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STATISTICAL SPOTLIGHT #8

The First Five Years of Life in Ireland

Prepared by the Department of
Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
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DATA +
ANALYTICS



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Introduction

The aim of this Spotlight is to collate available data that helps to illustrate key trends in relation to the goals and objectives of the First 5 Strategy (2019-2028).¹ First 5 is a whole-of-Government strategy to improve the lives of babies, young children and their families. It is a ten-year plan to help make sure all children have positive early experiences and get a great start in life.

First 5 is a constituent strategy of Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (BOBF), which sets out an ambitious agenda across Government to improve outcomes for children and young people aged 0–24.² First 5 reinforces commitments made in BOBF to deliver improvements across the five national outcomes (Active and healthy; Achieving in learning; Safe and protected; Economically secure; and Connected, respected and contributing).

First 5 uses evidence to identify the goals, objectives and the specific actions that will be taken across Government to support babies, young children and their families.

Four main goals are identified in the Strategy:

Goal A: Strong and supportive families and communities

Goal B: Optimum physical and mental health

Goal C: Positive play-based early learning

Goal D: An effective early childhood system

The Strategy identifies nine main objectives to achieve Goals A, B and C, as well as five building blocks to assist with the implementation of Goal D.³ The nine Objectives relate to: helping parents to balance working and caring responsibilities; providing information, services and supports for parents; providing practical and material resources to parents; promoting positive health behaviours; providing high quality

¹ To read the Strategy, visit https://first5.gov.ie/userfiles/pdf/5223_4966_DCYA_EarlyYears_INTERACTIVE_Booklet_280x215_v1.pdf#view=fit

² BOBF is the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People (2014–2020). For more information, see <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/775847-better-outcomes-brighter-futures/>

³ Strategic Actions related to Strategy implementation, rather than objectives, are used to support Goal D. There are 14 Strategic Actions in total, which align to the five building blocks under Goal D. These Strategic Actions are not covered in this Spotlight.



health services; encouraging positive mental health; supporting a positive home learning environment; providing affordable and high quality Early Learning and Care (ELC); and supporting transitions to primary school.

This Spotlight is structured into three sections corresponding to Goals A, B and C in the First 5 Strategy. There are three sub sections in each, resulting in nine sub sections that mirror the nine Objectives in the First 5 Strategy (see Figure 1). A summary table is included for each of these three goals to highlight the key statistics for each Objective and their trends over time.⁴ A number of statistical tables are then presented under each section, which provide data that can help to illustrate the most recent progress under each Objective. Note that in many cases, there are other data sources that could also have been selected, but were not referenced in this Spotlight due to their inclusion in recent DCEDIY publications such as the State of the Nation's Children reports (SONC) and the Better Outcomes Brighter Futures (BOBF) Indicator Set. See Table 1 for more information.

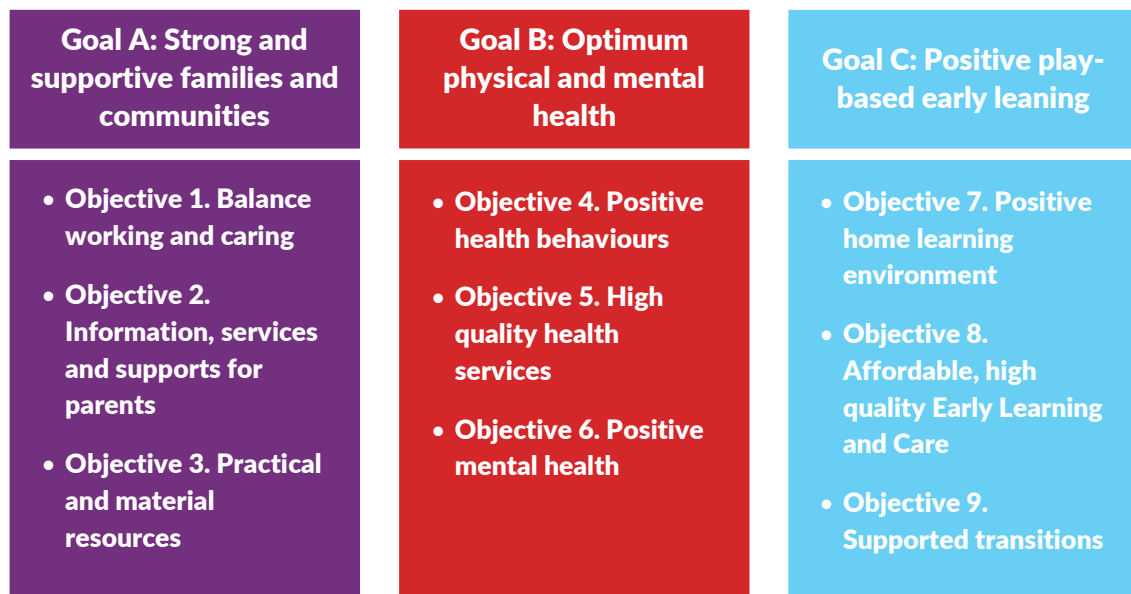


Figure 1: First 5 goals and objectives

Data have been primarily sourced from the following sources:

- Central Statistics Office: Census of Population; General Household Survey (GHS), Labour Force Survey (LFS), and Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC);

⁴ Trends over time are defined by comparing the oldest and most recent data points for each statistic in the summary tables.



- Educational Resource Centre (ERC);
- Eurostat's Survey of Income and Living Conditions (EU SILC);
- DCEDIY International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS);
- Department of Education;
- Healthcare Pricing Office (HPO);
- Health Service Executive Disability Services;
- Local Government Management Agency (LGMA);
- National Council for Special Education (NCSE);
- National Drug Treatment Reporting System (NDTRS);
- National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF);
- Pobal; and
- Tusla.

While the majority of the data used in this report are on children aged 5 years and under, in some cases the only data available were for children aged 4 years and under.

The data in this report can be read with reference to broader data presented in other DCEDIY publications, such as the State of the Nation's Children reports (SONC) and the Better Outcomes Brighter Futures (BOBF) Indicator Set (see Table 1). SONC provides the most up-to-date data on the National Set of Child Wellbeing indicators, presenting key information the health, behavioural and educational outcomes of children living in Ireland and benchmarking progress in Ireland relative to other countries.⁵ The BOBF indicator set helps to track progress in the lives of both children and young people aged 0-24 over time, using the framework of the five national outcomes outlined in the BOBF Strategy.⁶ These publications contain more detail on a number of indicators in this Spotlight, such as by providing data on age ranges outside of the 0-5 age group, and also present data on additional indicators that can complement those presented in this Spotlight. The complementarity between this Spotlight and these broader data sets is outlined in Table 1 below.

⁵ To access the most recent SONC data, visit the SONC webpage at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/1f703-state-of-the-nations-children/>

⁶ While the BOBF indicator set was first published in 2017, an updated version of the indicator set was published in early 2022, which contains the most recently available data for each of the 70 indicator areas. To access the indicator set, visit <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/582092-better-outcomes-brighter-future-indicator-set/>



Table 1: Indicator overlap with State of the Nation’s Children (SONC) and Better Outcomes Brighter Futures (BOBF)

Indicator theme	Indicator present in SONC	Indicator present in BOBF
Indicators that can provide more detail on the data in this Spotlight		
Child population	Yes, Table 1 - 3	Yes, demographic table
Children living in jobless households		Yes, indicator 46
Children in care	Yes, Table 144 and 145	Yes, demographic table
Children in direct provision		Yes, demographic table
Poverty rates among children	Yes, Table 123	Yes, indicator 44
Social housing need	Yes, Table 124 and 125	
Uptake of antenatal care	Yes, Table 135	
Breastfeeding rates	Yes, Table 63 and 64	Yes, indicator 1
Birth weight	Yes, Table 61 and 62	Yes, indicator 2
Childhood hospitalisation	Yes, Table 65 - 68	
Patient wait times	Yes, Table 142 and 143	
Parental mental health		Yes, indicator 9
Access to parent and family support services		Yes, indicator 35
ELC participation		Yes, indicator 26
Class size		Yes, indicator 25
Additional indicators that can complement the data in this Spotlight		
Infant mortality rates	Yes, Table 4, 6 and 7	Yes, indicator 6
Births to teenage mothers	Yes, Table 96 and 97	Yes, indicator 12
Public Health Nurse visits	Yes, Table 136	
Health and development checks for infants	Yes, Table 137	Yes, indicator 17
Vaccine uptake among children	Yes, Table 138-141	Yes, indicator 3
Engagement of children in pre-school numeracy and literacy activities		Yes, indicator 18
Homelessness among children		Yes, indicator 48
Obesity among children	Yes, Table 69	Yes, indicator 2



Demographic information

The data in this section are mainly derived from the 2016 Census of the population, which was conducted by the Central Statistics Office (CSO), with some additional population estimates data from the CSO Population and Migration Estimates. In 2016, there were 403,919 children aged 5 and under living in Ireland, accounting for 8.5% of the population (see Table 2).⁷ 206,562 of these children were male (51.1%) and 197,357 were female (48.9%).

