

# Estonia<sup>207</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); Maternity benefit (*ema vanemahüvitis* – mother’s parental benefit) (responsibility of the Ministry of Social Affairs)**

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

- 100 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, funding and taxation*

- 100 per cent of average earnings, calculated based on employment during reference period, with no upper limit on payment.
- A mother who is considered as non-economically-active (not employed) receives the mother’s parental benefit for 30 consecutive calendar days starting from the birth of the child. A benefit rate of €725 is paid if the mother did not work during the reference period.
- Payments are made to the mother by the Social Insurance Board.
- Payments are taxed as part of income tax.
- 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).
- Benefit is paid to Estonian residents, 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.*

- In case of premature birth 70 days or earlier, mother's parental benefit is paid for 100 consecutive days for working mothers and 30 days for non-working mothers from the birth of the child.
- In case of stillborn child mother is entitled to 100 days of maternity leave and mother's parental benefit. In case of death of the newborn child, mother is entitled to 30 days of maternity leave and benefit after the death of the child.

#### *Regional or local variations in leave policy*

- None.

#### *Additional note (e.g., if leave payments are supplemented by collective agreements, employer exclusions, or rights to postpone)*

- None reported.

**b. Paternity leave (*isapuhkus* – literally 'father's leave') (responsibility of Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications); Paternity benefit (*isa vanemahüvitis* – father's parental benefit) (responsibility of Ministry of Social Affairs)**

*Length of leave (before and after birth)*

- 30 calendar days.

*Payment and funding*

- 100 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 as part of income tax.
- 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.
- Leave can be taken in several periods of 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*

- In case of stillborn child or death of the newborn child father is entitled to 30 consecutive days of Paternity leave and father's parental benefit.

*Regional or local variations in leave policy*

- None.

*Additional note (e.g., if leave payments are supplemented by collective agreements, employer exclusions, or rights to postpone)*

- None reported.

**c. Parental leave (*vanemapuhkus*) (responsibility of Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications); Parental benefit (*jagatav vanemahüvitis* – shared parental benefit)(responsibility of Ministry of Social Affairs)**

*Length of leave*

- Until the child reaches 3 years.
- 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 €5,256.09 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: €886 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 €820 per month.
- Payments are made to the parent by the Social Insurance Board.
- All payments are taxed as part of income tax.
- 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 three 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.
- 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 (€2,632.55). 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 €820 (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.

*Regional or local variations in leave policy*

- None.

*Additional note (e.g., if leave payments are supplemented by collective agreements, employer exclusions, or rights to postpone)*

- None reported.

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

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

- Leave of 60 calendar days per episode of illness 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 60 calendar days per illness episode. Paid by the Health Insurance Fund.
- **Parents with a disabled child** may take 1 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 10 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 an annual basis, but 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, at 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.
- **Unpaid child leave**: 10 days annually per each parent raising a child up to 14 years of age or a disabled child up to 18 years of age.
- Leave of 7 calendar days for **illness of a family member**. Paid by the Health Insurance Board.
- Leave of 5 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 minutes breastfeeding break every 3 hours or a 1 hour break per day. The state fully compensates the breaks, except for mothers who receive parental benefit for raising a child. Paid by the employer who can later claim compensation from the Social Insurance Board. 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.

### *Antenatal appointments and care*

- An employer must allow an employee time for health checks and pay their average wage.

### *Other provisions*

- None reported.

## **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. 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 2024 (including proposals currently under discussion)**

The number of sick leave days for children up to 12 years of age increased from 14 days to 60 days. From 1 January 2026 the upper limit for parental benefit will be decreased from three times the average wage to double the average wage. Simultaneously, parental benefit will not be reduced when receiving income from employment.

## **4. Uptake of leave**

### **a. Maternity leave**

No information available on take up of maternity leave. In 2024, 11,000 persons received maternity benefit (12,264 persons in 2023).<sup>208</sup> In 2023, there were 10,949 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. There is no information available on take up of Paternity leave for 2024, but 10,849 men received paternity benefit.

### **c. Parental leave**

No information available on take up of leave. Information is available only for recipients of the benefit. In 2024, 25,137 persons received shared parental benefit of whom 19.4 per cent were men and 80.6 per cent women. The share of benefit paid to fathers has increased over time from just 1-2 per cent in 2004-2006 to

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<sup>208</sup> Source: Social Insurance Board, statistics.

19.4 per cent in 2024. 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 was 70 days old). Previously the access was limited, and they could take the benefit only after child was 6 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 6 months of the benefit period. The average wage received was higher than the average wage in the country. 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**

No recent data.