

Enhancing Quality in Family Day Care

Country Report – Ireland

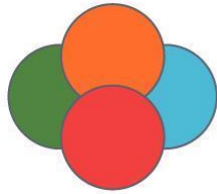
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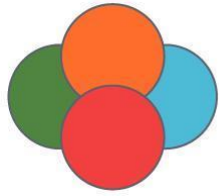
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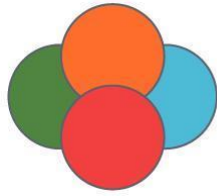


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1. Introduction

This country report documents relevant policy, research, and practice of the organisation of ECEC in Ireland, with specific attention paid to family day care.

NOTE: Ireland uses the terms 'childminding' and 'childminder' to denote 'family day care' and 'family day carer'.

2. Information on Ireland

2.1 General information



Key Facts

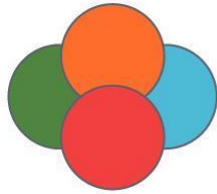
Official name: Ireland (Éire in Irish)
Capital: Dublin
Population: 5.1 million (Census 2022)
Official languages: English & Irish
Government: Parliamentary democracy
Head of state: President Michael D Higgins
Head of government: An Taoiseach Leo Varadkar
Currency: Euro
Joined UN: 1955
Joined EU: 1973
Ratified UNCRC: 1992

Map source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:British%E2%80%93European_Union_frontier_in_Ireland.svg

English rule of the island of Ireland dates to the 12th century. Following centuries of rebellion and an independence movement by Irish nationalists in 1916, the Irish Free State was founded in 1922, remaining part of the British Commonwealth until the Republic of Ireland was established in 1949, to be called Ireland in line with the 1937 Constitution. The treaty with the British Government that formed the Irish Free State saw 6 of Ireland's 32 counties remain part of the United Kingdom, resulting in civil war between pro- and anti-treaty sides. While the civil war ended in 1923, conflict persisted for many years, primarily in Northern Ireland, between two populations, one comprising those loyal to the union with the United Kingdom and the other seeking to join a united Ireland under Irish rule.



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There is an open border between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic. The common travel area, enjoyed by British and Irish citizens before either country's EU membership, is still in place. Overall, the full implications of 'Brexit' for relations on the island of Ireland and between the UK and the Irish Republic have yet to be fully understood or resolved.

The current population of Ireland (Republic) is 5.1 million people, which is the highest recorded since 1841¹, when Ireland suffered a catastrophic famine. The Irish economy is focused on IT, financial services, pharmaceuticals, and agribusiness. Ireland is attractive to foreign direct investment² due to its taxation structure, its education levels, and high productivity levels.

2.2 Children's lives in Ireland

Ireland's child population is 1,201,618, 23.6% of the total population, which is the highest in the EU, for which the average is 18.2%. This represents a 'demographic dividend' for Ireland given the numbers in the workforce, and Ireland's low unemployment rate (4.2% in December 2022³).

Table 1. Number of children, by age and gender (2022)			
	Male	Female	Both sexes
Population under 18	614,835	586,783	1,201,618
All ages	2,517,525	2,582,704	5,100,229
Age			
Under 1 year	31,281	29,746	61,027
1 year	28,834	27,341	56,175
2 years	30,279	28,866	59,145
3 years	31,718	30,612	62,330
4 years	32,056	30,977	63,033
5 years	33,576	32,083	65,659
6 years	32,780	31,226	64,006
7 years	33,683	31,967	65,650
8 years	34,924	32,996	67,920

Source: DCEIDY (2022), *State of the Nation's Children, Sociodemographics*, <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/eec03-sonc-part-1-sociodemographics/>

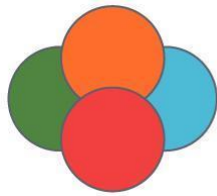
¹ Central Statistics Office, *Press Statement Census of Population 2022, Preliminary Results, 23 June 2022*.

² Economic & Social Research Institute (2021) *Enhancing the attractiveness of the island of Ireland to high-value Foreign Direct Investment*, press release, 7 December 2021, <https://www.esri.ie/publications/enhancing-the-attractiveness-of-the-island-of-ireland-to-high-value-foreign-direct>

³ Central Statistics Office (2022), *Monthly Unemployment December 2022*, <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/pmue/monthlyunemploymentdecember2022/#:~:text=Commenting%20on%20today's%20release%2C%20John,of%205.1%25%20in%20December%202021.>

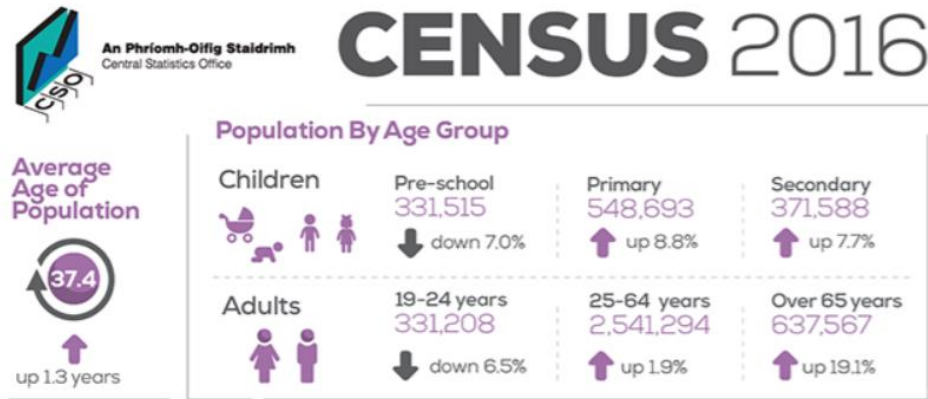


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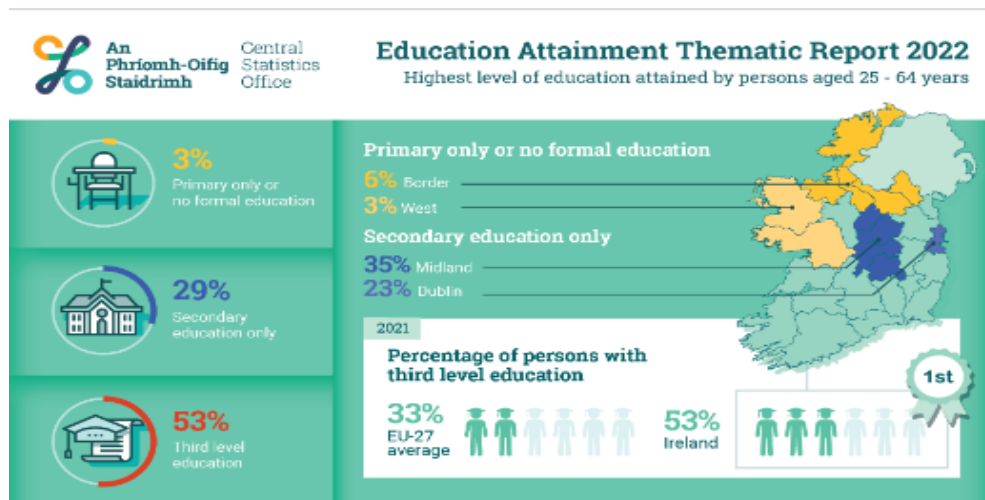