Table 2: Children aged 5 and under by sex, 2016

	Number of children
Male	206,562
Female	197,357
Both Sexes	403,919
Total all ages	4,761,865

Source: CSO Census, 2016

Table 3 shows the population estimates for children aged 5 and under by single year of age.⁸ It is estimated that there were 365,617 children aged 5 and under living in the State in 2021, a decrease from 382,071 in 2019. Apart from the number of four year old children, which is estimated to have increased slightly from 64,431 to 64,861 from 2019 to 2021, this downward trend was consistent across years of age within this group. The steepest decrease was seen in the number of children aged less than one year, which is estimated to have dropped from 61,396 in 2019 from 55,483 in 2021.

⁷ This figure is the number of 0-5 year olds recorded on Census night 2016, which includes visitors. When examining children by population group and other variables, the number of children aged 5 and under will not always total 403,919. This is because a certain number of these children were not usual residents; were not living with their parents; or were living in a communal establishment (such as a hospital or hotel) on Census night. This meant that these children were not categorised as children within a family unit, and therefore further analyses of information such as their nationality and ethnicity could not be conducted on these children.

⁸ The annual population estimates for are calculated by trending forwards the most recent Census of Population data. From this base, each person is aged forward, births are added and deaths are subtracted. The estimated number of immigrants is then added and the number of emigrants are subtracted. Allowance is also made for estimated inter-regional migration in arriving at the final figures. For more information, see <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-pme/populationandmigrationestimatesapril2021/backgroundnotes/>

**Table 3:** Population estimates of children aged 5 and under by single year of age, 2019-2021

	2019	2020	2021
Under 1 year	61,396	58,349	55,483
1 year	61,939	61,481	58,465
2 years	64,620	62,048	61,576
3 years	62,862	64,727	62,168
4 years	64,431	62,911	64,861
5 years	66,823	64,504	63,064
Total 0-5	382,071	374,020	365,617

Source: CSO Population and Migration Estimates, 2021

Table 4 examines the number of children aged 5 and under by minority population group based on the 2016 Census data, which includes nationality, Traveller ethnicity, and disability status. In 2016, there were 344,016 children with Irish nationality, accounting for 88.7% of the 0-5 population. 34,177 did not have Irish nationality (8.8%), and 9,679 did not indicate their nationality (2.5%). The number of children aged 5 and under with Irish Traveller ethnicity was 4,915, accounting for 1.3% of the 0-5 population. There were 13,026 children aged 5 and under with a disability, accounting for 3.4% of the 0-5 population.

Table 4: Children aged 5 and under by minority population group, 2016

	Number of children	Percentage of the 0-5 population
Non-Irish	34,177	8.8
Irish Traveller	4,915	1.3
Disability	13,026	3.4

Source: CSO Census, 2016

Family Composition

33.1% of all families with children had at least one child aged 5 and under (see Table 5). This included: 33.6% of married couples with children, 64.1% of cohabiting couples with children, 23% of one parent mothers with children, and 8.5% of one parent fathers with children.



Looking at the composition of families with children aged 0-5, 66.9% of families with at least one child aged 5 and under were married couples with children; 17% were cohabiting couples with children; 15.2% were one parent mothers with children; and 0.9% were one parent fathers with children.

Table 5: Children aged 5 and under by family type, 2016

	Number of households with children aged 0-5	Number of households with children of all ages	Percentage of families with children that had children aged 0-5	Breakdown of families with children aged 0-5 by family type
Married couple with children	191,190	568,317	33.6	66.9
Cohabiting couple with children	48,446	75,587	64.1	17.0
One parent mother with children	43,482	189,112	23.0	15.2
One parent father with children	2,538	29,705	8.5	0.9
All families with children	285,656	862,721	33.1	100.0

Source: CSO Census, 2016

Tenure Status

Looking at the 0-5 population by housing tenure status, 11.5% of those living in a residence that was owned with a mortgage/loan in 2016 were aged 5 and under, and 2.3% of those living in an owner occupied residence without a loan/mortgage were aged 5 and under (see Table 6). This figure was 12.9% in the case of those living in a residence rented from a private landlord; 9.1% in the case of those living in a residence rented from a Local Authority; and 9.2% in the case of those living in a residence rented from a voluntary/co-operative housing body; while 9.6% of those living in a residence free of rent were aged 5 and under.

Among children aged 0-5, 51.6% lived in a residence owned with a mortgage/loan, and 8.2% lived in an owner occupied residence without a loan/mortgage. 26.7% lived in a residence rented from a private landlord; 8.9% lived in a residence rented from a



Local Authority; 0.9% lived in a residence rented from a voluntary/cooperative housing body; and 1.3% lived in a residence free of rent.

Table 6: Nature of occupancy of children aged 0-5, 2016

	Number of 0-5 year olds in each occupancy type	Percentage of 0-5 year olds in each occupancy type	Breakdown of occupancy type among 0-5 year old population
Owned with mortgage/loan	207,574	11.5	51.6
Owner occupied without loan/mortgage	33,100	2.3	8.2
Rented from private landlord	107,464	12.9	26.7
Rented from Local Authority	35,831	9.1	8.9
Rented from voluntary/co-operative housing body	3,590	9.2	0.9
Occupied free of rent	5,344	9.6	1.3
Not stated	9,364	7.2	2.3
All types of occupancy	402,267	8.6	100.0

Source: CSO Census, 2016

Maternal Education

Table 7 examines the 0-5 population breakdown by highest maternal education level. In 2016, the majority (54.6%) of children aged 5 and under had mothers with third level education as their highest education level. Third level education was also the most common highest level of education achieved by mothers of non-Irish children aged 5 and under (54.7%) and by mothers of children with a disability (43.7%), while it was the least common highest level of education achieved by mothers of children aged 5 and under from the Traveller community (1.6%). Primary education (including no formal education) was the least common highest level of education achieved by mothers of all children aged 5 and under (2.7%), by mothers of non-Irish children (3.3%) and by children with a disability (4.2%). However, this was the most common highest level of education achieved by mothers of children aged 5 and under from the Traveller Community, with 46% of these mothers having either no formal education or primary education.



Table 7: Highest level of education attainment of mothers of children aged 0-5 by population group, 2016

	All Children	Traveller Community	Non-Irish	Children with a Disability
Primary education (including no formal education)	2.7	46.0	3.3	4.2
Lower secondary	6.3	29.5	4.2	10.6
Upper secondary	33.9	14.8	33.1	39.0
Third level	54.6	1.6	54.7	43.7
Not stated/Not available	2.5	8.2	4.8	2.4

Source: CSO Census, 2016

Health of Children

Table 8 examines the health status of children aged 5 and under, as reported in the 2016 Census. These data reveal that the vast majority (92.9%) of these children were in good or very good health, with 81.4% reported to be in very good health and 11.5% reported to be in good health. This is higher than the percentage of the general population (87%) that reported that they were in good or very good health.

Table 8: Percentage of children aged 5 and under in good and very good health, 2016

	Very good	Good	Good or very good
Number of 0-5 year olds	328,739	46,502	375,241
Percentage of 0-5 year olds	81.4	11.5	92.9

Source: CSO Census, 2016



Goal A: Strong and supportive families and communities

Table 9: Summary table of key statistics under the objectives of Goal A

Objective	Theme	Key statistic	First value	Second value	Change
1. Balance working and caring	Low work intensity households	Percentage of children aged 0-5 living in very low work intensity households, by educational attainment level of their parents	(i) 4.6% had parents with tertiary level education (2018)	(i) 4.7% had parents with tertiary level education (2020)	↑
			(ii) 70.5% had parents with less than primary, primary, and lower secondary education (2018)	(ii) 52.3% had parents with less than primary, primary, and lower secondary education (2020)	↑
	Children living in jobless households	Percentage of children aged 0-5 living in a jobless household	11.8% (q4 2018)	8% (q4 2020)	↓
	Maternity and paternity benefit uptake	Maternity and paternity benefit uptake rate by sector (per 100 employees)	(i) 5.8 per 100 employees used maternity benefit across sectors (2017)	(i) 5.3 per 100 employees used maternity benefit across sectors (2019)	↓
			(ii) 3.2 per 100 employees used paternity benefit across sectors (2017)	(ii) 3.1 per 100 employees used paternity benefit across sectors (2019)	↓
	Households that availed of flexible working arrangements	The percentage of households with children aged 0-5 that availed of some form of remote working	9.5% (any time before q1 2020)	45.5% (q3 2020-2021)	↑



Objective	Theme	Key statistic	First value	Second value	Change
2. Information, services and supports for parents	Support for Parent & Toddler groups	Number of Parent & Toddler grants approved by local County Childcare Committee	414 (2019)	229 (2021)	↓
	Family Support Services and Child and Family Support Networks	(i) Number of children referred to family support service	(i) 37,024	(i) 32,473	↓
		(ii) Number of operating Child and Family Support Networks	(ii) 115 (2019)	(ii) 122 (2021)	↑
	Children in care by placement type	The number of children aged 0-5 in care	1,096 (2018)	978 (2020)	↓
	Reason for being in care	The percentage of children aged 0-5 in care by primary reason for being in care	(i) 3.5% physical abuse	(i) 5.9% physical abuse	↑
			(ii) 5.3% emotional abuse	(ii) 7.7% emotional abuse	↑
(iii) 1.4% sexual abuse			(iii) 0.8% sexual abuse	↓	
(iv) 52.6% neglect			(iv) 52.6% neglect	=	
(v) 37.3% welfare			(v) 33.0% welfare	↓	
Children in direct provision	(i) Percentage of children in direct provision aged 0-5	(i) 52.7% (2019)	(ii) 32.4% (2021)	↓	
	(ii) Number of children in direct provision aged 0-5	(i) 883 (2019)	(ii) 675 (2021)	↓	



