

# U.S. at bottom of pack to help working moms

By Sheelah Kolhatkar, Bloomberg

Bloomberg News has just completed an investigation into the plight of working mothers in America, and it's not a pretty picture. Only 12 percent of those employed get paid time off to care for a new baby, according to U.S. Labor Department statistics. Only three states have programs offering paid family leave – California, since 2004; New Jersey, since 2009; and, as of last month, Rhode Island.

“Papua New Guinea is the only other nation that doesn't provide or require a paid maternity leave, according to information on 185 countries compiled by the United Nations' International Labor Organization,” Bloomberg reports. “It recommends 14 weeks off at a level no lower than two-thirds of previous earnings.”

Those who pay attention to the work-family debate have been aware of this for a long time. What is startling is how stubbornly it remains a non-issue in policy circles; even with increasing numbers of women now serving in Congress—20 in the Senate and 78 in the House, the highest ever—legislation that tries to address the current inadequate pregnancy and family policies is largely absent.

Currently, the Family and Medical Leave Act, which was passed in 1993, guarantees workers at companies with 50 or more employees 12 weeks of unpaid leave. The problem is that many people can't afford to take it. Larger companies tend to offer more generous benefits, which have been shown to correlate strongly with an increase in women returning to their jobs after having a child.

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