

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 (□□□□□□) (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 KRW2,000,000 [€1,424.34]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 KRW2,000,000 [€1,424.34]. 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 KRW6,000,000 [€4,273.02] 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.
- A woman who gave birth but is not eligible for the Maternity benefit (for example, self-employed workers) can receive KRW1,500,000 [€1,068.25] for 90 days (KRW500,000 [€356.09] per each 30 days)

³ Conversion of currency undertaken for 31 July 2020, using: https://www.ecb.europa.eu/stats/policy_and_exchange_rates/euro_reference_exchange_rates/html/eurofxref-graph-krw.en.html

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.

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

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

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

Length of leave

- Ten days.

Payment and funding

- 100 per cent of ordinary earnings.
- Paid by the employer. The Employment Insurance Fund pays for five days on behalf of the SMEs to reduce the financial burden on the SMEs. To calculate the payment for five days, the maximum monthly ordinary earnings are KRW2,000,000 [€1,424.34].

Flexibility in use

- Leave can be taken within 90 days after the birth.

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

- All employees whose spouse gave birth.

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

Length of leave

- One 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 [€498.52] per month and an upper limit of KRW1,500,000 [€1,068.25] per month. For the remaining nine months, 50 per cent of ordinary earnings, with a minimum of KRW700,000 [€498.52] per month and a maximum of KRW1,200,000 [€854.60] per month.

- Using part-time Parental leave, the employee can reduce working hours for one to five hours a day. For one hour reduction, 100 per cent of ordinary earnings is paid with an upper limit of KRW2,000,000 [€1,424.34] per month. For two to five hours reduction, 80 per cent of ordinary earnings with an upper limit of KRW1,500,000 [€1,068.25] 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 [€1,780.42]. This so-called 'daddy months' (□□□ □) 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.
- For single parent family, higher payment is applied: the Parental benefit for the first three months of leave increases to 100 per cent of ordinary earnings with a limit of KRW2,500,000 [€1,780.42] per month; 80 per cent for the fourth to sixth month with a limit of KRW1,500,000 [€1,068.25] per month; 50 per cent of ordinary earnings with a limit of KRW1,200,000 [€854.60] per month for the remaining months.
- 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. However, this rule is not applied when it is not the fault of the employee for not working for more than six months with the same employer (for example, closing or bankruptcy due to the economic recession from 31 March 2020).
- 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).
- Full-time Parental leave can be split once, i.e. it can be taken in two separate periods. Part-time Parental leave can be split in three months periods.
- 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.

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

- If the employee takes only part-time Parental leave, he or she can take part-time Parental leave up to 2 years.
- Both parents can take leave at the same time.

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.
- 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.
- Employees can take up to 10 days' unpaid leave per year to take care of family members on account of illness, accidents, old age and childcare. Grandparents and grandchildren are covered by this 10 days' leave. The total number of unpaid leave per year is 90 days, i.e. this 10 days' leave is included within the total 90 days' unpaid leave.

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. Leave paid at a high rate runs for 9 months. There is no entitlement to ECEC. 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 2019 (including proposals currently under discussion)

The Upper limit on the Maternity benefit for the last 30 days increased from KRW1,800,000 [€1,281.91] to KRW2,000,000 [€1,424.34] in 2020. This means that the total Maternity leave benefit paid for 90 days by Employment Insurance Fund on behalf of the SMEs increased to KRW6,000,000 [€4,273.02] in 2020.

From 1 July 2019, women who give birth but are not eligible for the Maternity benefit (for example, self-employed workers) can receive KRW1,500,000 [€1,068.25] for 90 days (KRW500,000 [€356.08] per each 30 days)

From October 2019, the duration of the Paternity leave was extended from three to five days up to ten days, paid by the employer. To reduce the financial burden on SMEs, the Employment Insurance Fund pays for five days of leave up to the monthly limit of KRW2,000,000 [€1,424.34].

From 28 February 2020, if both parents take Parental leave, both parents are paid, but the 'daddy months' payment is given only to one parent.

Since 31 March 2020 higher Parental leave benefit is applied for single parent family: the Parental benefit for the first three months of leave increases to 100 per cent of ordinary earnings with a limit of KRW2,500,000 [€1,780.42] per month; 80 per cent for the fourth to sixth month with a limit of KRW1,500,000 [€1,068.25] per month; 50 per cent of ordinary earnings with a limit of KRW1,200,000 [€854.60] per month for the remaining months.

Since 31 March 2020, 25 per cent of the Parental leave benefit that is paid as a lump sum if the employee returns to the same employer upon expiry of leave is paid also if it is not the fault of the employee for not working for more than six months with the same employer (for example, closing or bankruptcy due to the economic recession from 31 March 2020).

From October 2019, 10 days' unpaid leave was introduced to take care of family members on account of illness, accidents, old age and childcare in addition to the 90 days' unpaid leave.

Policy response to the Covid-19 pandemic up to end June 2020

No information.

4. Uptake of leave⁶

a. Maternity leave

In 2019, the number of employees taking Maternity leave was 73,306: 24 per cent of the total number of births (the provisional number of births in 2019 is 303,100). The number of births decreased from 406,200 in 2016 to 326,800 in 2018. 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 employment insurance is limited (see footnote 4); and self-employed workers are not eligible.

b. Paternity leave

No information.

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.

c. Parental leave

In 2019, 105,165 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 21.1 per cent (22,297) in 2019, compared with 13.4 per cent (17,662) in 2018. This proportion has been rising in recent years, from 2.0 per cent in 2010.

The number of 'daddy months' users increased by 48.2 per cent from 6,606 in 2018 to 9,796 in 2019, with the large majority of users (8,599, 87.8 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 48.2 per cent from 3,820 in 2018 to 5,660 in 2019; male employees represented 13.1 per cent of all part-time Parental leave takers.