

Finland¹

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For comparisons with other countries in this review on leave provision and early childhood education and care services, please see the [cross-country tables](#) at the front of the review (also available individually on the [Leave Network website](#)). To contact authors of country notes, see the [members page](#) on the Leave Network website.

1. Current leave and other employment-related policies to support parents

Note on terminology: a new leave scheme came into effect in August 2022 and major changes were introduced in leave policy. 'Maternity leave' was replaced with 'Pregnancy leave' and 'Paternity leave' was abolished as Parental leave was divided evenly between parents.

a. Pregnancy leave (formerly Maternity leave, see note on terminology) (raskausvapaa/graviditetsledighe²) (responsibility of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the Ministry of Labour)

Length of leave (before and after birth)

- Forty working days (for all types of leave, one calendar week consists of six working days). Leave can start 30 days before and no later than 14 days before the estimated due date.
- It is obligatory to take leave for the last two weeks before the due date and two weeks after the birth.

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² Names of the different types of leave are given in Finnish and Swedish. Finland is a bilingual country with a Swedish-speaking minority.

Payment and funding

- Ninety per cent of the individual's annual earnings between €10,665 and €64,048, with a lower percentage (32.5 per cent) for earnings above this level. Parents not employed and those whose annual earnings are less than €10,665 get a minimum flat-rate allowance of €31.99 per working day (€800 per month). In 2022, 15 per cent of pregnant/birthing parents received the minimum allowance, with no increase from 2021.
- Pregnancy allowance is not paid for days when the pregnant/birthing parent is working, but the days cannot be saved and used later. Working on Sundays does not affect the benefit.
- A pregnant parent can receive the pregnancy allowance when studying during pregnancy. Receiving study grant payments does not prevent payment of the pregnancy allowance.
- If an employer pays a salary to the parent during Pregnancy leave on the basis of collective agreements, the pregnancy allowance is paid to the employer.
- Payments are taxed.
- Pregnancy leave accumulates the beneficiary's pension based on 121 per cent of the yearly earnings from which the leave benefit is calculated (2023). These earnings accumulate the pension at 1.5 per cent per year. For an unemployed beneficiary or a student, the pension is accumulated as if the earnings were €815.78 a month.
- Earnings-related benefits are funded by the sickness insurance scheme, financed by contributions from employers (in 2023, 48 per cent of the total cost), contributions from employees (in 2023, 41 per cent of the total cost), and the remaining 11 per cent is funded by the state. In 2023, employers pay 1.58 per cent of their total salary bill and employees pay 1.41 per cent of their taxable earnings higher than €15,663: these percentages are subject to annual change in the state budget. The minimum flat-rate allowances and 5 per cent of the benefit expenditure are funded from state taxation.

Flexibility in use

- None. Pregnancy allowance days must be taken consecutively and cannot be postponed until later.

Eligibility (e.g., related to employment or family circumstances)

- Entitlements are based on being insured under the Finnish Health Insurance Act.
- The basic formula is that a person entitled to family benefits is also entitled to leave.
- A pregnant/birthing parent is entitled to pregnancy allowance after the pregnancy has lasted 154 days.
- Benefits are based on annual income in the preceding 12 months regardless of length of service. In certain situations (for example, the parent has recently returned to work after Parental or Child Home Care leave), the allowance can be calculated on the basis of the last three months of the 12-month period. If the estimated due date of the new baby is before the previous child turns three years old, parental allowance can be based on the

same annual or earned income that was used to calculate the allowance for the previously born child.

Variation in leave due to child or family reasons (e.g., multiple or premature births; poor health or disability of child or parent; lone parent); or delegation of leave to person other than the parent

- In the case of premature birth, if the baby is born earlier than 30 days before the due date, the birthing parent is entitled to benefit and leave from the next day for the following 40 days.
- In case of miscarriage, if the pregnancy has lasted at least 154 days the parent who was pregnant can get pregnancy allowance for 40 days and parental allowance for 65 days if not working.
- Pregnancy allowance is paid only to the pregnant/birthing parent, it cannot be transferred to the other parent even if the beneficiary falls ill during pregnancy leave. If the beneficiary dies or is unable to care for the child, the other parent is entitled to parental benefit.

Additional note (e.g., frequent supplement of state benefit by collective agreements; employer exclusions or right to postpone)

- After the parental leave reform in 2022, many collective agreements were negotiated in 2023 and now include full pay during pregnancy leave and part of parental leave for both parents. There is not yet information of the coverage. During periods of full pay, the daily benefit is paid to the employer. However, as shown in the 2020 Labour Force Survey, due to the high prevalence of fixed-term contracts for women of child-bearing age, a high proportion of women giving birth do not have an effective employment contract; so only 42 per cent of women on leave (called Maternity leave in the old system) received pay from the employer. In addition, according to a study by Kela on Family Leave Compensation paid to employers, around 2020 in only a half of the started leaves (called Maternity leave in the old system) was the benefit paid to the employer (on the basis of the employer paying full wage for the employee during leave)³.

b. Paternity leave (*isyysvapaa/faderskapsledighet*)

No statutory entitlement. But see Note on terminology and section 1c on Parental leave.

