



‘Extra Time’ With Dad

IMPROVING MEN’S HEALTH THROUGH
PATERNITY LEAVE IN IRELAND



MOVEMBER® INSTITUTE
OF MEN’S HEALTH
MOUSTACHES LOVE RESEARCH

“Mental health is a family matter, and ... even though mum is absolutely, necessarily the most important person when a baby is born, we should be looking out for the dads too. We also know that if you’ve got a supportive and involved partner, that can be very psychologically beneficial for both the mother and the child during the perinatal period.”

– Professor Sinéad McGilloway, founder director of Maynooth University’s Centre for Mental Health and Community Research.

“Before having children, most decisions I made mainly affected me. Now, every decision financially, emotionally, professionally, and personally, is connected to my family and my children’s wellbeing. Becoming a father also changed my understanding of love and patience. I developed a much deeper sense of purpose and emotional connection than I had before.”

– A Dad speaking to Movember’s ‘Fathers in Ireland’ Survey in May 2026, reflecting on what has changed since he became a father.

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ABOUT MOVEMBER

Since 2003, Movember has challenged the status quo, shaken up men’s health research, and transformed the way health services reach and support men – taking on prostate cancer, testicular cancer, mental health, and suicide prevention. Movember has raised well over €29.7m for men’s health in Ireland, thanks to a passionate community of over 12,000 Mos. These funds have delivered more than 1,300 men’s health projects around the world.

The Movember Institute of Men’s Health launched in 2023, building on a 20-year legacy of investment in men’s physical and mental health. The Institute accelerates research and translates it into tangible, real-world outcomes.

To learn more, please visit Movember.com or contact advocacy@movember.com.

ABOUT THE MOVEMBER INSTITUTE OF MEN’S HEALTH

Building on a 20-year legacy of investment in men’s physical and mental health, The Movember Institute of Men’s Health launched in 2023 and has ambitious goals to enhance quality of life for millions of men worldwide. Uniting global experts in the field of men’s health, the Institute will accelerate research and translate it into tangible, real-world outcomes.



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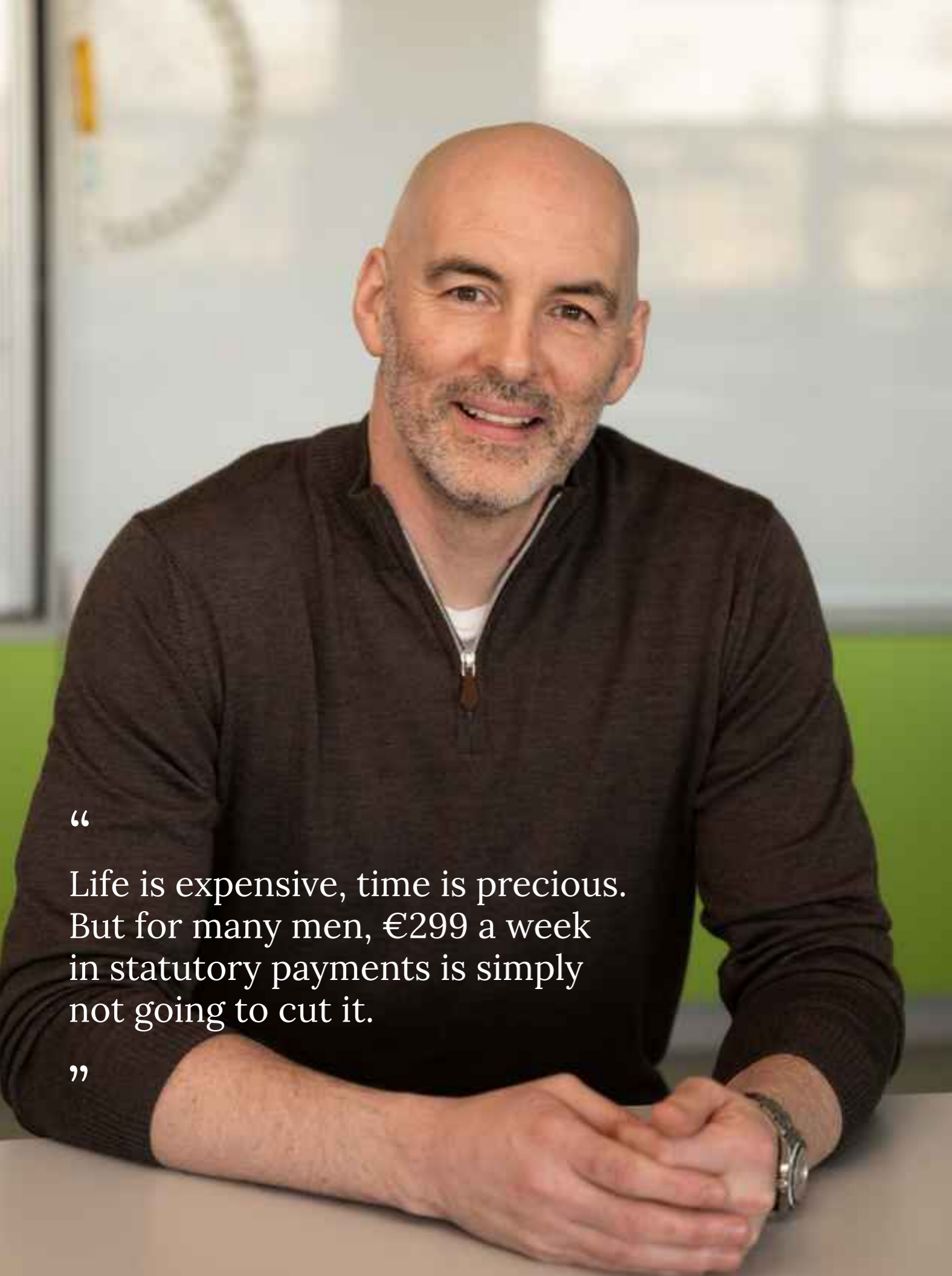
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“

