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Parental Leave Policies in the Mining Sector

Women and the Mine of the Future

Introduction

Maternity, paternity, and parental leave policies are essential to enabling women's ongoing employment in the mining sector. Maternity leave is a policy that supports the health and safety of pregnant individuals and their children while protecting their right to economic and employment security. It also ensures that they do not face discrimination due to their reproductive role and promotes their participation in the labour force (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2014). It provides women with certain rights regarding their pregnancies that create a safer work environment and upholds their right to leave

and breaks to care for their child. According to the [ILO](#) (2021, p. 41), maternity protection "supports women's enhanced participation in the labour force and expands the pool of talent available to the economy." Those policies will typically include protective measures for pregnant individuals and the provision of paid leave, breastfeeding breaks, and measures to protect against discrimination and dismissal (ILO, 2014).

The development of paternity leave policies and the increase in the sharing of caregiving between parents is considered "one of the most significant social developments of the twenty-first century" (ILO, 2014, p. 1). As a result, many countries and companies have developed policies that encompass



maternity, paternity, and adoption leave or that adopt gender-neutral policies to be divided between caretakers as they see fit. Those policies are referred to broadly as “parental leave.”

In 2022, the [Women and the Mine of the Future Global Report](#) did a deep dive into the gender-disaggregated employment profile in large-scale mining in a sampling of 12 countries. The report gathered strong quantitative and qualitative data and offered a cross-country analysis that identified key trends in the sector. Of these trends, the report identifies that while parental leave policies in the mining sector may be adequate, the sector faces specific challenges around the implementation of the policies and especially the employment of women and people who have care responsibilities. Another trend of the report is that women tend to drop out of their mining careers at an earlier age than men, confirming the long-held assumption that there is a leaky pipeline in the retention of women. Of the many reasons behind women leaving the mining sector were inappropriate prenatal and parental policies as well as a lack of support to parents with childcare responsibilities.

Because of the importance of parental policies in supporting women’s economic empowerment (and the trends identified in the [Women and the Mine of the Future Global Report](#)), this paper will take an in-depth look at parental policies in the mining sector. The purpose of this paper is to review the existing international and national frameworks as well as the publicly available parental leave policies of the 12 baseline countries that were part of the [Women and the Mine of the Future](#) project. The paper first details the international and national frameworks around parental policies for the 12 countries identified, followed by an analysis of mining company policies that operate in these same countries. Finally, the paper will end with an analysis of

interesting trends regarding parental policies in the mining sector, along with some considerations for the mine of the future.

International Normative Framework

The ILO created its first global standard, [C003 – Maternity Protection Convention, 1919 \(No.3\)](#), to protect working women before and after childbirth. Subsequent conventions were adopted, namely the [Maternity Protection Convention \(Revised\)](#) and, ultimately, the most up-to-date maternity protection standard, the [Maternity Protection Convention, 2020 \(No. 183\)](#). Currently, 119 countries meet the 1919 and 1952 ILO standard of 12 weeks of maternity leave, and 62 countries provide for the ILO 2020 standard of 14 weeks or more ([ILO, 2022](#)). There are no ILO standards on the provision of paternity leave, although the [Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 \(No.156\)](#), recognizes the importance of fathers’ involvement in family responsibilities and childcare, and a [report](#) by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) report on child development (2017) suggests 4 weeks of paid paternity leave for fathers.

There are large variations across countries regarding the minimum requirements pregnant individuals need to meet to be entitled to leave. Those include the need for a minimum advance time to declare pregnancy for leave entitlement to apply, minimum length of service before leave can apply, type of contract or a minimum number of hours worked each week, existing number of children in the family, etc. The most common condition is a minimum length of service with the same employer, which can vary from 3 months up to 1 year. Part-time and temporary workers may struggle to meet those eligibility requirements.

