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**Observatory for  
Sociopolitical Developments  
in Europe**

# **Financial support for family vacations in Europe?**

## **An overview of the supporting regulations**

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## **Abstract**

This brief expert opinion represents an overview of government vacation pay regulations in the EU member states France, Luxembourg, Spain and Lithuania.

The individual sections on countries are organized according to the following criteria: government payments, rightful claimants of the payment and whether needs-testing is necessary. The government payments can be subdivided into three different instruments: monetary payments, voucher systems and existing infrastructure. Rightful claimants fall into two target groups, on the one hand, families who are enabled to vacation together with their children and, on the other hand, vacation stays for children only.

## 1 France

Monetary payments: NO
Vouchers: YES
Service / Infrastructure: YES
Vacationing together - Families with their children: YES
Vacation stays for children only: NO (not explicitly)
Needs-testing: YES

### 1.1 Vouchers - "Chèques-vacances"

As early as in 1982 so-called "*Chèques-vacances*" ("vacation checks") were introduced by the government in France in order to enable working people to take a vacation. They serve as a vacation subsidy.<sup>1</sup> The slogan of the governmental agency for the vacation checks "*Agence National pour les Chèques-Vacances*" (abbreviated ANCV) is: "*Because having a vacation is important*".<sup>2</sup>

The vacation vouchers serve in France as an instrument in order to fight against every form of exclusion.

The vacation checks can be employed for travel (among other things, for train journeys or toll charges), hotels and youth hostels, in catering as well as for other cultural and athletic activities (among other things, theater visits).

The vacation checks can be redeemed with approximately 160,000 service providers in the tourism sector and other leisure time providers. The participating providers can be found on the Internet and identified locally by signs (mostly through stickers on the doors).

The checks are valid for two years plus their year of issue. After the validity has expired, the checks can still be transferred within three months following this. This long period of validity enables families to save their vacation checks in order to then enable them, for example, to undertake a larger-scale vacation trip.

### 1.2 Rightful claimants

Person groups who are authorized to apply for vacation checks are divided into three groups:

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1 Model is the (non-governmental) Swiss travel payment office, which introduced a leisure time payment system with so-called "Reka checks" as early as in 1939. Further information at <http://www.reka.ch/de/rekaferien/Seiten/reka-ferien.aspx>.

2 «Parce que les vacances c'est essentiel»

1. **Families** who receive **small earnings**, who have a child entitled to support and social services, for example, from the government family benefit office, the CAF<sup>3</sup> or through communal social welfare centers, referred to as CCAS.<sup>4</sup>
2. **Working people in the private sector** whose working conditions include arrangements for vacation checks or which were arranged collectively via the works council. The amount of the vacation checks and their payments depend on the gross salary.<sup>5</sup>
3. **Government employees** who are employed in public service, in regional authorities or in public hospitals. For public service a deductible of 70-90% or 65% applies for employees under 30 years. The determination of the payments likewise depends on the tax gross. At <https://www.fonctionpublique-chequesvacances.fr/cv/web/chooseSimul> there is available a vacation check computer which calculates whether the person is entitled to payment or not, following entry of personal data and designation of the employment position.

### 1.3 Allocation

Rightful claimants who are listed under 1. are sent, unsolicited via the family benefit office (CAF), an order form which enables them to apply for vacation checks. This procedure is accessible and informs beneficiaries about the existence of vacation checks.

The allocation criteria are dependent on the public agency to which the family refers for assistance. These issuing agencies stipulate criteria and conditions for the amount of the vacation checks to be paid. Criteria for example are the level of earnings and the number of minor children.

There is always a percentage share of vacation checks which must be paid proportionally by the issuing parties. The level of the proportional financing in case of CAF depends for example on the family quotient.<sup>6</sup> The amount of the monetary value of the checks remains identical and it is only the percentage participating that changes.

- Employees from the private sector (see 2.) who fulfill the above-designated criteria are provided with their vacation checks via their employers or via the works council.

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3 The CAF (caisse d'allocations familiales) is a government family benefit office where different subsidies can be applied for. The subsidies fall into the areas: birth, education and accommodation. See also: <https://www.caf.fr/>.

4 CCAS (centre communal d'action sociale) are communal social welfare centers. See also: <http://www.unccas.org/unccas/ccas-cias.asp>.

