freechildcare

SCHEME

jobsplus

A GUIDE TO THE FREE CHILDCARE SCHEME

THE FREE CHILDCARE SCHEME IS AN INITIATIVE WHICH WAS LAUNCHED IN APRIL 2014, WHEREBY GOVERNMENT PROVIDES FREE CHILDCARE SERVICES TO PARENTS/GUARDIANS WHO WORK OR WHO ARE PURSUING THEIR EDUCATION. THE CHILDCARE SERVICE IS OFFERED THROUGH THE REGISTERED CHILDCARE CENTRES LISTED HERE: HTTPS://FREECHILDCARE.GOV.MT

1.

Who is eligible for the Free Childcare Scheme?

Children whose parents are either **both** employed or in education can benefit from the free childcare scheme.

'Parents in work' refers to both parents/guardians who are employed, or a single mother/father/guardian who is employed and paying social security contributions.

'Parents in education' refers to parents/guardians who are pursuing their education, leading to a recognised qualification. In this case, applicants have to provide a *statement of course attendance* from the respective educational institution. In addition to the application, applicants not following a course at the University of Malta, MCAST or ITS are to provide a *statement of course recognition* from the NCFHE (National Commission for Higher Education).

In the case of single parents, applicants should provide evidence of their current status. Documentation submitted should be: either the child's birth certificate or a legal document, such as a Decree/*rikors* from the Maltese Courts, indicating that the single parent has full care and custody of the child.

In the case of fostering parents, applicants are to provide an official document from the Fostering Board and additional supporting documentation.

The scheme may also be extended to parents who are not in employment due to terminal illnesses. In such cases, parents are advised to contact us on 22201137/8 or freechildcare@gov.mt

The age group for this scheme is for **children from three months up to three years of age.** Free Childcare is terminated once the child is eligible to enrol into Kindergarten 1 provided by the state.

State kindergarten has two intakes during each scholastic year: 1st October and 1st February. Children will be admitted to Kindergarten 1 on the 1st October provided that the child would have attained three years of age by the end of December. Children will be admitted to Kindergarten 1 on the 1st February provided that the child would have attained three years of age by the end of April.

Using Scholastic year 2019 / 2020 as an example, a child is eligible for Kindergarten 1 on the 1st of October 2020 once he/she would have attained three (3) years of age by the end of December 2020. A child is eligible for Kindergarten 1 on the 1st of February 2020 once he/she would have attained three years of age by the end of April 2020. Therefore, all children who will be three years of age by the 31 December 2020 will no longer be eligible for free childcare with effect from the 1st of October 2020. After this, all children who will be 3 years of age by the 30th of April 2020 will no longer be eligible for free childcare with effect from the 1st of February 2020.

It is important to note that this applies to all children, even those whose parents/guardians intend on sending their children to a Church or Independent kindergarten. Once a child becomes eligible for kindergarten as indicated above, the Free Childcare Scheme will be terminated.

Parents on parental leave/career break leave are not eligible for the scheme.

2.

Where are the childcare centres eligible for the scheme located?

An updated list of eligible childcare centres can be found on the Free Childcare Scheme website: https://freechildcare.gov.mt For further information, please call 22201137/8 or email us on freechildcare@gov.mt

3.

Are these Childcare Centres licensed?

Yes, all the Centres listed online are licensed and monitored by the Department for Quality Services in Education (DQSE) within the Ministry for Education.

4.

How should I decide which Centre to apply to?

Selecting your preferred Childcare Centre is a matter of personal choice. Once you select your centre, you should contact them directly in order to initiate the application process.

5.

How do Centres decide who gets accepted or not?

It is at the discretion of each Childcare Centre to accept or reject a child. The first step is to approach the Centre of your choice. The Centre will then inform you whether they can enrol your child into the Centre or otherwise. In case of refusal, you will have to opt for an alternative Centre.

6.

If I live in a locality where a Childcare Centre is situated, am I guaranteed a placement in the local Centre?

There is no guarantee of a placement. It is advisable that you book as early as possible, so that the Centre of your choice will be able to provide the best service to accommodate the needs of your family.

7.

How do I apply for the Free Childcare Scheme?

