

This Maltese company is officially extending paternity leave to all its employees ^[1]

Should other companies follow suit?

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EXCERPTS

As debates on equality and the gender pay gap continue to rage on, some companies are looking for ways to balance the scales and set an example for others to follow. And that's exactly what one Maltese company has decided to do.

Vodafone Malta just stepped up their equality game, increasing paternity leave to two weeks.

"Our purpose is a simple one," Vodafone Malta's Head of HR Dollsy Darmanin told Lovin Malta. "We want to offer more time for both parents to spend with their family. We recognise that extending the period of paternity leave provides more support for the employee's family and leads to higher engagement by supporting colleagues in key moments in their lives."

When it comes to paternity leave, the company already used to offer three days over and above the statutory entitlement of one day. However, since the beginning of this month, all male employees will benefit from two weeks of fully paid paternity leave in the event of the birth or adoption of a child.

This isn't the first time that Vodafone found themselves at the forefront of a number of family-friendly measures. Having 46% of its workforce being female, they already offered flexitime, mobile working, 17 weeks of fully-paid maternity leave, the option to return from maternity leave on a reduced basis whilst retaining pay of a 40-hour week for a period of six months, and four months of unpaid parental leave. All these initiatives earned Vodafone the Family-Friendly Measures Award at the Worker of the Year National Awards.

There's a case to be made for increasing paternity leave: reports such as that of the World Economic Forum have demonstrated that countries with the strongest economies are those that have found ways to close the gender pay gap and keep women tethered to the workforce after becoming mothers.

Meanwhile, a damning study by European company Honeypot has ranked Malta at fifth from the bottom of a list of 41 countries when it came to the percentage of women working in tech, with only 11.27% of the total ICT workforce being female.

Even an incremental change to paternity leave could lead to long-lasting benefits for businesses, families, children, women and, ultimately, the men themselves.

Here are four reasons why extending paternity leave is a good idea.

1. Better happier dads

Studies have shown that there's no hardwired maternal instinct which makes women better parents. Women who are the primary caregivers develop neural pathways in their brains that make them more responsive to emotional cues in their children – and these same pathways develop in fathers who are the primary caregiver.

The amount of time spent alone caring for a child is what enables men and women to become instinctively great parents. Paternity leave allows fathers to spend more time with their children – and fathers who take leave also get more satisfaction from the time spent with their children.

2. More equal sharing of domestic labour, including housework

While an increasing number of mothers are opting to return to work, many women see their careers suffer after becoming parents, in part because they still end up shouldering the bulk of the domestic load. Early paternal involvement may lead to continued engagement and involvement and to a more equal division of work between parents.

3. Greater productivity and less turnover on the workplace

Employees who feel supported in balancing their work and familial duties will suffer from less stress and burnout, and therefore are more motivated and productive.

This increases worker retention and reduces turnover, which helps businesses avoid the cost of having to hire and train employees to replace those who leave to care for new children.

4. Greater equality in the workplace

Forget quotas; the best way to make corporate culture friendlier towards women is to make dads take paternity leave.

When childcare responsibilities fall exclusively on the mother, the effect is to depress women's wages. Time out of the labour force deprives them of experience and promotions. When men shoulder more of the childcare burden, the effect is lessened.

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