³ Miettinen A, Mustonen J, Räsänen T. (2022) Perhevapaakorvauksen käyttöönotto. Tuloksia selvityshankkeesta. Kela Työpapereita 167/2022. [Report on Family leave compensation for employers]

c. Parental leave (*vanhempainvapaa/föräldraledighet*) (responsibility of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the Ministry of Labour)

Length of leave

- One hundred and sixty working days per parent.
- Leave is an individual entitlement, part of which (63 days) is transferable to the other parent or to a partner who is not the child's parent or to the partner of the child's other parent or to another person who is the child's legal guardian.

Payment and funding

- Ninety per cent of earnings to both parents for the first 16 Parental leave days. For the remaining period, benefit is paid at 70 per cent of the individual's annual earnings between €13,713 and €41,629, with a lower percentage for earnings above this level (40 per cent up to €64,048 and 25 per cent above this). Those whose annual earnings are less than €13,713 before the birth get the minimum flat-rate allowance (€31.99 per weekday, appr. €800 per month).
- Parents are permitted to work while on Parental leave, but they receive only the minimum flat-rate allowance for the days they work. Working on Sundays does not affect the benefit.
- Payments are taxed.
- Pension is the same as for Pregnancy leave.
- Funding is the same as for Pregnancy leave.

Flexibility in use

- The birthing parent can take Parental leave after the end of Pregnancy leave. The baby's other parent can take Parental leave from the day the baby is born.
- Parents can get parental allowance at the same time for a maximum of 18 days.
- Parental allowance can be used flexibly at the times of one's preference, in as many and as short parts (minimum one day) as one wishes until the child turns two. However, employed parents can take Parental leave in four parts of minimum duration 12 days per calendar year, and if the employer agrees, in more periods or even as individual days.
- Parental allowance is not paid for days when one is working more than five hours. As parental allowance is only paid for weekdays (Monday to Saturday) one can, however, work on Sundays or midweek holidays.
- Leave can be taken part-time if the daily working time is no more than five hours per day. One day of partial Parental leave decreases the leave by half a day. Partial parental allowance is half of what the allowance is for full-time leave. To get the partial Parental leave, employed parents must make an agreement with their employer regarding part-time work.
- Parents can take partial Parental leave for the same period of time.

Eligibility (e.g., related to employment or family circumstances)

- Entitlement is based on being insured under the Finnish Health Insurance Act, just as it is for Pregnancy leave.
- One can get parental allowance if one is the biological or adoptive parent, and the legal guardian of a child. Same-sex couples have the same leave rights as different-sex couples.
- Both parents are entitled to Parental benefit even if the parents do not live together, provided that the parent is not working and is responsible for childcare.
- One can get Parental benefit while studying during Parental leave, as long as one is able to take care of the child.

Variation in leave due to child or family reasons (e.g., multiple or premature births; poor health or disability of child or parent; lone parent); or delegation of leave to person other than the parent

- In the case of multiple births, the length of leave is extended by 84 days for each additional child. Parental leave is divided equally between both parents: in the case of twins, both parents get 202 days and in the case of triplets for 244 days of Parental leave. A parent of twins can transfer 105 days and a parent of triplets 147 days to the other parent.
- In multiple-birth families, in addition to the usual 18 days, 90 days can be taken out at the same time for the second and each additional child.
- If, due to premature birth, the Pregnancy leave has started earlier than 30 days before the expected date of delivery, Parental leave is extended by as many days. Both parents can use half of these additional days or transfer some or all of them to another person.
- If the pregnant/birthing parent dies and the other parent does not care for the child, the Parental benefit can be paid to another person responsible for the care of the child.
- Parental allowance cannot be used for two different children at the same time. Parents can choose for which child they apply for the benefit. Otherwise, there are no restrictions concerning the use of parental allowances payable on the basis of different children.
- Single parents can use all 320 days of Parental leave if the other parent has not been confirmed, the other parent is not the child's legal guardian, the other parent is not insured under the Finnish Health Insurance Act or the other parent is, due to illness or injury, unable to take care of the child and cannot therefore be paid parental allowance. Of the 320 days, 126 days can be transferred to another person.

d. Childcare leave or career breaks

- Childcare leave, referred to as 'Home-care leave' (*hoitovapaa/ vårdledighet*) can be taken after 160 Parental benefit days have been used, until a child's third birthday. While taking leave, a parent can receive Child home care allowance (*kotihoidon tuki/hemvårdsstöd*).

