

Sweden¹

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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 (pregnancy benefit: *gravitetsspänning*) (responsibility of the Ministry of Social Affairs)

- It is obligatory for women to take two weeks Maternity leave before or after delivery; they can decide whether to take part of the paid parental insurance benefit during this period of leave. Pregnant women can take indefinite leave paid at 77.6 per cent of earnings, if a job is a risk to the foetus and no other work can be made available. If a job is physically demanding and therefore hard for a pregnant woman to perform, the Swedish Social Insurance Agency can grant eligibility of up to 50 days of leave during the last 60 days of pregnancy, paid at 77.6 per cent of income. This benefit is called pregnancy benefit and the woman will need a physician's certificate. If she is not granted pregnancy benefit, she may start using Parental leave benefit during the last weeks of pregnancy (see footnote for Parental leave).
- The Parental leave law §4 (under Maternity leave) states the right to breastfeed the child, but there are no further details about how this impacts work (for example, how often, for how long, and so on).

¹ Please cite as: Duvander, A.-Z., and Löfgren, N (2020) 'Sweden country note', in Koslowski, A., Blum, S., Dobrotić, I., Kaufman, G. and Moss, P. (eds.) *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2020*. Available at: http://www.leavenetwork.org/lp_and_r_reports/.

b. Paternity leave / Temporary leave in connection with a child's birth or adoption (*tillfällig föräldrapenning i samband med barns födelse eller adoption*) (responsibility of the Ministry of Social Affairs)²

Length of leave

- 10 days. Designed to be used for the other parent (or carer) to attend delivery, to care for older siblings while the mother is in the hospital, and/or to participate in childcare when the mother comes home. Most often this is used by the father of the child and was previously called 'daddy days' (*pappadagar*).

Payment and funding

- 77.6 per cent of earnings up to an earnings ceiling of SEK348 750 [€33,913.55]³ per year. Payments come from the Swedish Social Insurance Agency.
- Funding for all forms of Parental leave is obtained from statutory contributions from employers and the self-employed. Employers in Sweden pay 31.42 per cent of all employees' salary in such statutory contributions to cover all social insurance (including pensions). Out of the 31.42 per cent, 2.6 percentage points is dedicated to all Parental leave insurance. However, if costs exceed the 2.6 percentage points there is margin and funds for the parental insurance do not run out.⁴

Flexibility in use

- Leave can be used at any time during the first 60 days after childbirth. Most commonly, it is used as full-time leave (i.e. five days a week).

² Referred to as 'Paternity leave' in reviews before 2014; now revised to provide a literal translation of 'entitlement,' which is considered gender-neutral.

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-sek.en.html

⁴ Tax authorities, see: <https://www.skatteverket.se/foretagochorganisationer/arbetsgivare/arbetsgivaravgifterochskatteavdrag/arbetsgivaravgifter.4.233f91f71260075abe8800020817.htm>

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

- All employees are eligible, regardless of time spent in employment, but a person is required to have a sickness benefit qualifying income (SGI).⁵
- The benefit is gender-neutral and attributed to the parent who has not been pregnant. If the parent who has been pregnant is sole custodian another close person can use the days.

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.

- Leave is increased in the event of multiple births (e.g., doubled in the case of twins).
- Co-habiting adoptive parents get five days each at the time of adoption. A single adoptive parent gets ten days. Benefits are conditional on the child being under ten years of age at their adoption (leave can only be used up until the child is ten years of age, or 12 years if the parents obtained custody from 2014 and onwards).

c. Parental leave (*föräldrapenning*) (responsibility of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Ministry of Employment) ⁶

Length of leave (before and after birth)

- Each parent is entitled to take full-time leave from work until their child is 18 months old, regardless of whether they are using paid benefits. In addition to this, a parent always has right to leave from work when using parental benefit, to reduce work hours and when the child is sick (see below).
- Parents with joint custody are eligible for 240 days of Parental leave benefit each; some days may be transferred between them while others are non-transferable (see below). There is thus one legislation concerning the right to leave (18 months, see above) and another granting benefits (240 days). The separate legislations for rights to leave under the Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation, and the legislation for benefits under the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs are thus separate entities in Sweden.

⁵ Swedish Inspectorate for the Social Insurance (2016) *Sickness benefit qualifying income*. Report 2016:10. Stockholm. Available at: www.inspsf.se. Swedish report with English summary.

⁶ Ministry of Social Affairs has responsibility over the parental benefit and Ministry of Employment has responsibility over the legislated right to leave from work.