In addition to maternity leave, the maternity protection conventions cover health

**TABLE 1.** ILO Ratifications among study countries (2022)

Country	1919 Maternity Protection Convention	1952 Maternity Protection Convention (revised)	2000 Maternity Protection Convention
Argentina	Ratified in 1933		
Australia			
Brazil		Ratified in 1965	
Canada			
Chile	Ratified in 1925; Denounced in 1997	Ratified in 1994	
Colombia	Ratified in 1933		
Ghana		Ratified in 1986	
Mongolia		Ratified in 1969	
Peru			Ratified in 2016
South Africa			
Sweden			
Zambia		Ratified in 1979	

Sources: All ratification statuses were sourced from the ratifications by countries for [C003 - Maternity Protection Convention, 1010 \(No.3\)](#), [C103 - Maternity Protection Convention \(revised\), 1952 \(No.103\)](#), and [C183 - Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 \(No.183\)](#).

protection, employment protection and non-discrimination, and breastfeeding. The ILO (2022) suggests that special workplace protection is required for working women. That is because pregnancy, childbirth, and the postnatal period are three phases in a woman's reproductive life where they might face specific health risks. In the last century, there has been a shift in approach from ILO norms and conventions regarding women's safety before, during, and after pregnancy. At first, blanket employment prohibitions for women—pregnant or not—were adopted, a trend best exemplified by the [Underground Work \(Women\) Convention, 1935 \(No. 45\)](#), which prohibited women from working in underground mines altogether. Policies have evolved away from those prohibitions toward more targeted protection measures for

pregnant and lactating mothers, depending on their work environment and the risk of exposure to hazards.

Currently, employers have the legal responsibility to ensure the health and safety of their employees, and especially pregnant and breastfeeding employees. The [ILO Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 \(No.183\)](#) establishes that pregnant or breastfeeding women should not be obliged to work in conditions that are prejudicial to their health or that of their child. Women also have the right to return to the same position or equivalent position paid at the same rate upon return from maternity leave. Those clauses are especially relevant to the mining sector, as there are real risks to individuals who are pregnant and breastfeeding in



the large-scale mining sector (Dorman & Boudreau-Larivière, 2012). Among physical hazards, extremes of heat, hyperbaric environments, noise, and vibration can be detrimental to the pregnancy or breastfeeding. Chemical hazards that have known effects on pregnancy and breastfeeding include aluminum, arsenic, carbon monoxide, chromium, copper, lead, manganese, mercury, nickel, selenium, uranium, and many others.

National Frameworks

Despite the fact that some study countries have not ratified any of the ILO conventions on maternity protection, Table 2 shows that all of them still provide a minimum of 12 weeks of leave, and 10 out of 12 countries provide 14 weeks and more. The two countries whose national frameworks provide for 12 weeks of maternity leave are Argentina and Ghana. Many countries have specific provisions for paternity leave and parental leave policies to be split between parents. In addition, all countries covered in the project (except Australia) have specific provisions regarding breastfeeding breaks. Table 2 compares all maternity, paternity, parental, and breastfeeding policies for the study countries of the study.

TABLE 2. Summary of maternity, paternity, parental, and breastfeeding provisions in study countries (2022)¹

Country	Maternity leave	Paternity leave	Parental leave	Breastfeeding breaks
Argentina	12 weeks paid	2 days paid leave		2 half hours
Australia	Entitled to parental leave	Entitled to parental leave	20 weeks of paid leave at national minimum wage, to be shared between parents	None
Brazil	120 days paid leave by the employer at full pay with the possibility to extend to 180 days	5 days paid leave by the employer at full pay with the possibility to extend to 20 days		2 half hours until 6 months old

¹ Please note that some countries define a week to mean 5 business days whereas others use week to mean a whole calendar week. The leave periods reported in this table refer to those used in the original sources.