- Childcare leave can be taken in two parts, the minimum length being one month. Parents can alternate the use of Child home care allowance and Parental leave in the case that one parent (usually the father) uses their Parental leave days later and not right after the other parent (usually the mother) has used their quota days.
- The Child home care allowance can be paid to any parent – whether or not they are on Childcare leave from their job – as long as their child is not in a childcare service provided or funded by the local authority.
- The Child home care allowance consists of a basic payment of €377.68 per month, with an additional €113.07 for every other child under three years of age and €72.66 for every other pre-school child over three years of age, plus a means-tested supplement (up to €202.12 per month).
- The average Home-care allowance per family in 2021 was €406 per month. Home-care allowance is financed from municipal taxation with a state subsidy of 25 per cent of the costs.
- In 2022, 21 per cent of municipalities paid a municipal supplement to the Child home care allowance, most commonly in big municipalities. These supplements averaged €169 per month per child, with a range from €50 to €350.⁴ The municipalities usually impose specific conditions on paying the supplement, most frequently that all children in the family below school age have to be taken care of at home. Paying a municipal supplement has become less common: in 2014, 30 per cent of municipalities offered it.
- If a child under school age is taken care of in a private day care centre, by a private nanny, or another person employed by the family and accepted by the local authority, the family is entitled to Private day care allowance (*yksityisen hoidon tuki/privatvårdsstöd*), which is €192.28 per month per child. An addition of up to €265.85 per month per child can be paid, based on the size and income of the family. In 2022, 37 per cent of municipalities paid a municipal supplement to the private day care allowance, the average varying between €221 to €412 in full-time care depending on the age of the child and the type of ECEC. The local authorities usually impose specific conditions on paying the supplement, most frequently related to the hours of private day care. In 2022, 39 per cent of municipalities offered a service voucher for private day care services, the average varying between €444 to €1,115 (depending on the type of ECEC, family income, and child's age): offering vouchers has grown more popular among the municipalities over the years.⁴
- Child home care allowance and municipal supplement are taxable income.
- During Childcare leave, pension is accumulated as if the earnings were €815.78 per month. These earnings accumulate the pension at a rate of 1.5 per cent per year.

e. Other types of leave and flexible working

⁴ Lahtinen, J. and Svartsjö, M. (2022) Kotihoidon tuen ja yksityisen hoidon tuen kuntalisät ja palveluseteli [Municipal supplements of home care allowance and private care allowance and service vouchers]. Helsinki: Kuntaliitto.

Parental leave for adoptive parents and pay

- Adoptive parents of a child (under 18 years of age) are eligible for Parental leave of 320 working days. Each parent is entitled to 160 days of leave starting from the day the child comes to their care, up until two years have elapsed from that date.
- Entitlements are based on being insured under the Finnish Health Insurance Act.
- Adoptive parents in both same- and opposite-sex couples are entitled to Parental leave allowance.
- A parent who adopts and takes care of a child alone is entitled to all 320 days of Parental leave the same way as single parents having biological children.
- An adoptive parent can receive parental benefit also during studies as long as one is able to take care of the child.
- Adoptive parents are entitled to Child home care allowance for a period which ends two years after the Parental leave period started, even if the child is older than three years of age (but below school-age).
- A parent who adopts a child younger than 12 months of age and is married to, and lives with, the parent of the child (intra-family adoption) is entitled to the same Parental benefit as parents having biological children when their parentage has been confirmed.

Time off for the care of dependants

- Parents of children under ten years of age can take up to four days' leave when a child falls ill (temporary childcare leave, *tilapäinen hoitovapaa/tillfällig vårdledighet*). There are no limits on how often parents can take leave for this purpose during the course of a year. Payment is dependent on collective agreements but is often at full earnings for three or four days at a time. A parent with joint custody who does not live with a child is entitled to the leave.
- If an employee needs to be absent from work in order to care for a family member or other close person, the employer must try to organise work so that the employee can be absent for a fixed time period. The employer and the employee agree on the length of leave and other arrangements. Return to work must be agreed upon between the employer and the employee prior to the leave commencing. If an agreement cannot be reached, the employee can, with reasonable grounds, interrupt the leave by announcing this to the employer one month before their return at the latest. The employee must account for the grounds of the absence and for interrupting it, if the employer requests it. No benefit or wage is paid during this leave.

Special care allowance

- An allowance for a parent who is not able to work on the following grounds:
 - because they must engage in the hospital care of a child under the age of seven, a severely ill child between the ages of seven and 15, or in the rehabilitation of a child under the age of 16.
 - because they provide home care for a severely ill child under the age of 16, when home care is in connection to hospital care.

