

Korea¹

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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

a. Maternity leave (출산전후휴가) (responsibility of the Ministry of Employment and Labour)

Length of leave (before and after birth)

- 90 calendar days: a minimum of 45 days must be taken after birth. In the case of a delayed birth, additional days are provided to guarantee 45 days' leave after the birth; however, any additional days in excess of the 90 days are not paid. It is obligatory to take leave.
- In the case of a miscarriage or stillbirth, five to 90 days' leave is provided depending on the length of pregnancy.

Payment and funding

- 100 per cent of ordinary earnings (i.e. for contractually agreed working hours, excluding bonuses and/or overtime pay) at the time of taking leave, paid by the employer for the first 60 days; then, 100 per cent of ordinary earnings paid by the Employment

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² The opinions expressed and arguments employed herein are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official views of the Ministry of Health and Welfare, Korea.

Insurance Fund with an upper limit of KRW1,800,000 [€1,364.83]³ for the last 30 days.

- To reduce the financial burden on small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), the Employment Insurance Fund⁴ pays for the first 60 days, up to a limit of KRW3,600,000 [€2,729.66]. If an employee's ordinary earnings are higher than the limit for the first 60 days, the employer must pay the difference between the limit and the employee's ordinary earnings for that period. This means that the Employment Insurance Fund pays up to KRW5,400,000 [€4,094.50] on behalf of SMEs, including payment for the last 30 days which is provided for all types of companies. The definition of an SME varies across sectors: for example, in the manufacturing sector, the enterprise must have no more than 500 employees, and in the construction sector no more than 300 in order to be considered as an SME.
- The Employment Insurance Fund for Maternity leave benefit is financed mainly by employers' and employees' contributions, with a small amount of government subsidy.

Flexibility in use

- Maternity leave can be taken from 45 days before the expected date of delivery. For medical reasons, women who have previously experienced or risk a miscarriage can take the first 45 days at any time.

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

- All female employees, whether permanent or temporary workers, are eligible for Maternity leave; but to be eligible for the Maternity benefit from the Employment Insurance Fund, employees must have been insured for 180 days prior to the commencement of Maternity leave. For those not entitled to the benefit, the employer must pay for the first 60 days.
- Self-employed workers are not eligible.

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

³ Conversion of currency undertaken for 24 June 2019, using:
<https://www1.oanda.com/currency/converter/>

⁴ Employment insurance (EI) does not cover government officials, teachers (both in public and private schools), part-time workers working fewer than 60 hours per month, or domestic workers. EI also does not cover businesses in the agriculture, forestry, fishery, and hunting sectors with four or fewer employees, nor does it cover small construction firms.

- In the case of multiple births, the length of paid Maternity leave increases to 120 days.

b. Paternity leave (배우자 출산휴가) (responsibility of the Ministry of Employment and Labour)

Length of leave

- 3 to five days, in order to give some flexibility to the employer in deciding the length of leave.

Payment and funding

- 100 per cent of ordinary earnings for the first three days. The remaining two days are unpaid.
- Paid by the employer.

Flexibility in use

- Leave can be taken within 30 days after the birth.

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

- All employees whose spouse gave birth.

c. Parental leave (육아휴직) (responsibility of the Ministry of Employment and Labour)

Length of leave

- 1 year for each employed parent. Leave is an individual non-transferable entitlement.

Payment and funding

- For the first three months of full-time Parental leave, 80 per cent of ordinary earnings, with a minimum of KRW700,000 [€530.77] per month and an upper limit of KRW1,500,000 [€1,137.36] per month. For the remaining nine months, 50 per cent of ordinary earnings, with a minimum of KRW700,000 [€530.77] per month and a maximum of KRW1,200,000 [€800.29] per month.
- For part-time Parental leave, 80 per cent of ordinary earnings with an upper limit of KRW1,500,000 [€1,137.36] per month is applied for the whole period of leave, to encourage employees to use part-time Parental leave.

- In cases where both parents take Parental leave for the same child at different times, the allowance for the first three months of leave taken by the second parent increases to 100 per cent of ordinary earnings, with a limit of KRW2,500,000 [€1,895.60]. This so-called 'daddy months' (아빠의 달) aims to encourage fathers to take Parental leave - as fathers conventionally take leave after the mother - by providing higher benefits when both parents participate in Parental leave consecutively.
- 25 per cent of the Parental leave benefit is paid as a lump sum if the employee returns to the same employer upon expiry of leave, and works for more than six months with the same employer afterwards.
- Funded from the Employment Insurance Fund.

Flexibility in use

- Leave can be taken until the child reaches the age of eight (or second grade in elementary school).
- Leave can be split once, i.e. it can be taken in two separate periods. In this case, employees can divide Parental leave into one period of full-time leave and one period of reduced working hours; or two periods of full-time Parental leave; or two periods of reduced working hours. However, the total period of leave taken cannot exceed one year.
- Instead of taking Parental leave on a full-time basis, employees can reduce their working hours.⁵ Reduced working hours must be a minimum of 15 hours per week and cannot exceed 30 hours per week. The Parental leave benefit is paid in proportion to the number of working hours.
- Both parents can take leave at the same time, subject to the agreement of both employers. If both parents take leave at the same time, only one parent receives the Parental leave benefit.