- For each parent, 195 of the 240 leave days are income-based (see below). For children born 2016 or later, 90 of these days are reserved and cannot be transferred to the other parent (often called a 'mother's quota' and a 'father's quota'). One of the parents may only take all benefit days in cases of one custodian, or the other parent being permanently sick and not able to care for the child. The remaining 105 income-based days for each parent can be transferred to the other by signing a consent form.
- For each parent with joint custody, 45 days of the 240 total leave days are paid at a minimum level (see below). These days can be transferred to the other parent by signing a form.
- Starting with children born from 1 January 2014, either form of paid leave can be used up until the child turns 12 years old (though only 96 days can be used after the child turns four years old). For children born before this date, parents may use the paid leave up until a child's eighth birthday or until the end of the first school year.
- Parent who migrate to Sweden with children under the age of 12 receive 200 days for children over 12 months, and 100 days for children over 24 months.
- There is an extra pension supplement for the parent who earns the lower income during the child's first four years. This supplement to the pension-qualifying amount is aimed to compensate the parent who takes the largest responsibility for childcare and therefore must scale back their work, or who temporarily exits the labour market.⁷

Payment and funding

- For parents who are eligible for income-related benefit (see below), 195 days of leave are paid at 77.6 per cent of earnings, up to an earnings ceiling of SEK465,000 [€45,218.07]⁸; the remaining 45 days are paid at a flat-rate payment of SEK180 [€17.50] per day. The first 180 days used for the child need to be earnings-related and not flat-rate. Parents who are not eligible to earnings-related leave receive a flat-rate of SEK250 [€24.31] per day for 240 days.
- All Parental leave benefits, income related and flat-rate, offer pension credits.
- Funding is the same as for temporary leave in connection with birth and adoption.

⁷ Swedish Pension Agency (2014) *Orange report 2014. Annual report of the Swedish Pension System*. Stockholm. Available at: <https://secure.pensionsmyndigheten.se/download/18.3c07b8ed14fbdb77cd57cd1/1446806348928/Orange+Report+2014+eng.pdf>

⁸ The ceiling for Parental leave is higher than for temporary leave in connection with a child's birth or adoption to encourage use of Parental leave by fathers.

Flexibility in use

- The length of leave is counted in calendar days (rather than weeks or months) to enhance flexibility of use. It is also possible to use the benefit during weekends. To get 77.6 per cent of earnings, seven days of benefit per week are needed.
- Parents can take paid leave days full-time, part-time, quarter-time, or one-eighth time, with the length of leave extended accordingly (e.g. one day of full-time leave becomes two days of part-time leave and four days of quarter-time leave). Parents cannot work while being on (days of) paid or unpaid leave.
- Paid and unpaid leave can be combined to enable parents to stay at home longer.
- Parents can take leave in one continuous period or in several blocks of time. While, officially, employees taking Parental leave have the right to stay away from work for a maximum of three periods each year, many employers allow for more periods.
- Both parents can take up to 30 days of paid leave at the same time, until the child reaches one year of age. These days have been labelled 'double days' (*dubbeldagar*). Parents cannot use any of the mother's quota or father's quota when using double days. Parents must use the remaining 105 income-based days that they are each entitled to if they want to stay home at the same time.

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

- The benefit requirements are both residence-based and employment-based in Sweden. All parents living in Sweden are entitled to paid Parental leave. Paid leave at 77.6 per cent of earnings requires parents to have had an income of over SEK250 [€23.48] per day for 240 days before the expected date of delivery or adoption. A parent remains qualified to receive the same compensation for Parental leave if an additional child is born or adopted within 30 months of the birth or adoption of an earlier child. This is economically significant mainly to parents who reduce working hours (and income) after the first child, since it keeps them at a higher benefit level for the second (or subsequent) child. This is commonly referred to as the 'speed premium.'
- Self-employed persons contribute to the social security system with a separate tax and are eligible for the same leave benefits as employed persons.
- Parents are entitled to paid Parental leave even if their partners are unemployed.
- Same-sex parents have the same rights as opposite-sex parents and the Parental leave is gender-neutral in its construction. Rights to leave and benefit are based on custody.