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However, Ireland's population is aging, and the number and proportion of children 0-4 years-of-age are in decline (see infographic below).



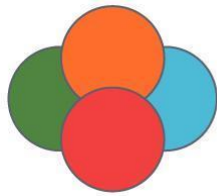
Levels of educational performance and attainment have risen rapidly since the 1950s. 53% of the Irish population has a third-level education, compared with the EU average of 33%. There is a lot of pressure on secondary school children to strive for third-level education in a very competitive entry system. It is in this context that the regulatory minimum qualification to work in ECEC services (EDF level 4) sits as a low level of qualification. Ireland's apprenticeship system remains underdeveloped in many areas, including in ECEC.



Children in Ireland continue to experience high rates of poverty.



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The percentage of children (14%) who are at risk of poverty in Ireland in 2021 was higher than in the population as a whole (12%)⁴.

Children in single parent families persistently experience the highest levels of income poverty and basic material deprivation of any households, and the infographic below illustrates the relative poverty experiences of children in one – and two-parent families.



Intergenerational poverty remains prevalent in Ireland. In 2019, the proportion of adults experiencing deprivation was 35 percentage points higher among those who reported 'very bad' financial circumstances in the household during childhood when compared to individuals, of the same gender and age, who reported 'very good' financial circumstances during their childhood⁵.

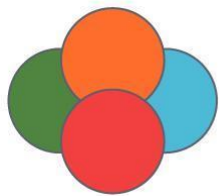
A recent major governmental study⁶ on intergenerational poverty using data from the EU-wide Survey of Income and Living Conditions concluded the following:

Our analysis finds that educational attainment is a key mediating factor between poverty in childhood and in adulthood. Therefore, policies that seek to reduce persistent inequalities in educational outcomes, from early childhood through to higher education, are crucial. This includes access to high-quality early education, additional supports for the most disadvantaged schools and children, and measures to

⁴ DCEIDY (2022), State of the Nation's Children, Sociodemographics, <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/eec03-sonc-part-1-sociodemographics/>

⁵ Curristan, S., Maître, B. and Russell, H. (2022), *Intergenerational Poverty in Ireland*, https://www.esri.ie/system/files/publications/RS150_0.pdf

⁶ Curristan, S., Maître, B. and Russell, H. (2022), *Intergenerational Poverty in Ireland*, https://www.esri.ie/system/files/publications/RS150_0.pdf



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ensure greater equality of access to third-level institutions. The next most important factor linking child and adult poverty was employment status, highlighting the role of training and labour market supports, especially for those at greater risk of unemployment.

3. General information on ECEC in Ireland

3.1 ECEC/Childcare in Ireland

NUMBER OF ECEC SERVICES IN IRELAND

The most recent data says that there are **4,065** Tusla-registered ECEC services in Ireland. There are only **58** registered childminding (family day care services) in that statistic.

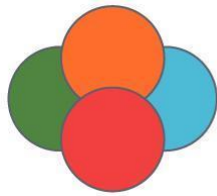
Ireland has been a traditional country, with the 1937 Constitution naming wives' and mothers' place within the home. Childcare has been considered a private family issue for much of the 20th century, with early education (considered to start when children enter primary school from age 4 years) deemed the role of the primary school. According to Hayes:

This reflects the long shadow of a nationalist and Catholic lens through which the Church has opposed State interference in family life, a situation still visible within the Irish Constitution.⁷

Some services provision emerged in the 1970s and 1980s by the voluntary sector for children 'at risk', and we see private and community playgroups established in local communities by women. It was not until a national forum on early education in 1998 and the arrival of substantial European funding to support gender equality in the workforce that childcare hit the Irish political and policy agenda. The focus was on the creation of new childcare places and settings. The current Irish sector is based on the expansion of these parent-operated playgroups into formal childcare/ECEC settings, and the introduction in recent years of multi-site operators. However, the majority of settings are small, with a national average of 44 children per setting, and do not operate on a full-day basis.

Centre-based ECEC and school age childcare in Ireland are privately owned and managed, with a 70/30 split between for-profit businesses and non-profit community-based settings. The State's role has been primarily involved regulating minimum service standards,

⁷ Hayes, N (2022) 'Mapping Irish policy development in early childhood education and care: a century of change?' In Hayes, N. and Walsh, T. (eds) *Early Childhood Education and Care in Ireland*.



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administration and governance of capital and capitation grants and childcare subsidies, and the training and education of ECEC staff.

(Childminders) family day carers are self-employed, operating alone (legally they can only employ a person for unexpected cover) in their own home, for payment.

ECEC services were first regulated (commencing over time) in 1996. Centre-based and family day care services are governed under the same enabling legislation and regulations.

The 2021 OECD review on ECEC quality in Ireland⁸ stated:

Given the market-driven nature of the ECEC sector, increased funding should be accompanied by mechanisms to ensure that it translates into higher quality.

The following is the most recent national data on types of childcare used by parents, although it is old data.

Types of Childcare Used	% of children aged 0-12	
	2007	2016
Parent / Partner	75	70
Unpaid relative or family friend	9	16
Paid relative or family friend	3	3
Childminder / Au Pair / Nanny	9	10
Creche / Montessori / Playgroup / After-school facility	9	13
Other	1	1
Total children using non-parental childcare	30	38

Source, Central Statistics Office (2017), Module on Childcare, Q3 2016, <https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/surveys/qnhsmoduleonchildcare/>

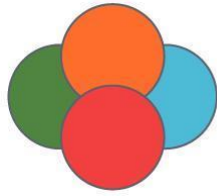
An estimated 10 percent of children in Ireland from infancy to 12 years of age are cared for by childminders (family day care), au pairs and nannies⁹, although we do not know the breakdown between these three groups in the workforce. Based on the 2016 Census this equates to approximately 88,000 children.

