1: States of Jersey gender pay gap

Measure	2024	2023
Median hourly pay gap	10.3%	12.5%
Mean hourly pay gap	14.5%	14.6%

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Key figures:

- The median hourly pay gap (the midpoint difference between what men and women earn per hour) is 10.3% in 2024, down from 12.5% in 2023.
- The mean (average) hourly pay gap is 14.5% in 2024, marginally down from 14.6% in 2023.
- Total workforce involved: 3,016 male employees and 5,272 female employees as at 30 June 2024. Women made up 63.6% of the workforce.

Workforce composition and labour-market structure:

- Significant gender imbalances remain in certain job types: for example, 90% of teaching assistants are female; 97% of Fire & Rescue employees are male.
- Part-time work remains much more common among women (36.7% of female employees worked part-time) than men (10.7%) in the public sector dataset.
- In terms of salary quartiles: In the lowest quartile, 73% of employees were female; in the highest quartile, 55% were female and 45% were male.

Senior roles (Tier 1 and Tier 2 leadership):

- Female representation among senior roles has increased: from 11 in Tier 1 & 2 in 2021 to 18 in 2024.

[24] Gender pay gap report 2024
[25] Gender pay gap report 2024

- For Tier 1 roles, the median hourly pay gap is 12.5% (females earn on average 12.5% less) and for Tier 2 roles the median gap is 2.5%.

Why This Matters for the Family Friendly Legislation Review

While the current available data is limited to those working with the public sector for the Government of Jersey and Non-Ministerial Departments, a persistent gender pay gap is relevant to how family friendly rights are used and experienced. For example, if women tend to earn less on average, then the opportunity cost of taking leave or reducing hours may be higher for women, reinforcing gendered caring roles.

The fact that women are disproportionately in part-time roles suggests that caring responsibilities may continue to shape employment patterns, an important context for understanding how parents and carers engage with leave, flexible working, and returning to work.

The increase in female senior appointment is encouraging but the gap remains, and sectoral imbalances persist, this underscores the need to look at career progression and workplace culture, not just statutory rights.

Since the majority of the workforce in many lower pay bands is female, this suggests that women are more likely to hold lower-paid, possibly less secure roles. Family friendly legislation must be designed so that it is accessible and meaningful to those in such roles, not just those in well-paid or full-time employment.

While the gender pay gap within the public sector in Jersey has shown modest improvement in 2024, with the median gap narrowing to 10.3%, it remains sizeable. The data highlights structural labour-market patterns, such as concentration of women in part-time roles, lower pay bands and certain sectors, that intersect with family friendly employment issues. For this review, understanding the gender pay gap helps the Sub-Panel situate family friendly rights within the real economic context experienced by parents and carers, and underlines that making rights available is only one part of the solution, ensuring equitable access, meaningful uptake and cultural change is equally important.

Fathers’ experience

The Sub-Panel wanted to ensure that the experiences of fathers were equally represented in the evidence gathered, actively engaging with fathers at the community events, promoting specifically to fathers on social media during the evidence gathering phase of the review and sharing the survey with fathers’ groups and men supporting organisations.

The public hearings held with third sector community support organisations were also very valuable in gaining an understanding of the challenges their clients face, most significantly the hearing with Brighter Futures who offer a Dads’ Club and a choice of activities and resources in a safe and relaxed environment that provides the opportunity to meet other dads and male carers. During the public hearing with the team, the Sub-Panel particularly wanted to understand the experiences of their clients and why parents access their services, with former and current clients attending to share their experiences. There were a number of key themes highlighted during the hearing:

Low Awareness of Entitlements Among Fathers

A recurring theme throughout the testimony is that many fathers do not know what they are entitled to under Jersey's family friendly employment law. Several fathers only become aware of their rights through Brighter Futures and via peer discussion within the Dads' Club.

One father explicitly stated he had "no idea" he could take up to 52 weeks of parental leave.

- Staff noted that many fathers do not know they have 10 hours of antenatal leave, and this is "not on the radar" of most expectant parents.
- Information appears to be inconsistently disseminated by employers, with fathers often learning more from peers than from official sources.

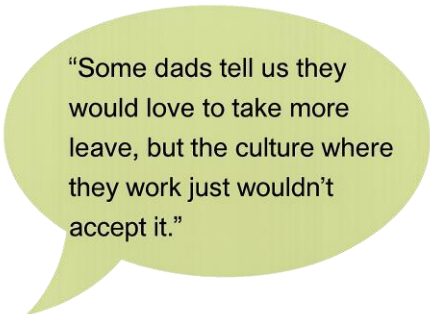
[26]

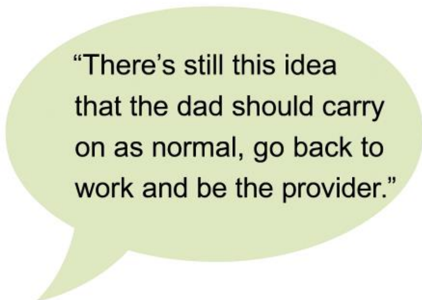
The implication of these messages being that poor communication and low employer engagement directly suppress fathers' ability to use the leave available to them.

Workplace Stigma and "Cultural Barriers" to Fathers Taking Leave

The evidence strongly points to entrenched cultural attitudes that discourage men from taking parental leave or flexibility.

- Staff described "stigma" and a sense of masculine pride that stops many fathers asking questions about leave.
- Fathers often report fear of seeming less committed or less reliable if they request time off.
- Several witnesses suggested that cultural expectations continue to frame fathers primarily as financial providers rather than caregivers.





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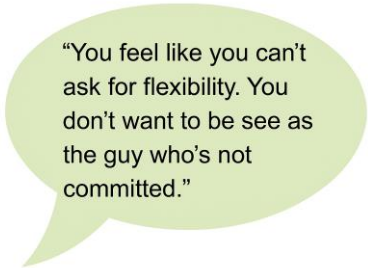


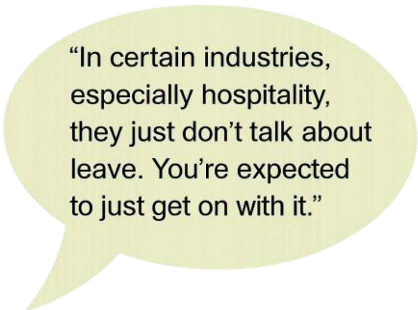
[29]

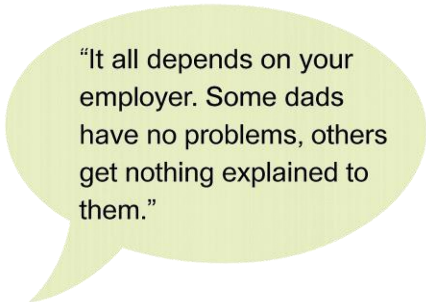
Brighter Futures staff emphasised that stigma varies by industry and workplace type, male-dominated sectors appear to have stronger barriers and fewer role models of fathers taking leave, indicating that legal entitlements alone are insufficient unless workplace culture shifts to normalise fathers taking leave.

Inconsistent Employer Support and Unequal Treatment

Evidence from multiple fathers interacting with Brighter Futures shows deep variation in employer behaviour:

- Some fathers had very supportive employers who proactively explained all options.
- Others received little to no information, leaving them entirely unaware of the equalised leave system.
- Hospitality and retail were highlighted repeatedly as challenging sectors with poor communication and rigid conditions.
- Fathers in self-employment face the most significant constraints, often being unable to take leave at all because of immediate financial pressure.





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This evidence reinforces the recurring theme, that Fathers' ability to take parental leave depends heavily on their employer's attitudes, HR capacity, and sector norms.

[29] Transcript-Family-Friendly-Legislation-Brighter-Futures-14-July-2025-(1).pdf
[30] Transcript-Family-Friendly-Legislation-Brighter-Futures-14-July-2025-(1).pdf

Financial Pressures Severely Limit Uptake

Even when fathers wish to take leave, the financial reality of life in Jersey often makes it unviable.

Key financial barriers identified:

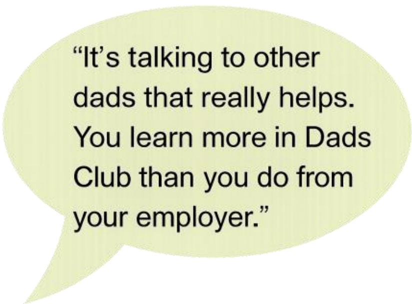
- The cost of nursery or childcare (around £1,700+ per month per child) makes both parents taking leave simultaneously unrealistic for households with older children already attending nursery.
- Fathers in lower-income or single-income households simply cannot afford extended leave.
- Self-employed fathers lose income immediately if they step back from work.

One father described needing to take additional weekend jobs to meet basic costs, making parental leave practically impossible. The implication being that without adequate financial support structures, fathers' legal rights cannot be fully exercised.

Peer Support Networks Are Crucial for Fathers Accessing Leave

During the hearing it was shared that peer discussion, especially within Brighter Futures' Dads Club, plays a vital role in:

- Sharing knowledge about entitlements
- Normalising discussions about leave
- Reducing stigma
- Helping fathers feel less isolated



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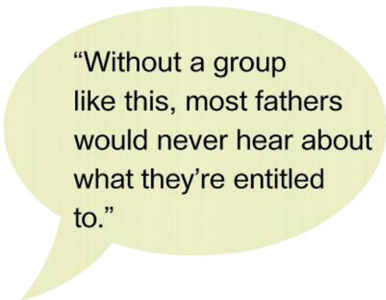


[32]

Fathers learn significantly more about their leave rights through informal, peer-led conversations than through employers or government materials.

Community-led father-support groups are increasingly stepping in to fill gaps in formal communication and guidance around parental rights. These initiatives help fathers navigate leave, flexibility and early parenthood, highlighting the need for more structured, government-led communication that speaks directly to fathers and supports their active role in early caregiving.

[31] Transcript-Family-Friendly-Legislation-Brighter-Futures-14-July-2025-(1).pdf
[32] Transcript-Family-Friendly-Legislation-Brighter-Futures-14-July-2025-(1).pdf

Impact of Limited Paternal Leave on Family Wellbeing

A strong message throughout the session is that fathers want more involvement but that structural and cultural barriers hold them back.

Witnesses reported:

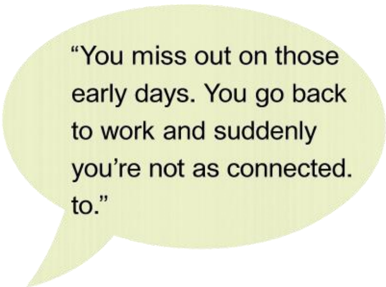
- Fathers feel less connected to their child when they cannot take leave.
- Partners struggle without paternal support in the perinatal period.
- Fathers who do take more leave often report stronger attachment and better mental health outcomes.

One father noted that extended leave helped him change career to prioritise time with his children, the implication being thar increasing paternal leave uptake is likely to improve family bonding, mental health, and child development.

The Law in Practice Feels "Equal on Paper, Unequal in Reality"

Although Jersey's legislation is gender-neutral in design, the lived experience introduced by the Brighter Futures clients suggests:

- Fathers rarely access long periods of leave.
- Most fathers and families do not view 52 weeks as a real option, due to finances, workplace culture, and childcare costs.
- Staff could not identify families who had taken full parental leave entitlements.



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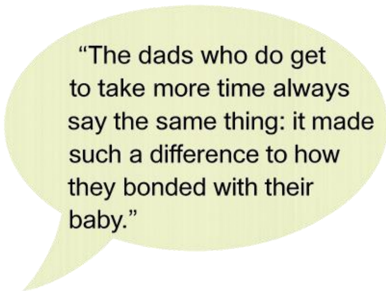

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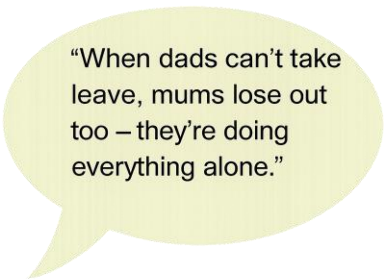

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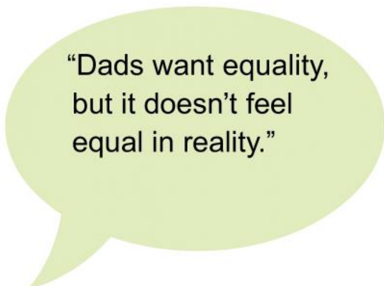

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[33] Transcript-Family-Friendly-Legislation-Brighter-Futures-14-July-2025-(1).pdf
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[36] Transcript-Family-Friendly-Legislation-Brighter-Futures-14-July-2025-(1).pdf

This suggests that future reform should prioritise making parental rights practically accessible, not just legally available. Evidence shows that statutory entitlements alone are insufficient if families cannot afford to use them or if workplace culture prevents uptake. Ensuring real-world accessibility will be essential for the legislation to achieve its intended impact.

Desire for More Inclusive Care Models (Including Grandparents and Extended Family)

This theme that recurs throughout much of the stakeholder engagement, emerged towards the end of the hearing, but relates strongly to paternal leave experiences:

- Many families rely heavily on grandparents for childcare.
- Witnesses argued that parental leave or flexible working should be extended to main carers, including grandparents who assume daily care.
- The inability of grandparents to take formal leave places additional pressure on fathers who must return early to work.

> "Grandparents are doing a lot of the childcare now. Parents rely on them because childcare is so expensive."

This indicates that strengthening support for extended family networks, such as grandparents and kinship carers, could indirectly enable more fathers to take shared parental leave. When wider family members are better supported to contribute to childcare, fathers may face fewer work-related or financial barriers to taking time away from work, improving the overall balance of caregiving within households.

Key Themes

From the Brighter Futures evidence, fathers' experiences of parental leave are shaped by:

- Lack of awareness of entitlements
- Strong workplace stigma and cultural expectations
- Inconsistent employer practices
- Financial barriers that override statutory rights
- Reliance on peer support rather than official communication
- Negative impact on bonding, mental health, and family wellbeing
- Legislation that is fair in principle but not accessible in practice
- Need for more flexible, inclusive models involving extended family

These themes highlight that fathers are not actively choosing to disengage from early caregiving, the system around them is not enabling or encouraging it, despite the intention of Jersey's law.

FINDING 51
Fathers often learn more from peers regarding their parental entitlements than from official sources and community-led father engagement is currently filling a gap in formal communication.

RECOMMENDATION 21
The Minister for Social Security should develop, as part of the centralised communications campaign messaging focused on fathers, ensuring that their parental entitlements are clearly explained and widely understood, and that employers are aware of, and consistently uphold, their obligations under family friendly legislation.

FINDING 52
Stigma varies by industry and workplace type, male-dominated sectors appear to have stronger barriers and fewer role models of fathers taking leave, indicating that legal entitlements alone are insufficient unless workplace culture shifts to normalise fathers taking leave. Hospitality and retail are highlighted repeatedly as challenging sectors with poor communication and rigid conditions.

FINDING 53
Fathers in self-employment face the most significant constraints, often being unable to take leave at all because of immediate financial pressure.

FINDING 54
Fathers are not actively choosing to disengage from early caregiving, the system around them is not enabling or encouraging it, despite the intention of Jersey's law.

Official support infrastructure

Jersey Advisory and Conciliation Service (JACS): *System-Level Insights into the Operation of Family Friendly Employment Rights*

As part of its evidence-gathering process, the Sub-Panel considered it essential to hear from the Jersey Advisory and Conciliation Service (JACS), the impartial grant funded body that acts as the employment relations service on behalf of Government and supports employers, employees and trade unions to 'work together for the prosperity of Jersey business and the benefit of employees'[37].

JACS' independence is guaranteed by statute, the States of Jersey passed the Jersey Advisory and Conciliation (Jersey) Law in March 2003.

JACS occupies a unique role within the Island's employment system: it is not a regulator and does not enforce policy, but acts as an independent, confidential advisory service similar to Acas in the UK, they are consistently cited as the primary source for advice and guidance for employers and employees in Government communications, including the Government

[37] About JACS | JACS

website. Because of this position, JACS is uniquely placed to observe broad patterns of behaviour, areas of misunderstanding, the practical realities businesses face, and the frequency with which family friendly provisions lead to workplace disputes. Their insight therefore complements the experiences of parents, unions, small business owners and third-sector groups by offering a system-level view of how the law is actually functioning in practice.

The Sub-Panel met with the Director of JACS Patricia Rowen in a public hearing on the 16th July.

JACS's Role and Operational Context

During the hearing, JACS described its governance model, operating under a service-level agreement with the Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance (SPPP) department, while maintaining strict independence from Ministers and Government decision-making. This arm's-length relationship was described as essential to its impartiality, particularly when advising employers about their legal obligations or supporting employees who may be in conflict with their employer. JACS receives over 11,000 contacts each year, a figure that has risen steadily, and provides extensive training, guidance and communication materials to help organisations comply with employment legislation, including the family friendly reforms. Preparatory work begins even before implementation dates are confirmed so employers are ready for changes as soon as they come into force.

Understanding and Applying Family Friendly Rights

The JACS Director told the Sub-Panel that most employers and employees understand the core elements of the family friendly framework, conflicting with feedback received throughout the review by employees and support services. They can predict upcoming "baby booms" by monitoring surges in enquiries relating to parental leave. Between January and May 2025, JACS dealt with more than 200 direct queries about parental rights, almost evenly split between employers and employees. Importantly, the majority of these queries concern technical issues such as how to calculate holiday during parental leave, how public holidays are dealt with, the handling of bonuses or pension contributions, or what happens to accrued leave when an employee changes jobs. These are detailed points of interpretation rather than disagreements about the basic entitlements themselves.

JACS reported that misconceptions do still arise, such as the incorrect belief by some employers that eligibility for parental leave requires 12 months' service, despite the law clearly defining this as a "day one" right. They also noted that employees often confuse employment rights with Social Security parental benefits, which JACS cannot advise on, sometimes leading to frustration that stems not from the legislation but from uncertainty over where to seek correct information.

Flexibility, Cultural Factors and Practical Barriers

One of the themes emerging from the hearing was the desire, expressed by both employers and employees, for greater flexibility in how leave can be taken. The current requirement for leave to be taken in blocks of at least two weeks can be difficult to accommodate, particularly in small businesses or in sectors requiring physical presence. JACS noted that while such flexibility may be beneficial, any legislative change must take account of the administrative systems underpinning Social Security benefits.

The Sub-Panel also explored whether there remains cultural stigma attached to taking parental leave, particularly for fathers. JACS explained that while they do not receive a high volume of father-specific complaints, stigma is still present as a broader societal issue. They see it less as an employment law problem and more as a reflection of traditional expectations around caregiving. In practice, JACS reported no evidence that equal parental leave rights have discouraged employers from hiring or disadvantaged men or women differently.

Communication and Public Awareness

JACS described a wide range of communication methods, including guidance videos, flowcharts, newsletters, training sessions and a highly used website. For example, one of their parental leave explainer videos attracted more than 700 views in the first five months of 2025 alone. Despite strong engagement, they acknowledged that gaps remain, particularly around clarity of information for migrant workers or individuals whose first language is not English. The service uses digital translation features but cannot provide professionally translated materials for all languages. Ms Rowan explained that JACS is developing a new communications strategy, with the aim of simplifying access and improving reach.

Throughout the review's evidence gathering, there has been a consistent message across all stakeholders, that the publicly available information on the law, and the family friendly amendments specifically, are inadequate or confusing – with the main message, particularly from parents and support services, being that clearer, consistent, centralised information is needed to ensure compliance and confidence.

The Sub-Panel does not dispute that JACS provide a number of training opportunities however, they question the strategic planning and development of this training.

The Sub-Panel Chair asked during the hearing about how training on new legislation is planned and structured, and who the courses are aimed at, the JACs Director explained that;

'… What we do is we start the training on it immediately … For anybody, it is a public course, anybody can attend it. Those are the public ones; they go out to everybody or we will do in-house ones where businesses might invite us in or we will go into specific situations like presenting to groups of people or interested parties. We have recently done something with the construction industry. We are doing something with the Jersey Charities Association. I did the breast-feeding initiative earlier this year. We deliver training, as soon as it gets in we start advising on the potential for new law coming in anyway; that was even spoken about before it went to the States. This is a potential, you need to be prepared for that. Once we know that it has gone through the States we start preparing all the documentation and little videos. We have already got a video out there on this new law, even though we do not have an implementation date yet. We are advising upfront so that people have a level of preparedness[38]*.*

The Sub-Panel question the validity of this approach and also how learning outcomes are assessed across a potentially diverse audience. As the review evidence has indicated that there is a significant lack of understanding of the current legal provisions across both employers and employees, this suggests that there is a significant gap. When assessing needs and developing training programmes that are fit for purpose and fulfil the intended outcomes, it is essential to tailor the tone and content to the audience to support effective communication, and compliment this with proper evaluation of the impact of the training.

Much was made during the hearing of the volume of enquires, engagement methods and communication channels, without discussion of JACS strategy for assessing knowledge gaps, targeting training or supporting to the right audience, suggesting that demonstrating the pressure on the service is paramount, rather than assessing impact.

[38] Transcript-Family-Friendly-Legislation-JACS-16-July-2025_1.pdf

In order to further assess effective communication channels, Question 2 of the review survey asked

During pregnancy or when you were planning for a child, did you access information regarding employment, claims and benefits?

307 respondents answered 'yes' and of these 299 indicated their information sources with only 8 denoting JACS as their source, just 2.7% of respondents, suggesting that for prospective parents, JACS is not a current known or trusted source of information.

Impact on Employers and Dispute Resolution

One of the most significant insights provided by JACS is that, contrary to some perceptions, family friendly legislation is not causing measurable harm to employers. JACS stated clearly that they have seen no evidence of any business failing as a direct result of the reforms. Formal disputes are extremely rare and are usually resolved as soon as the employer is presented with accurate information. In one recent case, the issue was settled immediately once the misunderstanding was clarified.

JACS also rejected the suggestion that equalising parental rights has encouraged discriminatory recruitment practices. Employers, they said, have broadly accepted the changes and compliance remains high across all sectors.

Independence, Data and System-wide Learning

Throughout the hearing, JACS emphasised the importance of maintaining independence from Government policy functions. While they routinely provide anonymised statistics to inform policy, they stressed that becoming more integrated with Government would undermine the confidentiality and trust that underpin their advisory role. Their main resource challenge relates to ongoing funding to maintain and modernise their website and training materials, rather than staffing or demand pressures.

Overarching Themes from JACS Evidence

Taken overall, JACS's evidence appears to provide reassuring confirmation that the family friendly legislative framework is functioning broadly as intended. Enquiries tend to focus on technical interpretation rather than disputes about basic rights, and there is little evidence of widespread non-compliance or employer resistance. Where issues do arise, they relate primarily to communication gaps, societal attitudes, operational challenges in small businesses, and confusion between employment law and Social Security benefits.

For the Sub-Panel, the JACS testimony helps differentiate between issues of legislative design and issues of communication, culture and awareness. Their perspective reinforces the need for clearer public information, accessible guidance for both employers and employees, and the importance of addressing cultural attitudes toward parental leave, particularly for fathers, alongside formal legislative measures.

Key themes from the Hearing

JACS reports high levels of employer compliance and very few disputes
JACS indicated that the family friendly employment framework is generally well understood and implemented by employers. They reported no significant or repeating dispute patterns relating specifically to family friendly rights and noted that tribunal claims in this area are extremely rare.

“We have not had any tribunal claims… it was settled immediately once the employer realised the error.”

JACS’ position is that, when provided with clear information, employers and employees “get it immediately”, implying the legislation functions well when queries arise.

Demand for guidance remains high, showing ongoing need for support
Despite confidence in employer compliance, JACS continues to receive a substantial volume of queries on parental rights, over 200 in the first five months of 2025 alone. Questions typically relate to public holiday calculations, pensions during unpaid leave, and holiday accrual after flexible working changes, rather than fundamental misunderstandings of statutory rights. This demonstrates ongoing complexity in the practical application of the law.

Communication is multi-channel but relies heavily on individuals contacting JACS
JACS sets out a broad communication strategy but acknowledges that its job is to provide information when requested, not to run mass public awareness campaigns.

Stakeholders must proactively seek assistance, and JACS confirmed they do **not** monitor whether the public fully understand the legislation.

“We do not do anything particularly on one subject… we advise on all employment law topics the same.”

The service is responsive rather than outreach-focused, which may contribute to awareness gaps noted elsewhere in the review.

JACS does not advise on Social Security benefits – a major source of public confusion
JACS repeatedly emphasised that they cannot comment on parental allowance, social security entitlements, or pensions, which sit outside their statutory remit. They acknowledged this is often confusing for parents seeking “one place” to understand the whole system.

“We do not advise on Social Security… We could add a slide saying, ‘there may be benefits available’, but nothing more.”

This structural divide contributes to wider public misunderstanding of rights and benefits, as identified across the review.

Limited employer challenges – but rigid block-leave rules may constrain flexibility
The most frequent employer concern relates to the statutory requirement for parental leave to be taken in blocks of at least two weeks. JACS explained that both employers and employees sometimes seek more flexible arrangements, but the law is prescriptive.

“**Some employers would like to be more flexible… employees might only want to take a week, but the law doesn’t allow that.”**

This suggests scope for legislative refinement.

Cultural stigma affects both mothers and fathers, but JACS sees this as a societal, not legal, issue.
Asked about stigma relating to fathers taking parental leave, JACS suggested the issue predates the legislation and is not gender-specific:

"There is always a stigma around the parent who leaves at 2pm… That is society; not the law."

This supports the review's conclusion that improved communication alone cannot shift gender norms; cultural change measures are also needed.

No evidence of sector-specific issues from JACS' perspective
While charities and CAJ reported challenges in sectors such as construction and hospitality, JACS stated they see **no unusual volume of disputes** from any particular industry.

"Hospitality is not a particular hot spot for us… we do not see more queries from them than any other sector."

This contrasts with other stakeholder evidence is an important finding and highlights potential under-reporting or hidden non-compliance.

Translation and accessibility challenges remain unresolved
Despite seeing many visitors whose first language is not English, JACS has **no translation resources** and cannot afford to offer them. They rely on Google Translate, voice-to-text tools, or individuals bringing their own interpreters.

"We do not have the resources… translation is extremely expensive and risks excluding other language groups."

This may limit access for migrant workers, one of the groups most at risk of misunderstanding or not asserting their rights.

JACS stresses independence from Government, limiting coordination
JACS noted that although Government funds their service, they must remain independent and cannot appear aligned with Government messaging. This creates a structural barrier to a unified communications strategy.

"We cannot work too closely with Government… that could impact our independence and confidentiality."

This distinction underscores the need for Government to lead on consistent, centralised communication, something the review finds lacking.

Conclusion – The Role of JACS

Throughout the review, the Sub-Panel became increasingly concerned that the Jersey Advisory and Conciliation Service (JACS), despite its valued role as an independent source of legal advice and dispute resolution, is not consistently meeting the needs of families and employers seeking guidance on family friendly legislation. Evidence from hearings, written submissions and public testimony indicated that some of JACS' guidance is confusing, inadequate, or insufficiently reflective of modern family structures and the practical complexities of the law.

The Sub-Panel therefore concludes that JACS' role, responsibilities and communications function require a fundamental review. This should clarify expectations, ensure that its primary legal advisory and conciliation functions remain properly supported, and determine whether wider communication and training duties should continue to sit with JACS. If they do, these functions must be adequately planned, funded and monitored by the sponsoring department.

While JACS operates as an independent body established in statute, it remains important that the quality and effectiveness of its services are carefully monitored to ensure they continue to deliver appropriate public benefit. Without clearer scope and resourcing, both families and employers risk being left without reliable, accessible guidance on the rights and obligations set out in Jersey's family friendly legislation.

FINDING 55
JACS is highly valued for its independent advice, but evidence shows that some of its public guidance on family friendly rights is unclear, or not effectively targeted, leading to inconsistencies in the information available to parents and employers.

RECOMMENDATION 22
The Minister for Social Security should consider and reassess the remit of JACS, their capacity, and communications function, with a view to refocusing the organisation on its core strengths, ensuring clear accountability structures are put in place.

Evidence from the Minister for Social Security: *Communication, Compliance and the Real-World Impact of Family Friendly Legislation*

During its public hearing of 15 July, the Sub-Panel received extensive evidence from the Minister for Social Security regarding the operation, communication and monitoring of Jersey's family friendly employment legislation. The discussion provided valuable insight into both the Government's intentions and the structural limitations that influence how effectively the legislation supports families in practice. Throughout the hearing, several recurring themes emerged, including the absence of meaningful compliance data, ongoing communication challenges, the affordability of parental leave, and broader social pressures affecting families.

