



Sustainability@Leave

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Parenting Leave Policies in Finland and Inequalities





Parenting Leaves in Finland: Types of Leave and Design Elements



Parenting Leave Policy in Finland

- Pregnancy & Parental Allowance / Leave
- Two legislations:
 - Allowances in the Health Insurance Act (*sairausvakuutuslaki*): defines eligibility, duration and benefit level
 - Leave rights in the Employment Contracts Act (*työsopimuslaki*): defines that those eligible to allowance are also eligible to leave from an employment contract
- Other types of leave (after Parental Leave): Care Leave with Home Care Allowance, Partial Care Leave with Flexible Care Allowance or Partial Care Allowance
- Employment protection from discrimination based on taking leave set in the Act on Equality between Women and Men

Pregnancy Leave

- 40 working days (6 working days per calendar week) for pregnant mother
- Earnings-related benefit (90% of annual earnings up to 70 379 EUR, 32,5% of earnings above that level), **flat-rate** (31,99 EUR / working day in 2026) **if low income** ($\leq 10\,664$ EUR)

Parental Leave

- Individual entitlement: 160 working days for each parent = 320 days per child
- But partly transferable: 63 days can be transferred to the other parent, or to legal guardian, or the parent's partner; 97 days of "use-it-or-lose-it quota" for each parent.
- 18 days can be taken simultaneously by both parents.
- Flexibility: Days can be taken in several blocks, as single days, or part-time; can be used until the child turns 2.
- Parents with no other eligible parent can take all the days.
- Parents of multiple children born / adopted at the same time receive 84 additional days per additional child.
- Earnings-related benefit (between 90 % and 25 %, depending on earnings level and the duration of leave), flat-rate if low income

Parenting Leave Policy in Finland: recent changes

- A comprehensive reform of the leave scheme took place in 2022 (in effect since August 2022)
- The reform aimed at increasing 1) the well-being of families, 2) gender equality in paid and unpaid work, 3) equality between children in different family forms, 4) work-family balance with more flexible options to take leave.
- The main changes:
 - The introduction of gender-neutral terminology and symmetrical quotas for both parents, replacing the previous Maternity Leave (app. 4 months), Paternity Leave (54 days = 9 weeks) and Parental Leave (app. 6 months)
 - The total number of days was increased, the increase being targeted to non-birthing parents' leave
 - Increased flexibility as leave can be taken part-time, in more blocks than before, and until the child turns two.
 - Partners of the parents eligible if the parent transfers leave days from his/her quota.



Inequality-Reducing and Inequality-Generating Elements of Parental Leave Design in Finland



Who is eligible, who not?

- Wide eligibility based primarily on being insured under the Health Insurance Act:
- Access to Parental or Pregnancy Allowance is based on residence – No employment-related conditions.
- Parental or Pregnancy Leave is granted for the days of the allowance to those with an employment contract.
 - Some restrictions to flexible use, i.e. the number and duration of blocks the leave can be taken in.
- Parents who are the legal guardians of the child are eligible irrespective of gender or family form (e.g. same-sex parents, adoptive parents).
 - However, other carers, such as grandparents, are not eligible.

What do we know about take-up rates?

- Pregnancy and Parental Leave is taken practically by all birthing parents/mothers.
- Right after the 2022 reform, 85% of fathers took at least some days of Parental Leave (81% before the reform).
- Fathers with a child born in 2023 took on average 84 days, mothers 253 days. The share of days that fathers use independently (not at the same time with the mother) has increased after the reform.
- Socioeconomic differences in fathers' take-up of leave according to the father's and his spouse's (mother's) education and income.

Sources: Social Insurance Institution, 2025 and 2026; Saarikallio-Torp & Miettinen, 2021

Parenting Leave Policy in Finland and Gender Equality

- Changing policy goals: from ‘freedom of choice’ towards gender equality:
 - The Parental Leave scheme has long supported the gendered take-up of leave, but notable changes taking place after the 2022 reform.
- Explanations for gendered take-up / obstacles to fathers’ take-up of Parental Leave:
 - The idea of mothers as primary carers,
 - Family finances,
 - Practices and organizational culture at fathers’ workplaces. (Kinnunen et al., 2024.)

Developing Leave Policies in Finland

- Central labour market organizations have a central role in developing leave legislation through tripartite negotiations between employer and employee representatives and the state (Lammi-Taskula & Takala, 2009).
- Many collective agreements top up national legislation, for example by guaranteeing leave with full pay for a certain period.
 - → New inequalities between birthing and non-birthing parents, and between employees working in different positions and fields (even within same organizations).



Final Discussion



Parenting Leave Policies in Finland and Inequalities

- Few inequalities at the level of the legislation, but employers have a central role in how entitlements are used in practice.
- Research gaps: Leave take-up under the ‘new’ scheme (from 2022 onwards), especially among minority groups, e.g. different family forms
- Current problems:
 - Home Care Allowance – cash-for-care benefit paid to parents of under three-year-old children – remained untouched in the 2022 Parental Leave reform. Shortening or abolishing HCA has been suggested several times.
 - HCA has been criticized for decreasing (immigrant) mothers’ labour market participation and children’s participation in ECEC, and thus for increasing gender inequality and inequalities among children.