5 Employees who do not earn more than € 3170 gross on average a month must participate with at least 20%. Employees who earn on average above € 3170 gross a month must participate with at least 50%. The percentage of the deductible decreases by 5% per maintenance entitled child (10% in case of a child with a handicap), however, does not exceed the percentage of 15%.

6 Quotient familial (QF).

- Government employees of public service (see 3.) are provided with vacation checks via the Ministry of Public Service.<sup>7</sup>
- Government employees of the public hospital sector (see 3.) are provided with vacation checks via the CGOS.<sup>8</sup>
- State employees of the regional authorities (see 3.) must refer to their regional authority for receipt of the vacation checks.

The individual vacation checks are allocated in amounts of € 10 and € 20.

As an example, the additional payment relating to the vacation checks is represented in case of the CAF:

The amount of the payments for the vacation checks is dependent on the formation of the family quotient and the number of children. The share of the CAF, as well as the extra-payment amount of the family, are to be taken from Table 1. The financial participation of the family is either deducted monthly from the payments of the corresponding family services or taken directly from the account of the beneficiary in four installments.

**Table 1:** Amounts of the vacation checks and the respective contents of the CAF and the beneficiaries

Family quotient	1 child (€ 150)		2 children (€ 200)		3 children (€ 250)		From 4 children (€ 300)	
	Share CAF	Family content	Share CAF	Family content	Share CAF	Family content	Share CAF	Family content
0 - 350	105	45	140	60	175	75	210	90
351 - 550	75	75	100	100	125	125	150	150
551 - 700	45	105	60	140	75	175	90	210

Source: <http://www.caf.fr/ma-caf/caf-de-l-allier/offre-de-service/enfance-et-jeunesse/les-cheques-vacances-tout-ce-qu-il-faut-savoir> (called up on 23.2.2015).

The values represented in the table are standard values and can vary according to department and regionally available social fund.

<sup>7</sup> Original: Ministère de la fonction publique

<sup>8</sup> CGOS stands for Comité de gestion des oeuvres sociales des établissements hospitaliers - a committee for the management of the social services in hospitals.

## 2 Luxembourg

Monetary payments: NO

Vouchers: YES

Service / Infrastructure: YES

Common vacation - Families with their children: NO

Vacation stays for children only: YES

Needs-testing: YES

### 2.1 Vouchers - "Chèque service Accueil"

In Luxembourg there is available the "*Chèque services Accueil*" (CSA) which can be used for different extracurricular school activities and different types of child care (such as for example crèches, daycare in-loco parentis, vacation times, school of music, sports club). The system functions by means of vouchers with different weighting, which can be applied in time periods when support is provided. It involves a government payment which is financed via the *Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, de l'Enfance et de la Jeunesse* (Ministry of National Education/Training of Children and Youth) and the municipalities.

The objective of the vouchers is to be of assistance to the families in case of an individual and flexible child care and to enable the reconciliation of family and professional life in this case.

Within this voucher system there is a vacation tariff which functions according to the general voucher system which is first of all described.

### 2.2 Rightful claimants

The CSA vouchers are directed to all parents of children living in Luxembourg of age 0-12 and/or children who attend an elementary school.

For families who have low earnings and/or guaranteed minimum income (RMG), there are special tariffs (see Table 2) and reductions available. The financial contribution which is to be paid per hour of support is based on the earnings of the parents and the rank of the child within the sibling age level.

### 2.3 Allocation

For participation in the CSA system, a corresponding application to the municipality of residence is necessary by the parents or legal representative person. The

membership card with the personal data<sup>9</sup> is valid for 12 months and must be renewed every year.

If, due to low household income, parents wish to apply for further reductions, they are obliged to inform the municipality of residence of their taxable earnings.<sup>10</sup> In the case that parents do not indicate their earnings, the highest tariff is applied (cf. last column Table 2).<sup>11</sup>

## 2.4 Value

The value of the CSA vouchers is stipulated according to the social and family relationships of the child. Enclosed is a tabular overview of the beneficiaries and the scope of support which can be claimed in relation to the costs.

The voucher system provides for a grading of the support services according to the earnings of the parents: There is a time-related quota on free support which varies according to earnings. If parents wish to make use of more hours of child support, the voucher tariff has an additional payment. In case of even longer support times, the family social tariff applies. In case of more than 60 hours child support weekly, all parents must pay the full tariff.

