Germany[233]

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April 2026

Germany is a federal country with 16 federal states (Länder).

For cross-country comparisons of leave provision and early childhood education and care (ECEC) services, please refer to the tables at the beginning of this review (also available separately on the Leave Network website). To contact the authors of the country notes, please consult the members page on the Leave Network website.

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

Note on terminology: German legislation (*Bundeselternzeit- und Elterngeldgesetz* (*BEEG*)) distinguishes between two dimensions of Parental leave: '*Elternzeit*' refers to job protection rights and the right to work part-time, while '*Elterngeld*' and '*ElterngeldPlus*' refer to Parental leave benefits.

a. Maternity leave (*Mutterschutz*) (responsibility of the Federal Ministry for Education, Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth)

Length of leave (before and after birth)

- 14 weeks in total: 6 weeks before the the expected date of birth and 8 weeks after the birth.
- It is obligatory to take 8 weeks after the birth, or 12 weeks in the case of premature or multiple births, as well as in cases where the child is born with a disability.
- Beyond the Maternity leave period, pregnant and breastfeeding women are protected from workplace hazards, night work and overtime hours. In the case of asylum seekers, deportation is generally suspended during maternity protection periods.

Payment, funding and taxation

233 Please cite as: Reimer, T., Blum, S., Fischer, J., Peukert, A., Schober, P. and Stertz, A. M. (2026) 'Germany country note', in Dobrotić, I., Arnalds, 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/

- For women covered by statutory health insurance, health insurance funds pay benefits up to €13 per day. The employer pays a top-up to cover the difference between this amount and the woman's average net earnings in the last 3 months before the start of Maternity leave, resulting in full income replacement with no upper limit.
- Women who are privately insured or not employed may receive a lump-sum maternity benefit of up to €210 in total, paid by the Federal Office for Social Security.
- Women receiving unemployment benefits (*Arbeitslosengeld* [ALG I]) are entitled to maternity benefits equivalent to their previous unemployment benefit, paid by the statutory health insurance fund.
- Women receiving basic income support (ALG II / *Bürgergeld*): do not receive maternity benefit as an earnings replacement, since they are not in insured employment., and continue to receive basic income support. Additional needs related to pregnancy (e.g., a pregnancy allowance and one-off benefits for initial equipment) may be granted.
- Women receiving basic income support but are/were working in Minijobs (earnings below €556 per month receive the lump-sum maternity benefit (up to €210) on top of their income to the subsistence level.
- Women with very low earnings (e.g., in marginal employment) may receive only limited maternity benefits (e.g., the lump-sum payment of up to €210 if not covered by statutory health insurance).
- Most payments are usually made via the employer, who is fully reimbursed through the statutory health insurance (U2 scheme). The maternity benefit paid by the statutory health insurance fund (up to €13 per day) is transferred directly to the mother. For women not in dependent employment but covered by statutory health insurance with entitlement to sickness benefits (e.g., some self-employed women), maternity benefit is paid directly by the health insurance fund; if not covered by statutory health insurance, a lump-sum maternity benefit (up to €210 in total) is paid by the Federal Office for Social Security.
- If a woman is prohibited from working outside the statutory maternity protection period (e.g. due to workplace health risks), she receives continued payment from the employer. This corresponds to her average earnings in the last three months before the pregnancy began (is reimbursed through the health insurance (U2 scheme).
- Payments are not subject to income tax, but are taken into account under the progression clause (*Progressionsvorbehalt*), which may increase the tax rate applied to other taxable income.
- Funded by a combination of statutory health insurance and employer contributions. Employers are fully reimbursed for their payments through the U2 reimbursement scheme, which is financed by a levy paid by all employers (not only for female employees). The contribution rate is set individually by each health insurance fund and typically amounts to around 0.2–0.4 per cent of gross wages.

Flexibility in use

- Expectant mothers may choose to continue working or studying during the last 6 weeks before the expected date of birth provided they explicitly declare their consent. This consent may be withdrawn at any time.

