

CARER LEAVE POLICIES IN THE UNITED KINGDOM



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Caring for family members alongside paid work is increasingly common and the longevity revolution means this will continue. Combining care work and paid work has well-known consequences for carers, their employers, the labour force and economies. Some governments have introduced strategies that let carers take time away from their jobs to fulfill care responsibilities while still being able to return to their job afterwards. To inform development of carer leaves in the UK, an international policy scan was carried out in nine other countries (Australia, Canada, Finland, Germany, Italy, Japan, Poland, Slovenia and Sweden) as part of the [Sustainable Care](#) program.

This Policy snapshot provides an overview of carer leave initiatives in the UK. These policies and their implications for working carers are part of a forthcoming edited book J Fast, J Heyes, and K Hamblin, **Combining Work and Care**, that will be published by Policy Press.

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UNITED KINGDOM'S POLITICAL CONTEXT

The United Kingdom is comprised of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Some executive and legislative powers have been devolved to different degrees across the four nations: Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have executive and legislative powers; Metro Mayors in parts of England and the Mayor of London have executive powers. Employment law has not been devolved.

Responsibility for policy, legislation and the allocation of funding for social care is devolved to the four nations where multiple local councils/ trusts or authorities (LAs) are responsible for the delivery of services.

The UK is considered a liberal welfare state. Social care is needs-tested; people with assets above a certain level are required to pay for some or all of the costs of their care (with the exception of Scotland which has removed the means-test for personal care).

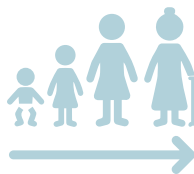
UNITED KINGDOM'S SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT



Labour force participation rate in the UK was 78.9% in July 2021, down from 79.8% in January 2020 (pre-pandemic).



3.8% unemployment rate in January 2020 (pre-pandemic), rose to a high of 5.2% in December 2020, and is 4.5% as of August 2021.



The proportion of people in the UK aged 65 and older is expected to rise from 18.7% in 2020 to 23.9% by 2039.



Carers UK estimates that 1 in 8 adults (around 6.5 million people) were carers in 2019, doubling to about 13.6 million people caring through the COVID-19 pandemic.



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LEAVE FOR FAMILY AND DOMESTIC REASONS

INTENT

An employee is entitled to be permitted by their employer to take a reasonable amount of time off during working hours to provide care for a dependent.

DURATION

"A reasonable amount of time off" is left to the discretion of the employer.

BENEFITS

Time off is unpaid unless the employer provides a contractual right to paid emergency leave.

DEPENDENT

Dependent includes a spouse, a child, a parent, a person who lives in the same household as the employee, otherwise than by reason of being his employee, tenant, lodger or boarder" (Employment Relations Act, Part II, Schedule 4, section 57). The cohabitation requirement has since been removed.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

The statutory right to take time off for dependents applies to all employees only – whether permanent, temporary, full time or part time. This right does not apply to workers (less structured, casual workers and those with non-guaranteed hours) and the self-employed.

All employees who have worked for their employer for a minimum of 26 weeks can request the right to work flexibly.

Employees can only make one request a year.

Employees are entitled to take time off during working hours to provide care on occasion when a dependent is ill, injured or assaulted; whose care arrangements are unexpectedly disrupted; or in consequence of the death of a dependent.

FEATURES

Employees' jobs are protected.

Under the Employment Relations Act 1999 employee has the right not to be subjected to any detriment by any act, or any deliberate failure to act, by his employer.

Equality Act 2010 expanded protection from discrimination in the workplace to carers (in England, Scotland and Wales) through a requirement that employers have due regard to promote equality of opportunity for carers.

NOTICE

A medical certificate is not required.