

Bulgaria⁸⁷

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April 2026

For comparisons with other countries in this review on leave provision and early childhood education and care services, please see the [cross-country tables](#) at the front of the review (also available individually on the [Leave Network website](#)). To contact authors of country notes, see the [members](#) page on the Leave Network website.

1. Current leave and other employment-related policies to support parents

a. Maternity leave (*otpusk poradi bremennost i ragdane*⁸⁸) (responsibility of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy; National Social Security Institute)

Length of leave (before and after birth)

- 410 calendar days, from which 45 calendar days must be taken before the expected date of birth. Employers are obliged to accept women's requests for Maternity leave.
- It is obligatory to take the first 135 days, and these are divided into three periods:
 - The first period includes 45 calendar days before the expected date of birth (pre-natal leave/pregnancy leave). If a woman gives birth before the 45th day, the remaining days are added to the rest of the leave. If the delivery is delayed after the 45th day, the period is extended with a new medical statement until delivery. The total length of the pre-natal leave/pregnancy leave cannot exceed 93 days.
 - The second period includes 42 calendar days after childbirth (post-natal leave). Women are also entitled to these 42 days in case of stillbirth, death of child soon after birth, or if the child is to be adopted. In these cases, the post-natal leave can be extended if a medical examination proves that the woman's health and labour capacity are not fully recovered.
 - The third period includes the remaining 48 calendar days until the 135th day. The post-natal leave is thus a total of 90 calendar days after childbirth.

⁸⁷ Please cite as: Dimitrova, E., Kotzeva, T. and Ilieva, K. (2026) 'Bulgaria country note', in Dobrotić, I., Arnalds, A. A., Kaufman, G., Koslowski, A., Moss, P. and Valentova, M. (eds.) *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2026*. Available at: <https://www.leavenetwork.org/annual-review-reports/>

⁸⁸ Since 2018, adoption leave has been treated under a separate article of the Labour Code.

Payment, funding and taxation

- 90 per cent of the mean gross salary or the mean insurance income, which the woman has received in the last 24 months preceding the leave. The financial compensation cannot be lower than the minimum salary BGN1,077 [€550.67]⁸⁹ from the period 01.01.2025 - 31.12.2025; and there is an upper limit at a monthly maximum insurance income of BGN3,750 [€1,917.37] for the period 1 January 2025-31 March 2025 and BGN4,130 [€2,111.67] for the period 1 April 2025-31 December 2025. The same regulation applies for self-employed women.
- In the case of a woman giving birth while still on Maternity/Parental leave, i.e. when two periods of Maternity leave overlap, during the new period of Maternity leave the Maternity pay remains at the level received for the previous child, if that was higher.⁹⁰
- Payments are not taxed.
- Funded by the National Social Security Institute through employer and employee contributions.

Flexibility in use

- None.

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

- Women taking Maternity leave have the right to receive financial compensation if they have been insured at the National Insurance Institute against the risk of general illness and pregnancy for at least 12 months (i.e., they were employed and paid contributions to cover the risk of maternity). The same regulation applies for self-employed women.
- With the agreement of the mother, once the child reaches 6 months (and until the 410th calendar day), leave can be transferred to the father if he has been paying insurance at the National Insurance Institute for at least 12 months or to one of the grandparents if s/he is employed.
- If a woman has not worked or has not paid social insurance against the risk of general illness and pregnancy, she can receive a monthly benefit until the child's first birthday to the value of BGN200 [€102.26]. This is dependent on means-testing, with the income per family member being less than BGN810 [€414.15] for the period 1 January 2025 – 31 March 2025 and BGN860 [€439.72] for the period 1 April 2025-31 December 2025. The conditions and procedure for receiving these benefits are stipulated in the Family Allowance Law for Children. Payments are not taxed.
- If the mother (adopter) is a student studying in full-time education, she is entitled to receive a one-time allowance of BGN2,880 [€1,472.54] in 2025. She has the right to receive the financial allowance through two instalments: at birth of the child and enrolment and after enrolment for the next

⁸⁹ Conversion of currency undertaken for 20 July 2026, using: <https://data.ecb.europa.eu/currency-converter>.

