

# Estonia<sup>236</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 Economic Affairs and Communications)**

#### *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 725 euros if the mother did not work during reference period.
- Payments are made to the mother by the Social Insurance Board.
- 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 1 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; single parent); or delegation of leave to person other than the mother.*

- None.

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

### *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 1c).
- Payments are made to the father by the Social Insurance Board.
- Payments are taxed.
- Funded from general taxation.

### *Flexibility in use*

- Leave can be taken during 30 days before the expected birth of a child up to the time the child reaches 3 years of age.
- Leave 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.
- Spouses in same-sex couples are eligible for Paternity leave and benefit.

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

- None.

### **c. Parental leave (*vanemapuhkus*) (responsibility of Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications)**

*Length of leave*

- Until the child reaches 3 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., 68 weeks): from after the end of Maternity leave, and with an upper limit of €4,733.53 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: €820 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 €725 per month.
- Payments are made to the parent by the Social Insurance Board.
- All payments are taxed.
- All types of parental benefits are funded from general taxation.
- There are two types of pension credits for parents with children under 3 years of age (independent of Parental leave or employment), available simultaneously. The state pays a social security contribution, calculated based on the minimum wage, to the first pension pillar (public pay-as-you-go system) over 3 years. Also, the state pays contributions to the second pension pillar (public contributions-based system) over 3 years: the sum of this public pension contribution is 4 per cent of the average wage.

### *Flexibility in use*

- Parental leave may be used as one continuous period or in several periods at any time until a child is 3 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 (€2,366.76). 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 €725 (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.
- Spouses in same-sex couples are eligible for shared parental benefit.

### *Variation in leave due to child or family reasons (e.g. multiple or premature births; 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**

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 3 years, and qualify for parental benefits.
- Same-sex couples can adopt as a couple.

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

- 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. Paid by the Health Insurance Fund.
- Parents with a disabled child may take one day of leave per month with full earnings replacement. Paid by Social the Insurance Board.
- 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 per child in the case of two parents) until the child reaches the age of 14 years (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 years). 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. Paid by the Social Insurance Board.
- Seven paid calendar days for illness of a family member. Paid by the Health Insurance Board.
- Five working days per year to care for a relative with a severe disability. There is a flat-rate payment based on minimum wage. Paid by the employer who is reimbursed by the Social Insurance Board.
- Benefits paid by the Health Insurance Board are financed from social tax contributions, payments by the Social Insurance Board are 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 3 hours or a 1 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. Paid by the employer along with salary who can later claim compensation from Social Insurance Board.

### *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' in the [cross-country tables](#) at the front of the review.

### **3.Changes in policy since April 2023 (including proposals currently under discussion)**

Starting from 1 January 2024, same-sex couples in Estonia gained the right to marry. Consequently, spouses in same-sex couples also acquired the right to receive paternity benefits, shared parental benefits, and adoption benefits. Additionally, same-sex couples can now adopt both within and outside of their family.

## **4. Uptake of leave**

### **a. Maternity leave**

No information available. In 2012, 9,172 persons received maternity benefit (9,810 persons in 2021).<sup>237</sup> In 2022, there were 11,646 births, but there is no information on how many of these mothers were eligible for Maternity leave.

### **b. Paternity leave**

In 2020, the number of men who used Paternity leave represented 60 per cent of live births, rising to 74.7 per cent in 2021.<sup>238</sup> There is no information available on take up of Paternity leave for 2022, but 10,546 men received paternity benefit, which represents 90.5 per cent of live births during the year.

### **c. Parental leave**

No information available in take up of leave. Information is available only for recipients of the benefit. In 2022, 30,644 persons received shared parental benefit of whom 17.4 per cent were men and 82.6 per cent women. In August 2021 83.8 per cent of parental benefit recipients were women and 16.2 per cent men<sup>239</sup>; these numbers are recipients during the month, and do not reflect the number of days the benefit is received (which 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>240</sup> The increase started in 2007

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<sup>237</sup>Statistics Estonia.

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<sup>239</sup> Author's calculations using data from the Social Insurance board.

<sup>240</sup> Author's calculations based on Social Insurance Board data.

after fathers were allowed to take up the parental benefit right after the end of Maternity leave (when the child was 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 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 country.<sup>241</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>242</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> Source: Social Insurance Board.

<sup>242</sup> Estonian Health Insurance Fund, based on the calculations of the Ministry of Social Affairs.