

Leave Policy Responses to COVID-19: a cross country comparison

Sources used

The main sources used in this section are the country notes prepared by the members of the International Network on Leave Policies and Research, following a common format.

The expertise and work of the country note authors is gratefully acknowledged.

Policy responses to the Covid-19 pandemic up to end June 2020 for parents and other carers: a cross-national overview

Parents and other carers who rely on formal care settings and schools have been profoundly impacted by the pandemic. The demands on them to provide care have increased greatly. All country note contributors to the *International Review for Leave Policies and Research 2020* were asked to provide information regarding the national policy responses to the Covid-19 pandemic for parents and other carers. Country note contributors were asked for the policy response up to the end of June 2020 in regard to childcare and schools; Parental leave; and any other measures for parents and other carers. In total, we have information for 41 countries (there are 45 countries covered by the Review). The list of countries can be seen in Table 1.

Childcare and schools

It has been an extremely common, though not universal response that ECEC (early childhood education and care) settings and schools have been mandated to close for a certain period of time between February and June 2020 (and beyond, but data collection ended in June). The periods of closure varied across countries. Sometimes, ECEC did not close, but schools did. When closure has been mandated, it has sometimes been total, but more frequently, there has been some provision available for the children of key workers and others who had particular reason to need it. This was particularly the case for younger children. The definition of key workers varies in how broadly they are defined across countries. However, even where formal ECEC has been available in theory, it has typically not been particularly well used by key workers in practice, who evidently have usually preferred to find other childcare solutions where possible. In some countries (e.g. Canada, France, Germany), discretion has been given to local authorities around ECEC provision during this period.

In addition to ECEC, it has been noted in several country notes (e.g. Austria, China), that where (informal and/or formal) long-term care is regularly provided by migrant workers who have been unable to travel from their home countries or regions, this has also led to a care gap during the pandemic that needs to be addressed by family members. Also, other day care settings for adults requiring care as well as facilities for children with disabilities have been closed, which has led to a care gap that needs to be addressed by family members.

Parental leave

Many countries have not considered any changes to existing Parental leave regulations to be necessary. A few countries (Hungary, Latvia, Slovakia) have extended entitlements during lockdown, in the case that the end of a benefit was due to

occur at that point in time. Another response found in a handful of countries (Québec in Canada, Luxembourg, New Zealand) has been to exceptionally allow key workers to interrupt leave in a way that might not normally be possible, so that they can go back to work without losing entitlement. A few countries (such as Bulgaria, Germany) have considered how the lockdown might impact on future eligibility to leaves (such as months with income losses due to short-time work being exempt from future Parental benefit calculations for expecting parents) and taken action accordingly.

Other measures for parents and other carers

In terms of other measures taken to support parents, many countries have introduced a range of extraordinary social assistance and unemployment related assistance, much of which will have supported parents, even if they were not a specific target group. More details can be found in the individual country notes. Specific measures targeted at parents include free ECEC (e.g. Australia); cash allowances and/or one-off payments (e.g. Austria, France). Many countries considered ways to ensure parents on a low income were able to feed their children adequately (e.g. Chile, Estonia, Sweden).

A few countries were reasonably well set up with existing leave regulations, such as Bulgaria, the Netherlands and Sweden, as they already allowed access to emergency leaves and leaves to care for a sick child or relative. Some countries have enacted new temporary emergency leave measures to provide job protection and (mostly partial) wage replacement to parents, in particular to parents of children with disabilities, and in a few cases other carers, who are impacted by day care closures and who may not be able to work from home. Not all forms of leave are paid (or paid for very long). In most cases, there are eligibility restrictions on access to these temporary leaves, so it should not be assumed that all parents would have had access.

A very common response has been to encourage workers to work from home where possible rather than take such emergency leave. Sometimes a flexible approach to working has been the only policy response. Sometimes this has been reinforced by emergency temporary laws, sometimes it has been left between employers and employees to work out and not actually enacted into law.