- because they must be available during the school or day care assessment of a severely ill child.
- Both biological and adoptive parents are entitled to the allowance. It can also be granted to employees who care for the child of their spouse. During hospital care or rehabilitation, the allowance can be paid to both parents if the child's physician considers the participation of both parents to be necessary. The allowance is not paid to parents who receive parental, sickness, or unemployment benefit.
- The payment is equal to 70 per cent of annual earnings between €13,713 and €41,629, with a lower percentage (40 per cent for annual earnings up to €64,048, and 25 per cent above this) for earnings above this level. Employees whose annual earnings are less than €13,713 get a minimum flat-rate allowance of €31.99 per working day (€800 per month). The allowance is paid for at maximum for 60 working days for hospital care or rehabilitation of the same illness and for 60 working days for home care. Receiving the allowance does not entitle the beneficiary to a leave of absence from work.

Specific provision for (breast)feeding

- None. Breastfeeding leave is not considered necessary, as Parental leave lasts until the child is ten to thirteen months old.

Flexible working

- Parents of children under two years of age can take Parental leave flexibly in several parts (employed parents can take their leave in max four parts per calendar year; it is possible to take the leave in more than four parts if agreed by the parent's employer). They can also take part-time leave and receive Partial Parental Allowance if they work for no more than five hours per day (see section 1c). The employer has to justify a refusal for part-time leave in writing.
- Parents can work reduced working hours (Partial Childcare leave, *osittainen hoitovapaa/partiell vårdledighet*) from the end of Parental leave until the end of the child's second year at school. The employee is entitled to Partial Childcare leave if they have been working for the same employer for at least six months during the past 12 months. The employee should negotiate the reduction in hours with the employer, and the employer can only refuse if the reduced working hours would lead to serious disadvantages for the organisation – in which case, working hours must be a maximum of 30 hours per week. Both parents can take Partial Childcare leave during the same period but cannot take leave during the same hours of the day.
- Parents of children under three years of age are entitled to Flexible care allowance (*joustava hoitoraha/flexibel vårdpenning*) if, after taking Parental leave, they work less than 80 per cent of the normal full-time hours in their respective field. The Flexible Care allowance is €179.49 per month if the weekly working hours are no more than 30 hours, or 80 per cent of the normal full-time hours, and €269.24 per month if the weekly working hours are no more than 22.5 hours, or 60 per cent of the normal full-time hours. Flexible care allowance can be paid to both parents at the same time if they take care of the child during different hours of the day or different days of the week. Parents can receive Flexible care allowance even if the child

attends municipal ECEC. Flexible care allowance is paid for only one child, even if the family has more than one child entitled to the allowance. The allowance is not paid for a leave period shorter than one month.

- Employees taking Partial Childcare leave during the child's first and second year at school are entitled to Partial care allowance (*osittainen hoitoraha/partiell vårdpenning*) of €108.15 per month. Partial care allowance is paid for only one child, even if the family has more than one child entitled to the allowance. The allowance is not paid for a leave period shorter than one month.

Compensation for employers for indirect leave costs

- Employers are able to claim compensation for indirect leave costs such as finding and training a replacement for a female employee taking Maternity/Pregnancy leave. The compensation is available to employers who pay full-time employees a salary during at least one month of their leave. A prerequisite for family leave compensation is that the employee must have at least three months' service before the leave or, in the case of an adoptive parent, before the Parental leave, and that the employment must last at least one year. The amount of the lump-sum compensation is €2,500. In 2022, the Social Insurance Institution (Kela) paid compensation to over 4,100 employers for over 20,000 parents⁵; this is less than half of the parents taking Maternity/Pregnancy allowance in 2022.

2. Relationship between leave policy and early childhood education and care policy

The maximum period of paid post-natal leave is 36 months (including low paid Home-care leave). The maximum period of highly paid leave is 13.8 months after birth. As there is an entitlement to Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) from the month the child turns nine months old, there is no gap between the end of well-paid leave and an ECEC entitlement.

If a parent takes part of her/his Parental leave days after the child has started in ECEC, the child is entitled to return to the same daycare place if the leave is no longer than 13 weeks.

For ECEC attendance levels, see 'relationship between leave and ECEC entitlements' on the [cross-country comparisons](#) page.

⁵ Social Insurance Institution, <https://tietotarjotin.kela.fi/en/statistical-data/> parental allowances.

3. Changes in policy since April 2022 (including proposals currently under discussion)

The Parental leave reform took effect from 1 August 2022 (for the description of the old leave scheme, see the Annual Report 2022). The main changes to the leave scheme include introducing a gender-neutral terminology, symmetrical allocation of leave quotas for each parent with a possibility to transfer part of the quota to the other parent, a longer parental leave in total and increased flexibility in use.