Objective	Theme	Key statistic	First value	Second value	Change
	Children in refuges and safe homes	The number of children aged 0-4 who accessed safe accommodation	(i) 874 children accommodated in refuges (ii) 14 children accommodated in safe homes (2017)	(i) 594 children accommodated in refuges (ii) 13 children accommodated in safe homes (2019)	↓ ↓
3. Practical and material resources	Poverty rates	Percentage of children aged 0-5 at risk of poverty and experiencing consistent poverty	(i) 6.4% consistent poverty rate (ii) 11.9% at-risk of poverty rate (iii) 19.4% deprivation rate (2017)	(i) 2.8% consistent poverty rate (ii) 8.4% at-risk of poverty rate (iii) 15.3% deprivation rate (2021)	↓ ↓ ↓
	Food and energy poverty	Percentage of households with a child aged 0-5 experiencing food and energy poverty	(i) 1.8% food poverty (2017) (ii) 3.8% energy poverty (2017)	(i) 1.6% food poverty (2019) (ii) 6.1% energy poverty (2019)	↓ ↑



Objective	Theme	Key statistic	First value	Second value	Change
	Housing quality	Percentage of children aged 0-5 by quality of their household dwelling	(i) 0% do not have an indoor flushing toilet for the sole use of their household	(i) 0% do not have an indoor flushing toilet for the sole use of their household	=
			(ii) 8.6% live in a household considering their dwelling as too dark	(ii) 7.9% live in a household considering their dwelling as too dark	↓
			(iii) 0% have neither a bath nor shower in their dwelling	(iii) 0% have neither a bath nor shower in their dwelling	=
			(iv) 10.1% live in a dwelling with a leaking roof; damp walls, floors, or foundation; or rot in window frames or floor (2017)	(iv) 12% live in a dwelling with a leaking roof; damp walls, floors, or foundation; or rot in window frames or floor (2019)	↑
	Social housing need	Percentage of households in need of social housing with a child aged 0-5	23.1% (2019)	18.4% (2021)	↓

↑ Data increasing ↓ Data decreasing = Data show broadly constant or no significant movement/relatively static



Objective 1: Balance working and caring

Parents will be assisted to balance working and caring to contribute to optimum child development and to best suit their family circumstances

Objective 1a: Low work intensity households

This section looks at evidence that can illustrate how parents are coping with balancing their work and caring responsibilities. Table 10 examines the percentage of children aged 5 and under living in households with very low work intensity across the EU, by the highest educational attainment level of their parents. Very low work intensity households are defined in this context as households where members of the working age population living in the household worked for 20% or less of their total work-time potential during the previous year.

Looking at households where the highest level of education among parents of children aged 5 and under was tertiary level, in 2018, 0% of 0-5 year olds in Malta and Romania lived in very low work intensity households, while 5.6% of those in Sweden and Lithuania lived in very low work intensity households. In 2020, the bottom position was held by Romania alone (0%) and the top position was held by Ireland (4.7%). This represents a slight increase from the percentage of children aged 0-5 living in very low work intensity households in Ireland in 2018 (4.6%).

Table 10 also examines households where the highest level of education among parents of children aged 5 and under was “less than primary, primary and lower secondary education”. In 2018, the country with the lowest percentage of children aged 5 and under living in very low work intensity household was Luxembourg (3%), and the country with the highest level was Finland, with 83.2% of children in this age group living in a very low work intensity household. In 2020, Luxembourg also held the bottom position with 3.5%, and Czechia held the top position with 76.5%. The percentage in Ireland decreased significantly during this time, from 70.5% in 2018 to 52.3% in 2020.


Table 10: Percentage of children aged 0-5 living in very low work intensity households, by educational attainment level of their parents, EU 27 2018-2020

	2018		2019		2020	
	Tertiary education	Less than primary, primary and lower secondary education	Tertiary education	Less than primary, primary and lower secondary education	Tertiary education	Less than primary, primary and lower secondary education
Austria	2.4	42.5	3.7	43.2	3.5	30.0
Belgium	2.1	43.6	2.1	39.9	2.5	37.8
Bulgaria	2.1	42.2	2.0	41.3	1.8	40.6
Croatia	2.4	51.9	1.7	26.9	1.4	16.0
Cyprus	1.9	49.3	1.9	16.3	0.7	19.9
Czechia	2.8	48.2	1.7	57.5	1.2	76.5
Denmark	4.3	35.9	3.1	n/a	2.2	61.9
Estonia	2.6	15.0	2.4	13.8	2.9	22.9
EU 27	n/a	n/a	2.5	22.6	2.4	27.5
Finland	2.6	83.2	3.7	57.8	3.6	56.1
France	2.2	32.5	2.7	29.5	1.9	37.7
Germany	2.2	43.2	3.0	23.5	3.9	39.3
Greece	1.6	22.4	1.2	22.6	2.5	11.2
Hungary	0.9	12.2	0.3	13.7	2.6	17.5
Ireland	4.6	70.5	4.6	74.5	4.7	52.3
Italy	2.5	16.4	2.8	12.1	2.0	17.0
Latvia	4.2	12.1	2.3	15.3	4.4	13.7
Lithuania	5.6	n/a	2.1	n/a	2.9	n/a
Luxembourg	1.0	3.0	0.4	6.6	0.3	3.5
Malta	0.0	12.3	0.0	11.3	0.1	15.8
Netherlands	2.0	21.8	2.7	23.3	1.5	32.0
Poland	1.1	23.5	0.6	17.9	1.0	15.9
Portugal	1.3	11.9	1.5	11.5	1.5	11.4
Romania	0.0	21.8	0.0	15.2	0.0	17.8
Slovakia	1.0	63.0	1.8	72.5	0.6	34.5
Slovenia	0.3	38.2	0.5	28.4	0.9	27.0
Spain	1.1	16.5	3.0	18.4	2.1	15.4
Sweden	5.6	45.8	5.1	44.5	4.2	43.1

Source: Eurostat Survey of Income and Living Conditions (SILC), 2018-2020



Objective 1b: Children living in jobless households

Table 11 examines the percentage of children aged 5 and under living in jobless households in Ireland, from q4 2018 to q4 2021.⁹ This figure was highest in q4 2018, with 11.8% of these children living in jobless households, and was lowest in q4 2021, with 8% of children in this age group living in jobless households.

Table 11: Percentage of children aged 5 and under living in jobless households, Q4 2018 - Q4 2021

	2018Q4	2019Q4	2020Q4	2021Q4
Percentage living in a jobless household	11.8	10.3	9.2	8.0
Number living in a jobless household	45,100	39,100	34,100	28,600

Source: CSO Labour Force Survey, 2018-2021

Objective 1c: Maternity and paternity benefit uptake

Looking at the maternity and paternity benefit uptake rates by sector,¹⁰ both maternity and paternity benefit uptake rates have decreased from 2017 to 2019 (see Table 12). Maternity benefit uptake rates reduced from 5.8 per 100 female employees in 2017 to 5.3 per female 100 employees in 2019, and paternity benefit uptake rates reduced from 3.2 per 100 male employees in 2017 to 3.1 per 100 male employees in 2019. This may partially reflect the decline in birth rates during this time, which reduced from 61,824 registered births in 2017 to 59,294 in 2019.¹¹

The Accommodation and Food Service Activities sector had the lowest maternity and paternity benefit uptake rates in 2017 (3 per 100 female employees and 1.3 per 100 male employees); 2018 (2.7 and 1.1); and 2019 (2.5 and 1.1). The Education sector and Financial and Real Estate Activities sector both had the highest rates of maternity

⁹ Note that this figure is based on households where all persons 15+ are classified as either unemployed or inactive according to ILO definitions (i.e. nobody in the household is classified as employed). This differs from the unemployment definition in the Census, which does not include those who are looking for a job, those who are a student, those looking after home/family, those who are retired, and those who are unable to work due to permanent sickness or disability.

¹⁰ Maternity benefit uptake rates are calculated as the number availing of maternity benefit per 100 female employees, and paternity benefit rates are calculated as the number availing of paternity benefit per 100 male employees. Those eligible for maternity benefit are entitled to 26 weeks of paid leave, while those eligible for paternity benefit are entitled to two weeks of paid leave. For more information, see <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/eampb/employmentanalysisofmaternityandpaternitybenefits2016-2019/>

¹¹ For more information, see <https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/birthsdeathsandmarriages/vitalstatisticsannualreport/>



benefit uptake in 2017, with 8 in every 100 female employees taking up maternity leave that year. The Education sector had the highest rate of maternity benefit uptake in 2018 (7.8), while the Public Administration and Defence sector had the highest rate in 2019 (8.3). The Public Administration and Defence sector had the highest rate of paternity benefit uptake in 2017 and 2018 (both 4.8) and in 2019 (5.6).¹²

Table 12: Maternity and paternity benefit uptake rate by sector (per 100 employees), 2017-2019