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

- Families with multiple births are entitled to additional paid leave (in the case of twins, an additional 90 days at 77.6 per cent of earnings and an additional 90 days at a flat-rate of SEK180 [€17.50] per day). For each additional child in a multiple birth, parents are entitled to an additional 180 days at 77.6 per cent of earnings.
- In the case of sole custody, the parent with custody receives all of the Parental leave days (i.e., 480 days). However, in most cases of parents who are living apart, parents share joint custody and, thus, both share rights to leave. Of all children up to two years of age, 95 per cent have two original parents with joint custody.⁹

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

- Additional Parental leave pay (*föräldralön*) has been negotiated in collective bargaining agreements in the public sector and is commonplace in the private sector. A common collective agreement is that the employer pays ten per cent extra under the ceiling (i.e., workers receive 90 per cent of earnings) and/or up to 90 per cent of income above the ceiling.¹⁰

e. Other employment-related measures

Specific provision for (breast)feeding

- None. Parental Leave Law §3:1 specifies a right to leave for breastfeeding but not in detail. Also no benefits are available for breastfeeding, just right to time off work.

Time off for the care of dependants

- Temporary Parental leave (*tillfällig föräldrapenning*) is available for 120 days per child, per year, for children under the age of 12, and for children aged 12 to 15 years, with a physician's certificate. This is paid at 77.6 per cent of earnings, up to an earnings ceiling of

⁹ See data in Statistics Sweden's database, http://www.statistikdatabasen.scb.se/pxweb/sv/ssd/START__LE__LE0102__LE0102X/Vardnad/?rxid=67663b18-ed2c-45be-8526-7b45f6cc3f34.

¹⁰ Swedish inspectorate for the Social Insurance (2018) *Utvecklingen av kollektivavtalade ersättningar sedan 2000-talets början [Development of extra payments from collective agreements since 2000]* Report 2018: 14.

SEK348,756 [€33,914.13] per year; it is a family entitlement and it can be used to care for sick children. Sixty of these days can also be used to stay at home with young children if the regular caregiver is sick. Since 2001, it can be offered to someone outside the family if they are an eligible person in the social insurance system. The ten days of temporary Parental leave associated with birth or adoption (see section 1.b.) also come under this category of temporary Parental leave.

- Parents whose children are sick or functionally disabled for more than six months can apply for childcare allowance (*vårdbidrag*) from the birth of the child until the child reaches the age of 19. From 2019, there has been a transition to a new allowance form (see below).

Flexible working

- Until a child reaches the age of eight or completes the first grade of school, parents have the right to reduce their normal working time by up to 25 per cent; there is no payment for working reduced hours.

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

The maximum period of paid post-natal leave available in Sweden is approximately 16 months, with 13 months paid at a high rate. There is an entitlement to ECEC from one year of age, available in centres or at licensed family day carers, on a full-time basis for employed parents or a part-time basis if the parents are not employed. Consequently, there is no gap between the end of leave and an ECEC entitlement. However, the present three reserved months for each parent can create such a gap if one parent is not using the leave benefit but remains custodian. More reserved time will obviously increase such a gap. Levels of attendance at formal services for children both under and over three years of age are above the average for the countries included in this review and 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 2019 (including proposals currently under discussion)

Since 1 July 2019, a parent may transfer his/her Parental leave benefit days to a co-resident partner who is not the other parent. A parent can transfer out of the individual 240 days, but not the reserved 90 days.

From 2019, the childcare allowance has been transformed to a new form where one may get benefit for care and extra costs for a child's disability. There are also legislated rights to leave from work in these situations. One week extra leave per family has been announced by the present government to be introduced for families with children aged four to 16 years to enable the balance between work and family and allow for extra need of childcare. However, given the crisis during the spring of 2020 such a week is likely to be postponed.

Already in December 2017, a major commission on Parental leave published proposals for changes in Parental leave legislation, which may still have consequences for future leave legislation.¹¹ The commission proposed among other things: 1) increasing the amount of each parent's quota to five months with five months to share between them; 2) stricter age limits for when Parental leave can be used; 3) abolishing the speed premium and temporary leave in connection to a child's birth or adoption; and 4) providing for the possibility to transfer two months of leave to someone other than the two primary parents. No major reforms have been enacted so far.

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

Childcare and schools

- ECEC has been open for all children throughout the period. However, the tolerance level for children to attend has changed so that even small colds (e.g. a running nose) is reason for a child to stay home. Children are both frequently sent home and kept home.
- Schools have been open but some measures of social distancing have been made, such as half-classes and time out of school. This has been decided on the school-level.
- High schools have been closed for attendance from 18 March and until the end of semester around 1st or 2nd week of June. Exceptions for national exams have been made. During this period the education has been through distance teaching. High schools will open for the autumn semester, albeit with new measures, such as some learning from home, decided at the school level.
- Universities have been closed for attendance of students during the end of the spring semester. Opening up for students are

¹¹ Jämställt föräldraskap och goda uppväxtvillkor för barn – En ny modell för föräldraförskringen [Gender-equal parenthood and good conditions for child-rearing – a new model for Parental leave] *Statens Offentliga Utredningar* 2017:101.

selective and decided at the local level and with different strategies.