⁹⁰ Since the income reference period will span over months on Maternity leave / Parental leave with the previous child, either of which is lower paid than the income from employment, this option protects those mothers who did not return to work in order to take care of their children.

semester. The allowance can be received until the child becomes one year old.

- The payment of maternity benefits is suspended if the parent receiving them works under a second employment contract that includes coverage for general illness and maternity. The full payment of benefits will not be discontinued if a civil or temporary contract is concluded during the leave, provided that it is not considered an employment relationship.
- Women living in Bulgaria with Bulgarian citizenship or those with foreign citizenship who have paid social insurance to account for the risk of general illness and pregnancy in the last 12 months (regardless of the country where social insurance has been paid).

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 parents

- The leave allocated for pregnancy, childbirth, and child adoption (plus the financial compensations related to it) ends in the case of stillbirth, death of the child, if the child is given for adoption, or the child is enrolled in a public childcare institution. The exact end of leave depends also on a medical statement certifying that the mother is in good health and can return to work.
- The first 135 calendar days of leave are available only to the mother since they aim to ensure mothers are the ones who care for children in the first months of life; the leave also serves for recovery of mothers' health and labour capacity. But with the agreement of the mother, once the child reaches 6 months (and until the 410th calendar day), leave can be transferred to the father if he has been paying insurance to the National Insurance Institute for at least 12 months. The financial compensation for this period is 90 per cent of average gross monthly earnings or the average insurance income that the father received in the last 24 months preceding the birth of the child. The financial compensation cannot be lower than the minimum salary, BGN107 [€54.71] from the period 01.01.2025 - 31.12.2025, and there is an upper limit at a monthly maximum insurance income of BGN3,750 [€1,917.37] for the period 1 January 2025 – 31 March 2025 and BGN4,130 [€2,111.67] for the period 1 April 2025-31 December 2025. The same regulation applies for self-employed men.
- The Maternity leave can be transferred not only to the father but also to one of the grandparents. The condition is that the grandparent is employed. The grandmother or grandfather to whom the leave has been transferred is entitled to monetary compensation from the National Social Security Institute until the child reaches 1 year. Its amount is 90 per cent of the mean insurance income from the last 24 months.
- When the mother of a child up to 2 years or the adoptive mother of a child up to 5 years is deprived of parental rights or the exercise of parental rights over the child is granted to the father (adoptive parent), the relevant part of the leaves for childbirth (Maternity leave), adoption and raising a child (Parental leave) may be used by the father (adoptive parent) without requiring the mother's consent.

Regional or local variations in leave policy

- None.

Additional note (e.g., if leave payments are supplemented by collective agreements, employer exclusions, or rights to postpone)

- None reported.

b. Paternity leave (*otpusk po bashtinstvo*) and Paternity leave for raising a child up to 8 years of age (*Otpusk za otglejdane na dete do 8-godishna vazrast ot bashtsta*) (responsibility of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy; National Social Security Institute)

Length of leave

- 15 calendar days.
- A further 2 months of leave for fathers is available under certain conditions – ‘Paternity leave for raising a child up to 8 years of age’ (*Otpusk za otglejdane na dete do 8-godishna vazrast ot bashtsta*).

Payment, funding and taxation

- The financial compensation for the period of 15 calendar days Paternity leave is 90 per cent of average gross monthly earnings, or the average insurance income in the last 24 months preceding birth of the child. The regulation also applies for self-employed men. The financial compensation cannot be lower than the minimum salary, BGN1,077 [€550.67] for the period 1 January 2025-31 December 2025. There is an upper limit on payment of a monthly maximum insurance income of BGN3,750 [€1,917.37] for the period 1 January 2025 – 31 March 2025 and BGN4,130 [€2,111.67] for the period 1 April 2025-31 December 2025.
- Payments are not taxed.
- Paternity leave is counted as work experience and cannot be transferred to the mother.
- Paternity leave is funded in the same way as Maternity leave.
- Paternity leave for raising a child up to 8 years of age is paid at BGN780 [€398.81] per month.