	2017		2018		2019	
	Maternity	Paternity	Maternity	Paternity	Maternity	Paternity
Accommodation and Food Service Activities	3.0	1.3	2.7	1.1	2.5	1.1
Administrative and Support Service Activities	3.5	2.1	3.3	2.0	3.2	1.7
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	4.3	3.0	3.9	2.4	3.6	2.9
Construction	5.1	3.1	6.1	3.0	6.0	3.4
Education	8.0	4.3	7.8	4.2	7.2	3.8
Financial and Real Estate	8.0	4.7	7.3	4.3	6.6	4.2
Human Health and Social Work Activities	6.0	3.0	6.2	2.9	5.7	2.7
Industry	6.2	4.0	6.2	3.9	6.2	4.5
Information and Communication	5.0	3.1	5.3	2.9	5.2	3.3
Other NACE Activities	5.8	2.1	5.8	2.0	5.2	1.7
Professional, Scientific and Technical Activities	5.6	3.4	5.5	3.1	5.3	3.1
Public Administration and Defence	7.7	4.8	7.4	4.8	8.3	5.6
Transportation and Storage	6.1	3.4	5.6	3.0	5.5	3.2
Wholesale and Retail Trade	4.6	2.8	4.3	2.5	4.3	2.8
Total maternity/paternity benefit rate	5.8	3.2	5.4	2.9	5.3	3.1

Source: CSO Labour Force Survey (LFS), 2017-2019

¹² For information about the percentage of eligible fathers in Ireland who did not take up paternity benefit by sector, see table 6c in Statistical Spotlight #6: Gender Norms in Ireland: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/c2a87f-the-statistical-spotlight-series/>



Objective 1d: Households that availed of flexible working arrangements

Table 13 looks at the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the uptake of remote working among parents with children aged 5 and under. The percentage of parents that availed of some form of remote working was 9.5% pre-Covid (i.e. any time before Q1 2020), but jumped to 45.5% post-Covid (from q3 2020 to q3 2021). While comparable data on use of flexible hours is not available for the pre-Covid period, the percentage of parents with children aged 5 and under that availed of flexible hours was 15.5% in the post-Covid period.

Table 13: Percentage of households with children aged 0-5 that availed of some form of remote working, pre-Covid and post-Covid

	Pre-Covid	Post-Covid (Q3 2020 - Q3 2021)
Availed of some form of remote working	9.5	45.5
Availed of flexible hours	n/a	15.5

Source: CSO Personal and Work-Life Balance Survey, 2021

Table 14 examines the types of barriers facing parents with children aged 5 and under in taking both paid and unpaid leave during the post-Covid period.¹³ Being short staffed was the main barrier to taking paid leave, with 64.5% of parents with children aged 5 and under that experienced barriers to taking paid leave reporting that they faced this barrier. This was also the main barrier faced by parents with children aged 5 and under who reported experiencing barriers to taking unpaid leave (65.1%). A lack of flexibility in the workplace in relation to taking leave was the second most common challenge experienced by those facing barriers to taking paid leave (33.8%) and the fourth most common experienced by those facing barriers to taking unpaid leave (24%). Being too busy in work to take leave was the second most common challenge facing those who experienced barriers to taking unpaid leave (26.2%) and the fourth most common for those experiencing barriers to taking paid leave (24.6%). Other common challenges for those experiencing barriers to taking paid leave included the build-up of work while on leave, with 26.6% facing this

¹³ Data on barriers to paid and unpaid leave is only available for the post-Covid period q3 2020 – q3 2021.



barrier,¹⁴ while financial loss was another common challenge faced by those experiencing barriers to taking unpaid leave (24.7%).¹⁵

Table 14: Percentage of parents with children aged 0-5 that experienced barriers to taking paid and unpaid leave by barrier type, q3 2020 - q3 2021

	Barriers to taking paid leave	Barriers to taking unpaid leave
Short staffed/lack of staff to cover work	64.5	65.1
Lack of flexibility of taking leave/lack of flexibility in workplace	33.8	24
Work builds up while on leave	26.6	n/a
Too busy in work to take leave/work is too busy to allow leave	24.6	26.2
Other	15.7	17.9
Need to keep leave for school holidays	9.5	n/a
Not sure how many holidays entitled to/unsure of leave available	5.1	1.7
Not enough leave	4.9	n/a
Harmful for career	4.3	8.8
Need to keep leave if children get sick	2.6	n/a
Unsure of entitlements to unpaid schemes	n/a	1.7
Financial loss	n/a	24.7
Lack of job stability	n/a	5.8
Not available in workplace	n/a	15.7

Source: CSO Personal and Work-Life Balance Survey, 2021

¹⁴ This option was not offered to those who reported experiencing barriers to taking unpaid leave, only to those who reported experiencing barriers to paid leave. The inclusion of “N/A” in the “Barriers to taking unpaid leave” column indicates that this barrier option was not offered to those who reported experiencing barriers to taking unpaid leave.

¹⁵ This option was not offered to those who reported experiencing barriers to taking paid leave, only to those who reported experiencing barriers to unpaid leave. The inclusion of “N/A” in the “Barriers to taking paid leave” column indicates that this barrier option was not offered to those who reported experiencing barriers to taking paid leave.



Objective 2: Information, services and supports for parents

Parents will benefit from high-quality, evidence-based information and services on various aspects of parenting to support child development and positive family relationships along a continuum of need.

Objective 2a: Parent & Toddler grants

In addressing Objective 2, this part of the Spotlight presents data on parenting supports and services that are available to support child development and positive family relationships. One such support is the Parent & Toddler grant, which is administered to non-profit Parent & Toddler groups by Pobal and local County Childcare Committees (CCCs). The funding can be used for expenses including play and educational equipment (e.g. toys and books); activities for the children (e.g. arts and crafts, music); and training for parents (e.g. paediatric first aid, committee skills, parenting courses). Table 15 looks at the number of Parent & Toddler grants approved by local CCCs from 2019-2021. The total number of grants approved decreased significantly from 414 in 2019 to 171 in 2020, before rising to 229 in 2021. This is primarily due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, which resulted in the closure or pausing of many existing Parent & Toddler groups. The highest number of grants was approved by Cork County local CCC in 2019 (41); by Dublin City local CCC in 2020 (18); and by Donegal local CCC in 2021 (21).



Table 15: Number of Parent & Toddler grants approved by local County Childcare Committees, 2019-2021

	2019	2020	2021
Carlow	5	2	2
Cavan	9	4	7
Clare	6	1	4
Cork City	7	7	6
Cork County	41	10	16
Donegal	29	16	21
Dublin City	26	18	12
Dún Laoighaire Rathdown	4	1	5
Fingal	13	0	4
Galway	26	14	13
Kerry	17	4	9
Kildare	14	5	7
Kilkenny	6	0	3
Laois	4	2	1
Leitrim	7	14	3
Limerick County	26	0	14
Longford	5	2	4
Louth	10	16	6
Mayo	23	4	13
Meath	20	17	9
Monaghan	8	2	7
Offaly	12	0	6
Roscommon	11	9	7
Sligo	5	2	4
Tipperary	28	9	11
South Dublin	14	8	12
Waterford	10	2	8
Westmeath	8	0	6
Wexford	13	2	7
Wicklow	7	0	2
Totals	414	171	229

Source: Pobal, 2019-2021



Objective 2b: Family support services

Table 16 examines the number of children referred to a Family Support Service (FSS), which is an umbrella term for a diverse landscape of responsive community and home-based services and supportive relationships designed to promote family functioning. These services range in complexity according to presenting need, and focus on early intervention in promoting and protecting the well-being and rights of children and families. Particular attention is given to those who are vulnerable or at risk, with the early intervention focus of FSS aiming to protect against risk escalation. FSS are provided through Family Resource Centres; (targeted) Family Centres; in-home services; home visiting; counselling and therapy services; and parenting programmes. Table 16 shows how the number of children referred to a FSS decreased from 37,024 in 2019 to 32,473 in 2021, while the percentage of referred children who received a service during the year increased from 67% in 2019 to 73% in 2021.

Table 16 also examines the number of operating Child and Family Support Networks (CFSNs) in a given year, which are established across the country to provide services that can provide integrated and comprehensive interventions for vulnerable children and their families. This can involve local statutory child and family service providers (e.g. psychologists; public health nurses; social work; justice; education and welfare) and local voluntary and community children and families services (Family Support Centres; agencies currently funded through the HSE/CFSA children and families services; & organisations funded through other sources e.g. Pobal, Department of Education). The number of operating CFSNs increased slightly during this time, from 115 in 2019 to 122 in 2021.

Table 16: Children referred to Family Support Services, 2019-2021

	2019	2020	2021
Number of children referred to a family support service	37,024	31,267	32,473
Percentage of referred children who received a service	67%	72%	73%
Number of operating Child and Family Support Networks	115	121	122

Source: Tusla, 2019-2021



Objective 2c: Children in care

Objective 2c examines the State’s provision of Alternative Care services, such as the placement of children in care when parents are not able or available to provide the necessary care. Looking at the number of children aged 5 and under in care from 2018 to 2020, the numbers have decreased over time, from 1,096 in 2018 to 978 in 2020 (see Table 17). The vast majority these children were in foster care, while a small minority were in other types of care,¹⁶ and children were rarely placed in residential care.

Table 17: Number of children aged 0-5 in care by placement type, 2018-2020

	2018	2019	2020
Residential Care	0	0	*17
Foster Carer	1,092	1,074	973
Other	4	7	5
Total	1,096	1,081	978

Source: Tusla, 2018-2020

While the reasons children can be placed in care are varied, they are typically broken down into five categories (see Table 18). From 2018 to 2020, the primary reason for being in care among children aged 5 and under was neglect, with over half of children in this age group placed in care due neglect across the three years (52.4-52.6%). This was followed by welfare concerns (33-37.3%); emotional abuse (5.3-7.7%); physical abuse (3.5-5.9%); and sexual abuse (0.8-1.4%).