As the other childcare allowances (Child home care allowance, Private day care allowance, Flexible care allowance and Partial care allowance) were not changed in the reform, there is ongoing discussion about the need of a further reform. A reform of the child care allowances has been proposed e.g. by a working group on social security and services for children and families under the Social Security Committee⁶.

4. Uptake of leave

Due to the leave reform in 2022 being so recent, the following information on uptake is mainly based on the previous leave scheme. Therefore, in this section the old leave terminology is used, in which leave users are called 'mothers' and 'fathers'. However, in statistics and research the gender and the relationship to the child of the users of fathers' leave entitlements is not specified.

a. Maternity leave / Pregnancy leave

Almost all mothers use the leave. Two weeks of leave before the birth and two weeks after the birth are obligatory. Very few mothers entitled to Maternity/Pregnancy leave work during the leave period.

b. Paternity leave⁷

Before the 2022 reform, Paternity leave of nine weeks included one to 18 days of leave which could be taken while the mother was on Maternity or Parental leave, and the remaining days (54 days minus the days taken when the mother was on

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https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/164687/Sosiaaliturvakomitea_2023_2.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

⁷ One to 18 days which can be taken while the mother is on leave.

Maternity/Parental leave) which were to be taken after the Parental leave. Statistics allow for a different review of the uptake of these two different types of Paternity leave. Similarly, since the 2022 reform, up to 18 days of parental leave can be taken during the other parent's parental leave, but data on the take-up is not yet available.

A majority of fathers have taken the one to 18 days of Paternity leave during the time when the mother was on their leave. According to annual statistics, 79 per cent of fathers took this leave in 2021⁸. This percentage describes the uptake on an annual basis, counted as the proportion of the Parental benefit periods that started in the respective year. In a Kela study based on fathers' leave uptake on children's birth cohort basis, the percentages are lower. Until 2013, the proportion of fathers taking the 18-days Paternity leave was 70 to 75 per cent, but has dropped since then, and only 69 per cent of fathers of children born in 2016 took this leave⁹. Differences in data based on annual statistics and cohort-based analysis are mainly due to the possibility to take Paternity leave until the child turns two. This means that annual statistics for leave take-up in 2021 can include fathers whose child was born in 2019, 2020 or 2021. Since 2010, the number of children born has decreased considerably, affecting also the numbers of fathers using family leaves. A significant number of fathers postpone take-up of Paternity leave which makes annual statistics inexact. However, with this precaution, we present this data to give a rough picture of the development of leave take-up, as cohort-based data is not available for earlier years.

Since 2008, the average length of the leave taken while the mother is on Maternity or Parental leave has been 15 working days (15.6 days in 2021⁸). The reasons for not taking the short Paternity leave are most often the father's work situation, the family finances, or the father not being in work^{10 11}.

c. Parental leave and fathers' individual leave (i.e., the days of Paternity leave to be taken after the Parental leave)

Parental leave, which before the 2022 reform was 158 days and could be used by either parent, has been mostly taken by mothers. Almost all mothers take the full days of Parental leave, whereas so far only a small and slowly growing share of fathers has taken Parental leave^{9 10}. In 2021, seven per cent of fathers took parental leave on an annual basis, the average length being 58 days⁸. Fewer than four per cent of mothers are working to any extent during their leave period.

⁸ *Statistical Yearbook of the Social Insurance Institution 2021*. Helsinki: Kela 2022.

⁹ Miettinen, A. and Saarikallio-Torp, M. (2020) Isälle kiintiöidyn vanhempainvapaan käyttö ja sen taustatekijät [Trends and socioeconomic determinants in the use of father's quota], *Yhteiskuntapolitiikka* 85(4).

¹⁰ Lammi-Taskula, J., Salmi, M. and Närvi, J. (2017) Isien perhevapaat [Fathers on family leave], in Salmi, M. and Närvi, J. (eds.) *Perhevapaat, talouskriisi ja sukupuolten tasa-arvo* [Family leave, economic crisis and gender equality]. Raportti 4/2017. Helsinki: THL.

¹¹ Närvi, J. (2018) *Isä hoitaa – vai hoitaako?* [Daddy takes care – or does he?]. Working paper 1/2018. Helsinki: THL.

The popularity of the fathers' individual leave (that part of Paternity leave which could be taken after Parental leave) increased gradually since its introduction in 2003. Before the 2013 reform, in 2012, on an annual basis about 30 per cent of fathers took this leave, then called fathers' month. In 2019, the share had increased to 45 per cent on an annual basis, being 44 per cent in 2021⁸. However, looking at the cohort of children born in 2013, 45 per cent of fathers took Paternity leave after Parental leave period before the child turned two. Since then, the share has increased gradually, and 48 per cent of fathers of children born in 2018 took Paternity leave after Parental leave¹². The average length of leave taken by fathers after Parental leave has risen from 24 days in the 2006 cohort to 31 days in the 2016 cohort.⁹

Since 2013, it has been possible to postpone taking Paternity leave until the child turns two years of age. Analysis of the uptake statistics suggests that a shift towards leave uptake nearer the child's second birthday is taking place⁹. A study based on survey data collected in 2013 indicated that for most fathers (71 per cent), the possibility to postpone uptake was important for their taking of the leave, and for a third it was a decisive factor¹⁰.

