

Estonia¹

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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 (*rasedus- ja sünnituspuhkus*) (responsibility of the Ministry of Social Affairs)

Length of leave (before and after birth)

- 140 calendar days: between 30 and 70 days can be taken before the expected date of birth. If fewer than 30 days' leave are taken before the expected birth, leave is shortened accordingly (e.g. if the mother starts Maternity leave 20 days before the expected birth, overall leave is shortened by ten days to 130 instead of 140 days).

Payment and funding

- 100 per cent of average earnings, calculated based on employment in the previous calendar year, with no upper limit on payments. The minimum wage (€584 per month) is paid to mothers who had not worked during the previous calendar year but then worked prior to the birth of the child.
- Funded from health insurance contributions. All employers (and self-employed people) pay a payroll tax of 33 per cent for each employee; 13 per cent is for health insurance and 20 per cent for pension insurance.

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Flexibility in use

- None, except for when the leave can be started before birth.

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 one month.
- There are no conditions linked to length of service.
- Self-employed people qualify for maternity benefit on the same conditions as workers, even without taking up the leave (for which they are not eligible).
- 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; lone parent); or delegation of leave to person other than the mother.

- None.

b. Paternity leave (*isapuhkus* – literally ‘father’s leave’) (responsibility of Ministry of Social Affairs)

Length of leave (before and after birth)

- 30 calendar days.

Payment and funding

- Additional parental benefit for fathers 100 per cent of earnings, calculated according to the rules of parental benefit (see below)
- Funded from general taxation.

Flexibility in use

- Can be taken during 30 days before the expected birth of a child up to the time the child reaches 3 years of age.
- Can be taken in blocks, with a minimum of 7 days at a time unless the employer agrees to shorter periods.

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 additional 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 additional parental benefit for fathers.
- Same-sex partners cannot use this leave.

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

- None.

c. Parental leave (*lapsehoolduspuhkus* – literally ‘childcare leave’) (responsibility of Ministry of Social Affairs)

Length of leave

- Until the child reaches three years of age. Leave is a family entitlement.

Payment and funding

- Two types of benefit are available to all families who legally reside in Estonia, whether or not the parents are eligible for Parental leave.
- Parental benefit (*vanemahüvitis*) is paid at 100 per cent of personal average earnings (calculation is based on reference period of 12 months prior to pregnancy) for 435 days (i.e. 62 weeks): from after the end of Maternity leave, and with an upper limit of €3,821.55 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 545 days. The minimum benefit paid to parents who worked in the reference period is the minimum wage: €584 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 €584 per month.
- Childcare benefit (*lapsehooldustasu*) is a flat-rate payment of €38 per month, paid from the end of parental benefit payments until the child reaches three years of age and paid to both working and non-working parents (i.e. payment continues if a parent takes up employment). Childcare benefit is not paid to children born after 1 September 2019.
- Both parental and childcare benefits are funded from general taxation.
- Pension credits for parents with children under three years of age (independent of Parental leave or employment). There are two types of pension credits for parents, available simultaneously. The state pays a social security contribution, calculated based on

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 three years: the sum of this public pension contribution is four per cent of the average wage.

Flexibility in use

- Parental leave may be used in one part or in several parts at any time until a child is three years old.
- 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 (€1,910.77). 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 €584 (benefit rate).
- Fathers can take Paternity leave and/or receive additional Parental Benefit for Fathers during mother's Maternity leave or Parental leave. Otherwise, parents cannot be on leave at the same time.
- Earning income while receiving parental benefit is allowed (being on leave is not compulsory). If earnings are up to 1.5 times the average wage (in 2021 €1910.77), the parental benefit is not reduced. The amount exceeding this limit is reduced by 50 per cent. Minimum benefit of €584 is guaranteed, no matter what the amount of additional income.

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 and childcare benefits. Also, a parent's spouse, a person in custody of the child, and adoptive parents have the right to parental and childcare benefits.
- Fathers are eligible for parental benefit when their child has reached 70 days of age and after having used father's additional parental benefit.
- The actual caregiver of a child (i.e. if none of the above-mentioned) is eligible for Parental leave if parents do not use the leave themselves. In the case of a non-parental caregiver, they are eligible for childcare benefit, but not parental benefit.
- Same sex couples are eligible if the child is adopted by the other parent.

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

- None.

d. Childcare leave or career breaks

- No statutory entitlement; see section (e) below, for supplementary annual holiday entitlement.

e. Other employment-related measures

Adoption leave (lapsendamispuhkus) and pay

- 70 days of adoption leave per child for parents adopting a child under ten 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 benefit and childcare benefit.
- Same sex couples cannot adopt (as a couple).