One of the most significant issues highlighted during the hearing was the Government's limited ability to monitor whether employers are complying with the law. The Minister confirmed that the legislation provides no mechanism for Government to collect data on employer behaviour or to proactively assess whether employees are accessing their entitlements. As she explained, "***The legislation does not provide for government to… collect data and enforce it***," meaning the only way non-compliance becomes visible is if an individual is willing to pursue an employment tribunal claim. This leaves policymakers with a substantial evidence gap, particularly as, evidenced by the CAJ, many parents are reluctant to enter formal disputes. The Minister acknowledged this limitation openly and welcomed the Sub-Panel's survey as one of the few tools available to illuminate real-world experiences.

A second prominent theme concerned the clarity and accessibility of information available to families and employers. The Minister accepted that public understanding of family friendly rights remains inconsistent and that Government resources could be improved. Work was underway to include a new leaflet with maternity packs, providing a clearer, step-by-step explanation of what parents need to do when planning leave. However, concerns raised by the Sub-Panel about inadequate or confusing material, particularly a JACS video that had reportedly left viewers "more confused than ever", exposed a fundamental tension in the current system. Although Government funds JACS to provide guidance, the Minister stressed that JACS operates independently and that it is "not [her] role" to check the accuracy of their public-facing material stating, ***"It is not my role to check on JACS' website… that would be a misuse of Ministerial time."*** This exchange highlighted a structural ambiguity in accountability: while the Government holds responsibility for ensuring that families understand their rights, it has little oversight of one of the primary bodies families rely on for information.

The affordability of parental leave formed a further core element of the discussion. The Minister acknowledged that many parents are unable to take the full period of leave to which they are entitled because the current level of financial support is insufficient to cover their living costs. As she noted, "***People who may want to spend longer with their child currently feel that they cannot do that.***" She reflected on her own positive experience of being able to take extended leave but recognised that this is not the reality for many families. Despite this awareness, the Minister made clear that there are currently no Government plans to increase financial support for parental leave, stressing that any future improvements would need to be fiscally sustainable and politically supported.

The hearing also touched on the role of health services in communicating rights and entitlements. Midwives were described as "the key communication point for family friendly benefits," and officials reported regular engagement with the Midwifery Department to ensure accurate information is shared with expectant parents. However, the Sub-Panel raised concerns about inconsistent communication across other services, including health visitors and Family Nursing & Home Care. The Minister offered no detailed plans to improve engagement with these groups, leaving open the question of whether all new parents receive the same level of information and support.

A related challenge discussed was the absence of proactive monitoring of employer practices. The Minister confirmed that the Government has no statutory power to request information from employers about job protection, flexible working decisions or the uptake of parental leave. As she put it, "***The legislation does not give me any provision… to make it incumbent on employers to provide me with information***," meaning employers' behaviours remain largely invisible unless employees come forward with complaints. While the Minister suggested that unions, JACS and employer groups may provide some insight, she acknowledged that this intelligence is incomplete and inconsistent.

Throughout the hearing, the Minister emphasised the importance of balancing the needs of families with economic competitiveness and fiscal responsibility. She described the legislation as fundamentally balanced but recognised inherent tensions in maintaining employer confidence while expanding support for parents, stating ***'It is always that tension… supporting our economy but also supporting parents"***. She expressed openness to Scrutiny recommendations - but noted that any proposal to extend rights should include clear advice on cost and implementation.

Finally, the Sub-Panel explored wider social challenges affecting families, drawing on evidence previously provided by Brighter Futures. The Minister acknowledged that child poverty and rising living costs are placing increasing pressure on families and that support must extend "***right through that journey***." She described acting swiftly in cases of individual hardship when issues were brought to her attention, although such interventions do not address structural affordability constraints within the legislation.

Overall, the hearing echoed many of the key themes heard throughout the Sub-Panel's evidence gathering, demonstrating that while Jersey's family friendly legislation provides an important framework of rights, its practical impact is weakened by financial barriers, communication gaps, and the absence of meaningful monitoring. The Minister's evidence was constructive and transparent, but it also underscored that improving the system will require coordinated cross-government effort, clearer lines of accountability, and a more robust strategy for ensuring families and employers understand and can exercise their rights.

Key themes from the hearing

No system to monitor employer compliance
The Minister confirmed that Government has no proactive way to assess whether employers follow the law, relying solely on tribunal claims.
Observation: A major data gap prevents Government from knowing how the legislation is working in practice.

Communication is unclear, inconsistent and often inadequate
Parents and employers struggle to understand their rights, and key resources, especially JACS guidance, were described as confusing.
Observation: Poor, fragmented communication continues to undermine awareness and uptake of rights.

Accountability gap regarding JACS guidance
Although Government funds JACS, the Minister stated it is not her role to oversee its advice materials.
Observation: This creates an accountability gap in ensuring accurate public information.

Affordability limits real access to parental leave
Many families cannot afford to take unpaid leave despite statutory entitlement to 52 weeks.
Observation: Legal rights do not equate to practical access for low- and middle-income families.

Over-reliance on midwives as the main communication channel
Information about rights is delivered almost exclusively through midwives, with inconsistent involvement from FNHC or other services.
Observation: This single-channel approach risks gaps and inequity in understanding.

No current plans to enhance paid leave or affordability support
The Minister acknowledged financial barriers but stated no reforms are planned.
Observation: Without targeted changes, existing inequalities in access to leave will continue.

Sectoral differences and employer challenges persist
Small businesses struggle most with staffing and flexibility demands.
Observation: The legislation's impact varies significantly across the labour market.

Insufficient data on uptake or outcomes
Government cannot measure how much leave parents take, how employers respond, or the wider impact of the legislation.
Observation: The absence of monitoring limits evidence-based policymaking.

Evidence from the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development: *the interaction between family friendly employment legislation, the labour market, and wider demographic and economic pressures*

The Minister for Sustainable Economic Development responded to a letter from the Sub-Panel's questioning the interaction between family friendly employment legislation, the labour market, and wider demographic and economic pressures. The letter emphasises that Government sees demographic decline and an ageing population as significant long-term challenges but does not view enhanced parental leave as a primary policy lever to address them.

The Minister confirmed that workforce participation for women and young adults has increased since 2011, but attributed recent employment trends largely to post-pandemic recovery rather than specific effects of family friendly legislation. He stated that isolating the impact of the 2018 and 2020 reforms on labour participation is not possible with existing data.

Regarding business engagement, the Minister referred to the 2024 Post-Implementation Review (PIR) and reiterated its conclusions: that the current leave structure is broadly functioning well, that increased flexibility may undermine the principle of equal parental rights, and that no further expansion of paid leave should be pursued at this time.

On economic analysis, the Minister stated that Government has not produced a Jersey-specific cost–benefit analysis of enhanced parental leave but referenced UK evidence indicating positive economic and equality outcomes from improved parental rights. He highlighted that healthcare and education sectors already offer enhanced parental entitlements, but argued that extending statutory leave would increase operational pressures and locum costs.

The letter also discussed broader demographic challenge: declining birth rates, rising living costs, and outmigration. The Minister asserted that the Government's principal response lies within the Future Economy Programme and the Common Strategic Policy, including childcare expansion, school meal provision, and raising low incomes, rather than through employment law changes.

While acknowledging that parental leave and flexible work contribute to job satisfaction and may aid retention, the Minister did not commit to any reforms linking employment rights to demographic or economic outcomes. He maintained that employment law's purpose is to balance rights and responsibilities, not to act as a driver of population policy.

This correspondence illustrates a significant divergence between the Government's current policy stance and the issues emerging from the Sub-Panel's evidence base. While the Minister acknowledges Jersey's acute demographic and economic pressures, the response reinforces that enhanced parental leave and wider family friendly employment rights are not currently being considered as strategic policy tools, despite strong stakeholder evidence that affordability barriers, employer practices and limited leave accessibility directly affect family wellbeing, workforce participation and decisions about remaining in Jersey.

The absence of Jersey-specific economic analysis, coupled with limited monitoring and consultation, underscores a critical gap in understanding how family friendly legislation is functioning in practice and whether it is contributing to wider population and labour market objectives. This strengthens the case for the Sub-Panel's review and highlights the need for a more joined-up, evidence-led approach to family policy across Government.

Key themes

No dedicated economic analysis of parental leave impacts

The Minister confirmed that Government has not undertaken Jersey-specific modelling of how parental leave affects workforce participation, productivity or equality. Evidence cited is external (UK review) rather than locally derived.
Observation: There is no local assessment of whether Jersey's parental leave system supports long-term economic sustainability or labour market participation.

Government cannot isolate the impact of the 2018/2020 reforms

The Minister stated that Covid-19 disrupted labour market patterns, making it impossible to determine whether legislative changes influenced participation among parents.
Observation: The effectiveness of family friendly legislation remains unmeasured due to lack of specific data and analytical tools.

Current ministerial position mirrors the 2024 Post-Implementation Review

The Minister reiterated the PIR's conclusions:
- Avoid increasing the paid parental leave period.
- Avoid expanding flexibility, which might undermine equal parental rights.
- Prioritise improving communications rather than altering the law.

Observation: The Government does not plan to amend parental leave structures, even though stakeholders have highlighted accessibility challenges and financial barriers.

Government sees childcare expansion, not leave reform, as main family policy lever

The Minister positioned childcare expansion (universal offer for ages 2–3, free school meals, living wage) as core demographic and cost-of-living interventions.
Observation: Employment law reform is not currently viewed by Government as a primary tool for addressing demographic or economic risk, despite evidence from submissions that leave accessibility is a major barrier for families.

Acknowledgement of demographic risk, but limited policy linkage to parental rights

The Minister noted Jersey is facing ageing and shrinking workforce pressures but argued that international evidence shows limited fertility response to policy intervention. **Observation:** Government recognises demographic decline but is not exploring enhanced parental leave or wider family friendly rights as potential mitigation strategies.

No formal business consultation beyond the 2024 PIR

The Minister referenced the PIR as the primary mechanism for employer feedback and did not identify further structured engagement across sectors.
Observation: Ongoing employer consultation appears limited, despite evidence from this review showing varied sectoral impacts and burdens.

Acknowledgement that improved parental rights may support job satisfaction and retention

Although Government has not examined this locally, the Minister accepted evidence from the UK that enhanced leave can: improve retention,

- narrow the gender pay gap,
- support equality,
- improve childhood outcomes.

Observation: Government accepts international evidence of economic benefits but has not applied it to Jersey policy development.

Conclusion

The Sub-Panel's review of Jersey's family friendly legislation has revealed a system that is progressive in intent but uneven in impact, with families' real-world experiences often falling short of the policy ambitions set out when the law was amended in 2020. Five years on, the legislation provides a strong foundation of rights on paper, but its effectiveness is constrained by affordability barriers, inconsistent employer practices, and widespread gaps in public understanding. These limitations are occurring against the backdrop of a record low birth rate, high cost of living, increased emigration pressures, and mounting financial strain on working families, factors that make this review both timely and necessary.

Across hearings, written submissions, community pop-ups and hundreds of survey responses, a consistent picture emerged: parents value the protections and opportunities the legislation offers, but many cannot fully exercise them. The most common barrier is affordability. While the law grants up to 52 weeks' leave per parent, families repeatedly reported that taking leave beyond the six weeks of employer-funded pay is financially impossible. For lower-income households, already stretched by rising housing costs, expensive childcare and eligibility rules that make them ineligible for additional support, extended leave is largely symbolic rather than attainable. This was powerfully captured by frontline services, with FNHC stating plainly that parental leave "is not truly accessible to low-income families."

The review also found that the legislation is not yet being fully realised due to significant communication and awareness gaps. Many families, employers, and even HR professionals remain unclear about core entitlements and responsibilities. This lack of clarity persists despite the Ministerial Conclusions published following the PIR, and despite the Government's commitment to improve communications. Evidence gathered by the Sub-Panel showed no sign of a coordinated, government-led strategy to address these gaps, leaving families reliant on inconsistent information from employers, service providers and third-sector organisations.

Concerns about uneven employer behaviour were another recurring theme. While many employers were described as fair, flexible and supportive, others, particularly in sectors such as construction, hospitality and agriculture, were reported to discourage leave, provide misinformation, or in some cases penalise employees for attempting to use their rights. These experiences were echoed through the Citizens Advice Jersey's casework and community testimony, directly contrasting with JACS' assertion that few employment disputes exist in this area. The absence of proactive monitoring leaves these issues largely invisible to Government.

The review highlighted important considerations around fathers, gender norms and shared care. For many families, father-involvement was described as transformative, strengthening bonding in the crucial first 1,001 days and supporting maternal wellbeing. However, fathers also reported barriers: stigma from employers, lack of flexibility, and financial pressures that limit their leave-taking. Single parents, grandparents and extended family networks also emerged as central to Jersey's childcare landscape. Many families rely heavily on informal care, often provided by grandparents, due to the high cost of nurseries and limited availability of places. Yet these contributors are not well recognised within the current legislative framework.

A broader set of themes also cut across the review, including:

- loneliness and isolation among new parents
- mental health pressures linked to the postnatal period
- the need for culturally competent and inclusive services
- challenges in navigating childcare provision, waiting lists and affordability
- the particular vulnerability of families without local support networks
- the panel's consistent observation that inequalities - economic, structural and informational, shape who can benefit most from the legislation.

Despite these challenges, the review also found considerable goodwill, creativity and resilience within the community. Families offered numerous practical ideas, from supports for multiple births to improvements in catchment flexibility and clearer entitlement guidance. Employers highlighted the positive cultural impact of the legislation, including improved retention, loyalty and family-friendly workplace values. Representative bodies such as Liberate emphasised the importance of updating language, policies and guidance to reflect Jersey's increasingly diverse family structures and identities.

Ultimately, the Sub-Panel concludes that the aims of the legislation remain sound: to protect families at critical life stages, promote gender equality, and improve children's outcomes through parental presence during early development. However, the gap between entitlement and experience remains significant. The current system cannot be considered fully effective until families at all income levels, in all sectors, and across all identities can access their rights without fear, financial hardship or ambiguity.

To move forward, Jersey requires clearer communication, stronger monitoring, more equitable design, and policy adjustments that reflect contemporary realities, including the cost of living, childcare shortages, variations in housing stability, and the increasing complexity of family life. These findings inform the Sub-Panel's recommendations for a more coherent, inclusive and genuinely family friendly approach, capable of supporting children's development, strengthening parental wellbeing and contributing to a more sustainable future for Jersey.

Key observations of the Review

The legislation is strong in principle but uneven in practice.
Five years after implementation, the rights provided by the 2020 amendments are not being fully realised due to financial, structural and communication barriers.

Affordability remains the single biggest obstacle.
While parents value the right to up to 52 weeks' leave, most cannot afford to take it beyond the six weeks of employer-paid entitlement. This means extended parental leave is largely inaccessible for low and middle-income families.

Awareness of rights is inconsistent and often inadequate.
The Sub-Panel found no evidence of a coordinated, government-led communications strategy since the PIR. Families, employers and HR professionals frequently reported confusion about entitlements, processes and responsibilities.

Employer practices vary significantly between sectors.
Positive examples exist, but problems were repeatedly reported in construction, hospitality and agriculture. CAJ and survey evidence suggest that some employers actively discourage or penalise parents for asserting their rights, contradicting claims that disputes are rare.

Childcare affordability and availability fundamentally shape how rights are used.
High childcare costs, long waiting lists and limited flexible options create barriers to returning to work and exacerbate financial pressures during the early years of parenting.

Fathers face cultural and financial barriers to taking leave.
Despite legislative equality, stigma, workplace norms and financial constraints mean many fathers cannot take extended leave, limiting the legislation's intended impact on gender equality and shared care.

Single parents, grandparents and extended families play a substantial but unsupported role.
Many families rely heavily on informal care due to childcare costs, yet these contributors are not well recognised in policy design.

Mental health, isolation and the challenges of the first 1,001 days are prominent themes.
Families highlighted the emotional and psychological pressures of early parenthood, compounded by financial strain and limited support networks.

Stronger monitoring and accountability are needed.
With no proactive mechanism to track employer compliance or parental uptake, Government cannot currently assess whether the law is working as intended.

The system is inclusive in aspiration, but not yet inclusive in effect.
More consistent language, clearer guidance, recognition of diverse family structures and supports for vulnerable groups are required to ensure all families benefit equally.

Policy Options for a More Family Friendly Jersey

Although this report provides a set of formal recommendations, the Sub-Panel feels compelled to speak more personally and directly to the wider issues facing families in Jersey today. Throughout this review, Members heard from hundreds of parents, carers, employers, charities and early-years professionals. Their testimonies were powerful, often moving, and left the Sub-Panel with a deep sense of responsibility to ensure that every child in Jersey is given the best possible start in life, and that every family feels supported, valued and able to thrive.

It became clear that many of the pressures facing parents, particularly the poorest and most vulnerable, lie beyond the narrow boundaries of employment law. Jersey is experiencing a record low birth rate, rising emigration among young families, and an increasingly ageing population. Without decisive, long-term action, the Island risks becoming a place where raising children is simply unaffordable, where too many feel forced to leave, and where economic growth and social cohesion are undermined by demographic decline.

The Sub-Panel recognises that these are systemic challenges, and that the scope of this review did not allow for the full suite of longitudinal reforms that would be needed to reverse these trends. With more time and capacity, Members would have wished to explore far-reaching policy shifts, across housing, tax, childcare, migration, parental leave and early years support, to create a genuinely family friendly Island capable of sustaining its future.

Nevertheless, compelled by the weight of evidence and the urgency of the issues raised, the Sub-Panel has included a set of medium and long-term policy options that expand on the Review's recommendations and are designed to stimulate strategic discussion and support Government in developing a bold, coherent vision for Jersey's families, these are influenced by the public responses to the review, particularly from the survey and community events. These proposals are offered not as prescriptive solutions, but as a starting point for a much needed conversation about how Jersey can once again become a place where families feel encouraged, supported and appreciated, and where the practical realities of raising children are truly understood and addressed.

The Sub-Panel believes passionately that investing in families is investing in the Island's future. At this pivotal moment, the choices made now will determine whether Jersey becomes a harder place to raise children, or a more hopeful, nurturing and sustainable community for generations to come.

<u>Childcare Affordability, Access and Flexibility: Bring forward and smooth the free hours offer</u>
Option:
- Extend funded early-years hours before age of 2
- Allow children to access NEF/early-years hours as soon as they reach eligibility, rather than waiting until the following September.
- This directly addresses the "early years gap" repeatedly raised in evidence and the frustration about term-based cut-offs.

<u>Cap out-of-pocket childcare costs as a share of income</u>
Option: Introduce an income-related childcare subsidy so that eligible families pay no more than a set percentage of household income (e.g. 7–10%) on registered childcare.
- Mirrors international practice (e.g. the Nordic income-capped models).
- Targets support where cost pressures are greatest, without eroding the entire fee structure.

<u>Extend funding to more flexible providers and atypical hours</u>
Option: Allow public funding (NEF/early-years subsidies) to be used with:
- Registered childminders and nannies, not just nurseries
- Providers offering shift-friendly or extended hours
- Specialist or inclusive settings for children with additional needs.

This responds directly to shift-worker evidence and gaps for neurodivergent.

<u>Support capacity and quality in the childcare market</u>
Option: Create an Early Years Capacity Fund to:
- Help providers expand places, especially for under-2s and in under-served parishes
- Invest in workforce pay, training and retention
- Support inclusive provision for disabled children.

These addresses shortages, long waiting lists and variability in quality flagged across submissions.

<u>Recognise unpaid care in the tax system</u>
Option: Provide targeted tax relief or credits to:
- Single-earner couples where one parent is home with under-school-age children

- Grandparents who have reduced work to provide regular childcare.

This responds to the strong theme of reliance on extended family and the sense that those contributions are invisible in current policy.

Housing and Cost of Living for Families: Family housing guarantees and rent support
Option:
- Introduce targeted rent subsidies or caps for families with young children in the private sector; and/or
- Expand family-suitable social housing with stable, affordable rents.

Parents repeatedly linked decisions about having children or leaving Jersey to housing affordability.

Mortgage and deposit support for young families
Option: Develop a family home ownership pathway, e.g.
- Government-backed low-deposit products for first-time buyer families
- Shared-equity schemes prioritising households with children.

Stable housing is repeatedly identified as a precondition for planning a family.

Integrate childcare and housing planning
Option: Require that major new housing developments plan for childcare and family services (e.g. nursery space, safe play areas, family hubs).

Helps co-locate housing, childcare and community support, reducing logistical and cost pressures.

Provide targeted support for SMEs and charities
Option:
- Introduce a small-employer rebate or grant to offset part of the cost of paid parental leave, and/or
- Scale certain obligations (e.g. notice periods, leave blocks) by employer size.

This responds to employer concerns about disproportionate administrative and cost burdens.

"Family-Friendly Jersey" employer accreditation
Option: Create a voluntary accreditation or kitemark scheme recognising employers who:
- Go beyond the statutory minimum on leave, flexible working and childcare support
- Actively encourage the use of KIT days and phased return schemes
- Track and publish internal data on uptake and equality.

This uses reputational incentives rather than only regulation and gives families a visible signal of good practice.

Public sector as exemplar
Option: Require Government of Jersey to promote:

- Its own enhanced parental leave, flexibility and childcare policies, and
- Publish regular staff data on uptake, grade levels and gender equality.

This sets a benchmark for the wider labour market and addresses evidence that even within GoJ practice is uneven between departments.

Governance, Data and Communication: Build a proper evidence base on uptake and compliance

Option: Establish a statutory reporting and monitoring framework to collect anonymised data on:

- Parental leave uptake (by income, sector, gender, family type)
- Flexible working requests and outcomes
- Tribunal cases, settlements and informal disputes.

This directly addresses the current “data blind spot” around compliance and impact.

Ongoing participatory review:

Option: Commit to a **five-year rolling review** of family friendly legislation and early-years policy, with:

- Regular surveys of parents, employers and children’s services
- Structured input from groups representing single parents, migrants, LGBTQ+ families, and disabled children.

This ensures the framework evolves with changing demographics and economic conditions.

Supporting Extended Families and Community Networks: Recognise grandparent and kinship care

Option:

- Offer small stipends or tax relief for grandparents providing substantial regular childcare, and/or
- Ensure kinship carers have access to parental leave and child-related benefits equivalent to parents.

This reflects the reality that many families rely on grandparents to bridge unaffordable childcare gaps.

Develop local “family hubs”

Option: Better support and expand existing integrated family hubs (co-locating midwives, health visitors, parenting support, mental health, third sector support services, benefits advice and playgroups), building on the current model, especially in high-need areas.

Directly addresses evidence of isolation, mental health strain, communication gaps and fragmented support.

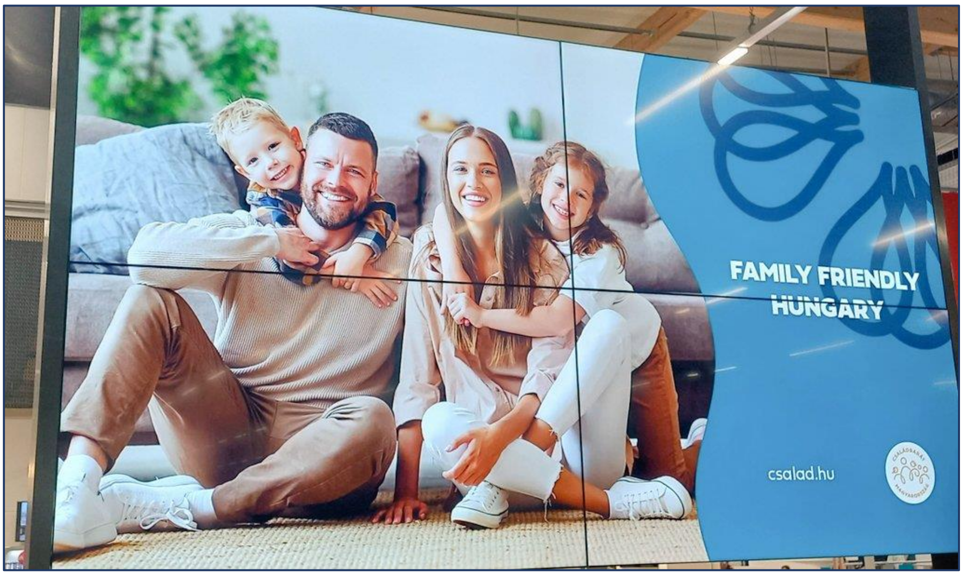
Appendix 1

International 'family friendly' policy approaches

Hungary, an exercise in centralised family policy

Since the 2010s, Hungary has placed family policy at the centre of social and economic strategy to counter low fertility and population ageing. The approach blends generous cash/tax benefits, subsidised loans and housing support, and expanded leave rights, and it is marketed domestically and internationally as "Family-Friendly Hungary.[39]" The government's communications explicitly frame childbearing as a civic duty and anchor a traditional, heterosexual breadwinner–caregiver family ideal.

The "family friendly" signs at Hungarian airports, primarily Budapest Airport (BUD), refer to a multi-faceted initiative, which includes both government awareness campaigns promoting Hungary's family policies and specific airport facilities designed to assist families travelling through the airport.



1 Signage at Budapest Airport

[39] Government - Ministry of Finance - News

2 Signage at Budapest Airport

Main Pillars of Hungary's Family-Friendly Policy Framework

Hungary's contemporary family policy model is built on a series of highly visible and politically prioritised measures designed to financially incentivise childbirth and support larger families. Cash and tax-based instruments form the backbone of this approach, with a strong focus on reducing the tax burden on parents, particularly mothers.

One of the most significant components is the large family tax allowance, which increases progressively with the number of children in the household. This is complemented by high-profile income tax exemptions. Since 2019, mothers with four or more children have been exempt from paying personal income tax (PIT) for life, a measure framed by the Government as a reward for "population-sustaining" family contributions. In 2023, this was extended further through a PIT exemption for mothers under 30, aimed at encouraging earlier childbearing. Most recently, the Government announced that from 2025, mothers with two or three children will also benefit from phased PIT exemptions, effectively widening tax relief to a much larger proportion of families. Taken together, these measures significantly reduce the tax burden for parents and represent a central ideological pillar of Hungary's pronatalist strategy.

Loans and Housing Support

Alongside tax relief, Hungary places heavy emphasis on concessional loans and housing-focused subsidies as a way of lowering the financial barriers to starting or expanding a family. At the centre of this approach is the "Baby-Expecting Loan" (Babaváró hitel[40]), a highly subsidised, interest-free loan available to young married couples, which can be partially or fully forgiven if the couple have children within the required timeframe. The scheme is designed both to encourage marriage and to support early family formation.

40 81-98-kramarics_szandra_esely-2023-1-vegleges.pdf

These financial supports are complemented by the CSOK programme, which provides substantial housing grants and preferential mortgages for families with children, as well as vehicle subsidies for larger families, particularly those with three or more children. These schemes aim to reduce living-cost pressures and improve access to suitable housing, key components in the Government's wider demographic agenda.

Official communications frequently emphasise the scale of investment, with the Hungarian Government claiming that total family supports now amount to more than 4% of GDP. This level of expenditure is significantly higher than many European comparators and illustrates the strategic political importance placed on family policy as a tool for addressing Hungary's long-term demographic challenge

Leave and Work–Life Balance Measures

Hungary has, in recent years, complemented its extensive system of financial incentives with reforms intended to improve work–life balance and parental leave entitlements. In 2023, the Government implemented a package of changes to bring national legislation into alignment with the EU Work-Life Balance Directive (2019/1158). These reforms included doubling statutory paternity leave, giving fathers a clearer legal entitlement to early caregiving involvement, and introducing carers' leave to support workers who need to care for dependent relatives. Additionally, employees gained a statutory right to request flexible working arrangements, such as adjusted hours or remote work, designed to assist parents returning to employment after childbirth.

These adaptations sit alongside Hungary's existing parental benefit architecture, which includes long-standing programmes such as CSED (infant care benefit), GYED (child care allowance), and GYES (universal child-raising allowance). These schemes vary in generosity, eligibility criteria and duration, and are detailed extensively in the international Leave Network's annual country notes. Together, they create a layered system of parental income support, combining contributory and flat-rate elements, though access often depends on employment and insurance status, meaning benefits can vary widely between households.