Since 2010 there has been a series of major and impactful reforms in ECEC and SAC, including the:

- **the first national ECEC regulator (Tusla Early Years Inspectorate) established in 2015, introducing the first national register of services and national approach to regulation and inspection**

⁸ OECD (2021) *Strengthening Early Childhood Education and Care in Ireland : Review on Sector Quality* <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/2e5b45cc-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/2e5b45cc-en>

⁹ Nannies and Au Pairs are employees of parents, often living in the family home. Regulation relates to their employment conditions. Childminders are self-employed, usually operating in their own home.



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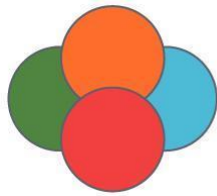
- introduction in 2010 of one year of universal free Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme, and its extension in 2018 to two years per child
- Better Start Quality Development Service for ECEC established in 2015
- introduction of Early Years Education Inspection (EYEI) in 2015, developed and implemented by the Department of Education, which evaluates the nature, range and appropriateness of the early educational experiences of children in the ECCE Programme
- first minimum qualification to work in ECEC services in 2016 (level 4, European Qualifications Framework)
- introduction of the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) in 2016 to support access to and participation by children with additional needs to the ECCE Programme
- introduction of the National Childcare Scheme in 2019, which is the first statutory financial childcare support scheme for parents, payable directly to Tusla-registered services
- publication in 2019 and implementation of the first quality criteria and guidelines for further and higher education ECEC qualifications
- publication in 2019 of Ireland's first early years strategy, *First 5: a Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children, and their Families 2019-2018*¹⁰
- publication in April 2021 of Ireland's first national plan for family day care, the *National Action Plan for Childminding 2021- 2028*
- publication of *Nurturing Skills: The Workforce Plan*
- publication in December 2021 of *Partnership for the Public Good: A New funding Model for Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare*
- introduction of 'Core Funding', which sits on top of ECEC capitation and subsidies and funds capacity.
- Agreement of the first Employment Regulation Order legally setting minimum pay rates for early years educators employed in group-based centres.

NOTE: The Irish Government uses the term Early Learning and Care (ELC) rather than ECEC.

3.2 A split, centralised ECEC system

Ireland's ECEC system is split between governance and funding by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (with regulatory oversight by an independent agency, Tusla, under DCEDIY's sponsorship) and the development of policy on curriculum, quality standards and educational inspection by the Department of Education.

¹⁰ See: <https://first5.gov.ie/>



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That there are two separate inspections in ECEC – regulatory by Tusla and education by the Department of Education- is an example of the structural split in the system.

A further split is evident between provision for children above and below age three years, which has negative impacts on children’s experiences of quality by age and on the terms and conditions of the workforce. The ECCE Programme (free preschool) is regarded as educational by the government. It attracts a capitation payment, is subject to quality assurance and incentives, and has a well-resourced model for the inclusion of children with additional needs. Meanwhile, provision for children under 3 years and over three outside of the ECCE Programme time did not have these features (until very recently), and financial incentives have until very recently been geared towards settings with early years educators at higher education levels for the ECCE Programme only.

The OECD (2021) Country Policy Review of ECEC in Ireland¹¹ recommended that Ireland,

Make efforts to overcome the duality between provision for the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme and non-ECCE provision by increasing funding for younger children, aligning incentives to attract qualified staff, and extending education-focused inspections into these rooms, as committed to in First 5.

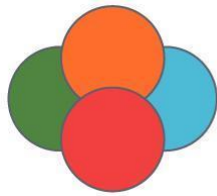
Unlike Flanders and Denmark, Irish local government and local authorities (municipalities) have weak decision-making and financial powers generally, including in ECEC. In each local authority area, City and County Childcare Committees (CCCs) support parents and ECEC providers, linking national policy and guidance with local delivery. Planning and funding of ECEC is centralised, through DCEIDY and Education primarily, although a plethora of government departments have responsibilities in key areas: Housing and Planning; Finance; Community. One of *First 5*’s four goals is to build ‘an effective early childhood system’.

3.3 Types of ECEC/Childcare Services

97% of eligible children participate in the universal ECCE Programme (preschool) and 27% of children under age three in ECEC group-based centres.

The following types of ECEC and SAC are offered by centre-based services.

¹¹ OECD (2021) *Strengthening Early Childhood Education and Care in Ireland- Review on Sector Quality*, <https://www.oecd.org/ireland/strengthening-early-childhood-education-and-care-in-ireland-72fab7d1-en.htm>



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Figure 3.6: Number and percentage of ELC and SAC services by service type offered

Sessional a.m.	2,189	87%
Part-time	1,036	41%
SAC	995	39%
Full day	854	34%
Sessional p.m.	677	27%
Breakfast club	535	21%
Drop-in	34	1%
Total	2,520	100%

Source: Pobal (2022) Annual Early Years Sector Profile Report 2021 /2022

Table 45. Number and percentage of pre-school services under contract to deliver the Early Childhood Care and Education Programme (ECCE) that meet basic and higher capitation criteria (2016–2021)

	ECCE services		Basic capitation		Higher capitation	
	No.		No.	%	No.	%
2016/17	4,284		2,237	52.2	2,047	47.8
2017/18	4,246		1,902	44.8	2,344	55.2
2018/19	4,216		1,529	36.3	2,687	63.7
2019/20	4,478		1,600	35.7	2,878	64.3
2020/21	4,023		1,561	38.8	2,462	61.2
2021/22	3,973		1,383	34.8	2,590	65.2

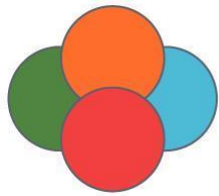
Source: DCEDIY (2022), State of the Nation’s Children

The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme offers every child from 2 years 8 months to primary school entry 15 hours per week of free early childhood care and education provision for 38 weeks per year.

As of late 2022, there are two types of graduate premiums under Core Funding: the Graduate Lead Educator Premium and the Graduate Manager Premium. The Graduate Lead Educator Core Funding Premium is paid as a top-up on the number of hours of provision that is led by



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a graduate with a relevant qualification and three years of experience. The Graduate Manager Premium is also a paid top-up for a service whose manager has a relevant qualification and three years of experience.

