

# 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 2021 the cap is equal to twice the average wage of 2019, which amounted to €1,092. The maximum benefit amounts to €1,669.5.

- 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, in such cases the post-natal period of leave is shortened accordingly.
- 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, 31 weeks if he is single and 37 if taking care of two or more children. Thus, taken together, the parents are eligible for 62 (or 68 or 80) weeks of 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 1c). 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 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 allowance. 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 as well as be insured when 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 1c) and to 28 weeks of maternity benefits not transferable to mothers (see 1a). Thus, in effect, fathers have access to individual 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 €378.1 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 €275.9 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 agree with their employer on an extension of parental leave until their child reaches the age of five.
- 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.
- Parents' spouses are also eligible, if living in the same household.
- 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, upon agreement with the employer, this can be extended until the child reaches the age of eight.

- 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 eleven (or 18 if the child is suffering from long-term health problems) for other reasons (e.g. if the child's school is closed). The length of leave is not limited. However, insured parents only receive an earnings-related benefit (*ošetrovné*) paid at 55 per cent of their previous daily earnings for a maximum of 14 calendar days. There is no limit to the number of episodes per year, if these do not exceed ten days each.

- Insured parents are also entitled to a long-term benefit to care for a child that is in need of home care following a hospital stay or palliative care. The benefit amounts to 55 per cent of their previous daily earnings for a maximum of 90 calendar days and can be split between the parents.

#### *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 period of post-natal leave is three years, 13 months paid at a high rate, the remainder at a low flat rate. There is no entitlement to Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), though children at the age of five will be entitled to a place in kindergarten as of September

2021, when attending kindergarten becomes compulsory for this age group.

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 2020 (including proposals currently under discussion)**

Under the new ruling coalition of four parties, OĽaNO (Ordinary People and Independent Personalities), Sme Rodina (We Are Family), Za Ľudí (For the People) and SAS (Freedom and Solidarity), maternity benefits and parental allowance increased as of January 2021. The maternity benefit cap was raised from €1,549 to €1,669.5. Parental allowance increased slightly, from €370 to €378.1 for parents who previously received the maternity benefit, and from €270 to €275.9. for those who did not.

Starting from January 2021, the maximum period during which benefits can be received by parents taking care of a sick child was extended from 10 to 14 days. At the same time a new, long-term benefit of 90 days was introduced.

Finally, compulsory kindergarten for five-year-olds came into force in January 2021 and is to be applied from September 2021, a change introduced by the previous ruling coalition of three parties, the populist SMER-SD (Direction – Social Democracy), SNS (Slovak National Party) and Most-HÍD (inter-ethnic Slovak-Hungarian party).

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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/>

## **Policy responses to the Covid-19 pandemic up to end April 2021**

### *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'. In August 2020 government indicated nurseries should monitor the epidemiological situation based on pre-defined rules and recommended they close when instructed by the authorities or when two or more positive cases are confirmed among employees or the children, until authorities allow for reopening.
- 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). Kindergartens closed again on 11 January 2021 for all children except for children of critical infrastructure workers and those parents who cannot work from home. Kindergartens could reopen again on 8 February.
- Schools for children in grades 1-5 closed on 16 March 2020 and could reopen from 1 June, though the final decision was up to directly responsible authorities, e.g. municipalities. Grades 1-4 closed again on 11 January 2021 and could reopen on 8 February.
- Schools for children in grades 5-9 closed on 16 March 2020 and could reopen from 22 June. They closed again on 26 October. Small-group teaching in groups of up to five students was allowed from 16 November for students from disadvantaged backgrounds who cannot access online learning. The grades reopened again on 7 December and closed on 11 January 2021. On 8 February, grades 5-9 teaching could resume again for small groups from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Schools for children with special needs in grades 1-9 closed on 16 March and could reopen from 1 June 2020, the final decision was up to directly responsible authorities, e.g. municipalities. Schools for children with special needs in grades 5-10 were closed again on 26 October, reopened on 10 November, closed again on 11 January 2021, and could reopen on 8 February;
- High schools closed on 16 March 2020 and could reopen from 22 June 2020. They closed again on 12 October, reopened on 7 December and closed on 11 January 2021. On 8 February high school teaching could resume again for small groups from disadvantaged backgrounds, as well as the final grades in high schools and all grades in medical, special needs, practical and technical high schools.



### *Parental leave*

- There were no modifications to Parental leave.

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

- 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). The change was discontinued on 15 October and reintroduced on 11 November, covering both parents who received the benefit until 15 October and newly eligible parents. This change is ongoing but temporary. Parents are eligible if they were receiving parental allowance (see 1c) and have no income from employment, business or self-employment and are not receiving social benefits or pensions. Payments are equal to earlier payments.
- Parents' access to leave to take care of a sick relative (*ošetrovanie člena rodiny* (OČR)) (see 1e) was temporarily amended and became the so-called 'pandemic leave to take care of a sick relative' (*pandemická OČR*).
- Parents (mothers, fathers, adoptive parents) have been 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 ten 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.
- With the start of the school year in September, the leave was reintroduced for parents of schoolchildren whose schools were closed as well as for parents of kindergartners when kindergartens were closed but also when parents preferred not to send their child to the kindergarten. Starting from 23 September parents of kindergartners were only eligible if their kindergarten was closed.
- 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 have been eligible for the leave.
- Parents have not paid 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.

## 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, the most recent year for which data is available, 78 per cent of maternity benefits went to mothers and 22 per cent to fathers.<sup>5</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>6</sup> A 2020 analysis of administrative data showed 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>7</sup>

### b. Paternity leave

There is no statutory leave entitlement.

### 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

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<sup>5</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>6</sup> Sociálna poisťovňa [Social Insurance Agency] *Priemerný mesačný počet vyplatených nemocenských dávok*. Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/soy9m9y>

<sup>7</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>

allowance (see 1.c). Data on the number of recipients of the Parental leave allowance is only available on a monthly basis. In February 2021, the most recent month for which data was available at the time of writing, the allowance was paid to 152,359 parents; 147,230 of whom were women (i.e. 97 per cent, similar to the figure reported the year before).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ústredie práce, sociálnych vecí a rodiny (UPSVaR) [Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family] (2021). Mesačná štatistika o počte poberateľov sociálnych dávok a dotácií a čerpaných finančných prostriedkoch. Available at: [https://www.upsvr.gov.sk/statistiky/socialne-veci-statistiky/2021/2020-socialne-davky.html?page\\_id=1060272](https://www.upsvr.gov.sk/statistiky/socialne-veci-statistiky/2021/2020-socialne-davky.html?page_id=1060272)