Table 18: Number of children aged 5 and under in care by primary reason for being care, 2018-2020

	2018		2019		2020	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Physical Abuse	38	3.5	52	4.8	58	5.9
Emotional Abuse	58	5.3	65	6.0	75	7.7
Sexual Abuse	15	1.4	11	1.0	8	0.8
Neglect	576	52.6	566	52.4	514	52.6
Welfare	409	37.3	387	35.8	323	33.0
Total	1096	100.0	1081	100.0	978	100.0

Source: Tusla, 2018-2020

¹⁶ Other types of care include children in supported lodgings, at home under a care order, in a detention school/centre, other residential centre (e.g., disability unit or drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre).

¹⁷ * refers to the number placed in residential care in 2020, which is too small to be disclosed and has been combined with “other”.



Objective 2d: Children in direct provision

Looking at the number of children placed in direct provision from 2019 to 2021, the number of children aged 5 and under have decreased from 883 in 2019 to 675 in 2021 (see Table 19).¹⁸ Children aged 5 and under accounted for 52.7% of all children in direct provision in 2019, which reduced to 37% in 2020 and 32.4% in 2021.

Table 19: Children aged 5 and under in direct provision, 2019-2021

	2019	2020	2021
Percentage of children in Direct Provision aged 5 and under	52.7%	37.0%	32.4%
All children aged 5 and under	883	734	675

Source: DCEDIY International Protection Accommodation Services (IPAS), 2019-2021

Objective 2e: Children in refuges and safe homes

Refuges and safe homes are types of emergency domestic violence accommodation needed for safety in times of crisis. While refuge accommodation usually consists of individual units or in a large building or shared campus, safe homes are usually provided as a separate unit of accommodation (e.g. a flat or a house) at a community or local level that generally suits those at low to medium risk of serious harm. The number of children aged 0-4¹⁹ accommodated in refuges has decreased over time, from 874 in 2017 to 594 in 2019 (see Table 20). The number of children aged 0-4 accommodated in safe homes has slightly decreased over this time, from 14 in 2017 to 13 in 2019, despite an increase to 23 in 2018.

Table 20: The number of children aged 0-4 who accessed safe accommodation, 2017-2019

	2017	2018	2019
Number of children accommodated in refuges	874	682	594
Number of children accommodated in safe homes	14	23	13

Source: Tusla, 2017-2019

¹⁸ The number of children under 5 in direct provision is likely to rise significantly in 2022 due to a large increase in the number of international protection applicants.

¹⁹ Data for 0-5 years are not available as data are collected in specific age groups (e.g. 0-4 years, 5-9 years).



Objective 3: Practical and material resources

Families and communities will be supported to provide children with the necessary material and practical resources to encourage positive development in the early years

Objective 3a: Poverty rates

This section aims to get a better understanding of how many children aged 5 and under may not have the necessary resources to support positive development in the early years. The consistent poverty rate²⁰ among this age group decreased from 6.4% in 2017 to 2.8% in 2021, while the at-risk of poverty rate²¹ decreased from 11.9% in 2017 to 8.4% in 2021²² (see Table 21). The deprivation rate²³ also reduced over time, from 19.4% in 2017 to 15.3% in 2021, despite increasing to 22.6% in 2019.

Table 21: Percentage of children aged 5 and under at risk of poverty and experiencing consistent poverty, 2017-2021

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Consistent Poverty Rate	6.4	4.8	5.9	4.9	2.8
At Risk of Poverty Rate	11.9	8.9	10.7	11.6	8.4
Deprivation Rate	19.4	17.9	22.6	16.0	15.3

Source: CSO Survey of Income and Living Conditions, 2017-2021

Table 22 looks at the percentage of households with a child aged 5 and under that were experiencing food poverty²⁴ and energy poverty²⁵ from 2017-2019. The

²⁰ The consistent poverty measure looks at those who are defined as being at risk of poverty and experiencing enforced deprivation.

²¹ The at-risk-of-poverty rate is the share of persons with an equivalised income below a given percentage (usually 60%) of the national median income.

²² Caution should be taken when comparing 2017-2018 SILC data to 2020-2021 SILC data, due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and associated impacts of temporary financial supports, as well as the operational and methodological changes that were made introduced to the running of the survey from 2020 onwards. For more information, see <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-silc/surveyonincomeandlivingconditionssilc2021/backgroundnotes/>

²³ The deprivation rate captures those experiencing two or more of the eleven basic deprivation indicators. To view the full list of deprivation items, see <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-silc/surveyonincomeandlivingconditionssilc2021/backgroundnotes/>

²⁴ Food poverty is defined as the percentage of households with at least one child aged 5 and under that have an inability to afford a meal with meat, chicken, fish, or vegetarian equivalent every second day. For more information, see <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-silc/surveyonincomeandlivingconditionssilc2019/backgroundnotes/>

²⁵ Energy poverty is defined as the percentage of households with at least one child aged 5 and under that have an inability to keep home adequately warm. For more information, see <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-silc/surveyonincomeandlivingconditionssilc2019/backgroundnotes/>



percentage experiencing food poverty was highest in 2018 (2.1%) and lowest in 2019 (1.6%). The percentage experiencing energy poverty was highest in 2019 (6.1%) and lowest in 2017 (3.8%).

Table 22: Percentage of households with a child aged 5 and under experiencing food and energy poverty, 2017-2019

	2017	2018	2019
Food poverty	1.8	2.1	1.6
Energy poverty	3.8	4.3	6.1

Source: CSO Survey of Income and Living Conditions, 2017-2021

Objective 3b: Housing quality

Table 23 looks at the share of children aged 5 and under living in a household that may be deemed to be of insufficient quality for their needs, and compares the data from Ireland with the EU average. In most cases, children aged 5 and under living in Ireland fared better than the EU average for this age group. 0% of children aged 5 and under living in Ireland did not have an indoor flushing toilet for the sole use of their household from 2017-2019, while this figure ranged from 1.5-1.8% for the EU average of this age group. All children aged 5 and under living in Ireland had a bath or shower in their dwelling in 2017 and 2019 (this was not the case for 0.1% of children in 2018), while 1.4-1.7% of children aged 0-5 in the EU did not have a bath or shower.

In the case of the percentage of children aged 5 and under living in a dwelling with a leaking roof, damp walls, floors or foundation, or rot in window frames or floor, this figure ranged from 10.1% in 2017 to 12% in 2019 in Ireland, while the EU average figure ranged from 14-15.3%. The percentage of children aged 5 and under living in a household considering their dwelling to be too dark was higher in Ireland than the EU average from 2017-2019, ranging from 5.1-8.6% in Ireland compared to a range of 5.1-5.4% across the EU.


Table 23: Children aged 5 and under by quality of their household dwelling, 2017-2019

		2017	2018	2019
Percentage of children aged 0-5 not having indoor flushing toilet for the sole use of their household	Ireland	0.0	0.0	0.0
	EU	1.8	1.6	1.5
Percentage of children aged 0-5 living in households considering their dwelling as too dark	Ireland	8.6	5.1	7.9
	EU	5.4	5.1	5.1
Percentage of children aged 0-5 having neither a bath, nor a shower in their dwelling	Ireland	0.0	0.1	0.0
	EU	1.7	1.4	1.4
Percentage of children aged 0-5 living in a dwelling with a leaking roof, damp walls, floors or foundation, or rot in window frames or floor	Ireland	10.1	11.4	12.0
	EU	14.3	15.3	14.0

Source: Eurostat Survey of Income and Living Conditions (SILC), 2017-2019

Objective 3c: Social housing need

Table 24 looks at households with a child aged 5 and under that are in need of social housing from 2019 to 2021.²⁶ This figure decreased during this time, from 15,891 in 2019 to 10,897 in 2021. The share of all households in need of social housing that had at least one child aged 5 and under was 23.1% in 2019, but dropped to 18.4% in 2021.

Table 24: Households in need of social housing with a child aged 0-5, 2019-2021

	2019	2020	2021
Number of households with a child aged 5 and under in need of social housing	15,891	12,745	10,897
% of households in need of social housing with a child aged 5 and under	23.1	20.6	18.4

Source: Local Government Management Agency (LGMA), 2019-2021

²⁶ Data on social housing need does not include those already housed under the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme that wish to transfer to social housing, as these households are placed on a separate transfer list. By q1 2021, 67% of households housed under the HAP scheme had at least 1 child under the age of 18.