**Table 2:** Overview of the CSA voucher services

Beneficiary	Free support	Voucher tariff	Family social tariff	Full tariff
Children from households with earnings of less than 3.5x the social minimum wage	0-3 hr./week	4-24 hr./week (max. 2.50 Euro)*	25-60 hr./week (max. 4.50 Euro)*	> 60 hr./week
Children from households with earnings more than 3.5x the social minimum wage	/	0-24 hr./week (max. 4 Euro)*	25-60 hr./week (max. 7.50 Euro)*	> 60 hr./week
Children from households which receive the guaranteed minimum income (RMG) or children threatened with social exclusion or poverty.	0-25 hr./week	26-60 hr./week (max. 0.50 Euro)*	/	> 60 hr./week

\*The actual tariff in case of every child is set according to the household income and the ranking of the child. Example: In case of siblings, the support of the 4<sup>th</sup> child is free.

Source: <http://www.guichet.public.lu/citoyens/de/famille/parents/garde-enfants/cheque-service-tarification/index.html> (called up on 24.2.2015).

9 Name and address of the child, national ID of the child, name and address of the parent/representative, invoicing address, rank of the child among the siblings for whom child benefit is paid, preferred communication language of the parents/representative. The ranking of the child can be requested from the National Fund for Family Controls (Caisse Nationale des Prestations Familiales - CNPF).

10 Concerning the tax assessment notice or the past three wage or salary billing, along with certificate attesting that no obligation to the charge of a tax return exists or every other record document as proof of present earnings. Married couples and registered life partners are treated with equal weighting.

11 If the monthly earnings to be taxed are above 4.5x the social minimum wage, i.e. € 8,645, or the yearly income to be taxed is above € 103.736, the maximum rates apply and a verification of the income levels is not required.



Example: Recipients of the guaranteed minimum income (*revenu minimum garanti - RMG*) and parents of other children threatened with poverty (marked purple in Table 2) have a weekly **free** claim of up to 25 hours of **support**.

The **voucher tariff** enables an extension of the support hours up to 60 hours with an intrinsic content of maximum € 0.50 per hour and a free meal in the support facility.

The **full tariff** is then computed for all beneficiaries, independently of the household income and the ranking of the child, with an intrinsic content of € 7.50 from the 60<sup>th</sup> hour of support.

## 2.5 Vacation tariff

In addition to the tariffs represented, there exists a **vacation tariff** which is of significant interest to present expert opinion which, however, would be difficult to categorize without the previously described voucher system.

This vacation tariff is now represented here exclusively for the group of recipients of guaranteed minimum income (*revenu minimum garanti - RMG*) and other children threatened by poverty or exclusion.<sup>12</sup>

During the summer vacation (in Luxembourg 8 weeks), the parents have 4 weeks claim to the following payments:

- 25 hours free support weekly and 35 hours support weekly for the "voucher tariff" or
- Free registration for one or more vacation activities for a duration of maximum 4 weeks or
- A combination of these possibilities, where the total time may not be more than 4 weeks.

Furthermore, the CSA takes over, up to an amount of maximum € 60 per day, any costs incurred from providers in case of vacation activities.

## 2.6 Redeeming the vouchers

The providers of the vacation activities (camps, youth leisure time etc.) for which the vouchers can be redeemed must be recognized as CSA providers by the ministry (*Ministère de l'Education nationale, de l'Enfance et de la Jeunesse*). These are for example: *le Service National de la Jeunesse* (governmental youth service) or *le service de vacances de la Croix-Rouge* (vacation service of the Red Cross Luxembourg).

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<sup>12</sup> For the other two groups of the beneficiaries the vacation tariff is limited to the after-school care center and not usable for further vacation activities.

### 3 Spain

Monetary payments: NO
Vouchers: NO
Service / Infrastructure: YES
Common vacation - Families with their children: NO
Vacation stays for children only: YES
Needs-testing: /

With the research, two governmental programs relating to the promotion of children and youth vacation were found:

#### 3.1 Family unburdening - "Respiro Familiar"

The program provides families with members in need of care with the opportunity to unburden themselves from the routine duties of caring for their members, where the latter are supported in vacation centers for certain time periods within vacation facilities. Children with handicaps, as well as older persons with care requirement, are the target group. For this, the vacation offer is adapted according to their corresponding requirements. For children with intellectual handicaps, vacations are offered for example in rural vacation parks, including support and leisure activities. The objective of the program is, on the one hand, to make the possibility of a vacation available to the children as well as older persons in need of care and, on the other hand, to offer a time-related release to the families who are burdened with routine care duties.