Country	Maternity leave	Paternity leave	Parental leave	Breastfeeding breaks
Canada	15 weeks at 55% benefit up to CAD 650 a week	Entitled to parental leave	40 weeks paid at 55% benefit (up to CAD 650) or extended parental leave of 69 weeks paid at 33% (up to CAD 390) for either parent	Allowed, unpaid
Province of Quebec	18 weeks at 70% of earnings	5 weeks non-sharable at 70% of earnings	32 weeks (first 7 at 70% of earnings, next 25 weeks at 55% of earnings). Can be extended another 4 weeks at 55% of earnings once 8 sharable weeks have been paid to each parent	
Chile	18 weeks paid at full salary	5 days paid leave	12 weeks with subsidy payment	1 hour until 2 years
Colombia	18 weeks paid at 100% of salary	2 weeks paid leave	Parents can divide the final 6 weeks of maternity between them	2 half hours, until 6 months
Ghana	12 weeks paid at 100% of salary			1 hour until 12 months
Mongolia	120 days paid at a minimum of 70% of normal pay			2 hours until 6 months old; 1 hour until 1 year old
Peru	14 weeks paid leave	10 days paid leave		1 hour until 1 year old
South Africa	16 weeks	3 days		2 half hours
Sweden	60 days prior to the birth in addition to parental leave	2 weeks in addition to paid parental leave	480 days to be split as parents choose, with 90 days reserved for each parent at 80% of regular wages	Guaranteed with no age limit for the child
Zambia	14 weeks with full pay	5 days of unpaid leave		2 half hours until 6 months old

Sources: All parental leave policies were sourced or cross-referenced with the ICLG (2019) and the Pan American Health Organization (2019).



Argentina

In Argentina, women are allowed 90 days (12 weeks) of maternity leave. Women are not allowed to work longer than 30 days before their due date. Women who have been in employment for more than a year can choose to extend their leave for a period of 3 to 6 months, but the additional leave is not paid. Women are entitled to two half-hour breaks a day for breastfeeding. Men are entitled to 2 days of paid paternity leave (ILO, 2014).

Australia

Australia's Paid Parental Leave Act 2010 provides 52 weeks of unpaid parental leave, with 20 weeks paid at the national minimum wage to be divided between parents. The mother is the first beneficiary, but she can choose to transfer some of her leave to her partner. Employed fathers are entitled to 2 weeks (14 days) of paternity leave paid at national minimum wage (Australian Government, 2022). Australian employers are not legally obliged to provide lactation breaks to their employees, even if the ILO recommends that breastfeeding women be entitled to one paid break per day (Australian Breastfeeding Association, 2019). However, breastfeeding is a protected ground of discrimination. Not providing adequate facilities or breaks for individuals who need to express milk can constitute discrimination (Fairwork Ombudsman, 2023).

Brazil

In Brazil, the Federal Constitution mandates 120 days of maternity leave for women and 5 days of paternity leave (ILO, 2014), paid at full pay. The law allows for an extension of maternity leave in the private and public sectors up to 180 days. Employers who offer the additional 60 days can deduct the amount from their corporate income tax. For paternity leave, the increase in leave effected by law is a maximum of 20 days. Women have the right to two half-

hour breastfeeding breaks until their child is 6 months old. The breaks can be taken separately or together at the end of their shift.

Canada

In Canada, there are parental leave benefit programs at both the federal and provincial levels, except for the province of Quebec, which is responsible for all maternity, paternity, parental, and adoption benefits within its jurisdiction. All people giving birth are entitled to 15 weeks of paid maternity leave paid at 55% benefit (or up to CAD 650 per week). Maternity leave can start up to 12 weeks before birth. There is no blanket federal provision for paternity leave (ILO, 2014).

Paid parental leave comes in addition to maternity leave and can be split between parents. There are two options for parental leave: standard parental leave, which is up to 40 weeks paid at 55% (with a ceiling of CAD 650 a week), and extended parental leave, which goes up to 69 weeks paid at 33% (with a ceiling of CAD 390 per week).

In Quebec, people giving birth are entitled to 18 weeks of paid leave at 70% of earnings. Secondary carers are entitled to 5 weeks of non-sharable leave at 70% of earnings. Additional 32 weeks of parental leave is available, with the first 7 weeks at 70% of earnings and the next 25 weeks at 55% of earnings. This leave can be further extended by 4 weeks (at 55% of earnings) once 8 sharable weeks have been paid to each parent. Due to parental leave being under provincial jurisdiction, policies concerning leave benefit programs are decentralized. The variety of parental leave policies has raised debates in Canada on whether there should be a unitary federal program governing them (Government of Canada, 2022).

