

Relationship between leave and ECEC entitlements: April 2026

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 the note on source at the end of the table below. **Attendance rates for children under three years of age** vary from less than 10 per cent (Argentina, Colombia, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, Mexico, Slovak Republic and Türkiye), to over 50 per cent (Belgium, Denmark, France, Iceland, Israel, Korea, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, and Portugal). **Attendance rates for children over three years of age** are uniformly much higher, but vary from 75 per cent or under (Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Greece, Mexico, Switzerland, Türkiye, and the US) to 95 per cent and over (Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Japan, Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Norway, Spain, Sweden, and the UK). 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-six countries have an **entitlement to an ECEC service**. In 14 countries (Argentina, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Colombia, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, France, Hungary, Kosovo, Luxembourg, Mexico, and Serbia), the entitlement includes a period of *compulsory* attendance at an ECEC service, usually for children aged 4 years and over, but from 3 years in France and Hungary. In some countries, this is only a part-time entitlement, and in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Mexico, there is insufficient provision to implement this policy. In 21 countries, the entitlement is only from three years of age or later. A further 9 countries have a clear entitlement before 3 years of age: at between 2 and 3 years in Belgium and Ireland, and at 12 months or younger or at the end of Parental leave in 7 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 8th country, Portugal, a recent reduction of the entitlement from 4 to 3 years cannot yet be fully met. It is only in 6 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, Slovenia, and Sweden. Elsewhere, there are substantial gaps, which if combined with countries that have no ECEC entitlement, emphasise the extensive lack of coordination between these two policy areas.

Table 4: Relationship between leave and ECEC entitlements (April 2026)

Country	Attendance rates at formal ECEC services (%) (2023)		Child's age (months) at:			Gap (in months) between:	
	0-2 years	3-5 years	(a) end of leave	end of well-paid leave (b) ¹	start of ECEC universal entitlement (c) ²	(c)-(a)	(c)-(b)
Argentina	5.1[2018]	76.5[2017]	8–8.3	2–2.3	□ 4 years: OB	39.7–40	45.7–46
Australia	46.8	90.6	24	..	..	No ECEC entitlement	
Austria	22.1	91.2	24	14.2	□ 5 years: OB & PT	36	45.8
Belgium	56.5	98.3[2019]	51	4.2	□□ 2.5 years	No gap	25.8
Bosnia and Herzegovina	/	/	11	..	□ 5 years: OB & PT	49	..
Brazil	24.9	68.6[2021]	4–6.5	4–6.5	..	No ECEC entitlement	
Bulgaria	17.4	86.8	36	12.1	□ 4 years: OB	12	35.9
Canada	34	/	12.8-19.5	..	..	No ECEC entitlement	
Canada: Québec	/	/	12.8	11.2	..	No ECEC entitlement	
Chile	20	75.1	5.6	5.6	..	No ECEC entitlement	
China	/	/	2.8	2.8	□ 3 years	33.2	33.2
Colombia	9.4	73	4	4	□ 5 years: OB	56	56
Costa Rica	7.2[2018]	70.8	3	3	..	No ECEC entitlement	
Croatia	30.7	80.3	36	14	□ 6 years: OB & PT	36	58
Cyprus	39.4	86.2[2021]	13.5	6.5	□ 4,7 years: OB	42.5	49.5
Czech Republic	4.9	85.3	36	11.6	□ 3 years: OB at 5	No gap	24.4
Denmark	55.3	95.7	11.1	11.1	□□ 6 months	No gap	No gap
Estonia	27.7	90.6	36	17.8	□□18 months	No gap	<i>!No gap!</i>
Finland	39.8	89.1	36	12.4	□□ 9 months	No gap	No gap
France	57.7	100	36	3	□ 3 years: OB	No gap	33
Germany	41.9	95.3	84	1.9	□□1 year	No gap	10.1
Greece	31	68.8[2019]	22.7-72	6.4-12.7	□ 4 years: PT	25.3–no gap	35.3-41.6
Hungary	14[2022]	97.4	36	24	□□ birth: OB at 3	<i>!No gap!</i>	<i>!No gap!</i>
Iceland	50.6	96.1	20	12	..	No ECEC entitlement	
Ireland	36.7	95	26	..	□□ 32 months: PT	6	..
Israel	58.2	98.7	12	3.5	..	No ECEC entitlement	
Italy	41	93.5	16	5	..	No ECEC entitlement	
Japan	46.1[2023]	95.9	14	14	..	No ECEC entitlement	