Flexibility in use

- None for the 15 calendar days Paternity leave.
- Paternity leave for raising a child up to 8 years of age can be used in one or several periods of time until the child reaches 8 years old.

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

- The father has the right to use Paternity leave if the mother and the father are married or live in a shared household. The father can use it from the day when the new-born child is discharged from the hospital (there is no indication as to whether or not it can be postponed to a later date).
- The father can use 15 calendar days of Paternity leave if he has paid social insurance for at least 6 months. The same regulation applies for self-employed men.

- The leave ends in case of the death of the child; divorce; if the child is given up for adoption or the child is enrolled in a public childcare institution.
- Men living in Bulgaria, with either Bulgarian or foreign citizenship, are eligible if they have paid social insurance against the risk of general illness and pregnancy over the last 6 months (regardless of the country where social insurance has been paid).
- If the father has used two or more months of Maternity, Parental or Adoptive leave, he is not eligible for "Paternity leave for raising a child up to 8 years of age" (*Otpusk za otglejdane na dete do 8-godishna vazrast ot bashtsta/osinovitelia*); if he has previously used less than two months of these leave, he may take as many days of "Paternity leave for raising a child up to 8 years of age" (*Otpusk za otglejdane na dete do 8-godishna vazrast ot bashtsta*) as will complete the two months designated to the father. The condition to use the leave is that the father is employed and has at least 12 months of paid social insurance regardless of the time of the payment. The monthly benefit is BGN780 [€398.81] in 2025. The leave can be used at one time or in separate periods of time. The leave is counted as work experience.
- The payment of Paternity leave benefits is suspended if the father receiving them works under a second employment contract that includes coverage for general illness and maternity. The full payment of benefits will not be discontinued if a civil or temporary contract is concluded during the leave, provided that it is not considered an employment relationship.

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 parents

- None.

Regional or local variations in leave policy

- None.

Additional note (e.g., if leave payments are supplemented by collective agreements, employer exclusions, or rights to postpone)

- None reported.

c. Parental leave (*otpusk za otglegdane na dete do 2 godishna vazrast*) (responsibility of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy; National Social Security Institute)

Length of leave

- Until the child reaches 2 years of age.
- Leave is claimed by the mother, but can be fully transferred to the father or a grandparent if they are in employment.

Payment, funding and taxation

- A monthly benefit of BGN780 [€398.81], universal to all beneficiaries and independent of their income. The payment is determined annually by the State budget. Payments are not taxed.
- Parental leave is counted as work experience.
- Funded in the same way as Maternity leave.

Flexibility in use

- If the mother (whether adoptive or biological) decides not to use the paid Parental leave fully or in part after the 135th day, she is entitled to receive partial financial compensation for the remaining period of the leave. This compensation is set at 50 per cent of the monthly benefit for parents taking leave, i.e., BGN390 [€199.41] for the period 1 January 2025-31 December 2025. The same rule applies if the paid Parental leave is taken by another person who wants to return to work.
- The same condition applies for self-employed mothers should they decide to start working and renew their social security payments before the end of the paid Parental leave.

Eligibility

- Parental leave is firstly the mother's right. If the mother (adoptive or biological) of a child below the age of 2 years dies or gets seriously ill and cannot take care of the child, the leave can be taken by the father. With the father's agreement, the leave can be transferred to one of the grandparents if they are employed and have paid social security against the risk of pregnancy and general illness for at least 12 months.
- The parents or other leave-takers have paid social insurance for at least 12 months.
- Parental leave cannot be used at the same time by the mother and the father or one of the grandparents.
- Parental leave ends if the child is enrolled in a public childcare institution: the rationale for this is that the leave is given to the mother in order to ensure that she will provide permanent care for the child. The leave also ends if the child is given for adoption.
- There is no special regulation for same sex-couples. Same-sex couples are illegal in Bulgaria.
- The payment of Parental leave benefits is suspended if the parent receiving them works under a second employment contract that includes coverage for general illness and maternity. The full payment of benefits will not be discontinued if a civil or temporary contract is concluded during the leave, provided that it is not considered an employment relationship.