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

- Entitlement to Maternity leave is universal for women in employment, education or similar situations, while entitlement to Maternity leave benefits depends primarily on health insurance status and employment situation.
- The following groups receive Maternity leave payments:
  - Women who are statutorily insured and in employment receive maternity benefit (*Mutterschaftsgeld*) and an employer top-up.
  - Women not covered by statutory health insurance (e.g., privately insured or marginally employed without entitlement to statutory benefits) may receive a lump-sum maternity benefit of up to €210 in total, paid by the Federal Office for Social Security.
  - Self-employed women are entitled to maternity benefits only if they are covered by statutory health insurance with entitlement to sickness benefits; otherwise, they may receive only the lump-sum payment.
  - Women without employment (e.g., asylum seekers) are not entitled to maternity benefit as an earnings replacement, but may receive support through the general social protection system (e.g., benefits under asylum seekers' benefits law).
  - If no maternity benefit is payable (e.g., for unemployed women, self-employed women without statutory health insurance or adoptive mothers), Parental leave benefit (*Elterngeld*) may be claimed from the day of birth and thus effectively replaces Maternity leave benefits from that point onward.

Variation in leave due to child or family reasons (e.g., multiple or premature births; poor health or disability of child or mother; single parent); or delegation of leave to person other than the mother

- In the case of multiple births, premature , or when a child is born with a disability, the postnatal maternity protection period is extended from 8 to 12 weeks. In the case of premature birth, any part of the prenatal leave not taken is added to the postnatal period.
- In exceptional cases (e.g., death of the mother), other caregivers may receive certain benefits, but not Maternity leave as such.

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

There is no statutory entitlement.

c. Parental leave *(Elternzeit)* (responsibility of the Federal Ministry for Education, Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth)

Length of leave (*Elternzeit*)

- 3 years per child.
- Leave is an individual, non-transferable entitlement.

Payment, funding and taxation (Basiselterngeld/ElterngeldPlus)

- An income-related benefit is paid if parents reduce or interrupt employment to care for a child. Parents can choose between (or successively combine) two types of Parental leave benefits: (i) *Basiselterngeld* (for full-time Parental leave) and (ii) *ElterngeldPlus* (for part-time Parental leave).

  Basiselterngeld

  - Replaces a proportion of former income, if parents take full-time leave to care for their child/ren.
  - Paid for up to 12 months after birth, with 2 additional months (making a total of 14 months) if both parents take at least 2 months each (partner months, *Partnermonate*), or for single parents.
  - Generally paid at 65 per cent[234] of previous net earnings (higher rates of up to 100 per cent for low incomes), with a minimum of €300 per month and a maximum of €1,800 per month.
  - Interaction with Maternity leave benefits: Maternity leave benefits received after childbirth are fully offset, so that for mothers the effective duration is typically reduced (e.g. to around ten months, or 12 months for single mothers).
  - Parents without prior earnings receive the minimum amount (€300/month). Parental benefits (*Elterngeld*) are taken into account when calculating means-tested benefits during unemployment such as *Bürgergeld* and are therefore largely offset against these benefits.

  ElterngeldPlus

  - Replaces a proportion of the loss in income if parents reduce their working hours to care for their child/ren.
  - Paid for a period of 24 months, with 2 to 4 additional months (partnership bonus, *Partnerschaftsbonus)* per parent if both parents work 24-32 hours per week for at least 2 to 4 consecutive months.

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[234] Parents with a previous net income between €1,000 and €1,240 per month receive benefits at a rate of 67 per cent and parents with a previous income of €1,240 and higher receive benefits at a 65 per cent rate, up to the limit of €1,800 per month for the parental benefit (*Elterngeld*) payment. Parents with a net income of less than €1,000 per month receive an increased benefit: for every €2 that their monthly earnings are below €1,000, their parental benefit increases by 0.1 per cent. For parents with monthly incomes above €1,240, on the other hand, the income replacement rate is reduced: for every €2 their monthly earnings exceed this sum, their parental benefit decreases by 0.1 per cent, to a minimum rate of 65 per cent. For parents on leave who work part-time during the leave, the income replacement rate is 65 per cent of the difference between the previous year's net earnings before birth and the current earnings after the birth.