Life is expensive, time is precious.
But for many men, €299 a week
in statutory payments is simply
not going to cut it.

”

Introduction From Richie Sadlier

Richie Sadlier is a former professional footballer and author who works as a psychotherapist and is a sports pundit on national television. He has a special interest in youth wellbeing and education.

You can read the books and listen to the podcasts if you like. Or just as I did, you can grill your friends for advice, mining for the parenthood hacks that you think every parent knows. You can comb the internet endlessly for the information you think you'll need, but it's only when you carry your firstborn through your front door for the first time do you realise just how much your life has changed forever.

I became a father for the first time three years ago. I felt more important and less significant than ever before, somehow experiencing both at the same time. Our focus was on Sam, our newborn son; my focus was on him and my wife, Fiona. I'm self-employed so I didn't need anyone's permission to stay at home with them. However, what I was able to do isn't an option for many new fathers. Due to the current levels of paternity supports on offer in this country, prioritising fatherhood in those first few weeks is clearly unaffordable, unless you're lucky enough to have an employer who will supplement the State-provided payment.

No-one living in Ireland needs to be told about cost-of-living pressures. Paternity leave participation rates are influenced heavily by the costs involved. For fathers in Ireland, opting to be present to support the needs of your family, to experience those impossible-to-put-into-words first few weeks together is a financial calculation. Life is expensive, time is precious. But for many men, €299 a week in statutory payments is simply not going to cut it.

For many friends of ours, taking paternity leave on €299 a week in State support was a non-starter. For many of my therapy clients, this was not only not an option, but a perceived slight on their value as fathers, on them as men. You hear the unvarnished truth in therapy rooms. The yearning for connection and attachment. The quest for meaning. The need to be useful. The vulnerability of not being enough, not knowing the right things, not being able to do it. The dread of thinking 'what if things don't work out?'. New fathers aren't short of things that keep them awake at night - no legislative change anywhere can remedy that - but where possible, surely, we should be supported rather than obstructed from playing our part.

Adapting to Sam and Fiona's needs was a day-to-day endeavour. I wasn't sure what I was doing but I knew my place. There was no confusion or conflict. I had previously heard this from other fathers and it never quite landed. They spoke of a certainty of purpose, a clarity, a meaning previously absent from their lives. I'll be honest, I wasn't convinced when I first heard men speaking like that. But when Sam arrived, I understood exactly what they were talking about.

Under EU Law, new fathers are entitled to two weeks statutory paternity leave. That's the legal minimum. It's not capped at that; countries are free to place their own value on its importance and do things as they see fit. But two weeks is where the bidding begins. In Ireland, regrettably, we've settled for that legal minimum.

Fathers living in Ireland lose three quarters of their income if they take their two weeks of Paternity Leave. And Ireland is fifth-from-bottom of the EU table when it comes to support for new fathers. When we combine their entitlement of 2 weeks of paternity leave and 9 weeks parent's leave, fathers in Ireland receive the equivalent on average of only 2.8 weeks of full-time pay. This is less than a third of the EU average and only 15% of the level of support provided by leading countries like Slovakia, Luxembourg and Spain.

That Dads in Ireland must suffer significant financial loss to experience what I did is not right. As a self-employed person with savings to fall back on, I didn't have a boss to approach, the judgement of colleagues or reputational damage to fear, or the threat of not making rent by staying at home, all factors revealed in the research that play a big part. Some of these barriers are complicated and require societal shifts to remove, but the financial obstacles should be replaced by financial support.

Sam was 50 hours old when we brought him home in January 2023. We had no idea at the time how things would turn out - who does? But I knew I didn't want to leave. I wanted to be there for it all. There were things Fiona needed from me; there were things I could do for Sam, but above all were the benefits I was getting from just being in that house. I had never known anything like it, but I had to experience it for myself to fully appreciate it. I guess that's the clarity many of those new fathers were trying to convey.

As many fathers in Ireland as possible should get the option to feel what I felt, to do what I did, to know what I mean when I try (and fail) to describe what it's like. We had a daughter a year ago. Knowing what I knew from having already been through it I was even more determined to take as much leave as I could possibly afford. Undistracted focus on this newborn baby is one of the greatest feelings and most basic entitlements any father can have. Pricing fathers out of fully experiencing fatherhood just doesn't make sense for men, families, communities or workplaces.

Executive Summary

Fatherhood is a critical window for men's health. Fathers who take leave bond more deeply with their children, report better mental health, and remain more involved in caregiving long-term.

