

# Slovak Republic<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 (*materská dovolenka*) (responsibility of Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family)

*Length of leave (before and after birth)*

- 34 weeks: six to eight weeks of pre-natal leave; and 26 to 28 weeks of post-natal leave. Maternity leave cannot be shorter than 14 weeks and cannot end earlier than six weeks after giving birth.

*Payment (applied for the whole period of Maternity leave) and funding*

- 75 per cent of earnings in the previous calendar year, calculated as average earnings on those days, when the employee had earnings and thus paid sickness insurance. The benefit has a cap in the form of maximum earnings, based on which the benefit can be calculated. The earnings ceiling is set at twice the national average wage from two years before.<sup>2</sup> The benefit is not subject to taxation. If the maternity benefit is lower than parental allowance (see 1c below), an additional payment is made to cover the difference.

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<sup>2</sup> In 2020 the cap is equal to twice the average wage of 2018, which amounted to €1,013. The maximum benefit amounts to €1,549.

- The benefit is paid from sickness insurance contributions, collected by the Social Insurance Agency, and mandatory for all employees and self-employed. Employees contribute 1.4 per cent of their earnings, employers pay an additional 1.4 per cent of their employees' earnings. Self-employed workers pay 4.4 per cent of their declared earnings. Sickness insurance can also be paid on a voluntary basis.
- During Maternity leave, pension contributions and health insurance contributions are paid by the state.

### *Flexibility in use*

- Leave typically starts six weeks, but can start as early as eight weeks before the expected date of birth.
- If the mother gives birth before the expected date, she can use the remainder of her pre-natal entitlement after giving birth.
- If the mother dies, the leave and benefit can be claimed by the father.
- On top of the of mother's maternity benefit, the father has the right to an additional maternity benefit of 28 weeks not transferable to the mother. Thus, taken together, the parents are eligible for 62 weeks of the maternity benefit. Fathers are not eligible for Maternity leave; however, they can make use of the maternity benefit while being on Parental leave (see also 1.c. below). Fathers can claim their maternity benefit when their child is between six weeks and three years of age. Both parents must agree that the father will take over taking care of the child. During this time, the mother may be in paid work or on Parental leave, however, she is not entitled to the parental benefit. Both parents cannot receive maternity benefits for the same child at the same time. However, both parents may be on maternity benefits at the same time with different children, typically the mother with a new-born and the father with an older child.
- Employed mothers and fathers are not allowed to continue their previous employment while on maternity benefits, neither full-time nor part-time. However, they can start new employment, either with a different employer or in a new position with the same employer.<sup>3</sup> The self-employed can continue working while on maternity benefits.

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<sup>3</sup> However, the Social Insurance Agency has been turning down fathers' applications for maternity benefits when they did not meet the condition of taking care of their child, due to paid work (pravnenoviny.sk (2019). *Ako dopadli žaloby otcov proti nepriznaniu dávky materské*. Available at: <https://www.pravnenoviny.sk/ako-dopadli-zaloby-otcov-proti-nepriznaniu-davky-materske>.)

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

- To be eligible for the maternity benefit, a mother must have paid sickness insurance contributions for at least 270 days of the two years before giving birth. A father must have paid contributions at least 270 days of the two years before starting leave. All employees pay sickness insurance contributions.
- The same conditions apply to the self-employed and voluntarily insured, however, the self-employed only pay sickness insurance contributions if their income reached at least €6,078 the previous year.
- There is no provision for same-sex couples to share leave. Under Slovak legislation same sex couples do not have the right to marriage, civil partnership or adoption of children.

*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*

- Maternity leave is extended to 37 weeks for single mothers and 43 weeks in the case of multiple births.
- In the case of a stillbirth, the mother is granted a maximum of 14 weeks of Maternity leave.
- If the child dies while the mother is on Maternity leave, the mother has the right to two more weeks of leave following the death of the child.

## **b. Paternity leave**

No statutory entitlement. However, fathers are entitled to three years of Parental leave (see 1.c) and to 28 weeks of maternity benefits not transferable to mothers (see 1.a). Thus, in effect, fathers have access to 28 weeks of well-paid leave.