- The benefit level is calculated based on lost income due to reduced working hours; it is generally at 65 per cent, but capped at 50 per cent of the *Basiselterngeld* amount (i.e., €150–€900 per month).
- Maternity leave benefits are also offset against *ElterngeldPlus*, effectively reducing the actual benefit period available to part-time employed mothers to 22 months.

Additional elements of Basiselterngeld and ElterngeldPlus

- Sibling bonus (*Geschwisterbonus*): +10 per cent (minimum €75/month for *Basiselterngeld*; €37.50 for *ElterngeldPlus*) under specified conditions (two children under 3 years of age, or three or more children under 6 years of age, or two children of which at least one is disabled and under 14 years of age in the household).
- Multiple birth supplement: €300 (*Basiselterngeld*) or €150 (*ElterngeldPlus*) per additional child.

- *Elterngeld* is not taxed directly. However, it is counted when calculating the applicable tax rate (*Progressionsvorbehalt*). In effect, the Parental leave benefit can lead to being grouped in a higher tax rate class, and thus to higher taxes on the rest of the income.
- Up to 3 years per child are credited (pension credits, *Kindererziehungszeit*) in the statutory pension system; the parents may decide how pension credits are to be divided. Credits apply regardless of whether parental leave is taken. Each year of recognised child-rearing time entails a monthly pension increase of €33.05 in Western Germany and €31.89 in Eastern Germany. Pension credits for child-rearing are currently paid through Germany's contribution-based pension system.
- *Basiselterngeld* and *ElterngeldPlus* are funded by the federal government through general taxation.

Flexibility in use

- Parents may choose between *Basiselterngeld* and *ElterngeldPlus* or combine both types of paid leave.
- Employment of up to 32 hours per week is permitted while receiving benefits. In this case, parental benefit is paid only for the loss of income. For example, if a parent worked 40 hours per week before taking parental leave and continues working 30 hours per week thereafter, they receive 65 per cent (or 67 per cent to 100 per cent for lower incomes) of the difference between their previous and current income, in addition to their earnings from employment.
- Parental leave may be split into up to three periods (more with employer consent)However, once the child is over 14 months old and both parents completed their parental benefits, they cannot apply for a new period of parental benefit receipt even if they have not exhausted the maximum length.
- Up to 24 months of the unpaid Parental leave period can be taken between ages 3 and 8 years.
- Parents can take leave simultaneously, but receipt of *Basiselterngeld* (full-time parental leave benefits) for both parents at the same time is limited to a maximum of 1 month and only within the first 12 months of the child's life.

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

- Parental leave (*Elternzeit*): all parents gainfully employed at the date of birth. During the Parental leave, parents must not be employed more than 32 hours per week.
- Parental benefit (*Basiselterngeld* and *ElterngeldPlus*):
    - Biological parents, adoptive parents and parents in pre-adoptive foster care.
    - Parents not working more than 32 hours per week.
    - Parents living in the same household as the child (this includes separated parents with joint custody).
    - Self-employed parents.
    - Same-sex couples (if legally recognised as parents, if the couple is partnered/married *or* a step child adoption is planned).
    - Parents or a single parent with a (joint) taxable income not exceeding €175,000 per annum (reference period: tax year preceding the birth).
    - EU/EEA/Swiss citizens residing or working in Germany; Ttird-country nationals with a valid residence/work permit.
    - Eligibility for asylum seekers depends on their residence status and access to the labour market; in particular, entitlement requires that employment is permitted and actually taken up[235].
    - Others who take over the care of the child in exceptional circumstances (see below)

Variation in leave due to child or family reasons (e.g., multiple or premature births; poor health or disability of child or mother; single parent); or delegation of leave to person other than the parents

- Single parents can claim the full 14 months of *Basiselterngeld*.
- Grandparents may take Parental leave under specific conditions (e.g., if the parent is a minor or in education/training).
- Additional months of parental benefit are granted for premature births depending on how early the child is born: 1 month extra if at least 6 weeks early: 2 months if at least 8 weeks early: 3 months if at least 12 weeks early; 4 months if at least 16 weeks early.