These graduate premiums are replacing the ECCE Programme Higher Capitation (see table above) phased out in late 2022 which provided additional funding for each staff member at levels 6 or 7 as a quality lever. However, this funding was not available for staff with higher educational levels outside of the ECCE Programme. This led to educators with the basic minimum qualification working with the youngest children and outside of the ECCE Programme, deepening the split system.

3.4 Accessibility & Availability

Children in Ireland have no entitlement to a legally guaranteed place in an ECEC or SAC service, nor do their parents have any legal entitlement to a childcare place to support them participate in the workforce.

Outside of the free, universal ECCE Programme parents in Ireland pay amongst the highest monthly fees for ECEC in Europe¹² for centre-based services.

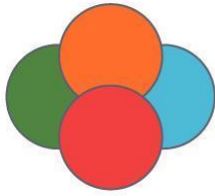
To support access and affordability, the National Childcare Scheme, operational since 2019, provides financial support to parents for ECEC and School-Age Childcare services through 2 subsidy types: universal and income related. The State operates at a long arms-length from the ECEC sector. This is very likely to change, however, as Partnership for the Public Good continues its implementation.

There is no centralised government planning to ensure that supply meets demand/need. A provider can open and be eligible for government subsidy once they pass Tusla's inspection process. The outcome is a mix of oversupply and undersupply nationally, and a serious lack of rooms in services for babies and toddlers as settings prefer to offer primarily the ECCE Programme as the funding model has made this kind of provision administratively easier, and more economically viable than provision for children under 3.

First 5 includes a commitment to develop a national data and planning system to align supply and demand. The new Core Funding model also provides a mixture of incentives and disincentives to delivering ECEC and SAC services to children of different ages.

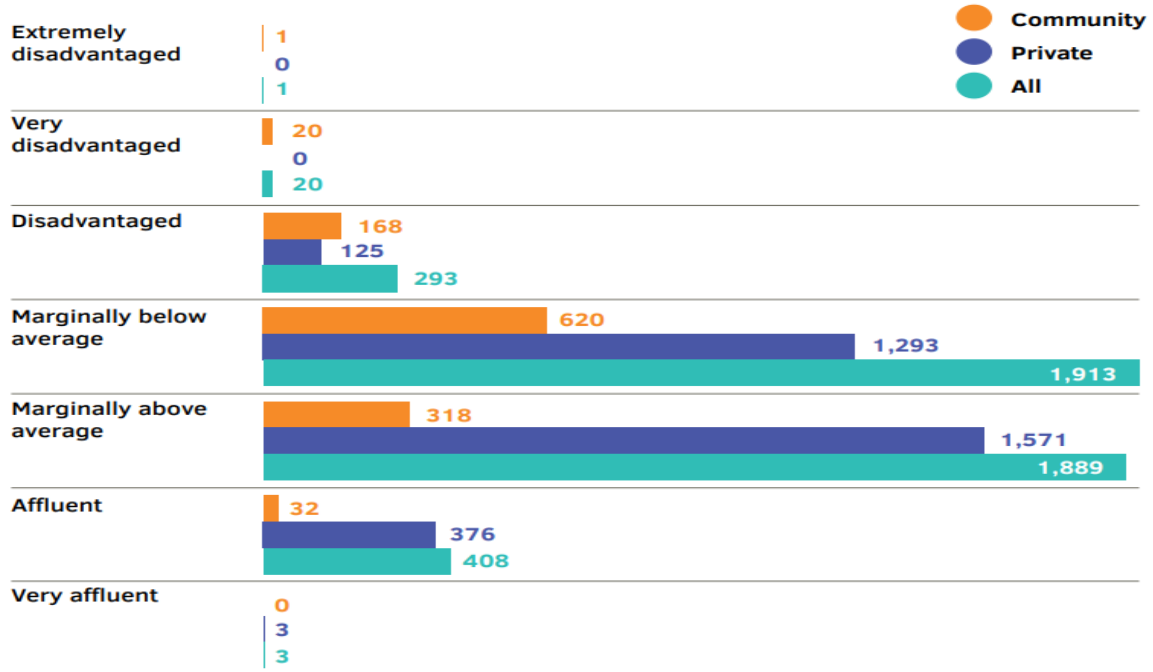
There is a dearth of ECEC and SAC services in Ireland's most disadvantaged areas.

¹² European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019. Eurydice Brief: Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.



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Figure 3.2: Number of ELC and SAC services by the level of disadvantage of the area where the service is located



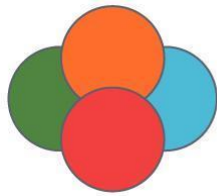
Source: Pobal (2022) *Annual Early Years Sector Profile Report 2021 /2022*

3.5 Quality

3.5.1 Structural Quality

Tusla, Ireland’s Child and Family Agency, is the regulator for ECEC and school age childcare services operating group care in centres and childminding in childminders’ homes since 2015. Tusla operates the national statutory ECEC & SAC registration system. It is a legal requirement for all services proposing to operate to apply to Tusla.

The following are the child-staff ratios for ECEC services.



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Required adult:child ratio depending on the child's age	
(0 - 1 years) 1:3	(2 - 3 years) 1:6
(1 - 2 years) 1:5	(3 - 6 years) 1:8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » The adult:child ratios are 1:11 for any child availing of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme and attending a Sessional Pre-School Service (up to 3.5 hours). » A child attending on a full day care basis avails of an ECCE scheme once a day only. » The adult:child ratio of 1:8 or 1:6 is effective after 3.5 hours (when the ECCE Sessional Pre-School Service has finished) and the child is staying on in the Full Day Care Service for the rest of the day. 	
At least 2 adults are on the premises at all times.	

Source: Tusla, Quality and Regulatory Framework Full Day Care Service and Part-Time Day Care Service

The most recently published Tusla national inspection data is from 2017.¹³ Compliance with regulations varied by regulation, with high levels of compliance (94% of 1,559 services) on adult-child ratios, but low (55% of 1,447 services) on safeguarding the health, safety, and welfare of the child. Childminders were the least likely of all service types to be found non-compliant, although caution is required on this data due to very low numbers.