At the federal level, breastfeeding breaks are allowed, but employers have no obligation



to pay for them. There are also policies regarding breastfeeding breaks at the provincial level. In Ontario for instance, employees are legally allowed to have extra breaks to breastfeed or pump milk while at work.

Chile

Chile's Labour Code states that women are entitled to 18 weeks of paid maternal leave. However, only women in formal employment who have contributed to social security for a mandated amount of time have the legal right to paid leave, a criterion that excludes many women working informally. Men have the right to a 5-day paid paternity leave paid in full by the employer. In addition to maternity and paternity, parents are entitled to 12 weeks of parental leave, and the mother can choose to transfer up to 6 weeks to the father (ILO, 2014). Women have the right to breastfeed their children under the age of 2 at any time during the working day and either by dividing the break, or by postponing or advancing the beginning or end of the working day (Bosch, 2019).

Colombia

The Labour Code guarantees maternity leave for 18 weeks, paid at 100% of the wage by the government (ILO, 2014). Paternity leave is 2 weeks, also paid at 100%. Parents can also divide the final 6 weeks of maternity leave between them. In Colombia, women have the right to two half-hour breastfeeding breaks until the child is 6 months old.

Ghana

In Ghana, the law mandates 12 weeks of fully paid maternity leave. Maternity leave is paid for by the employer and may be extended for medical reasons or for multiple births. Annual leave entitlement can also be added to the maternity leave. The law does not provide for paid paternity or parental leave. A gap in legislation does not prohibit an employer from inquiring whether a woman is pregnant

or about her intention to have children during recruitment or during promotions. The Labour Act introduced breastfeeding breaks of 1 hour for a maximum of 12 months.

Mongolia

In Mongolia, the law provides for a period of maternity leave covering 60 days prior to birth and 60 days after delivery, totalling 120 days. During the maternity leave, the Mongolian Social Insurance system is responsible for payments to the mother. Criteria for eligibility include having made at least 12 contributions in the 6 months prior to taking leave. Eligible employees receive 70% of their average salary over the previous 12 months. Additional parental leave is granted to all mothers or single fathers with children under the age of 3. The employer is obligated by law to accept the employee in the same position or in a similar position when the employee returns at the end of the leave (ILO, 2014). Women are entitled to a 2-hour breastfeeding break until their child is 6 months old, and a 1-hour break with a child aged 6 months to 1 year (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2017).

Peru

In Peru, the law mandates 14 weeks of paid maternity leave for women, with 100% of their salary paid in the form of social benefits. Women are protected from dismissal due to pregnancy, and the law guarantees their return to their former position after the end of the leave. Fathers are entitled to 10 days of paternity leave, with 100% of their salary in the form of social benefits. Additionally, women have the right to a 1-hour breastfeeding break until their child is 1 year old (Pan American Health Organization, 2019).

South Africa

The Basic Conditions of Employment Act of 1997 mandates 4 months maternity leave for women. However, there is no legal



requirement that the maternity leave be paid. During their leave, women can access money from the Unemployment Insurance Fund. Women's job security is maintained through the Employment Equity Act which prohibits termination. Men have the right to 3 days of paternity leave. There is no additional parental leave.

South Africa's Code of Good Practice on the Protection of Employees during Pregnancy and After the Birth of a Child guarantees the right to breastfeeding breaks of half an hour twice a day until the child reaches 6 months (Department of Health, Republic of South Africa, 2019).

Sweden

In 1974, Sweden introduced the world's first gender-neutral parental benefits. Parents are eligible for 480 days of parental leave in total to be split between them as they choose. This includes 390 days paid at 80% of earnings. 90 days of leave are reserved for each parent exclusively and cannot be transferred. A total of 384 days must be taken before the child's fourth birthday, whereas the remaining 96 days can be taken until the child turns 12 (European Commission, 2023). Breastfeeding breaks are guaranteed, with no age limit for the child (ILO, 2014).

