

Cork the Capital of Pappa Lattes? Paternity Benefit Take-up in Ireland

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Key Findings and Policy Recommendations

- Half of fathers take up paternity benefit and county Cork reports the highest take-up.
- Take-up is below EU average due to the low flat-rate benefit.
- The Irish government has to increase generosity and extend leave to give fathers a meaningful role in the early years of parenthood.

To mark Father's Day in Ireland, this article looks at how many fathers are actually taking paternity benefit. Since 2016, Irish fathers had been granted – for the first time – paid statutory leave at the birth of their child. Hence, it is timely to take a closer look at these fathers. Who are they and where do we find them? Are Irish fathers embracing new caring roles and following Swedish dads of more gender equality? There, with tongue-in-cheek, they are called 'Pappa Latte', to describe the phenomenon of coffee-drinking fathers crowding playgrounds, while watching their kids play. Of course, the reality of fathers on leave involves supporting the mother immediately after childbirth, running household errands, bonding with the new child and taking care of any older siblings. This reality of care work has been documented in great detail by [Johan Bävman](#) in his internationally acclaimed photo exhibition *Swedish Dads*. In other words, I investigate if Irish fathers are turning into Daidí Lattes? In the following, I will summarise my academic research (Köppe, 2023, Köppe and Szelewa, 2023), which studies the paternity benefit take-up over time. In addition, I will also present some new analysis of county differences.

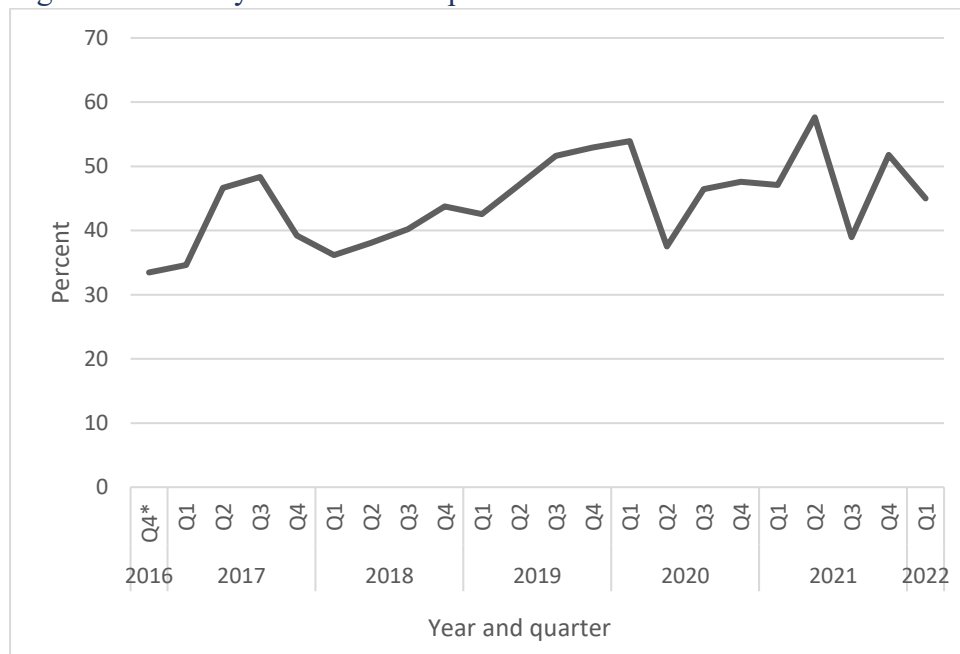
Take-up is low

Back in 2016, Ireland was one of the last countries within the European Union to introduce paid paternity leave, and Irish fathers still had to wait another three years for paid parental leave. In effect, the government introduced two weeks paid leave at the rate of maternity benefit. In general, the statutory flat rate benefit means that it is less attractive for higher

income earners to take leave. Yet, public sector employees and about 40% of private sector workers have access to a full salary top-up during this time.

While the initial take-up had been praised in Irish media, the actual take-up remained below the government target of 46-61% (Figure 1). Only shortly before the pandemic hit, take-up reached the peak of 54%. During the pandemic the rate dropped again and remains below the minimum government target at 45% in the first quarter of 2022. In contrast, our European neighbours’ paternity leave is mostly paid at more generous wage replacement rates and about 68% of fathers take leave. In sum, only about half of Irish dads embrace the new caring roles fully, at least for the relatively short teaser of two weeks. Since 2019, the take-up rate has largely plateaued and without policy or cultural change, there is no indication that take-up will increase further.