Goal B: Optimum physical and mental health

Table 25: Summary table of key statistics under the objectives of Goal B

Objective	Theme	Key statistic	First value	Second value	Change
4. Positive health behaviours	Antenatal care	Share of maternities who received antenatal care in the first trimester (0-12 weeks) by occupation	20.8% lower professional (2017)	22.8% lower professional (2019)	↑
	Antenatal care	Share of maternities who received antenatal care in the first trimester (0-12 weeks) by age group	36.1% 30-34 age group (2017)	35% 30-34 age group (2019)	↓
	Births by occupation	Percentage of births by mother's occupation	19.9% lower professional (2017)	21.5% lower professional (2019)	↑
	Preterm births	Percentage of live births that were preterm	6.7% (2017)	6.7% (2019)	=
	Length of maternity hospital stay	Mean length of maternity stay in hospital	2.7 days (2017)	2.7 days (2019)	=
	Breastfeeding rates	Exclusive breastfeeding rates at discharge, by birth country of mothers living in Ireland	43.5% of mothers born in Ireland (2017)	41.8% of mothers born in Ireland (2019)	↓
5. High quality health services	Reason for hospital admissions	Top principal diagnoses for in-patient discharges aged 0-5 years, as a share of top 10 principal diagnoses that year	(i) 16% diagnosed with acute bronchiolitis	(i) 8% diagnosed with acute bronchiolitis	↓
			(ii) 14% diagnosed with disorders related to short gestation and birth weight (2018)	(ii) 19% diagnosed with disorders related to short gestation and birth weight (2020)	↑



Objective	Theme	Key statistic	First value	Second value	Change
	Children on out-patient waiting lists	Number of children aged 0-5 on out-patient waiting lists	(i) 9,503 waiting more than one year (ii) 36,269 waiting in total (December 2019)	(i) 10,611 waiting more than one year (ii) 34,312 waiting in total (December 2021)	↑ ↓
	Children on in-patient waiting lists	Number of children aged 0-5 on in-patient waiting lists	(i) 391 waiting more than one year (ii) 2,813 waiting in total (December 2019)	(i) 718 waiting more than one year (ii) 3,168 waiting in total (December 2021)	↑ ↑
	Assessment of Need	Percentage of completed applications for Assessment of Need that were for children aged 0-5	57% (2019)	62% (2021)	↑
6. Positive mental health	Children with parents that entered treatment for problem alcohol use in the past year	Numer of children aged 0-5 with parents treated for alcohol as a main problem	1,115 (2019)	856 (2020)	↓
	Children with parents that entered treatment for problem drug use in the past year	Numer of children aged 0-5 with parents treated for drugs as a main problem	1,987 (2019)	2,255 (2020)	↑

↑ Data increasing ↓ Data decreasing = Data show broadly constant or no significant movement/relatively static



Objective 4: Positive health behaviours

Parents, families and communities will be supported to engage in and promote positive health behaviours among babies and young children, starting from the pre-conception period

Objective 4a: Antenatal care

This section examines the different kinds of supports and services used by families to support positive development and health behaviours in young children. Table 26 looks at the share of maternities who received antenatal care²⁷ in the first trimester from 2017-2019, by occupation.²⁸ The most common occupation was “Lower professional”, ranging from 20.8-22.8% of maternities; followed by “Intermediate non-manual workers” (18.3-19%); followed by “Home duties” (14-16.9%) or “Other non-manual workers” (14.9-15.2%).

Table 26: Share of maternities who received antenatal care in the first trimester (0-12 weeks) by occupation, 2017-2019

	2017	2018	2019
Employers & managers	7.3	7.3	8.2
Farmers & farm managers	0.1	0.2	0.1
Higher professional	7.3	7.8	8.6
Home duties	16.9	14.3	14.0
Intermediate non-manual workers	19.0	18.3	18.4
Lower professional	20.8	22.5	22.8
Not classifiable	3.2	3.4	3.1
Not stated	0.4	1.2	1.4
Other agricultural occupations & fisherwomen	0.2	0.2	0.2
Other non-manual workers	15.1	15.2	14.9
Salaried employees	1.1	1.1	0.9
Semi-skilled manual workers	2.7	2.4	2.3
Skilled manual workers	1.3	1.3	1.2
Unemployed	4.5	4.8	3.8
Unskilled manual workers	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Healthcare Pricing Office (HPO), 2017-2019

²⁷ Antenatal care includes the following options: ‘1. Hospital/Obstetrician’, ‘2. GP only’, ‘3. Hospital or GP combined’ or ‘5. Midwife only’.

²⁸ Occupations are coded and grouped, with minor modifications, according to the system of socio-economic groupings as used by the Central Statistics Office in the 1991 Census of Population, Volume 6.



Table 27 looks at the share of maternities who received antenatal care in the first trimester by age group. From 2017-2019, this was most common among the 30-34 age group, ranging from 35-36.1% of maternities; followed by the 35-39 age group (30.9-32.1%), followed by the 25-29 age group (16.5-17.3%).

Table 27: Share of maternities who received antenatal care in the first trimester (0-12 weeks) by age group, 2017-2019

	2017	2018	2019
Under 20 Years	1.5	1.3	1.2
20-24 Years	7.7	8.0	7.2
25-29 Years	17.3	16.9	16.5
30-34 Years	36.1	35.0	35.0
35-39 Years	30.9	31.3	32.1
40 Years and Over	6.5	7.5	8.0
Not Stated	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Healthcare Pricing Office (HPO), 2017-2019



Objective 4b: Births by occupation

Table 28 examines the percentage of births²⁹ by mother’s occupation, from 2017-2019. The highest percentage of births was in the “Lower professional” group, ranging from 19.9-21.5% of births during this time; followed by “Intermediate non-manual workers” (17.5-18.4%) and “Home duties” (15-18.7%).

Table 28: Percentage of births by mother's occupation, 2017-2019

	2017	2018	2019
Employers and Managers	7.3	7.4	7.6
Farmers and Farm Managers	0.1	0.1	0.1
Higher Professional	7.4	7.8	8.1
Home Duties	18.7	16	15
Intermediate Non-Manual Workers	18.4	17.5	17.5
Lower Professional	19.9	21.1	21.5
Not Classifiable	3.4	3.5	3.1
Not Stated	0.5	2.4	4.1
Other Agricultural Occupations	0.2	0.2	0.2
Other Non-Manual Workers	14.3	14.3	14.1
Salaried Employees	1.1	1.1	0.9
Semi-Skilled Manual Workers	2.8	2.5	2.3
Skilled Manual Workers	1.3	1.2	1.2
Unemployed	4.7	4.9	4.3
Unskilled Manual Workers	0	0	0
Total	100	100	100

Source: Healthcare Pricing Office (HPO), 2017-2019

²⁹ In accordance with the WHO guidelines, only births weighing 500 grams or more are included in any analysis of NPRS data.



Objective 4c: Preterm births

The percentage of live births that were preterm ranged from 6.7% in 2017 and 2019 to 6.9% in 2018. This ranged from 4.8% to 5% of live singleton births, to 55.1% to 56.7% of live multiple births (see Table 29 and Figure 2).

Table 29: Percentage of live births that were preterm, 2017-2019

	2017	2018	2019
% of all live births	6.7	6.9	6.7
% of live singleton births	4.8	5.0	4.9
% of live multiple births	56.3	55.1	56.7

Source: Healthcare Pricing Office (HPO), 2017-2019

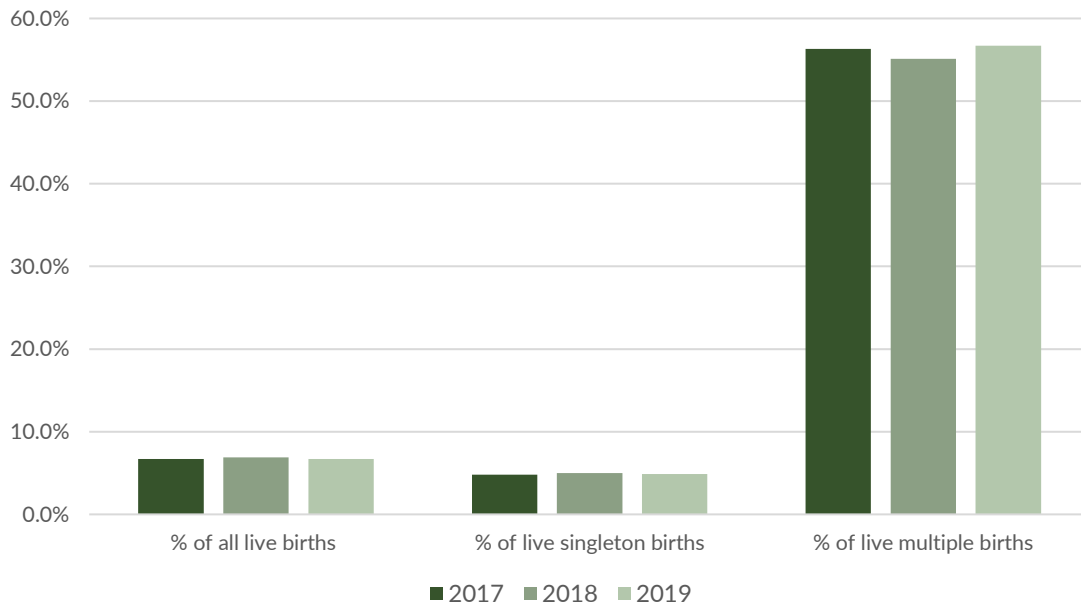


Figure 2: Percentage of live births that were preterm, 2017-2019

Table 30 and Figure 3 examine the mean length of a maternity stay in hospital from 2017-2019. This was 2.7 days for maternities with non-preterm infants, and ranged from 12.5-12.8 days for maternities with preterm infants.