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 parents

- With the agreement of the mother, paid Parental leave can be taken by one of the grandparents if they are employed, on the condition that the grandparent has paid social insurance for at least 12 months, regardless of when this payment was made.

- If both parents of a child below the age of 2 years die and the child is not enrolled in a childcare institution, the paid Parental leave can be used by the guardian, and – with their agreement – by one of the biological grandparents of the child.
- When the mother of a child up to 2 years of age or the adoptive mother of a child up to 5 years of age is deprived of parental rights or the exercise of parental rights over the child is granted to the father (adoptive parent), the relevant part of the leaves for childbirth (Maternity leave), adoption and raising a child (Parental leave) may be used by the father (adoptive parent) without requiring the mother's consent. Previously, the law limited this transfer of leaves to the father only in the case of the mother dying or becoming seriously ill and unable to care of the child.
- The father or adoptive parent to use parental leave after 6 months of the child – these are the cases when the mother is deprived of parental rights or the exercise of parental rights is granted to the father by law. In other words, this is not a question of voluntary transfer (with the permission of the mother), but the right of the father to use parental leave is legally regulated. Until the change, fathers can only use this leave in cases where the mother has died or is seriously ill and with the mother's voluntary consent to transfer the leave to the father.

Regional or local variations in leave policy

- None.

Additional note (e.g., if leave payments are supplemented by collective agreements, employer exclusions, or rights to postpone)

- None reported.

d. Childcare leave or career breaks (*neplaten otpusk za otglegdane na dete do 8 godishna vazrast*) (responsibility of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy)

- Unpaid childcare leave to look after a child up to the age of 8 years can be taken by each parent (adoptive or biological) for up to 6 months, after the period of the Parental or Adoption leave has expired. It can be taken by both parents (though not simultaneously) if they are in employment and if the child is not placed in a publicly-funded childcare institution. Up to 5 months of this leave can be transferred to the other parent.
- The entitlement period is extended to 1 year in the case of a single parent (adoptive or biological) or a guardian of a child both of whose parents are deceased. The guardian can transfer any unused remaining portion (or the whole period of the leave) to any of the child's grandparents if they are in employment.
- The employer should be notified 10 days in advance to the leave commencing. The leave can also be broken down and used as separate blocks of time, but no fewer than five days at a time. Like Maternity, Paternity, and Parental leaves, this counts as work experience.

e. Other types of leave and flexible working

Adoption leave and pay (otpusk pri osinovyavane na dete do 5-godishna vazrast)

