

France¹

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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 (*Congé de maternité*) (responsibility of Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Family, Solidarity and Urban Affairs)

Length of leave (before and after birth)

- 16 weeks: at least two weeks before the birth, the remainder can be taken before or after. It is obligatory to take leave.

Payment and funding

- 100 per cent of earnings, up to a ceiling of €3,269 a month. In the public sector, the leave is fully paid (i.e. there is no ceiling). In the private sector, some employers (particularly larger companies) pay in full, others do not.
- Funded from health insurance², financed by contributions from both employees and employers. The total amount of this contribution is 15.45 per cent of gross pay, including all social contributions, with employees contributing 2.35 per cent and employers 13.10 per cent.

Flexibility in use

- Two weeks can be taken before or after birth

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

- All employees and self-employed workers.

¹ Please cite as Boyer, D. and Fagnani, J. (2017) 'France country note', in: Blum S., Koslowski A., and Moss P. (eds.) International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2017. Available at: http://www.leavenetwork.org/lp_and_r_reports/

² The present social security system, including statutory health insurance, officially came into being with the Ordinance of 4 October 1945 which aimed to cover all the so-called 'social risks'. In 1967 social security was separated into four branches: health insurance (which represents the largest share of expenditures devoted to social protection), pensions, family allowances, and insurance for work-related accidents and occupational illnesses.

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

- In the case of multiple or premature births, the length of leave increases to 12 weeks after birth.
- Mothers having a third or higher order child receive 24 weeks of leave.

b. Paternity leave (*Congé d'accueil à l'enfant* – literally 'leave for looking after a child') (responsibility of Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Family, Solidarity and Urban Affairs)

Length of leave

- Two weeks (11 working days).

Payment and funding

- Payment and funding as for Maternity leave (see 1a).

Flexibility in use

- Leave must be taken within the four months following the birth.

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

- All employees and self-employed workers.

c. Parental leave (*Congé parental*) (responsibility of Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Family, Solidarity and Urban Affairs)

Length of leave

- Until the child reaches three years. Leave is an individual entitlement, i.e. both mother and father can take leave until the child is three years old.

Payment and funding

- Childcare allowances or childrearing benefits – *Complément de libre choix d'activité*" (CLCA) and *Complément optionnel de libre choix d'activité* (COLCA) – were previously available to all families who met the eligibility condition, whether or not parents took Parental leave. CLCA and COLCA continue to be paid to families with a child born before 1 January 2015, until the child is three years old, but since 1 January 2015, the CLCA/COLCA have been revised and replaced by 'PreParE' (*'Prestation partagée d'éducation de l'enfant'*). The benefit amount is income-related and dependent on whether the recipient works and, if so, for how long, i.e. for those on the lowest income level, €392.09 per month if not working; €253.47 per month if working less than half of full-time hours; and €146.21 per month if working 50 to 80 per cent of full time hours.
- For parents with *two or more children* (under 20 years of age), CLCA and PreParE can be paid until a child is three years old. However, in the case of PreParE the payment can be made for a maximum period of 24 months to any one parent, which means that the remaining 12 months can only be received by the other parent, who must stop employment or reduce working hours.

- For parents with only *one child*, CLCA is paid until six months after the end of the Maternity leave. However, in the case of PreParE the payment is extended for a maximum period of 12 months, but only for six months to any one parent, which means that the remaining six months can only be received by the other parent, who must stop employment or reduce working hours.
- COLCA is available to large families (with at least three children): a flat-rate payment of approximately €638.96 per month is made on condition that one parent stops working completely. However the duration is only for one year. Large families can choose between COLCA and CLCA.
- CLCA, COLCA and PreParE are paid by the local CAFs (*Caisse des allocations familiales*), the Family Allowance funds that are part of the social security system and provide a wide range of benefits for families with children. CAFs are financed by contributions from employers only, amounting to 5.4 per cent of gross wages, and not by employees unlike the Maternity and Paternity leaves that are funded from the health insurance scheme.
- Non-employed parents (including those taking leave) receive pension credits for childrearing: '*Assurance vieillesse du parent au foyer*' (Avpf)³. Avpf is paid by the local CAFs (*Caisse des allocations familiales*) to guarantee retirement rights to people who stop or reduce their professional activity to take care of one or several children or a handicapped person. This allowance is means-tested.

