

Relationship between leave and ECEC entitlements: April 2023

Most discussions of policy frameworks to support employed parents with young children highlight two key policies: Parental leave and early childhood education and care (ECEC). The table below looks at the relationship between these two policy areas, and, in particular, at whether they are coordinated in the sense that an entitlement to leave leads immediately into, or coincides with, an entitlement to ECEC.

Great variations exist between countries in both leave policies and ECEC. The table shows two dimensions of variation for ECEC: attendance rates at formal services and entitlement to ECEC. Attendance rates are taken from the OECD Family Database P3.2; for more information, see note on source at end of the table below. **Attendance rates for children under three years of age** vary from less than 15 per cent (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Mexico, Poland, Slovak Republic and Türkiye), to over 50 per cent (Belgium, Denmark, France, Iceland, Israel, Korea, Luxembourg, Netherlands, and Norway), with a median rate among the 42 countries yielding data of 33 per cent. **Attendance rates for children over three years of age** are uniformly much higher, but vary from under 70 per cent (Croatia, South Africa, Switzerland, Turkey and the US) to 95 per cent and over (Belgium, Denmark, France, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Korea, Norway, Spain and the UK), with a median rate among the 44 countries for which there is information of 90 per cent. What these figures do not reveal is the opening hours of services and how far they are suited to the needs of working parents: indeed, in many cases they will not be.

Thirty-two countries have an **entitlement to an ECEC service**. In 11 countries (Argentina, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Colombia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, France, Hungary, Luxembourg and Mexico), the entitlement includes a period of *compulsory* attendance at an ECEC service, usually for children aged four years and over, but from three years in France and Hungary; in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Mexico, there is insufficient provision to implement this policy. In 16 countries the entitlement is only from three years of age or later. A further eight countries have a clear entitlement before three years of age: at between two and three years in Belgium and Ireland, and at 12 months or younger or at the end of Parental leave in seven countries: Denmark, Finland, Luxembourg, Malta, Norway, Slovenia, and Sweden, with full-time places available in all cases except Luxembourg

(whose part-time entitlement is part of a multilingual education programme). In another seven countries – Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Mexico, Romania, and Russia – there is a legal entitlement for the youngest age group, but it is reported that a shortage of places means that, to varying degrees, the entitlement is not fully operational until a later age; in the case an eighth country, Portugal, a recent reduction of the entitlement from four to three years cannot yet be fully met. It is only in six countries with an operational entitlement for the youngest age group that there is no gap between the end of well-paid leave and the start of an ECEC entitlement: Denmark, Finland, Malta, Norway, Slovenia, and Sweden. Elsewhere, there are substantial gaps, which if combined with countries that have no ECEC entitlement, emphasises the extensive lack of coordination between these two policy areas.

	Attendance rates at formal ECEC services (2020)		Child's age (months) at:			Gap between (months)	
	0-2 years	3-5 years	end of leave(a)	end of well-paid leave(b)⁷⁶	start of ECEC entitlement(c)	(c)-(a)	(c)-(b)
Argentina	5% (2018)	77% (2017)	8 to 8.3	2 to 2.3	■ 4 years:OB	40	46
Australia	45%	82%	24	✘	✘	No ECEC entitlement	
Austria	20%	90%	24	14	■ 5 years:PT & OB	36	46
Belgium	58%	99% (2019)	12	4	■ 2½ years	18	26

⁷⁶ Where bonus months given if leave shared, 'end of well-paid leave' includes these months. Both (a) and (b) give child's age if leave taken in one continuous period and full-time.

	Attendance rates at formal ECEC services (2020)		Child's age (months) at:			Gap between (months)	
	0-2 years	3-5 years	end of leave(a)	end of well-paid leave(b) ⁷⁶	start of ECEC entitlement(c)	(c)-(a)	(c)-(b)
Bosnia and Herzegovina	No information		11	0	■5 years:OB	No ECEC entitlement	
Brazil	21%	85% (2018)	4.2 to 6.5	4.2 to 6.5	✗	No ECEC entitlement	
Bulgaria	15%	78%	36	12	■4 years OB	12	36
Canada	No information		19-22	✗	✗	No ECEC entitlement	
Québec	No information		12.8	11.2	✗	No ECEC entitlement	
Chile	20%	78%	5.6	5.6	✗	No ECEC entitlement	
China	No information		2.8 ⁷⁷	2.8	■3 years	33.2	33.2
Colombia	30%	84%	4.0	4.0	■5 years:OB	56	56
Croatia	20%	72%	36	6	✗	No ECEC entitlement	

⁷⁷ China: 2.8 months is the national minimum entitlement; many provinces offer longer periods of leave, most frequently up to 4.7 months.

	Attendance rates at formal ECEC services (2020)		Child's age (months) at:			Gap between (months)	
	0-2 years	3-5 years	end of leave(a)	end of well-paid leave(b) ⁷⁶	start of ECEC entitlement(c)	(c)-(a)	(c)-(b)
Cyprus	22%	90%	6	5.3	■4 years 8 mths:OB	50	50.7
Czech Republic	6%	86%	36	24	■3 years:OB from 5	No gap	12
Denmark	55%	98%	11.2	11.2	■■6 months	No gap	No gap
Estonia	26%	91%	36	19	■■18 months	No gap	?No gap
Finland	37%	88%	36	12.4	■■9 months	No gap	No gap
France	58%	100%	36	3.7	■3 years:OB	No gap	2.2
Germany	39%	94%	36	14	?■■1 year ⁷⁸	?No gap	?No gap
Greece	23%	69% (2019)	14 to 72	6 to 12	■4 years PT	34 to no gap	36 to 42
Hungary	12%	93%	36	24	?■■birth;OB from 4	?No gap	?No gap
Iceland	61% (2018)	96%	20	12	×	No ECEC entitlement	

⁷⁸ Germany: there is an entitlement to ECEC from 12 months of age, but the entitlement does not specify hours per day or per week; many services in Western Germany still offer only part-time hours, though full-time opening has remained the norm in Eastern Germany.