Statistics indicate that one in four fathers do not take either Paternity or Parental leave, not even the one to 18 days' leave while the mother is on leave. In the cohort-based analysis, the proportion of non-users was 29 per cent in 2006, decreasing gradually to 23 per cent in the 2016 cohort⁹.

Although the fathers' individual leave, (the part of Paternity leave to be taken after Parental leave before 2022, and the 'fathers' month' before 2013), has become more and more popular, its contribution towards actually equalising parental responsibilities has been called into question: in every third family, in 2013, the mother stayed at home during all of the father's Paternity leave weeks, because she planned to continue to care for the child at home (supported by the Home-care allowance), and because the father had to take his leave before the child's second birthday¹⁰.¹⁰

According to surveys and a register-based study (on fathers with children born in 2011, 2013 or 2016), men over the age 30, men with a good income, and men whose partners have a good income (as well as the fathers of first-born children) were more likely to take the 'fathers' month' or the longer Paternity leave⁹ ¹⁰ ¹¹. In families where the mother had been employed before the child was born, their high socio-economic status also increased the likelihood of the father taking the longer leave. This likelihood was decreased, instead, if the father held the view that men were mainly responsible for the family's income, or if the father had recently experienced unemployment. The most common reasons that fathers gave for not taking the longer part of Paternity leave (or the 'fathers' month') were that they thought the family's finances did not allow it, or that their spouse was taking care of the child supported by the Home-care allowance (this is for the cohort of fathers with children born in 2011 or 2013). The spouse not having a job also hindered fathers from taking their leave quota. Work-related obstacles were also mentioned quite often. Highly educated fathers stated that they tended not take

¹² Social Insurance Institution (Kela), unpublished statistical data.

the longer leave because of work pressure or the nature of their work, while blue-collar workers more often cited family finances as their reason for not taking leave. However, family finances were mentioned more often than work-related reasons, even by highly educated fathers. Very few fathers mentioned negative attitudes at their workplace as an obstacle, but instead considered their own long absence from work as too difficult to justify taking. This was related to the distribution of their work during fathers' leave: fathers reported that a substitute was seldom hired, and work tasks were most commonly shared between fellow workers or, among white-collar employees, were left to be taken care of by the father himself despite taking leave, which made fathers hesitate to use the possibility of taking leave for longer than a few weeks^{10 11}.

According to the above-mentioned surveys, fathers with children born in 2011 were more likely to share the Parental leave (besides fathers' individual leave) with the mother if they were over 30 years of age and the fathers of first-born children. The spouse's higher education level had a significant – if small – effect on the likelihood of fathers sharing the Parental leave. Fathers with children born in 2013 more commonly took Parental leave if their spouse had a higher education level and income, especially if the father himself was not highly educated^{10 11}.

The spouse's education level was significantly related to fathers' Parental leave also in a survey in 2016 with parents of one-year-old children living in ten different municipalities¹³. In addition, Parental leave was more often taken by fathers in regular day jobs than in shift work. Entrepreneurs and managers took Parental leave less often. Aspects related to motivation were however more important than socioeconomic background: the main motivation for fathers' take-up of parental leave was the desire to spend time with the child, as well as to take a break from working life and support the spouse's return to employment or studies.

The part-time option for taking Parental leave has not been popular. Statistics show that in 2003 (the first year that it was available), 37 parents received the Partial Parental allowance and in 2021, still only 285 parents used it¹⁴. Although the number of parents using this option was in slight increase, taking part-time Parental leave was still very rare.

As the 2022 leave reform introduced a longer leave quota for fathers as well as more flexibility in taking parental leave on part-time bases or in several segments, changes are also expected in the patterns of take-up of these types of leave in the coming years.

d. Childcare leave or career breaks

Almost all families (87 per cent in 2020¹⁵) take advantage of the Child home care allowance (HCA) at least for some time after Parental leave. Since 2006, statistics

¹³ Eerola, P. et al. (2019) 'Fathers' leave take-up in Finland: Motivations and barriers in a complex Nordic leave scheme'. SAGE Open. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244019885389>

¹⁴ Kelan Lapsiperhe-etuustilasto 2021 [Social Insurance Institution Statistics on Family Benefits, 2021] Official Statistics of Finland, Social Security 2022.

are available regarding its use by parents, showing that HCA is used almost entirely by women. Only six to nine per cent of the recipients of HCA per year (2006-2020) have been men. In 2021, 8.1 per cent of the recipients of HCA were men^{8 15}.