Where structural barriers prevent fathers from taking leave, research consistently links poor uptake with elevated risk of paternal mental health difficulties and reduced bonding in the critical early months.⁶⁻¹¹

Ireland ranks among the worst in the EU for support to new fathers. The two weeks of statutory paternity leave is the minimum permitted under EU law, and the total leave support available to a father in Ireland is just 2.8 weeks of equivalent full-time income, against an EU average of 8.5 weeks and Slovakia's 21 weeks. That represents a 74.5% reduction in earnings for fathers in Ireland who avail of statutory paternity or parent's leave.

In September 2025, Movember launched The Real Face of Men's Health report,³ calling for urgent action on paternity leave uptake in Ireland. This report sets out the evidence base for that call – examining Ireland's international standing, the barriers fathers face, and the significant health improvement opportunity that meaningful reform represents.

The report also draws on the findings of a survey of dads in Ireland commissioned by Movember and conducted in May 2026. This was a national survey of 403 fathers in the Republic of Ireland with children aged ten or under. The survey consisted of a mix of closed- and open- text questions on the experience of parenthood, fathers' take-up of paternity leave, the barriers that exist to taking leave, and mental and physical health during fatherhood. Insights from this 'Fathers in Ireland' survey are included throughout this report.

2.8 weeks

The equivalent number full time weeks of salary support offered to men when paternity and parent's leave are combined.⁴

8.5 weeks

The EU average number of full time weeks of salary support offered to men, three times that of Ireland.⁴

~60%

Of Irish fathers believe two weeks' statutory paternity leave is not enough time. A similar proportion say that €299 per week is not enough money to enable them to take it.³²

1 in 5

Irish fathers responding to Movember's 2026 'Fathers in Ireland' survey said they took no paternity leave whatsoever, whether statutory or from their employer.³²

68%

Of those surveyed who took paternity leave relied either in part or in full on employer supports or top-ups.³²

~50%

Of eligible fathers did not claim statutory Paternity Benefit between 2019 and 2022.⁵

OUR CALL TO ACTION

Establish a Government-Led Paternity Leave Working Group

Movember calls on the Government to convene a dedicated multi-stakeholder Paternity Leave Working Group with a mandate to:

- Review the duration of statutory paternity leave and develop a phased pathway beyond the EU minimum of 10 working days
- Develop a roadmap to replace the flat-rate €299/week Paternity Benefit with an earnings-related model that reduces income loss, particularly for middle- and lower-income fathers
- Examine workplace culture barriers – including employer practices, awareness, and the career risk perceptions that prevent fathers from availing of their entitlements
- Align Ireland's Paternity Leave provision with the Men's Health Action Plan 2024-2028¹ and the Programme for Government² commitment to advancing men's health
- Report with clear recommendations within a defined timeframe, with representation from fatherhood experts, employer groups, trade unions, public health, and family policy specialists
- Develop mandatory monitoring and reporting requirements for employers and industry bodies, to track uptake of paternity and parent's leave by sector and firm size

Ireland's Position: A European Outlier

SUPPORT FOR NEW FATHERS

When a child is born in Ireland, fathers (or partners) have two paid leave entitlements. **Paternity Benefit** covers two weeks, taken in the first six months after the birth, paid by the State at a flat rate of €299 a week. **Parent's Benefit** covers a further nine weeks per parent, available at any point before the child turns two, also paid at €299.¹² That is a maximum of 11 weeks in total at €299 per week.

Compared with the rest of the EU, Ireland's offer to fathers is well below average. The OECD's 'full-rate equivalent' measure adjusts for partial pay, expressing each country's entitlement as the number of weeks a father would receive at full salary.

On that measure, Ireland's eleven weeks at €299 work out to 2.8 weeks of fully paid leave, against an EU average of 8.5 weeks.⁴

At the top of the table, Slovakia, Luxembourg, and Spain offer the equivalent of 19 to 21 weeks of fully paid leave for fathers; around seven times what Ireland provides. Only Czechia, Cyprus, Bulgaria and Hungary sit below Ireland on this measure.

Key finding

Ireland has the 5th lowest level of support for new fathers. Ireland offers about a third (32.9%) of the EU average and around 15% of leading countries like Slovakia, Luxembourg and Spain.⁴



European Union Member State	Full-Rate Equivalent (weeks)
Slovakia	21.0
Luxembourg	20.5
Spain [^]	19.0
Portugal	14.5
Croatia	12.7
Netherlands	11.3
Sweden	10.9
Finland	10.8
Slovenia	10.7
Lithuania	9.9
Romania	9.4
EU-27 mean	8.5
Poland	8.3
Austria [*]	8.1
France [*]	7.8
Belgium	6.8
Latvia	6.8
Greece	6.4
Malta	6.4
Italy	5.9
Denmark	5.5
Germany [*]	4.8
Estonia	4.3
Ireland[#]	2.8
Hungary	2.3
Bulgaria	1.9
Cyprus	1.4
Czechia	1.2

Table 1: Total supported leave for fathers in the EU-27

Source: OECD Family Database, indicator PF2.1, Table PF2.1.B (updated April 2026; entitlements as of April 2025).

