

NAME

`chown`, `fchown`, `lchown`, `fchownat` – change ownership of a file

SYNOPSIS

```
#include <unistd.h>

int chown(const char *pathname, uid_t owner, gid_t group);
int fchown(int fd, uid_t owner, gid_t group);
int lchown(const char *pathname, uid_t owner, gid_t group);

#include <fcntl.h>      /* Definition of AT_* constants */
#include <unistd.h>

int fchownat(int dirfd, const char *pathname,
              uid_t owner, gid_t group, int flags);
```

Feature Test Macro Requirements for glibc (see [feature_test_macros\(7\)](#)):

```
fchown(), lchown():
    /* Since glibc 2.12: */ _POSIX_C_SOURCE >= 200809L || _XOPEN_SOURCE >= 500 || /* Glibc
    versions <= 2.19: */ _BSD_SOURCE

fchownat():
    Since glibc 2.10:
        _POSIX_C_SOURCE >= 200809L
    Before glibc 2.10:
        _ATFILE_SOURCE
```

DESCRIPTION

These system calls change the owner and group of a file. The `chown()`, `fchown()`, and `lchown()` system calls differ only in how the file is specified:

- * `chown()` changes the ownership of the file specified by *pathname*, which is dereferenced if it is a symbolic link.
- * `fchown()` changes the ownership of the file referred to by the open file descriptor *fd*.
- * `lchown()` is like `chown()`, but does not dereference symbolic links.

Only a privileged process (Linux: one with the `CAP_CHOWN` capability) may change the owner of a file. The owner of a file may change the group of the file to any group of which that owner is a member. A privileged process (Linux: with `CAP_CHOWN`) may change the group arbitrarily.

If the *owner* or *group* is specified as `-1`, then that ID is not changed.

When the owner or group of an executable file is changed by an unprivileged user, the `S_ISUID` and `S_ISGID` mode bits are cleared. POSIX does not specify whether this also should happen when root does the `chown()`; the Linux behavior depends on the kernel version, and since Linux 2.2.13, root is treated like other users. In case of a non-group-executable file (i.e., one for which the `S_IXGRP` bit is not set) the `S_ISGID` bit indicates mandatory locking, and is not cleared by a `chown()`.

When the owner or group of an executable file is changed (by any user), all capability sets for the file are cleared.

fchownat()

The `fchownat()` system call operates in exactly the same way as `chown()`, except for the differences described here.

If the *pathname* given in *pathname* is relative, then it is interpreted relative to the directory referred to by the file descriptor *dirfd* (rather than relative to the current working directory of the calling process, as is done by `chown()` for a relative *pathname*).

If *pathname* is relative and *dirfd* is the special value `AT_FDCWD`, then *pathname* is interpreted relative to the current working directory of the calling process (like `chown()`).

If *pathname* is absolute, then *dirfd* is ignored.

The *flags* argument is a bit mask created by ORing together 0 or more of the following values;

AT_EMPTY_PATH (since Linux 2.6.39)

If *pathname* is an empty string, operate on the file referred to by *dirfd* (which may have been obtained using the [open\(2\)](#) **O_PATH** flag). In this case, *dirfd* can refer to any type of file, not just a directory. If *dirfd* is **AT_FDCWD**, the call operates on the current working directory. This flag is Linux-specific; define **_GNU_SOURCE** to obtain its definition.

AT_SYMLINK_NOFOLLOW

If *pathname* is a symbolic link, do not dereference it: instead operate on the link itself, like **lchown()**. (By default, **fchownat()** dereferences symbolic links, like **chown()**.)

See [openat\(2\)](#) for an explanation of the need for **fchownat()**.

RETURN VALUE

On success, zero is returned. On error, -1 is returned, and *errno* is set appropriately.

ERRORS

Depending on the filesystem, errors other than those listed below can be returned.

The more general errors for **chown()** are listed below.

EACCES

Search permission is denied on a component of the path prefix. (See also [path_resolution\(7\)](#).)

EFAULT

pathname points outside your accessible address space.

ELOOP

Too many symbolic links were encountered in resolving *pathname*.

ENAMETOOLONG

pathname is too long.

ENOENT

The file does not exist.

ENOMEM

Insufficient kernel memory was available.

ENOTDIR

A component of the path prefix is not a directory.

EPERM

The calling process did not have the required permissions (see above) to change owner and/or group.

EPERM

The file is marked immutable or append-only. (See [ioctl_iflags\(2\)](#).)

EROFS

The named file resides on a read-only filesystem.

The general errors for **fchown()** are listed below:

EBADF

fd is not a valid open file descriptor.

EIO

A low-level I/O error occurred while modifying the inode.

ENOENT

See above.

EPERM

See above.

EROFS

See above.