- Adoption leave and pay (for adopting a child under the age of five years) is available for 365 days and can be taken from the day of the child's arrival at home, but no later than the child's 5th birthday. Adoptive parents of a child up to 5 years can transfer the leave to one of the grandparents if s/he is employed. The grandparent to whom the leave has been transferred is entitled to monetary compensation from the National Social Security Institute until the child reaches 1 year. Its amount is 90 per cent of the mean insurance income from the last 24 months.
- An allowance is paid by the National Social Security Institute to the adoptive parent or the user of the leave (e.g., spouse, grandparent in the case when the right has been transferred) for the period of the leave of at 90 per cent of average gross monthly earnings (taken over a period of 24 consecutive months, preceding the month in which payment of the allowance starts), provided that social security payments to cover general illness and maternity have been made for 12 months, and the child is not placed in a full-day childcare institution. If the adoptive parent or the user of the leave returns to full-time employment before the end of the leave period, they are entitled to receive 50 per cent financial compensation for the period of the leave.
- Adoptive fathers in married couples may use the adoption leave and pay in place of the adoptive mother with her consent, beginning no earlier than 6 months after the child's arrival at home and no later than the child's 5th birthday. With the same condition, the leave can be transferred to one of the parents of the adoptive mother or father and to one of the parents of a single adoptive parent. In all cases when the leave and pay are transferred, the person who steps in for the adopter should be in employment and have paid social security contributions for general illness and maternity for 12 months. The monetary compensation is 90 per cent of the mean insurance income from the last 24 months. Single adoptive fathers/mothers are entitled to the same adoption leave and pay as adoptive parents in couples.
- Adoptive parents of children under the age of 2 years are entitled to Parental leave for any remaining period between the end of the adoption leave (365 days) and the child's 2nd birthday under the same conditions as biological parents. If the user of this leave returns to work before the ending of the leave, the adoptive parent can receive 50 per cent of the allowance associated with it for the remaining period.
- If adoptive parents are married when adopting a child under the age of 5 years, the adoptive father is entitled to 15 days of leave beginning from the day of the child's arrival in the household. It is paid at 90 per cent of average gross monthly earnings, provided that social security payments to cover maternity and general sickness have been made in the previous 6 months.
- Adoption leaves are counted as employment experience.
- Foster mothers are entitled to Maternity leave and pay under the same conditions as biological mothers, but the period of leave is reduced by the difference between the full length of the Maternity leave (410 days) and the child's age when placed in foster care. The right to transfer Maternity leave and benefit from the mother to the father when the child reaches the age of 6 months is also available to foster families.

- From 2024, Adoption leave and Parental leave for adopting a child under 5 years of age may be granted directly to the father, without the mother's consent, in cases where the mother has been deprived of parental rights or where the exercise of parental rights has been awarded to the adoptive father in accordance with a court decision.

Time off for the care of dependants

- **Leave to care for a sick family member** including a child (*otpusk pri vremenna nerabotosposobnost*) can be taken for up to 60 calendar days per year per family. Apart from this period, a caregiver caring for a child (including a foster carer) is entitled to additional days of leave in the following circumstances: to accompany a hospitalized child under the age of 3 years; to care for a quarantined child under 18 years; and to attend to a healthy child under 12 years who has to stay at home due to a quarantine in school or a childcare institution. The length of the leave in all three cases is unspecified and depends on the evaluation of the respective medical authorities. In fact, this is a special case within general sick leave and requires medical papers issued by a GP to be presented to the employer. The leave is available to all insured members of a family but cannot be taken simultaneously to care for the same child/relative. It is paid at 80 per cent of average gross monthly earnings. Self-employed persons can take this leave if they are insured (i.e., have made contributions to cover general sickness and maternity for a period of 18 months, preceding the month in which they claim use of the leave). Sick leave to care for a child interrupts paid annual leave. If a parent is on unpaid leave (e.g., for raising a child under 8 years old), sick leave for caring for another sick child is not compensated by the National Social Security Institute, as there is no active insurance coverage to interrupt.
- **Leave to care for two or more children under the age of 18 years** (*platen otpusk za dve I poveche givi detsa*) is available to employed mothers, subject to collective work agreement. Mothers with 2 children are entitled to 2 days of leave for every calendar year, and mothers with 3 or more children to 4 days per calendar year. The leave is available until and including the year one or more of the children reach 18 years of age. Paid annual leave compensation is at 100 per cent. If not used, this leave cannot be compensated in cash, except upon termination of the employment relationship. It can be postponed for use during the next calendar year, but no later than mid-year. Reasons for postponement are as follows: by the employer – for important production reasons; or by the employee, when using another type of leave or at their request with the employer's consent. If the postponed leave has not been permitted by the employer until 30 June in the following year, the employee has the right to determine the timing of its use, provided they notify the employer in writing at least 14 days in advance.