Parental leave

- There were no modifications to Parental leave.

Other measures for parents and other carers

- Temporary Parental leave to take care of sick children (for children up to 12) was made more flexible. Normally parents need a doctors' certificate that the child is sick after 7 days of leave in the child's sick period. During the pandemic, this was not needed and periods of temporary Parental leave were not limited in length, as long as within the 120 days limit per year. Length and eligibility for the Temporary Parental Leave were kept the same. The special regulations are still in place and there has been no announcement of change. This exemption of doctor's certificate is by Authority-decision and not a new law, thus easier to change again. Temporary regulation that Temporary Parental Leave benefit can be used if a school or preschool close. Benefits are 90 per cent of normal benefit and this applies from 25 April to 30 September. As schools and preschools have been open this regulation is not used to any large extent (by June 2020).
- Extra housing allowance of 25 per cent for receivers during July to December 2020.
- People belonging to an at-risk group may for the period 1 July to 30 September 2020 get benefits for up to 90 days of up to SEK804 a day. This can also be paid if one needs to refrain from working in order to avoid infecting a close relative belonging to an at-risk group. It can only be received if other benefits are already received (such as personal assistant) to take care of this relative. By doctor's certificate.
- Preventive benefits for parents of children who have recently been seriously ill (during 2020) can be used 1 July to 30 September 2020.
- Pregnancy benefit can be used if there is risk of COVID-19 in the work environment.
- Payments of child support and maintenance support can be postponed if the income of the payer has been reduced.
- Disease carrier allowance can be used if a doctor decides that a person cannot work because (maybe) infected by disease classified as dangerous, including COVID-19.
- When high schools closed, many children were not provided lunch anymore. Some weeks into the pandemic pupils with 'exceptional needs' could collect lunch packages after agreement with the school.
- During the pandemic fathers-to-be have not been welcome at deliveries.

- The administration of Parental leave has worked well during the pandemic and waiting times for benefits have not increased. During March there were 200,000 more applications for Temporary Parental leave than expected, but by the end of April the numbers were back to normal again.
- Supported working hours reductions (*korttidspermittering*) were implemented on a large scale for companies to survive during the pandemic. Such measures are still in place.

4. Uptake of leave¹²

a. Maternity leave

In 2019, 24,822 women received Maternity leave benefits for an average of 39 days.¹³ Since there were 114,523 births in 2019, this suggests that 22 per cent of pregnant women took Maternity leave.

b. Temporary leave at the birth or adoption of a child

In 2019, 87,090 individuals took temporary Parental leave at the birth or adoption of a child. Approximately 76 per cent of fathers, same-sex partners, or other designated persons took this leave. Of all leave users, only 1.1 per cent were women. Men took on average 9.6 of the ten eligible days.

c. Parental leave and child-rearing benefit

Leave uptake: Almost all families use paid Parental leave in Sweden. For children born up to the end of 2013, it has been possible to use this benefit until a child reaches the age of eight or after the first school year has ended and many parents use days during the preschool years. In 2019, most Parental leave days were taken by women during the first year of the child's life, while men tended to take leave when the child was between the ages of one and three. However, most leave days are taken before children reach the age of two; all children are entitled to an ECEC place from 12 months of age. While mothers still take more Parental leave, the proportion of total days used by men has slowly increased. In 2002, fathers took about 12 per cent of all Parental leave days used in that year; by 2018, it had increased to 29 per cent. On average women took 83 days and men took 41 days during 2018. The percentage of couples that are sharing Parental leave equally (40 to 60 per cent) is very slowly increasing. For children born in 2017, 18.4 per

¹² See annual update on statistics on family policy in Social Insurance in Figures 2019. Accessible in English at <https://www.forsakringskassan.se>.

¹³ See: <https://www.scb.se/hitta-statistik/sverige-i-siffror/manniskorna-i-sverige/fodda-i-sverige/>

cent of couples equally shared leave used during the child's first 24 months.