Narrative Framing and Selective Pronatalism

Despite these expansions in formal entitlements, the strategic narrative underpinning Hungary's family policy remains highly selective. The policy framework generally privileges a particular model of family life - typically married, heterosexual, majority-ethnic, securely employed, and broadly middle class. Government communications and eligibility criteria across multiple schemes reinforce this idealised family structure as the desired norm, with financial benefits and symbolic recognition disproportionately concentrated on such households.

As a result, groups who fall outside this preferred model, such as single parents, cohabiting couples, same-sex parents, low-income workers, minority ethnic families, or those in insecure employment, are often less well served by the system. Some face practical barriers to accessing benefits, while others report feeling excluded or stigmatised by policy messaging that equates "good" families with traditional marital arrangements and sustained labour market participation.

This pattern reflects what researchers describe as "selective pronatalism": a demographic strategy that seeks to raise birth rates, but only within specific segments of the population deemed socially or politically desirable. As such, despite improved statutory leave provisions, the broader policy environment may contribute to deepening social inequalities and limit the benefits of work–life reforms for many families who do not fit the Government's preferred family archetype.

What the evidence says about outcomes

Fertility Trends in Hungary

Despite Hungary's highly publicised pronatalist agenda and substantial financial investment in family policy over the past decade, fertility rates have not risen to replacement level, nor have they demonstrated sustained long-term growth. After reaching a historic low in the early 2010s, Hungary's total fertility rate (TFR) did experience a gradual rebound, increasing to the mid-1.5 range by 2021–2022. This rise was frequently cited by the Hungarian Government as evidence that its family-support programmes, such as tax exemptions, subsidised loans and housing incentives, were beginning to shift demographic behaviour.

However, this upward trend proved fragile. Like most European countries, Hungary has since faced post-pandemic demographic headwinds, including economic uncertainty, rising living costs, housing pressures, and widespread hesitancy around long-term financial commitments. These pressures contributed to a Europe-wide fall in fertility, and 2023 marked the lowest EU fertility rate on record. Hungary was no exception: its TFR slipped again, returning to a level broadly consistent with the regional pattern.

The most recent international datasets indicate that Hungary's TFR[41] is now hovering around 1.5, placing it squarely in line with neighbouring Central and Eastern European countries and well below the replacement level of 2.1. In other words, even with one of Europe's most extensive and financially intensive pronatalist programmes, Hungary has not been able to reverse demographic decline.

This suggests that structural socio-economic conditions, such as job security, housing affordability, gender equality, and work–life balance, remain more powerful determinants of childbearing decisions than financial incentives alone. It also reinforces a key insight relevant to Jersey and other small jurisdictions: pronatalist policy success depends not only on benefits and allowances, but on the wider environment in which families live, work, and plan their futures.

Behavioural impact & distribution

Independent reporting and research note modest fertility effects and uneven take-up: measures have disproportionately benefited middle-income, mortgage-eligible households, with weaker reach to lower-income families or those outside marriage. This is policy design plus discourse that reinforces traditional gender roles and sidelines minorities, consistent with "selective" rather than universal pronatalism.

Strengths of the Hungarian model

Policy salience and scale

The programme represents a highly salient, whole-of-government intervention characterised by its visibility, political prioritisation, and substantial financial commitment. It is not a marginal or symbolic policy; rather, it is a large-scale, multi-instrument package delivered across multiple ministries, administrative systems and public-sector agencies, with direct and measurable effects on households, employers and wider society.

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[41] Hungary Fertility Rate (1950-2025)

The government has invested significant fiscal resources, with family policy expenditure reportedly exceeding 4% of GDP, a scale comparable to European leaders in family support. This funding supports a broad suite of measures, including paid parental leave, childcare subsidies, tax incentives, housing allowances, early-years services, and targeted benefits for families with young children.

Because of its scope and the breadth of instruments involved, the policy is highly visible to citizens. Families experience the policy directly through financial transfers, subsidised services or extended leave rights, while employers encounter it through labour-market regulations and administrative requirements. The prominence of the programme contributes to strong public recognition, widespread societal discourse, and embedded expectations that government has a central role in supporting child-rearing and work–family balance.

Overall, the combination of scale, visibility and sustained political commitment ensures that the policy is not only impactful but also central to national debates about family life, demographic strategy and labour-market participation.

Structural weaknesses and risks

Selectivity and Exclusion

A recurring critique of Hungary's family policy framework is that eligibility rules and programme design tend to privilege certain family types, particularly married, formally employed couples who are able to access tax reductions, housing subsidies, and concessional loans. These supports are far less accessible to single parents, cohabiting partners, minority families and lower-income households, many of whom face structural barriers to qualifying for credit-linked schemes or do not earn enough to benefit from significant tax exemptions. This dynamic - where benefits disproportionately flow to households that are already more economically secure, mirrors the "worthy/unworthy" divide described elsewhere in this review. As in Jersey, families with the greatest need often realise the smallest gains from complex, selective schemes that presuppose dual incomes, home ownership, and stable employment.

Tax-based supports, such as personal income tax (PIT) exemptions and family allowances, are also inherently regressive: they provide the largest financial benefit to higher earners while being worth little, or nothing, to those on low incomes or outside the tax system. As a result, the redistributive impact of Hungary's most visible family measures is limited, and policy design can inadvertently reinforce existing socio-economic inequalities.

Gender Equality and Labour Market Effects

Hungary's policy mix continues to centre motherhood as the default model of early-years caregiving, and incentives for fathers, while recently expanded, remain comparatively modest. The absence of a substantial, earnings-related "use-it-or-lose-it" father quota means that caregiving still falls overwhelmingly on mothers, reinforcing traditional gender roles both at home and in the labour market. This pattern has parallels with several themes identified in the Jersey evidence base, including employer assumptions about who will take leave and ongoing cultural expectations that mothers carry the bulk of unpaid care.

Furthermore, the system's strongest incentives, such as housing loans, baby-expecting loans, and extended maternity-linked allowances, are tied to marriage, long-term employment and credit markets rather than universal early-years services. This approach does little to support maternal employment sustainably, particularly after a first child, and does not address constraints faced by families who prioritise flexible, affordable childcare over debt-based support.

Cost-Effectiveness and Macro-Level Trade-offs

Hungary's family expenditure now exceeds 4% of GDP, making it one of the highest in Europe. Yet despite this scale of investment, fertility has remained below replacement and has recently declined in line with wider European trends. International evaluations increasingly question whether large cash transfers and housing subsidies can meaningfully offset the deeper structural and cultural drivers of low fertility, such as rising costs, delayed family formation, labour market insecurity, and the increasing age of first-time mothers.

The use of PIT exemptions as a primary mechanism also has fiscal consequences. The newly announced tax exemptions for mothers of two or three children will further narrow the tax base, raising concerns about medium-term sustainability and the opportunity costs of diverting public funds toward tax relief rather than service expansion. These trade-offs are directly relevant to Jersey, where any shift toward large-scale tax or cash incentives would need careful consideration to avoid undermining revenue or equity.

Policy Coherence

Hungary's strategy is characterised by generous cash benefits and substantial loan and housing-based incentives, yet it invests comparatively less in universal, high-quality early childhood education and care (ECEC). This imbalance is notable because international evidence, particularly from the OECD and Nordic States, consistently shows that the most effective and equitable way to improve maternal employment, support second births, and reduce gender inequalities is through accessible childcare services combined with individual, earnings-related parental entitlements.

The Hungarian case thus illustrates the limits of a policy model built primarily on financial transfers rather than services. While politically visible and popular among eligible groups, cash and loan supports do not substitute for the childcare infrastructure needed for long-term labour market participation and family wellbeing. The contrast between high expenditure and modest demographic outcomes offers a cautionary example for Jersey as it considers how best to balance financial support, childcare expansion, and parental leave reform.

International positioning

Compared with Nordic/Iberian "equality-forward" models that pair earnings-related pay with non-transferable father quotas and universal services, Hungary relies more on tax breaks, subsidised credit, and traditional family framing. The latter can raise headline generosity for target groups, but it tends to underperform on fathers' participation, inclusiveness, and long-run fertility relative to systems that universalise access and shift workplace norms.

Practical lessons for this review

Shift from selectivity to universality

Hungary's experience illustrates the limitations of highly selective, identity-based pronatalist policy design. Benefits that privilege married, heterosexual, majority-ethnic or middle-income households create unequal access and reduce overall policy effectiveness. A more universal approach, extending support to all family forms and income groups, tends to promote higher uptake, reduce stigma and ensure that resources reach families facing the greatest constraints. For Jersey, the lesson is clear: prioritising *universal, simple, and accessible entitlements*, such as childcare subsidies or earnings-related parental leave, is more effective than narrow tax-based incentives that disproportionately benefit higher earners and heteronormative family structures.

Prioritise service-side supports and individual parental entitlements

Research consistently shows that expanding *early childhood education and care (ECEC)* and introducing *individual, earnings-related parental leave rights*, including dedicated "father quotas", has a stronger impact on gender equality and family wellbeing than tax deductions or allowances. Hungary's focus on tax-base erosion (large tax allowances and exemptions) has limited value for low-income families, many of whom have insufficient tax liability to benefit. By contrast, improving access to high-quality childcare and ensuring adequate, secure parental income replacement encourages both parents to participate in caregiving and work. Jersey could benefit from placing greater weight on services and income security, rather than relying predominantly on tax relief mechanisms.

Beware loan and housing subsidy bias

Hungary's major family programmes rely heavily on concessional loans (e.g., the "baby-expecting loan", subsidised mortgages, vehicle grants). These instruments are accessible primarily to already advantaged households with stable employment and credit histories, and they tend to exclude precisely those families facing the greatest barriers to childbearing. Evidence also shows that such subsidies can inadvertently fuel housing price inflation, reducing long-term affordability and undermining the intended pronatalist effect. For Jersey, where housing cost is one of the strongest deterrents to family formation, loan and mortgage driven policies risk deepening structural inequalities unless accompanied by wider housing market reform and supply-side measures.

Align messaging with equality and inclusion goals

Hungary's family policy narrative has been strongly framed around traditional family roles, with implicit (and sometimes explicit) messages favouring married couples and maternal caregiving. This kind of selective pronatalist messaging can marginalise non-traditional families, including single parents, same-sex couples, blended families, and parents with insecure employment, while reinforcing gender stereotypes that deter fathers from taking leave. A key lesson for Jersey is the importance of inclusive, equality-based framing: ensuring that communications, employer guidance and policy design normalise fathers' participation in early childcare and recognise the diversity of family structures present on the Island.

Guard fiscal sustainability and value for money

Hungary's large-scale personal income tax exemptions are highly visible politically, but economically inefficient. They reduce the tax base without delivering strong or lasting demographic effects and create long-term fiscal pressure. Comparative evidence shows that **time-limited, earnings-related parental leave and investment in childcare capacity and quality** provide significantly better value for money and stronger outcomes for children, parents and employers. For Jersey, where fiscal space is limited, the lesson is to avoid large, open-ended tax expenditures and instead prioritise sustainable, evidence-based measures that deliver measurable social and economic returns.

Lessons for Jersey from the Hungarian Model

Hungary's extensive family policy package, spanning tax reliefs, cash transfers and housing-linked incentives, offers useful insights for Jersey as it considers future reforms.

Avoid Selective Schemes That Exclude Those Most in Need

Hungary's benefits largely favour married, dual-earner households able to access mortgages and tax reductions. Single parents, low-income families and those outside the tax system gain far less.
Lesson for Jersey: Prioritise universal, accessible supports over tax or credit-linked schemes that reinforce inequality.

Promote Gender Equality Through Balanced Leave Design

Despite high spending, Hungary's limited "use-it-or-lose-it" leave for fathers has not shifted caregiving norms. Mothers remain the primary carers, affecting their return to work.
Lesson for Jersey: Strengthen individual parental entitlements, to normalise shared care and support women's employment.

Be Cautious About Loan and Housing-Based Incentives

Hungary's flagship policies rely on subsidised loans and mortgages tied to marriage and long-term employment. These are costly and exclude many families, with unclear long-term fertility effects.
Lesson for Jersey: Avoid over-reliance on financial instruments that increase household debt or disproportionately benefit higher-income groups

Prioritise Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

Hungary spends heavily on cash benefits but invests less in universal childcare, which international evidence shows is crucial for sustained maternal employment and for enabling families to have additional children.
Lesson for Jersey: The greatest returns come from accessible, high-quality childcare paired with well-designed parental leave, not from tax cuts or subsidies alone.

Consider Fiscal Sustainability and Long-Term Impact

Hungary's expanding tax exemptions narrow the tax base while delivering limited demographic gains.
Lesson for Jersey: Any new benefits must be designed with long-term sustainability in mind, ensuring public resources are invested where evidence shows they make the most difference.

New Mexico – Universal Childcare

[42]

The Governor of New Mexico announced[43] that, starting 1 November 2025, the state will become the first in the United States to guarantee free, universal childcare for all families, regardless of income. Significant features include:

- The existing childcare assistance programme will be expanded by removing income eligibility thresholds and continuing the waiver on family co-payments, thereby opening access to every family in the state.
- The initiative is projected to deliver average annual savings of about US $12,000 (approximately £9000) per child for the typical New Mexico household.
- To accompany the policy, the state has established a US $12.7 million low-interest loan fund to build, expand or renovate childcare facilities, and requested an additional US $20 million in the 2027 budget.

[42] New Mexico Offers Free Childcare for All. The Federal Government Should Follow Suit. - Roosevelt Institute
[43] New Mexico is first state in nation to offer universal child care - Office of the Governor - Michelle Lujan Grisham

- The plan targets specific challenges in the early years and workforce readiness: e.g., support for infants and toddlers, children with special needs, increasing the child-care workforce by an estimated 5,000 professionals, and improving pay and conditions for early years educators.
- The Governor framed the initiative as a dual investment in family stability and the broader economy, emphasising how childcare supports parents' participation in work while promoting children's development in safe, nurturing environments.

Relevance for review

For the purposes of this review, this example is particularly informative because:

- It represents a universal entitlement model (not means-tested) which contrasts with many family support schemes that are income-targeted.
- It demonstrates how policymakers integrate early years provision with labour market participation, viewing childcare simultaneously as a family support measure and an economic investment.
- It highlights the importance of infrastructure investment and workforce development as part of scaling up childcare access, emphasising that policy is not just about hours or subsidies but building supply capacity.
- It serves as a comparative benchmark for Jersey: while Jersey's current policy covers children from around age four and is term-time only, the New Mexico model covers all ages, all families, and all year-round care (in effect).
- It raises questions relevant to our context: how universal does a scheme need to be to maximise impact? How are supply and affordability simultaneously managed? How do policymakers balance cost, quality and access?

Lessons from Sweden - Extended Parental Leave to Grandparents and Wider Family.

[44]

Sweden has long been regarded as one of the global leaders in family-friendly policy, and in 2024 introduced a significant reform that further broadened the definition of who can provide childcare support in the critical early years. Under new rules that came into force on 1 July 2024, **parents can transfer up to 45 days** of their paid parental leave to someone who is not a legal guardian, such as a grandparent, relative, or trusted friend. In the case of single

[44] Sweden expands parental leave to grandparents and friends | COFACE Families Europe

parents, this flexibility increases to 90 days, drawn from Sweden's generous allocation of 480 days of paid parental leave per child.

The person receiving the transferred leave must be insured for Sweden's parental allowance (which applies to almost all residents), ensuring that the scheme is both widely accessible and administratively straightforward. Retired individuals can also receive parental allowance when taking on childcare responsibilities, with remuneration calculated from their pension income. Importantly, recipients of the allowance cannot work or study during this period, it must be used exclusively for hands-on care of the child.

Sweden's decision to widen access to parental leave reflects its broader vision of building flexible, resilient, and inclusive family support networks. The reform acknowledges that modern families take many forms and that practical childcare support often depends on grandparents, extended family, or close friends. By giving families the right to decide who is best placed to help during the early months and years, Sweden aims to reduce pressure on parents, particularly mothers, while improving child wellbeing.

This policy change also sits within Sweden's long-standing commitment to promoting gender equality. Sweden was the first country to introduce paid paternity leave in 1974, and today around 30% of all parental leave is taken by fathers. A large body of international evidence links more equal sharing of parental leave with improved maternal employment rates, reduced gender pay gaps, and **a more equitable distribution of unpaid care work, a persistent issue globally, where women perform approximately 76% of all unpaid care.**

Relevance to Jersey

Sweden's approach directly reflects several of the themes identified throughout this review:

- **Grandparent involvement**: Many Jersey families told the Sub-Panel that grandparent care plays a vital role in enabling parents to return to work, often because of high childcare costs or lack of alternative support. Several grandparents expressed a desire for formal recognition of their caregiving role. Sweden provides a clear model of how this could be achieved.
- **Flexibility in family structures**: Evidence gathered by the Sub-Panel shows that families in Jersey are diverse and often rely on wider networks beyond the nuclear family. Sweden's policy explicitly supports this reality.
- **Reducing gendered pressures**: Many Jersey parents, especially mothers, reported that returning to work was extremely challenging due to cost, childcare access and employer flexibility. Extending or redistributing leave can help relieve these pressures and support both parents to balance work and caregiving.
- **Supporting single parents**: The provision for single parents to transfer up to 90 days of leave mirrors concerns raised locally that single parents often face disproportionate financial and logistical barriers in the early years.

Overall, Sweden's reform offers a useful example of a progressive, family-centred, and gender-responsive model that broadens support networks while maintaining strong protections for parental choice and child wellbeing. It provides a potential policy direction for Jersey as it considers how best to support families, strengthen care networks, and improve the practical application of its family-friendly legislation.

Shared Parental Leave

Shared parental leave (SPL) is a model of family leave that allows parents to share a single pool of post-birth or post-adoption leave between them, rather than having separate entitlements for each parent. It is designed to give families more flexibility over how they divide caring responsibilities in the baby's first year and to encourage a more equal distribution of care between parents.

Under a shared parental leave system (such as the one used in the UK):

- The birth parent takes a short period of compulsory maternity leave.
- The remainder of the leave entitlement is converted into a shared pot that either parent can take.
- Parents can take their leave simultaneously or consecutively.
- Leave can often be taken in multiple blocks, with periods of work in between.
- Pay is usually shared as well, though at statutory—rather than full—rates.

Policy Intent

The purpose of SPL is to:

- Support greater involvement of fathers and partners in early caregiving
- Reduce the gender imbalance that places most childcare responsibility on mothers
- Support women's career progression by enabling more equal sharing of leave
- Provide parents with flexibility and choice in shaping early family life

Limitations in Practice

Evidence from the UK[45] and other jurisdictions shows that SPL typically has low uptake, especially among fathers, due to:

- Lower rates of statutory pay
- Cultural expectations that mothers take the majority of leave
- Fear of career penalties for men
- Complexity of the system, especially where parents work for different employers

This is why Jersey's 2017 Employment Forum ultimately recommended against adopting SPL, and instead proposed equal, individual rights for each parent, now the basis of Jersey's current system.

Policy Salience and Scale: How Jersey Compares Internationally

In countries such as Sweden, France and Hungary, family policy has been elevated to a core national priority, supported by large-scale, long-term government investment and a highly visible policy agenda. These systems typically involve multi-instrument packages combining parental leave, childcare subsidies, tax allowances, cash benefits, housing support and early-years services, costing between 3% and 5% of GDP. Their scale and prominence make family policy immediately recognisable to households and employers, shaping societal expectations around work, care and state responsibility.

While Jersey has introduced progressive and inclusive family friendly employment rights, the scale of public expenditure and policy integration differs significantly from these international models. Jersey's current approach is characterised by:

- a strong legislative framework on parental leave and workplace rights,
- targeted benefits and subsidies,
- but lower fiscal outlay relative to GDP,

45 Parental leave and pay review: summary of existing evidence - GOV.UK

- and fewer interconnected or universal family support instruments.

Comparison With High-Investment Systems

- Sweden integrates generous, high-paid parental leave with universal childcare guarantees, income-adjusted fees, and embedded father quotas. The result is a system where family policy is part of national identity and economic strategy.
- France combines long-standing investments in early-years care, subsidised crèches, tax relief for childcare, and family allowances. High coverage makes these policies visible to almost all families.
- Hungary has expanded family policy as a demographic strategy, committing over 4% of GDP to cash transfers, housing benefits, extended leave, tax exemptions, and employment incentives for mothers. Visibility is high because support is embedded in housing, tax, employment and social security systems.

In comparison, Jersey's policy ecosystem is less fiscally expansive, and family support is more fragmented across parental leave entitlements, childcare subsidies, income support mechanisms, and a developing early-years policy framework. Although the legislation is modern and progressive, especially in recognising diverse families and creating equal rights for parents, the level of investment and whole-system coordination remains more limited.

Implications for Jersey

The experience of high-investment countries demonstrates that:

1. Policy scale matters for uptake, visibility and cultural change, particularly in encouraging fathers' participation, reducing gender inequality and improving early child outcomes.
2. Fiscal commitment is closely tied to demographic strategy and labour-market resilience.
3. Multi-instrument systems (childcare, leave, benefits, tax, housing) amplify impact when designed to work together.
4. High visibility and consistent messaging increase public confidence, reduce stigma, and create predictable entitlements.

Jersey's family friendly rights are advanced in legislative terms, but the comparison shows that the transformative effects observed internationally require coordinated investment, long-term planning and whole-of-government focus, particularly on childcare affordability, cost-of-living pressures and sustained support in the critical early years.

Appendix 2

Sub-Panel membership

The Sub-Panel comprised of the following States Members:

Deputy Louise Doublet (Chair)

Deputy Kristina Moore

Deputy Karen Wilson

Deputy Lucy Stephenson

Terms of reference

- To conduct a comprehensive review of family friendly legislation and policy including amendments to the Employment Law made in 2018 and 2020.
- To assess how the legislation compares to other equivalent jurisdictions.
- To assess the impact of family friendly legislation.
- To assess the adequacy of family friendly legislation and how they align to the best
- interests of the child, ensuring the best start in life.

Evidence considered

Responses to written questions were received from the following Ministers:

- The Minister for Social Security
- The Minister for Sustainable Economic Development

The Panel also held a Public Hearings with:

- Brighter Futures, 14th July 2025
- Jersey Child Care Trust, 14th July 2025
- The Minister for Social Security, 15th July 2025
- Jersey Advisory and Conciliation Service, 16th July 2025
- Family Nursing and Home Care, 16th July 2025

There was a public call for evidence and requests for written submissions were sent to 60 stakeholders, responses were received from the following:

- Best Start Partnership
- Citizens Advice Jersey
- Deputy Elaine Millar
- Deputy Hilary Jeune
- Family Nursing and Homecare
- HR Now
- Jersey Chamber of Commerce
- Jersey Early Years Association
- Liberate
- National Education Union Jersey
- The Institute of Directors
- Virtual HR
- Wadzanai Lesley Katsande -Gwatidzo

It should be noted that the Panel received a number of submissions from member of the public and employers who wished to remain anonymous or confidential.

To view all the submissions, responses to written questions and Public Hearing transcripts, please visit the review page on the States Assembly website.

Review Costs

Public Hearing Transcripts

£150 (per audio hour) x 5 hours = £750

Expert Advisor

£10,600

Digital and Public Engagement

£440.60

Total = £11,790.60

What is Scrutiny?

Scrutiny panels and the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) work on behalf of the States Assembly (Jersey's parliament). Parliamentary Scrutiny examines and investigates the work of the Government, holding ministers to account for their decisions and actions. They do this by reviewing and publishing reports on a number of areas:

- Government policy
- new laws and changes to existing laws;
- work and expenditure of the Government;
- issues of public importance.

This helps improve government policies, legislation and public services. If changes are suggested, Scrutiny helps to make sure that the changes are fit for purpose and justified.

The Health and Social Security Scrutiny Panel reviews policy and legislation related to the topics of Public Health and Social Care. The Panel reviews topics under the remit of the Ministers for Health and Social Services and Social Security and considers and scrutinises draft legislation, policies and other matters of public importance.

To learn more about the Panel's work please click here.

Appendix 3 Advisor's Report

A Review of the Family-Friendly Policies in Jersey:

The Case of Recent Parenting-Related Leave Policy Reforms

October 2025

Acknowledgements

This report is authored by Merve Uzunalioğlu, PhD, as part of the ongoing Scrutiny Review conducted by the Health and Social Security Scrutiny Panel in Jersey.

Table of Contents

The purpose of this report

This report aims to provide an independent review to support the ongoing Scrutiny Review of Family-Friendly Policies in Jersey. It focuses solely on parenting-related leave policies.[46] The report is organised around two main pillars. The first part examines the literature on leave policies and compares the approaches of various countries. The aim is to establish a benchmark for effective leave policy practices and to understand the approaches other countries use to implement leave policies. The second part then reviews Jersey's leave provisions, examining legislative changes through the lenses of adequacy, inclusiveness, and complementarity. The report concludes with a concise summary of the societal and economic advantages associated with paid leave provisions. Given the implementation of leave policies within workplaces, a section detailing family-friendly workplace practices is included before a set of recommendations for future action.

An overview of the literature on parenting leaves

Parenting leave policies serve as a means for enabling direct parental caregiving while simultaneously allowing parents to maintain their employment, thereby supporting their standard of living and promoting the well-being of both children and parents during the initial years following childbirth. Such policies have historically been advocated as measures to promote gender equality (Gornick and Meyers, 2008). However, for these intentions to be fulfilled and for leave policies to contribute not only to the parent-child relationship and well-being but also to family resilience, leave policies should be universally accessible (Daly et al., 2025). That is, irrespective of marital, employment, and citizenship status, all parents should be entitled to certain forms of support for childcare, especially through parental leave (Dobrotić and Blum, 2020; O'Brien et al., 2020).

There are five distinct elements of parenting leave: the eligibility criteria, the length of leave, the level of compensation, the mode of leave and its transferability between parents or carers.

Eligibility

There exists considerable variation in the accessibility of parental leave policies across European and international jurisdictions. The legislative frameworks within each country dictate whether such leave is universally available or selectively granted to all parents or employed individuals. Dobrotić and Blum (2020) groups the existing systems into four categories: universal parenthood model, selective parenthood model, universal adult-worker model, and selective adult-worker model. It is also estimated that throughout Europe, more than one-third of prospective mothers and over one-fifth of prospective fathers aged between 20 and 49 are ineligible for parental leave. The reasons for ineligibility pertain to economic inactivity, participation in non-standard employment, self-employment, or having a short period of employment with the same employer. (O'Brien et al., 2020).

Once passing the eligibility threshold, other constituting elements of leaves, such as the compensation, length and transferability, come to the fore to shape leave-taking behaviours of parents.

Much like the design of the policy, particularly concerning the eligibility criteria, its funding mechanism significantly influences its accessibility to parents. Globally, the methods of

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[46] Throughout the report, parenting leaves is used as the umbrella term encompassing maternity, paternity, parental and childcare leaves.

financing parenting leave differ among nations. The three predominant approaches include funding through general taxation, social security or social insurance, and employer-funded schemes (Dobrotić et al., 2024). Employer-financed leaves are likely to benefit primarily those employees who are more privileged, particularly within the context of relatively secure and standard employment conditions, potentially excluding low-income workers from this scope (Davison and Blackburn, 2023; Bartel et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2025).

Remuneration

The extent of compensation often appears as the principal factor influencing the decision to take leave, particularly for fathers (Uzunalioğlu, 2023; Brandth et al., 2022). It is also associated with higher returns in employment, especially for mothers. For instance, following Germany's implementation of two months of paternity leave with comparatively substantial income replacement, alongside a twelve-month parental leave, there was a notable increase in employment probabilities among high-income mothers, thereby positively affecting mothers' labour supply (Kluve and Schmitz, 2017).

A consistent lesson derived from Nordic evidence is that earnings-related benefits and incentives specifically designed for fathers exert a substantial influence on behaviour. The implementation of father-exclusive leave, sometimes referred to as 'daddy months,' allocates designated time for paternal engagement. When complemented with adequate remuneration, such measures are observed to diminish the private cost associated with paternal leave and contribute to shifting social norms at the margin (Duvander and Johansson, 2012; Patnaik, 2019). Similar findings emerge in other country contexts, such as Denmark's designated weeks and higher replacement rates, which enhance men's participation and may increase women's relative income within couples (Druedahl et al., 2019). However, there is considerable variability in how paternal leave-taking influences gender equality. Depending on the measures used to estimate, often, fathers' increased leave-taking leads to greater contributions to household and care work, especially with more time spent on childcare (Boll et al., 2014; Lee and Uzunalioğlu, 2025). This does not necessarily reduce mothers' time spent on these chores.

