

Italy¹

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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 (*Congedo di Maternità*) (responsibility of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies and, for public employees, Ministry of Economy and Finance)

Length of Leave (before and after birth)

- Five months: at least four weeks can be taken before the birth. However, the pregnant woman also has a choice to work up to childbirth, as long as a specialist doctor certifies that this option does not damage the health of the pregnant woman and the child. Those who choose this option are able to benefit from the five months of mandatory Maternity leave after the birth of the child. It is obligatory to take this leave. Absence from work can take place two months before the childbirth if pregnancy is certified as 'at risk,' or if the Territorial Department of Labour certifies that the job is incompatible with pregnancy.

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Payment and funding

- 80 per cent of previous earnings with no upper limit for salaried workers. For home helps, self-employed workers, and agricultural temporary labourers, earnings are 80 per cent of conventional earnings determined each year by the law. For non-fixed term workers, Maternity leave depends on accredited contributions, though each professional sector has the potential to determine, with approval by the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Policies, a higher limit, taking into account income and contribution potential of the professional sector and compatibility with financial availability of the professional fund.
- Funded by the INPS (National Institute for Social Security), financed by contributions from employers and employees at a rate that is related to the sector and to the type of employment contract (for example, in manufacturing it is 0.46 per cent of earnings for employers and 0.28 per cent for employees). Workers on Maternity leave may be paid directly by INPS or by their employer, who is recompensed by the INPS. These contributions maintain pension rights.
- Pension contributions for women taking Leave are made by the INPS. Maternity leave periods outside an employment relationship are counted as social security contributions for retirement pensions, provided that the claimant has at least five years of employment and has paid social security contribution at the time of her application.

Flexibility

- For employees and workers enrolled in the Separate Social Security Fund '*Gestione separata*',² the 20-week period is compulsory, but there are two options for taking this Leave: four weeks before the birth and 16 weeks after (upon presentation of a medical certificate); or eight weeks before the birth and 12 weeks after. The allowance is accorded to autonomous female workers from eight weeks before the birth to 12 weeks after. Maternity leave, however, is not compulsory for this category. The Jobs Act provides that, in the case of premature birth, which takes place before month seven of the pregnancy, the amount of Leave not used before birth is added to post-natal Leave.

² By Law 335/1995, workers must contribute to a separate Italian National Institute of Social Security (INPS) fund for co-workers in order to obtain the right to a pension. They work on the basis of 'contracts of continuous and co-ordinated collaboration' or under contract for a project 'co.pro.,' that lay between employed and self-employed individuals' contracts.

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

- All employees and self-employed women with social security membership, including workers enrolled in *Gestione separata*.

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 by 12 weeks.
- In the case of a premature birth, the mother may take unused pre-natal Leave after the birth; and if the infant is hospitalised, the mother has the right to suspend her Maternity leave, taking up the Leave again once the child is discharged.
- The mother can transfer one day of Maternity leave to the father, or a longer period if certain conditions prevent the mother from using the Leave.

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

- Public sector employees receive 100 per cent of earnings.
- In general, national collective agreements guarantee 100 per cent of earnings, with employers paying the additional 20 per cent.

b. Paternity leave (*congedo di paternità*) (Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Policies)

Length of Leave

- Ten days, which are obligatory. A further one day of optional Leave is available if the mother transfers part of her Maternity leave. Both types of Leave are not yet permanent and are still experimental, depending on budgetary approval (e.g. the optional part of the Leave was not funded in 2017).

Payment and funding

- 100 per cent of earnings with no upper limit.

Flexibility

- Leave can be used until five months after childbirth.
- Leave can be taken as separate days.

Eligibility

- All employees.
- Same-sex couples are not eligible.

