

Estonia

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For comparisons with other countries in this review – on demographic, economic, employment and gender equality indicators and on leave provision and early childhood education and care services - go to cross-country comparisons page on website. To contact authors of country notes, go to membership-list of members page on 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)

- One hundred and forty calendar days: between 30 and 70 days can be taken before birth of a child. If less than 30 days leave is taken before the expected birth, leave is shortened accordingly.

Payment and funding

- Hundred per cent of average earnings, calculated on employment in the previous calendar year, with no ceiling on payments. The minimum wage (€290 per month) is paid to mothers who did not work during the previous calendar year but have worked prior to the birth of a child.
- Funded from health insurance contributions. All employers and self-employed pay a payroll tax of 33 per cent for each employee; 13 per cent is for health insurance, 20 per cent for pension insurance).

Flexibility in use

- None except for when leave can be started before birth; taking leave is obligatory.

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 at least three months. Self-employed people qualify for maternity benefit on the same conditions as workers.

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)

- Ten working days, to be taken during two months before the expected birth of a child or two months after the birth of a child.

Payment and funding

- No payment.

Flexibility in use

- Can be taken during two months before or two months after the birth of a child.

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

- All public servants and other employed fathers with permanent or temporary employment contracts.

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. This entitlement is per family.

Payment and funding

- There are two types of benefit payable, neither of which is specifically linked to Parental leave but available to all families who meet the eligibility conditions.
- Parental benefit (*vanemahüvitis*) is paid at 100 per cent of average earnings (calculated on employment in the previous calendar year) for 435 days (i.e. 62 weeks) from after the end of Maternity leave, with a ceiling of €2,143 per month, equivalent to three times average earnings. The minimum benefit paid to working parents is the minimum wage, €290 per month. For parents who are not on leave and not working, parental benefit is paid from the birth of the child at a flat rate of €278 per month until the child reaches 18 months of age.
- Childcare benefit (*lapsehooldustasu*) is a flat-rate payment of €38 per month, paid from the end of payment of parental benefit until the child reaches three years of age to both working and non-working parents (i.e. payment continues if a parent takes up employment).
- Both parental and childcare benefit are funded from general taxation.

Flexibility in use

- Parental leave may be used in one part or in several parts at any time until a child is three years of age.
- When a parent takes up employment after the birth of a child, the parental benefit is reduced.

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

- Fathers are eligible for parental benefit when their child has reached 70 days of age.

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

- The actual caregiver of a child is eligible for Parental leave if parents do not use leave themselves. In the case of a non-parental caregiver, he or she is eligible for childcare benefit, but not parental benefit.

d. Childcare leave or career breaks

No statutory entitlement; see (e) *Time off for the care of dependents* for supplementary annual holiday entitlement.

e. Other employment-related measures

Adoption leave (lapsendamispuhkus) and pay

- Seventy days of adoption leave per child for parents adopting a child under ten years at 100 per cent of average earnings. Adoptive parents are eligible for Parental leave for a child under three years, and qualify for parental benefit and childcare benefit.

Time off for the care of dependants

- Leave can be taken by either parent to care for a sick child under 12 years, with 80 per cent of earning replacement for up to 14 calendar days per episode of illness.
- Parents with a handicapped 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 and six days per year for a parent raising a child under three years, or three or more children under 14 years. There is a flat-rate payment of €4.25 per day.
- All payments funded from general taxation.

Flexible working

- Breastfeeding mothers with a child under 18 months can take either a half an hour breastfeeding break every three hours or a one hour break per day. The state compensates the breaks 100 per cent with the exception of 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 paid post-natal leave available in Estonia is 36 months, but half of this period is only paid at a low flat rate. According to Social Welfare Act municipalities are obliged to provide a place in ECEC to all children, starting from age of 18 months, i.e. after the end of the high paid leave period. However, municipalities are not able to meet this obligation, and for children between 18 months and 3 years of age the lack of places in ECEC is a serious issue. Many municipalities that are not able to provide an ECEC place, 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 3 years are below the average for the countries included in this review and for OECD countries; but above average for children over 3 years. For actual attendance levels, see 'relationship between leave and ECEC entitlements' on [cross-country comparisons](#) page.

3. Changes in policy since April 2011 (including proposals currently under discussion)

No changes reported.

4. Take-up of leave

a. Maternity leave

As Maternity leave is obligatory, 100 per cent of employed women take up leave.

b. Paternity leave

Fourteen per cent of fathers took up leave in 2006 and 2007, but in 2008, after payment was introduced, take-up of leave increased approximately four times, up to 50 per cent. Since 2009 when the benefit for Paternity leave was abolished, there are no statistics on the take-up.

c. Parental leave

No official statistics about take-up of leave are collected. According to research, over 80 per cent of women take some Parental leave. Men account for about 6 per cent of the recipients of parental benefit.

d. Other employment-related measures

In 2010, 26 per cent of people who received benefit for caring for a sick child were men.