Full-Rate Equivalent = duration × payment rate; sums paid paternity leave and father-specific parental leave.

Notes: [^] Spain's figure reflects the 16→19 week extension under Royal Decree-Law 9/2025 (in force 31 July 2025).

[#] Ireland's figure is updated from the 2.1 weeks shown in PF2.1.B to 2.8 weeks based on increase to €299 weekly support and the most recent (2024) average full time salary (Eurostat nama_10_fte table). An error in the OECD table listing up to 7 weeks of parent's leave has also been corrected to 9 weeks as per current Irish regulations.

^{*} Austria, France, and Germany apply payment rates against net (rather than gross) earnings and are not strictly comparable to the other countries;

“Babies are expensive. Most young families cannot afford to lose two-thirds of the father's wage while the other parent is also having the same drop in income while on Maternity Leave.”

– Laura Bambrick, Irish Congress of Trade Unions

“Regrettably ... in 2020, just over 50% of fathers in employment did not claim paternity benefit, up from 48.2% in 2019 – with significant variations across different industries, occupations and socioeconomic backgrounds. This highlights how deep-rooted societal and cultural norms and workplace expectations might have discouraged some men from talking extended time off for childcare responsibilities and underlines the importance of maintaining a gender spotlight on men (and men's health).”

– HSE and Department of Health, Men's Health Action Plan 2024–2028¹

THE EARNINGS REPLACEMENT CRISIS

Most EU countries pay paternity leave at or close to full salary: seventeen member states cover 80% or more of weekly earnings during paternity leave, and twelve cover 100%.⁴ Ireland does not.

On the flat €299 rate, a father in Ireland loses around three-quarters of his average weekly income while on paternity leave, and the same flat rate applies to parent's leave. This loss falls hardest on low - and middle-income fathers, who have the least slack in their household budgets to absorb it.¹³ Some employers top up the state payment, but they are under no obligation to do so.

“[Reforming paternity and maternity supports] ...would constitute a transformation in family support and work/life balance, ensure that all employees enjoy similar supports and put us on a par with best practice in Europe.”

– SIPTU Submission to Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality, 2020

In Ireland, we don't do enough to support parents. Despite improvements in recent years, we continue to lag behind other countries in terms of paid leave for parents and flexible work arrangements.

– Aidan Farrelly, T.D.

74.5%

Ireland – reduction compared to average weekly income while on Paternity and Parent's Leave.⁴

20%

17 EU countries ensure that men lose 20% or less of their weekly income during paternity leave.⁴

0%

12 EU countries ensure that men do not lose any of their weekly income during paternity leave.⁴

UPTAKE: THE STORY BEHIND THE STATISTICS

Research by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission and the Economic and Social Research Institute⁵ in 2025, using administrative data from a 10% random sample of births between 2019 and 2022, found that just over half of eligible fathers took statutory paternity leave, meaning roughly half did not take the leave they were entitled to. The Programme for Government 2025² and the Men's Health Action Plan 2024–2028¹ both acknowledge this shortfall.

Uptake is not evenly distributed. Higher-paid fathers, and those working in larger companies with stronger HR policies, are more likely to make use of paternity leave. Only around 55% of fathers have access to employer top-ups.¹³ The flat-rate nature of Paternity Benefit suppresses uptake particularly among middle- and lower-income fathers.

November's 'Fathers in Ireland' survey, carried out in May 2026,³² provides more recent insight into paternity leave uptake in Ireland, and suggests that it remains relatively low, and heavily dependent on the availability of employer supports. The survey, conducted with 403 fathers in the Republic of Ireland with children aged ten or under, found that 1 in 5 Irish fathers reported taking no paternity leave at all after the birth of their child. Of the 4 in 5 who did, the vast majority (68%) relied either entirely on employer-provided paid leave or on statutory leave topped up by employer contributions.

Only 16% said they took the statutory paternity leave entitlement of two weeks without additional supports. This represents only just over 12% of the entire sample of survey respondents, and suggests that taken on its own, the entitlement was of limited appeal or use.



Insight from November's 'Fathers In Ireland Survey'

One in five dads surveyed took no paternity leave of any kind.

Those who did take paternity leave relied heavily on their employers for support:

- 68% surveyed relied either in part or in full on employer supports or top-ups
- only 16% took their two week's statutory leave and nothing more.⁴

Barriers to Paternity Leave in Ireland

Barriers to paternity leave uptake in Ireland fall into three overlapping categories: financial, social norms and duration.

The first two are primarily barriers to uptake and the third, duration, is a barrier to families getting the maximum benefits from paternity leave. However, addressing any one in isolation will produce limited results and they must be addressed together.

1. FINANCIAL BARRIERS

The €299 weekly flat rate represents a significant income loss for most fathers in Ireland. OECD and EU research consistently finds that earnings-related pay drives uptake, while flat-rate systems suppress participation, particularly among middle-income fathers.^{4,14-16} The IHREC/ESRI report found that take-up increases with male earnings, “likely driven by the fact that top-ups tend to be more prevalent in higher earning sectors.”⁵

The barrier is sharper still for self-employed fathers. They sit outside the employer top-up system entirely and rely solely on the flat-rate paternity benefit, and for sole traders in particular, stopping work can mean losing clients or contracts – with effects that extend well past the leave period itself. The CSO Labour Force Survey recorded over 350,000 self-employed workers in Ireland in Q4 2024¹⁷, a sizeable cohort for whom the financial calculation is harder still.