Extra pregnancy protection was available in some countries (e.g. Denmark).

Only two countries mention it explicitly as policy responses (Sweden and UK), but it is likely to have been experienced more widely, that fathers were not welcome at delivery of their babies during the pandemic.

If you have an interest in a particular country response, please see the individual country note for more in-depth information.

If **citing** the complete review, please do so as:

Koslowski, A., Blum, S., Dobrotić, I., Kaufman, G. and Moss, P. (2020) *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2020*. Available at:

http://www.leavenetwork.org/lp_and_r_reports/

If citing an individual country note, please use the citation given as a footnote on the first page of that country note.

Table 1: Policy responses to the Covid-19 pandemic up to 30 June 2020

Country	ECEC (early childhood education and care) and schools: were there mandated closures?	Parental leave – changes to the usual provision	Other measures including new leaves for parents and other carers (not including general social assistance measures which may also benefit carers)
Australia	No (though demand for ECEC dramatically fell)	No	Free of charge ECEC
Austria	No for ECEC (though demand fell), Yes for schools	No	Extra social assistance for families; 3 weeks special paid leave applies in case of care for a relative or children
Belgium	Yes (care for keyworkers' children available)	Yes (keyworkers may suspend leave)	Corona time credit and corona parental leave
Brazil	Yes	No	No
Bulgaria	Yes	Yes, period of calculation for future leaves to be extended.	Employers had to grant requests for paid annual leave or unpaid leave for certain groups of carers
Canada	ECEC closures varied by province and territory likewise ECEC for key workers' children; all parts of the country saw school closures for some period	No change to existing measures (except in Québec for healthcare workers);	11/13 jurisdictions created new unpaid leave entitlement; Leaves to allow for care for those caring for persons over 18
Chile	Yes	No	Food packages for children
China	Yes mostly, with some variation across provinces.	No	Shopping discount vouchers
Croatia	Yes (care for keyworkers' children available)	No	No
Cyprus	Yes	No	Special leave for childcare; Special leave available for children with disabilities of any age.

Country	ECEC (early childhood education and care) and schools: were there mandated closures?	Parental leave – changes to the usual provision	Other measures including new leaves for parents and other carers (not including general social assistance measures which may also benefit carers)
Czech Republic	No for ECEC (though many settings did close), Yes for schools	Yes (modification of 'attendance allowance 'and extension of 'time off for care of dependants)	No
Denmark	Yes (care for keyworkers' children available)	No	Extra pregnancy protection.
Estonia	ECEC remained open (though fell), schools closed	No	Extra benefit for parents raising a child with special needs or disability who stopped working; free meal delivery for (some) schoolchildren
Finland	ECEC remained open for children needing it (about ¼ remained in ECEC); Schools were partly closed.	No	Extra social assistance for (some) parents
France	ECEC remained open to key workers, with geographical variation to extent of closures; Schools were partly closed.	No	Yes, support available to parents unable to work due to ECEC/school closures
Germany	Yes, ECEC closures varied by state (care for keyworkers' children available)	Yes (Parental leave benefit adapted for the pandemic)	Special (partial) income replacement benefit available for some parents; extra social assistance, care support allowance for those affected by care shortages
Greece	Yes	No	Leave for a special purpose
Hungary	Yes (ECEC care for keyworkers' children available)	Yes, end of Parental benefit duration extended if due to finish during lockdown	Additional or special leave options