In the long run, HCA has become less popular; the proportion of children aged zero to two years taken care of at home supported by HCA has dropped from 58 per cent in 2000 to 38 per cent in 2021⁸. The overall decreasing popularity matches the growing proportion of young children attending childcare services from 2000 to 2021: while the proportion of children under the age of one in these services has dropped to less than one per cent, the proportion of children aged one has risen to 38 per cent (and children aged two to 70 per cent)¹⁶.

Annual statistics also enable an assessment of uptake periods of HCA. In families receiving this allowance at some point before their child turns three years of age¹⁷, periods taken have divided rather evenly: in 2020, 31 per cent took fewer than seven months; 29 per cent took between seven and 12 months; 28 per cent took between 13 and 24 months; and 12 per cent took longer than 24 months (the maximum length being 26 to 27 months)¹⁵. However, the proportion taking the longest period of leave has declined from 25 per cent (2003) to 12 per cent (2020), while the proportion taking the shortest periods rose from 26 to 31 per cent¹⁵. In the long run, from cohorts of children born 2010 to 2018, the median lengths of HCA periods have decreased from 14 months to 11 months, and the proportion of mothers using HCA for 13 months or more has decreased from 54 per cent to 40 per cent¹⁸. The recent decline in the uptake of HCA likely reflects the improving labour market situation.

The proportion of fathers taking HCA has remained low. The (few) male recipients of HCA took much more often the shortest periods than their female counterparts (71 per cent in 2020), and of all men taking HCA, 9 per cent took it for more than 12 months¹⁵.

A survey in 2013 with parents who had a child in 2011 shows that HCA was most likely taken by fathers whose spouses had a high employment status and a high income¹⁰.

According to surveys in 2013 and 2016, the main obstacle for fathers' take-up of Home-care leave with HCA was family finances, which more than half of the surveyed fathers said hindered them from taking Childcare leave. Other common reasons for not taking the leave (cited by a fifth to a third of fathers) were that their spouse did not have a job, that the father did not consider taking the leave to be necessary, and that the child started at day care. Work-related reasons such

¹⁵ See www.tietotarjotin.fi [Child care subsidies] and *Statistical Yearbook of the Social Insurance Institution 2020*.

¹⁶ Säkkinen, S. and Kuoppala, T. (2021) *Varhaiskasvatus 2020 [Early childhood education 2020]* Helsinki: THL Statistical Report 32/2021.

¹⁷ These statistics exclude families receiving home-care allowance where the person taking care of the child is not a parent; however, these families only comprise 2 to 3 per cent of all recipients.

¹⁸ Miettinen, A. and Saarikallio-Torp, M. (2023) Äitien kotihoidon tukijaksot lyhentyneet - väestöryhmittäiset erot yhä suuria [Mothers' home care allowance periods have become shorter - large differences between population groups]. *Yhteiskuntapolitiikka* 88(2).

as the nature of their work or work pressure were mentioned by only one in six or one in five fathers^{10 11}.

Mothers' take-up of child-care leave or HCA is related to their education and position in the labour market.

Recent findings from a survey in 2022 to parents with a child born between 2019–2021 show that longer HCA periods were taken or planned more often by mothers who did not have an effective employment contract or were not working as entrepreneurs at the time of the birth of their child (one fourth of the respondents)¹⁹. According to another survey of parents with a child born in 2011, mothers with a two-year-old youngest child were more likely to be in paid work if they were: employed before the child was born, had a high-income level, had a high level of education, and had a permanent contract when the child was born. A mother was more likely to be still at home with a two-year-old if she was: a blue-collar worker, had a low level of education, had a low-income level before the child was born, and had three or more children. Of the mothers who were still at home with a two-year-old youngest child, less than half had a job waiting for them and half did not have an employment contract²⁰. Further analysis indicated that of the mothers without an employment contract, almost a third had no education after basic school; a third had vocational education, and a third had more than vocational education²¹.

A study using Kela's register data on parents of children born 2010–2018 also found that highly educated mothers and those with high income (before the birth of the child) were more likely not to use HCA at all, or used it for shorter periods than lower-educated/low-income mothers. Longer periods of HCA were also more common among mothers with many children, with immigrant background, if the mother was a single-parent or had been unemployed before the childbirth.¹⁸ One study also showed that of all first-time mothers (around 2010), 29 per cent continue to a new parental leave for the second child directly from HCA²². This pattern was more common among mothers who were in a weaker labour market position before the birth of the children.