Application forms can be downloaded from the official website: https://freechildcare.gov.mt or collected from your preferred Childcare Centre. Once the application is complete - along with all the requested documentation - you are to present it to your preferred Childcare Centre which will then pass it on to the Free Childcare Scheme Office. **Any missing or incomplete information in the application may result in delays in application processing.**

8.

What documents do I need to apply for the Free Childcare Scheme?

'Parents in work'
Foreigners working in Malta:

- Must be registered with Jobsplus
- Must provide their Jobsplus Employment History.

In case of parent working abroad:

- A recently dated and signed declaration letter from respective employer

Employees:
*Three (3) most recent pay-slip*s of the eligible parent (defined as Parent 1, a mother or single parent (mother or father) who is in employment.

A *recently dated and signed declaration letter from the employer of both the eligible parents* and, where applicable, the second parent (defined as Parent 2 who is already in employment and/or education) stating:

- Fixed schedule: average number of weekly working hours & the number of days of work per week.
- Flexible schedule: average number of monthly working hours & the number of days of work per month.

Self-Employed:
The most recent tax return or acknowledgment from the Inland Revenue Department or the most recent receipt of NI contributions paid. In the event that self-employment has just started, none of the above applies but we require an acknowledgment from Jobsplus confirming the commencement date of the self-employment.

A recently dated and signed declaration letter stating:

- Fixed schedule: average number of weekly working hours & the number of days of work per week.
- Flexible schedule: average number of monthly working hours & the number of days of work per month.

'Parents in education'

- A recently dated statement of course attendance from the educational institution.
- Statement of course recognition from NCFHE.

9.

When should I apply?

The application should be received by the Free Childcare Scheme Office at least one month before the date of commencement of services. Any delays may result in your child being accepted for the Free Childcare Scheme at a later stage.

10.

Are there any waiting lists in the Free Childcare Scheme?

There are no waiting lists for the scheme. The scheme is ongoing and available for all eligible applicants. On the other hand, some Centres may have a waiting list but that is a matter which requires discussion with the Centre of your choice.

11.

Why can't Centres just add another child to a group or create more room?

Childcare Centres are licensed by the Department for Quality Services in Education (DQSE) within the Ministry for Education. Group sizes, adult-to-child ratios, and the space required per child are all regulated by applicable standards (National Standards for Child Day Care Facilities).

12.

What are the hours of operation for the Centres?

Each Centre regulates its own hours of operation.
For further details, you will need to contact the respective centre directly.

13.

Can Centres charge any fees?

No. If you are benefitting from the Free Childcare Scheme, the Centre is not allowed to request any payment and/or deposit over and above what Government pays. Centres are only allowed to charge a 'reasonable', one-off registration fee and for food services.

14.

How do I change the Centre?

If for any reason you need to either change the Centre you may do so provided that you notify the Centre of this change at least one month in advance. The Centre will then notify the Free Childcare Scheme Office.

When changing the centre, please ensure that both centres, i.e. both the 'old' and 'new' centres, inform the Free Childcare Scheme office of the necessary changes. A transfer declaration form should be filled and signed by the applicants and the 'new' Childcare Centre Representative when requesting a transfer. This form shall be collected from and submitted through the 'new' Childcare Centre. A transfer can only come into effect from 1st day of each month depending when the request and form are submitted, and approval of both centres.

It is important to remember that once you have signed a contract with one Childcare Centre, you have made a commitment to that Centre. If you want to withdraw from a Centre, you must follow its procedures, policies, and the terms and conditions of the Free Childcare Scheme which are available at: **https://freechildcare.gov.mt**

15.

How is entitlement calculated?

Entitlement is based on the number of hours worked, i.e. if the parent (only hours of the mother/parent 1 are taken into consideration) or guardian work for 20 hours a week, the entitlement will be worked on 20 hours per week. Computed on a monthly basis the working hours amount to 86.7 hours a month **(20 x 52 weeks/12 months).**

To make up for unforeseen exigencies, the beneficiary is entitled to an additional 10% of the working hours for the month and is also entitled to 20 hours monthly to make up for commuting time. In the case of the above, the entitlement would be calculated as follows: average monthly working hours **(86.7 hrs) + 10% (8.67) + 20 hrs = 115 hours.** The monthly-booked hours may not exceed this figure.

Parents who are studying are eligible for a specified amount of hours. Part-time students are eligible for 20 hours a week, while full-time students are eligible for 40 hours a week.