Table 30: Mean length of maternity stay in hospital, 2017-2019

	2017	2018	2019
Mean number of days	2.7	2.7	2.7
Mean number of days for preterm infants	12.6	12.8	12.5

Source: Healthcare Pricing Office (HPO), 2017-2019

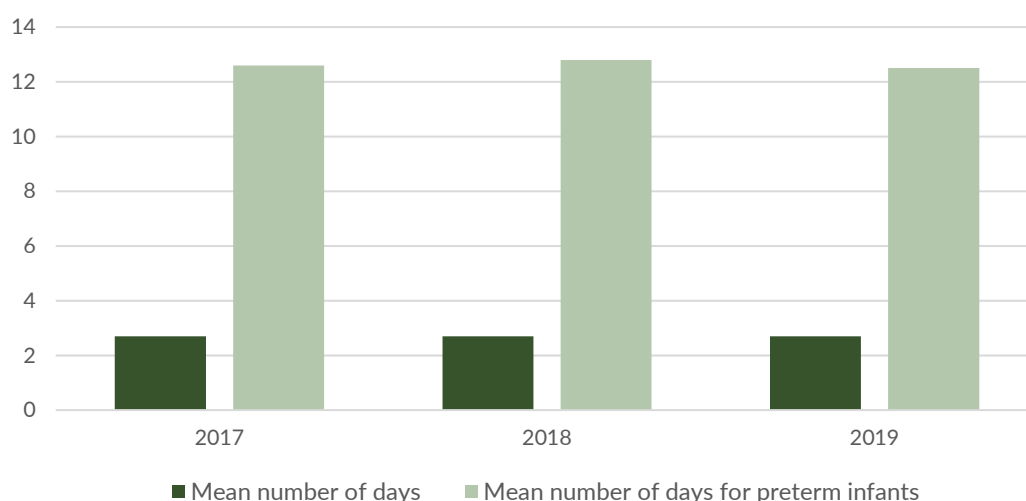


Figure 3: Mean length of maternity stay in hospital, 2017-2019

Objective 4d: Breastfeeding rates

Table 31 examines the percentage of mothers living in Ireland that exclusively breastfed at discharge from 2017-2019, analysed by the mother’s birth country. Mothers born in the EU15 (excluding Ireland and the UK)³⁰ had the highest rates of breastfeeding during this time, ranging from 76.5% in 2017 to 72.2% in 2019. This was followed by mothers born in the rest of Europe (64.8-76%); mothers born in all other EU28 countries (63.7-72.2%); and mothers born in the Americas (65.8-70%). Mothers born in Ireland had the lowest exclusive breastfeeding rates at discharge, decreasing from 43.5% in 2017 to 41.8% in 2019.

Table 31: Exclusive breastfeeding rates at discharge, by birth country of mothers living in Ireland, 2017-2019

	2017	2018	2019
Ireland	43.5	42.7	41.8
UK	50.7	48.3	50.3
EU15 (excluding Ireland and the UK)	76.5	73.3	72.2
EU15 to EU28	72.2	67.5	63.7
Rest of Europe	76.0	69.1	64.8
Africa	49.9	44.5	45.8
Asia	54.7	48.8	47.6
America	70.0	69.2	65.8

Source: Healthcare Pricing Office (HPO), 2017-2019

³⁰ The EU15 (excluding Ireland and the UK) is comprised of the following countries: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and Sweden.



Objective 5: High quality health services

Babies and young children have access to safe, high-quality, evidence-based integrated primary, preventative and specialist healthcare services

Objective 5a: Reason for hospital admissions

This section focuses on data that can illustrate if children aged 5 and under have access to safe and high quality healthcare services, as well as data on disease prevalence among this age group. Looking at the top 10 principal diagnoses³¹ for in-patient discharges among children aged 5 and under³² (see Table 32), acute bronchiolitis was the most common diagnosis among this age group in 2018 (16%) and 2019 (18%), while disorders related to short gestation and low birth weight were the most common in 2020³³ (19%).

Table 32: Top 10 principal diagnoses for in-patient discharges aged 0-5 years (percentages expressed as a share of top 10 diagnoses for each year), 2018-2020

	2018	2019	2020
Acute bronchiolitis	16	18	8
Disorders related to short gestation and low birth weight; not elsewhere classified	14	14	19
Acute upper respiratory infections of multiple and unspecified sites	10	9	7
Viral and other specified intestinal infections	10	9	N/A ³⁴
Viral infection of unspecified site	9	9	6
Medical observation and evaluation for suspected diseases and conditions	9	9	9
Abnormalities of breathing	8	8	9
Respiratory distress of the newborn	8	10	15
Unspecified acute lower respiratory infection	8	8	N/A
Other disorders of urinary system	7	N/A	10
Other gastroenteritis and colitis of infectious and unspecified origin	N/A	7	N/A
Neonatal jaundice from other and unspecified causes	N/A	N/A	9
Transient disorders of carbohydrate metabolism specific to the foetus and newborn	N/A	N/A	6

Source: Healthcare Pricing Office (HPO), 2018-2020

³¹ Principal Diagnosis is the diagnosis established after study to be chiefly responsible for occasioning an episode of admitted patient care, an episode of residential care, or an attendance at the health care establishment.

³² This data is based on hospitalisations, which may include multiple admissions for the same patient.

³³ Please note that the 2020 data provided does not include any public activity performed in private hospitals under the 2020 private hospital agreements.

³⁴ N/A means that the diagnosis did not feature in top 10 principal diagnoses for the 0-5 age group that year.



Objective 5b: Children on waiting lists

Table 33 looks at children aged 5 and under on out-patient waiting lists from 2019 to 2021. The total number of children in this age group on out-patient waiting lists decreased from 36,269 in 2019 to 34,312 in 2021, as measured on a specific date in December of each year. However, the number waiting for more than one year has increased over time, from 9,503 in 2019 (26.2% of the total) to 10,611 in 2021 (30.9% of the total).

Table 33: Children aged 5 and under on out-patient waiting list, 2019-2021

	19/12/2019	23/12/2020	23/12/2021
% waiting > 1 year	26.2%	36.6%	30.9%
Waiting > 1 year	9,503	12,423	10,611
Total waiting	36,269	33,986	34,312

Source: National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF), 2019-2021

Looking at children aged 5 and under on in-patient waiting lists, this number increased from 2,813 in 2019 to 3,168 in 2021, as measured on a specific date in December of each year (see Table 34). The numbers waiting more than one year have almost doubled during this time, from 391 in 2019 (13.9% of the total) to 718 in 2021 (22.7% of the total).

Table 34: Children aged 5 and under on in-patient waiting list, 2019-2021

	19/12/2019	23/12/2020	23/12/2021
% waiting > 1 year	13.9%	25.1%	22.7%
Waiting > 1 year	391	740	718
Total waiting	2,813	2,952	3,168

Source: National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF), 2019-2021



Objective 5c: Assessment of need

An assessment of need (AON) is a short screening assessment to identify if a child has any particular health needs, which are often conducted if a child is thought to have a disability. Table 35 examines the share of AON applications that are completed for children aged 5 and under. The share of completed AON applications that applied to children aged 5 and under was 57% in 2019, but increased to 62% in 2021.

Table 35: Percentage of completed applications for AON for children aged 0-5, 2019-2021

	2019	2020	2021
Under 1 year old	1%	1%	2%
1 years old	4%	8%	7%
2 years old	13%	14%	13%
3 years old	13%	14%	13%
4 years old	14%	11%	13%
5 years old	12%	14%	14%
All 0-5 years old	57%	62%	62%

Source: Health Service Executive (HSE) Disability Services, 2019-2021



Objective 6: Positive mental health

Babies, young children and their parents enjoy positive mental health

Objective 6a: Children with parents that entered treatment for problem drug and/or alcohol use

This section presents data that can shed light on the mental health of parents and young children. While there is very little mental health data on children aged 5 and under, there is data some data on mental health and addiction among parents of children in this age group. Table 36 looks at children aged under 5 years whose parents have entered treatment for problem alcohol use in a particular year. In 2019,³⁵ 19.7% of children with parents who entered treatment for problem alcohol use were aged under 5 years, which decreased to 18.7% in 2020.³⁶

Table 36: Children with parents treated for alcohol as a main problem, 2019-2020

	2019	2020
Total number of children aged under 5 years	1,115	856
% of all children that were aged under 5 years	19.7%	18.7%

Source: National Drug Treatment Reporting System (NDTRS), 2019 and 2020

Table 37 examines children aged under 5 years whose parents have been treated for problem drug use in a particular year. In 2019, 28.5% of children with parents who entered treated for problem alcohol use were aged under 5 years, which increased slightly to 28.7% in 2020.

Table 37: Children with parents treated for drugs as a main problem, 2019-2020

	2019	2020
Total number of children aged under 5 years	1,987	2,255
% of all children that were aged under 5 years	28.5%	28.7%

Source: National Drug Treatment Reporting System (NDTRS), 2019 and 2020

³⁵ Data are only available for 2019 onwards.

³⁶ Please note that NDTRS data are case based, which means there is a possibility that individual children are counted more than once in the figures above, where a service user (parent) received treatment at more than one centre in a calendar year. The figures are based on cases entering treatment and do not include cases continuing in treatment from preceding years.



