

18th international review on leave policies and related research 2022 ^[1]

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Excerpts

Relationship between leave and ECEC entitlements: April 2022

Most discussions of policy frameworks to support employed parents with young children highlight two key policies: Parental leave and early childhood education and care (ECEC). The table below looks at the relationship between these two policy areas, and, in particular, at whether they are coordinated in the sense that an entitlement to leave leads immediately into, or coincides with, an entitlement to ECEC.

Great variations exist between countries in both leave policies and ECEC. The table shows two dimensions of variation for ECEC: attendance rates at formal services and entitlement to ECEC. Attendance rates are taken from the OECD Family Database P3.2; for more information, see note on source at end of the table below. Attendance rates for children under three years of age vary from less than 15 per cent (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Mexico, Poland, Slovak Republic and Turkey), to over 50 per cent (Belgium, Denmark, France, Iceland, Israel, Korea, Luxembourg, Netherlands, and Norway), with a median rate among the 40 countries yielding data of 33 per cent. Attendance rates for children over three years of age are uniformly much higher, but vary from under 70 per cent (Croatia, South Africa, Switzerland, Turkey and the US) to 95 per cent and over (Belgium, Denmark, France, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Korea, Norway, Spain and the UK), with a median rate among the 44 countries for which there is information of 90 per cent. What these figures do not reveal is the opening hours of services and how far they are suited to the needs of working parents: indeed, in many cases they will not be.

Thirty-two countries have an entitlement to an ECEC service. In 11 countries (Argentina, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, France, Hungary, Luxembourg, and Mexico), the entitlement includes a period of compulsory attendance at an ECEC service, usually for children aged four years and over, but from three years in France and Hungary; in Bosnia and Herzegovina, there is insufficient provision to implement this policy. In 16 countries the entitlement is only from three years of age or later. A further eight countries have a clear entitlement before three years of age: at two and half years in Belgium, and at 12 months or younger or at the end of Parental leave in seven countries: Denmark, Finland, Luxembourg, Malta, Norway, Slovenia, and Sweden, with full-time places available in all cases except Luxembourg (whose part-time entitlement is part of a multilingual education programme). In another seven countries – Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Mexico, Romania, and Russia – there is a legal entitlement for the youngest age group, but it is reported that a shortage of places means that, to varying degrees, the entitlement is not fully operational until a later age; in the case an eighth country, Portugal, a recent reduction of the entitlement from four to three years cannot yet be fully met. It is only in seven countries with an operational entitlement for the youngest age group that there is no gap between the end of well-paid leave and the start of an ECEC entitlement: Denmark, Finland, Malta, Norway, Romania, Slovenia, and Sweden. Elsewhere, there are substantial gaps, which if combined with countries that have no ECEC entitlement, emphasises the extensive lack of coordination between these two policy areas.

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