The same errors that occur for **chown()** can also occur for **fchownat()**. The following additional errors can occur for **fchownat()**:

EBADF

dirfd is not a valid file descriptor.

EINVAL

Invalid flag specified in *flags*.

ENOTDIR

pathname is relative and *dirfd* is a file descriptor referring to a file other than a directory.

VERSIONS

fchownat() was added to Linux in kernel 2.6.16; library support was added to glibc in version 2.4.

CONFORMING TO

chown(), **fchown()**, **lchown()**: 4.4BSD, SVr4, POSIX.1-2001, POSIX.1-2008.

The 4.4BSD version can be used only by the superuser (that is, ordinary users cannot give away files).

fchownat(): POSIX.1-2008.

NOTES**Ownership of new files**

When a new file is created (by, for example, [open\(2\)](#) or [mkdir\(2\)](#)), its owner is made the same as the filesystem user ID of the creating process. The group of the file depends on a range of factors, including the type of filesystem, the options used to mount the filesystem, and whether or not the set-group-ID mode bit is enabled on the parent directory. If the filesystem supports the **-o grpuid** (or, synonymously **-o bsdgroups**) and **-o nogrpuid** (or, synonymously **-o sysvgroups**) [mount\(8\)](#) options, then the rules are as follows:

- * If the filesystem is mounted with **-o grpuid**, then the group of a new file is made the same as that of the parent directory.
- * If the filesystem is mounted with **-o nogrpuid** and the set-group-ID bit is disabled on the parent directory, then the group of a new file is made the same as the process's filesystem GID.
- * If the filesystem is mounted with **-o nogrpuid** and the set-group-ID bit is enabled on the parent directory, then the group of a new file is made the same as that of the parent directory.

As at Linux 4.12, the **-o grpuid** and **-o nogrpuid** mount options are supported by ext2, ext3, ext4, and XFS. Filesystems that don't support these mount options follow the **-o nogrpuid** rules.

Glibc notes

On older kernels where **fchownat()** is unavailable, the glibc wrapper function falls back to the use of **chown()** and **lchown()**. When *pathname* is a relative pathname, glibc constructs a pathname based on the symbolic link in */proc/self/ffd* that corresponds to the *dirfd* argument.

NFS

The **chown()** semantics are deliberately violated on NFS filesystems which have UID mapping enabled. Additionally, the semantics of all system calls which access the file contents are violated, because **chown()** may cause immediate access revocation on already open files. Client side caching may lead to a delay between the time where ownership have been changed to allow access for a user and the time where the file can actually be accessed by the user on other clients.

Historical details

The original Linux **chown()**, **fchown()**, and **lchown()** system calls supported only 16-bit user and group IDs. Subsequently, Linux 2.4 added **chown32()**, **fchown32()**, and **lchown32()**, supporting 32-bit IDs. The glibc **chown()**, **fchown()**, and **lchown()** wrapper functions transparently deal with the variations across kernel versions.

In versions of Linux prior to 2.1.81 (and distinct from 2.1.46), **chown()** did not follow symbolic links. Since Linux 2.1.81, **chown()** does follow symbolic links, and there is a new system call **lchown()** that does

not follow symbolic links. Since Linux 2.1.86, this new call (that has the same semantics as the old `chown()`) has got the same syscall number, and `chown()` got the newly introduced number.

EXAMPLE

The following program changes the ownership of the file named in its second command-line argument to the value specified in its first command-line argument. The new owner can be specified either as a numeric user ID, or as a username (which is converted to a user ID by using [getpwnam\(3\)](#) to perform a lookup in the system password file).

Program source

```
#include <pwd.h>
#include <stdio.h>
#include <stdlib.h>
#include <unistd.h>

int
main(int argc, char *argv[])
{
    uid_t uid;
    struct passwd *pwd;
    char *endptr;

    if (argc != 3 || argv[1][0] == '\\0') {
        fprintf(stderr, "%s <owner> <file>\n", argv[0]);
        exit(EXIT_FAILURE);
    }

    uid = strtol(argv[1], &endptr, 10); /* Allow a numeric string */
    if (*endptr != '\\0') { /* Was not pure numeric string */
        pwd = getpwnam(argv[1]); /* Try getting UID for username */
        if (pwd == NULL) {
            perror("getpwnam");
            exit(EXIT_FAILURE);
        }
        uid = pwd->pw_uid;
    }

    if (chown(argv[2], uid, -1) == -1) {
        perror("chown");
        exit(EXIT_FAILURE);
    }

    exit(EXIT_SUCCESS);
}
```

SEE ALSO

[chgrp\(1\)](#), [chown\(1\)](#), [chmod\(2\)](#), [flock\(2\)](#), [path_resolution\(7\)](#), [symlink\(7\)](#)

COLOPHON

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