

Christopher Ryan, DPER

Questions

Leave

- **Your IBEC quoted report seems to suggest an 18% and also a 40-60% company support for leave add - on's? Could you explain?**

The 18% company support relates to topping up Parent's leave while the 46 – 60% support relates to paternity and maternity leave.

A 2018 IBEC report on maternity and paternity leave found that 60% of companies surveyed pay over and above social welfare benefit to employees on maternity leave and 46% of companies' surveyed pay over and above social welfare benefit to employees on paternity leave.

Before the introduction of parent's leave in November 2019, the 2019 annual IBEC HR Survey asked organisations in the private sector whether they will pay over and above social welfare benefits to those availing of the new parent's leave. 18% said they would to all eligible employees.

- **What would be a sustainable duration of fully paid parental leave for Public Servants.?**

There are many factors which would impact on the sustainability of the scheme, including duration, rate of payment, uptake levels etc. It would not be possible to quantify what a sustainable duration would be without considering all the relevant factors.

Government Policy

- **How do we make the policy fit for purpose?**

The Focussed Policy Assessment recommended that any future policy development should focus on the interrelated questions of **uptake and equity** (between genders and workers), include **all relevant costs**, and could be guided by 3 principles:

Simplify: Integration of the three paid schemes (and potentially the unpaid scheme) could provide administrative efficiencies and a clearer offering to citizens.

Support All Parents to Take Leave: Higher SIF payments rather than a reliance on salary top ups could improve uptake rates and therefore equity between gender and workers.

Incentivise Gender Sharing: Under the EU Directive the duration of non-transferrable leave for each parent has to be ring-fenced at 9 weeks. Beyond this it would be worth exploring the possibility of allowing leave to be shared (based on family choice) with potentially some additional increase in the duration of leave available for

individuals currently eligible for paternity leave. For example in Austria and Portugal families are rewarded with higher payments and/or extended leave durations if certain gender sharing criteria are met. Such an approach stands a better chance of meeting the aims of the Directive.

- **Are parents positions safe when they return back to employment, do the same salaries and positions apply.**

You are treated as being in employment while you are on statutory leave (maternity, paternity, parent's leave). This means that you have the right to return to work to the same job with the same contract of employment. If this is too difficult to arrange, your employer must provide suitable alternative work on terms that are not 'less favourable' than your old job.

- **The recommendations of the policy assessment review seem to me to clearly indicate that the changes introduced by government in 2019 are not strong enough to address the change needed. What needs to happen for the recommendations to be acted on?**

Overall policy responsibility for the parental leave system is with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth but the Department of Social Protection administer the social welfare payments and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform is responsible for the decision on whether to top up public service salaries.

Implementation of any recommendation, is a matter, in the first instance, for the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth.

Cost

- **Who is going to pay for all this extra Paternity & Maternity leave? Extra tax on pensioners?**

Paternity, maternity and parent's benefit are paid out of the Social Insurance Fund (SIF), which is made up of Employee and Employer PRSI contributions.

- i) What proportion of total public expenditure that leave expenditure (estimated at €647m) currently involves, and

Gross current expenditure for 2021 is estimated at €72.3bn. Expenditure on maternity paternity leave is estimated at €647m, 0.9% of total current expenditure.

- ii) What % increase in public expenditure that enhanced leave entitlements would involve.

The amount of increase would depend on the level of enhanced leave entitlement i.e. the duration of leave or rate of payment.

- Is there an estimated costing for providing full pay for parent's leave among public sector workers?

The estimated cost of providing full pay for parent's leave among public sector workers is an additional €91m, consisting of

- €43m in public service salary top ups
- €48m in substitution costs in the education and health sector.

This estimated cost assumes a 100% take up among public service staff under the current entitlement of 5 weeks parent's leave.

Other Countries

- **How does it work in EU & other countries employing women of a certain age & they go on maternity leave? Is there a hesitation to employ them even if they have the qualifications for the job?**

Overall policy responsibility for maternity leave is a matter for the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. Therefore, they would be in a better position to answer questions relating to the international and EU experience.