

# Estonia<sup>1</sup>

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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 (*emapuhkus*) (responsibility of the Ministry of Social Affairs)**

#### *Length of leave (before and after birth)*

- One hundred calendar days: an employed mother can use Maternity leave up to 70 days before the child's expected date of birth and 30 calendar days after the child's expected date of birth.
- It is obligatory to take 30 days after the birth.

#### *Payment and funding*

- One hundred per cent of average earnings, calculated based on employment during reference period, with no upper limit on payment.
- A mother who is considered as a non-active person (not employed) receives the mother's parental benefit for 30 consecutive calendar days starting from the birth of the child. Benefit paid at benefit rate 654 euros if the mother did not work during reference period.
- Payments are taxed.
- Funded from general taxation.

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### *Flexibility in use*

- If the mother takes Maternity leave at least 31 days before the expected date of birth of the child, her Maternity leave duration is at least 61 days. The unused days of Maternity leave are transferred over to the period of the shared parental leave.
- If the mother takes Maternity leave later than 30 calendar days before the expected date of birth of the child then her Maternity leave duration is at least 30 calendar days. In this case, the unused days of the Maternity leave are not carried over to the period of the shared Parental leave.

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

- All employed mothers are eligible for Maternity leave, including workers with temporary contracts if the contract lasts more than one month.
- There are no conditions linked to length of service.
- Self-employed people qualify for mother's parental benefit with the same conditions as workers, even without taking up the leave (for which they are not eligible).
- There are no conditions linked to citizenship.

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

- None.

## **b. Paternity leave (*isapuhkus* – literally 'father's leave') (responsibility of Ministry of Social Affairs)**

### *Length of leave (before and after birth)*

- Thirty calendar days.

### *Payment and funding*

- One hundred per cent of earnings, calculated according to the rules of parental benefit (see below).
- Payments are taxed.
- Funded from general taxation.

### *Flexibility in use*

- Can be taken during 30 days before the expected birth of a child up to the time the child reaches three years of age.
- Can be taken by calendar days.

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

- All employed fathers with permanent or temporary employment contracts are entitled to Paternity leave. There are no conditions linked to length of service. All fathers are entitled to parental benefit for fathers regardless of employment status (i.e. including unemployed and inactive).
- Self-employed or unemployed fathers are not eligible for Paternity leave but are entitled to parental benefit for fathers.
- Same-sex partners cannot use this leave.

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

- None.

### **c. Parental leave (*vanemapuhkus*) (responsibility of Ministry of Social Affairs)**

*Length of leave*

- Until the child reaches three years of age.
- Leave is a family entitlement.

*Payment and funding*

- Shared parental benefit (*jagatav vanemahüvitis*) is paid at 100 per cent of personal average earnings (calculation is based on reference period of 12 months prior to pregnancy) for 475 days (i.e., 69 weeks): from after the end of Maternity leave, and with an upper limit of €4,291.29 per month (equivalent to three times average earnings). For parents who are not on leave and not working, the benefit is paid from the birth of the child for 515 days (altogether with mother's parental benefit and fathers' parental benefit 575 days). The minimum benefit paid to parents who worked in the reference period is the minimum wage: €725 per month (i.e., in case of very low wage or short work experience). For parents who were not working during the reference period, the parental benefit is paid at a flat rate (benefit rate) of €654 per month.
- All payments are taxed.
- All types of parental benefits are funded from general taxation.
- Pension credits for parents with children under three years of age (independent of Parental leave or employment). There are two types of pension credits for parents, available simultaneously. The state pays a social security contribution, calculated based on minimum wage, to the first pension pillar (public pay-as-you-go system) over three years. Also, the state pays contributions to the second pension pillar (public contributions-based system) over three years: the sum of this public pension contribution is four per cent of the average wage.

### *Flexibility in use*

- Parental leave may be used in one part or in several parts at any time until a child is three years old.
- Being on leave while receiving the benefits is not compulsory. When a parent takes up employment after the birth of a child, the parental benefit is reduced if the income from employment exceeds 50 per cent of the benefit ceiling (€2,154.65). Income exceeding 50 per cent of the benefit ceiling is divided by two and deducted from the level of benefit. However, the maximum reduction of benefit is up to €654 (benefit rate).
- Fathers can take Paternity leave and/or receive Parental Benefit for Fathers during mother's Maternity leave or Parental leave.
- Parents will be able to take up to 60 days of parental leave at the same time. At this time, both parents receive parental benefit.

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

- All working parents are eligible for Parental leave.
- Self-employed and unemployed parents are not eligible for Parental leave.
- All parents are eligible for parental benefits. Also, a parent's spouse, a person in custody of the child, and adoptive parents have the right to parental benefits.
- Fathers are eligible for shared parental benefit after having used father's parental benefit.
- Same sex couples are eligible if the child is adopted by the other parent.

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

- None.

#### **a. Childcare leave or career breaks**

- No statutory entitlement; see Section 1e for supplementary annual holiday entitlement.