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

- Employers can refuse to grant Parental leave to employees who have not worked continuously for their firm for one year.
- In order to receive the Parental leave payment, employees must have been insured for at least 180 days prior to the commencement of Parental leave and take at least 30 days' leave consecutively.
- Self-employed workers are not eligible.

⁵ This part-time Parental leave is called 'Reduced Working Hours during Childcare Period.'

- Same-sex couples are not eligible, as same-sex marriage is not legal.

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

- None.

d. Childcare leave or career breaks

- None.

e. Other employment-related measures

Adoption leave and pay

- The same Parental leave regulations apply in the case of adoption.

Time off for the care of dependants

- Employees can take up to 90 days' unpaid leave per year to take care of a family member on account of illness, accident, old age, etc. This must be taken in blocks of at least 30 days.

Flexible working

- All female workers who are within the first 12 weeks, or beyond week 36, of their pregnancies can reduce their working hours by two hours per day, without a reduction in pay. This rule on shorter work hours for pregnant workers, previously applicable only to companies with more than 300 employees, was extended to all businesses in March 2016.
- After childbirth, a female worker is entitled to a 30-minute paid break two times a day to feed a child under 12 months of age (including breastfeeding and bottle feeding).

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

The maximum period of paid post-natal leave available in Korea is 27 months. From 2013 onwards, a childcare subsidy is available for all children aged five years or younger to attend any type of formal ECEC facility, regardless of family income level.

Levels of attendance at formal services for children both under and over three years of age are slightly above the OECD average. For actual attendance levels, see 'relationship between leave and ECEC entitlements' on [cross-country comparisons](#) page.

3. Changes in policy since April 2018 (including proposals currently under discussion)

The upper limit of the Maternity leave allowance for the last 30 days, which is paid by Employment Insurance, was fixed at KRW1,350,000 [€1,023.62] for 15 years, but was increased to KRW1,500,000 [€1,137.36] in 2017, to KRW1,600,000 [€1,213.18] in 2018, and to KRW1,800,000 [€1,364.83] in 2019. This means that the total Maternity leave allowance paid by Employment Insurance on behalf of SMEs for the 90 days was increased to KRW5,400,000 [€4,094.50] in 2018.

In January 2019, payment for the last nine months of Parental leave was increased from 40 per cent to 50 per cent of ordinary earnings. The minimum and maximum limits were also increased from KRW500,000 [€379.12] to KRW700,000 [€530.77], and from KRW1,000,000 [€758.24] to KRW1,200,000 [€909.89], respectively.

From January 2019, the ceiling for the 100 per cent 'daddy months' benefit increased, and was adjusted to KRW2,500,000 [€1,895.60] per month for all children, regardless of birth order. In July 2017, the ceiling was KRW1,500,000 [€1,137.36] for the first child and KRW 2,000,000 [€1,516.48] for the second child and further children. Then, in July 2018, the ceiling was increased to KRW 2,000,000 [€1,516.48] for all children, regardless of birth order.

4. Uptake of leave⁶

a. Maternity leave

In 2018, the number of employees taking Maternity leave was 76,414: 23 per cent of the total number of births (the provisional number of births in 2018 is 326,900). The number of births decreased from 406,200 in 2016 to 357,700 (provisional) in 2017. There are three main reasons why use of Maternity leave is low: female employment rates are low, so many women giving birth are not employed; the coverage of

⁶ The numbers in this section relate to the number of employees taking leave covered by employment insurance. Therefore, the number of persons taking leave who are teachers (private and public), civil servants, part-time workers, etc. are not included. Please see note footnote 4, which explains the coverage of EI.

employment insurance is limited (see footnote 4); and self-employed workers are not eligible.

b. Paternity leave

No information.

c. Parental leave

In 2018, 99,199 employees took Parental leave, an increase on the number taking leave in 2017 (90,110). The number of births in 2017 was 357,771 and 326,900 (provisional) in 2018.

The proportion of male employees among the total number of employees taking Parental leave was 17.8 per cent (17,662) in 2018, compared with 13.4 per cent (12,042) in 2017. This proportion has been rising in recent years, from 2.0 per cent in 2010.

The number of 'daddy months' users increased by 49.8 per cent from 4,409 in 2017 to 6,606 in 2018, with the large majority of users (5,737, 86.8 per cent) being male employees. The remainder were female employees whose husbands had taken Parental leave before them (when these female employees took leave after their husbands, they received the 'daddy months' payment for three months and then normal Parental leave payment for the remaining months). The increased popularity of the 'daddy months' can be attributed to the fact that the period was extended from one month to three months (January 2016), and the payment level has increased since its introduction. It could also be a result of changing attitudes towards men taking Parental leave.

In 2018, the average duration of Parental leave taken by men was 6.6 months (compared to ten months for women). The proportion of men who used Parental leave for three months or less was 40 per cent, while 39 per cent took between nine and 12 months of leave. For women, the proportions were ten per cent and 73 per cent respectively.

The number of employees taking part-time Parental leave increased by 35.4 per cent from 2,821 in 2017 to 3,820 in 2018; male employees represented 14.4 per cent of all part-time Parental leave takers.