Movember’s 2026 ‘Fathers in Ireland’ survey³² also indicates that those who do choose to take paternity leave do so at a financial cost: of those surveyed, two thirds of fathers who took paternity leave said they experienced financial strain.

Insight from Fathers In Ireland Survey

Taking paternity leave comes at a financial cost for many families:

- Two thirds of Irish fathers surveyed who took paternity leave said they experienced some (42%) or significant (25%) financial strain as a result
- Too many relied on savings, reduced spending or employer support to get through the period.

67%

Of dads who took paternity leave said they experienced financial strain as a result.³²

2. SOCIAL NORMS AND WORKPLACE CULTURE

Even where leave is available, many fathers do not feel they can take it. Fear of career repercussions, cultural expectations about the male provider role, and the perception that paternity leave is not “normal” for men all suppress uptake. A survey of Irish adults found strong public support both for full earnings cover during leave and for ring-fencing part of child-related leave for fathers only.⁵

The problem is structural, not just attitudinal. Business representative group Ibec has highlighted that taking parental or family leave is still regarded as detrimental to men’s careers in some companies.¹⁸ International research finds the same bias: male workers who request family leave are perceived as higher on “weak, feminine” traits, with measurable effects on promotion and pay.¹⁹ Take-up is higher in larger companies with stronger HR policies and the capacity to cover absences;¹³ meaning the fathers least supported by workplace culture are also the ones with the least cushioning.

In Ireland, taking paternity leave is voluntary, as it is in most EU countries. A small group of Member States have gone further: Italy and Spain require fathers to take all of their paternity leave, and France and Portugal mandate a portion.²⁰ The evidence is consistent; mandatory elements drive the largest single increases in uptake. Spain’s biggest single jump, around 20 percentage points, came when part of the leave became compulsory in 2019.¹⁴

For mandatory leave to be feasible, appropriate support levels are also necessary to prevent the imposition of income loss on new fathers – something that would have the potential to particularly impact low- and middle-income fathers. Spain, for example, pays 100% of earnings throughout the period of mandatory paternity leave.¹⁴

In Movember’s 2026 ‘Fathers in Ireland’ survey³² half of Irish fathers surveyed who took paternity leave felt that taking more leave would have put their career progression at risk, even where they were entitled to such leave.

Insight from Movember’s ‘Fathers In Ireland Survey’

Even among men who are entitled to leave and choose to take it, workplace culture remains a significant brake on full uptake:

- Half of Irish fathers who took paternity leave believed that taking more would have put their career progression at risk.



50%

Of dads who took paternity leave said they felt taking more would put their career progression at risk.³²

3. DURATION OF LEAVE

Two weeks is not enough time for fathers to fully bond with their newborn, support their partner's recovery, or develop confidence and competence in caregiving. Studies from the UK,¹¹ Iceland,⁸ and Sweden⁹ show that fathers who are more involved in childcare in the first year – including through paternity leave – remain more involved long-term.

Spain offers an instructive comparison. Between 2017 and 2021, paternity leave was progressively extended from 2 to 16 weeks, with uptake rising from 46% to over 75% across the same period.¹⁴⁻¹⁶ The largest single jump, around 20 percentage points, came when part of the leave became compulsory in 2019.¹⁴ Spain extended its entitlement to 19 weeks at full pay on 31 July 2025.

Finland offers a further illustration. Before its August 2022 reform, Finnish fathers were entitled to a paternal allowance of around 9 weeks. The reform replaced this with a per-parent quota of 160 working days, 97 of them non-transferable.²¹⁻²² Fathers' share of parental allowance days rose from 12.5% in 2021 to 20.9% in 2024,²² and the average number of days used by fathers nearly doubled, from 44 days for children born in 2021 to 78 days for those born after 4 September 2022.²¹ This supports the idea that dedicated support provided to fathers drives real change in time spent with family.

In Movember's 2026 'Fathers in Ireland' survey,³² the fathers surveyed overwhelmingly reported that taking paternity leave was beneficial to them, including for father-child bonding, reduction of family stress, and for parental health (see detailed results below in the section 'The Father-Child Bond: A Long-Term Investment'). However, over half of fathers (52%) said that the leave they took did not feel like enough time.

“Ireland’s current policy on paternity leave does not reflect what modern family life is like. The beginning of any child’s life is not just the most important developmentally, but also the most expensive time for parents. Caregivers, mostly fathers, lose out on precious time with their newborns because they simply can’t afford to take leave. I support Movember’s call for increased funding for paternity leave and an increased period of leave to be granted so that families can focus on what matters most when a child is born, spending time together as a family.”

– Roderic O’Gorman, T.D.

Duration of Paternity Leave in Spain, at a glance:

2017: 2 weeks → 2021: 16 weeks → 2025: 19 weeks;
uptake rose from 46% to over 75%

52%

Of dads did not feel like the paternity leave they took was enough time.³²

SUMMARY OF BARRIERS

The barriers above do not act independently – they compound, and they compound along the same axis of sectoral disadvantage.