Regional or local variations in leave policy

- Parental leave legislation is regulated at the federal level. While some federal states previously provided additional benefits, such schemes have largely been phased out. Currently, only Saxony continues to provide a supplementary state-level benefit (*Landeserziehungsgeld*):
    - This benefit is typically payable in the 2nd or 3rd year of the child's life, usually following the end of parental benefit receipt. If the benefit is claimed in the 2nd year of life, payment for a first child is up to 5 months, for a second child up to 6 months, and for a third and subsequent children up to seven months. If claimed in the 3rd year of life and no publicly

[235] Under Section 61 of the Asylum Act, asylum seekers are generally granted access to the labour market after three or six months, depending on their status. Eligibility for parental benefit is conditional on both permission to work and the actual engagement in gainful employment.

funded childcare has been used since the child's 14th month, payment for a first and second child: is up to 9 months, and for a third and subsequent children up to 12 months.
  - The benefit level level is up to €150 per month for the first child; up to €200 for the second child; up to €300 for each additional child. Full benefit is paid up to a net household income of €24,600 per year (€21,600 for single parents); above this threshold, payments are gradually reduced; the threshold increases by €3,140 per additional child.
  - Eligibility conditions: residence in Saxony and co-residence with the child; the child is not enrolled in publicly funded childcare during the period of receipt (with limited exceptions, e.g., during education or training); employment does not exceed 30 hours per week.

d. Childcare leave or career breaks

No statutory entitlement.

e. Other types of leave and flexible working

Adoptive leave and pay

- Adoptive parents are entitled to Parental leave and Parental leave benefits (see above). They are eligible for parental benefit from the date the child is placed in their household (adoptive placement), rather than from the date of birth.

Time off for the care of dependants

- **Child Sick Days** (*Kinderkrankentage*) and Child Sick Pay (*Kinderkrankengeld*): In the event of a child's illness (generally up to age 12 years), parents covered by statutory health insurance (not parents with private health insurance) are entitled to take leave from work. Each parent may take up to 15 working days per child per year (30 days for single parents)Parents receive 90 per cent of their net earnings (100 per cent in certain cases, e.g., one-off payments). The total annual entitlement is capped at 35 days per parent (70 days for single parents), even if there are several children. If the child is hospitalised and requires parental presence, entitlement may be extended beyond the standard limits.
- Employees may take up to 10 working days of **short-term care leave** (*Kurzzeitige Arbeitsverhinderung*) per year per care-dependent relative in cases of acute care needs. During this period, they are entitled to a care support allowance (*Pflegeunterstützungsgeld*), usually amounting to around 90 per cent of net earnings. The allowance is paid by the compulsory long-term care insurance of the person in need of care.
- Employees in a workplace with more than 15 employees may take up to six months of unpaid **long-term care leave** (*Pflegezeit*) to care for a close relative in a home environment. During this period, employees have the legal right to apply for an interest-free government loan to compensate for lost income. The loans have to be repaid within 48 months after the start of the leave of absence. *Pflegezeit* does not require the consent of employers.
- Employees in workplaces with more than 25 employees may reduce their working time to a minimum of 15 hours per week for up to 24 months. This

family long-term care leave (*Familienpflegezei*) is also a statutory entitlement (subject to conditions). Income losses may be compensated by an interest-free government loan, repayable within 48 months after the start of the leave.

Specific provisions for breastfeeding

- Mothers are entitled to paid time off for breastfeeding during the child's first 12 months: at least 60 minutes per day or 90 minutes per day if working more than eight hours. These breaks are fully paid and cannot be transferred.