	Attendance rates at formal ECEC services (2020)		Child's age (months) at:			Gap between (months)	
	0-2 years	3-5 years	end of leave(a)	end of well-paid leave(b) ⁷⁶	start of ECEC entitlement(c)	(c)-(a)	(c)-(b)
Ireland	36%	100%	24.7	×	■ 32 months PT	7.3	×
Israel	57%	100%	12	3.5	×	No ECEC entitlement	
Italy	26%	95%	16	5	×	No ECEC entitlement	
Japan	41% (2019)	95%	14	14	×	No ECEC entitlement	
Korea	63%	94%	27	27	× ⁷⁹	No ECEC entitlement	
Latvia	27%	93%	37.9	1.9	■ 19 months	No gap	?15.1
Lithuania	30%	90%	36	12	×	No ECEC entitlement	
Luxembourg ⁸⁰	63%	90%	14.8	14.8	? ■ 1 year PT:OB from 4	?No gap	?No gap
Malta	NI	91%	12 to 75.3	3.3	■ 3 months ⁸¹	No gap	No gap

⁷⁹ Korea: there is no entitlement, but because of a low birth rate, there are sufficient ECEC places to meet demand.

⁸⁰ Luxembourg: based on full-time employed parents taking the option of 4 months full-time leave. The maximum flat-rate payment is high and has, exceptionally, been counted as well-paid leave. See also Section 2 of country note for limitations on entitlement.

⁸¹ Malta: entitlement for children with parents in full-time employment or education.

	Attendance rates at formal ECEC services (2020)		Child's age (months) at:			Gap between (months)	
	0-2 years	3-5 years	end of leave(a)	end of well-paid leave(b) ⁷⁶	start of ECEC entitlement(c)	(c)-(a)	(c)-(b)
Mexico	5%	80%	2.3	2.3	? ■■ birth:OB	?No gap	?No gap
Netherlands	69%	92%	16	8.1	■4 years PT	32	39.9
New Zealand	46%	89%	12	×	×	No ECEC entitlement	
Norway	58%	97%	37	13	■■12 months	No gap	No gap
Poland	13%	88%	50	14	■3 years	No gap	22
Portugal	47%	92% (2019)	36	6	■3 years	12	42
Romania	8%	78%	24	24	? ■■ birth	?No gap	?No gap
Russian Federation	20% (2018)	83% (2017)	36	2.3	? ■■2 months ⁸²	?No gap	?No gap
Serbia	No information		36	11.2	×	No ECEC entitlement	
Slovakia	4%	78%	36	13	■5 years	48	24
Slovenia	46%	93%	13.2	13.2	■■end Par. leave	No gap	No gap

⁸² There is no information available to confirm whether the entitlement to an ECEC place from two months of age can be met.

	Attendance rates at formal ECEC services (2020)		Child's age (months) at:			Gap between (months)	
	0-2 years	3-5 years	end of leave(a)	end of well-paid leave(b) ⁷⁶	start of ECEC entitlement(c)	(c)-(a)	(c)-(b)
South Africa	No information		4	×	×	No ECEC entitlement	
Spain	41%	97%	36	5.5	■3 years	No gap	30.5
Sweden	48%	95%	18	13	■12 months	No gap	No gap
Switzerland	37%	50%	3.7	3.7	×	No ECEC entitlement	
Türkiye	<1%	42%	9	3	×	No ECEC entitlement	
U. Kingdom	45% (2018)	100%	13.9	1.4	■3 years	22.1	34.6
USA	NI	66% (2018)	×	×	×	No ECEC entitlement	
Uruguay	No information		2.8	2.8	■4 years	45.2	45.2
OECD average	36%	87%					

Source: *Enrolment rates in early childhood education and care services, 0- to 2-year-olds; and Enrolment rates in early childhood education and care services and primary education, 3- to 5-year-olds*: OECD Family Database, available at: <http://www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm>.

OECD notes that

Data on the use of early childhood education and care services for very young children (0- to 2-year-olds) come from several sources. For most countries, the data on enrolment...come from OECD Education at a Glance 2020, which itself collects data from national authorities through the OECD INES Ad-hoc Survey on Early Childhood Education and Care...Data [for] Belgium, the Czech Republic, France, Hungary, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, the Slovak Republic, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Malta and Romania are OECD estimates based on information European Union's Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) survey...

Data on the use of early childhood education and care and primary education for 3- to 5-year-olds come in all cases from the joint UNESCO-OECD-EUROSTAT (UOE) data collection programme, either via OECD Education at a Glance 2020 or the Eurostat database. (https://www.oecd.org/els/soc/PF3_2_Enrolment_childcare_preschool.pdf, pp.6,7)

Key:

Well-paid leave: earnings-related payment at 66 per cent of earnings or above, an indicator used by the European Commission in monitoring member states' progress in meeting Employment Guidelines (European Commission (2010), *Indicators for monitoring the Employment Guidelines including indicators for additional employment analysis, 2010 compendium*, Table 18.M3. Available at:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=4093&langId=en>)

✕: no well-paid leave or no entitlement to ECEC; ■: entitlement, but only from three years of age or older; ■■: entitlement from below 3 years of age. PT: entitlement is for 20 hours per week or less. OB: attendance is obligatory.

■? or ■■? indicates the existence of an entitlement that cannot be met due to shortage of places. N.B., in these cases, data on gaps appears in italics preceded by '?' ('*no gap*') and refers to the entitlement on paper, and not the actual availability of services.