Flexibility in use

- Parents taking leave may work between 16 and 32 hours per week.
- The fixed amount benefit can be received at full rate if the parent stops work completely, or at a partial rate if the recipient decides to work part time; so, if parents work part time, the CLCA/PrePaRe payment is reduced. If both parents work part time, they can each receive CLCA/PreParE but the total cannot exceed one full CLCA/PrePaRe payment. For the higher allowance paid for large families (COLCA and increased PreParE), one parent must stop work completely.
- Parents can take part-time Parental leave simultaneously. If they take it on a full-time basis, parents can be provided with CLCA/PreParE successively (i.e. one parent receives the benefit at any one time).

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

- All employees are eligible for Parental leave if they have worked at least one year for their employer before the birth of a child.
- Eligibility for CLCA/PreParE becomes more restrictive the fewer children a parent has: for example with three children the eligibility condition is to have worked for two out of the five years preceding birth (two out of the four years for parents with two children), but with only one child it is necessary to have worked without break for two years preceding birth.

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 parents)

- Where a child is seriously ill or disabled, Parental leave (regulated by the Labour code) can be extended by a year.
- Lone parents are entitled to the full period of PreParE.

³ See <http://www.caf.fr/aides-et-services/s-informer-sur-les-aides/petite-enfance/assurance-vieillesse-du-parent-au-foyer-avpf>

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

- Employers can refuse to let parents work part time if they can justify this on business grounds.

d. Childcare leave or career breaks

- No statutory entitlement.

e. Other employment-related measures

Adoption leave and pay

- For adoptive parents the same regulations for Parental leave apply as for other parents.

Time off for the care of dependants

- Every employee is eligible for an unpaid leave (*Congé de présence parentale*) to care for a sick child under the age of 16 years. Legally, periods of leave cannot exceed three days per year (or five days in specific cases), but this is a minimum and most collective agreements have special arrangements, as in the public sector where employees can take 14 days a year to care for a sick child.
- *Allocation journalière de présence parentale (AJPP)*: in cases of a serious disability or illness of a child under 20 years, every employee with at least one year of employment with an employer is entitled to paid leave to care for her/his child, or to work part time, for a period of up to three years. The allowance is paid for a maximum of 310 days over the three years period, and the level of the allowance depends on the duration of work in the enterprise and on the family structure; in couples, the amount is €43.01 per day if one parent stops work completely; and €51.11 for a lone parent. A similar period of leave is possible for employees who need to care for a relative at the end of life, either a child or a parent living in the same house.

Flexible working

- No statutory entitlement. Employees in the public sector are entitled to work part time for family reasons. The 'family tax credit' (*Crédit d'impôt famille, CIF*), introduced in 2004, is a financial incentive provided to companies to encourage them to develop family-friendly initiatives for their employees. The CIF stipulates that 25 per cent of related expenses are deductible from taxes paid by the company up to a ceiling of €500,000 per year and per company. As of January 2010 eligible expenses can no longer include training programmes for employees on Parental leave and supplements paid to employees taking various forms of child-related leave.

Specific provision for (breast-)feeding

- None.

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

The maximum period of post-natal leave available in France is three years, but most of this is low paid; leave paid at a high rate (Maternity leave) lasts for less than four months. Since 1989 there is an entitlement to ECEC from three years of age: the French Education code states that 'every child upon reaching the age of three has the right to attend a nursery school located as close as possible to his or her residence if her or his family claims a place'. So there is no gap between the end of Parental leave and an ECEC entitlement, but a substantial gap of more than two-and-a-half years between the end of well-paid leave and an ECEC entitlement if we do not consider the large variety of other solutions on early childcare (childminders, EAJE). Levels of attendance at formal services for children under and over three years are above the average for OECD countries. For actual attendance levels, see 'relationship between leave and ECEC entitlements' on [cross-country comparisons](#) page.

3. Changes in policy since April 2016 (including proposals currently under discussion)

None reported.

4. Take-up of leave

a. Maternity leave

Almost all mothers take up Maternity leave, which is obligatory, although the length of leave taken varies, with women in higher status employment taking less leave.

b. Paternity leave

Around two-thirds (62 per cent) of eligible fathers have taken leave in 2013.

c. Parental leave and childrearing benefit

It is impossible to calculate the number of parents on Parental leave because employers are not required to provide information about take-up. Statistics are limited to childcare allowance (CLCA/COLCA and PreParE), and it is not possible to find out how many recipients are also on Parental leave.