#### **e. Other types of leave and flexible working**

##### *Adoption leave (lapsendamispuhkus) and pay*

- Seventy days of adoption leave per child for parents adopting a child under 18 years of age at 100 per cent of average earnings, with no upper limit.

Adoptive parents are eligible for Parental leave for a child under the age of three years, and qualify for parental benefits.

- Same sex couples cannot adopt (as a couple).

#### *Time off for the care of dependants*

- Fourteen calendar days per episode of illness. Leave can be taken by either parent to care for a sick child under the age of 12 years, with 80 per cent of earning replacement for up to 14 calendar days per illness episode.
- Parents with a disabled child may take one day of leave per month with full earnings replacement.
- Child leave benefit: each parent is entitled to a total of ten days of child leave per child (i.e., a total of 20 days) until the child reaches the age of 14 (leave is not calculated on a per-year basis, but all days will be spread over the period until the child reaches the age of 14). The child leave benefit is paid under similar principles to that of the parental benefit, 50 per cent of previous income. Child leave can be taken for each child separately, up to a maximum of 30 calendar days per year.
- Seven paid calendar days for illness of a family member.
- Five working days per year to care for a relative with a severe disability. There is a flat-rate payment based on minimum wage.
- All payments funded from general taxation.

#### *Specific provision for (breast)feeding*

- Breastfeeding mothers with a child under 18 months of age can take either one 30-minute breastfeeding break every three hours or a one-hour break per day. The state compensates the breaks 100 per cent, except for mothers who receive parental benefit for raising a child. Funded from general taxation.

#### *Flexible working*

- An employee has the right to request opportunities for reconciliation of work and family life, including flexible working arrangements from the employee. The employer is required to provide an explanation to the person whose application has been refused or postponed.

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

The maximum period of post-natal leave is 36 months, with just over half of the period paid at a high rate. According to the Social Welfare Act, municipalities are obliged to provide a place in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) for all children (but there is no individual right to a place), starting from the age of 18 months. In principle, therefore, there is no gap between the end of well-paid leave

and an ECEC entitlement; however, in practice, not all municipalities are fully able to meet this obligation, and for children between 18 months and three years of age the lack of places in ECEC is an issue. Many municipalities pay a special childcare benefit to working parents who use a private licensed carer or centre.

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

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

Major changes in parental benefit system came into force on 1 April 2022 (please see the country note for Estonia 2022). Since 1 February 2023 in the case that a child dies before attaining three years of age, both parents have the right to receive shared parental benefit for up to 30 consecutive calendar days as of the date following the death of the child.

## **4. Uptake of leave**

### **a. Maternity leave**

- No current information on take up of leave is available. In 2021, 9,810 persons received maternity benefit (10,025 persons in 2020)<sup>2</sup>. In 2021, there were 13,272 births, but there is no information on how many of these mothers were eligible to Maternity leave.

### **b. Paternity leave**

- There are no data for the current year. In 2020 the share of men who used paternity leave in the number of live births was 60 per cent. In 2021 the share rose to 74.7 per cent<sup>3</sup>.

### **c. Parental leave**

- No official statistics about the uptake of leave are collected. Information is available only on recipients of the benefit. The latest statistics from August 2021 shows that parental benefit was paid to 17,051 persons, 83.8 per cent of whom were women and 16.2 per cent men<sup>4</sup>. At the end of 2019, 12.5 per cent of parental benefit recipients were men. These numbers reflect the

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<sup>2</sup> Estonian Health Insurance Fund database.

<sup>3</sup> Statistics Estonia

<sup>4</sup> Author's calculations using data from Social Insurance board.

number of recipients during the month, not dependent on the number of days the benefit is received (could be just for one day).

- The share of benefit paid to fathers has increased over time from just 1-2 per cent in 2004-2006 to 7.4 per cent in 2013 and 2017<sup>5</sup>. The increase started in 2007 after fathers were allowed to take up the parental benefit right after the end of Maternity leave (when the child is 70 days old). Previously the access was limited, and they could take the benefit only after child was six months old.
- However, these numbers do not reflect the level of take-up of the parental leave by fathers as leave-taking is not an eligibility condition for receiving the benefit. While working while receiving the benefit is allowed, in August 2021, 72 per cent of male recipients of the parental benefit (9.2 per cent of females) received simultaneously also income from work. In 2019, 57 per cent of fathers receiving parental benefit continued working during the whole period and 8 per cent worked at least for six months of the benefit period. The wage received was as an average higher than average wage in the county<sup>6</sup>. This indicates that many fathers, although receiving the benefit, are not the primary caregivers. Due to the changes in legislation that enable them to receive 150 per cent of the average wage plus parental benefit simultaneously, fathers' uptake of the benefit has increased, but they continue working.

#### **d. Other types of leave and flexible working**

- In 2016, 28 per cent of parents who received benefit for nursing a sick child under the age of 12 years (i.e., care leave certificates) were men (in 2015 this was 27 per cent, and in 2014 this was 26 per cent)<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Author's calculations based on Social Insurance Board data.

<sup>6</sup> Source: Social Insurance Board.

<sup>7</sup> Estonian Health Insurance Fund, based on the calculations of the Ministry of Social Affairs.