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

- Employed fathers, including those who are self-employed and enrolled in *Gestione separata*, may take three months' paid Leave after the birth in the following circumstances: the mother's death or severe illness; the child being left by the mother; or the child being in the sole care of the father. An important verdict by the Tribunal of Florence extends the possibility of obtaining Paternity leave, paid at 80 per cent of earnings, to two months before childbirth. This means that the father can take the whole period of Maternity leave in certain circumstances, i.e. if the mother is a housewife, ill or, alternatively, if she is a self-employed worker who cannot take the Leave. The Tribunal is a civil court and its decision acts as an important precedent for other Tribunals, but is not automatically binding. Conditions are the same as for Maternity leave.

c. Parental leave (*Congedo Parentale*) (responsibility of the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Policies and, for public employees, the Ministry of Economy and Finance)

Length of Leave (before and after child's birth)

- Six months per parent. Leave is an individual entitlement and is non-transferable.
- The maximum total length of leave per family is ten months, unless the father takes at least three months of Leave; in which case, the total length of leave can be extended to 11 months, and the father can extend his leave to seven months. During this period, parents receive pension credits, so that they do not suffer a reduced pension because of taking Leave.

Payment and funding

- 30 per cent of earnings when leave is taken for a child under six years of age; the Leave is unpaid if taken when a child is six to twelve years of age.
- Funded in the same way as Maternity leave.
- Pension contributions for parents taking Leave are made by the INPS.

Flexibility in use

- Leave can be taken at any time until a child is 12 years old.
- Leave can be taken as a single leave period up to a maximum of six months; or as shorter periods amounting to a maximum of six months.
- Leave can be taken on an hourly basis, up to half of the daily hours worked during the month immediately preceding the start of Parental Leave; but this 'hourly-based leave' cannot be combined with another kind of permitted absence from work on the same day.
- Parents can take Leave at the same time.

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

- All employed parents, except domestic workers and home helps. Self-employed workers are generally entitled to three months, which can be taken only during the first year after child's birth.
- The father is entitled to leave even if the mother is not, for example, if she is a housewife. Circular letter B/12-5-2009 from the Department of Labour, Health, and Social Policies extends the right to fathers to make use of the Leave indicated in the act if the mother is a housewife³; previously this right was limited to fathers where the mother was self-employed. This change gives equal financial value to domestic work as labour outside of the home.
- Parental Leave of three months, to be taken within the first year of the child's life, is available to workers enrolled with *Gestione separata* by the INPS.
- Same-sex couples are eligible.
- Unemployed women are eligible to the maternity allowance granted by the National Social Security Institution for five months in place of the unemployment benefit.

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

- As the Leave is per child, each parent is entitled to additional Leave in the case of a multiple birth (e.g. the length is doubled for twins, and tripled for triplets).
- A single parent may take ten months of Leave.

³ Art. 40c, Act of Law n. 151/2001: right to work reduced hours with full earnings compensation for the first 12 months after childbirth.

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

- Public sector employees receive 100 per cent of earnings during the first 30 days of Leave.

d. Childcare leave or career breaks

No statutory entitlement.

e. Other employment-related measures

Adoption leave and pay

- For adoptive and foster parents, the same regulations for Maternity, Paternity and Parental Leave apply as for other parents. The period of Maternity leave does not depend on the age of the child adopted and must start within five months of them entering the family; in the case of international adoption, the Leave can also be taken for overseas visits in connection with adoption. Paternity leave can be taken within five months of a child's entry into the family or into Italy, in the case of national or international adoption. The Parental Leave for adoptive and foster parents can be taken within eight years of the child entering the family but not after their eighteenth birthday; payment, generally, is 100 per cent of earnings for the first 30 days and 30 per cent of earnings for the subsequent five months, if taken within three years of the entry of the child into the family.

Time off for the care of dependents

- No limit for a child under three years of age; five days per year per parent for a child aged three to eight years. This Leave is unpaid.
- Employees are entitled to two years' Leave over the course of their entire working life in the case of a serious need in their family: for example, the disability of a child or other relative, even if not co-resident. The order of priority for taking Leave is: spouse, parents, children, then siblings of the person who needs care. During the period of Leave, the applicant is entitled to receive an allowance of 100 per cent of their previous earnings, up to a ceiling of €47,351 per year.

Flexible working

- Until a child is 12 months old, female employees are entitled to work reduced hours for breastfeeding, with full earnings

compensation (one hour less per day if working six hours per day or less; two hours less per day if working longer than six hours). Fathers are entitled to use this benefit in certain conditions, for example: if the mother is self-employed or a freelancer; if the mother opts not to use it; if the mother is not employed; or if the father has sole custody of the child. Home helps, domestic workers, and autonomous workers are not entitled to reduced hours, but in this case too the father can work reduced hours.