Time off for the care of dependants

- 14 calendar days per episode of illness. Leave 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 14 calendar days per illness episode.
- Parents with a disabled child may take one day of leave per month with full earnings replacement.
- A parent with a child under 14 years of age can take ten working days of unpaid leave per year.
- Parents may take a supplementary period of holiday: three days per year for a parent raising one or two children under 14 years of age, and six days per year for a parent raising a child under three years of age, or three or more children under 14 years of age. There is a flat-rate payment, calculated based on the minimum wage, of €27.59 per day.
- Seven paid calendar days for illness of a family member.
- Five working days per year to care for a relative with a severe disability. There is a flat-rate payment based on minimum wage.
- All payments funded from general taxation.

Flexible working

- None.

Specific provision for (breast)feeding

- Breastfeeding mothers with a child under 18 months of age can take either one 30-minute breastfeeding break every three hours or a one-hour break per day. The state compensates the breaks 100 per cent, except for mothers who receive parental benefit for raising a child. Funded from general taxation.

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 and the remainder at a low flat-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 (i.e. after the end of the higher paid leave period). 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, and for children between 18 months and three years of age the lack of places in ECEC is an issue. Many municipalities pay a special childcare benefit to working parents who use a private licensed carer or centre.

Levels of attendance at formal services for children under three years of age are below the average for OECD countries, but above the average for children over three years. For actual attendance levels, see 'relationship between leave and ECEC entitlements' on [cross-country comparisons](#) page.

3.Changes in policy since April 2020 (including proposals currently under discussion)

Starting from 1 July 2020, all fathers have a non-transferable right to receive Fathers' Additional Parental Benefit for 30 days instead of Paternity Benefit for 10 working days. Employed fathers must take Paternity leave in order to receive the benefit. Self-employed, unemployed, or non-active fathers have no right to leave, but receive the benefit.

Fathers can take this additional benefit at the same time as the mother receiving maternity benefit or parental benefit – or they may take their benefits separately. Fathers' additional 30-day benefit period is added to the total 435-day benefit period.

Parents can use parental benefit, including the fathers' additional benefit over three years.

Starting from 2022, Maternity and Parental leave will be merged into a single Parental leave and there will be a single parental benefit with non-transferable parts for the mother, for the father, and a shared part.

Policy response to the Covid-19 pandemic up to end April 2021

Please also see the note in the 2020 Leave Review (www.leavenetwork.org)

Childcare and schools

- Kindergartens remained open, however, parents were strongly recommended to keep children at home.
- All school classes switched to distance learning from 11 March 2021, contact learning remained available for students with special educational needs. Hobby groups and trainings were stopped.
- Starting from 1 March 2021, classes 5-12 switched to distance learning, contact learning was allowed for consultations.

Parental leave

- The draft law, which enters into force on 1 July 2021, excludes the period of registration as unemployed from the reference period for calculating parental benefit. This provides higher benefit for parents who have lost their jobs due to the corona crisis, as time spent unemployed is not taken into account when calculating the average amount of parental benefit. This is a temporary measure valid for the calculation of parental benefit for children born between 1 January 2021 and 31 December 2023.

Other measures for parents and other carers

- Free meal delivery for school children (to replace free school meals) was organised by local municipalities on conditions decided by municipalities. These conditions varied; some municipalities provided a universal delivery, while others applied a means-test.

4. Uptake of leave

a. Maternity leave

No information on take up is available. In 2019, 10,778 persons received maternity benefit (10,025 persons in 2020)². In 2019, there were 13 925 births, but there is no information on how many of these mothers were eligible to Maternity leave.

b. Paternity leave

There are no data for the current year. Based on preliminary data of registration of births in 2018, around 54 per cent of fathers took leave, and in 2019, that rose again to 58 per cent of fathers.³

c. Parental leave

No official statistics about the uptake of leave are collected. Information is available only on recipients of the benefit. The latest statistics from January 2021 shows that parental benefit was paid to 18,485 persons, 87.3 per cent of whom were women and 12.8 per cent men. At the end of 2019, 12.5 per cent of parental benefit recipients were men. These numbers reflect the number of recipients during the month, not dependent on the number of days the benefit is received (could be just for one day).

The share of benefit paid to fathers has increased over time from just 1-2 per cent in 2004-2006 to 7.4 per cent in 2013 and 2017.⁴ 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 is 70 days old). Previously the access was limited, and they could take the benefit only after child was six months old.

However, these numbers do not reflect the level of take-up of the 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 January 2021, 70.6 per cent of male recipients of the parental benefit (8.4 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 six months of the benefit period. The wage received

² Estonian Health Insurance Fund database.

³ Author's calculations using data from Statistics Estonia and Social Insurance Board.

⁴ Author's calculations based on Social Insurance Board data.

was as an average higher than average wage in the county⁵. 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 and do so full time.

d. Other employment-related measures

In 2016, 28 per cent of parents who received benefit for nursing a sick child under the age of 12 (i.e. care leave certificates) were men (in 2015 this was 27 per cent, and in 2014 this was 26 per cent).⁶

⁵ Source: Social Insurance Board.

⁶ Estonian Health Insurance Fund, based on the calculations of the Ministry of Social Affairs.