Leave length

In addition to the compensation level, the duration of leave influences both the utilisation of leave by parents and the impact of this decision on them. Moderate durations of paid, job-protected leave support maternal job continuity and facilitate timely return to employment, whereas excessively extended leaves may negatively affect employment prospects or slow career progression. Evidence from Germany indicates that expansions increasing the duration of leave without corresponding earnings-related compensation tend to decrease mothers' short-term employment prospects (Schönberg and Ludsteck, 2014). Conversely, reforms that enacted better compensation for shorter periods facilitated quicker return to employment and improved mothers' wage prospects (Mari and Cutuli, 2020). Some studies also warn about the duration of leave as they argue that an extended leave may lead to adverse employment outcomes such as limited career progression and income loss (Evertsson, 2016). There is also evidence from Austria arguing that long parenting leaves, around 2.5 years, can worsen maternal mental health, underscoring the risks of very long durations (Chuard, 2023). It is worth noting that there is notable heterogeneity in how the leave is affecting mothers, especially depending on their education and income level (Schober and Büchau, 2022).

Leave as an individual entitlement

Scholarship on leave policies also emphasises the importance of defining leave as an individual, non-transferable entitlement to boost leave uptake, particularly among fathers (O'Brien et al., 2007). When leave is designed as a family entitlement or is allowed to be transferred among parents as opposed to a use-it-or-lose-it principle, gendered patterns of caregiving are likely to be reinforced (Brandth et al., 2022). Consequently, it can be argued that transferability and mode determine who utilises leave, whereas broader childcare systems and workplace cultures influence the outcomes.

Workplace characteristics

Just as the scope of statutory entitlements is considerable, the context within which these leave entitlements are granted is equally important. In this regard, workplace characteristics, spanning from the sector of operation to the gender composition of the workforce, from age distribution to the nature of employment contracts, are of fundamental significance (Anxo et al., 2007; Bygren and Duvander, 2006). Organisational culture mediates the extent to which statutory parenting-leave rights are used in practice. Three linked mechanisms recur in the evidence: (i) managerial gatekeeping and the “ideal worker” norm that equates commitment with uninterrupted, long hours at the office (Acker, 1990); (ii) signal effects from leadership, HR governance and the gender composition of management (Nordberg, 2018; Brandth and Kvande, 2019); and (iii) the local availability and social legitimacy of flexible working (Cook et al., 2020).

For example, recent evidence using linked administrative records for Luxembourg demonstrates that workplace structure influences actual take-up: company size and sector are connected to whether mothers and fathers utilise parental leave and whether they take it full-time or part-time (Amjahad et al., 2022; Valentova et al., 2025). Notably, fathers employed in large firms are more inclined to take full-time leave, whereas part-time leave is more frequently observed in smaller firms—implying that the capacity for replacement and operational flexibility influences employers’ willingness to accommodate leave. Furthermore, the sector in which a partner is employed also seems to serve as a determinant of fathers’ leave-taking, signifying that bargaining at the couple level occurs within two workplaces rather than just one (Uzunalioğlu, 2023) and claiming parenting leaves, as O’Brien argued for infant care (O'Brien, 2009), becomes a matter that exceeds the private sphere of families.

A comparative analysis of parenting leave provisions across Europe

The history of parenting-related leave policies begins in the late 1880s in Germany with the introduction of maternity protection to safeguard pregnant workers’ health (Moss, 2019). Over the following century, maternity leave became a standard across Europe, supported by a European Commission Directive, namely 92/85/EEC.[47] The focus on paternity and parental leave emerged from the 1990s onwards. Several directives at the European level, specifically

[47] Council Directive 92/85/EEC of 19 October 1992 on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health at work of pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/1992/85/oj/eng

96/34/EC,[48] 2010/18/EU,[49] and 2019/1158,[50] have been enacted over the past thirty years, establishing minimum standards for a range of work-life balance measures aimed at supporting families—particularly working parents with young children—as well as individuals with caring responsibilities, notably carers' leave. As of 2025, the minimum standards for parenting-related leave provisions across Europe are set as[51]:

- Minimum 14 weeks of maternity leave, of which 2 weeks are mandatory
- Minimum 2 weeks of paternity leave
- Minimum 4 months of parental leave per parent, 2 of which are non-transferable.

The provision of parenting-related leave policies exhibits considerable variation among different countries. These disparities are evident in the terminology used, eligibility criteria, funding mechanisms, levels of compensation, and the duration of leave (Meil et al., 2025). These policy instruments set a minimum standard for European member states to follow. Yet, countries, even as EU members, and others worldwide, adopt different approaches. Table 1 below offers a snapshot of countries with diverse population sizes and welfare state models.

A comparative analysis of parental leave frameworks across eight countries reveals considerable differences in scope, funding methods, eligibility criteria, compensation levels, and the degree of gender equality incorporated into policy design. While all of the countries listed in the table offer statutory entitlements, the balance between government responsibility, employer participation, and individual rights varies widely, reflecting diverse welfare state traditions and policy priorities.

The scope of leave provisions varies from traditional maternity, paternity, parental leave entitlements (e.g., Luxembourg, Belgium) to more complex, multi-layered systems that include shared parental leave, career breaks, and emerging rights such as neonatal care (United Kingdom) or gestational mourning leave (Portugal). Iceland is notable for integrating maternity, paternity, and parental leave into a single, unified system that promotes gender equality and shared responsibility. Spain has presented one of the most progressive reforms in recent years by providing fully paid and equal leave for mothers and fathers, albeit with a longer parental leave period remaining unpaid.

Most systems predominantly depend on social security or general taxation, with varying degrees of employer co-funding. Australia and New Zealand exemplify a greater reliance on general taxation, whereas continental European systems, such as Belgium, Luxembourg, Portugal, and Spain, are integrated within social insurance frameworks. Employer contributions typically serve as supplementary, often limited to wage replacement or additional payments, thereby highlighting the pivotal role of the state in funding leave benefits.

While the minimum standards for this are established by Directive 2019/1158, the length of leave varies significantly across countries. This variation primarily depends on the formulation of national policies. For instance, Luxembourg adheres to the traditional distinction between maternity, paternity, and parental leave, offering a maternity leave of 20 weeks, a paternity

[48] Council Directive 96/34/EC of 3 June 1996 on the framework agreement on parental leave https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/1996/34/oj/eng
[49] Council Directive 2010/18/EU of 8 March 2010 implementing the revised Framework Agreement on parental leave https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2010/18/oj/eng
[50] Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2019/1158/oj/eng
[51] https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2025/769505/EPRS_ATA(2025)769505_EN.pdf

leave of 10 days, and parental leave of six months per parent. Spain provides 16 weeks of fully compensated leave for each parent, with an additional option for unpaid leave until the child reaches three years of age. Australia's provision of 20 weeks at the minimum wage contrasts markedly with schemes in Spain and Portugal, where maternity and paternity leave are compensated at full earnings replacement, subject to caps. The United Kingdom's 52-week maternity leave is the longest among these, although only 39 weeks are paid, with the payment decreasing from 90 per cent of the wage to a flat statutory rate.

The eligibility criteria exhibit considerable variations in the inclusiveness of leave provisions. Universal maternity protection is widely implemented, whereas access to parental leave is frequently contingent upon prior contributions or the duration of employment, such as Australia's requirement of 12 months of continuous service and the United Kingdom's 26-week qualifying period. Certain systems explicitly accommodate non-traditional family configurations, exemplified by the United Kingdom granting entitlements to adopters and same-sex couples, and New Zealand recognising carers and adoptive parents. Conversely, some systems remain more aligned with conventional employment models.

Compensation structures strongly influence leave uptake. Systems offering earnings-related benefits with high replacement rates (Iceland, Portugal, Spain, Luxembourg) are more likely to encourage both maternal and paternal participation, thus promoting gender equality. In contrast, flat-rate benefits (UK, Belgium, New Zealand, Australia) may perpetuate gendered divisions, as women are more prone than men to bear the financial penalties associated with extended leave. Iceland's utilisation of earnings-related benefits with ceilings reflects an effort to balance fairness with fiscal sustainability.

Shared or transferable leave provisions reveal differing policy objectives. Iceland's 'use-it-or-lose-it' quotas incentivise fathers' participation, ensuring that leave is not disproportionately concentrated on mothers. Similarly, Spain's equalisation of maternity and paternity leave represents a deliberate move towards gender symmetry. By contrast, Australia's parental leave pay remains primarily targeted at mothers, with unpaid provisions offering greater flexibility for sharing. In the UK, Shared Parental Leave (SPL) offers theoretical flexibility; however, its complex design and low compensation rates result in limited take-up (Department for Business & Trade, 2023).

Explicit incentives for exceptional circumstances addressing special family needs are relatively uncommon. Portugal incorporates provisions such as gestational mourning leave and advocates for shared usage. Belgium provides time credits for private sector employees and career breaks for public sector employees, allowing parents to take extended leaves with increased flexibility. Iceland's system is distinctive in integrating behavioural incentives through non-transferable quotas, effectively functioning as a penalty for fathers who do not utilise them. The United Kingdom's reforms to extend neonatal leave and enhance redundancy protections constitute incremental measures aimed at improving security; however, they do not offer substantial financial incentives.

Regarding compensation, three main clusters generally stand out. The Nordic model, exemplified by Iceland, emphasises gender equality and earnings-based remuneration, promoting paternal involvement through significant incentives and penalties. The continental European model, observed in Belgium and Luxembourg, prioritises maternity leave and the equalisation of parental leave. Portugal's system shares similarities with these models, albeit with a more gender-neutral terminology. Spain advocates for gender equality and offers relatively high benefit replacement rates; however, these are available only within a limited time window. The Anglo-Saxon model, which includes Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom, favours flat-rate benefits, extended unpaid leave, and employer discretion, often resulting in limited financial support and minimal progress toward gender equality.

This comparison emphasises the ongoing tension between universalism and conditionality, fiscal restraint and gender equality, and the balance of responsibility between the state and employers. Systems that provide earnings-related benefits with non-transferable quotas, like in Iceland and Spain, seem most effective at encouraging fair parental leave usage. Similarly, better payment along with flexible usage modalities and a use-it-or-lose-it approach also facilitates higher leave take-up, as seen in the case of Luxembourg (Uzunalioğlu, 2023). In contrast, flat-rate schemes with many unpaid options, such as in the UK, Australia, and New Zealand, may formally extend leave durations but could inadvertently increase inequalities in practice. The findings emphasise that policy design is crucial not only for granting entitlements but also for influencing how caregiving responsibilities are distributed between genders.

TABLE 1 A COMPARISON OF PARENTING-RELATED LEAVE PROVISION (2024/2025)

Country	Types of Leaves	Funding Mechanism	Duration (Paid/Unpaid)	Eligibility	Compensation Level	Shared/Transferable	Bonuses/Penalties
Australia	Parental Leave (paid & unpaid), employer-provided maternity/paternity leave	General taxation (Parental Leave Pay), employers for additional leave	20 weeks paid (Parental Leave Pay), up to 24 months unpaid job-protected leave	Employees with 12 months continuous service; universal access to paid parental leave with work test	Parental Leave Pay at national minimum wage rate; employer leave usually wage replacement	Unpaid leave can be split/shared, paid leave primarily for the mother but flexible	Employer discretion, some additional top-ups
Belgium	Maternity, Paternity, Parental, Career Breaks	Social security (ONEM/RVA), some employer top-ups	Maternity 15 weeks paid, Paternity 20 days paid, Parental 4 months per parent, Career break up to 1 year (allowances)	Employees with contributions, universal for maternity, parental leave eligibility criteria apply	Maternity 82% of earnings, Paternity flat-rate, Parental allowance (flat-rate), Career break allowance	Parental leave is individual, but transferable under some conditions	Career break allowances, possible bonus for longer use
Iceland	Maternity, Paternity, Parental (all under fæðingarorlof system)	Funded through social insurance (Labour/Social Affairs)	Each parent has an individual paid entitlement (several months), which can transfer part	All employed/resident parents with contributions	Earnings-related benefit with a ceiling	Yes, leave entitlements divided between parents; some transfer possible	Design encourages both parents to use quotas ('use-it-or-lose-it' principle)
Luxembourg	Maternity, Paternity, Parental	Social security funds	Maternity 20 weeks paid, Paternity 10-20 days paid,	All employed mothers (mandatory maternity),	100% earnings for maternity, Paternity at replacement,	Parental leave is shareable and available to both parents, uptake	No bonuses, reforms encourage

			Parental 4–6 months (full-time) or part-time/fractioned versions	insured/self-employed for paternity, parental leave open to both parents	Parental flat-rate allowance	increasing among fathers	uptake (esp. fathers)
New Zealand	Primary Carer Leave, Extended Leave, Partner's Leave	Government via Inland Revenue	Up to 26 weeks paid + additional unpaid options	Employees with 6 or 12 months service, carers, adoptive parents	Earnings-related up to a cap	Yes, can be transferred to partner or other carers	None explicit
Portugal	Maternity, Paternity, Parental, Gestational mourning leave	Social security, with employer involvement	Maternity 120 days (30 before, 90 after, paid), Paternity/Parental up to 150 days shared, Gestational mourning 3 days paid	Employees with social contributions, universal coverage for some provisions	Maternity/paternity at 100% earnings (within caps), parental partly paid	Yes, parental leave can be shared between parents	Gestational mourning leave; incentives to encourage uptake of shared leave
Spain	Birth & Childcare Leave, Parental Leave (2 types), Career Breaks	Social security (INSS), some employer role	Maternity/Paternity (equalised) 16 weeks each paid, Parental leave up to 3 years (mostly unpaid)	All employed parents; contributory basis	100% earnings (maternity/paternity equal), Parental leave mostly unpaid or with allowance	Maternity and paternity leaves equalised; parental leave individual but both parents eligible	Equalisation as incentive, no explicit bonuses
UK	Maternity, Paternity, Shared Parental, Parental, Adoption,	Statutory pay (government, via employers), some employer enhancements	Maternity 52 weeks (39 paid), Paternity 2 weeks paid, Shared Parental up to 50 weeks (37 paid),	Employees with qualifying period (26 weeks), adopters and same-sex couples included	Maternity 90% then flat rate, Paternity flat rate, SPL flat rate, Neonatal flat rate planned	Maternity transferable to SPL (except 2 weeks), SPL sharable,	Neonatal leave (2025) added, redundancy protection extended

	Neonatal Care (2025)		Parental leave 18 weeks unpaid, Neonatal leave planned			adoption leave aligned	
Source: leavenetwork.org							

Overview of the recent leave policy developments in Jersey

Over the last decade, the Government of Jersey undertook two substantive reforms to its parenting-related leave regime. Prior to September 2018, maternity leave was characterised by a bifurcated structure: 18 weeks in total, including two weeks of compulsory, fully paid leave, with the remaining 16 weeks unpaid and contingent upon an employment history threshold of 15 months. This effectively entrenched a two-tiered system, privileging mothers with sustained employment records while marginalising those without. Parental leave was confined to a non-remunerated two-week entitlement, accessible without eligibility conditions. Notably absent were provisions for leave related to antenatal appointments for fathers, second partners, or intended surrogates, as well as for adoption appointments, breastfeeding breaks, or health and safety-related paid leave.

The reform implemented in September 2018 can be regarded as a significant initial step toward establishing more equitable and supportive provisions for parental leave. The duration of maternity leave was increased from 18 to 26 weeks, coupled with the removal of eligibility requirements, thereby universalising access to six weeks of fully paid leave. Parental leave was restructured into a fully paid entitlement of two weeks, followed by an additional 24 weeks of unpaid leave, with a new flexibility that enables parents to divide leave into up to three separate segments. These provisions were similarly extended to adoptive and surrogate parents, contingent upon the primary adopter or intended parent assuming the paid portion. Moreover, recognition was given to leave for attending antenatal and adoption appointments, with remuneration available for up to 10 hours. Additional measures, including flexible working arrangements, breastfeeding breaks, and paid health and safety leave for pregnant or nursing employees, were acknowledged, although without specified timelines or limits.

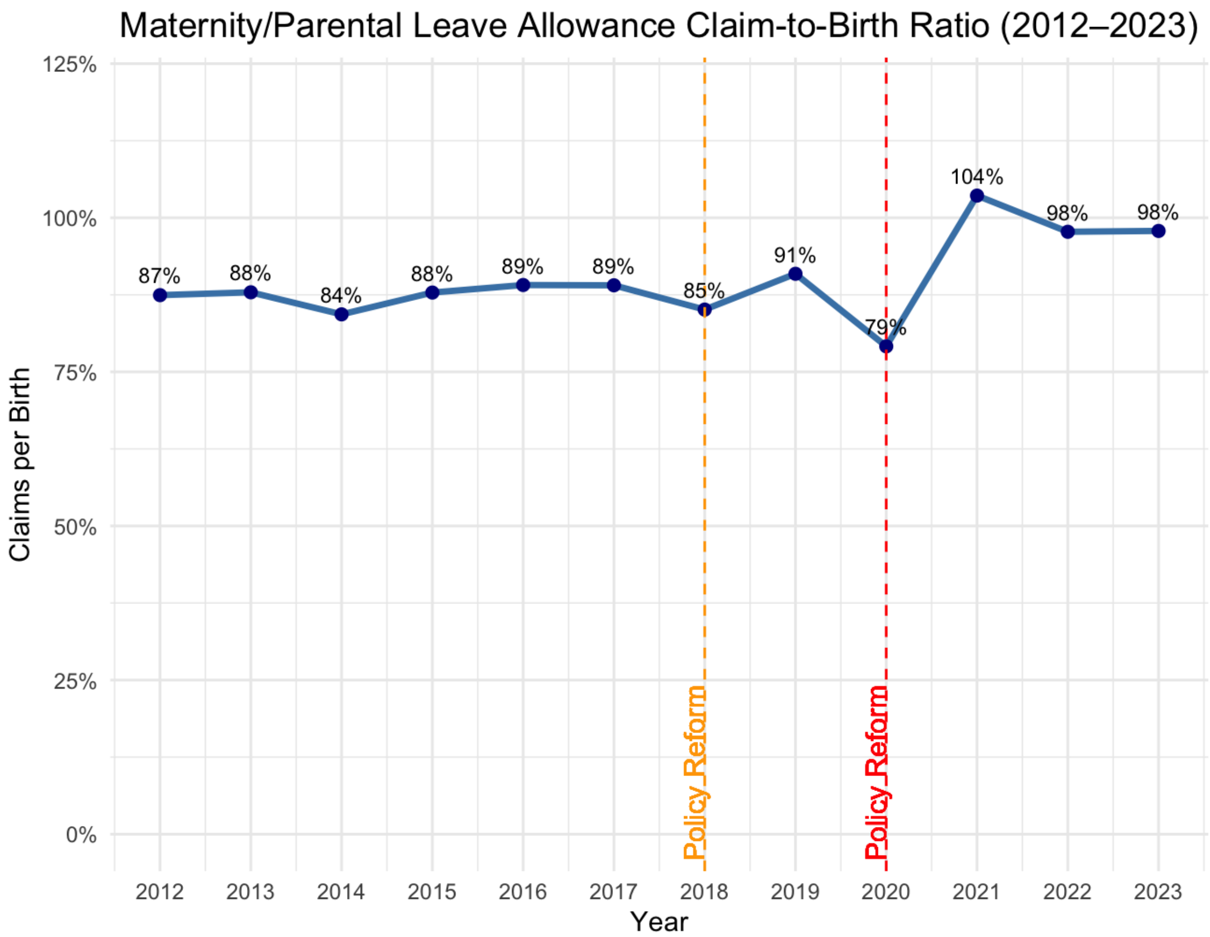
The second significant step, representing a progressive recalibration of provisions for parenting-related leaves, was enacted in September 2019. The 2019 reform established a unified parental leave entitlement that superseded previously distinct provisions, namely maternity leave and parental leave, extending also to adoption and surrogacy contexts on similar terms. The restructured entitlement extends to a total of 52 weeks, with six weeks remunerated at 100% by the employer. Each parent is entitled to six weeks of paid leave, with an additional 14 weeks available through a state-funded family entitlement that can be shared between parents. The remaining 20 weeks of the total 52 weeks of leave are unpaid. Proposals to finance an additional six weeks at full-time compensation rates through state resources remain actively under consideration. Notably, this reformulated parental leave system introduces increased flexibility, allowing parents to divide their leave into up to four separate segments.

Empirical evidence consistently emphasises the significance of leave design in affecting parental participation; specifically, customised, non-transferable (‘use-it-or-lose-it’) leave components evidently promote increased leave utilisation, particularly among fathers. The Jersey reform addresses some of these components, which may aid in reshaping caregiving norms and fostering equitable parental involvement.

The figure below exhibits the ratio of maternity and parental leave allowance claimed per birth over the last decade in Jersey.[52] There appears to be a consistent allowance-to-birth ratio,

[52] Parental Allowance, Maternity and Adoption Benefit Statistics https://opendata.gov.je/dataset/maternity-benefits

varying from 87% to 98%, with a dip at 79% and an oversaturation at 104%. The years following the 2020 legislative amendments demonstrate near-complete coverage of births with the maternity and parental allowance.



In addition to the amendments to the existing leave provisions, other indicators of work-life reconciliation policies have also been introduced with the September 2020 reform. The changes include paid breastfeeding breaks during the first year after childbirth, as well as paid leave in the case of a health and safety necessity for a pregnant or breastfeeding employee. Regarding breastfeeding, employers are also asked to provide appropriate facilities at the workplace to support nursing employees.

Key issues identified

The Jersey Government had conducted a 2024 Post-Implementation Review (PIR) aimed at gathering views on the new family-friendly parental rights. The data for the review were collected during November and December 2023 through an online survey collection tool. The primary parties targeted for data collection to gather their opinions were employee and employer groups, advocacy groups, and the general public. Table 2 presents the list of key stakeholders involved in the review process.

The findings reflect the perspectives of employees and employers regarding their opinions and desires on leave provisions and associated entitlements. While employees expressed satisfaction with the opportunity to spend time with their newborns while maintaining job security, they also raised some further concerns and desires. Several key insights emerge:

From the employees' perspective, the financial burden of taking leave can be quite substantial. Specifically, the remuneration is often deemed inadequate, and taking unpaid leave is considered challenging. The amount of lost income discourages many families from sharing leave, as they cannot afford to lose one of their primary sources of income, particularly when there is a significant disparity in earnings between parents. A widespread desire among parents is for an increase in compensation levels distributed over an extended period. The preferences of Jersey's employed parents are likely to resonate with those of numerous European parents as well. Multiple studies in this domain have consistently demonstrated that when parents receive better compensation, they are more inclined to utilise their entitled leave (Karu and Tremblay, 2017). Moreover, co-parental earnings contribute to their decision to share leaves, and the foregone income, or rather the level of compensation, shapes their final decisions on taking leave (Valentova, 2025), signalling the role of the overall economic and labour market context.

Another issue that came up concerns the mode of leave. Parents voice a desire for flexibility in the leaves, for example, through expansion of the leave entitlement period from two to three years. The flexibility of leave provisions comes with its own complexities. On the one hand, studies have shown that flexibility often positively influences men's leave-taking behaviours (Brandth and Kvande, 2016). Opting for flexible leave creates less disruption to the workflow, which potentially attracts more fathers to take their leave. On the other hand, from the perspective of providing and sharing care for young children, taking leave intermittently or spread over time as opposed to longer blocks raises questions about its actual impact when the overall distribution of care labour and time use is considered (ibid).

Finally, an important issue that has arisen regarding the leave provisions pertains to the general awareness and actual implementation of leave policies. There appears to be a deficiency in knowledge concerning the entitlements of individuals. This was observed not only among employees but also among employers, resulting in confusion regarding the utilisation of leave. Such observations indicate a necessity for enhanced communication, particularly with employers, leading to the second concern. Some participants in the survey reported experiencing unequal treatment in the allocation of leave between men and women. This perpetuates a traditional perspective, wherein women's leave-taking is regarded as customary, whereas men's leave-taking is perceived as exceptional (Bygren and Duvander, 2006). As similar experiences were voiced in the case of Jersey, this should be taken as an invitation to explore ways to engage workplaces in implementing leave policies.

The recent amendment to the leave policies in Jersey explicitly holds employers accountable, as they are now obligated to provide leave compensation for a duration of six weeks. Some of the employers who participated in the survey reported that they have revised their employee rights in accordance with the new entitlements. However, they also voiced concerns regarding the practicality of implementation, particularly concerning the replacement of employees on parental leave. These concerns reflect those raised by employees and align with the experiences of other employers across Europe. It is common for employers to claim they face productivity risks or are burdened by the direct costs of funding parenting leaves. This is often pertinent to workplaces of small size or the speciality of the type of job, as finding a replacement for the leave-taking employee could pose a challenge (Valentova et al., 2025). However, when small-sized firms manage to compensate for the missing labour either by hiring temporary workers or increasing other employees' hours, employees' leave-taking does not pose a significant risk to their productivity, as the evidence from Denmark indicates (Brenøe et al., 2023). Other studies also argue that there are more benefits generated for employers than costs associated with employees' leave-taking (Davison and Blackburn, 2023; Bartel et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2025). These include attracting talent, increasing loyalty to the workplace, and higher retention rates (Davison and Blackburn, 2023; Bartel et al., 2025). In most countries, the legislation defines a time window that requires employees to inform the employer about their leave-taking intentions. This typically occurs about five months before the actual start of the leave. In other words, the employer has time to prepare for the employee's prospective absence in the coming months.

Another party involved in this process was the Jersey Advisory and Conciliation Service (JACS), an organisation with a statutory duty to advise on Employment Law. Their observation highlights the need for more precise guidance on implementing the new leave provisions. For example, the organisation emphasises the importance of clarifying how work-related tasks are handled during leave, the status of pension accumulation, bonuses, and annual leave when on parental leave. Another concern raised is the eligibility rules and exclusions. For instance, the ineligibility of self-employed parents for parental leave is considered problematic. Across Europe, there are examples of countries excluding the self-employed, such as the UK and Belgium, and examples of universal provisions, like those in Sweden, Finland, Luxembourg, and Spain, where all employed parents are eligible, regardless of their employment type.

Finally, although not specifically related to leave, childcare provision is another issue that needs to be addressed here. The survey respondents mentioned the limited provision of childcare services, difficulties securing a place and concerns about fees. The availability of affordable, high-quality childcare services is considered crucial not only for children's sociopsychological development but also for maternal employment (Stahl and Schober, 2020). In Jersey, the Social Security Minister appears to acknowledge nursery and childcare provision extensions as part of the Common Strategic Policy 2024-2026, while noting that they are out of scope for the Social Security Minister's agenda.

The review indicates that recent developments in parenting-related leave legislation are broadly supported by the majority of stakeholders. However, there remains some level of dissatisfaction and a desire for further enhancements. Particular attention should be given to clarifying the entitlements and their implications in relation to other employment rights. The key areas identified for potential improvements include the structuring of financing, the length of the paid leave period, the modalities of leave utilisation, and the eligibility criteria.

TABLE 2 KEY STAKEHOLDERS IDENTIFIED

Government Bodies and Officials	Employer and Business Representatives	Employee and Trade Union Representatives	Advocacy and Advisory Groups
Minister for Social Security: Responsible for initiating the review and presenting conclusions. **Employment Forum:** Advised on and recommended the family-friendly rights amendments. **Jersey Advisory and Conciliation Service (JACS):** Provides advice and assistance on Employment Law rights and participated in the review process. **Health and Social Security Scrutiny Panel:** Undertook the review of family-friendly legislation. **Corporate Communications (Government of Jersey):** Assisted in survey distribution. **Social Security Department:** Consulted on maternity benefits. **States of Jersey Fostering and Adoption team:** Provided **information on adoption processes.** **Health and Safety Inspectorate:** Provided insights on health and safety at work. **Office of the Chief Statistician:** Provides data for calculations in the law. **CYPES colleagues, Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning, Minister for Children and Families:** Ministerial colleagues with interests in childcare provision.	**Chamber of Commerce:** Represented member businesses and participated in the survey. **Jersey Hospitality Association (JHA):** Promotes the interests of hospitality industry members and provides input. **Institute of Directors (IoD Jersey):** Represents business community individuals and provided feedback. **Jersey Farmers' Union (JFU):** Promotes the interests of the agriculture/horticulture sector. Recruitment Agencies: Provided a collective response on temporary staff and maternity cover.	**Unite the Union:** Represents members across various sectors in Jersey. **NASUWT The Teacher's Union:** Represents teachers and school leaders in Jersey.	**Jersey Childcare Trust (JCCT):** Independent charity providing services/information to children/parents and policy makers; actively participated in the review. **Best Start Partnership:** A group of voluntary, government, and private sector organisations. **Citizens Advice:** Provided advice and participated in the survey. Salvation Army: Involved in the distribution of survey details. **The Children's Workforce:** Group involved in survey distribution. **Employment Lawyers Association, Jersey branch (ELA (JB)):** Prepared a response to the consultation. **Local Breastfeeding Working Group:** Promotes breastfeeding and supports employers.