CSO administrative data show that non-take-up of Paternity Benefit in 2020 ranged from 38.6% in Industry to 73.1% in Accommodation & Food Service Activities, a 34.5-percentage-point gap for a legal entitlement.²³ The financial cost of taking leave is also distributed unevenly, but in the opposite direction. Median weekly earnings in 2024 were €871.87 in Industry and €391.62 in Accommodation & Food Services²⁴, so fathers in the higher-paying sector face an income drop of about €573 per week on the flat €299 benefit, while fathers in the lower-paying sector face a drop of about €93. The smaller absolute drop, however, lands on workers with the least slack in their household budgets to absorb it.

Employer top-ups, which would otherwise close the gap, are not distributed evenly and are clustered in sectors with lower requirements for them. The CSO's 2021 cohort data show that only 3.1% of fathers and mothers in Public Administration & Defence received no employer top-up during family leave, against 80.9% in Accommodation & Food Service Activities.²³ An Ibec survey similarly found that only 24% of companies with fewer than 50 employees provide a top-up to Paternity Benefit, despite roughly half of Irish employees working in such firms.¹³ The same sectors in which the income drop is hardest to absorb – hospitality, agriculture, construction – are also the sectors in which top-ups are rarest and statutory take-up is lowest.

The result is a system in which the financial, employer-coverage, and sectoral barriers reinforce each other rather than offset, concentrating non-take-up among the fathers least able to forgo income.

Movember's 2026 'Father's in Ireland' survey³² echoes this: of those respondents who reported having taken paternity leave, the vast majority did so in whole or in part on the basis of employer supports or top-ups, whereas take-up for statutory paternity leave in the absence of these employer benefits was very low (see above).

The IHREC/ESRI survey experiment found public attitudes strongly supportive of full earnings coverage and ring-fenced leave for fathers,⁵ suggesting this distribution does not reflect what fathers, mothers, or the wider public would choose.

The flat-rate benefit, set well below average earnings, to a large degree outsources the question of who can afford to take paternity leave to individual employers – and it is low- and middle-income fathers who face the negative consequences.

Where fathers are not supported to take their entitlement, the burden of early childcare falls disproportionately onto mothers, reinforcing the assumption that caring is women's work – with consequences that are unfair to both parents.

When fathers are absent in those early weeks, the division of caring labour is set: mothers take on the primary parenting role and fathers are locked into the provider role. Research shows that patterns established in the first months of a child's life tend to persist. The consequence is what economists call the 'motherhood penalty': the reduction in women's earnings, career progression, and workplace equality that follows childbirth, and which is closely linked to the unequal distribution of childcare.³¹



Paternity Leave and Men's Health

The evidence on paternity leave and men's health is unambiguous. Fathers who take leave are healthier; what is needed now is the resolve to act.

THE MENTAL HEALTH CASE

International studies consistently demonstrate that fathers who take paternity leave report significant mental health benefits.²⁵ Fathers with close connections to their children have fewer mental and physical health problems, are more productive at work, and report greater happiness.⁷ Longer durations of paternity leave are associated with higher mental wellbeing.²⁵

Research in the United Kingdom in 2025 from The Dad Shift (UK) and Movember found that 45% of fathers experience multiple symptoms of depression or anxiety in their baby's first year.⁶ The same research found that improving paternity leave was the single biggest action a government could take to support new dads' mental health.

Movember's 2026 'Fathers in Ireland' Survey³² found that three in five (60%) of dads surveyed feel that society does not take fathers' mental health seriously. Close to three in five (57%) feel the Irish Government does not take fathers' mental health seriously. More

than three in five (62%) were not asked about their mental health during their partner's pregnancy or after the birth of their child. The survey also found that one in four dads reported their mental health as fair or poor, citing pressure, overwhelm and sleep deprivation as factors.

The same survey found that almost two in five (37%) fathers do not prioritise their own health. The primary reasons cited for this were cost (40%); being too busy with work (36%) and the feeling they should put family ahead of themselves (31%). One in three dads in Ireland surveyed also reported feeling more isolated or lonely since becoming a father owing to reductions in social life and adult connection, caring demands, and loss of personal freedom and hobbies.

Ireland's flat €299 weekly rate, replacing only around a quarter of average earnings, prevents many fathers from taking the leave the international evidence shows would benefit them, their mental health, and their families' wellbeing.

~60%

Of dads feel that neither society nor Government takes fathers' mental health seriously.³²

62%

Of dads were not asked about their mental health during their partner's pregnancy or after the birth of their child.³²

1 in 4

Dads rate their mental health as fair or poor.³²

37%

Of dads do not prioritise their own health, largely owing to cost, work and family pressures.³²

33%

Of dads say they feel more isolated and lonely since becoming a father.³²

Insights from Movember's 'Fathers In Ireland Survey'

Fathers' mental health is being overlooked

- Three in five (60%) of dads believe that society does not take fathers' mental health seriously.
- Close to three in five (57%) believe the Irish Government does not take fathers' mental health seriously.

The system is missing them when it matters most

- More than three in five (62%) were not asked about their mental health during their partner's pregnancy or after the birth of their child.

One in four dads rate their mental health as fair or poor.