3.6 Pedagogical Framework

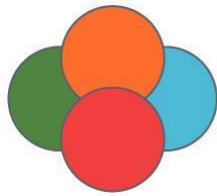


Aistear (Irish for 'journey') is the play-based, emergent national curriculum framework for children aged birth to six years in ECEC, including the first two years of primary school and the home. It is underpinned by 12 interconnecting principles presented in 3 groups:

- Children and their lives in early childhood
- Children's connections with others
- How children learn and develop

It uses four interconnected themes to describe children's learning and development: Well-being; Identity and Belonging; Communicating; and Exploring and Thinking.

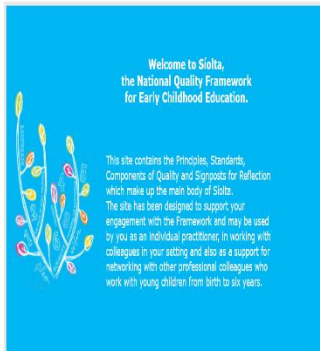
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siolta
The National Quality Framework
for Early Childhood Education

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Siolta is designed to allow ECEC settings to evaluate their level of quality provision and to determine the quality of the service they are providing. There was a Quality Assurance Programme with a 12-step process including; baseline self-assessment, action planning and quality development work, evidence collection and portfolio building, supported by an external mentor, with the setting submitting a completed Siolta portfolio for external validation, which ended in 2022. Low service numbers participated- the QAP is a long, involved process, relying on the motivation of the service provider. The QAP has been halted with a new approach being developed by the Department of Education.

3.7 Pedagogical Quality

3.7.1 Quality Assurance

As noted earlier there is split inspection regime:

Tusla 's Early Years Inspectorate promotes and monitors the safety and quality of care and support of children in registered ECEC and SAC services in accordance with the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016. Breaches of regulations must be resolved through a predefined process. Tusla can remove services from the national register, although this is a last resort, and not used to a great extent.

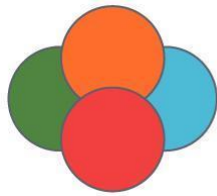
While structural quality, safeguarding and health and safety are the primary regulations, Tusla has put an increased focus on 'regulatory practice' and the pedagogical principles underpinning inspection.¹⁴

The **Department of Education's Early Years Education Inspection (EYEI)** evaluates the nature, range and appropriateness of the early educational experiences of babies and young children in state-funded early learning and care settings, with the aim of improvement. Until 2022, only ECCE Programme rooms in services were inspected, as they were regarded as educational. This changed in 2022, and now all rooms in all registered ECEC services will be inspected under the new model¹⁵, lessening Ireland's split ECEC system and enabling

¹⁴ Tusla (2021) *Pedagogical principles of the Tusla Early Years Inspection Process*,

https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/EYI_Underpinning_Pedagogical_Principles_FINAL.PDF

¹⁵ Department of Education (2022) Guide to Early Years Education Inspections, <https://www.limerickchildcare.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Guide-to-Early-Years-Education-Inspections-updated-08.09.22.pdf>



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children’s right to quality services. The framework uses a Quality Continuum to grade inspection outcomes.

Level	Description
Excellent	Provision that is excellent is exemplary in meeting the needs of children
Very good	Provision that is very good is highly effective in meeting the needs of children
Good	Provision that is good is effective in meeting the needs of children but with some aspects to be developed
Fair	Provision that is fair requires practice to be improved to meet the needs of children
Poor	Provision that is poor is inadequate and requires significant improvement to meet the needs of children

A 2018 report¹⁶, collating the findings of the 2017/2018 inspection reports, found that three quarters of settings provide a ‘very good’ or ‘excellent’ context for learning, less than half ‘excellent’ or ‘very good’ processes to support learning, two thirds were evaluated as having ‘very good’ or ‘excellent’ management and leadership; and the children in another two thirds of settings had ‘very good’ or ‘excellent’ quality learning experiences and achievement.

There is no link between these two inspections at the system, framework, or reporting levels. However, *First 5* includes the following commitment:

Develop measurement tools to assess quality of early childhood services commencing with a tool to measure and monitor the quality of practice in ELC settings. A national baseline study using the tool will be carried out, with a view to repeat quality reviews at regular intervals to assess progress in raising quality standards.

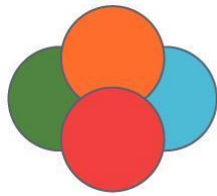
The inclusion of childminding services (family day care) in this initiative will be vital to provide Ireland’s first baseline measure of quality levels in these services.

The **Better Start Quality Development Service** is a national initiative, which is available to all Early Learning and Care (ELC) settings in Ireland. They provide professional development to settings catering for children from birth to 6 years. Better Start’s team of Early Years Specialists provide mentoring and coaching to implement the national frameworks *Síolta* and *Aistear*, enhancing quality practice and positive outcomes for children.

¹⁶ Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (2018), *Early Learning and Childcare – Focused Policy Assessment No. 5*, Prevention and Early Intervention Unit.



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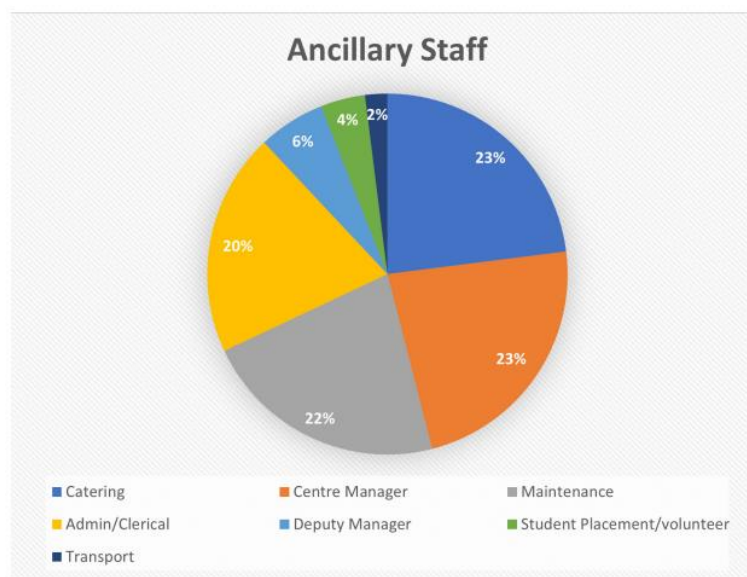
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publication in 2019 and implementation of the first agreed quality criteria and guidelines for further and higher education ECEC qualifications, and the development of a structure to review and oversee compliance with the new standards and guidelines. There is a commitment to move over time towards a professional standards body.