Adequacy of provision and the extent of coverage

The current legislation regarding leave policies aspires to be inclusive; however, it is structured with explicit exclusions or restrictions. The legislation predominantly pertains to two-parent families engaged in regular employment. Nevertheless, certain limitations remain, particularly concerning lone parents, self-employed parents, and individuals undergoing IVF treatments. Additionally, there is a lack of provisions addressing same-sex parents or blended families.

There are many examples and studies showing that lone-parent families face more disadvantages when compared to two-parent families. They tend to experience poverty or hardship more than two-parent families (Maldonado and Nieuwenhuis, 2015). Furthermore, managing care and employment responsibilities often presents a greater challenge due to a lack of additional support to share these duties. While Jersey's new leave legislation does not discriminate against lone parent families, it also does not provide the much-needed support that this group likely requires. The legislation specifying the ‘defined period of leave for each parent’ suggests that lone parents will have access to half of the total leave period. This creates an inequality of opportunities for children of single parents, who will have only half of the parental contact due to the absence of a second parent.

There are examples from other European countries offering extended support to lone parents. In Spain, for instance, lone-parent families can claim 32 weeks of parental leave. The total paid leave for two-parent families is 32 weeks, and with the legislation change in 2024, lone parents will be able to access the same amount of leave, representing a more equitable approach. Other countries, including Austria, France, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Norway, Slovenia and Sweden, also provide lone parents with an extended period of leave (not just half of what a two-parent family receives).

The parental leave legislation governs the rights of employees but excludes self-employed parents. This creates a dual support system, or rather, a lack of one, for this group of parents and their children.

Those who are going through IVF treatments or considering fostering children are also left out of the scope of the recent leave legislation. The lack of legislative recognition for such cases suggests a limitation on certain family formations in the Island.

Finally, the additional support needs of so-called ‘sandwich generation’ adults who are squeezed between the care-giving responsibilities for their children and their parents, or other adult members of their family, are also overlooked. Such recognition would serve as an acknowledgement of care as a continuous process throughout the entire life course, rather than a temporally constrained endeavour that necessitates systemic support specifically around the time of childbirth.

The recent legislation concerning leave policies in Jersey has achieved notable progress across various areas; however, there remains room for enhancing inclusiveness in subsequent years. It is imperative to consider the structure of the country's labour market and to identify methods to mirror the evolving dynamics of contemporary employment. In an era marked by the increasing prevalence of atypical employment relationships, zero-hour contracts, temporary positions, and self-employment, revising legislative frameworks to align with the labour market’s nature will enhance coverage and foster more equitable opportunities for the children of Jersey.

Policy coherence and delivery

The government has articulated a strategy to promote the objectives of family-friendly legislation, as outlined in the Ministerial Conclusions following the Post-Implementation Review (April 2024) and further updates in March 2025. Central to this approach is a commitment to raise awareness of family-friendly rights through a co-produced communications plan, which draws on effective practices, such as employment rights materials aimed at temporary migrant workers. This reflects a relational approach, recognising that effective implementation relies not only on formal regulation but also on knowledge sharing and mobilisation of intermediary institutions. The Minister for Social Security has affirmed that cooperation between government, business, and the advice sector is working well in this regard.

Notably, the government has indicated that it chose not to pursue further legislative reform regarding the structure of parental leave, including increased flexibility or redistribution between parents. The current legal framework, which requires advance notice and allows employer discretion under specific conditions, is seen as balancing worker protection with employer capacity effectively.

In terms of income-related supports, a specific policy review has been initiated to strengthen the connection between Home Responsibility Protection (HRP) credits and eligibility for parental allowance. The proposed adjustments, due for implementation in April 2025 (subject to operational feasibility), aim to close existing gaps and provide more consistent access to entitlements. Although the Minister does not hold direct responsibility for childcare provision, the decision to share relevant survey data with other departments demonstrates an awareness of the intersectoral nature of family policy and the importance of coordinated governance in this domain.

Government support and the Employment Law

The relationship between government support and employment law reform demonstrates a pattern of partial alignment, wherein the structural logic of policy objectives is not consistently matched by operational coherence or equitable distribution. The current employment legislation entitles all parents to 52 weeks of leave, including 6 weeks paid at full salary by the employer, with the remaining leave available in flexible segments over a two-year period. Concurrently, the Social Security Law offers up to 32 weeks of contributory parental allowance, contingent upon eligibility, with structured sharing provisions between parents. Nonetheless, this 20-week gap between available leave and financial support constitutes a significant barrier for families, many of whom report being unable to utilise their entitlement due to financial constraints fully. This underscores a systemic limitation in the protective capacity of the state and raises pertinent questions regarding equity, especially for parents with incomplete contribution histories.

The proposed reform to Home Responsibility Protection (HRP) credits signals a recognition of these access barriers, but such changes are still in development. Parallel concerns arise regarding childcare. Although not within the direct purview of the Minister for Social Security, the unavailability and unaffordability of childcare were frequently identified as structural impediments during the Post-Implementation Review. In effect, without reliable childcare in place, parental leave becomes a formally available but substantively inaccessible right. This misalignment undermines the normative coherence of the policy framework.

In conclusion, although the communications strategy, which is multifaceted and endorsed by organisations such as JACS and Citizens Advice Jersey, has shown limitations in resolving interpretive ambiguities, both employers and parents continue to struggle with understanding the provisions. This emphasises the need for more deliberate and inclusive dissemination of information. Together, these issues underscore the complex relationship between legislation, economic support, and service infrastructure, as well as the ongoing challenge of implementing family-friendly policies in a way that is both comprehensive and equitable.

Intra-governmental, multi-sectoral coordination and collaboration

There is clear evidence of interdepartmental and cross-sector coordination in the development and implementation of family-friendly legislation, although areas for further alignment remain.

The Employment Forum plays a key role in shaping employment law by actively engaging a broad range of stakeholders, including employer organisations like the Chamber of Commerce and Jersey Hospitality Association, as well as employee representatives and advice services such as Unite the Union, Citizens Advice Jersey, and the Jersey Childcare Trust. This inclusive approach involves consultations with representatives from sectors like health, legal, financial services, and the public sector, ensuring that diverse perspectives influence policy recommendations. Information-sharing mechanisms are also in place, as demonstrated by the Minister for Social Security's distribution of childcare affordability survey data to colleagues in education and children's services. This inter-ministerial communication reflects a shared understanding of the interconnectedness between social policy areas. Efforts to raise awareness of family-friendly rights are also collaborative, with a government-wide communications strategy being developed in partnership with external organisations.

The operational role of JACS reinforces this view of institutional interdependence, as the organisation not only provides advice but also acts as a mediator between legal frameworks and public understanding. The '1,001 Critical Days' initiative further highlights the intersectoral nature of early years policy, connecting maternal and child health directly with employment rights. However, structural tensions still exist. Respondents to the review highlight ongoing gaps in employer awareness and the economic viability of parental leave, exposing the limits of current coordination. These challenges suggest that although mechanisms for collaboration exist, a deeper and more sustained integration across departments and policy areas is needed to achieve the legislative's normative and practical goals.

Looking back and forward

Given Jersey's growing investment and interest in parental leave policies, this section examines the potential benefits associated with such leaves. Addressing this may offer motivation for further policy development. In this concluding section, we briefly review the outcomes of parental leave policies for families, employers, and workplaces. Before the final remark with recommendations, we provide examples of family-friendly workplace practices.

Parenting leave policies, family and society

Parenting leave grants parents time with their young children. Especially after childbirth, the leave supports time for breastfeeding and building bonds between parents and children. For example, a review of studies on the effects of paid maternity leave found that around 12 weeks of paid maternity leave is linked to decreased psychological distress among mothers, reduced intimate partner violence, lower infant mortality, better attachment between parents and the baby, and increased breastfeeding duration (Van Niel et al., 2020; Heshmati et al., 2023).

Supporting parents in balancing care and work commitments is also seen as a way to promote fertility, although it is rarely explicitly mentioned as a policy goal (Thévenon, 2011). The evidence base looking at the associations between parenting leave and fertility is mixed, with some studies finding positive associations and others not significant linkages between the two (Gauthier, 2007). For example, the introduction of two weeks of paid paternity leave in Spain in 2007 was found to reduce fertility intentions and delays in the subsequent births (Farré and González, 2019). Potential explanations for this mechanism include men's increased time spent in child-rearing and women's strengthened attachment to the labour market (ibid).

However, a more recent review of the literature on leave policies and fertility argues that the variation in findings stems from study design. Further careful examination of the studies suggests a likely positive relationship between leave policies and fertility (Thomas et al., 2022). Similar supportive evidence also suggests that an extension of paid leave entitlements coupled with limited childcare service provision is found to be associated with an increased fertility rate, for example, in Central European countries (Bergsvik et al., 2021). The conflicting evidence may be taken as a recommendation to adopt a comprehensive approach across the policy landscape that supports families in having and raising children, rather than viewing it as a standalone solution to a single policy issue.

Owing to its contribution to health and well-being outcomes, retention in employment and improved relationship quality, investing in parenting leave policies means investing in society. For example, a microsimulation study from the US estimated a return in net social benefits valued at $7,251 to $29,369 for every $1,000 spent on paid parental leave (Wang et al., 2025). Similarly, another study examining San Francisco's Paid Parental Leave Ordinance estimated the employer cost at $0.01-$0.06 per hour on average, which is relatively low (Goodman et al., 2020). Another UK simulation estimates that if paternity leave were paid at a 90% rate for 5-6 weeks (similar to existing maternity leave), the benefits created by this change would exceed the costs borne. Fathers taking some 6-week paid paternity leave would cost about £2.8 billion in lost economic output, compared with a £5.5 billion gain from increased female labour productivity (Woodruff, 2025). The modelled policy design here includes self-employed fathers, operates with a salary cap (approximately £1,200/week), is financed by the government, and allows fathers to use leave flexibly.

Providing parenting-related leave as a statutory entitlement supported by the state would enhance its utilisation and benefits. However, there is an undeniable role for employer support:

Parenting leave policies and employers

Paid parenting leave policies offer a job guarantee, ensuring that parents taking leave can return to the same employer. In other words, parenting leave policies, especially when well compensated, attract talent and help retain employees. They promote employee loyalty, reduce labour turnover, and boost productivity (Goodman et al., 2019).

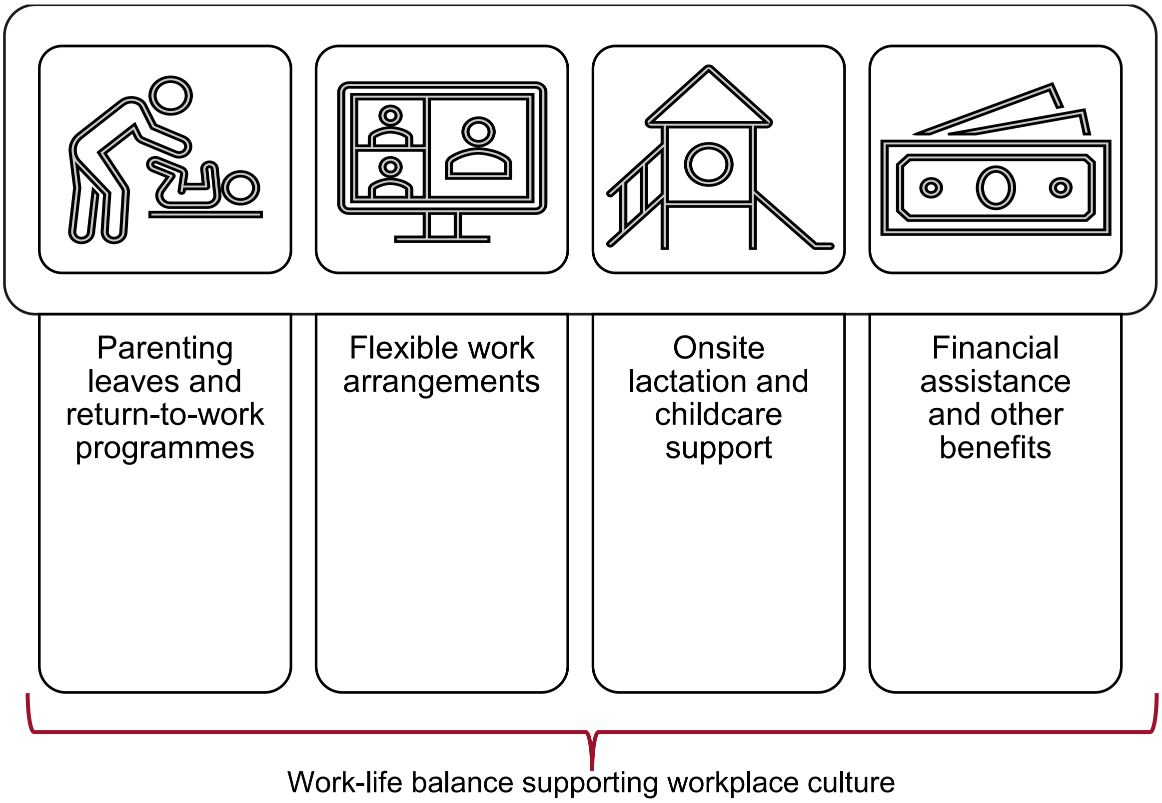
Finally, an important indicator behind mainstreaming the uptake of parenting leaves at the workplace, especially by fathers, appears to be the workplace culture and a supportive managerial attitude towards leave-taking. Two opposing angles evidence this. On the one hand, at workplaces with a dominant ideal worker ideology and gendered caregiving norms, work-life reconciliation fails to be a priority. In such environments, leave-taking becomes a norm-confirming act that accommodates female employees' retention in the workforce, as observed in Japan, despite generous leave policies offered by the state (Brinton and Mun, 2016). On the other hand, the presence of supportive managers is found to encourage higher and more flexible leave-taking by fathers (Goodman et al., 2019).

Given the importance of workplaces in implementing parenting leave, we turn to some of the exemplary practices from family-friendly workplaces:

Family-friendly workplace practices

Family-friendly workplaces are generally defined as those that support employees in managing their caregiving responsibilities, thereby reducing conflicts between work and family life (Frye and Breaugh, 2004; Guedes et al., 2023). The responses that companies develop to achieve this aim vary considerably depending on their size, sector, and workforce composition. Despite such heterogeneity, the literature consistently identifies a set of overarching practices that aim to mitigate work-family conflict and support employees' caregiving responsibilities, as summarised in Figure 1 below.

FIGURE 3 KEY WORK-LIFE SUPPORT PRACTICES AT FAMILY-FRIENDLY WORKPLACES



Source: Adapted from amazingworkplaces.co and unicef.org

A workplace culture that actively supports work–life balance is fundamental to fostering family-friendly environments. According to UNICEF (2025) four key areas of intervention form the essential pillars of such workplaces. These can be implemented through four sequential steps:

1- Defining the employer-specific challenges, needs and priorities
2- Designing company-specific solutions and policies
3- Adopting, supporting and promoting family-friendly practices
4- Reviewing, monitoring, and evaluating family-friendly policies

While these steps provide a universal framework, the details of implementation inevitably vary according to the type of workplace. For instance, factories with shift-based work, farms with dispersed workforces, office environments that rely on digital collaboration (either in person or remotely), and retail or service settings each face distinct operational constraints and opportunities (UNICEF 2025). The intensity of the workflow, the composition of the workforce, the hierarchical structure of the company, the physical workplace, and the sector in which the company operates may pose their own challenges as well as opportunities.

For example, in practice, this means that employees working on farms may require different forms of flexibility compared with those in office-based roles. Providing on-site childcare facilities may be a feasible and effective solution for factories located in industrial zones. In contrast, urban offices might find it more practical to offer childcare vouchers or partnerships with nearby nurseries.

Recognising these sectoral differences, innovative approaches are emerging across regions. One notable example is the *Companies That Care* (*Empresas que Cuidan,* ECU)[53] initiative, developed by UNICEF in Latin America. Initially launched in Argentina, ECU is an online platform that provides companies with tools, case studies, and guidance to promote family-friendly and work–life balance supportive practices. The platform particularly targets employers with a large proportion of staff who have young children, enabling them to share knowledge, pilot innovative approaches, and learn from peer organisations across the region.

Workplace practices are also strongly influenced by national statutory frameworks and the capacity of individual enterprises to go beyond minimum standards. For instance, in the United Kingdom, statutory maternity leave includes six weeks of higher-rate pay, followed by 33 weeks at a flat-rate statutory payment, and an additional 13 weeks of unpaid leave. Fathers are entitled to two weeks of flat-rate statutory paternity pay. Within the Russell Group universities, enhanced provisions demonstrate employers' commitment to work–life balance: fully paid maternity leave ranges between 8 and 26 weeks, while paternity leave ranges from 1 to 6 weeks at full pay (Woollam, 2023). Similarly, private companies such as Adobe offer 26 weeks of fully paid maternity leave, alongside up to 16 weeks of paid parental leave for partners.[54]

Flexible working arrangements constitute another cornerstone of family-friendly practice. These may include remote working, flexitime, compressed hours, job-sharing, or part-time options, depending on organisational capacity. For example, flexitime allows parents to align their working hours with school schedules. In contrast, compressed working weeks enable employees to free one day per week for childcare, potentially reducing childcare costs and improving work–life balance.

On-site childcare facilities also represent a highly valued intervention, particularly in industrial or campus-style settings. A notable example is Orange Moldova,[55] which, with guidance from

[53] https://www.empresasquecuidan.org
[54] https://benefits.adobe.com/uk/time-off/leaves-of-absence
[55] https://www.ilo.org/resource/news/innovative-childcare-workplace-enables-women-participate-labour-market

the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and financial support from the Government of Sweden, established an on-site childcare centre capable of accommodating up to 400 children per month, covering 67 per cent of all eligible children. Likewise, Cisco provides on-site childcare for children aged three months to five years, enabling working parents to access reliable and high-quality care close to their place of work.[56]

Complementary low-cost measures, such as dedicated lactation rooms, further support employees who are breastfeeding, facilitating their return to work without compromising their caregiving responsibilities. Additional provisions may include comprehensive family health insurance, extended family and other care leave entitlements, child stipends, or salary-sacrifice schemes for childcare vouchers—all of which contribute to creating genuinely family-friendly workplaces that recognise and accommodate the diverse needs of employees.[57]

Such examples of family-friendly workplace practices are far from exhaustive. While all aim to ensure, support, and promote work–life balance and employee well-being, employers are encouraged to identify solutions that best fit their specific operational and workforce needs, as demonstrated with the examples above. Building upon statutory entitlements, organisations can develop tailored approaches that serve both the business and its employees effectively.

At the heart of this approach is the cultivation of a workplace culture that recognises caregiving and personal responsibilities as integral aspects of life, and that actively supports employees in managing them alongside their professional duties. Crucially, research highlights the pivotal role of managers and supervisors in bringing such policies to life—by modelling supportive behaviours, facilitating flexibility, and ensuring that family-friendly measures outlined in company policy are genuinely implemented in practice (Frye and Breaugh, 2004; Been et al., 2017; Dulk et al., 2011).

Concluding remarks

This report demonstrates that the formulation of parenting leave policies is crucial in shaping both parental leave-taking behaviours and wider social outcomes. Evidence consistently reveals that the accessibility, generosity, and framework of entitlements impact not only individual decisions but also patterns of gendered caregiving, labour market attachment, and workplace culture. The Jersey reforms of 2018 and 2019 represented a notable shift from a fragmented framework towards a more unified and inclusive model, aligning with broader European policy provisions. Nonetheless, findings from the 2024 Post-Implementation Review underscore ongoing tensions among inclusiveness, affordability, and employer feasibility.

Firstly, the issue of adequacy remains pivotal. Although the extension of fully paid leave generally receives a positive reception, the six-week duration is broadly regarded as inadequate. The existing 20-week gap between statutory leave entitlement and contributory parental allowance constitutes a significant obstacle, as financial constraints discourage families from utilising their full entitlement. Evidence from comparative contexts indicates that higher earnings-related replacement rates and extended periods of compensated leave correlate with increased uptake, especially among fathers, and with improved maternal employment outcomes. In

[56] https://blogs.cisco.com/wearecisco/a-cisco-benefit-with-working-parents-in-mind
[57] https://www.nhsemployers.org/articles/salary-sacrifice-schemes

Jersey, this underscores the necessity for additional reforms concerning remuneration levels and state financing mechanisms.

Secondly, inclusiveness persists as an ongoing challenge. Existing legislation omits groups such as the self-employed and fails to consider the additional needs of lone parents and individuals undergoing fertility treatments, thereby limiting equitable access. Comparative data from other European nations illustrate that policy reforms can provide lone parents with leave entitlements comparable to those of two-parent families, and several countries extend eligibility to the self-employed. Addressing these exclusions would foster fairness and enhance developmental opportunities for children.

Thirdly, the review indicated that awareness and implementation remain inconsistent. Both employees and employers exhibit uncertainty regarding entitlements, while workplace norms influenced by gender continue to regard leave-taking as an exception for men. These findings imply that statutory entitlements are likely to be effective only within a workplace culture that is supportive and where information sharing is transparent. Comparative evidence demonstrates that factors such as workplace size, sectoral characteristics, and managerial attitudes significantly affect leave-taking practices, underscoring the necessity for continued engagement with employers.

Finally, childcare provision emerges as a crucial component of parental leave. Unless childcare is both affordable and reliable, parents are unable to make the most of their leave entitlements. This highlights the need for a more integrated approach, one that recognises parental leave as part of a wider work–care support system.

While it is worth keeping in mind that no policy alone is a silver bullet, nor are they short of imperfections. The heterogeneities among leave users and the context in which the entitlement is taken should be considered jointly as the scope of provisions. Still, there are potential steps that could enhance the parenting leave provisions and their potential outcomes in Jersey. Policy recommendations, therefore, include:

1. **Improving pay and government funding: Lengthening paid leave and possibly splitting the cost between employers and the government to help make it more affordable and encourage both parents to take it.**
2. **Expanding inclusiveness**: Extending eligibility to lone parents, self-employed workers, and diverse family forms to ensure equitable access.
3. **Improving communication and implementation**: Strengthening awareness campaigns and employer guidance, supported by intermediary institutions, to reduce confusion and promote equal treatment of mothers and fathers in practice.
4. **Addressing workplace culture**: Encouraging supportive managerial practices and embedding family-friendly norms within organisations to facilitate leave-taking without stigma.

5. **Integrating childcare provision**: Coordinating parental leave policies with accessible, affordable and quality childcare services to enhance the protective capacity of the overall system.

Jersey's recent reforms have made significant progress. However, further adjustments in financing, inclusiveness/accessibility, implementation, and childcare integration could help create a more coherent and equitable parental leave framework that better supports families with young children as they navigate between employment and care. Drawing on evidence from European welfare states, the importance of policy design is clear: it's not only about entitlements but also ensuring meaningful access and long-term benefits for families, employers, and society.

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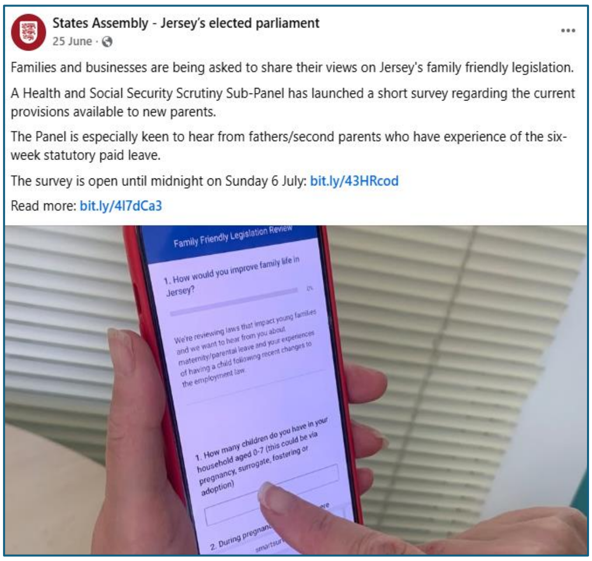
Prepared exclusively for the Health and Social Security Scrutiny Panel in Jersey.

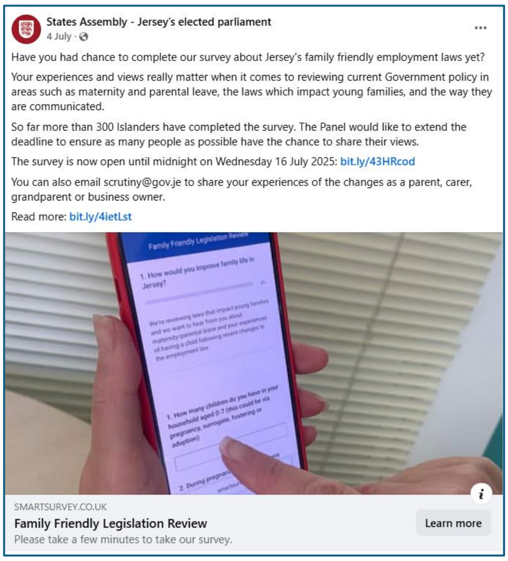
October 2025

Appendix 4

Family Friendly Legislation Review Survey analysis

As part of the review, the survey ran for 6 weeks from the 2nd June - 18th July 2025. It was widely promoted on social media and directly to family support services, schools, nurseries and health care settings.





The survey was primarily aimed at parents and carers and sought to gain insights into first hand experiences of raising and caring for children under the amended legislation.

It comprised of 27 questions and included quantity and qualitive questions and a range of free text options to allow respondents to give further detail of their experiences.

The survey had 428 respondents, all of whom had 1 or more children in their household born from newborn to 7 years old.

Question 2: During pregnancy or when you were planning for a child or, did you access information regarding employment, claims and benefits?

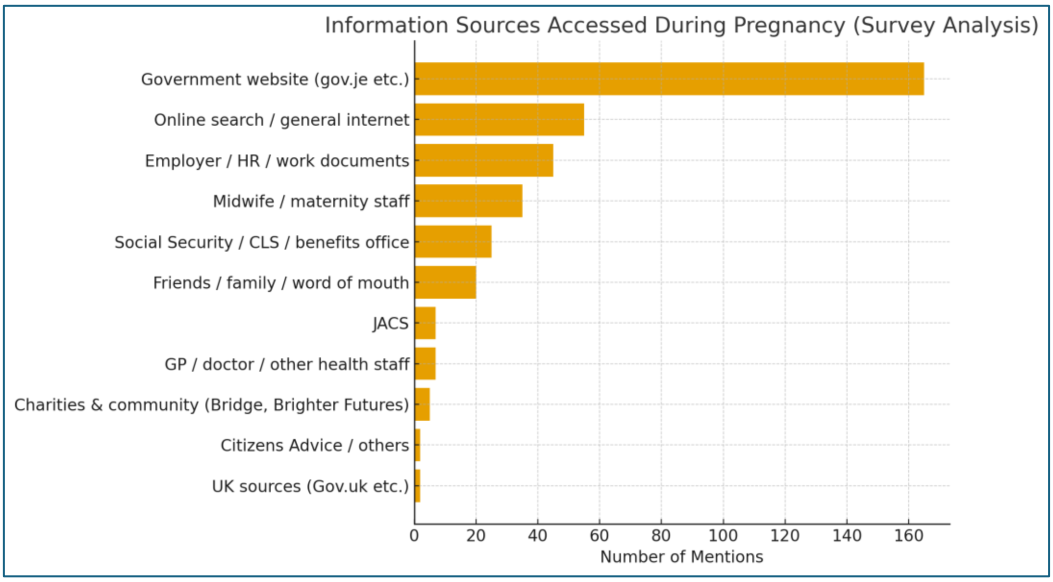
72% of respondents confirmed that they had accessed information, and 28% had not.