- Employees of any gender who have parental responsibility for a child under six years of age or a disabled child under 18 years of age have a legal right to apply to their employers to work flexibly (e.g. to reduce their working hours). Employers have a legal duty to consider these requests and may refuse them only 'where there is a clear business ground for doing so [... and must give] a written explanation explaining why.'

Leave for female victims of gender based violence

- Victims of gender-based violence (as certified by municipal social services or anti-violence centres) employed in the public or private sectors, and who have care responsibilities, may request Leave from work for three months, with a right to full pay. For the same period, they are also entitled to switch from full-time to part-time employment.

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

The maximum period of post-natal leave is 15 to 16 months (depending on bonus months if the father takes Parental Leave); however, there is only five months of well-paid leave entitlement. There is no entitlement to ECEC, though nearly all children attend ECEC from three years of age.

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

Despite being recognised as a social right for children and working mothers by Law 1044/1971, provision of ECEC for children under three years of age is much lower and very variable between different regions.

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

Paternity leave

Following the Budget Law 2021, employed fathers are entitled to ten days of compulsory Paternity leave (increased from seven days granted before), which is an individual right and independent of the mother's right to Maternity leave. Also, the possibility to transfer one day of the Maternity leave to the father has been confirmed by the Law 178/2020.

Kindergarten bonus

Bonus to cover the costs of kindergarten or home care (in the case of serious disease) for children up to the age of three was confirmed by Law Decree 30, 13 March 2021.

Universal birth allowance

A monthly birth allowance (known as 'Baby Bonus') for families for each child born, adopted, or in pre-adoptive foster care was confirmed by Law 178/30 December 2020 (Budget Law 2021) article 1, comma 362.

The family card

The family card was introduced in 2016 to be applied in a set of municipalities in 2018. As from February 2020, in line with the 2019 Budget law, it has been extended at the national level and is provided to families with at least three children under 26 years. During the pandemic, the card has been made accessible to all families with at least one dependent child; however, from January 2021, families with less than three children under 26 years old cannot be eligible for the family card.

Culture bonus or 18-year bonus

It has been renewed for 2021.

Universal allowance fund and family services

The 2020 budget law established the 'Universal allowance fund and family services', in which, from 2021, the resources dedicated to the birth allowance (so-called baby bonus) and the nursery bonus will be transferred. The additional resources of the Fund will be directed to the reorganisation and systematisation of policies supporting families with children. The Chambers are examining the draft law S. 1892 delegating to the Government the adoption of one or more legislative decrees aimed to reorganize, simplify and strengthen - progressively - the measures aim to support dependent children through single and universal allowance and a so-called Family act (C. 2561). This government initiative aims to support female employment, increase the birth rate, promote the importance and social value of formal and non-

formal educational and learning activities for children and support the financial autonomy of young people.

Starting from 1 July 2021 and until 31 December 2021, a temporary allowance ('bridge allowance') for families with minor children who are not entitled to the current allowances has been established by the Italian Government 22nd Council of Ministries held on 4 June 2021. The 'bridging allowance' is dedicated only to families who do not meet the requirements to access family allowances already in force. The latter will continue to be paid to the families of employees and the like. A new 'bridge allowance' will guarantee support for families of self-employed, unemployed or citizenship income earners who are currently excluded from family allowances. To access the "bridge allowance", the applicant's family unit must have an ISEE of less than €50,000 per year. In addition, the applicant must comply with one of the following requirements:

- be an Italian citizen or of a member state of the European Union, or a family member with the right of residence;
- be a citizen of a state not belonging to the European Union, in possession of an EU residence permit for long-term residents or a residence permit for work or research purposes for at least six months;
- be subject to the payment of income tax in Italy;
- be domiciled or resident in Italy and have dependent children up to the age of eighteen;
- be resident in Italy for at least two years, even if not continuous, or be the holder of an open-ended or fixed-term employment contract of at least six months.