16.

I work irregular hours. How do I calculate my entitlement?

You are to provide the Centre with the average number of hours you would normally expect to work during the month.

17.

How many hours do I have to book?

You are entitled to book any amount of hours that does not exceed the total amount you are entitled to as explained in point 15. **The scheme does not impose a minimum number of booked hours per month.** However, if you book more hours than you intend to utilise, the overbooked hours will be deducted from your yearly absence entitlement hours.

When booking the childcare hours you should take into account the number of service hours that you are going to make use of. Service hours start at drop-off and end at pick-up. Parents should review the number of hours they require on a monthly basis and inform the centre to submit a ***change request for booked hours,*** as and when required, before the end of the previous month (eg: changes in booked hours for March should be submitted in February at the earliest possible).

18.

Can I change the number of booked hours per month?

Yes, parents are advised to calculate the number of hours they require per month and inform the Centre accordingly, so that they may submit a 'Change Request' for Booked Hours on your behalf. If you book more hours than you require, then you will risk exhausting the 25% absence entitlement prematurely.

19.

If I exceed my booked hours what fees will apply?

Parents can utilise more hours than their entitlement provided that they pay the provider's rate. Parents should ensure that the provider informs them of the chargeable rate prior to registration.

What happens if my child is sick or fails to attend due to unforeseen circumstances?

Each child is entitled to a **25% absence entitlement** which is calculated on the number of booked hours per month. The Government will pay the childcare centres in full for each month if the child attends the full amount of booked hours and up to a maximum of 10% over and above the booked hours per month.

If the child does not attend the full amount of booked hours, whether it is for certified medical absence or any other absence, then the difference between the booked hours and the attended hours is deducted from the 25% absence entitlement. If the 25% absence entitlement hours are exhausted, the parent/s will be notified and the difference between the booked hours and attended hours would need to be paid directly to the Centre by the parent/guardian, should the Centre issue any bill/s.

Example:

- A child is booked for 100 hours per month. This means that the yearly absence entitlement is equivalent to (100 hrs x 25% x 12 months) 300 hours.
- If during month 1 the child attends 80 hours instead of the 100 hours booked, the absence entitlement hours would go down by 20 hours.
- If during month 2 the child attends the full amount of booked hours, the absence balance would remain as per previous month, i.e. 280 hours.
- If the absence entitlement hours are exhausted, the parent/s will be notified and the difference between the booked hours and attended hours would need to be paid directly to the Centre by the parent/guardian, should the Centre issue any bill/s.

Parents should immediately inform the Centre when the child is sick. In cases where the child is sick for more than three days, parents must present a medical certificate to the centre as a confirmation that the child is fit to be re-integrated with other children.

21.

What happens when we go on holiday?

Parents should notify the Centre of any changes they intend to make to the number of booked hours during the previous month. The centre will then deduct the number of booked hours for the following month, and you will ensure that the period in which you will be on holiday will not be deducted from the 25% yearly absence entitlement and no additional fees will have to be paid.

If, for any reason, you are unable to notify the centre before the end of the month, then you can make use of the yearly absence entitlement hours.

Parents should be aware that the yearly absence entitlement is limited, and once these hours are exhausted, you will have to pay the applicable fees directly to the Centre. Please read the terms and conditions on the official website: freechildcare.gov.mt

22.

How is my child's attendance recorded?

Once your application is accepted for the Free Childcare Scheme, your Centre will assign two (2) key fobs to your child's profile. These fobs will be used to record your child's attendance, on drop-off and pick-up times.

Please note that parents are responsible for the sole usage of the fobs, and in no circumstance are the fobs to be retained by the Childcare Centre.

23. How do I monitor my child / children's profile and attendance?

If you are already benefitting from the Free Childcare Scheme, you may keep track of your child's profile and attendance by visiting: **https://freechildcare.gov.mt/applyonline** and logging in using your e-ID credentials (username = your ID card number, password = your e-ID password and click on "Logon using e-ID"). We encourage all parents to monitor their children's profile regularly.

Should you need help or more information, kindly call 22201137 / 22201138 or email freechildcare@gov.mt

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For more information:

22201137 / 22201138

freechildcare@gov.mt

https://freechildcare.gov.mt

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