5. Research and publications on leave and other employment-related policies since April 2011

a. General overview

Leave policies and childcare arrangements have gained researchers' attention recently as the issues of demographic changes and work-life balance have emerged in the political arena. Previously, research on reconciliation of work and family life, including use of Parental leave, focused mainly on women. No significant research has been done on employers' family-friendly policies.

b. Selected publications since April 2011

Karu, M. (2011) *Fathers and parental leave: slow steps towards dual earner/dual carer family model in Estonia (Dissertationes Sociologicae Universitatis, Tartuensis nr 6)*. Tartu: Tartu University Press. Available at:

http://dspace.utlib.ee/dspace/bitstream/handle/10062/18103/karu_marre.pdf?sequence=1

The aim of the dissertation is to analyse the division of childcare between men and women in Estonian society. The question is why does Estonian society move so slow towards dual earner/dual carer family model? The dissertation concentrates on the dual carer component of the model and on the division of care responsibilities between men and women. The dissertation is based on three interrelated, original studies focussing on different dimensions of Parental leave and its gender implications. The studies suggest that the lack of a gender equality perspective in Estonian policy making is partially due to the coercive ideology of gender equality in the Soviet Union and late acknowledgement of father's role in the family. Caring for a child is not part of the hegemonic masculinity in Estonia; men do not feel that their participation in childcare is expected or accepted and are afraid of negative consequences of atypical choice. The research also showed that different images of parenthood determine the understanding of parents' roles in child's development and influence fathers' intention to stay on Parental leave. From the point of view of the dual earner/dual carer model it is also significant to what extent the familization of fathers has led to the defamilization of mothers. When women continue being the main carers and fathers can step up or in when it is suitable for their masculine life-course, the current gender order and hegemonic masculinity will not be much questioned or challenged.

Karu, M. and Kasearu, K. (2011) 'Slow Steps towards Dual Earner/Dual Carer Family Model: Why Fathers do not Take Parental Leave', *Studies of Transition States and Societies*, Vol.3, No.1: 24-38. Available at: <http://www.tlu.ee/stss/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/vol3-issue-1-karukasearu.pdf>

The article looks at the transition of Estonian society towards a dual earner/dual carer family model and focuses on fathers' decisions regarding taking their Parental leave. Based on the theory of planned behaviour by Ajzen, data from 20 qualitative interviews with fathers of small children are analysed to explore the beliefs fathers have when it comes to Parental leave. The analysis distinguishes between two images of 'good parenting' that play a role in the fathers' intention to take Parental leave. First, there is an image of an outcome-oriented 'project manager' affected by failure anxiety; and second, there is a much more relaxed image of a 'good parent' as a 'companion' who values everyday contact and a close relationship with the child(ren).

Roosalu, T. (2012) *Taking care of children and work in Estonian society: running out of post-socialist time (Dissertations on Social Sciences, 58)*. Tallinn: Institute of International and Social Studies, Tallinn University. Available at: http://e-ait.tulib.ee/200/1/roosalu_triin_dok

The dissertation analyses the time dedicated to children in different stages of childhood in the light of participation in the labour market, with the aim of comparing Estonia with other

European and post-Soviet countries. It describes time spent on Parental leave, non-participation in the labour market and working part-time together with other family and work reconciliation strategies in Estonia and elsewhere. The author compares parents' participation in childcare during the first three years of a child's life, when they have a right to Parental leave, and later. Parental behaviour and choices are also examined in the framework of a typology of parenting style.

Karu, M. (2011) 'Parental leave in Estonia: Does familization of fathers lead to defamilization of mothers?', *NORA - Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*. DOI: 10.1080/08038740.2011.601466. Available at

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/08038740.2011.601466>

In comparison with its Nordic neighbours, the post-Soviet Estonia, with its fair share of deeply rooted gender stereotypes and dominant heteronormativity, does not live up to the dual earner/dual carer family model. Despite having developed a generous leave scheme modelled after the Nordic countries, the father's contribution to childcare remains almost non-existent, and progress towards equalizing the division of care has been slow. Using registry data, the current study shows that, in addition to fathers' low take-up of Parental leave, when the father does take leave, this does not always result in the immediate employment of the mother. Without some role reversal, the impact of the father's leave remains even more limited. The study also shows that the familization of fathers has less probability of leading to the defamilization of mothers if the mother was previously unemployed, of young age, or with four or more children.

c. Ongoing research

None reported.

The Ministry of Social Affairs has announced a call for tender for a study of family and work reconciliation policies in order to analyse and estimate possible impacts of policy alternatives, including the introduction of a 'daddy's month'. The study seeks to estimate costs of different policies to state and employers as well as the possible impact on fertility, gender equality and female employment. The study will start in May 2012 and will be finalized by May 2013.