Specific provision for (breast)feeding

- Absence from work for (breast)feeding a child (*otpusk za karmene I hranene na malko dete*) is permitted for 2 hours per day (taken as one block or two separate blocks of 1 hour each) when a child is under the age of 8 months and the mother is working full-time (eight hours per day); or for 1 hour per day when a mother is working fewer than 7 hours. In the case of multiple

or pre-term births, absence of 3 hours per day is permitted to a full-time employed mother and 2 hours per day to a mother employed for fewer than 7 hours. Here again presumed are two breastfeeding breaks during the workday, which may be combined in one block of time with the worker's consent.

- When the child reaches 8 months of age, paid absence for breastfeeding is reduced to 1 hour per day (two hours for multiple or pre-term births) and requires a supporting recommendation about how long the child should be breastfed, to be issued by a doctor and presented to the employer.
- The same legal right is guaranteed to adoptive mothers and mothers of stepchildren. In all cases it is non-transferable.
- Mothers can receive full remuneration for the time they spend (breast)feeding during the working day.

Flexible working for carers

- On returning to work after taking leave, the employed person may request a temporary change in the duration or the distribution of their working hours to facilitate reconciliation between work and family duties. The law obliges the employer to consider such a request and agree to it, providing it is possible for the company to accommodate this request.
- In order to better reconcile work and family responsibilities, an employee can request to work remotely, to change working hours or their distribution, as well as other changes in the employment relationship for a certain period of time, not fixed by the law, subject to bilateral agreement between the employer and the employee. This option is given to employees who are parents (biological or adoptive) of children up to 12 years of age and employees who take care of a parent, a spouse or other relative in a direct line for serious medical reasons. The employee has the right to pre-term return to their previous work arrangements. However, the option of requesting a change in the place of work (e.g., remote or home-based work) or in the working hours does not oblige the employer to grant it. If the employer disagrees with the request, their only obligation is to give a reasoned written response regarding their refusal within 14 days.
- Outside the case of family care, the Labour Code provides for the right of an initiative from both, the employer and the employee, to: switch from full to partial working time and vice versa, from fixed to flexible timetable (but with a fixed amount of present-in-the-office hours, set by the employer), and from remote to in-office work.
- Employed mothers of children under 6 years of age have a legal right to work from home with the same (or another) employer, upon request.⁹¹ When the child turns 6 years, the mother who has been working from home should be restored to the same position she previously held or, if that position is no longer available, to an appropriate alternative, with her consent. Mothers of children under 6 years of age may work from home for another employer, in which case they should be granted unpaid leave from their former employer and the right to return to the same or an appropriate

⁹¹ In reality, this statutory right for flexible or remote work for mothers with children under 6 years of age is actually non-applicable. According to data from the national representative survey of the labour force (available here: <https://bit.ly/2FvAcIb>), only 1.5 per cent of employed women who take care of children and elderly relatives work on flexible time and just 0.8 per cent of them self-manage their own working time.

alternative position after the entitlement to work from home expires. The right may be used by the father if the mother is not able to use it.

Antenatal appointments and care

- Pregnant women or those undergoing in-vitro treatment at an advanced stage are entitled to take time off during working hours to attend medical appointments. (see 'Leave for conducting citizen's, community or other duties' below)

