

Korea¹

Hyunsook Kim and **Eunkyung Shin** (Ministry of Health and Welfare, Korea)²

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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 (출산전후휴가) (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 (75

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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.

days for multiple births); then, 100 per cent of ordinary earnings paid by the Employment Insurance Fund with an upper limit of KRW2,000,000 [€1,482.37]³ for the last 30 days (45 days for multiple births).

- To reduce the financial burden on small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), often called an affirmative support enterprise, the Employment Insurance Fund⁴ pays for the first 60 days, up to a limit of KRW2,000,000 [€1,482.37]. 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 [€4,447.11] (KRW8,000,000 [€5,929.48] for multiple births) 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 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.

³ Conversion of currency undertaken for 21 June 2021, 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.

- A woman who gave birth but is not eligible for the Maternity benefit (for example, self-employed workers) can receive KRW1,500,000 [€1,111.78] for 90 days (KRW500,000 [€370.59] per every 30 days)

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 a person other than the mother

- In the case of multiple births, the length of paid Maternity leave increases to 120 days (a minimum of 60 days must be taken after birth).

b. Paternity leave (배우자 출산휴가) (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. The upper limit on payment for five days is KRW382,770 [€283.70].

Flexibility in use

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

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

- All employees whose spouse gives birth.

c. Parental leave (육아휴직) (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 [€518.83] per month and an upper limit of KRW1,500,000 [€1,111.78] per month. For the remaining nine months, 50 per cent of ordinary earnings, with a minimum of KRW700,000 [€518.83] per month and a maximum of KRW1,200,000 [€889.42] 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 [€1,482.37] per month. For two to five hours reduction, 80 per cent of ordinary earnings with an upper limit of KRW1,500,000 [€1,111.78] per month is applied for the whole leave period, 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 [€1,852.96]. This so-called 'daddy months' (아빠의 달) 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 [€1,852.96] per month; 80 per cent for the fourth to the sixth month with a limit of KRW1,500,000 [€1,111.78] per month; 50 per cent of ordinary earnings with a limit of KRW1,200,000 [€889.42] 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 year in primary 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 into 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 35 hours per week. The Parental leave benefit is paid in proportion to the number of working hours.
- If the employee takes only part-time Parental leave – in other words, does not take full-time Parental leave at all, he or she can take part-time Parental leave up to two years.
- Both parents can take parental 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 a 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

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

- Employees are entitled to a 90 days of unpaid family care leave per year when they need 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.
- Although family care leave should be taken in blocks of at least 30 days, employees can take family care leave of up to 10 days per year on a daily basis to take care of family members on account of illness, accidents, old age and childcare. Grandparents and grandchildren are covered by this ten days' leave. The total number of unpaid leave per year is 90 days, i.e. these ten days of leave are included within the total of 90 days of unpaid leave.
- These ten days of family care leave are temporarily paid in order to lessen the family care burden caused by COVID-19.

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.
- 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 is 27 months. Well-paid leave runs for 9 months. There is no entitlement to ECEC.

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, as well as for OECD countries in general. For actual attendance levels, see 'relationship between leave and ECEC entitlements' on the [cross-country comparisons](#) page.

A childcare subsidy is available for all children aged five years or younger to attend any type of formal ECEC facilities, regardless of family income level.

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

In 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 of unpaid leave. From March 2020, employees who use the 10 days of family care leave are entitled to family care

payment. This payment was introduced as a temporary, COVID-19 related measure for 2020; however, it was prolonged to 2021.

From December 2020, artists are entitled to Maternity leave from the Employment Insurance Fund if they have been insured as artists for 90 days prior to the commencement of Maternity leave.

In December 2020, the Korean government announced the fourth basic plan for low fertility and population ageing, which includes crucial measures to enlarge investments for children and their families. First, infant allowance for children under the age of one year will be introduced in 2022, which will be gradually increased to KRW500,000 [€370.59] in 2025. Second, the first meeting package will be introduced in 2022, including a healthcare voucher for pre- and post-natal care amounting to KRW1,000,000 [€741.19] and a lump-sum grant for newborns amounting to KRW2,000,000 [€1,482.37]. Third, Parental leave benefit will be expanded by introducing 3+3 Parental leave payment, increasing the income replacement rate related to Parental leave payment, and expanding the entitlement to Parental leave to temporary or casual workers (including platform workers). If both parents take up Parental leave for more than three months before the child reaches 12 months, the upper ceiling on Parental benefit will increase to KRW3,000,000 [€2,223.56] per month, instead of KRW2,000,000 [€1,482.37]. The income replacement rate related to Parental leave benefit will be raised to KRW1,500,000 [€1,111.78] per month (from KRW1,200,000 [€889.42]).

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

Other measures for parents and other carers

- Family care leave is being paid for ten days per year. Employees have been entitled to 90 days of unpaid family care leave. From January 2020, employees are entitled to ten days of family care leave per year if 1) their family members are in COVID-19 contact or show symptoms of COVID-19 or 2) their children need to stay at home due to school closures. This is an individual entitlement per parent, and paid at KRW50,000 per day [€37.06]. The total number of unpaid leave per year is 90 days, i.e. this 10-day leave is included within the total 90-days unpaid leave. As the COVID-19 pandemic is still rampant, paid family care leave was extended by ten days (15 days for single-parent families) in September 2020.
- Emergency care by Public Agency of Social Service. Parents or carers of children are able to request 'emergency care' to the Public Agency of Social Service if they experience a care deficit

due to COVID-19 (e.g., parents or primary carers are in contact to COVID-19, or ECEC facilities or schools are closed due to COVID-19). Emergency care is available from 14 days to one month per case.

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.

c. Parental leave

In 2020, 112,040 employees took Parental leave, an increase in the number of parents taking leave in 2017 (90,110). This number does not include Parental leave takers in national and local governments - 46,060 of parents in 2019. The number of births in 2017 was 357,771 and 272,400 (provisional) in 2020.

Almost one in four Parental leave takers, 24.5 per cent (27,423), was male in 2020, and their share has increased by 11 percentage points since 2017 (from 13.4 per cent (17,662)). This proportion has been rising in recent years, from 2.0 per cent in 2010. Gradual transitions from a work-oriented to work-and-life balance culture are observed as Korea increasingly embraces family-friendly measures.

The number of 'daddy months' users more than doubled to 13,507 in 2020 (from 6,060 of 2018), with about 91 per cent of 'daddy months' users (11,769 out of 13,507) being male employees. The rest were female employees whose husbands had taken Parental leave before

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.

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 usage 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 government efforts to increase the income replacement rate related to the payment level. Also, the workplaces are gradually accommodating family-friendly culture, including acceptable social norms and attitudes towards male employees who would like to and are taking Parental leave, which may encourage male employees to take Parental leave.

In 2020, the average length of Parental leave period was 9.4 months; slightly more than half of Parental leave users take their Parental leave within six months after giving birth, and one in seven Parental leave users take it when their children go to primary school.

The number of employees taking part-time Parental leave almost tripled to 14,698 in 2020 (from 5,660 in 2019); male employees represented 11.2 per cent of all part-time Parental leave takers.