The allowance is paid for each minor child based on the number of children and the economic situation of the family certified by the ISEE; in particular, the amount decreases as the ISEE level increases. If there are more than two children in the household, the unit amount for each minor child is increased by 30 per cent, and for each minor child with disabilities the amounts are additionally increased by €50. The average benefit referable to the period from 1 July 2021 to 31 December 2021 is equal to €1,056 per household and €674 per child.

On 11 June 2020 the Family Act containing '*Delegations to the government for the adoption of the universal allowance and the introduction of measures to support the family*' delegated to the government the adoption of one or more decrees within a two year period that will aim to strengthen, rearrange and harmonise the legislation on Parental Leave. The Family Act provides at least two months of Parental Leave for each child not transferable to the other parent. It also includes: 1) a mandatory leave period of at least ten working days for employed father in the first months of the child's birth, which is granted regardless of the marital or family status; 2) a paid leave of at least five hours during the school year for meetings with the teachers. It also foresees an introduction of flexible leave options.

Policy responses to the Covid-19 pandemic to end April 2021

Parental leave

- The Law 77/2020 (17 July 2020) extended the period during which it was possible to take advantage of the COVID-19 leave until 31 August 2020, thus postponing the previous deadline of 31 July 2020. Parental leave could be alternately used by only one of the parents per family unit for children under the age of 12 years, provided that neither parent in the family did not benefit from income support measures in the event of suspension or termination of employment or that there is no other unemployed or non-working parent in the family. The 12-year age limit did not apply to disabled children in the situation of severity established under Article 4, c. 1, of the law 5 February 1992, no. 104, registered to schools of all types and levels or hosted in daycare centres. Parents on leave with a child under 12 years of age were granted an allowance equal to 50 per cent of their salary with a relative notional contribution. The possibility of taking the leave was also recognized for parents with children aged 12 to 16, but without the right to the benefit payment or recognition of the notional contribution.
- The Decree Law 30/2021 (13 March 2021) introduced a new leave for employees with children affected by COVID-19, in quarantine, or in cases of suspension of teaching activities in the presence or closure of daycare centres. The new leave is compensated at 50 per cent of salary. Eligibility is extended to employees in the private or public sectors who can use leave alternately (not on the same days) for cohabiting children under 14 years. The cohabitation requirement and the 14-year age limit do not apply to the care of children with disabilities in a situation of severity established under article 4, paragraph 1, of law no. 104, enrolled in schools of all types and levels for which the suspension of face-to-face teaching activities has been ordered or in daycare centres that have been closed due to the pandemic. For parents of children aged 14 to 16, there is the right to abstain from work; however, without the right to the benefit payment or recognition of the notional contribution. In the latter case, the application must be submitted only to the employer and not to the National Social Security Institute.

4. Take-up of Leave

a. Maternity leave

Maternity leave is obligatory for employees. The most recent data (INPS, 2020) for the private sector shows that in 2018 there were 198,279 beneficiaries, of whom 24,755 were fixed-term employees; 172,325 permanent workers; and 1,199 seasonal workers.

b. Paternity leave

In 2018 in the private sector, 123,142 fathers took compulsory Paternity leave (INPS); a 14 per cent increase since 2017. Optional leave beneficiaries increased from 868 in 2017 to 4,524 in 2018. However, as the figures show, the majority of fathers do not take advantage of this leave. Monitoring, as well as more information about the right to take Paternity leave, is needed in order to increase the number of fathers taking the compulsory leave.

c. Parental Leave

The most recent data (INPS, 2021) for the private sector, including agriculture, show that there were 297,002 Parental leave beneficiaries. Regarding self-employed workers, there were 2,026 Parental leave beneficiaries in 2019. Fathers are still a minority amongst parents beneficiaries of the leaves (21 per cent in 2019).⁴

As of March 2021, 1,304,903 applications for Bonus 'babysitting' included by the 'Cura Italia' Decree were received by INPS, out of whom 86 per cent came from the private sector (INPS, 2021).⁵

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https://www.inps.it/docallegatiNP/Mig/Dati_analisi_bilanci/Studi_e_analisi/CO_NGEDI_PARENTALI.pdf

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https://www.inps.it/docallegatiNP/Mig/Dati_analisi_bilanci/Osservatori_statistici/Analisi_Covid-19/Bonus_baby-sitting.pdf