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	0-2 years	3-5 years	(a) end of leave	end of well-paid leave (b) ¹	start of ECEC universal entitlement (c) ²	(c)-(a)	(c)-(b)
Korea	68.9[2023]	95.7	27	27	..	No ECEC entitlement	
Kosovo	/	/	11.2	5.2	□ 5 years: OB & PT	48.8	54.4
Latvia	36.1	94.9	37.9	1.9	□□□ 19 months	No gap	17.1
Lithuania	36.8	95.5	36	18	..	No ECEC entitlement	
Luxembourg	60.9	96	14.8	14.8	□ 1 year: PT; OB at 4	No gap	No gap
Malta	/	95.1	12.2-76.2	4.2	□□ 3 years	No gap	No gap
Mexico	4.4	73.9	2.3	2.3	□□ birth: OB	<i>!No gap!</i>	<i>!No gap!</i>
Netherlands	72.7	93.2	16	8.1	□ 4 years: PT	32	39.9
New Zealand	43.9	86.9	12.5	..	..	No ECEC entitlement	
Norway	61.4	97.2	37.5	13.5	□□ 12 months	No gap	No gap
Poland	13.4	93.6	50.2	14.2	□ 3 years	No gap	21.8
Portugal	58.8	93.3	36	6	□ 3 years	No gap	30
Romania	11.4	75.7	24	24	□□ Birth	<i>!No gap!</i>	<i>!No gap!</i>
Russian Federation	20[2018]	83[2017]	36	2.3	□□ 2 months	<i>!No gap!</i>	<i>!No gap!</i>
Serbia	/	/	36	11.3	□ 6 years: OB & PT	36	60.7
Slovakia	1	80.8	36	13	□ 5 years	24	47
Slovenia	48.7	93.2	13.2	13.2	□□ end of Par. leave	No gap	No gap
South Africa	/	/	4	..	..	No ECEC entitlement	
Spain	45.9	97.7	39.7	7.4	□ 3 years	No gap	28.6
Sweden	48.9	95.3	18	13	□□ 12 months	No gap	No gap
Switzerland	40.9	50.5	3.7	3.7	..	No ECEC entitlement	
Türkiye	0.7	54.5	9.3	3.3	..	No ECEC entitlement	
United Kingdom	45.1[2018]	100	13.5	1.4	□ 3 years: PT	22.5	34.6
USA	/	66[2018]	..	..	..	No ECEC entitlement	
Uruguay	/	/	6.3-6.7	3.3-6.7	□ 4 years	41.3-41.7	41.3-44.7
Vietnam	/	/	6.2	6.2	..	No ECEC entitlement	
OECD average	38.5	89					

Notes: 1=where bonus months are given if leave is shared, 'end of well-paid leave' includes these months. Both (a) and (b) give the child's age if leave was taken in one continuous period and full-time. If the length of Maternity leave or the fact that both parents should use their individual entitlement to Parental leave in the same time period (e.g. both can use their 36 months entitlement until the child turns 3) affects the overall

duration of leave, this is also taken into account. *Well-paid leave* is earnings-related payment at 66 per cent of previous earnings or above (based on legal replacement rate; in some countries benefits are taxed or may count towards income base for social security contributions, meaning that actual amounts received by the individuals may differ); **2**=this column refers to if and when a universal entitlement to ECEC begins. In a few cases, e.g., England (in UK) and Malta, children are entitled to ECEC at an earlier age, but only if their parents are employed or studying.

Key: /=no data; ..=no well-paid leave or no entitlement to ECEC; □ entitlement, but only from three years of age or older; □□ entitlement from below 3 years of age; **PT**=entitlement is for 20 hours per week or less; **OB**=attendance is obligatory. '**!**' ('**!no gap!**')=indicates the existence of an entitlement that cannot be met due to a shortage of places (i.e. refers to the entitlement on paper, and not the actual availability of services).

Source: Enrolment rates in early childhood education and care services, 0 to 2 year-olds; and Enrolment rates in early childhood education and care services and primary education, 3 to 5 year-olds: OECD Family Database, available at: <http://www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm>.

OECD notes that data on the use of early childhood education and care services for very young children (0- to 2-year-olds) come from several sources. For most countries, the data on enrolment...come from OECD Education at a Glance 2020, which itself collects data from national authorities through the OECD INES Ad-hoc Survey on Early Childhood Education and Care...Data [for] Belgium, the Czech Republic, France, Hungary, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, the Slovak Republic, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Malta and Romania are OECD estimates based on information European Union's Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) survey... Data on the use of early childhood education and care and primary education for 3- to 5-year-olds come in all cases from the joint UNESCO-OECD-EUROSTAT (UOE) data collection programme, either via OECD Education at a Glance 2020 or the Eurostat database. (https://www.oecd.org/els/soc/PF3_2_Enrolment_childcare_preschool.pdf, pp.6,7).