Zambia

In Zambia, the Employment Act mandates paid maternity leave of 14 weeks, fully paid and covered by the employer providing that the woman has completed at least two years of continuous service. Women's employment is protected by law while on maternity leave, prohibiting dismissal or penalties on the basis of pregnancy. Men are entitled to 5 days of unpaid leave. Women are entitled to two half-hour breaks, or 1 hour, for breastfeeding, until the child reaches 6 months of age. Those breaks are paid (ICLG, 2019).

Mining Company Policies

Some mining companies provide blanket global policies that exceed national requirements, whereas others adapt to the national framework of their countries of operations. The following section looks at parental leave provided by mining companies. In order to get an overview of the parental leave policies of mining companies, the largest mining companies operating in the 12 countries of the Women and the Mine of the Future project were identified, along with country-specific companies. However, not all companies disclosed their parental leave policies publicly or with enough details to be included in this article. This is why companies such as Barrick Gold, Freeport McMoran, or Glencore, to name three, are not included. Their omission in this report is in no way a commentary on the quality of the parental leave they provide; it simply indicates a lack of publicly available sources on the matter.

Of the parental leave policies made publicly available by mining companies included in this analysis, all provide a minimum of 18 weeks, except for Poderosa (Peru), which offers 14. They also all provide for 5 to 20 days of paternity leave, with the exception of Rio Tinto, which is rolling out 18 weeks of leave for secondary carers by the end of 2023. Companies that provide a global minimum standard of 18 weeks (like BHP and Rio Tinto) provide substantially more leave than the national 12 weeks mandated in countries like Argentina or Ghana. They also offer leave for fathers in places where it would not otherwise be offered, like Ghana, Mongolia, and Zambia.

Although some companies offer provisions for adoption leave, miscarriage, and stillbirth, there is no publicly available information to evaluate and very little discourse on the topic.

**TABLE 3.** Mining company parental policies operating in study countries (2022)

Country	Coverage	Maternity leave	Paternity leave	Parental leave	Eligibility
Anglo American	Australia	18 weeks	2 weeks	Primary and secondary carers can be of any sex or gender.	6 months paid employment
BHP	Global	18 weeks	2 weeks	Can be split between parents if they both work for BHP.	3 months paid employment
CODELCO	Chile	18 weeks, Ext. 24 weeks	5 days		
Compañía Minera Poderosa S.A.	Peru	98 days	10 days		
Newmont	Australia	26 weeks	10 days	Primary and secondary carers can be of any sex or gender.	
Rio Tinto	Global	18 weeks	1 week*	*By the end of 2023, secondary carers will be entitled to 18 weeks.	
Vale	Brazil	180 days	20 days		
	Australia	120 days	14 days		

Anglo American

Anglo American is a mining company that operates in many countries, including Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Peru, and South Africa. Its parental leave for Australia was the only one publicly available. In Australia, Anglo American offers a gender-neutral parental leave of 18 weeks, paid at full salary for the primary carer. Secondary carers have the right to 2 weeks of paid parental leave. Those provisions are in line with Australian law. Anglo American also discloses that paid parental leave

can be accessed after 6 months of paid employment. Paid parental leave is extended to those who experience stillbirth: 6 weeks for miscarriages before 20 weeks, and 18 weeks at full pay for stillbirth or death from 20 weeks (Anglo American, 2022).

BHP

BHP is the biggest mining company in Australia, but also operates in Brazil, Canada, Chile, and Peru. In 2009, BHP introduced a standardized minimum period of paid parental leave across all regions where



it operates (BHP, 2009). The leave is a minimum of 18 weeks upon the birth or adoption of a child. The parental leave is gender neutral and, if both parents work for BHP, it can be split between them. Employees become eligible for parental leave benefits after 3 months of continuous employment. It is unclear if the same applies to part-time workers or employees under short-term contracts. The secondary caregiver is granted 2 weeks of leave (BHP, 2009). Paid parental leave is extended to those who experience stillbirth, and BHP offers dedicated and lockable parents' rooms that can be used to breastfeed or express milk at all mine sites (WORK180, 2023). BHP also committed to contribute to retirement savings plans, also called "superannuations," during the entire parental leave period, including unpaid leave. This is a big improvement for primary carers who would have missed out on those savings during their unpaid leave (BHP, 2017).