Other provisions of leave

- **Leave for conducting citizen's, community or other duties** (*otpusk za izpunenie na grazhdanski, obshtestveni i drugi zadulzheniya*). Within this type of leave are included family-related situations such as: getting married; death of relatives in the direct line or spouse's relatives in the direct line (i.e., parents, children, spouses, siblings); medical examinations related to pregnancy or in-vitro treatment. The leave entitlement is 2 days in the cases of marriage or for the bereavement of a deceased relative. In the case of absence for reproductive medical examinations, there is no fixed duration within the workday. The time of absence is fully paid, unless otherwise specified in a collective agreement or in an individual agreement between the employer and the employee. This provision applies to all categories of workers and is not dependent on the length of service with the same employer. No flexibility in its use is provided.
- **Unpaid leave** (*neplaten otpusk*). An employee may request unpaid leave without giving reasons even *before* exhausting their entitlements to paid leave. There is no fixed maximum duration of this type of leave, however, only 30 days per calendar year are counted as work experience.
- Employment protection and non-discrimination throughout Maternity/Parental leave. The Labour Code sets out regulations to ensure employment protection and non-discrimination throughout Maternity, Paternity, and Parental leave of employed people. It prohibits the dismissal of a mother with a child under 3 years, without permission obtained from The Executive Agency 'General Labour Inspectorate'. The legal right to return to the same work position, or – if the position no longer exists – to an equivalent one, is also guaranteed by the Labour Code. Furthermore, it states the right to benefit from any improvements of the working conditions or indexation of the salary that occurred during childcare-related leave.
- A pregnant woman, a breastfeeding woman, or a woman who is in an advanced stage of in-vitro treatment has the right to refuse work which presents hazards to her and her child's health. A list of hazardous jobs and working conditions is regulated by the Minister of Labour and Social Policy and the Minister of Health. Based on the recommendation of the responsible healthcare authorities, the employer has a duty to temporarily rearrange working conditions and/or schedule in order to remove the risk and safeguard the woman's health. If this is impossible due to objective reasons, the woman shall be temporarily assigned to another job. To account for any waiting period before starting the new, more appropriate job, the woman will be compensated by her employer (to the sum of her gross monthly remuneration). If the remuneration on the new job is lower than that of the former one, the employer must pay compensation to settle the difference in payments. Each year, in coordination with the healthcare authorities, the

employer determines a list of work positions suitable for pregnant, breastfeeding or in-vitro treated women.

- Employed pregnant women, women who are in an advanced stage of in-vitro treatment procedure, or mothers with a child under the age of 3 years cannot be sent on a business trip without their consent. This right may be used by the father if the mother is not in a condition to benefit from it.

2. Relationship between leave policy and early childhood education and care policy

The maximum period of post-natal leave is 36 months, but well-paid leave only lasts for 12 months.⁹² Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is obligatory for children aged four (in the year the child is going to reach four), five and six years. There is therefore a gap of one year between the end of leave and the start of an ECEC entitlement and a gap of three years between the end of well-paid leave and an entitlement to ECEC.

For ECEC attendance levels, see 'relationship between leave and ECEC entitlements' on [cross-country comparisons](#) page.

3. Changes in policy since April 2025 (including proposals currently under discussion)

In 2025, two major changes were introduced in the legislation concerning paid leave arrangements. From 1 July 2025, amendments to the Social Security Code entered into force, under which the payment of Maternity, Paternity and Parental leave benefits is suspended if the parent receiving them works under a second employment contract that includes coverage for general illness and maternity. The rationale behind this change is that full benefits are intended to support full-time childcare at home. However, parents remain entitled to receive 50 per cent of the benefits due for early return to work if they resume the employment they held prior to taking any childbirth- or childcare-related leave.

The second major change aims to expand the group of parents eligible for flexible working arrangements. In 2025, amendments to the Labour Code introduced the possibility for parents (adoptive parents) of children up to 12 years of age to ask the employer to allow them to work flexible working hours. The employer must examine the request in accordance with the law and, in case of refusal, state the reasons for this refusal. Previously, this option was available only to parents (or adoptive parents) of children up to 8 years of age. This change is intended to support a better work-life balance for a broader group of working parents.

In 2025, the period during which employees can request temporary flexible work arrangements – such as changes to working hours (duration and distribution), remote work, or other adjustments to support work-life balance – was extended.

⁹² Bulgaria has no law or policy document entirely devoted to early childhood development. The legislative and political framework concerning ECEC is contained within the sectoral laws and policies in the healthcare, education and social sphere.

Previously, employees could make such requests until their child turned 8 years of age; this limit has now been increased to 12 years of age of the child.