Research provides evidence that women make up 98-99 per cent of parents taking leave; there has been little change since the introduction of PreParE; in December 2016, only 4.4 per cent of benefit recipients were men. It also suggests that mothers who were in employment just before taking Maternity leave are more likely to claim childcare allowance *if* they are entitled to Parental leave because they have a job guarantee. With high unemployment, most working mothers who are not entitled to Parental leave cannot take the risk of losing their job unless their partner has secure employment.

Mothers are more likely to claim Parental leave and childcare allowance when they face demanding working conditions, for example atypical/non-standard working hours or 'flexible' hours imposed by employers. It has been hypothesised that one of the factors explaining the high take-up of these entitlements is the deterioration in working conditions in recent years. From this perspective, taking Parental leave with childcare allowance is one way to escape a job with difficult working conditions that create difficulties for workers trying to combine paid and unpaid work.

A number of factors help to explain why fathers are so reluctant to claim Parental leave, including: the unequal gender distribution of domestic and child-raising tasks within the family still persisting in France; traditional value systems; in most couples, the man earning

more than the woman; and a workplace culture in the private sector that makes it difficult for a man, in particular at management level, to take Parental leave. The small number of fathers who take childcare allowance full time are mostly blue-collar workers or employees with a stable job beforehand. Compared to fathers who do not take Parental leave, they are more likely to work in female-dominated sectors and to have partners with a higher level of education, a higher status job and higher earnings. Besides, the majority of fathers on Parental leave take it on a part-time basis.

The number of parents receiving a childcare allowance has been decreasing, falling from 670,000 in 2007 to 455,300 by the end of December 2015 and the majority of beneficiaries receive full rate childrearing benefit (55 per cent)⁴. The proportion of a childcare allowance paid to parents who choose to work part-time during Parental leave has gone up, though it remains less than the amount paid to those who stop working completely. This financial incentive has, therefore, proven its efficiency and has sharply increased the number of recipients working part time while receiving the benefit.

5. Research and publications on leave and other employment-related policies since April 2016

Please be aware that this is not intended to be a comprehensive list of all publications or research in this area for this country. If you are aware of a publication or research that could be listed in this section, please contact the country note author(s) so that they can include it for the following year.

a. General overview

Only a few studies recently have addressed this issue. In the context of high unemployment and increased casualisation of the labour market, leave policy and the wider issue of reconciling paid work and family life have been relegated to a secondary position on the policy agenda. Public opinion is more concerned with the unemployment issue, reforms in pension and education systems and with the impact of the economic crisis on their professional situation.

b. Selected recent publications

Boyer D (ed.) (2016) *L'accueil du jeune enfant en 2015, données statistiques, Observatoire national de la petite enfance, rapport 2016*. CNAF. Available at: http://www.caf.fr/sites/default/files/caf/741/Accueil_jeune_enfant_2015.pdf

This report coordinates and synthesizes all the scientific data on family-work balance in France, with extensive information on maternal employment and the usage of different types of ECEC service.

Boyer D, (2016) 'Les pères en congé parental à temps partiel en France: vers un modèle égalitaire?', *Revue des politiques sociales et familiales*, No.122. Available at: <http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/revue/caf>

This article examines how fathers part-time Parental leave cope with their role in the home. It shows that the arrangements made are still heavily based on gender-based ideas. In particular, fathers' behaviour is strongly influenced by their idea that the mother-child relationship takes precedence and that they are somehow less qualified in their relationships and in their educational role.

Boyer D, (2016) (coord) 'Exercice de la paternité et congé parental en Europe', *Revue des politiques sociales et familiales*, No.122. Available at:

⁴ Observatoire National de la Petite Enfance, CNAF, 2015.

http://www.persee.fr/issue/caf_2431-4501_2016_num_122_1

This publication is based on chapters about fathers taking Parental leave drawn from a recent book edited by Margaret O'Brien and Karin Wall, 'Fathers on Leave Alone', with five national examples chosen: pioneer character (Norway), rooted (Finland), innovator (United Kingdom), conventional (France) or audacious (Portugal) of their measures to involve fathers in parental leave. The collection of articles also includes three recent French studies focused on men working part-time, staying in the home, or in a single situation.

c. Ongoing research

None reported.