The transition to motherhood is a critical life event that has an important impact on women's subsequent employment careers. In order to yield a comprehensive picture of the sorting mechanisms that lead to the differentiation of women's employment careers after birth, we estimate a competing risks model for maternity leave in which the young mother can return to a job with her pre-delivery employer, take up a job with another employer, can deliver another child or start a period of unemployment among other things. We do so by using linked administrative individual labour market data from Germany for a period of three decades. By applying for the first time a competing risks quantile regression model, we obtain unprecedented insights how women's skills, the quality of the previous job match, firm level characteristics, labour market conditions and leave policies are related to the length of maternity duration.