CODELCO

CODELCO is Chile's state-owned mining company, and the leading company in the country. Since 2019, CODELCO has provided 6 weeks of maternity leave prior to the birth of the child and 12 weeks following the birth. There is an option to extend the 12 weeks to 18 weeks, paid at 50%. Men have the right to 5 days of paternity leave, in line with the national framework. Women with children under the age of 2 are entitled to 1 hour a day of nursing break. The breastfeeding break can be divided into two, be taken at any time of the day, or used to postpone or shorten the start or end of the day (CODELCO, 2019). These provisions also apply to the birth or adoption of a child.

Compañía Minera Poderosa S.A.

Compañía Minera Poderosa S.A. is a Peruvian mining company. Pregnant employees are allowed 98 days (14 weeks) of parental leave before and after the birth. Leave

can be extended by 30 days if there are multiple births. The 98 days can be divided into half pre-birth and half post-birth. Poderosa provides 10 days of paternity leave to fathers, 20 days for premature or multiple births, and 30 days in the event of complications for the mother's health or a congenital illness or severe disability in the child. Poderosa provides a breastfeeding allowance, an amount granted to contribute to the care of the newborn (Compañía Minera Poderosa S.A., 2021).

Newmont

Newmont is an American gold mining company. Of the 12 study countries, it operates in Argentina, Australia, Ghana, and Peru. The parental leave policy was available for Australia. In 2019, Newmont increased its paid parental leave from the national minimum to 26 weeks. Secondary carers are offered 10 days of paid leave. The policy applies regardless of gender and is inclusive of same-sex partners (Gold Industry Group, 2019).

Rio Tinto

Rio Tinto is an Anglo-Australian company. Of the 12 study countries, it operates in Australia, Canada, Chile, Mongolia, and South Africa. Rio Tinto implemented a global minimum standard for paid parental leave for all employees. The leave is 18 weeks at full pay following either the birth or adoption of a child. The leave is not gender specific—the 18 weeks is granted to the person designated as primary caregiver. A new policy granting 18 weeks of paternity leave will be rolled out globally by the end of 2023. Until then, employees who elect to be the secondary caregiver receive 1 week of paid leave. If both parents work for Rio Tinto, leave can be taken simultaneously or consecutively (Wolfe, 2022).



Vale S.A.

Vale is a Brazilian company. It operates mainly in Brazil but also employs people in Australia, Canada, Chile, and Peru. It does not provide a blanket parental leave: instead, it adapts its leave according to the country of operation. In Brazil, Vale adheres to the Brazilian Government program “Empresa Cidadã,” which extends maternity leave from 120 to 180 days and the paternity leave from 5 to 20 days.

Of the maternity or paternity leave information made available, Vale discloses that in Australia, it provides 120 days leave for mothers and 14 days for the partner, in line with Australian law (Vale, 2022).

Considerations for the Mine of the Future

This overview of maternity policies in the mining sector, however simple, seems to indicate a few trends regarding pregnancy in the mining sector.

1. Mining companies offer appropriate—and sometimes advantageous—parental leaves.

The first observation made is that mining companies do meet —on paper—the national parental leave requirements. All the company policies reviewed meet international standards and often surpass them. This is especially interesting to note in light of the [Women and the Mine of the Future Global Report](#) (2023), which notes a “leaky pipeline,” where women leave the mining workforce at an earlier stage of their careers than men, around age 35 to 44 years old. The suggestion is that women leave the mining workforce for a variety of reasons, sometimes despite advantageous (on paper) parental leave policies.