This program is basically financed by the Spanish Ministry of Health Services, Social Services and Equality. However, the financing of the program is extended with public funds of the individual autonomous Spanish communities. Furthermore, proportional costs are provided for the families according to autonomous community.

#### 3.2 Vacations with the family - "Vacaciones en Familia"

Children living in public children's homes without parents or relatives have the opportunity to spend the summer vacations together with families participating in the program. Children of age between 6 and 14 years are the target group. The participation of the families who take a child with them on vacation is based on voluntary commitment, i.e. no government funding is made available for this. The promotion of solidarity and social inclusion are the objectives of the program. This program does not occur on a national level, rather it is managed by the government authorities of various autonomous Spanish communities.

## 4 Lithuania

Monetary payments: NO

Vouchers: NO

Service / Infrastructure: YES

Common vacation - Families with their children: NO

Vacation stays for children only: YES

Needs-testing: YES

The law "Social Assistance to Pupils", which came into force in the year 2006, creates social assistance and support for families with low earnings. Families which have children of school-age can access two kinds of support: 1. Free meals (breakfast and lunch) for pupils in the schools and additional free meals in the summer vacations during **summer camps**, which are offered in schools. 2. Provision of school materials for pupils.

### 4.1 Rightful claimants

Pupils have a claim to the designated payments if the family income is lower than 1.5 times of the subsistence level in the amount of € 153 stipulated by the government. For more information on this, see <http://www.socmin.lt/en/family-and-children/social-assistance-to-z2xz/social-support-for-pupils.html>.

## **5 Summary comparison**

With the research, no EU countries were found which make monetary payments directly to families.

In two countries, France and Luxembourg, there exist voucher systems which are allocated earnings-dependent. In France the vacation checks can be used in very diverse ways. In Luxembourg the vouchers can be employed in support hours in order to enable vacation stays, for example for children who come from socially vulnerable households.

With the Spanish program "Respiro Familiar", an infrastructure is available which should enable families to relax, but also assists children with handicaps to have a government financed vacation. The second Spanish program "Vacaciones en Familia" does not include any governmental promotion, nevertheless enables a vacation in an "outside" family to children who are brought up in children's homes.

In Lithuania there is a structural approach with the summer camps in the schools, which is also conceived for children whose families are provided with a low family income.

In total, no common European family-promoting vacation structure can be identified.

## 6 Literature references and web links

### France:

- <http://vosdroits.service-public.fr/particuliers/F2309.xhtml>
- <http://www.ancv.com/>
- <http://www.ancv.com/Le-Cheque-Vacances>
- <http://www.caf.fr/ma-caf/caf-de-l-allier/offre-de-service/enfance-et-jeunesse/les-cheques-vacances-tout-ce-qu-il-faut-savoir>

### Luxembourg:

- <https://www.accueilenfant.lu/accueil>
- <http://www.guichet.public.lu/citoyens/de/famille/parents/garde-enfants/cheque-service-tarification/index.html>
- [http://europa.eu/epic/practices-that-work/practice-user-registry/practices/vouchers-childcare-sports-music\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/epic/practices-that-work/practice-user-registry/practices/vouchers-childcare-sports-music_en.htm)

### Spain:

- FEAPS, Equipo del Programa de Apoyo a las Familias (2008): *Servicios de Respiro Familiar*.
- [http://www.madrid.org/cs/Satellite?c=CM\\_InfPractica\\_FA&cid=1354223013399&idConsejeria=1109266187278&idListConsj=1109265444710&idOrganismo=1109266227723&language=es&pagename=ComunidadMadrid%2FEstructura&sm=1109170600517](http://www.madrid.org/cs/Satellite?c=CM_InfPractica_FA&cid=1354223013399&idConsejeria=1109266187278&idListConsj=1109265444710&idOrganismo=1109266227723&language=es&pagename=ComunidadMadrid%2FEstructura&sm=1109170600517)

### Lithuania:

- <http://www.socmin.lt/en/family-and-children/social-assistance-to-z2xz/social-support-for-pupils.html>
- <http://www.smm.lt/web/en/>

### Referring websites:

- [http://europa.eu/epic/countries/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/epic/countries/index_en.htm) - European Platform for Investing in Children - Auflistung der EU-Länderprofile
- <http://eeagrants.org/What-we-do/Programme-areas/Human-and-social-development/Children-and-youth-at-risk> - Programme „Children and Youth at Risk”

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