Of the 72% of respondents who confirmed their information sources were:

Key Insights

- Government website (gov.je) as the primary 'go-to' source, but many respondents describe confusion, incomplete, or conflicting information.
- Employers and midwives act as critical intermediaries — filling gaps left by official channels.
- The Social Security department was frequently mentioned as a primary contact, but resulted in negative experiences (unclear advice, poor communication).

- Peer and informal networks play a significant role, indicating a need for clearer centralised guidance.
- Few people mentioned JACS, Citizens Advice Jersey, or third sector organisations, suggesting these could be more prominently signposted.



Question 3: Did the current laws around leave and financial benefits for new parents affect your decision to start a family or have a second child?

This question aimed to understand how family policy impacts real-life reproductive and employment decisions, seeking to determine whether the legal and financial frameworks around parenting in Jersey acts as a support or a barrier to family formation and growth.

Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes		60.98%	261
2	No		39.72%	170
			answered	428
			skipped	9

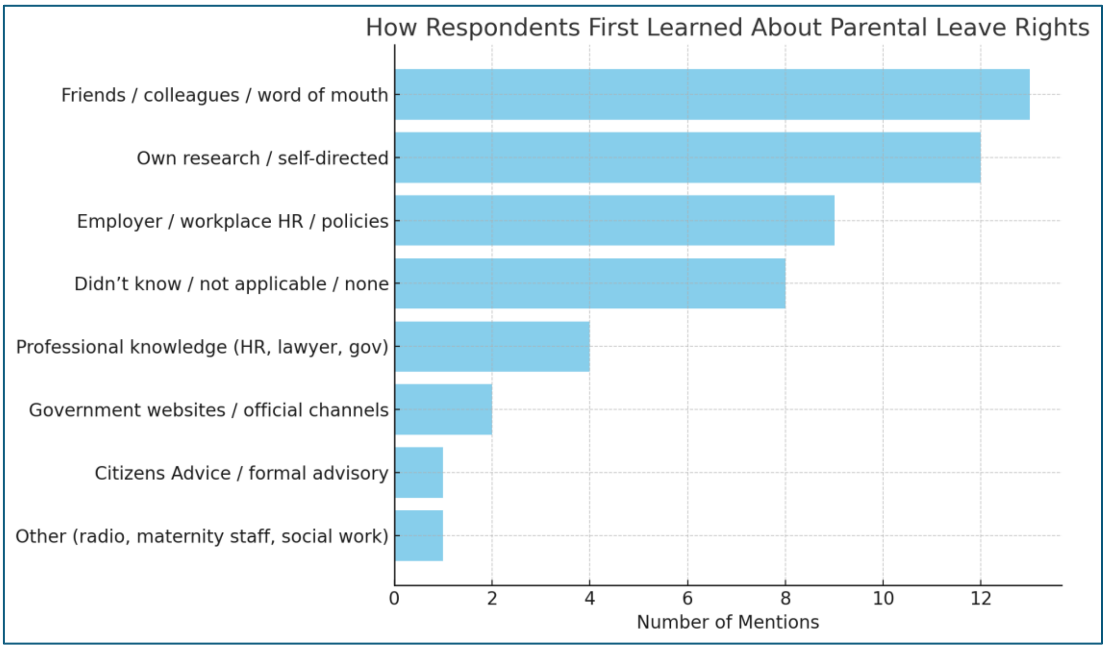
Question 4: Were you aware of the changes to the employment law in 2018 and in 2020 effecting rights to time off for ante-natal or pre-adoptive appointments?

Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes		65.27%	280
2	No		34.97%	150
			answered	429
			skipped	8

Question 5: How did you first learn about your parental leave rights?

3	Online	47.55%	204
4	Your midwife	21.21%	91
5	Other (please specify):	12.35%	53
		answered	429
		skipped	8

The 53 respondents who specified another source for learning about their parental rights included the following sources:



Friends, colleagues, and self-directed research were the most common sources, while official government channels and formal advice services were rarely mentioned, highlighting a significant information gap. The responses highlight a lack of centralised, clear communication about parental leave rights in Jersey.

People predominantly self-researched or relied on informal networks, with only a small proportion citing official or employer-provided guidance.

This suggests that awareness campaigns, employer training, and clear online resources could significantly improve understanding and confidence around parental leave entitlements.

I had to tell my employer of the new rules as I had read about them."

"I phoned Citizens Advice as the law was changing… My employer was uninformed."
"It was a scramble for information."

"Friends' experiences helped, but everyone had different advice."

"Never did [learn]."

Key Insights

Information gaps are substantial - most respondents found out on their own or through peers, not through structured communication.

Employers are inconsistent gatekeepers - some provided clear policies; others were unaware or incorrect, requiring employees to educate them.

Low visibility of official information - only a handful explicitly referenced gov.je or official campaigns. This suggests a need for proactive outreach.

Professional privilege in awareness - HR professionals, lawyers, and government employees had better awareness, implying that others rely on luck or effort.

High confusion during legislative change - several respondents noted the laws were “changing around the time” or “uncertain”, leading to anxiety and misinformation.

Question 6: Was your employer aware of the new rights to time off for ante-natal or pre-adoptive appointments?

Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes		59.30%	255
2	No		10.47%	45
3	Unsure		25.81%	111
4	Other (please specify):		6.51%	28
			answered	430
			skipped	7

Of the 430 responses to this question, the majority of respondent (59.3%) explained that their employers were aware of the rights to time off for appointments under the legislation, with 42.79% saying that either their employer did not know or were unsure if their employer was aware if these rights.

Of the 28 responses to ‘Other’ who provided further information:

Quantitative Summary (Approximate)

- 44% (12 responses): Not applicable / not employed / self-employed.
- 22% (6 responses): Employer unaware or only learned after prompting.
- 11% (3 responses): Employer aware or already following the law.
- 11% (3 responses): Negative or non-compliant experiences.
- 11% (3 responses): Other / unclear or historical responses.

Key Qualitative Insights

Significant Lack of Awareness

Several respondents reported that HR or management did not initially know about the new rights. In some cases, employees had to inform their employer:

“HR lady didn’t know, people hub had to check and it took them three days.”

“I had to tell them and request when the handbook would be updated.”

This suggests limited proactive communication or training among employers when the legislation was introduced.

Instances of Non-Compliance and Hostility

A minority but serious subset of responses indicate poor treatment or penalisation related to maternity rights:

“I was required to make up the time for any appointments and lost my job a week before going on maternity leave.”

“Appointments were frowned upon… asked to schedule them at work convenient times.”

“I was made to sign a non-disclosure agreement on the day I informed of my pregnancy.”

These indicate possible breaches of employment rights and workplace discrimination concerns.

Mixed Awareness Among Employers

Some respondents said their employers were aware or already compliant:

“They already gave it to us.”

“After speaking to 3 different people, yes.”

However, the fact that confirmation required “speaking to 3 different people” implies inconsistency even within organisations.

Overall, the data suggests:

- Awareness and implementation of family-friendly legislation among Jersey employers was inconsistent.
- Communication and training gaps were common.
- A small but concerning number of respondents experienced negative or unlawful treatment related to pregnancy and maternity.

Recommendations

Targeted Employer Education: Ensure HR teams and line managers receive concise, practical guidance on family-friendly rights.

Employee Awareness Campaigns: Encourage workers to know and assert their rights through outreach or online resources.

Follow-up Analysis: Collect more data from currently employed respondents to focus on awareness among active employers.

Question 7: Are you aware that all new parents in Jersey are entitled to up to 52 weeks of leave, with 6 weeks paid by the employer?

Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes	90.68%	389
2	No	9.32%	40
		answered	429
		skipped	8

Question 8: Do you think 6 weeks of paid leave is enough?

Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes	6.05%	26
2	No	94.42%	406
		answered	430
		skipped	7

Question 9: Did you know that maternity/parental leave can be taken in up to 3 separate blocks over a two-year period following the birth or adoption of a child?

Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes	88.58%	380
2	No	11.66%	50
		answered	429
		skipped	8

Question 10: Do you know that fathers/partners are entitled to paid time off for up to 10 ante-natal appointments?

Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes	48.02%	206
2	No	51.98%	223
		answered	429
		skipped	8

Question 11: Have you taken parental/maternal leave under the current Jersey legislation?

	Answer Choices	Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes	75.12%	323
2	No	25.12%	108
		answered	430
		skipped	7

Question 12: If you have taken maternity/parental leave under the current legislation, how satisfied were you with the flexibility and support provided by your employer?

	Answer Choices	Response Percent	Response Total
1	Very satisfied	23.61%	85
2	Satisfied	34.44%	124
3	Neutral	28.89%	104
4	Dissatisfied	9.17%	33
5	Very dissatisfied	4.44%	16
		answered	360
		skipped	77

Question 13. Did you apply for the Parental Allowance? (Parental Allowance is a weekly payment of £283.01 to support parents taking time off work to prepare for or care for a child, including through birth or adoption. It can be shared between 2 parents named on the birth certificate and paid for up to 32 weeks, either jointly or separately, directly into your bank account).

	Answer Choices	Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes	84.63%	358
2	No	15.60%	66
		answered	423
		skipped	14

Question 14: How easy was it to apply for the Parental Allowance?

Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Very easy	46.74%	179
2	Somewhat easy	42.04%	161
3	Not easy	11.23%	43
		answered	383
		skipped	54

Question 15: Did you apply for the Parental Grant? (The Parental Grant is a single (tax free) payment of £849.03 to help with the general cost of having a baby).

Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes	90.93%	381
2	No	9.07%	38
		answered	419
		skipped	18

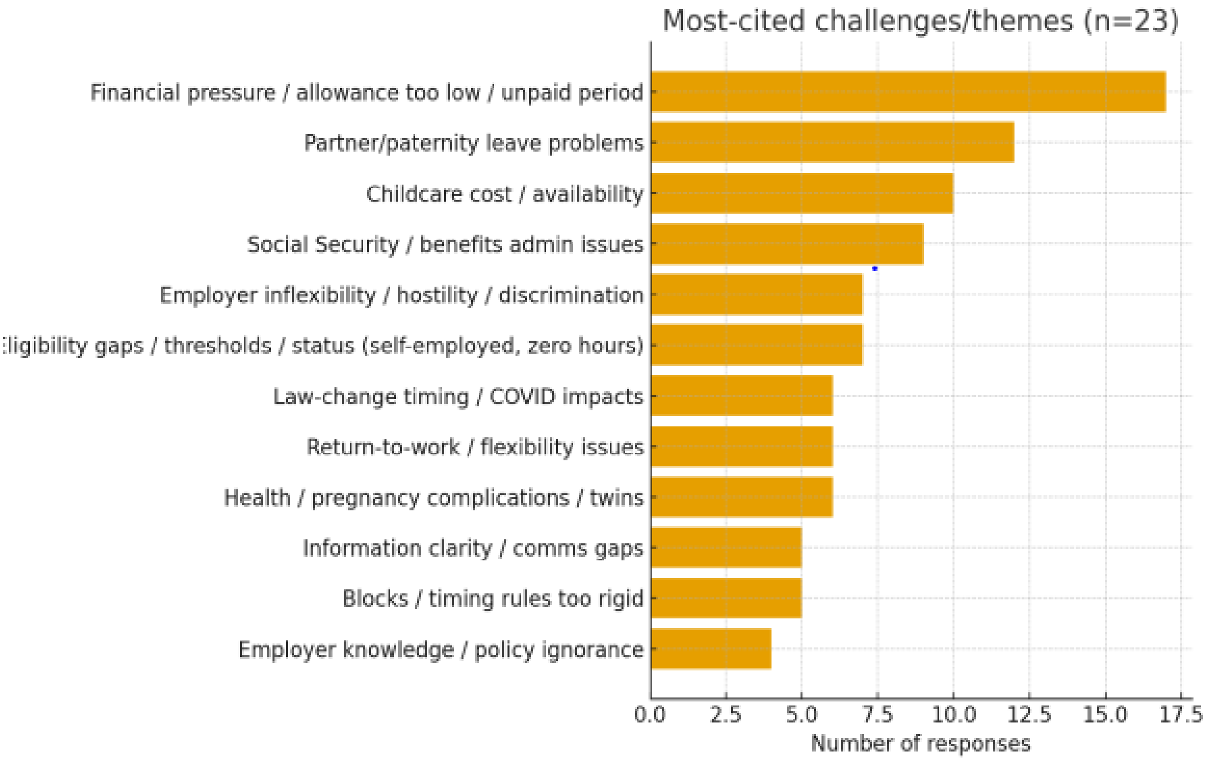
Question 16: How easy was it to apply for the Parental Grant?

Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Very easy	57.79%	230
2	Somewhat easy	34.92%	139
3	Not easy	7.29%	29
		answered	398
		skipped	39

Question 17: Did you encounter any challenges or obstacles when arranging or taking your maternity/parental leave?

Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes	32.60%	133
2	No	67.89%	277
		answered	408
		skipped	29

133 written responses were received to the 'Yes' options, these included



Most common points: money (low allowance/unpaid periods), childcare cost/availability, admin problems with Social Security/People Hub, and employer inflexibility or poor knowledge of policy.

- Rigidity hurts families: 3-block rules, term-time constraints, and notice requirements clash with real births (early/late, complications).
- Eligibility gaps: self-employed/zero-hours thresholds, law-change timing, and partner leave issues lead to surprises and refusals.
- Culture matters: several accounts of hostility, discrimination, or pressure; return-to-work often inflexible; phased returns rare.

Top recurring themes:

1. **Financial pressure / allowance too low / unpaid period**
2. **Childcare cost / availability**
3. **Social Security / benefits admin issues** (incl. People Hub)
4. **Employer inflexibility / hostility / discrimination**
5. **Blocks / timing rules too rigid**
6. **Eligibility gaps** (self-employed, zero-hours, thresholds)
7. **Partner/paternity leave problems**
8. **Information clarity / comms gaps**
9. **Return-to-work flexibility issues**
   (Plus smaller clusters: law-change timing/COVID, housing/tenancy, health complications, and a handful of positives.)

"Nursery fees are too high… I break even so not really much point going back."

"People Hub kept making mistakes. So many mistakes."

"I wanted to change my blocks, but my employer refused… I left that job."

"My husband… couldn't take more than 6 weeks. We can't have no income coming in."

"I was told I'd be paid for KIT days then my boss said no."

"Self-employed… had to go back to work when she was 3 weeks old to cover basic costs."

"Headteacher made me finish at end of term… six weeks earlier than I'd planned."

"Not told about thresholds… would have worked more to qualify."

Financial pressure / allowance too low / unpaid period

"I think the £283 should be for the full year."

Partner/paternity leave problems

"My husband can take a year off, but we can't afford it as I am taking a year off. We can't have no income coming in."

Childcare cost / availability

"Nursery fees are too high a lot of my friends have quit and can't return to work until the baby is 3! I break even so not really much point going back."

Social Security / benefits admin issues

"Child credits were not made clear when I was on mat leave and social security asked me to top up my contributions when I was no longer paid by work. Social security staff did not tell me that I could claim the credits as I had a baby under"

Employer inflexibility / hostility / discrimination

"I got made redundant Discrimination at work when I went back after both pregnancies."

Eligibility gaps / thresholds / status (self-employed, zero hours)

"Child credits were not made clear when I was on mat leave and social security asked me to top up my contributions when I was no longer paid by work. Social security staff did not tell me that I could claim the credits as I had a baby und..."

Law-change timing / COVID impacts

"My manager was unaware of what parental leave was available and how to apply. I did not know where to turn to apply, I found this out myself by researching and phoning around until someone advised me (I work for the states of Jersey).

Return-to-work / flexibility issues

"Nursery fees are too high a lot of my friends have quit and can't return to work until the baby is 3! I break even so not really much point going back."

Health / pregnancy complications / twins

"It should be illegal for workplaces to take the £283 off you, my husband had to pay his back! Needing to have a huge amount of savings just to survive financially. People Hub found it difficult to deal with teachers who work term time…..."

Information clarity / comms gaps

"Child credits were not made clear when I was on mat leave and social security asked me to top up my contributions when I was no longer paid by work. Social security staff did not tell me that I could claim the credits as I had a baby und..."

Potential system improvements:

Reduce/reshape the unpaid gap

Extend paid allowance beyond 32 weeks or smooth payments over the full leave to avoid income cliffs.

Childcare affordability & supply

Expand nursery places; targeted subsidies for under-2s; clearer place-holding rules to avoid losing spots.

Manager training & compliance

Short, mandatory briefings on blocks/notice/KIT/term-time; clear escalation for refusals; anti-discrimination refreshers.

Flex the rules

Allow single-week blocks, emergency changes after birth/complications, and alignment with school terms for educators.

One-stop digital journey

Unified form, auto-validation (names/IDs), trackable ticketing/SLA, and plain-English guidance with examples.

Support the return

Make phased returns the default; paid re-onboarding time for mandatory training and catch-up.

Question 18: Did you use any Keeping in Touch (KIT) days during your maternity/parental leave?

	Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes		26.81%	111
2	No		55.56%	230
3	Was not aware of KIT days		19.57%	81
			answered	414
			skipped	23

Only 26.81% used their KIT days, the remaining 311 respondents who answered this question indicated they did not use or were not aware of KIT days.

Question 19: How would you rate your employer's communication regarding maternity/parental leave rights and procedures?

	Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Very good		26.23%	107
2	Okay		56.86%	232
3	Very bad		16.91%	69
			answered	408
			skipped	29

Question 20: Are you aware that mothers have the right to request paid breaks for breastfeeding or expressing milk during the first 52 weeks after childbirth?

	Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes		65.19%	279
2	No		35.05%	150
			answered	428
			skipped	9

Question 21: If applicable, did your employer provide adequate facilities and support for breastfeeding or expressing breast milk at your workplace?

	Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes		20.00%	83
2	No		13.49%	56
3	Not applicable		66.99%	278
			answered	415
			skipped	22

Question 22: What would you suggest to improve maternity/parental leave policies and support for families in Jersey?

Across all 100+ comments, the responses show overwhelming consensus on the need for more financial support, longer paid leave, and cheaper childcare. There's also a strong secondary theme around flexibility, breastfeeding rights, and clearer information.

The tone ranges from constructive and policy-minded "***phase returns, integrate childcare subsidies***" to personal frustration and hardship "***I had to sell my house to stay home with my baby".***

Analysis of the survey's free-text responses reveals a consistent set of priorities expressed by parents and carers, highlighting where current family friendly legislation and wider support systems fall short in practice. Ten major themes emerged, with varying degrees of prevalence, but together they present a clear picture of the pressures families face and the reforms they believe would make the biggest difference.

The strongest theme, raised by around 60% of respondents, was the need for longer periods of paid parental leave, particularly for mothers. Many described the current six weeks' paid entitlement as wholly insufficient, both for recovery from birth and for early bonding. A considerable number advocated for paid leave of six months to a full year, and some explicitly referenced international models offering extended parental income.

Closely linked to this, approximately 55%, called for improved financial support for new parents, including higher weekly parental allowance, top-ups to match the cost of living, or more generous income support mechanisms. Many parents explained that the current level of financial support does not cover basic expenses, leaving families under significant strain during the first year of a child's life.

Around 45% highlighted the urgent need to address the cost of childcare, which many described as "extortionate". Parents suggested free or heavily subsidised childcare from 9 months or age 1, reductions in nursery fees, or a staged expansion of funded hours to close the affordability gap between parental leave ending and NEF hours beginning.

Improved paternity and partner leave was raised by roughly 30%, with respondents favouring longer paid entitlements, equal leave rights for fathers, or more flexible shared-leave models to support gender equality and parental choice.

Requests for greater flexibility in returning to work, such as phased return schemes, reduced hours, or protected part-time arrangements, were made by about 25% of respondents. Many emphasised the physical and emotional challenges of returning abruptly to full-time work after parental leave.

Around 20% stressed the need for clearer communication about entitlements. Parents described confusion about notice periods, pay structures, and how the parental allowance interacts with employment rights, and called for simple, unified guidance provided early in pregnancy.

Calls to extend breastfeeding protections, particularly break allowances up to two years (in line with WHO recommendations), were raised by around 15%, alongside requests for improved facilities and stronger enforcement of existing rights.

A similar proportion highlighted the importance of supportive family-friendly workplace cultures, including better employer training, proactive management support, and reduced stigma around parental leave, particularly for fathers.

Around 10% emphasised the need for better support for specific family circumstances, such as kinship carers, adoptive parents, parents of multiples, and those with children in neonatal care.

Finally, another 10% raised broader social policy measures, such as child tax relief, financial vouchers for essentials, and the removal of GST from baby products, reflecting the cumulative cost pressures facing young families.

Taken together, these themes show that while parents value the principles behind Jersey's family friendly legislation, they believe significant gaps remain, particularly in affordability, accessibility, flexibility, and clarity. The consistency of responses across hundreds of submissions demonstrates strong public appetite for a more modern, equitable and family-centred policy framework.

"Six weeks paid is not enough time. I'm selling my house just to have more time off to be the one to see my child's first steps."

"When we consider the first 1001 days research, it's shocking that people are only paid for 6 weeks on such an affluent Island."

"Nursery equals my wage. If I don't go back, I lose my job."

"More support if you choose to stay home—nursery isn't right for every family."

"Employers give the minimum they have to. As an adoptive parent it wasn't enough time to form attachment."

"Include clear, simple leaflets in maternity packs—what am I entitled to, and how do I apply?"

"Men should have at least 3 months paid leave. Equality helps mothers too."

Themes in detail

Financial Pressure & Allowance Reform

Respondents repeatedly cited the insufficiency of the £280 weekly parental allowance, noting it does not reflect Jersey's cost of living. Many compared Jersey unfavourably to the UK or Scandinavia.
Suggestions: raise allowance, index to inflation, longer duration, paid phased returns.

Childcare Costs and Access

Childcare was described as “crippling” and “a deterrent to working.”
Suggestions:

- Government-funded or subsidised childcare from 9 months–2 years.
- Extended free nursery hours.
- Better alignment between maternity end and free childcare start.

Longer Paid Maternity Leave

Most respondents advocate for at least one year paid, often with an optional unpaid extension. Some requested 18–24 months total to align with developmental needs.

Flexibility and Work Culture

Many respondents reported abrupt or stressful returns to work.
Suggestions:

- Encourage employers to offer phased return and flexible hours.
- Part-time and remote options where feasible.
- Training for managers on supporting returning parents.

Information, Awareness & Communication

Respondents want clear, accessible information early in pregnancy.
Suggestions:

- Add simple checklists to hospital maternity folders.
- Clear online calculators for entitlement and eligibility.
- Public awareness of rights (both for employers and employees).

Breastfeeding Rights

Support for extending breastfeeding breaks to two years and making such breaks paid, aligning with WHO and NHS guidance.

Wider Family Support

Innovative suggestions included:

- Tax relief per child.
- No GST on children’s essentials.
- Family vouchers for food, clothing, and baby items.
- Priority queuing for pregnant people or those with children in public spaces.

Cultural and Systemic Shifts

Some noted that attitudes in workplaces remain outdated, particularly toward pregnant or returning women.
Suggestions: anti-discrimination training; enforcement of family-friendly workplace standards.

Summary of Key themes

- **Extend paid leave to at least 12 months** (majority view).
- **Increase the parental allowance** and index it to cost of living.
- **Lower childcare costs** through subsidies or free hours from 9–12 months.
- **Guarantee flexible, phased return to work** with equal rights for both parents.
- **Improve clarity and communication** on eligibility and applications.
- **Extend breastfeeding rights** and support facilities.
- **Ensure inclusive policies** for adoptive, foster, and single parents.
- **Promote family-friendly work culture** across public and private sectors.

Question 23: Did your workplace provide any support that went above what is legally required of them, such as: of them, such as:

	Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Childcare		0.65%	2
2	Hybrid/flexible working		45.60%	140
3	Child friendly facilities in the workplace		1.63%	5
4	More than 6 weeks paid maternity/parental leave		61.89%	190
5	Financial support for childcare		1.95%	6
6	Other (please specify):		19.87%	61
			answered	307

Analysis of Question 23: Additional Support Provided by Workplaces

A total of 307 respondents answered this question, with 130 skipping it, indicating that either the question was not relevant to their circumstances or that they felt unable to identify any support beyond statutory requirements. Among those who responded, the data reveals significant variation in the type and extent of enhanced support offered by employers.

Most Common Forms of Enhanced Support

More than 6 weeks' paid maternity/parental leave – 61.89% (190 respondents)

This was the most frequently reported form of additional support. A clear majority of respondents experienced enhanced paid parental leave, suggesting that many employers, particularly larger organisations, provide leave arrangements that exceed statutory minimums. This finding aligns with employer submissions to the review, which indicated that enhanced policies are often used to support retention, promote gender equality, and maintain competitiveness in recruitment.

Hybrid/flexible working – 45.60% (140 respondents)

Flexible working was the second most common enhancement and reflects a broader cultural shift following the pandemic. Respondents' experiences suggest that many workplaces now offer flexibility beyond statutory rights, with varying forms of hybrid arrangements, remote working, or adaptable scheduling.

This is consistent with feedback across the survey that flexibility remains one of the most valued forms of support for working parents and carers.

Less Common Forms of Enhanced Support

Child-friendly facilities in the workplace – 1.63% (5 respondents)

Very few respondents reported access to child-friendly facilities such as breastfeeding rooms, on-site baby changing, or child-friendly meeting spaces. This supports earlier evidence that workplace infrastructure for families is generally limited in Jersey and often dependent on individual employers' resources.

Childcare provision – 0.65% (2 respondents)

Only two respondents indicated that their workplace provided direct childcare support. This extremely low figure aligns with the wider evidence that workplace-provided childcare is rare in Jersey and is generally not considered feasible for most employers due to cost, regulation, and space requirements.

Financial support for childcare – 1.95% (6 respondents)

Only a very small number of respondents received any form of financial assistance for childcare costs. Given that childcare affordability is a major concern raised throughout the survey, this result suggests that employer contributions in this area are uncommon and may represent a significant gap in current support models.

"Other" Forms of Support – 19.87% (61 respondents)

Nearly one in five respondents selected "Other," which likely captures a range of informal or bespoke support measures, for example:

- Extended phased-return arrangements
- Additional compassionate leave
- Mental health and wellbeing support
- Adjusted hours beyond formal flexible working
- Team-level adjustments to workload
- Temporary reduced duties
- Enhanced communication or HR support.

The high proportion choosing "Other" suggests that many employers may be offering non-standard, informal, or situational support that does not fit neatly into the predefined categories but nonetheless plays an important role in supporting working parents.

What this tells us:

Enhanced Support Is Uneven Across Sectors

The data suggests that while many respondents benefit from enhanced paid leave and flexible working, other types of support, particularly with childcare, remain very limited.

Large Employers Likely Driving Positive Results

The strong showing for enhanced paid leave likely reflects the influence of larger employers with the resources to offer such benefits. SMEs, based on employer submissions, are less able to provide these enhancements.

Flexibility is Key

Flexible working continues to be one of the most valued and accessible forms of additional support. It is often low-cost to implement and delivers substantial benefits to employees.

Childcare Support Remains the Weakest Area

Both direct childcare and financial help with childcare are extremely rare, despite being one of the most pressing challenges reported by families throughout the review.

"Other" Responses Reflect Hidden Good Practice

The significant number of "Other" responses indicates that some employers are offering more tailored support, though these practices lack consistency or formalisation.

Summary

Overall, the results indicate that while many employers, particularly larger organisations, offer enhanced paid leave and flexible working, other forms of support such as childcare assistance or child-friendly workplace facilities are far less common. The findings highlight important positive practices, but also identify clear gaps, particularly around childcare provision and infrastructure, which continue to place significant pressures on families.

Analysis of responses to this question shows that while many employers provide support that goes beyond statutory requirements, this is concentrated in a small number of areas. The most common enhancements reported were more than six weeks paid parental leave (61.9%) and access to hybrid or flexible working arrangements (45.6%), reflecting a strong cultural shift toward flexibility and a trend among larger employers to offer enhanced leave as part of broader recruitment and retention strategies. In contrast, very few respondents reported receiving additional support with childcare, including direct provision, financial assistance, or child-friendly workplace facilities, all of which remained extremely uncommon. Nearly one in five respondents selected "Other," indicating a range of informal or bespoke support measures offered on a discretionary basis, such as phased returns, wellbeing support, or ad hoc flexibility.