3.8 Workforce

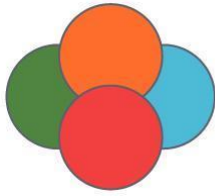
3.8.1 Statistics

The following graphs provide a breakdown of staff in the ECEC and School Age Childcare sector.¹⁷

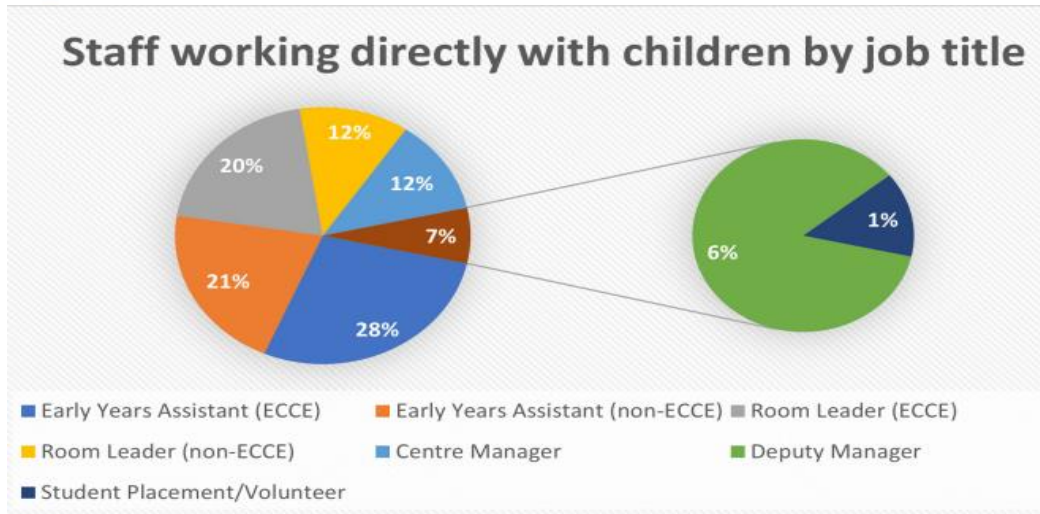


Data source: Pobal (2022), Annual Early Years Sector Profile Report 2020/2021

¹⁷ Source of graphs and information: Early Childhood Ireland (2023), The Workforce, Early Childhood Ireland Explainers, https://www.earlychildhoodireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Explainers_TheWorkforce.pdf



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3.8.2 Training and education

Under the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations (2016) all staff working directly with children in ECEC services must hold a minimum of a European Qualifications Framework level 4/Irish National Qualifications Framework/level 5) qualification in ECEC/childcare.

95% of staff working with children hold this qualification. The proportion of staff with an EQF level 5/NFQ level 6 qualification or higher is 70%.

There are currently no qualification or training requirements for those specifically in managerial or leadership roles.

Similarly, there are no qualification or training requirements for anyone who wishes to set up an ECEC or SAC setting, other than the Level 5 minimum regulatory requirement if that person is going to work directly with children in ECEC.

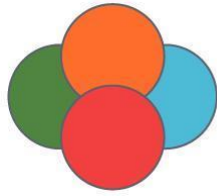
3.8.3 Pay & conditions.

The average hourly wage of staff working directly with children, excluding managers, in 2020/21 was €12.60. Including managers, the average hourly wage was €13.20. In 2020/21, one out of two staff earned below the living wage rate. Centre managers earned the most, being paid, on average, €16.35 per hour. On average ECCE Room Leaders and Early Years Assistants were paid more per hour than their non-ECCE equivalents.

Ireland's early years educators in ECEC and practitioners in School Age Childcare services achieved an Employment Regulation Order (ERO) in late 2022, which set minimum hourly pay rates, and other terms of conditions.



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Over €200m was provided by the State in Core Funding to pay the uplifts in pay required to meet the ERO rates, which are in the table below.

Role	Hourly Pay
Early Years educators/ School Age Care practitioners	€13.00
Early Years Lead educators/ School Age Care co-ordinators	€14.00
Graduate Early Years Lead educators/ Graduate School Age Care co-ordinators	€15.50
Deputy managers	€15.70
Managers	€16.50
Graduate managers	€17.25

Source: Early Childhood Ireland (2023), Early Childhood Ireland Explainers, Core Funding, https://www.earlychildhoodireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Explainers_CoreFunding.pdf

3.8.4 Recruitment & retention

Recruitment and retention is a major issue, for all roles. The national staff turnover rate is 19%.¹⁸

57% of services managed to retain all their staff.

22% of providers lost one staff member.

14% lost two or three.

7% lost more than three staff members.

29% of providers reported having at least one staff vacancy.

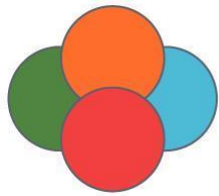
Most vacant posts are for those with Level 6 qualifications and Level 5 qualifications with 34% each.

49% of services experienced difficulties in recruiting experienced staff.

3.8.5 National workforce policy

Ireland's first national governmental early childhood strategy *First 5, the Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families, 2019- 2028* was published in late 2019. It includes a goal to form 'an appropriately skilled and sustainable professional workforce' as one of the key 'building blocks' of an effective early childhood system. The Department of Children, Equality, Integration, Disability and Youth published a Workforce

¹⁸ Pobal (2022) Annual Early Years Sector Profile Report, 2020/2021



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Plan for the ECEC and school age childcare workforce as an action from First 5 and its vision is:

'A well-qualified, skilled, diverse, and valued professional workforce that is centred on children's rights, needs and potential and that provides quality experiences for children in partnership with families, and which continues to advance its professional development within a coherent and competent system.'

First 5 contains two key targets: achieving a graduate-led (50%) workforce in ELC by 2028 and introducing minimum qualifications in school age childcare and in family day carers. An action in *First 5* is the development and implementation of a workforce plan.

NURTURING SKILLS: THE WORKFORCE PLAN (2021)

1. Career Framework

The first pillar involves establishing a career framework for staff to clarify roles within the sector and make it easier for educators and practitioners to embark on a career in a sector by showing how they can progress their career.

2. Qualification Levels

The second pillar involves raising qualification levels within the sector by providing support to achieve the professional qualifications that will become requirements for the different roles over time.