Flexible working for carers

- Employees who have been employed for more than 6 months in establishments with more than 15 employees have the right to request a permanent reduction in working hours (*Teilzeit*[236]), unless there are operational reasons to refuse, which include cases where the reduction in working hours causes severe impairment in workflow, organisation, and safety issues, or which result in a disproportional amount of costs. Reduction to part-time hours does not include an automatic right to return to full-time work.
- Employees who have worked longer than 6 months in the same workplace with more than 45 employees are entitled to reduce their working hours for a fixed period (*Brückenteilzeit)* of 1 to 5 years with a right to return to full-time work afterwards. Employers may refuse employees' requests for such temporary working hour reductions on the grounds of operational reasons.
- There is no general statutory right to work from home, although such arrangements are often regulated in collective agreements or company policies.

Time off for antenatal appointments and care

- Women are entitled to paid time off for medical examinations and care related to pregnancy and maternity.

Other provisions of leave

- **Stillbirth leave**. In the event of a stillbirth from the 24th week of pregnancy, women are entitled to the full maternity protection period. In such cases, they may choose to return to work after 3 weeks, provided they expressly declare their willingness to do so and there are no medical objections.
- Germany has no statutory entitlement to bereavement leave. Paid time off following the death of a close relative may arise from Section 616 of the Civil Code, collective agreements, works agreements or individual employment contracts, but the law does not specify either the eligible relatives or a fixed

[236] Overall, in 2024, 30.6 per cent of all employed persons in Germany worked part-time. The part-time rate was significantly higher among women (49.5 per cent) than among men (13.9 per cent). Care responsibilities are an important reason for part-time employment: 23.5 per cent of part-time workers report reducing their working hours to care for children, persons with disabilities or dependent relatives, with a markedly higher share among women (28.8 per cent) than among men (6.8 per cent). (https://www.destatis.de/DE/Presse/Pressemitteilungen/2026/01/PD26_N007_13.html).

number of days. In practice, paid leave days (at the rate of 100 per cent of former earnings) following the death of a close relative are usually provided for in collective agreements and range from 1 to 3 days.

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

All children in Germany are entitled to publicly funded early childhood education and care (ECEC) from the completion of their first year of life. This entitlement may be fulfilled through a place in a day-care centre or publicly funded family day care. In principle, there is therefore no formal gap between the end of well-paid parental allowance and entitlement to ECEC. In practice, however, access may be constrained by the availability of places, local opening hours and regional differences in provision.

Federal legislation regulating ECEC, the Social Code Book VIII (SGB VIII), establishes a legal entitlement but does not define a uniform number of hours. For children from age 1 to under 3 years, the scope of provision is based on individual need, including the needs of the child and the parents’ employment or training or job-search situation. For children aged 3 years to school entry, federal law provides an entitlement to a place in a day-care centre. Public youth welfare authorities are also required to work towards a needs-based supply of full-day places.

However, this does not amount to an unconditional nationwide legal entitlement to a full-day place. The practical scope of provision is therefore shaped partly by Länder legislation and local implementation. As a result, substantial regional differences remain. In particular, opening hours and the availability of full-day provision may not always be compatible with standard full-time working hours. Full-day care continues to be more widespread in Eastern Germany than in Western Germany.

According to the latest available data, as of 1 March 2025, around 801,300 children under the age of three were enrolled in ECEC in Germany. Although this was 47,100 fewer children than in the previous year, the participation rate increased slightly to 37.8 per cent, because the total number of children in this age group declined even more strongly. A substantial regional gap persists: in Eastern Germany, including Berlin, the participation rate for children under three was 54.9 per cent, compared with 34.5 per cent in Western Germany.

Across all age groups, just over 4.06 million children were in ECEC in Germany in 2025. Of these, 96.4 per cent were cared for in centre-based early childhood education and care, while 3.6 per cent were cared for in publicly funded family day care, for example by childminders.

For children aged three to under six, participation is close to universal. In 2025, 95.0 per cent of children in this age group attended ECEC. The rate was 94.3 per cent in Western Germany and 98.2 per cent in Eastern Germany, including Berlin.

