

# CARER LEAVE POLICIES IN FINLAND

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Caring for family members alongside paid work is increasingly common and the global longevity revolution means this will continue. Combining care work and paid work has well-known consequences for carers, their employers, the labour force and economies. Some governments have introduced strategies that let carers take time away from their jobs to fulfill care responsibilities while still being able to return to their job afterwards. To inform development of carer leaves in the UK, an international policy scan was carried out in nine other countries (Australia, Canada, Finland, Germany, Italy, Japan, Poland, Slovenia and Sweden) as part of the Sustainable Care program.

This Policy snapshot provides an overview of carer leave initiatives in Finland. These policies and their implications for working carers are part of a forthcoming edited book J Fast, J Heyes, and K Hamblin, **Combining Work and Care**, that will be published by Policy Press.

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## FINLAND'S POLITICAL CONTEXT

Finland is a parliamentary republic with 19 regions and over 300 municipalities.

Municipalities are self-governing with right to levy taxes and control and administer many community services such as schools, care services and infrastructure.

In 2021, the first stage of the new health and social services reform came into effect. The reform aims to ensure equal access to health and social services regardless of place of residence. The reform transfers the responsibility for organising services from municipalities to 22 health and social services counties with the right to levy taxes.

Finland is considered a Nordic welfare state with universally available comprehensive publicly funded welfare services, though in certain issues it lags somewhat behind its Nordic neighbours. It also displays features of marketisation and familism.

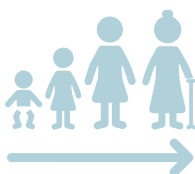
## FINLAND'S SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT



73.4% of people residing in Finland of employment age were in the labour force in August 2021, up from 69.1% in May 2020.



6.5% unemployment rate in August 2021, which was down from 7.8% one year earlier.



The proportion of Finns aged 65 years and older is projected to increase from 22% in 2019 to 28% by 2050, putting Finland among the five fastest ageing populations worldwide.



28% of working people take care of relatives and friends in need of care due to illness, disability or aging. A care allowance is granted to almost 50,000 carers who have a contract with their municipality and receive support.



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# ABSENCE FOR COMPELLING FAMILY REASONS

## INTENT

Employees are entitled to temporary absence from work because of unforeseeable and compelling reasons due to an illness or accident suffered by a family member.

## DURATION

Duration of leave and other arrangements are based on necessity and agreement between the employer and the employee.

There are no limits as to how often the leave may be taken.

## BENEFITS

The employer is not required to pay the employee remuneration for the duration of the absence.

No other compensation for loss of earnings during the leave is available.

## ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

The leave is available to all workers with an employment contract in Finland.

Employee must care for a family member.

Underlying reason for care is illness or accident.

## FEATURES

The employee has a right to return to their former position/duties. If this is not possible, the employee is offered equivalent work in accordance with their work contract.

## NOTICE

Employees must notify the employer of their absence and its reason as soon as possible.

On request, the employee must present proof of the grounds for the absence, and for its discontinuation.

## FAMILY MEMBERS

While the law itself does not specify who is considered a family member, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland defines a family member as an employee's relative in ascending or descending line or their spouse's or live-in partner's relative in ascending or descending line.

# ABSENCE FOR TAKING CARE OF A FAMILY MEMBER OR SOMEONE CLOSE TO THE EMPLOYEE

## INTENT

If it is necessary for an employee to be absent in order to provide special care for a family member or someone else close to them, the employee is entitled to a temporary absence from work.

## BENEFITS

The employer is not required to pay the employee remuneration during the absence.

No other compensation for loss of earnings during the leave is available.

## DURATION

Duration of leave and other arrangements are based on necessity and agreement between the employer and the employee.

There are no limits as to how often the leave may be taken.

## ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

The leave is available to all workers with an employment contract in Finland and based on agreement between the employer and employee.

Employee must care for a family member or "someone else close" to the employee, including more distant relatives and friends.

Underlying reason for care is "special care needs", which means that the care receiver needs the employee's help with their activities of daily living.

## FEATURES

The employer must try to arrange the work so that the employee may be absent from work for a fixed period.

The employee has a right to return to their former position/duties. If this is not possible, the employee is offered equivalent work in accordance with their work contract.

## SOMEONE CLOSE

According to the Employment and Equality Committee report on changing the Employment Contracts Act 14/2010, family member or someone close usually refers to an employee's relatives or friends, or their spouse or live-in partners' relatives.

## NOTICE

Returning to work in the middle of an agreed leave must be agreed on by the employer and the employee. If an agreement cannot be reached, the employee may discontinue their leave for a justifiable reason by informing their employer of their return no later than one month before the date of return to work.

On request, the employee must present proof of the grounds for the absence, and for its discontinuation.

# JOB ALTERNATION LEAVE

## INTENT

To allow employees to have career breaks while improving the employment potential of unemployed job seekers through a fixed-term work experience. While not designed for care leave purposes, the program has been used for caregiving.

## DURATION

Minimum duration of a job alternation leave is 100 successive calendar days up to a maximum of 180 calendar days.

## BENEFITS

The employee is entitled to a job alternation allowance which is 70% of the unemployment allowance.

Job Alternation Leave is an arrangement whereby an employee, in accordance with a job alternation agreement made with the employer, is released for a fixed period from their work duties covered by their service relationship.

The employer agrees to hire for a corresponding period a person registered as an unemployed jobseeker for a fixed term work experience in the job alternator's place.

Leave also applies to persons employed in a civil service or comparable service relationship with the State, a municipality or other corporation under public law.

Applies to employees who have worked at least 20 years prior to the leave, have a continuous work contract with the same employer for at least 13 months prior to the leave (with no more than 30 days of unpaid leave), and whose working hours are at least 75% of full time working hours.

After the leave, an employee must have at least a 5 year employment period before applying for a new job alternation leave.

Leave was not initially intended for care purposes so there is no eligibility criteria for care receivers.

Employee's job is protected.

The employee has a right to return to their former position and duties. If this is not possible, the employee is offered equivalent work in accordance with their work contract.

Employers must notify the employment and business office without delay that they have employed a substitute for the duration of a Job Alternation Leave and report any essential changes in the service relationship of the substitute.

## ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

## FEATURES

## NOTICE