2. Requirements women need to meet to benefit from parental leave differ.

When looking at the parental leave policies from mining companies, the requirements needed to allow women to benefit from those policies are not consistently available. Those requirements are expected to pertain to a minimum length of service, a minimum number of hours worked, types of contracts (part-time, full-time), etc. The [Women and the Mine of the Future Global Report](#) (2023) does point out that women can be overrepresented in part-time jobs, which brings the question of whether and how those women can benefit from parental leave. A better understanding of women’s employment in mining, and especially the conditions around their employment (full-time or part-time, permanent or seasonal contract, directly employed by the mine or through a contractor, etc.) could shed light on which women can avail themselves of the parental leave and other provisions offered by mining companies.

3. Workplace culture around pregnancy is a challenge.

A recurring topic while researching parental leave in mining was the workplace culture around pregnancy. Multiple studies have investigated the challenges women face when trying to gain suitable, alternative employment within companies when getting pregnant. One notable study on occupational health and safety considerations for women in mining in South Africa ([Botha & Conjré, 2015](#)) looked at challenges regarding pregnancy and breastfeeding for female mine workers. South Africa’s legal framework obliges employers to offer suitable alternative employment, as most women can safely continue to work during their pregnancy, albeit in positions that do not expose them to health hazards. However, interviews and



focus group discussions² shed light on the experience of women regarding their treatment by various mining companies during and after pregnancy. While some women interviewed indicated receiving appropriate care and treatment upon the announcement of their pregnancy, others had to ask to be moved to work on the surface, with one woman reporting receiving no accommodation at all.

This is not the only reported instance of women being reticent to disclose their pregnancy status or being refused accommodation or lighter duties. For instance, Rio Tinto's recent [report on workplace culture](#) (2022) reveals that women had some common fears around pregnancy, such as anxiety about disclosing, obstacles in obtaining flexible work arrangements, and being denied appropriate facilities. One woman in the report said, "I know of women who have anguished over having to tell their leader that they are pregnant, even if only seeking to take the minimal permitted leave. There is fear that there may not be a job to come back to, or it will be a lesser job."

It is worth emphasizing that the mines are also responsible for the health and safety of all women, including pregnant women, and that the provision of appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) to pregnant women is a major component. Where it is safe for pregnant women to continue with their duties, they should be outfitted with appropriate PPE.³

4. Support for the transition back to the workplace after parental leave is crucial.

As mentioned above, the workplace culture around pregnancy can leave women feeling unsafe to disclose their pregnancies or to

come back after childbirth. The transition back to the workplace is a crucial moment to retain women in the industry, and policies about this transition should be developed and implemented prior to the start of maternity leave. There are many components to the transition back to the workplace that are worth mentioning. First is the fluid transition before, during, and after childbirth. Proper accommodation of pregnancy is crucial, but other mechanisms can be put in place to facilitate the transition back to work, such as offering check-in days during leave to allow women to maintain contact with the goings-on of the company. Some companies facilitate or incentivize women to come back to the workplace by providing flexible work arrangements and schedules, as well as financial perks.

The second aspect of helping the transition back to work is ensuring that women have access to the proper facilities at work, such as breastfeeding rooms at all sites. Finally, a core element to supporting women's reintegration into the workplace is childcare provision. Some companies provide assistance in finding appropriate childcare for their employees, and some even offer childcare around mine sites or close to company offices (King-Abadi, 2018; Munyaneza, 2022). Ideally, all forms of support come together to create an enabling environment where women can come back to work after childbirth. An example of such an initiative is Caltex's BabyCare package (Stephens, n.d.), meant to facilitate the return to work of parents, and which includes quarterly bonuses, emergency childcare funds, and nursing mothers facilities. Three years after its implementation in 2012, the company reported a 25% increase in the number of women transitioning back to work after childbirth, demonstrating just how

2 Overall, 12 individual interviews and 19 group interviews (69 participants in total) were conducted at mine sites by the researchers (Botha & Conjré, 2015).

3 International Women in Mining keeps a directory of inclusive PPE, including maternity wear for women in mining. Please consult their [female PPE directory](#) for more information.



pivotal the support to come back to work is for many women (S&P Global, 2015).