Overall, these findings suggest that while many families benefit from enhanced leave and flexible working, childcare-related support remains a significant gap, and the availability of additional support varies markedly between employers and sectors.

Analysis of "Other" Responses

The free-text responses to the "Other" category reveal valuable insight into employees' lived experiences beyond the predefined options. A review of all comments shows that the majority of respondents used this option to clarify that their employer had not provided any support beyond the statutory minimum. Only a small minority described receiving additional or enhanced forms of support.

The comments can be grouped into several clear themes:

No Additional Support – *Most Common Theme*

The overwhelming majority of responses explicitly stated **"None", "No", "Nothing", "No support", "None whatsoever"**, or variations of these. Approximately two-thirds of the comments fall into this category.

These responses indicate that for many parents and carers, employers do not routinely provide enhanced family-friendly measures, and statutory minimum entitlements are the norm across sizeable parts of Jersey's workforce.

Examples include:

- "No-they are very ungenerous and have provided nothing at all."
- "Statutory minimum which is their approach to everything."
- "No support from my employer."
- "None whatsoever."
- "No childcare support in Jersey."

This also aligns with other sections of the survey where many respondents report low workplace support for childcare, flexible working, breastfeeding, or phased return arrangements.

Negative Workplace Culture or Active Resistance

A significant subset of respondents described negative or obstructive behaviour from employers rather than additional support. These comments highlight cultural or managerial barriers to flexibility that technically should already be supported under the law.

Examples include:

- "My former employer still made flexible working extremely difficult and then made my life difficult afterwards."
- "They were offering some form of flexible working that was not actually guaranteed nor clear."
- "No chance."

This theme suggests that for some parents, legal entitlements were met in name only, or employers created obstacles to accessing them, indicating inconsistency in the practical application of statutory rights.

Enhanced Paid Leave (Small Minority)

A few respondents reported receiving substantial enhancements, often well above statutory requirements.

Examples include:

- “4 months paid leave.”
- “3 months full pay and 3 months half pay.”
- “Had 5 months full pay working for the Government.”

These cases show that while some employers, primarily larger organisations, offer generous policies, such support is not widespread across the respondent group.

Flexible or Adjusted Hours (Limited Occurrence)

A small number of respondents referenced **ad hoc flexibility**, usually informal and manager dependent.

Examples include:

- “They let me work till 3 pm so I can stay evening with family.”
- “Flexible approach as to how and when I took my leave.”

These examples suggest that some employers provide personalised, non-policy-based adjustments, though these appear relatively rare and inconsistent across sectors.

Responses Indicating Non-Applicability

Several comments simply stated **“N/A”, “Not working”, “Not working yet”, “Self-employed”**, or noted that the respondent was not in Jersey during their maternity period.

These indicate that the question was not relevant to their circumstances rather than reflecting employer practice.

Limited Childcare-Related Support (Very Few Mentions)

Childcare support, either financial or practical, was almost entirely absent, with only isolated examples:

- “Staff discount on childcare, but the cost was still high.”

This reinforces the broader conclusion that childcare-related workplace support is extremely rare in Jersey.

Overall Interpretation

The “Other” comments largely reinforce findings from the fixed-response options: most employers do not offer enhanced family-friendly support, and many parents receive only the statutory minimum.

Only a small minority reported receiving generous paid leave or meaningful flexible arrangements beyond legal requirements.

A number of responses illustrate workplace cultures resistant to flexibility, signalling an implementation gap between the legislation and day-to-day practice.

Childcare support remains virtually non-existent, aligning with wider survey findings that childcare is one of the greatest challenges for families in Jersey.

Several respondents were unable to answer due to being self-employed, unemployed, or not in Jersey at the time, important reminders that the survey captured a broad demographic with varied employment statuses.

The "Other" responses overwhelmingly indicate that for many parents and carers, no additional support beyond statutory requirements is provided, and in some cases employers actively resisted flexibility or did not fully support existing rights. Only a small number of respondents reported enhanced paid leave or informal flexibility, suggesting that while good practice exists, it is inconsistent and unevenly distributed across Jersey's workplaces. These findings highlight a significant disparity in family-friendly support, strongly influenced by employer size, culture, and resources.

Question 24: Can you share how you balanced returning to work with caring for your child(ren)?

Responses show that for most parents there is no genuine "balance" – instead there is juggling, sacrifice and, for some, the complete loss of one income or career. A small number describe supportive employers and workable arrangements; the overwhelming majority describe financial strain, high childcare costs, exhaustion, and a sense of being forced into choices they would not otherwise make.

You can think of the responses as falling into a few broad patterns.

Heavy Reliance on Formal Childcare – Often at Unsustainable Cost

A dominant theme is that many parents had no option but to use full-time nursery or daycare, even when this meant most or all of one wage going on fees:

- Parents repeatedly say they are *"working to pay nursery"* or that childcare fees are equal to or higher than their mortgage.
- Several report nursery costs around £1,700–£2,000 per month per child, and describe these as *"extortionate"* and *"crippling"*.
- Some took out loans purely to cover nursery fees in order to return to work.
- A number say bluntly that they could not afford to return at all, or that it would have been cheaper not to work.

Parents regularly say they "had to" put babies into nursery from 4–6 months because there was no family support and no affordable alternative. This is often described as "heartbreaking" and emotionally very difficult, particularly where return to work is driven solely by financial necessity.

Grandparents and Extended Family as the Safety Net

Where grandparents or extended family are available, they are frequently described as the only reason a return to work was possible:

- Many respondents describe mixed arrangements: *"nursery 3 days, grandparents 2 days"*, or one day with a grandparent to reduce fees.
- Several say explicitly that without family help, they would not be able to work, or would have had to leave their job or the Island.
- Others note that they have no family on the Island, and that this makes balancing work and care "extremely difficult" and lonely.

This underscores a clear inequality: families with nearby grandparents can just about cope; those without are pushed to the edge.

Reducing Hours, Going Part-Time or Compressing the Week

A large number of respondents tried to "balance" by **reducing their hours**:

- Moving from full-time to 3 or 4 days a week.
- Working condensed hours (e.g. 5 days' hours over 4 days) to cut one nursery day.
- Early starts or late finishes so they can do nursery drop-off/pick-up and minimise hours paid for.

Even where this helps logistically, parents often say it doesn't make financial sense:

- Part-time wages are often only just above childcare costs, leaving very little to cover housing and other bills.
- Several people describe these arrangements as financially unsustainable in the long term, but the only way to spend any meaningful time with their children.

Some explicitly link reduced hours to career sacrifice: stepping back from promotion, accepting roles below their skill level, or leaving a profession (particularly teaching and nursing).

Opposite Shifts, Evening/Night Work and "Tag-Team" Parenting

Another common coping mechanism is parents working opposite shifts to avoid or reduce childcare:

- One parent works days while the other works evenings/nights, or weekends only.
- Some describe "tag team" parenting with virtually no overlap as a couple and chronic exhaustion.
- Several respondents say this pattern has taken a serious toll on relationships, mental health and family life, but they feel they have no alternative.

A recurring phrase is that there is "no work–life balance" at all – just survival.

Employer Flexibility: A Mixed Picture

Experiences with employers range from extremely supportive to actively hostile.

Positive examples include:

- Hybrid or remote working, with a mix of home and office days.
- Agreed changes to start/finish times to fit nursery hours.
- Compressed hours or part-time work granted on request.
- Formal phased returns using annual leave to build back up slowly.

A few respondents say they feel **"very lucky"** with their employer and credit flexible working with enabling them to stay in work and maintain their wellbeing.

Negative experiences include:

- Requests for part-time or flexible hours refused outright ("the job isn't part-time").
- Employers (including some in GoJ and schools) blocking or delaying flexible working and hiding behind "business need".
- Women returning from maternity leave being pushed out, given termination agreements, or treated with disdain.
- No time or facilities for breastfeeding or pumping, leading to early cessation.
- Being expected to perform at pre-baby levels immediately, with no phased return.

A number of respondents ultimately left their jobs or their profession entirely due to inflexibility – particularly in teaching, nursing and some private-sector roles.

Leaving Work Altogether – Often Not by Choice

A significant subset simply did not return to work, or left soon after:

- Some because childcare costs would have 'wiped out' their wage.
- Others because their employer refused flexibility, or they faced discrimination and stress.
- A few describe serious health issues (physical or post-natal mental health) combined with lack of support, leading to burnout, sick leave or resignation.

Several say explicitly that they would have liked to work and feel they have lost a valued career or wasted years of study because the system does not allow a workable balance.

Waiting Lists, Limited Options and Quality Concerns

Beyond cost, respondents highlight structural problems in childcare supply:

- Long waiting lists, especially for under-1s and term-time places.
- Very limited options for shift workers; some had to pay full-time fees despite only needing ad hoc hours.
- Concerns about nursery practices, opening hours, and lack of flexibility around sickness or closures.
- A perception that providers can "dictate the price" due to limited competition.

Some describe distressing experiences (injury at nursery, refusal to breastfeed on premises, charging when children are sent home ill) and a sense that regulation and oversight are weak.

Impact on Mental Health, Family Size and Staying in Jersey

Many answers talk about exhaustion, guilt, stress and burnout:

- Parents feel they are failing both at work and at home.
- Some link their experience of returning to work and childcare stress directly to post-natal depression or anxiety.

There are clear long-term behavioural impacts:

- Several families say they will not have another child because childcare and living costs are too high.
- Others are considering leaving Jersey to secure a better work–family balance elsewhere.
- Some already have left or are actively planning to.

These responses suggest that current conditions are influencing fertility decisions, retention of key workers, and long-term residency.

Inequalities Between Families

The free-text responses show stark differences between groups:

- Single parents repeatedly describe the situation as almost impossible: one income, no second parent to share leave or costs, and limited entitlement.
- Parents of twins, multiples or children with additional needs face amplified costs and time demands, making work particularly hard to sustain.
- Families with no local family (including many migrant families) are at a clear disadvantage compared to those with grandparents nearby.
- Self-employed parents describe the system as particularly hostile, feeling “punished” for not paying enough contributions to qualify despite working hard.

A Small Number of “Good News” Stories

It’s important to note that a minority of respondents do report genuinely workable balances, usually where:

- Employers are proactive and flexible.
- Grandparents can provide regular childcare.
- One parent can afford to step back temporarily without the household falling into hardship.

These examples show that when flexibility, support and income align, the legislation can work well – but they are not the norm in this dataset.

Overall Summary

Taken together, these responses suggest:

- For most parents, “balancing” work and care in Jersey currently means significant financial strain, reliance on grandparents, reduced hours, or extreme shift patterns.

- Childcare cost and availability, more than the legal framework itself, are the decisive factors shaping return-to-work decisions.
- Where employers are inflexible, parents (especially mothers) are forced to sacrifice their careers or their wellbeing.
- The system works best for higher-income families with supportive employers and nearby grandparents; it works least well for single parents, shift workers, self-employed parents, those without family support, and families with children who have additional needs.

this as evidence suggests that the legislative entitlements alone are not sufficient: without affordable childcare, real flexibility at work, and targeted support for those most at risk, many families cannot realise the rights they technically hold on paper.

Questions 25: In your opinion, which of the following provisions for families do you think would be beneficial if introduced in Jersey?

Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Home Care Allowance: financial support if you choose to care for a young child under 3 at home that can also be provided to a relative, like a grandparent	82.40%	337
2	Tax-free allowances or vouchers for registered informal caregivers (like grandparents)	51.34%	210
3	Transferable Parental Leave that can be shared between parents	45.97%	188
4	The provision of tax incentives or subsidies to employers who offer onsite childcare or partner with childcare providers	61.12%	250
5	Tax deductible childcare expenses, including for care by registered grandparents or extended family	71.88%	294
		answered	409
		skipped	28

Most popular options:

1. **Home Care Allowance for under-3s (option 1)**

    - 82.4% (337 respondents)
    - Strongest single preference. Parents clearly value financial support to care for a young child at home, and like the idea that this could also be paid to a grandparent or relative who is the main carer.

2. **Tax-deductible childcare expenses (option 5)**

    - 71.9% (294 respondents)
    - High demand for the ability to offset childcare costs through the tax system, including where care is provided by registered grandparents or extended family.

3. **Tax incentives / subsidies for employers offering or partnering in childcare (option 4)**

    - 61.1% (250 respondents)
    - Majority support for employer-linked solutions – onsite nurseries or formal partnerships with providers, supported by tax breaks.

4. **Tax-free allowances or vouchers for registered informal caregivers (option 2)**

    - 51.3% (210 respondents)
    - Over half of respondents favour direct financial recognition of informal, family-based care, if properly registered.

5. **Transferable parental leave between parents (option 3)** –

    - 46.0% (188 respondents)
    - Almost half support more flexible sharing of leave between parents – although this sits alongside strong qualitative support for each parent having their own paid entitlement.

Overall, the quantitative data shows very strong backing for measures that either reduce the cost of care or pay someone (parent or grandparent) to provide it**.** Employer-based and tax-based mechanisms also attract majority support, suggesting parents are open to a mix of instruments.

As part of question 25, respondents were provided the option to give free text responses to the sub-question: Any other provision that would help support families with young children?

Themes from free-text responses

The extensive free-text comments reinforce and deepen the tick-box results. Key themes:

1. Overwhelming concern about cost of childcare and NEF age

- Nursery fees are repeatedly described as *"crippling"*, *"extortionate"* and *"the same as a second mortgage"*.
- Many parents say they are working mainly to pay nursery fees, or that fees are equal to or greater than one salary.
- There is very strong support for earlier and more generous free hours / NEF:
    - Many suggest free or subsidised care from age 1 or 2, not just the year before school.
    - Several want the entitlement based on the child's age, not school year, highlighting that autumn-born children miss out for almost an extra year.

   - Comparisons are made with the UK model (from 9–10 months) and Nordic systems, with parents questioning why Jersey lags behind.

2. Desire for home-care support and social security protection

- Many comments explicitly support a home care allowance for mainstream children, not just those with higher needs.
- There is a strong values-based argument that parental care in the first 2–3 years has real developmental benefits and should be a genuine, financially viable option, not a luxury.

3. Support for grandparent and extended-family care

- Respondents frequently mention grandparents providing full or part-time care, often at personal financial cost.
- There is support for:
   - Allowances or tax relief for grandparents who reduce work or retire early to provide care.
   - Recognising grandparent care within tax, benefit and pension rules.
- At the same time, a few respondents caution that policy should not only favour families who have grandparents available, and that support for formal childcare is essential for isolated families.

4. Call for subsidised childcare and more places

- Many suggest subsidies or capped fees so that childcare represents only a set percentage of income.
- There are repeated calls for more nursery / childminder places, including:
   - For under-1s and under-2s,
   - For shift workers and nurses, and
   - Wraparound care (breakfast/after-school clubs and holiday clubs) aligned with working hours.

5. Tax and benefit reforms for families

Parents propose a wide range of fiscal measures, including:

- Higher child tax allowances and updated thresholds to reflect Jersey's cost of living.
- Child benefit / monthly child allowance available to all families (not just those on benefits), as in other European countries.
- Tax relief on nursery fees and school fees and removing caps where current deductions do not cover real costs.
- Better support for the "squeezed middle" – families who are not eligible for Income Support but still struggle once mortgage and childcare costs are paid.

6. Improved parental leave and flexibility

- Many want longer and better-paid maternity / parental leave, often suggesting up to 12–18 months of paid leave, at least at minimum wage level.

- Several support extended and better-paid leave for fathers, plus shared/transferable elements with “use-it-or-lose-it” weeks.
- There is strong demand for:
    - Phased returns after leave (rather than straight back to full-time),
    - A default expectation of flexible and part-time options for parents of very young children,
    - Paid carers’ leave when a child is ill.

7. Broader cost-of-living and housing pressures

While the question focused on “provisions for families”, many respondents link childcare policy to wider economic pressures:

- High housing costs and rents are repeatedly cited as a key driver of hardship and decisions about family size.
- Some call for controlled social and private rents, or tax breaks in the early years after having a child.
- Several grandparents explicitly say their children have left Jersey because they could not afford housing and childcare.

8. Mental health and perinatal support

A noticeable subset highlight:

- Gaps in post-natal mental health services, with long waits and heavy reliance on persistent health visitors.
- The emotional toll of returning to work early, sleep deprivation, and financial stress.
- Suggestions include night-nanny support for families with children with additional needs, and easier access to mental health support for parents.

9. Equity and targeting

There are two competing views on targeting:

- Some respondents advocate means-testing and focusing higher grants on those in need.
- Others stress that current means-tested systems leave middle-income families unsupported and feel “punished” for working or owning a home.

Overall, there is a strong sense that the system should recognise both low-income families and the squeezed middle and avoid ‘cliff-edges’ where earning slightly more leaves families worse off.

Taken together, the quantitative and qualitative responses show:

- Very strong public appetite for measures that significantly reduce childcare costs and/or pay parents or grandparents to care for children under 3.
- Clear support for earlier and more generous free childcare hours (from age 1–2) and for aligning entitlements with actual age rather than school year.
- Strong backing for recognising home-based care and grandparent care in both cash support and Social Security/pension rules.

- Broad support for tax-based reliefs and employer incentives, but parents are clear that these cannot substitute for a core offer of affordable childcare and adequate parental leave.
- A consistent message that current arrangements are not sustainable for many families, are influencing decisions about having more children and staying in Jersey, and risk long-term impacts on the Island's demographics and workforce.

Question 26: Do you have any additional comments or experiences you'd like to share regarding maternity/parental rights and workplace support

The 142 meaningful comments paint a consistent and often stark picture: parents feel the system is financially unsustainable, workplace support is highly variable, and existing rights often fail in practice due to lack of enforcement, inconsistent employer behaviour, and extremely high childcare costs.

Many responses express stress, exhaustion, financial strain, and career sacrifice, alongside examples of good practice from more supportive employers.

The themes can be grouped as follows:

1. Financial Pressure and Unsustainable Childcare Costs

As with Question 25, this is by far the strongest theme. Parents repeatedly describe the early years as financially impossible, especially between maternity leave ending and NEF hours beginning.

Key concerns:

- Childcare is *"eye-watering"*, *"crippling"*, or *"as much as a second mortgage"*.
- Many families cannot afford to have a second child, and some cannot afford a first.
- Parents say the cost of childcare wipes out one salary, making returning to work financially pointless.
- Those with mortgages feel "squeezed in the middle" and excluded from support because they own a home.
- Many parents link childcare affordability directly to Jersey's declining birth rate.

Representative quotes:

- *"Childcare is incredibly expensive and putting so many people off having children."*
- *"We would love another child, but we simply cannot afford it."*
- *"£283 per week is not enough to support a family of four. It's not sustainable."*
- *"Nursery fees eat all my wages — there's no point working."*

2. Insufficient Paid Parental Leave

Parents overwhelmingly say **6 weeks full pay is inadequate** and does not reflect physical recovery, bonding needs, or financial realities.

Many request:

- **Extended paid leave** (12–16 weeks minimum; several suggest 6 months or a year)
- **Better-paid leave**, ideally aligned with minimum wage or salary-based models
- **Improved partner/father leave**, especially beyond the statutory 6 weeks

Representative quotes:

- *"Six weeks is nowhere near enough."*
- *"Paid leave should cover at least the first 16 weeks."*
- *"Partners need more than 6 weeks to support the mother and bond with the baby."*
- *"Maternity pay should be minimum wage at the very least."*

3. Lack of Flexible Working in Practice

Many parents say that although the law gives a *right to request*, the practical reality is refusal, delay, or punitive treatment.

Most frequent issues:

- Requests for part-time work declined, especially in teaching, nursing and shift-based roles.
- Employers cite "business need" without genuine consideration.
- Some employees feel punished for asking.
- Several respondents left their careers entirely due to inflexibility.

Representative quotes:

- *"My flexible working requests were rejected twice. It caused enormous stress."*
- *"In secondary teaching women returning from maternity leave are routinely refused part-time hours."*
- *"I left my teaching career because the job was not family friendly."*

4. Workplace Discrimination and Negative Treatment

Many describe discriminatory or hostile treatment on return from leave.

Examples include:

- Responsibilities removed ("acting up" roles withdrawn)
- Being sidelined or pushed out
- Pay inequity
- Threats or pressure to return early
- Lack of accommodations for breastfeeding or pregnancy-related conditions
- Redundancy during pregnancy or shortly after return

Representative quotes:

- *"My employer made it painfully obvious I was being pushed out."*
- *"I was forced to return early or risk losing my job."*
- *"There is a stigma around employees returning from maternity leave."*
- *"I had no breastfeeding facilities. It was humiliating."*

5. Small Business Burden & Need for Employer Support

A striking cluster of responses came from small business owners or employees acknowledging the difficulty of funding leave.

Concerns include:

- Paying staff maternity leave while also paying a replacement ("paying twice for 6 weeks")
- Risk of small businesses becoming financially unstable
- Desire for government support or subsidy for employers

Representative quotes:

- *"For a small business, the 6 weeks paid leave can be financially devastating."*

Notably, parents are generally sympathetic — they want **more government funding**, not simply higher obligations on employers.

6. Disparities Between Employers

Respondents frequently highlight inconsistent benefits:

- GoJ's enhanced parental leave is seen as excellent.
- Large private-sector employers often have generous packages.
- Many employers stick rigidly to the statutory minimum.
- Some employers deducted the social security parental benefit from their own payments, while others paid both, described as "unfair and inconsistent".

Representative quotes:

- *"Some employers offer 20 weeks full pay. I only got 6 weeks. It's not fair."*
- *"My employer deducted my maternity benefit from my salary, but others let you keep both."*

7. Lack of Support for People Without Family on Island

A repeated concern: many provisions assume grandparents are available, disadvantaging families without local support.

Representative quotes:

- *"Why should families with grandparents get more support than those without any?"*
- *"It's harder with no family here yet we get less help."*

8. Poor Enforcement of Rights & Lack of Information

Many parents say:

- Employers ignore or circumvent the law.
- There is no enforcement mechanism except tribunal — which they fear.
- Health professionals, managers, and HR often do not understand the law.
- Parents learn their rights "by accident" or "through friends".

Representative quotes:

- *"There is no way to enforce rights except tribunal, which risks your future career."*
- *"I had to explain the law to my manager."*
- *"We need consistent guidance for self-employed parents too."*

9. Pregnancy Loss, Mental Health & Medical Needs

Several responses relate to extremely difficult experiences where support was lacking.

Themes include:

- Inadequate support after miscarriage
- Ongoing trauma from difficult births
- Perinatal mental health challenges with long waits
- No allowances for parents attending medical appointments for neurodivergent or sick children

Representative quotes:

- *"I miscarried and still got sent a 12-week scan letter. It broke my heart."*
- *"I had no mental health support after birth and was overwhelmed."*

10. Gender Equality Concerns

Two contrasting but important strands emerge:

Shared/Equal Parental Leave Seen as Positive

- Particularly praised in GoJ roles.

Some say equalising leave has unintentionally reduced enhanced maternity packages

- Employers "level down" rather than "level up".

Some fathers still face stigma for taking leave

- Seen as a persistent cultural barrier.

Representative quotes:

- *“My husband’s employer only allowed him 3 days leave.”*
- *“Equalising parental leave inadvertently reduced maternity packages in some companies.”*

11. Housing, Cost of Living & Pressure on Family Life

A number of responses link maternity/parental rights directly to wider structural pressures:

- High rents and mortgages
- Lack of family housing
- Cost of food and essentials
- Lack of term-time or after-school care aligned with work hours

Representative quotes:

- *“Housing costs alone make having a family almost impossible.”*
- *“Most nursery hours don’t align with work hours – how are parents supposed to manage?”*

12. Calls for Systemic Reform

Across responses, there is a clear view that Jersey needs a whole-system overhaul, not just amendments.

Parents want:

- Paid parental leave extended
- Affordable childcare from 9–12 months
- Earlier NEF funding
- Stronger enforcement of parental rights
- Support for families without grandparents
- Housing and cost-of-living measures
- More flexible work culture
- Better mental health support
- Enhanced rights after pregnancy loss
- Support for small businesses to provide leave

Many say they are reconsidering:

- Having more children, or
- Staying in Jersey, or
- Remaining in their career.

These free-text comments reveal deep, system-wide strain. Parents consistently describe a childcare and parental rights system that is:

- Financially unsustainable
- Inflexible, especially in key public services (teaching, nursing)
- Poorly enforced
- Emotionally draining, particularly in the return-to-work period

- Unfairly dependent on grandparents and high-earning partners
- Inequitable between sectors and employers
- A driver of low fertility and family emigration

At the same time, they offer clear pathways forward - affordable childcare, extended paid leave, flexible working, stronger rights enforcement, and government support for employers.

The free-text responses to this question provided some of the most insightful and candid evidence gathered during the review. Parents used this space to share honest experiences, both positive and negative, about navigating maternity and parental leave, childcare costs, workplace culture, and the return-to-work period. The comments reveal a system under strain, where many families are balancing financial pressure, inflexible working conditions, and inconsistent employer practices.

Despite the diversity of respondents, strong themes emerged with remarkable consistency. Together, they provide a clear picture of how Jersey's family friendly legislation is working in practice and where gaps remain.

Key Findings

- **Childcare costs are the single largest barrier** to returning to work, family stability, and decisions about family size. Many describe childcare fees as "crippling," "eye-watering," or "a second mortgage."
- **Six weeks' paid leave is widely viewed as insufficient**, particularly for mothers recovering from birth and for partners seeking to support them.
- **Experiences vary dramatically between employers**, with some offering generous enhanced packages and others providing only the statutory minimum or deducting benefits in ways parents feel are unfair.
- **Flexible working rights are inconsistently applied**, especially in teaching, nursing, shift-based roles and small businesses.
- **Workplace discrimination persists**, including pressure to return early, negative attitudes to parental leave, and sidelining of employees on their return.
- **Parents without family on the Island are at a clear disadvantage**, as many policy ideas rely heavily on grandparent care.
- **Small businesses struggle with the financial burden** of parental leave and seek government support to meet their obligations.
- **Mental health, pregnancy loss, and breastfeeding needs** are not consistently supported in workplaces.
- **Parents believe current conditions influence Jersey's declining birth rate**, workforce retention, and decisions to leave the Island.

Major Themes

1. Unsustainable Childcare Costs

Across responses, parents stressed that childcare expenses often exceed or eliminate one parent's take-home pay, leaving some unable to return to work and others choosing to delay or avoid having additional children. Many believe that without earlier and more generous support, particularly between 9 months and 3 years, Jersey will continue to see declining birth rates and young families leaving the Island.

Representative comment:
"Childcare is incredibly expensive and putting so many people off having children."

2. Inadequate Paid Leave

Most respondents believe that six weeks of paid parental leave is too short to support physical recovery, bonding, or the financial realities families face. Several parents described being forced back to work earlier than they wanted or needed.

Representative comment:
"Six weeks is nowhere near enough for mothers or partners."

3. Inconsistent Employer Support

Experiences ranged from highly supportive employers to workplaces that follow the bare minimum or actively discourage the use of parental rights. Some reported loss of responsibilities, reductions in hours, or pressures to return early.

Representative comment:
"My employer made it painfully obvious I was being pushed out after having a child."

4. Lack of Flexible Working in Practice

Although employees have the right to request flexible working, many described routine refusals, long delays, or punitive responses. This was particularly marked in teaching, nursing, and shift-based work.

Representative comment:

- *"I made two flexible working requests — both rejected. The stress was enormous".*

5. Unequal Support Between Families

Many responses emphasised that support disproportionately benefits families with grandparents nearby, while those without family on the Island struggle more and receive no equivalent help.

Representative comment:

- *"Why should families with grandparents get more support than those without any?"*

6. Small Business Challenges

Small employers expressed concern about their ability to fund statutory paid leave while also replacing staff, describing a need for government subsidies or shared-cost models.

Representative comment:

- *"As a small business owner, paying 6 weeks' leave and a replacement effectively doubles my wage bill."*

7. Gaps in Support for Breastfeeding, Pregnancy Loss and Perinatal Mental Health

Some parents reported lack of facilities for breastfeeding or pumping, inadequate support after pregnancy loss, and long waits for mental health services during the post-natal period.

Representative comment:

- *"No breastfeeding facilities were provided — it had a huge impact on my mental health."*

These comments show that while Jersey's family friendly legislation represents significant progress, the lived experience of parents remains uneven and often highly challenging. The combination of high childcare costs, limited paid leave, patchy employer practices, and insufficient enforcement means that many families feel they are "just surviving" during the early years.