3. National CPD System

This pillar involves developing and establishing a Continuous Professional Development (CPD) system for staff in the sector.

4. Recruitment, Retention and Diversity

The fourth pillar involves ensuring there is sufficient recruitment and retention of qualified staff. This is critical to securing enough qualified staff for roles in the sector. This pillar involves increasing diversity in the sector, including ethnic diversity, gender balance and other forms of diversity.

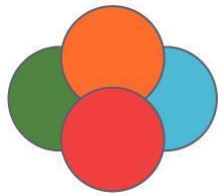
5. Regulation

The final pillar involves moving towards regulation of the profession. The benefits of this include protecting children, as regulations set certain standards that must be met and giving confidence to employers.

4. Information on family day care in Ireland

4.1 History

Childminding services tend not to be recognised to any great extent in written histories of the Irish ECEC sector. Childminding has been viewed as an extension of motherhood, rather than as a profession, or as a service to children. Indeed, the purpose and role of childminding is under quiet debate in Ireland: is it part of the ECEC system? Is it a family service within a



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domestic family model? These are crucial questions for what appropriate regulation and support should look like in the future.

One view of childminding in Ireland is that:

The cultural model initially identified is a distinctively Irish model of Close Relationships. Childminders prioritise providing a setting for children which emphasises love and affection, often conceptualised as extended family. Support systems for childminding should be aligned with this cultural model to sustain childminding in the future.¹⁹

The NAPC views childminding as part of the ECEC and School-Age Childcare sector.

Childminders in Ireland provide services to children aged 3 months into adolescence.

4.2 2021 – First National Policy

In Ireland, childminding services are almost entirely unregulated. Many childminders are legally exempt from regulations.

In May 2021, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth published Ireland’s first-ever dedicated family day care plan, the National Action Plan for Childminding (NAPC).

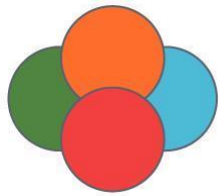
The **overall objective of this National Action Plan for Childminding** is to improve access to high quality and affordable early learning and care and school-age childcare through childminding.

Two vision statements underpin the Plan:

- That the children, families, and communities of Ireland can experience the benefits of quality childminding in a relationship-based, home-from-home, family life environment.
- That the life-learning, continuity of care and flexibility that quality childminding provides is acknowledged, supported by the development of an appropriate quality assurance system that protects and enhances this long-established and respected model of childcare.

The NAPC takes a gradual, balanced approach, reflecting both the opportunity created by the National Childcare Scheme to incentivise childminders to register with Tusla and the need for a phased, supportive approach that encourages and supports childminders to remain working in the sector.

¹⁹ O’ Regan, M. and Halpenny, AM (2020), Irish Childminding: An Eco-Cultural Perspective, in Early Childhood Ireland (2020), *National Early Years Research Day Proceedings, vol. 1.*



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National Action Plan for Childminding

Phase 1 – Preparatory

Is to last between two and three years and work has so far advanced during 2022. Research will take place into the number of childminders who will remain in the sector and will be legally required to register with Tusla in phase 2. The cost for childminders to deliver their services will also be examined along with the costs of phase 2 reforms. A consultation process on new regulations and inspection processes will begin and amendments to the Child Care Act 1991 will be introduced to remove legal exemptions. A Foundation Training programme for childminders will be developed and rolled out, as will a Quality Development Programme. Reforms to quality and financial supports and the costs involved with delivering these supports will be identified. A consultation and communications strategy will be established to ensure that childminders and parents are aware of the benefits of these changes. Regional Childminding Development Officers, City/County Childcare Committees and voluntary Childcare organisations will also be involved in supporting childminders with registering with Tusla and accessing the National Childcare Scheme (NCS).

Phase 2 - Transition

Is scheduled to take three to five years. It will begin when current legal exemptions from regulation are removed, and childminder-specific regulations come into force. With this phase comes eligibility for any childminder, who meets the registration requirements, to take part in the NCS. The Quality Development Programme will be rolled out for childminders. Childminders registered with Tusla will be required to complete the programme over a period of years. To remain registered, childminders will need to demonstrate that they have progressed through training and mentoring. Inspection services will be expanded, with a process that is appropriate for childminders. Quality supports and training for childminders will be established. This will include piloting and the introduction of staffed local childminding networks led by trained network leaders. Financial supports for childminders will be reformed in this phase and communications to inform childminders and parents about the new regulations and available supports will begin.

Phase 3 – Full Implementation

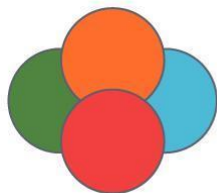
Will begin by 2028 at the latest. The regulatory requirements for the initial cohort of childminders will be completed, along with the Quality Development Programme. This phase will include the completion of infrastructure reforms as well as childminders being included in the full range of quality and funding supports. The rollout of staffed local childminding networks will accelerate. New childminders may continue to have access to the phased training requirements. Post-2028 timelines for the completion of the Quality Development Programme will be determined in advance.

4.3 Quality in family day care

The following are the child: staff ratios for childminding services in Ireland.



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(1)	(2)
No. of Pre-school children being cared for	Maximum no. of School Age children
1	10
2	7
3	5
4	2
5	1

Source: Tusla (2020) *School Age Childcare Registration FAQ*,
https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/V2_School_Age_Childcare_Registration_FAQ.pdf

There is no national data on the quality of ECEC in childminding services as they are not generally regulated and inspected.

The National Action Plan for Childminding will see all childminding services legally obliged to register with Tusla.

4.4 Family day care workforce

It is **estimated that between 19,000-35,000 childminders** caring for children aged 0-12 years operate from their own homes nationally²⁰. Of these only 58 are registered with Tusla, a declining number, which stood at 117 in 2017.²¹ They also primarily operate in the informal economy.

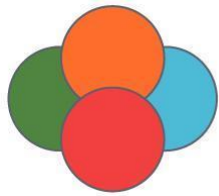
Given the lack of regulation and visibility, there is no national profile and qualifications data.

Their invisibility challenges the State and national support organisations alike to develop the quality of the workforce and the services. The National Childminding Action Plan’s strategy to support quality assurance and safeguard children is to extend the scope of regulation and inspection to all paid, non-relative childminders using appropriate regulation and inspection processes.