- More than four in ten (41%) cite pressure and overwhelm as affecting their mental health, with sleep deprivation (30%) and new responsibilities (21%) close behind.
- Dads who recognise the problem are not always getting the support they need to act on it.

Not enough dads in Ireland are prioritising their own health:

- Almost two in five (37%) Dads do not prioritise their own health.
- The main reasons are cost (40%); too busy with work (36%) and the feeling they should put family ahead of themselves (31%).

One in three dads are feeling more isolated and lonely, including due to:

- reduced social life and adult connection (41%)
- demands of time, routine and caregiving (35%)
- loss of personal freedom and hobbies (20%).

THE FATHER-CHILD BOND: A LONG-TERM INVESTMENT

The early weeks are critical for establishing strong father-child relationships. Studies from the UK,¹¹ Iceland,⁸ and Sweden⁹ show that fathers who are more involved in childcare in the first year remain more involved long-term, with associated benefits for children's development and mothers' mental health. Fathers who take two or more weeks of leave around the birth are significantly more likely to be actively involved in their children's care later, with associated benefits for children's cognitive development.²⁶

Allowing a system to persist that discourages these bonds is a missed opportunity, with consequences that follow men, their partners, and their children through life.

Movember's 2026 'Father's in Ireland' survey also points to the contribution paternity leave can make to parent-child bonding, alongside a range of other positives for better health and family. Respondents who took paternity leave overwhelmingly agreed that it helped support their partner's recovery (85%), was beneficial for their confidence as a parent (82%), reduced family stress (80%), allowed time for bonding (80%), and was beneficial for their relationship (80%) and mental health (79%).

"If we in Ireland are serious about addressing gender equity, we must rethink outdated attitudes that allow an unequal care burden to fall on women. I believe paternity leave is a cornerstone of gender equity and supporting fathers to take leave can only benefit our society as a whole."

– Sorca Clarke, T.D.



Insight from Movember's 'Fathers In Ireland Survey'

The evidence is clear: for those who take paternity leave, the benefit is overwhelmingly positive. Not just for dads, but for their children, their partners, their health and their families.

85%

Of dads said taking paternity leave was beneficial in supporting partner's physical and mental recovery.³²

82%

Of dads said that taking paternity leave was beneficial for their confidence as a parent.³²

80%

Of dads said taking paternity leave helped reduce family stress.³²

80%

Of dads said that taking paternity leave allowed them to bond with their child.³²

80%

Of dads said that taking paternity leave was beneficial for their relationship.³²

79%

Of dads say taking paternity leave was beneficial for their mental health.³²

Fathers' Own Words

The most important voices for change are fathers themselves. As part of Movember's 'Fathers in Ireland' survey, conducted in May 2026, some dads shared their experience of fatherhood in Ireland: how it changed their lives; its impact on their health; the financial and family challenges it raised; and the changes it made to social connection.



“Money was too tight [to take paternity leave]. I was given plenty of leeway from my employer but I absolutely needed my paycheck at the time”

“I was working 12-hour shifts. I didn't know if I was coming or going. My partner also worked office hours. Childcare was too expensive so we juggled with help from family but it was extremely tough.”

“I always see my kids playing around me and I feel joyful. Seeing them growing in my presence is also awesome.”

“The stress of balancing family and work commitments. Losing friends and other extended family relationships because they didn't understand my role as a father, man and partner. Being told by a colleague that I was negatively affecting my career by taking 6 months parental leave . Lack of control over leisure activities (has to be done around kids), demands from work that I could not comply with as I had to pick up or take care of my kids. Childcare struggles and lack of family or work support.”

“Becoming a father changed my understanding of love and patience. I developed a much deeper sense of purpose and emotional connection than I had before”.

“Nobody really cares about a father's feelings. Attention is focused on the children's mothers with due reason. It should not however be exclusively focused on women. I was the only person dealing with my wife's post-partum depression and the fallout from it. I had to run the household, mind older children, and try to cater for the emotional needs of my wife. All while being resented at work by men who didn't take parental leave and by women whose husbands didn't take parental leave.”

“Being a new father I was worried about my daughter, my wife's mental health post partem, money was very tight due to loss of my wife's income and I was also starting in a new high demand job”

“It is very stressful. Both me and my partner worked full-time and couldn't afford childcare. Only for the help of family I don't know if we would be where we are in life now.”

– Dads speaking to Movember's 'Fathers in Ireland' Survey in May 2026

The Broader Parental Leave Context

Any reform of paternity leave must be considered alongside existing supports for mothers. Ireland provides 26 weeks of paid maternity leave at the same €299 flat rate as Paternity Benefit, plus a further 16 weeks unpaid.²⁷

International evidence shows that earnings-related pay and ring-fenced paternity leave together drive the largest shifts in both uptake and gender equality outcomes.^{5,14-16} Greater father involvement in early childcare does not come at the expense of mothers; it supports maternal health, reduces postnatal depression, and improves family outcomes.

A note on equity

Movember's call for paternity leave reform is explicitly a call for equity within the family. Supporting fathers to be present should not diminish support for mothers; it strengthens it, as the evidence from Spain and Finland shows.