5. More research is needed comparing mining companies' parental leave policies to those in competing sectors.

Another missing piece of information is how advantageous parental leave policies in the mining industry are compared to other sectors that employ women with education and skill levels that are in high demand. A positive workplace culture around maternity, along with good benefits and safe workplaces, might be drivers that attract women, especially women with high educational attainment, toward one industry instead of another. When considering the jobs of the future, automatization and decarbonization could have positive impacts on women, and especially pregnant women's health and safety at work. If automatization leads to fewer jobs requiring manual labour in underground mines, health and safety considerations for pregnant and nursing women might be less of a concern moving forward. If, on the contrary, the number of women working in positions that expose them to mining hazards keeps increasing, special attention must be paid to scientific and evidence-based information about safety measures that may help inform and minimize pregnant individuals' exposure to hazards. More attention will also need to be paid to ensure that women find suitable accommodations and arrangements for their pregnancy and feel capable of disclosing their pregnancy and taking their allowed leave.

6. Changing norms around parental leave require normalizing parental leave for men.

Another emerging discussion centres around men's entitlement to leave policies and their participation in childcare. The childcare responsibilities of men, especially at the time of birth, are increasingly recognized

as essential to women's equal access to employment opportunities, and an increasing number of men would choose to benefit from more equal parental policies between women and men. This shift in norms around childcare is especially important to the mining sector, given the large number of men working in the industry. Allowing men to take their paternity leave so they can be involved in childcare has direct positive impacts on women, enabling a more equal distribution of care in the household and supporting the capacity of primary carers to return to work. Mining companies have the opportunity to offer more equal parental leave for secondary carers, supporting a more long-term shift in norms around men's role as carers.

However, a report conducted by the World Economic Forum (2022) in the United States found that one in five men was concerned that taking leave would hurt their career growth. The fear of discrimination in the workplace, such as missing out on opportunities or being overlooked for promotions and pay raises, as well as the fear of being marginalized, mocked, or singled out for taking paternity leave, are barriers to men using their leave benefits (Cox, 2021). To circumvent these obstacles, some countries, such as Sweden and Norway, are establishing a "daddy quota," or a minimum number of leave days for the secondary carers that is lost if not utilized (Janjuha-Jivraj, 2023). Despite the moderate success of such policies, they need to be complemented by workplace cultures where men decide to take their parental leave and be more involved at home.

Rio Tinto is rolling out a package consisting of 18 weeks of paid leave for parents regardless of gender. A recent testimonial from a father who benefited from the leave shows that workplace culture and role modelling were instrumental in creating the permission structure where he felt he could take his whole leave and become more involved in early childcare (Rio Tinto, 2023).



Creating awareness among men about their parental rights, having good role models of men utilizing the full extent of their leave, changing unspoken norms and stigma around taking paternity leave, and greater understanding of the benefits of men taking leave are all concrete steps companies can take to help support changing the norms around involving men more in early childcare (Cox, 2021).

7. Awareness raising is essential to shift the culture around parental leave.

Finally, a recurring recommendation found in multiple sources consulted during the drafting of this paper was for companies to provide training and awareness sessions to employees on their rights to parental leave and reproductive health and safety, including when regarding adoption and bereavement leave. Greater awareness given to all employees—regardless of their gender identity—could contribute to creating an environment where women have better knowledge of their rights and feel comfortable disclosing their

pregnancies without fear of losing their employment, experiencing breaks in their career development, and missing out on opportunities. While blatant discrimination is prohibited in most countries, many women do experience the fear of discrimination and loss of job or career opportunities, as demonstrated by the 2022 Rio Tinto [Respect at Work](#) report. Additionally, awareness should not be limited to (or more focused) only one gender. As previously discussed in more depth, greater awareness can also encourage discussions around paternity leave and the role of men in supporting childcare.

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Cover photo: A geologist (foreground) and a mining engineer trainee (background) conduct a pit inspection at the newly developed Golouma pit (Teranga Gold Corp.) The geologist depicted is well known for her commitment, competency, thoroughness and integrity. Papa Aliou Sylla/IWiM Photo Competition 2017



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