Parents are clear: without systemic improvements to affordability, leave entitlements, and workplace culture, Jersey risks continued pressure on families, workforce retention, and demographic sustainability. The comments provide a powerful foundation for the Sub-Panel's findings and recommendations.

Question 27: Is there anything you wish you'd known before starting your maternity/parental leave journey?

The 111 substantive responses highlight serious gaps in information, communication, accessible support and realistic expectations around maternity and parental leave in Jersey. Many respondents explicitly describe feeling uninformed, financially unprepared, unaware of key entitlements, and blindsided by the true costs and practical challenges of early parenthood in Jersey.

Lack of Clear, Accessible Information on Rights, Benefits and Processes

A dominant theme was the absence of clear, consolidated guidance on financial entitlements, parental rights, and administrative requirements. Many parents said they only learned about key entitlements *after* returning to work—or through word of mouth rather than official channels.

Key issues raised:

Limited understanding of social security benefits, including:

- maternity allowance
- Home Responsibility Protection (HRP)
- home care allowance
- income support possibilities
- effects of leave on pension contributions
- eligibility rules (especially around contributions the year before birth)
- No clear roadmap of who to contact, when, or what forms to complete.

Wide confusion over:

- how parental leave interacts with sick pay
- what happens if pregnant again during/after leave
- how to protect missing contributions
- maternity allowance for second children born close together

Many parents explicitly request a single, simple guide, ideally:

- provided early in pregnancy
- available online
- handed out at antenatal appointments
- delivered by a trusted professional (midwives were mentioned most).

Representative quotes:

- *“I wish there had been a clear road map — I had to work everything out myself while exhausted.”*
- *"I didn’t even know about HRP until a friend told me.”*
- *“The process was so complicated at a time when my brain was mush.”*

Severe Underestimation of Childcare Cost, Availability and Practical Barriers

The most common theme across responses was shock at childcare costs and the difficulty of securing a place—which many only discovered too late.

Key concerns:

- Childcare costs were far higher than expected (“crippling”, “unmanageable”, “more than my mortgage”).
- Nursery waiting lists were extremely long—some parents only learned after birth they should have booked during the first trimester or even before conception.
- Many found infant care poor value or poor quality, increasing anxiety.
- Holiday clubs were described as inaccessible, impractical, and incompatible with full-time work.
- Childcare was widely described as a barrier to having more children, returning to work, or even staying in Jersey.

Representative quotes:

- *“You have to register before you’re even pregnant — wild.”*
- *“I couldn’t enjoy my maternity leave because I spent months panicking about finding a nursery place.”*
- *“Nursery costs are more than £2,000 a month — I didn’t realise I’d be working just to pay childcare."*

3. Lack of Understanding About the Financial Impact of Leave and Insufficient Paid Time

Parents expressed frustration that they didn’t fully grasp the financial implications of maternity/parental leave until it was too late.

Themes:

- How little statutory parental allowance covers ("£283 a week is impossible to live on").
- How quickly savings are depleted.
- That pension and social security contributions are affected, leading to long-term disadvantage.
- The lack of support for:
    - multiple births
    - stay-at-home parents
    - middle-income households ("too rich for benefits, too poor to cope").
- Many said they *would have* stayed home longer or planned differently if they had more information.

Representative quotes:

- *"I didn't know my social security contributions would stop — this affects my pension for life."*
- *"I wish I'd known how financially hard it would be. We are thinking of leaving Jersey."*

4. Workplace Culture, Lack of Flexibility and Poor Manager Knowledge

Numerous parents described being unprepared for the lack of flexibility or poor treatment when returning to work.

Problems included:

- Requests for flexible or part-time hours routinely rejected.
- Employers not understanding the law or obligations.
- Pressure to respond to work during leave.
- Losing responsibilities or being sidelined after return.
- Lack of understanding around:
    - breastfeeding rights
    - time off for child illness
    - phased return
    - antenatal/IVF appointments

Representative quotes:

- *"I learned quickly that protection on paper doesn't mean protection in reality."*
- *"I wish I knew my employer would push me out after maternity leave — I wasn't prepared"*
- *"No support for shift workers — impossible to manage."*

5. Emotional Shock, Mental Health Strain and the Reality of Early Parenthood

Many wished they had understood the emotional impact, including:

- mental load
- separation anxiety
- sleep deprivation
- isolation
- the difficulties of balancing work and parenting

Some explicitly noted:

- lack of support for NICU parents
- lack of support after miscarriage or traumatic births
- mental health services difficult to access

Representative quotes:
- *"I wish I had known how mentally hard returning to work would be."*
- *"Leaving my baby at eight months broke me."*

6. Unequal Access to Support: "Those without family struggle most"

Many parents highlighted a two-tier system:

- Families with grandparents nearby cope better.
- Families without local support face much greater financial and emotional strain.

Many object strongly to proposals that incentivise grandparent care, arguing this disadvantages those without relatives.

- *"If grandparents get extra support, what help is there for those of us with none?"*
- *"I have no family here — everything rests on me. The system isn't built for people like us."*

7. Regret and Long-Term Implications

Several parents expressed deep regret about decisions made without good information:

- Not taking the full 52 weeks leave.
- Returning too soon.
- Not saving enough.
- Not understanding long-term financial consequences.

Representative quotes:

- *"I wish someone had encouraged me to take the full year — I'll never get that time back."*
- *"If I'd known how this would impact my pension, I would have planned differently."*

Overall Themes & Implications

Across the responses, several clear systemic issues emerge:

Information is fragmented, unclear and inaccessible.

Parents are often unaware of:

- what they're entitled to
- how to apply
- deadlines
- implications for pensions/social security
- return-to-work rights

Childcare cost and availability shape the entire experience.

This determines:

- whether parents can return to work
- how long they take leave
- whether they stay in Jersey
- whether they have more children

Workplace experiences vary dramatically.

Supportive employers exist, but many parents feel:

- pressured
- sidelined
- discriminated against
- unable to secure flexible work

Middle-income families feel "invisible".

They earn "too much" for support but still cannot afford childcare or housing.

The emotional and psychological load is underestimated.

Parents feel unprepared for:

- mental health difficulties
- the strain of balancing work and care
- the intensity of early parenting

Concluding Summary

The responses demonstrate that maternity and parental leave in Jersey is significantly more challenging than many parents expect, largely due to:

- extremely high childcare costs
- limited childcare availability
- unclear or inaccessible information

- inconsistent employer practices
- insufficient financial support
- the long-term impact on pension and social security credits
- the intense emotional toll of early parenthood

These reflections, shared candidly and often with distress, underscore the need for clearer guidance, stronger protections, better childcare provision, and more equitable financial support for all families, not only those with existing support networks.

Appendix 5

Exploration of recurring themes out of scope of the review

Childcare availability and costs

Alignment of Free Nursery Hours with Working Patterns

- From January 2026, children in the school year they turn 3 can receive free childcare funding up to £6,270 per school year.
- Where the place can be taken:
    - At a primary school nursery class operated by the States of Jersey.
    - At a private or voluntary sector provider registered under the Nursery Education Fund (NEF) scheme.
    - Childminders cannot offer NEF-funded hours.

  Types of providers:
    - Day nurseries (open before and after school hours, sometimes all year) for children from birth or early age.
    - Pre-schools (often mornings only or school hours) for children aged two to school entry.

  Application processes:
    - For private/voluntary providers: parents contact the provider directly, via a list of NEF-registered childcare providers.
    - For school nursery classes: parents should contact their local primary school to register interest.
- The NEF scheme offers 30 hours/week term-time funded nursery care starting in the school year a child turns four.
- The scheme is universal in eligibility at that point, but parental choice of provider and timing vary.
- There are multiple provider types (school nurseries, day nurseries, pre-schools) offering different attendance patterns; this diversity can help or complicate matching with parents' work patterns.
- Parents must apply in advance, and securing places (especially in private providers) requires early engagement with providers.
- Although the entitlement is significant, eligibility begins relatively late (in the year the child turns four) and the scheme is limited to term-time hours, leaving a potential gap for younger children and for year-round working families.
- This point underscores the childcare-cost and availability issues parents reported elsewhere in the survey – especially for under-3s and non-standard working hours.

In late September 2025, the Government of Jersey announced[58] the major investment package of nearly £7 million aimed at enhancing early-years support for families and children. The key component of this package is a £4 million universal offer for two- and three-year-old children, providing up to 15 hours of funded childcare per week during term time, to be delivered via participating nurseries and childminders from 2026 (subject to States Assembly approval).

Additional funding streams include:

- £1.5 million targeted support for children with additional needs.
- £0.7 million for speech and language therapy, following a successful pilot scheme.
- £0.6 million to continue various pilot programmes in schools.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning emphasised that the investment pursues both affordability and quality, aiming to ensure that *“**every child has the best start”***. The policy is framed as delivering on the Government’s Common Strategic Policy 2024-26, particularly in terms of supporting young children, families, and labour participation.

Importantly, the announcement recognises that high childcare costs are a barrier to workforce participation. The 15-hour offer is intended to relieve cost pressure on parents and enable primary-carer parents (most often women) to engage in work if they choose.

While the announcement marks a significant policy shift, Ministers acknowledge potential challenges, such as capacity constraints in the early-years sector: one stated expectation is that the majority of current childcare using families will benefit “immediately” once the offer is in place, although sector readiness and demand will require monitoring.

For the purposes of this report, the announcement represents a clear step toward reducing early-years childcare costs and enhancing workforce participation among parents of young children. However, it also highlights key issues that the Sub-Panel has identified elsewhere in this review:

- The age range (two- and three-year-olds) and the level of hours (15 hours/week during term time) raise questions about how well the provision aligns with typical working arrangements and the childcare needs of families with younger children or year-round employment.
- The announcement is framed as a universal offer but is subject to approval, meaning implementation and equity of access remain to be tested in practice.
- The magnitude of the investment (£7m) is meaningful but given the high cost of childcare reported by survey respondents and stakeholders, achieving the intended impact will depend on sufficient provider capacity, affordability beyond the funded hours, flexibility of delivery (e.g., childminders, shift-work), and effective employer-worker-family alignment.
- The broader agenda of supporting labour supply and gender equality is emphasised, but as other parts of this review show, workplace culture, employer flexibility, and information gaps remain significant.

[58] Government announces major funding plans for early years

While stakeholders widely welcomed increased investment in early childhood education, evidence highlighted a significant misalignment between the proposed entitlement and the typical working patterns of Jersey families.

Senior Ministers themselves acknowledged this issue during public hearings. The Minister for Sustainable Economic Development noted, during a Scrutiny public[59] hearing that Government "***has a habit of not quite matching with the business environment***", emphasising that 15 hours does not correspond with the reality of part-time employment in Jersey, where most part-time roles require around 20 hours per week. He stated: ***"No-one works a 15-hour-week job… If you want to be part-time, you are on 20 hours a week."***

Stakeholders expressed concern that the 15-hour model may therefore fall short of enabling meaningful participation in the workforce, particularly for primary carers (most often women) who require a childcare package that aligns with typical employment hours. Increasing the entitlement to 20 hours was suggested as a more effective approach that would better support labour market participation, reduce financial strain on families, and improve consistency for employers.

The Sub-Panel also understands that the policy had been developed with limited consultation with the business community, which raised questions about the extent to which economic and operational impacts had been considered. Scrutiny representatives referenced an ongoing "silo mentality" within government, contributing to concerns about strategic coherence.

In terms of anticipated benefits, Ministers highlighted that the scheme aims to:

- Reduce childcare costs for young families, where affordability remains one of the major barriers to returning to work.
- Enable primary carers to re-enter or increase participation in the workforce, with potential positive effects on labour supply.
- Support women's economic participation, given that mothers continue to take on the majority of unpaid care and are most affected by the cost of childcare.

Overall, while the introduction of universal free hours was recognised as a positive step, evidence suggests that aligning the entitlement with real working patterns, engaging employers in policy design, and ensuring provision is economically and practically viable will be essential to maximising its impact for families and the wider economy.

The public survey undertaken as part of the review showed a heavy reliance on formal childcare, often at what is suggested is an unsustainable cost to parents and caregivers.

A dominant theme is that many parents had no option but to use full-time nursery or daycare, even when this meant most or all of one wage going on fees:

- Parents repeatedly say they are *"working to pay nursery"* or that childcare fees are equal to or higher than their mortgage.
- Several report nursery costs around £1,700–£2,000 per month per child, and describe these as *"extortionate"* and *"crippling"*.
- Some took out loans purely to cover nursery fees in order to return to work.

[59] 2025-10-28-Transcript-Minister-for-Sustainable-Economic-Development.pdf

- A number say bluntly that they could not afford to return at all, or that it would have been cheaper not to work.

Parents regularly say they “had to” put babies into nursery from 4–6 months because there was no family support and no affordable alternative. This is often described as “heartbreaking” and emotionally very difficult, particularly where return to work is driven solely by financial necessity.

NEF and International Comparisons

Jersey’s NEF provides up to 30 hours per week of funded early learning during term time in the school year in which a child turns four. The entitlement can be taken in government nursery classes or at registered private and voluntary providers.

Policy implications for families and the labour market

Using the NEF as a lens, several implications emerge:

Age of entitlement and the “under-3 gap”

Currently support begins relatively late, in the pre-school year, meaning that parents must largely self-fund childcare from birth to around age three to four. This is precisely the period when many parents wish or need to return to work, and it aligns with the survey and qualitative evidence of severe financial pressure and difficult decisions about employment, career progression, and family size.

Term-time structure vs year-round employment

NEF hours are available term time only, roughly mirroring the school year. While this supports school-readiness, it leaves families to bridge funding and care gaps during school holidays, which can be particularly challenging for parents in full-year roles, shift work, hospitality, health and retail.

Partial coverage of working hours

Even at 30 hours, the NEF entitlement does not equate to a full-time working week, and for younger age groups the proposed 15 hours for two and three year olds (from 2026) would cover only part of a typical part-time week. Evidence highlighted that most part-time roles in Jersey are closer to 20 hours per week, raising questions about how well funded hours align with actual work patterns and the aim of freeing up labour supply.

Access and planning

NEF-funded places are limited and must be booked in advance, with providers reporting high demand and waiting lists. Parents therefore need to plan early and may have to accept arrangements that are driven by availability rather than preference or best fit with work and family life.

Child development and early years outcomes

From a child development perspective, NEF reflects an investment in early learning in the year before school, consistent with evidence that high-quality early education supports language, social and cognitive development and eases transition into Reception. However, many international models now frame early childhood education and care as a continuous entitlement from much earlier ages, particularly for disadvantaged children, rather than a short pre-school "booster" year.

In Jersey, the concentration of free hours in the year before school means:

- Earlier years (0–3) are more dependent on family resources and private payments.
- Children from lower-income households may have less consistent access to formal early learning environments in the most formative years, unless their parents qualify for separate targeted support through Income Support or other schemes.

Comparative perspectives

Against a small set of international and UK comparators, Jersey's NEF model sits somewhere in the middle:

England / wider UK

In England, all three- and four-year-olds receive 15 hours of free early education, with 30 hours for many working parents, and this is being extended downwards to cover children from nine months in stages. Scotland and some English local authorities have gone further in expanding funded hours for three- and four-year-olds, but implementation challenges and under-funding have led to concerns about availability, quality and provider sustainability.

Nordic models (e.g. Sweden)

Countries such as Sweden provide near-universal, heavily subsidised childcare from around the child's first birthday, with fees capped as a low percentage of household income (e.g. around 3% for the first child, decreasing for additional children). This approach integrates childcare and early education, supports maternal and paternal employment over the whole early years period and is explicitly designed as social and economic infrastructure, rather than a narrow education entitlement.

Jersey's relative position
Compared to these systems, Jersey's NEF:

- Provides a relatively generous pre-school year (30 term-time hours),
- But offers limited publicly funded support for under-3s, and

Does not yet systematically link childcare cost to household income, leaving families highly exposed to market prices.

Key issues for the Sub-Panel

Taking the NEF and emerging 15-hour offer together, the Sub-Panel wish to highlight:

Coverage vs timing – whether the concentration of support in the pre-school year best reflects evidence on the critical first 1,001 days and the points at which childcare costs most constrain parents' employment decisions.

Alignment with work patterns – the extent to which 15 and 30 hour models, delivered term-time only, realistically support part-time and full-time work in Jersey's labour market.

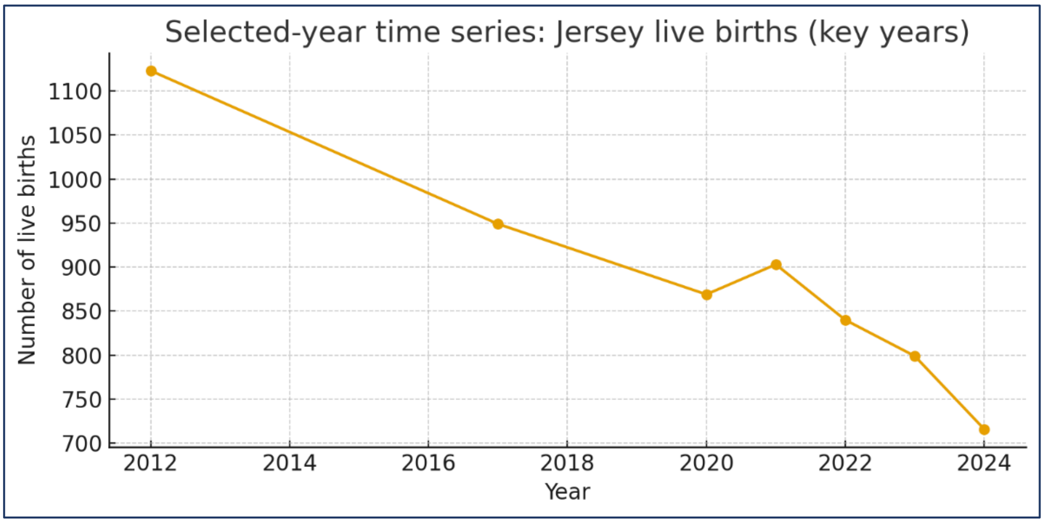
Equity and access – how far children from lower-income or unsupported families (with no access to grandparents or informal care) are able to benefit from early education compared with peers in better resourced households.

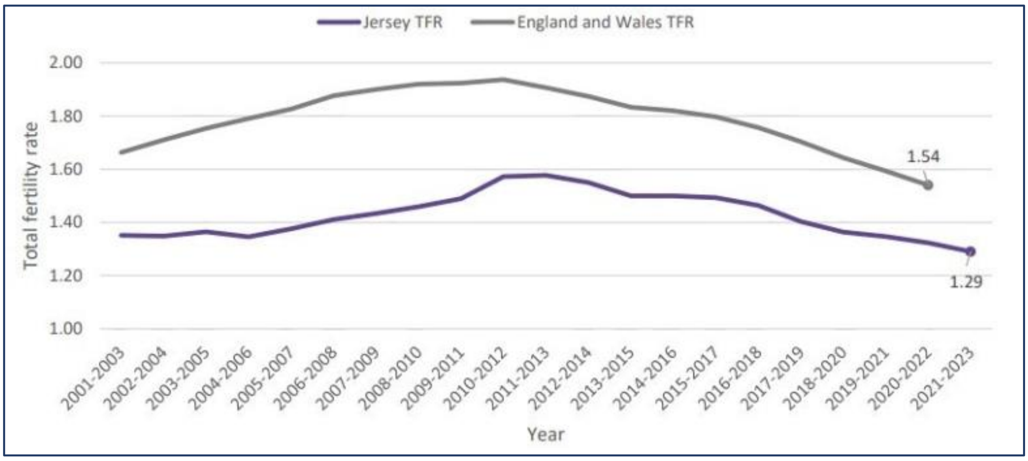
Provider sustainability – whether funding levels and design (for both NEF and any new hours) enable private and voluntary providers to remain viable without shifting costs onto unfunded hours.

Strategic coherence – the need for childcare and early years policy to be developed in partnership with employers and the early years sector, and integrated with wider objectives on gender equality, labour supply, cost of living and population sustainability.

Jersey's declining birth rate

Jersey is experiencing a marked decline in its birth rate, both in the number of births and in underlying fertility rates. The data show births have fallen ~36% from the 2012 peak and the average woman now expects only ~1.20 children in her lifetime in Jersey. With deaths already exceeding births, unless offset by migration, demographic pressures will increase. The causes are a mix of economic pressures, delayed parenthood, smaller families, and fewer younger adults resident on the Island.





Jersey Total TFR 2001 – 2023 compared to England and Wales during the same period.

- The number of live births in Jersey fell to 716 births in calendar year 2024, the lowest since at least 1995. That was a fall of about 10% compared to 2023.

- Compared to the peak recorded in 2012 (1,123 births in Jersey) the 2024 figure represents a drop of about 36%.

- The Total Fertility Rate (TFR) for Jersey for the period 2022-2024 averages 1.20 births per woman, well below the replacement level of about 2.1.

- The General Fertility Rate (GFR) — live births per 1,000 women aged 15-44 — was about 38 births per 1,000 women in 2024.

- The crude birth rate (live births per 1,000 population) in 2023 was about 7.7 births per 1,000 population, compared with about 10.1 per 1,000 in England & Wales for one comparable year.

- There has been a shift in the age profile of mothers: in recent years around 31% of mothers were aged 35 years or over at delivery in Jersey.

- Deaths now exceed births: in 2024 there were 877 deaths vs births of 716, giving a natural decrease of 162 persons via births-minus-deaths.

- Early 2025 data suggest the downward trend continues: in the first quarter of 2025 there were 151 births — down 13% year-on-year for that quarter alone.

Demographic Context: Understanding Jersey's Falling Birth Rate

Evidence reviewed by the Sub-Panel highlights a combination of structural, economic and social factors contributing to Jersey's sustained decline in fertility. These factors mirror wider international trends but are intensified in the Island's unique economic and demographic environment.

A major driver is the high cost of living, particularly housing affordability and the exceptionally high cost of childcare. Many prospective parents reported that the financial burden of raising a child in Jersey, combined with rent or mortgage pressures, has become a significant deterrent to starting or expanding a family. For some, the economic trade-off is so acute that they have delayed parenthood, had fewer children than planned, or decided against having children entirely.

These pressures are compounded by demographic shifts within the population. Jersey has an increasingly ageing population, with a shrinking proportion of residents within childbearing age. Out-migration of younger adults and lower levels of in-migration among families and younger workers further reduce the number of births simply by reducing the size of the population most likely to have children.

At the same time, changing social norms mean that many people are delaying parenthood, often due to career pressures, financial insecurity or housing constraints. With more births occurring later in life, the natural reproductive window narrows, and overall fertility tends to decline. This is accompanied by a broader societal trend towards smaller family sizes, with many parents choosing, by preference or necessity, to have only one child.

Evidence emerging both locally and internationally points to a growing societal trend of women choosing to delay or opt out of motherhood altogether, driven in part by persistent gender inequality. Women continue to shoulder a disproportionate share of unpaid care, experience career penalties associated with pregnancy and caregiving, and face structural barriers in balancing work, family life and financial security. In this context, motherhood is increasingly perceived not as a supported life choice but as one that carries significant personal, economic and professional cost. The Sub-Panel considers this trend highly relevant to the review, as it underscores the need for family friendly policies that genuinely promote gender equality, reduce the long-term penalties associated with caregiving, and create conditions in which choosing to have children does not place women at a systemic disadvantage.

The combination of these factors, economic strain, demographic ageing, reduced numbers of young adults, later parenthood, and smaller family size, creates a reinforcing cycle in which Jersey's birth rate continues to fall. Understanding these interconnected drivers is essential for shaping family friendly policies that are not only supportive but also capable of addressing the root causes of demographic decline.

Implications & concerns

With births below deaths, there is natural population decline unless offset by migration. A low fertility rate (1.20 births per woman) is well below replacement, so over time could mean fewer young people, potential labour-force shrinkage and greater dependency ratios (more older people relative to working age).

The drop in births will impact schools: e.g., one estimate is a possible 20% fall in primary-school-aged children between 2021 and 2028 in Jersey[60].

The Government and thought-leaders in Jersey consider this a "high-priority" issue.

[60] Policy Centre Jersey

The Sub-Panel asked the MSED; as Jersey's birth rate has been declining steadily and lower birth rates can lead to an ageing population and a smaller workforce (potentially impacting social security systems and economic growth), does the Government see this as a long-term risk to the Island's economic sustainability and what plans do Government have to mitigate this?

The Future Economy Programme includes the Government's vision and strategy for sustainable economic development. Specifically, the supporting delivery framework is focused on three initiatives: to develop new growth enablers; increase the productivity of existing sectors; and ensure support from an effective public sector. The programme is designed to mitigate the long-term risks to the Island's economic sustainability, which considers many factors including demographic shifts.

Emigration from the Island

Recent statistics show that Jersey's overall population is still growing very modestly, but this headline conceals important patterns of people leaving the Island. At the end of 2024, Jersey's resident population was estimated at 104,540, an increase of just 510 over the year. Natural change remained negative, with more deaths than births, meaning that population growth is now entirely driven by net inward migration (+670 in 2024). Notably, net migration was strongly positive for people with Registered status (+960) but negative for those with Entitled status (-810), indicating that more long-established residents left the Island than arrived.

Alongside this, new analysis of inward migration between 2017 and 2023 shows that Jersey experiences a high level of churn among those who move to the Island. Around one in three people who move to Jersey leave again within the first year, and only about two in five stay for longer than five years. Those most likely to leave within 12 months are men, people aged 16–29, low-income workers, Polish and other European nationals, and those with Registered status. In contrast, longer-term stayers are more often women, under-16s, high-income workers, British or Jersey nationals, and people with Entitled status.

There is also clear evidence that many of the people leaving are "home-grown" Islanders rather than short-term workers. Analysis of population change shows that Jersey's young adult population shrank by around 7% between 2017 and 2023, with particularly sharp falls among 20–24-year-olds (down 13%). Overall, the under-40 population fell by 5% over the same period, while the over-60 population increased by 15%. Government figures similarly show that the number of residents aged 20–29 declined from 12,080 in 2017 to 10,990 in 2023. Between 2017 and 2023, 2,690 long-term Islanders aged 20–24 with full residential status left Jersey, accounting for roughly one quarter of all entitled residents who left in that period – a trend widely referred to as the "bean drain[61]".

These outward flows sit alongside a broader demographic shift. Policy analysis notes that natural population increase has fallen from a peak of +340 (births minus deaths) in 2012 to an estimated natural decrease of around 150 people in 2024, as deaths now consistently exceed births. The same analysis highlights significant net emigration in 2021, followed by very high

[61] 'Bean drain' discussed in first debate of the new Jersey Youth Assembly - Jersey Evening Post

net immigration in 2023 and a more modest increase again in 2024. Without positive net migration, the Island's working-age population would already be in decline each year.

Qualitative evidence helps to explain why people, particularly younger adults, are leaving. Media interviews and local analysis point to a combination of high housing and living costs, limited perceived career opportunities outside financial services, and a desire to "spread wings" and experience larger cities as key drivers. Business and political leaders have warned that this pattern is already contributing to skills shortages and to a rising dependency ratio, with recent estimates suggesting that there are now fewer working-age people relative to those dependent on public services funded by taxation. Unless mitigated, continued outward migration of both short-term workers and long-established young Islanders risks reinforcing Jersey's trajectory towards a smaller, older population, with direct implications for the labour market, public finances and the Island's long-term economic sustainability.

Table 1 Jersey's Population growth, 2000-2024

End-Year	Population	Increase	Natural increase	Net migration
2000	88,400			
2001	88,900	500	190	300
2002	89,300	400	90	300
2003	89,600	300	250	0
2004	90,100	500	220	300
2005	91,000	900	220	700
2006	92,300	1,300	190	1,100
2007	94,000	1,700	320	1,400
2008	95,400	1,400	300	1,100
2009	96,200	800	250	600
2010	97,100	1,000	270	700
2011	97,900	700	330	400
2012	98,560	660	340	320
2013	99,300	740	280	460
2014	100,060	760	270	490
2015	101,210	1,150	240	910
2016	102,240	1,030	180	850
2017	102,730	480	130	360
2018	103,290	560	110	450
2019	103,280	-10	90	-100
2020	103,490	210	110	100
2021	103,190	-300	80	-380
2022	103,300	110	-100	200
2023	104,030	670	-120	730
2024	104,540	510	-150	670
Total		15,870	4,010	11,700

Note: the figures have been individually rounded so subtotals may not add up to totals.

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