## **c. Parental leave (*rodičovská dovolenka*) (responsibility of Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family)**

*Length of leave*

- Until the child reaches three years of age.
- Leave is an individual entitlement, both parents can be on Parental leave at the same time.

*Payment and funding*

- Parental allowance (*rodičovský príspevok*) is available to all parents who meet the eligibility conditions, whether they take

Parental leave or not. The parental allowance amounts to €370 per month for parents who previously received the maternity benefit. Parents who did not receive the maternity benefit are entitled to a parental allowance of €270 a month. The allowance is not subject to taxation.

- Parental allowance is funded from general taxation.
- The state pays pension and health insurance contributions for one stay-at-home parent taking care of a child until the age of six, when compulsory primary education begins.

#### *Flexibility in use*

- Parents can work full-time or part-time while receiving the parental allowance.
- While both parents can take Parental leave at the same time, only one parent is entitled to the parental allowance at the same time, even with multiple young children present in the family. Parents are also not entitled to the parental allowance when one of them receives the maternity benefit, unless the maternity benefit is lower than the parental allowance. In that case, a lower parental benefit is paid, so that the total sum received by the parent is equal to the parental allowance.
- Parental leave can be repeatedly interrupted and restarted.

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

- Parents must be permanent or temporary residents of the Slovak Republic when claiming the parental allowance in order to be eligible.
- To be eligible for Parental leave, parents must be employed.
- Parental allowance is provided from the birth of the child, if parents are not eligible for the maternity benefit.
- Parental allowance is not provided to parents if another child of theirs has been removed from their personal care.

#### *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*

- Parental leave and parental allowance can be extended until the child reaches the age of six if it has a long-term health problem or disability.
- Parental allowance is increased by 25 per cent per child in the case of multiple births.
- Parental allowance is reduced by 50 per cent for at least three months if any older child under parental responsibility is absent from compulsory education for at least three months.

- If the child dies while either parent is on Parental leave, the parent has the right to two more weeks of leave following the death of the child, though not beyond the day the child would have reached the age of one.
- If the parents separate, only one has the right to the parental allowance, even if both take care of the child.

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

No statutory entitlement.

#### **e. Other employment-related measures**

##### *Adoption leave and pay*

- Adoptive and foster parents are entitled to 28 weeks of Maternity leave and benefits (31 weeks for single parents, and 37 weeks for parents taking over care of at least two children). The leave can be used until the child reaches the age of three.
- Adoptive and foster parents also have the right to three years of Parental leave starting from the end of Maternity leave or the day when they take the child into their care, if the child is already older than three years of age. The leave can be used only until the child reaches the age of six. If the child is suffering from long-term health problems, Parental leave can last up to six years, but only until the child reaches the age of six. Parental allowance for adoptive and foster parents can be paid for a maximum of three years.

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

- Employees can take leave to take care of a sick relative at home (*ošetrovanie člena rodiny*), including a sick child, or to take care of a child under the age of ten for other reasons (e.g. if the child's school is closed). The length of leave is not limited. However, parents only receive an earnings-related benefit (*ošetrovné*) paid at 55 per cent of their previous daily earnings for a maximum of ten calendar days. There is no limit to the number of episodes per year, if these do not exceed ten days each.

##### *Flexible working*

- Pregnant women and women and men taking care of children below the age of 15 may ask their employer for shorter working hours. Employers may decline the request due to serious operational reasons.

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

- Mothers of children under the age of six months are entitled to two half-hour breaks for breastfeeding per child per full working day. Mothers of children aged between six and 12 months are entitled to one 30-minute breastfeeding break a day. Mothers working at least four hours a day have the right to one break a day per child until their child reaches six months. The break time is paid.

