

Canada ranks No. 34 in survey of 37 countries for parenting — here's how to do better ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

While Canada is better off than many when it comes to parents' work-life balance, a new ranking shows there's still room for improvement.

The small list by U.K.-based business solutions site, Expert Market, looked at 37 countries and ranked Canada as the fourth-worst place to have kids. Canada was followed by Costa Rica and Mexico, and the United States was ranked the worst overall.

Looking at the top countries, Finland came in at No. 1, followed by Estonia, Austria, France and Germany at No. 5. Other countries in the top 10 included Sweden, Japan, Norway, Luxembourg and Slovakia.

"We chose the data that most accurately reflects the real time that parents get to spend with their children, taking into account how much they get paid for that time, if at all," Sophia Patsikas of Expert Market tells Global News.

Ranking the countries

To create a ranking, the company looked at four distinctions of work-life balance. The average annual hours worked by parents, the number of paid vacations, and total paid leaves for mothers and fathers.

"To achieve the best work-life balance for parents, companies and governments should be supporting their employees on all fronts. Shorter annual leave and longer working hours can really eat into quality family time, and limited paid maternity and paternity leave can mean that parents are absent and stressed when they should be bonding with their new child," Patsikas says. "As work-life balance expectations rise and families strive for more equal parenting, work and government policies need to reflect this."

A look at Canada

And while the ranking is a small glimpse into what parental leave looks like in some countries around the world, it does note how Canada stands on a global platform.

Employment insurance (EI) maternity benefits are available to biological and surrogate mothers who cannot work due to pregnancy or who have recently given birth. EI parental benefits are available to parents taking care of newborns or a newly adopted child. Parents in Quebec can look for parental benefits through the Quebec Parental Insurance Program.

In Canada, this means on average, 55 per cent of a person's salary can be obtained throughout the year on EI, and as of January, the maximum yearly insurable earnings were capped at \$51,300, resulting in a maximum amount of \$543 per week.

In March, the government introduced a new 18-month option for parental leave, but parents would only be able to receive 33 per cent of their average weekly earnings.

"The number of hours worked by Canadians is fairly average, however, their average annual leave is very low at only 10 days. No EU countries have less than 20 days holiday for their employees, so at half this amount," Patsikas says.

And women, in particular, may find it even harder sometimes to find this work-life balance.

"Women are still expected to play multiple roles, and to pick up 'the second shift' as the caregiver and the homemaker. This is work beyond the workplace, and it's unpaid and undervalued. Women are also more likely to be moving in and out of the workforce as compared to men — maternity leave is one example," Paulette Senior, president and CEO of the Canadian Women's Foundation tells Global News.

And according to the foundation's findings, 61 per cent of Canadians feel that women can't work as much as men because there isn't enough affordable childcare.

"We know that unfortunately women are more likely than men to have to sacrifice career opportunities and advancement," she continues. "Supporting calls for affordable, accessible childcare is not just a win for women, it's a critical step on our path towards gender equality. It

will help address structural gender inequality that's holding women back, and we need to have it if we are ever going to achieve a gender-equal society."

How to achieve work-life balance

And while work-life balance can almost seem impossible and a privilege many families don't get to experience, Vancouver-based parenting coach Julie Romanowski, says there are some small things that can be done.

It starts with communication, she says, and opening up to your partner to discuss what you want and need. Prioritizing is the second step.

"Take into consideration what is in the best interest of yourself and the family," she tells Global News. "Create tangible tasks for everyone involved to do on a daily basis. It's surprising how many couples think the other partner shares the same expectations as them when in reality, most don't."

And lastly, learn how to manage your time. Get a calendar, schedule these priorities, tasks, events and don't forget to include downtime or alone time.

"I believe it is totally achievable, but it does require an investment," she continues. "The key to kick-starting this goal is to give more effort and more time up front, which is hard to find, [but] it will pay off in the long run and actually save you time and energy."

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