“Being there for your family as a new dad is an incredible experience and a vital role, but it shouldn't depend on your employer's goodwill or your income. Every dad should be able to access paternity leave, but many still aren't taking it because they can't afford to. As a TD and a new dad I strongly support this campaign for enhanced paternity benefits and longer paternity leave entitlements, and I will play my part in pushing Government to establish a Paternity Leave Working Group.”

– Ciarán Ahern, T.D.





Paternity Leave to Support Wider Society

Paternity leave is not only a matter of men’s health. It is economically and socially critical, a component of family wellbeing, child development, gender equity, and national productivity. Reform delivers benefits far beyond the individual father.

Fathers who take leave, particularly those taking two weeks or more, are more likely to remain involved in childcare long-term²⁶, and children with more involved fathers show better cognitive development.²⁸ Active paternal involvement is also associated with lower maternal depression, reduced stress, and higher maternal self-efficacy. Engaged fathers themselves report higher life satisfaction than those who engage less.⁷

Employers benefit through improved retention, productivity, and EDI positioning.²⁹ Society gains through higher female workforce participation, a more balanced distribution of unpaid care, and progress toward closing the gender pay gap.

FATHERS’ ATTITUDES TOWARD CAREGIVING

The Men’s Development Network and Treoir “2023 State of the World’s Fathers, Ireland” report found a strong appetite among Irish fathers to be involved in newborn care, and clear evidence that traditional attitudes about gender roles in the home are receding.³⁰

The same report found that 86% of Irish fathers want to be more involved in caregiving, 86% feel as responsible for care work as their partner, 84% of fathers viewed caring for their children as the most important thing in their life, and 69% would be willing to work part-time to do more of it. Irish fathers want to be present; the system must support them to do so.³⁰

Movember’s 2026 ‘Fathers in Ireland’ Survey³² bears this out. Nine in ten dads (90%) say fatherhood has given their life greater meaning, and more than eight in ten (86%) value their role as a father more than success in their career. Many dads are also actively rethinking what it means to be a dad: more hands-on, more emotionally present, and more openly affectionate.

Nearly eight in ten (79%) also say becoming a dad has significantly increased their sense of financial responsibility. For today’s fathers, being emotionally present and being a provider are not in conflict. They are both part of what it means to be a dad.

90%

Of dads say fatherhood has given their life greater meaning.³²

86%

Of dads value their role as a father more than career success.³²

79%

Of dads feel fatherhood has significantly increased their sense of financial responsibility.³²

79%

Of dads say they are more involved in the day-to-day care of their children than their own dad was.³²

78%

Of dads tell their children they love them more than their own father did.³²

The Path Forward: Policy Recommendations

Moving Ireland off the bottom section of the EU paternity leave support table requires urgent, structured action. The most important step the Government can take now is to establish a dedicated Working Group with a clear mandate to review the evidence and develop a reform strategy across all areas of paternity leave policy.

OUR CALL TO ACTION

Establish a Government-Led Paternity Leave Working Group

Movember calls on the Government to convene a dedicated multi-stakeholder Paternity Leave Working Group with a mandate to:

- Review the duration of statutory paternity leave and develop a phased pathway beyond the EU minimum of 10 working days.
- Develop a roadmap to replace the flat-rate €299/week Paternity Benefit with an earnings-related model that reduces income loss, particularly for middle- and lower-income fathers.
- Examine workplace culture barriers – including employer practices, awareness, and the career risk perceptions that prevent fathers from availing of their entitlements.
- Align Ireland's Paternity Leave provision with the Men's Health Action Plan 2024-2028¹ and the Programme for Government² commitment to advancing men's health.
- Report with clear recommendations within a defined timeframe, with representation from fatherhood experts, employer groups, trade unions, public health, and family policy specialists.
- Develop mandatory monitoring and reporting requirements for employers and industry bodies, to track uptake of paternity and parent's leave by sector and firm size.

“The findings in this report are important because this is not just about family policy, it is also about men's health, child development and stronger families. Giving fathers meaningful time at home in those early stages can have a lasting positive impact on wellbeing and relationships.”

– Naoise Ó Cearúil, T.D.





“The evidence in this report is clear. The current model is not working for fathers, families or employers, and when fathers are not enabled to be present in the earliest weeks and months of a child’s life, the cost is felt across our health system, our workplaces and our wider society.

Establishing a Government-led Working Group is a sensible next step. It should produce a clear roadmap with timelines, costings and measurable outcomes, particularly in increasing uptake and ensuring equitable access. This is not simply a social policy issue. It is an economic issue, a health issue and an equality issue. If we are serious about supporting families in Ireland, then we need to be equally serious about supporting Dads.”

– Grace Boland, T.D.



ABOUT MOVEMBER

Since 2003, Movember has challenged the status quo, shaken up men's health research, and transformed the way health services reach and support men – taking on prostate cancer, testicular cancer, mental health, and suicide prevention. Movember has raised well over €29.7m for men's health in Ireland, thanks to a passionate community of over 12,000 Mos. These funds have delivered more than 1,300 men's health projects around the world.

The Movember Institute of Men's Health launched in 2023, building on a 20-year legacy of investment in men's physical and mental health. The Institute accelerates research and translates it into tangible, real-world outcomes. To learn more, please visit Movember.com or contact advocacy@movember.com

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