Statistics show that education is crucial for employability and there are major differences in the share of employed mothers according to their level of education. In 2018, 65 per cent of highly educated mothers with a one to two year old child

¹⁹ Närvi, J., Kinnunen, A., Lammi-Taskula, J., Miettinen, A. and Saarikallio-Torp, M. (2023) Äitien kotihoidon tuen käytössä näkyvät niin työtilanne kuin hoivaihanteet: Perhevapaakyselyn 2022 tuloksia. [Mothers' use of Child Home Care Allowance is related to both work situation and care ideals: Results of the Family Leave Study 2022] Tutkimuksesta tiiviisti 7/2023, THL.

<https://www.julkari.fi/handle/10024/146075>

²⁰ Närvi, J. (2017) Äitien perhevapaat ja osallistuminen työelämään [Mothers' family leave and participation in working life]. In: Salmi, M. and Närvi, J. (eds) *Perhevapaat, talouskriisi ja sukupuolten tasa-arvo [Family leave, economic crisis and gender equality]*. Raportti 4/2017, Helsinki: THL.

²¹ Salmi, M. and Närvi, J. (2019) *The Finnish family leave reform in the light of research: the rise and fall of a reform 2017–2018*. Paper presented at the conference Towards Resilient Welfare States, Helsinki 14–15 March 2019.

²² Räsänen, T., Miettinen, A. and Saarikallio-Torp, M. (2020) Äidin työmarkkina-asema ja lasten kotihoidon pituus [Mother's labour market status and children's home care]. *Talous ja yhteiskunta* 1/2020.

had returned to paid employment, compared to only 21 per cent of mothers with no secondary education²³.

The Flexible Care allowance, available from the beginning of 2014, has gradually increased its popularity. In 2014, 15,766 families, and in 2021, 17,953 families received Flexible Care allowance, although the proportion of children under three years old being taken care of by this allowance is still low, about eight per cent^{8 14}. Flexible Care allowance has been more popular among highly educated mothers and those whose spouse has high income level, although, compared to the previous Partial Care allowance with a lower benefit, the new allowance has increased the take-up also among mothers with lower education levels²⁴. 11 per cent of the Flexible Care allowance recipients were men¹⁴.

In 2018, one in four women with children aged one to two years old worked part-time²³.

In 2021, Partial Home-care allowance during the child's first and second years at school was used by 15,650 families, to take care of seven per cent of children seven and eight years of age. Nine per cent of the recipients of Partial Home-care allowance were men.^{8 14}

The use of the Private Day Care allowance for children under the age of three is relatively rare. Altogether 13,205 families received Private Day Care allowance in 2021 for children aged zero to seven years. Two per cent of one-year-olds and four per cent of two-year-olds were taken care of supported by this allowance in 2021.^{8 14}

Research findings suggest that the length of leave periods taken by women depends on their level of education, employment status, and their possibilities and experiences in the labour market, as well as how easy it is to find employment, especially for those with a low level of education – however, the values and attitudes also play a role. The leave schemes also seem to create two categories of women in which a) women with a stable position in the labour market, higher levels of education, and better employment prospects have more options (i.e., being able to choose between a shorter or a longer family leave period, and between a period of part-time and full-time work), while b) women with little education and fewer opportunities in the labour market have fewer alternatives. So, a woman with a fixed-term contract or without work prior to the birth of the child is more likely to stay at home for a longer period, and to be reliant on the Home-care allowance. The HCA, therefore, has partly become an income source for unemployed women, even if it is lower than the basic unemployment benefit, while also functioning as an alternative to the use of childcare services for parents with an employment contract. It also serves as an alternative to unemployment, making room for women who identify strongly with the role of mothers as caregivers, instead of the less socially-valued identity of the unemployed.

²³ Statistics Finland, Labour force study, Families and Work 2018.

²⁴ Pekkarinen, T. and Tuomala, J. (2019) Joustavan hoitorahan työllisyysvaikutusten arviointi [‘An assesment of the effects of the Flexible care allowance on employment’]. *Valtioneuvoston selvitys- ja tutkimustoiminnan julkaisusarja* 2019:46. Helsinki: Valtioneuvoston kanslia.

e. Other types of leave and flexible working

There are no annual statistics available on the uptake of temporary childcare leave to care for an ill child. In the Quality of Work Life Survey (2018)²⁵, 72 per cent of employed women and 61 per cent of employed men with children under ten years of age had taken temporary childcare leave during the past 12 months – this is compared to 67 per cent of women and 52 per cent of men in 2013. In families where both parents have full-time employment, 76 per cent of mothers and 69 per cent of fathers have taken temporary childcare leave, compared to 71 per cent of mothers and 60 per cent of fathers in 2013. Although women still take temporary childcare leave more often than men, the gender gap has decreased over the past years.

²⁵ Sutela, H., Pärnänen, A. and Keyriläinen, M. (2019) *Digiajan työelämä – Työolotutkimuksen tuloksia 1977–2018 [Working conditions Surveys 1977–2018.]* Helsinki: Statistics Finland.