First 5 and the *National Childminding Action Plan* position early years educators in centres and childminders as a single workforce, which is a shift in policy thinking by the State. This could mean that joint CPD and mentoring/coaching over time.

²⁰ Summary report of the Working Group on reforms and supports for the childminding sector, <https://assets.gov.ie/26359/04ec2e05e5284b849ae0894e65d4ce8f.pdf>

²¹ Tusla - Child and Family Agency’s Early Years Inspectorate Annual Report 2017, https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Tusla_EYI_annual_report_MASTER_2017.pdf



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Childminders have a national association, Childminding Ireland, which provides training and practice supports and services such as insurance.²²

5. Information on professionalisation & support systems of family day care in the country

Family day carers (childminders) largely operate in an unregulated market, without access to childminding-specific preservice formal training or education. Childminders operate in isolation from each other, from individual in-setting quality development supports (mentoring, coaching, advice), such as are available to centre-based settings through Ireland's Better Start²³ national quality development agency, and from peer and group ECEC supports available to centres (workshops, peer networking and learning opportunities).

However, because of the NAPC, a team of Childminding Development Officers are being employed in the City and County Childcare Committees. CMDOs and CCCs are rolling out small online information sessions on a regional basis with childminders to engage with them, which appears to be having early success²⁴.

The DCEIDY will shortly introduce funded childminder-specific Foundation Training and, later, a Quality Development Programme to support them to meet new pre- and post-registration training requirements.

Under the phased plan, childminders will be required to meet the national NFO level 5 qualification, but it will be less onerous than the full Level 5 NFO requirement for centre-based practitioners and should be introduced over time, as it was for centre-based group services. The development of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) to support qualification is also anticipated.

6. Current challenges in ECEC in Ireland

6.1 General ECEC challenges

An expanded Department of Children and Youth, which, since 2019, with a remit that now includes Equality, Integration and Disability.

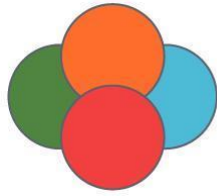
Bringing the political and policy focus to funding quality development in services and ensuring ultimately that services provide only high-quality experiences for children.

Workforce recruitment and retention, in both homes and centres.

²² See: <https://www.childminding.ie/>

²³ See: <https://www.betterstart.ie/>

²⁴ National Action Plan for Childminding – Steering Group – Meeting 5



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Bringing a market-led system into a place where it is widely regarded as a public good and is publically funded.

6.2 Family day care challenges

Identifying childminders operating services in their own homes in order to engage with them.

Successfully enacting legislative reform to regulate family day care services.

Bringing family day carers on board into a formal ECEC system, for both regulation and quality support.

Supporting childminders who are sole traders and have no relief staff through the CPD system and networks of childminders.

7. Information on the Irish QualFDC partner, Early Childhood Ireland

Early Childhood Ireland is the leading children's advocacy and membership organisation. We work in partnership with our members to achieve high-quality experiences for every child in Early Years and School Age Care settings. We advocate for an effective and inclusive Early Years and School Age Care system that values, supports, and invests in childhood, children, and services.

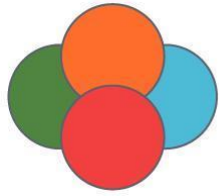
ECI has participated in several projects through Léargas (Ireland's NA). Engaging in these programmes, ECI offered the opportunity to its educators, and quality mentors to participate in a learning programme in another European country visiting childcare centres in several European countries, and had inputs from policy makers, educationalists, childcare specialists on the structure and implementation of childcare in the relevant country.

ECI was previously engaged in Erasmus+ projects the first being "Sequences – Self and external evaluation of quality in Europe to Nourish Childhood Education Services". The project supported quality in European Early Years settings through the creation of a practical self-evaluation toolkit based on the report of the Working Group on ECEC.

ECI has partnered (Child in Mind - Self-learning resources for informal childminders) and led (Valchild) two Erasmus+ KA2 projects to address gaps at national and European levels in the availability of high-quality vocational education and training and the accreditation of prior learning for family day carers. The projects developed an online self-paced EQF level 3 training course for FD carers, and a framework to identify and validate family day carers' informally achieved knowledge, skills, and competencies.



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These projects addressed learner needs in the European programme countries and provided solutions to governments in the programme countries who face policy and systems challenges in providing formal foundational learning opportunities and systems of accreditation for prior learning, in order to assure minimum quality standards for services and to create personalised learning pathways for FD carers working within the ECEC workforce.

8. Glossary of Terms

AIM Access and Inclusion Model

Aistear Early Childhood Curriculum Framework

ASCC After-School Childcare Programme

CCC City and/or County Childcare Committee

CCS Community Childcare Subvention

CCSP Community Childcare Subvention Plus

CCSU Community Childcare Subvention Universal

CE Community Employment

CEC Community Employment Childcare

CEC(AS) Community Employment Childcare (After-School)

CEC(PS) Community Employment Childcare (Pre-School)

CETS Childcare Education and Training Support Programme

CPD Continuing Professional Development

CSO Central Statistics Office

CSP Community Service Programme

CI Childminding Ireland

CMDO Childminding Development Officer

DLP Designated Liaison Person

DCEDIY Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

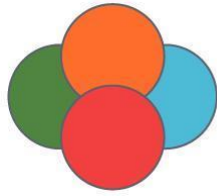
DEIS Delivering Equality of opportunity In Schools

DSP Department of Social Protection

DE Department of Education

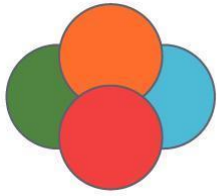


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ECI	Early Childhood Ireland
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education Programme
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
ETB	Education and Training Board
ELC	Early Learning and Care
ERO	Employment Regulation Order
EYP	Early Years Platform
EYS	Early Years Specialists
EYEI	Early Years Education Inspections
EYEPU	Early Years Education Policy Unit
HSE	Health Service Executive
LINC	Leadership for Inclusion in the Early Years Programme
NAPC	National Action Plan for Childminding
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCN	National Childhood Network
NCS	National Childcare Scheme
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
NVCO	National Voluntary Childcare Organisation
NVCC	National Voluntary Childcare Collaborative
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
QRF	Quality Regulatory Framework
SAC	School-Age Childcare
SACC	School-Age Childcare Capital
Síolta	National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education
TEC	Training and Employment Childcare
TUSLA	Child and Family Agency
VCO	Voluntary Childcare Organisation



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