### *Other measures*

- A childcare allowance (*Príspevok na starostlivosť o dieťa*) is available to cover some of the costs of childcare of children up to the age of three (or six in the case of a child with a long-term health problem or disability). It is available to one of the parents, including adoptive and foster parents, if they work or are enrolled in secondary or tertiary education. Parents are not entitled to the childcare allowance if in receipt of the maternity benefit or the parental allowance at the same time for any child. The allowance is provided in three forms. An allowance of up to €80 per month is paid when childcare is provided by a kindergarten included in the official network of schools and school facilities. An allowance covering declared costs up to €280 per month is paid when childcare is provided by other official providers. Finally, an allowance of €41 is paid when childcare is provided by other persons or relatives.

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

The maximum combined period of well-paid post-natal maternity benefits for both parents is 56 weeks. Parental leave associated with a much lower flat-rate benefit is available until the child reaches the age of three. While children under the age of three may attend nurseries and children over the age of three kindergartens, there is currently no ECEC entitlement in place.

As a result of long Parental leave and associated cultural norms, levels of attendance at formal services for children under three years of age are very low, well below the average both for the countries included in this review and for OECD countries. Levels of attendance for children over three years of age are much higher, but still below both averages. For actual attendance levels, see 'relationship between leave and ECEC entitlements' on [cross-country comparisons](#) page.

There is a shortage of kindergarten places, and with priority being given to five-year-olds, many parents of younger children struggle to obtain a

place.<sup>4</sup> This shortage of kindergarten places is likely to become more pronounced when kindergarten becomes compulsory for five-year-olds in September 2021. To address the shortage, construction of new kindergartens is underway, but the planned expansion (as of 2019) is insufficient even for five-year-olds, let alone younger children (ibid.).

### **3. Changes in policy since April 2018<sup>5</sup> (including proposals currently under discussion)**

As of January 2019, both parents can be on maternity benefits at the same time, if they are caring for different children. For example, the mother may receive the maternity benefit, while on Maternity leave with a new-born child, while the father may take Parental leave with an older child at the same time and also receive maternity benefit.

Starting from January 2020, the uniform parental allowance has been replaced with a two-tier system. Parents who were previously on the maternity benefit are eligible for an allowance of €370 a month. Parents who did not receive the maternity benefit are entitled to €270 a month. Both sums are considerably higher than the monthly allowance of €221 in place until the end of 2019.

Both changes were introduced by the ruling coalition of three parties, the populist SMER-SD (Direction – Social Democracy), SNS (Slovak National Party) and Most-HÍD (inter-ethnic Slovak-Hungarian party).

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

#### *Childcare and schools*

- Nurseries closed on 23 March 2020 and could reopen from 1 June 2020. Children of key workers were to be given priority upon reopening. Key workers were defined as 'especially workers in healthcare, social care, armed forces, police, sales, firefighters, drivers'.
- All kindergartens closed from 16 March 2020. They could reopen from 1 June 2020; however, the final decision was up to directly responsible authorities (e.g. municipalities).

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<sup>4</sup> Varsik, S. (2019) *Držím ti miesto. Komentár 2/2019*. Inštitút vzdelávacej politiky. Ministerstvo školstva, vedy, výskumu a športu [Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic]. Available at: <https://www.minedu.sk/komentar-022019-drzim-ti-miesto/>.

<sup>5</sup> This country note was not updated in April 2019, therefore the period of the last two years is covered here (whereas other 2020 country notes only cover changes since April 2019).

- All schools closed from 16 March 2020. They could reopen as follows (though the final decision was up to directly responsible authorities, e.g. municipalities)
  - Elementary schools (for children in grades 1-5) from 1 June 2020;
  - Schools for children with special needs in grades 1-9 from 1 June 2020;
  - All other schools from 22 June 2020.

#### *Parental leave*

- There were no modifications to Parental leave. Regular parental allowance was extended for parents whose parental allowance ended in March 2020 or later (i.e. their children reached three years of age or six years of age if the child has long-term health problems or a disability). This change is ongoing but temporary. Parents are eligible if they were receiving parental allowance (see Section 1c in country note) and have no income from employment, business or self-employment and are not receiving social benefits or pensions. Payments are equal to earlier payments.