Country	ECEC (early childhood education and care) and schools: were there mandated closures?	Parental leave – changes to the usual provision	Other measures including new leaves for parents and other carers (not including general social assistance measures which may also benefit carers)
Iceland	No (though ECEC strikes coincided so many settings closed for this reason), high schools were closed.	No	Special law to guarantee full salary payment in the case that parents were staying home; special child benefit
<i>Ireland</i>	No information		
Israel	Yes	No	One off payment per child
Italy	Yes	No	Leave for the care of minors; Special parental benefit; presumption of priority to 'smart' work to those caring for or those with serious disabilities; number of absence days to provide assistance to disabled family members increased.
Japan	No for ECEC (in particular care for keyworkers' children available), Yes for schools	Yes, use of existing special extension to leave where 'admission to ECEC has been requested but is not available	Employer subsidy to provide paid leave to parents; extra social assistance for parents per child.
<i>Korea</i>	No information		
Latvia	Pre-school discouraged but possible, Yes for schools	Yes, benefit extension if end fell during lockdown.	Increase in childcare allowance benefit, general and parental specific extra social assistance; food support for large families (3+ children)
Lithuania	Yes (care for keyworkers' children available)	No	60 days sickness benefit to stay at home with pre-secondary children & disabled children under 21
Luxembourg	Yes, (care for keyworkers' children available)	Yes, key workers could interrupt Parental leave	Special paid leave for family reasons; Special paid leave for family support to look after a disabled adult or an elderly person

Country	ECEC (early childhood education and care) and schools: were there mandated closures?	Parental leave – changes to the usual provision	Other measures including new leaves for parents and other carers (not including general social assistance measures which may also benefit carers)
Malta	Yes	No	Parents and carers unable to work from home provided with financial support and retained employment.
<i>Mexico</i>	No information		
Netherlands	Yes (care for keyworkers' children available)	No	Existing measures were available (emergency leave, unpaid parental leave, leave to care for a sick child or family member); no income replacement measures targeted at parents and/or other carers
New Zealand	Yes	Yes, key workers could interrupt parental leave (and return, which is not usually possible)	No
Norway	Yes (care for keyworkers' children available)	No	Yearly entitlement for parents to time off to care for sick children was reset on 1 July
Poland	Yes	No	Additional care allowance for parents (including parents of older children with disabilities)
Portugal	Yes (care for keyworkers' children available)	No	Leave from work (unpaid) with a special allowance for parents and those needing to care for a dependent with a disability or chronic illness.
Romania	Yes	No	Special partially paid leave to parents and carers of adult persons with disabilities; general special social assistance measures; quarantine medical leave (partially paid)
Russian Federation	Yes, with some provision for ECEC remaining open.	No	Additional payments for parents

Country	ECEC (early childhood education and care) and schools: were there mandated closures?	Parental leave – changes to the usual provision	Other measures including new leaves for parents and other carers (not including general social assistance measures which may also benefit carers)
Slovakia	Yes (some local authorities provided ECEC for key workers)	Yes, parental allowance extended in the case that the entitlement would come to an end in lockdown	Pandemic leave to take care of a sick relative
Slovenia	Yes (ECEC care for keyworkers' children available provided by volunteers (facilities were fully closed)	No	Parents at home entitled to some salary under special measures
<i>South Africa</i>	No information		
Spain	Yes	No change, though rights to request work/life reconciliation measures linked to leave were extended	Special measures applied also to carers of adults: The Catalan public sector had special leave
Sweden	No (apart from High schools)	Yes, temporary parental leave to take care of sick children was made more flexible.	Payments of child support and maintenance can be postponed due to income drops; lunch packages
Switzerland	Yes, with ECEC and primary schools available for key workers	No	Code of obligation covered parents for partial salary (including those with children up to 20 years in special education)
United Kingdom	Yes, with ECEC and primary schools available for key workers	No specific changes to leave.	Workers with health related caring responsibilities can claim sick pay. Food parcels to children usually provided with free school meals.

Country	ECEC (early childhood education and care) and schools: were there mandated closures?	Parental leave – changes to the usual provision	Other measures including new leaves for parents and other carers (not including general social assistance measures which may also benefit carers)
			The 'furlough' scheme supported some parents and other carers in that salary was paid without work requirement
United States	Yes (based on state decisions)	No	Temporary measures to extend paid family and medical leave
Uruguay	Yes	No	Right to tele working

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