4. Uptake of leave

a. Maternity leave

The general Maternity leave of 135 days is obligatory and it is considered a recovery period for mothers, as well as time for immediate childcare. This is documented by health authorities (i.e., GPs and hospitals). Data from the National Social Security Institute shows that in 2025, there were 72,688 beneficiaries of Maternity leave, of whom 327 (or less than 1 per cent) were men. These fathers (adoptive and biological) took the period of Maternity leave from the 6th month until 1 year after childbirth.⁹³ Among the first year paid beneficiaries, 786 (78 of them are adoptive parents) received 50 per cent financial compensation because they returned to work during the leave. Survey data shows that parents are in favour of highly paid Maternity leave during the first year of their child's life.⁹⁴

b. Paternity leave

For eligible fathers, the 15 days of Paternity leave are obligatory, intended to foster fathers' involvement in childcare immediately after the birth. According to the National Social Security Institute, 21,314 fathers (including 4 adoptive fathers) took paid leave in 2025: this is equivalent to less than half of all the children born that year. The 15 day leave is the most used type of Paternity leave in Bulgaria; the 2 month additional Paternity leave was taken by 2,059 fathers in 2025, including adopters.⁹⁵

c. Parental leave

In 2025, the second year of Parental leave was taken by 79,208 beneficiaries, of whom 706 were fathers. Moreover, 15,537 of beneficiaries received 50 per cent of the benefits for the second year because they returned to employment. Well-paid and higher qualified mothers prefer to return to work and choose other options for childcare (e.g., babysitter, relatives, or a crèche) rather than staying at home.⁹⁶

⁹³ National Insurance Institute, 2025. See https://nssi.bg/wp-content/uploads/SPRAVKA_bolnicni_31122025.pdf

⁹⁴ In Bulgaria, 73 per cent of all children up to 3 years of age are cared for at home by their parents and do not visit childcare facilities. In 2016, this was the highest percentage in the EU (see: Slavova, Z. (2016) 'Bulgaria is the country where the highest percentage of small children cared for by their parents', *IME Newsletter*. Available at: <http://ime.bg/bg/articles/bylgariya-e-stranata-v-koyato-nai-mnogo-ot-malkite-deca-se-otglejdat-ot-roditelite-si/#ixzz59SWQJ3W9>). Survey data on parents' attitudes toward family policy in Bulgaria demonstrate that most parents are highly appreciative of paid Maternity leave during the first year (see Kotzeva, T., E. Dimitrova, K. Ilieva and S. Moraliiska (2016) 'Survey on attitudes of parents towards family policy in Bulgaria', *Family Policy Vision – Parents' Views and Europe's Experience*, Sofia: NMD. Available at: <http://nmd.bg/dve-novi-publikatsii-po-proekta-viziya-za-semeyna-politika/>

⁹⁵ National Insurance Institute, 2025. See <https://nssi.bg/publikacii/statistika/obshto-zabolyavane-i-maichinstvo/>

⁹⁶ Survey data on parents' attitudes shows that approximately half of the respondents, mainly those with high levels of education and well-paid jobs, living in urban environments, are critical towards low-paid Parental leave during the second year, as well as towards the

For mothers without paid social security, who may be entitled to a monthly social benefit for 1 year after the birth, the National Agency for Social Assistance reports that 11,101 received this social benefit of BGN200 [€102.26] in 2025 (i.e., about one fifth of all mothers who gave birth that year).⁹⁷

d. Childcare leave or career breaks

No information available.

lack of services for children aged one to three. The experts interviewed in this survey are also sceptical about the genuine opportunity for highly qualified and educated parents to take second year leave, due to the negative effects of long-term Parental leave on labour market and women's qualifications (see Kotzeva et al., 2016; footnote 3).

⁹⁷ Report on the Activity of the Agency for Social Assistance in 2025. Available from <https://asp.government.bg/bg/za-agentsiyata/misiya-i-tseli/otcheti-i-dokladi/>