#### *Other measures for parents and other carers*

- Parents' access to leave to take care of a sick relative (*ošetrovanie člena rodiny (OČR)*) was temporarily amended and became the so-called 'pandemic leave to take care of a sick relative' (*pandemická OČR*).
- Parents (mothers, fathers, adoptive parents) are/were able to make use of this amended leave for as long as necessary during the entire time of the crisis to take care of:
  - children from birth to 10 years, if the child's nursery, kindergarten or school was closed or if quarantine was ordered;
  - children aged 11 to 15 years if the child's school was closed and the child is unable to look after itself;
  - children aged 0 to 17 years if the child's school was closed and the child has a long-term health problem or a disability;
  - children who had been in different care arrangements (e.g. with grandparents, nanny).
- The leave was discontinued for parents of children of school age with the onset of summer holidays, starting in July. However, parents could continue using the leave if their child was sick. Parents of children below school age could continue making use of the leave.
- The associated benefits amounted to 55 per cent of earnings in the previous calendar year, calculated as average earnings on those days, when the employee had earnings and thus paid



sickness insurance. This amounts to approximately 70 per cent of previous net earnings (for parents earning the average wage).

- Parents with sickness insurance were/have been eligible for the leave.
- Parents do/did not pay social contributions while on the leave to take care of a sick relative, the contributions being paid by the state. The state also paid the contributions otherwise paid by employers. Hence, parents taking care of children continued being insured (for example to receive maternity benefits).
- Parents whose Parental leave ended during the crisis became eligible for the leave to take care of a sick relative. For parental leave eligibility see Section 1 of the country note.

## 4. Uptake of leave

### a. Maternity leave

Nearly all eligible mothers take Maternity leave as it is obligatory. The number of fathers accessing maternity benefits has also been growing fast. In 2019, 78 per cent of maternity benefits went to mothers and 22 per cent to fathers.<sup>6</sup> Regular official statistics on maternity benefits are only published on the number of monthly benefits paid and in a non-gender-disaggregated form.<sup>7</sup> However, a new analysis of administrative data shows quickly rising uptake of maternity benefits by fathers. While in 2018 fathers took leave with 10 thousand children, in the first half of 2019 fathers took leave with 6.5 thousand children, amounting to 25 per cent compared to the number of children born during this period. Fathers take leave more often when they have higher income, when one or both parents have completed education or are self-employed.<sup>8</sup>

### b. Paternity leave

There is no statutory leave entitlement.

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<sup>6</sup> Istp.sk (2020) *Rastie dávka materské a aj počet jej poberateľov*. Available at: <https://www.istp.sk/clanok/15081/rastie-davka-materske-a-aj-pocet-jej-poberatelov>

<sup>7</sup> Sociálna poisťovňa [Social Insurance Agency] *Priemerný mesačný počet vyplatených nemocenských dávok*. Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/soy9m9y>

<sup>8</sup> Dančíková, Z. (2020) *Ani muži nemôžu mať všetko. Komentár IFP 2020/06*. Available at: <https://www.mfsr.sk/sk/financie/institut-financnej-politiky/publikacie-ifp/komentare/komentare-z-roku-2020/6-ani-muzi-nemozu-mat-vsetko-materska-otcov-nastup-matiek-do-prace-jun-2020.html>

### **c. Parental leave**

There is no information available on Parental leave use. Parental allowance is paid to most families, unless they opt for the childcare allowance (see 1c). Data on the number of recipients of the Parental leave allowance is only available on a monthly basis, in February 2020, the most recent month for which data was available at the time of writing, the allowance was paid to 142,040 parents, 137,657 (97 per cent) of whom were women.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ústredie práce, sociálnych vecí a rodiny (UPSVaR) [Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family] (2020). Mesačná štatistika o počte poberateľov sociálnych dávok a dotácií a čerpaných finančných prostriedkoch. Available at: [https://www.upsvr.gov.sk/statistiky/nezamestnanost-mesacne-statistiky/kopia-2019.html?page\\_id=971502&lang=en](https://www.upsvr.gov.sk/statistiky/nezamestnanost-mesacne-statistiky/kopia-2019.html?page_id=971502&lang=en)