Figure 1: Paternity Benefit Take-up in Percent



Source: updated crude rate based on Köppe (2023).

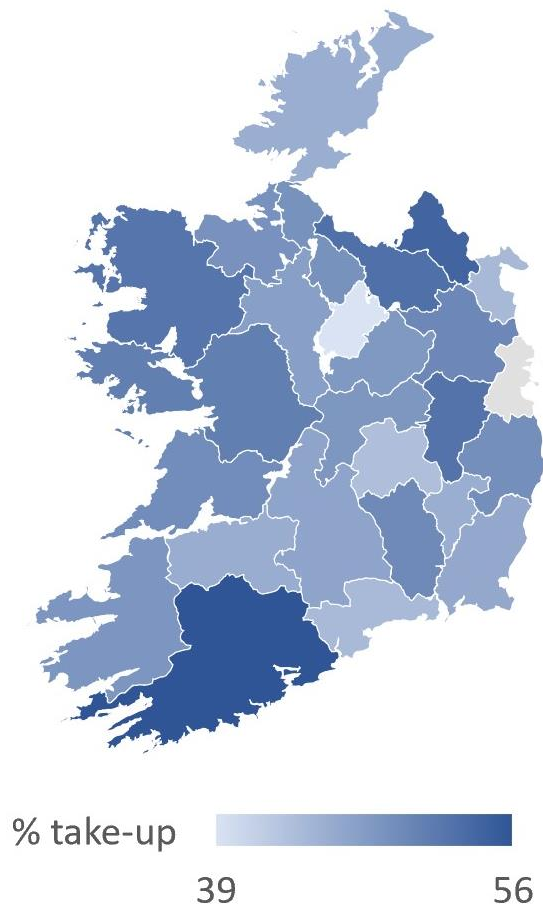
Occupational Inequalities

The relatively low take-up can be explained largely by occupational inequalities in fringe benefits. Large and international companies are more likely to offer salary top-ups (see table 2, Köppe, 2023). Moreover, these inequalities have increased between 2017 and 2018 (see figure 2, Köppe, 2023). This shows that mostly fathers that have access to more generous occupational benefits take leave. Ireland’s net replacement rate is one of the lowest within the EU (Köppe and Szelewa, 2023). Without access to some earnings-related benefits, these families cannot afford another reduction in their household income. Hence, statutory generosity would have to increase to reduce occupational inequalities and increase take-up.

Highest Take-up in Cork

Finally, figure 2 shows some additional and new county level analysis before the Covid-19 pandemic. Interestingly, Cork tops the list between 2017 and 2019. The overall variation between counties is between 12 and 16 percentage points. This means out of 10 men, there is an additional Cork man taking leave compared to men in Laois, who are at the bottom of the list in 2017/18. In the absence of more contextual data we can only speculate about some of the observed county differences. Moreover, counties are an inadequate measure of social characteristics. For instance, a father working for a tech company in Cork City is probably socially, culturally and economically in a different position to a farmer at the tip of Mizen Head. Yet, counties like Cork and Galway have thriving urban centres, host multinational companies with better occupational benefits and their significant student population potentially attracts more culturally modern men, which is reflected in above average take-up in these counties. Interestingly, border counties like Monaghan and Cavan also score high in 2019.

Figure 2: Paternity Benefit Take-up by county (2019)



Source: analysis based on crude rate (Köppe, 2023, DEASP, 2018, CSO, 2019).

Unexpectedly, the capital does not seem to be the beacon of modern masculinities in Ireland, as paternity benefit take-up of all Dublin counties dropped in the rankings from the 14th to the 18th position in the analysed three years. Nevertheless, within the Dublin commuter belt (Meath, Kildare, Wicklow) we can see above average take-up. Despite these interesting patterns, further statistical analysis is required to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how stable these county differences are and which socio-economic characteristics are driving these patterns.

Unfinished revolution

In sum, the introduction of paternity benefit and later on the expansion of parental leave triggered a gender revolution for Ireland. About half of fathers take leave and embrace being a Daidí Latte. Yet, the latte remains skinny as the insufficient flat rate benefit and occupational inequalities are not attractive for the other half of recent fathers. Nor are two weeks plus nine weeks parental leave sufficient to build a child-parent relationship. Hence, the gender revolution remains uneven and unfinished (England, 2010, Esping-Andersen, 2009). Irish policy-makers have to increase generosity and extend leave to give fathers a meaningful role in the early years of parenthood.

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