

# Ireland: More than 27,000 fathers have taken paternity leave so far <sup>[1]</sup>

“We have to take a wider societal view and not think of rearing children as something best done in one’s spare time, preferably by women,” Deirdre Clune said.

**Author:** Ryan, Orla

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## EXCERPTS

OVER 27,000 FATHERS have taken paternity leave since the scheme was introduced in September 2016.

The initiative allows fathers to take two weeks off work within six months of the birth of their child, receiving a payment of €235 per week.

New figures released by the Department of Social Protection (DSP) show that 27,307 fathers have been awarded leave since the scheme began last year. In total, 2,461 self-employed men have been given leave since September 2016.

The benefit is paid to employed and self-employed fathers who satisfy certain PRSI contribution conditions.

In most months in 2017, 2,000 or more fathers were granted paternity leave. For a county breakdown of paternity leave figures, [click here](#) <sup>[3]</sup>.

A spokesperson for the DSP told TheJournal.ie the take-up rate for paternity benefit was always expected to be lower than for maternity benefit.

“This was attributed to a number of factors including parental choice, whether the father or relevant parent has sufficient PRSI contributions and whether or not their employer would top up their wages or, if self-employed, could they afford to take the time away from their business.

“It is important to note that the paternity benefit legislation ensures no statutory obligation on an employer to continue to pay the normal salary during paternity leave. Employers have the option of providing a further top-up to the father’s regular salary if they so choose.”

As the scheme began in September 2016, and due to the fact fathers can take paternity leave at any stage in their child’s first six months, an accurate figure for the take-up of paternity leave in a full calendar year won’t be available for 18 months.

“For comparison, there were 63,897 births in 2016 but only 41,406 claims for maternity benefit – which equates to approximately 65% of births. Maternity benefit is a social insurance scheme with entitlement based on the person satisfying the PRSI conditionality (as is paternity benefit).

“It is expected that there will be approximately 30,000 paternity benefit claims paid in 2017, which would equate to approximately 70% of the number of maternity benefit claims for last year (based on the latest available figures),” the spokesperson added.

‘Use it or lose it’

Fine Gael MEP Deirdre Clune welcomed the figures, saying the current take-up rate is “not a bad start” when compared to other European countries.

“We have to take a wider societal view and not think of rearing children as something best done in one’s spare time, preferably by women,” Clune said.

She added that while she’d be reluctant to make paternity leave mandatory, a “use it or lose it” approach may help increase the number of men who take parental leave.

Clune said she’s conscious that employers, particularly in small businesses, “fear the cost of temporarily losing men as well as women to these family friendly policies, and I urge them to change how they view family time off”.

“Employees absenteeism costs business, particularly small businesses. I believe we’re going to have to accept that [paternity leave] is a cost of doing business just like holiday pay and sickness benefit,” she stated.

-reprinted from The Journal

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