For ECEC attendance levels, see ‘relationship between leave and ECEC entitlements’ in the cross-country tables at the front of the review.

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

In 2025, the main policy change was a further reduction in the income threshold for eligibility. For children born from 1 April 2025, couples and single parents are no longer entitled to parental allowance if their taxable income in the calendar year before the birth exceeds €175,000.

Since 1 June 2025, maternity protection periods after miscarriage have been staggered according to the stage of pregnancy. After a miscarriage from the 13th week of pregnancy, the protection period is 2 weeks; from the 17th week, it is 6 weeks; and from the 20th week, it is 8 weeks. The woman may choose to return to work voluntarily, but can revoke this decision at any time.

Several further changes are under discussion but have not yet been adopted. According to the 2025 coalition agreement, the parental allowance is to be simplified, minimum and maximum benefit amounts are to be increased, income thresholds are to be reviewed, and stronger incentives for a more equal sharing of leave are envisaged. The coalition also announced plans to improve parental allowance rules for self-employed parents and to examine the introduction of maternity protection for self-employed women. However, the federal government stated in May 2026 that its considerations on the further development of parental allowance had not yet been concluded. A separate statutory paid Paternity leave has still not been introduced, although related legal proceedings and EU-law questions continue to put pressure on the issue.

4. Uptake of leave

a. Maternity leave

There is a 100 per cent uptake of Maternity leave among eligible women after childbirth, as the postnatal protection period is compulsory and employment is prohibited during this time. No data are available on the uptake of Maternity leave before birth.

b. Paternity leave

There is no statutory entitlement to Paternity leave.

c. Parental leave benefit

In 2025, about 1.19 million women and 417,000 men in Germany received parental benefits. Overall, around 1.61 million women and men received parental benefit, around 62,000 fewer than in 2024, corresponding to a decline of 3.7 per cent. The number of parental benefit recipients therefore declined for the fourth year in a row and was 13.9 per cent lower than in 2021, a development that also reflects the decline in births in recent years. The share of fathers among all parental benefit recipients stood at 25.9 per cent in 2025, slightly higher than in 2024.

In the same year, 648,000 recipients of parental benefit planned to claim Elterngeld Plus, namely 45.2 per cent of eligible mothers and 26.1 per cent of fathers. Overall, the proportion of parental benefit recipients who also planned to receive Elterngeld Plus was 40.3 per cent, up from 36.7 per cent in 2024. Demand for paid parental leave in part-time has therefore continued to increase since the introduction of Elterngeld Plus in 2015. Around 54,000 recipients of Elterngeld Plus planned to use the partnership bonus, corresponding to 8.3 per cent of Elterngeld Plus recipients.

The share of fathers claiming parental leave benefits was highest in Saxony, at 30.0 per cent, followed by Baden-Württemberg at 28.0 per cent and Bavaria at 27.6 per cent. It was lowest in Saarland, at 21.0 per cent, followed by Bremen at 21.5 per cent.

In 2024 (latest data available), fathers received an average of 1,337 euros in parental benefit per month, while mothers received substantially less, at 830 euros per month. This difference reflects the fact that fathers were more often employed before the birth of the child and had higher relevant earnings for the calculation of parental benefit. However, the overall amount received was higher for mothers, because they claimed benefits for much longer periods: fathers received an average total of 4,185 euros, compared with 11,462 euros for mothers. The average planned duration of benefit receipt in 2024 was 14.8 months for women and 3.8 months for men. Many fathers who claim parental benefit do so, at least partly, for the first month after the birth of the child and thus use parental leave entitlements in a way similar to paternity leave.

Completed parental leave benefit claims: For children born in the third quarter of 2023, a total of 175,685 children in Germany were recorded in parental benefit statistics. For 83,170 of these children, at least one father received parental benefit, corresponding to a father participation rate of 47.3 per cent. By contrast, mothers received parental benefit for 172,931 of these children, corresponding to a mother participation rate of 98.4 per cent.