Benefit uptake: In 2018, the majority of women (88 per cent) and men (96 per cent) who took Parental leave were entitled to benefits at the earnings-related compensation level, as opposed to the low, flat-rate level. Approximately 19 per cent of all days used were on the lower flat-rate. Foreign-born parents and young parents, especially mothers, are more likely than native-born parents to have access to only the low, flat-rate payment. The average cash benefit was 30 per cent higher for fathers. Fathers received benefits of SEK812 [€78.96] (when flat-rate days included SEK656 [€63.79]) per day in 2018, while the average mother received benefits of SEK702 [€68.26] (when flat-rate days included SEK 513 [€49.89]).

Forfeited days: For children born in 2011 parents used on average 451 days, women 339 and men 112 days. This means that on average 29 days were forfeited.

Uptake patterns: Fathers with higher formal education take more Parental leave, as do fathers whose partners have higher levels of formal education. For children born in 2013, by 2015, fathers whose jobs required higher formal education had taken an average of 112 days of Parental leave, while mothers had taken 108. An important exception is men in management jobs who took an average of only 58 days, but this has increased more for men in this job than most others.¹⁴ Fathers who work in the private sector are less likely to take leave, perhaps because they more often lack extra compensation, as a result of collective agreements. Self-employed fathers take 27 fewer leave days than wage-earning fathers. Mothers who are self-employed take 46 fewer days than wage-earning mothers, but the proportional difference is much less for mothers than fathers. Groups who take little or no leave include those born outside Sweden and unemployed fathers (who typically have low benefit levels).¹⁵

The introduction of a father's quota in 1995 (one month) and its extension in 2002 (to two months) both led to more fathers taking more leave; though the second month had a less dramatic effect than the first.¹⁶ Still, only 44 per cent of fathers had taken their two reserved

¹⁴ Försäkringskassan [Swedish Social Insurance Agency] (2016). *Föräldrapenning och yrke. Korta analyser 2016:1 [Parental leave and occupation – Short analyses]*.

¹⁵ Anxo, D., Ericson, T. (2015) 'Self-employment and Parental leave', *Small Business Economics*, Vol. 45, 4: 751-770.

¹⁶ Duvander, A. and Johansson, M. (2012) Ett jämställt uttag? Reformen inom föräldraförsäkringen [Equal use? Reforms within Parental leave insurance] Rapport 2012:4. Inspectorate of Social Insurance. Available at:

months by 2015, for children born in 2013.¹⁷ The introduction of the third reserved month has also increased fathers' use of Parental leave.

Part of the change over time is that while fathers are using more, mothers are decreasing their use even more. During the first 2.5 years fathers increased their use by 4.4 days between 2015 and 2016, from 74 to 79 days. At the same time, decreased their use by 10 days, from 277 to 267 days.

d. Other employment-related measures

Mothers are more likely than fathers to work (long) part-time hours (34 hours or fewer per week); 22 per cent of all mothers with children from birth to 17 years of age worked part-time in 2012, compared to only five per cent of employed fathers.¹⁸ In 2015, 21 per cent of women aged 20 to 64 and working part-time, reported doing so in order to care for children, compared to ten per cent of men.¹⁹ Part-time employment among mothers has declined during the last ten years. No official statistics are kept concerning how many parents working part-time are doing so by exercising their entitlement to work reduced hours.

Temporary Parental leave to care for sick children is used somewhat more by mothers, who took 62 per cent of all days taken in 2018. On average, mothers took 8.7 days and fathers 7.0 days, this being highly dependent on the age of the child, as most days are used during the first years of their life, and after regular Parental leave has ended.

<http://www.inspsf.se/>. See also Duvander, A.-Z. and Johansson, M. (2014) 'Parental leave use for different fathers: A study of the impact of three Swedish Parental leave reforms', in Rostgaard, T. and Eydal, G. (eds.) *Fatherhood in the Nordic Welfare States - Comparing Care Policies and Practice*. Bristol: Policy Press; and Duvander, A.-Z. and Johansson, M. (2012) 'What are the effects of reforms promoting fathers' Parental leave use?', *Journal of European Social Policy*, Vol.22, 3: 319-330.

¹⁷ Försäkringskassan [Swedish Social Insurance Agency] (2016). *Föräldrapenning och yrke. Korta analyser 2016:1*. [Parental leave and occupation – Short analyses].

¹⁸ Statistics Sweden (2013) *Allt fler mammor jobbar heltid*. Article 2013:31. Available at: www.scb.se

¹⁹ Statistics Sweden (2016) *Lathund – Gainful Employment Table LF09*.