Goal C: Positive play-based early learning

Table 38: Summary table of key statistics under the objectives of Goal C

Objective	Theme	Key statistic	First value	Second value	Change
7. Positive home learning environment	Engagement in early numeracy activities	Percentage of parents that often engaged with their children in early numeracy activities	(i) 61% parents with boys	(i) 60% parents with boys	↓
			(ii) 59% parents with girls	(ii) 61% parents with girls	↑
			(iii) 35% parents with few home resources for learning	(iii) 41% parents with few home resources for learning	↑
			(iv) 67% parents with many home resources for learning	(iv) 69% parents with many home resources for learning	↑
8. Affordable, high-quality Early Learning and Care	Quality of ELC settings	Percentage of ELC and SAC staff with a highest qualification level of level 7 and above	25% (2018/19)	33.2% (2020/21)	↑
	Quality of ELC settings	Average weekly fees by age range of children and type of childcare provision	(i) €184.36 full time	(i) €186.84 full time	↑
			(ii) €109.98 part-time	(ii) €110.92 part-time	↑
(iii) €73.30 sessional			(iii) €74.20 sessional	↑	
Capacity in ELC settings		(i) Number of 0-5 year olds enrolled in ELC settings	(i) 124,423	(i) 131,592	↑
		(ii) Number of 0-5 year olds on waiting lists	(ii) 13,902	(ii) 16,447	↑
			(2016/17)	(2018/19)	



Objective	Theme	Key statistic	First value	Second value	Change
	Capacity in ELC settings	Percentage of ELC capacity used by 0-5 age group	78% (2017/18)	74% (2018/19)	↓
	Informal childcare	Percentage of children cared for only by their parents by age group	(i) 43.1% of 0-3 age group	(i) 56.4% of 0-3 age group	↑
			(ii) 3.1% of 3-6 age group (2018)	(ii) 5.4% of 3-6 age group (2020)	↑
	Formal childcare	Average number of weekly hours of formal childcare by age group	(i) 21.6 hours for 0-3 age group	(i) 23.7 hours for 0-3 age group	↑
			(ii) 25.1 hours for 3-6 age group (2018)	(ii) 28.7 hours for 3-6 age group (2020)	↑
Diversity in ELC settings	(i) Number of children supported under AIM (ii) Number of services in receipt of AIM support	(i) 3,179	(i) 4,244	↑	
		(ii) 41% (2017/18)	(ii) 45% (2020/21)	↑	
Diversity in ELC settings	(i) Number of children with additional needs attending ELC services (ii) Number of children with a diagnosed disability attending ELC services	(i) 11,636	(i) 8,370	↓	
		(ii) 12,821 (2017/18)	(ii) 8,146 (2019/20)	↓	



Objective	Theme	Key statistic	First value	Second value	Change
	Diversity in ELC settings	(i) Percentage of services providing care to children with additional needs	(i) 75%	(i) 74%	↓
		(ii) Percentage of services providing care to children with a diagnosed disability	(ii) 65%	(ii) 61%	↓
	Diversity in ELC settings	(i) Number of Traveller children enrolled in ELC services	(i) 2,633	(i) 2,831	↑
		(ii) Number of Roma children enrolled in ELC services	(ii) 688	(ii) 1,209	↑
	Diversity in ELC settings	(i) Percentage of services with Traveller children attending	(i) 16%	(i) 18%	↑
		(ii) Percentage of services with Roma children attending	(ii) 7%	(ii) 9%	↑
			(2017/18)	(2019/20)	



Objective	Theme	Key statistic	First value	Second value	Change
9. Supported transitions	Source of entrants to primary school	Percentage of children in mainstream junior infant classes who came from a childcare setting or pre-primary education	93.1% (2018/19)	94.2% (2020/21)	↑
	Age of entrants to primary school	Percentage of children in mainstream junior infant classes by age group on 1st January, 2015-2021	(i) 31.8% aged 4 and under (ii) 68.2% aged 5 and over (2015)	(i) 16.5% aged 4 and under (ii) 83.5% aged 5 and over (2021)	↓ ↑
	Class size	Share of junior infants in mainstream classes by class size	(i) 34.5% of classes had 20-24 pupils (ii) 36.1% of classes had 25-29 pupils (2019)	(i) 35.5% of classes had 20-24 pupils (ii) 31.4% of classes had 25-29 pupils (2019)	↑ ↓
	Special needs school programmes	Percentage of 5 year olds with special needs by school programme type	(i) 74.7% in mainstream national schools (ii) 25.3% in special national schools (2019)	(i) 75.9% in mainstream national schools (ii) 24.1% in special national schools (2021)	↑ ↓
	Special Needs Assistants (SNAs)	Number of SNAs allocated to mainstream primary classes	7,900 (2019/20)	8,609 (2021/22)	↑

↑ Data increasing ↓ Data decreasing = Data show broadly constant or no significant movement/relatively static



Objective 7: Positive home learning environment

Parents, families and communities are supported to provide a nurturing and stimulating environment for children's early learning, starting from birth

Objective 7a: Engagement in early numeracy activities

This section presents available information on the frequency with which parents support a nurturing and stimulating environment for children's early learning. Table 39 presents data from the 2011 and 2015 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), which examines parents' recollections of how frequently they engaged in early numeracy activities with their child before they entered the first grade of primary school. This data is analysed by gender and by the quantity of learning resources in the home, which can be used as a proxy indicator for socioeconomic status.

Parents were much more likely to report engaging in "play with building blocks or construction toys" with boys in both the 2011 study (78% engaged in this activity with boys, versus 58% with girls) and the 2015 study (75% with boys versus 60% with girls). Smaller gender differences were observed for the other numeracy activities included in the study: in 2011 parents were slightly more likely to report engaging in "counting rhymes or singing counting songs"; "play with number toys"; and "board games or card games" with girls, and slightly more likely to report engaging in "counting different things" and "play games involving shapes" with boys. With the exception of "play with building blocks or construction toys", parents in the 2015 study were more likely to engage in all other numeracy activities with girls than with boys.

Looking at socioeconomic status, children in homes with many resources for learning were more likely to "often engage" in each numeracy activity specified than children in homes with few resources. This was the case with 67% of parents with many home learning resources in 2011, and 69% in 2015. This is in contrast to of parents with few home learning resources, where 35% reported that they often engaged in numeracy activities with their children in 2011, although this rose to 41% in 2015.


Table 39: Frequency of parental engagement in early numeracy activities with their children, by gender and access to home resources, 2011-2015

	2011		2015	
	Never/almost never engaged	Often engaged	Never/almost never engaged	Often engaged
Boys				
Say counting rhymes or sing counting songs	5	62	8	58
Play with number toys (e.g., blocks with numbers)	8	53	9	50
Count different things	2	68	2	68
Play games involving shapes (e.g., shape sorting toys, puzzles)	4	64	4	62
Play with building blocks or construction toys	3	75	3	75
Play board games or card games	8	42	6	49
Average	5	61	5	60
Girls				
Say counting rhymes or sing counting songs	5	65	6	65
Play with number toys (e.g., blocks with numbers)	7	55	9	53
Count different things	2	67	2	70
Play games involving shapes (e.g., shape sorting toys, puzzles)	3	63	2	65
Play with building blocks or construction toys	7	58	8	60
Play board games or card games	10	43	6	51
Average	6	59	6	61
Few home resources for learning				
Say counting rhymes or sing counting songs	20	35	17	48
Play with number toys (e.g., blocks with numbers)	20	26	17	31
Count different things	10	39	13	51
Play games involving shapes (e.g., shape sorting toys, puzzles)	16	33	12	37
Play with building blocks or construction toys	16	39	13	50
Play board games or card games	14	35	6	27
Average	16	35	13	41
Many home resources for learning				
Say counting rhymes or sing counting songs	3	73	5	70
Play with number toys (e.g., blocks with numbers)	7	58	6	58
Count different things	2	77	1	80
Play games involving shapes (e.g., shape sorting toys, puzzles)	1	72	1	74
Play with building blocks or construction toys	2	74	3	77
Play board games or card games	7	48	3	57
Average	4	67	3	69

Source: Educational Research Centre (ERC), 2011 and 2015



Objective 8: Affordable, high quality Early Learning and Care

Babies and young children have access to safe, high-quality, developmentally-appropriate, integrated ELC (and school-age childcare), which reflects diversity of need

Objective 8a: Quality of ELC settings

In addressing First 5 Objective 8, this Spotlight looks at data that can illustrate if young children have access to high quality ELC that can respond to a diversity of needs. A key target in First 5 is to ensure that half of all early years educators have a level 7 degree³⁷ or above by 2028. Table 40 examines the progress on this target by presenting the percentage breakdown of ELC and SAC staff members³⁸ from 2018-2021 by the highest qualification level achieved. The most common highest qualification level during this period of time was level 6, however the percentage of ELC and SAC staff members with level 6 as their highest qualification level decreased from 41.8% to 36.9% of staff members from 2018/19 to 2020/21. The percentage of staff members with level 7 or above as their highest qualification level increased during this time, from 25.0% in 2018/19 to 33.2% in 2020/21.

Table 40: Percentage of ELC and SAC staff by highest qualification level, 2018-2021

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Total level 7 and above	25.0	26.6	33.2
NFQ Level 9/10	1.4	1.6	1.4
NFQ Level 8	16.1	16.5	18.2
NFQ Level 7	7.5	8.5	13.6
NFQ Level 6	41.8	42.2	36.9
NFQ Level 5	26.8	25.7	24.9
NFQ Level 4	0.6	0.4	0.4
No relevant qualification	5.8	5.1	4.6

Source: Pobal, 2018-2021

³⁷ Level 7 or higher on the [National Framework of Qualifications \(NFQ\)](#) refers to an ordinary bachelor degree or higher.

³⁸ Figures only refer to staff working directly with children. Note that this includes staff working in SAC-only services, for which there is no minimum qualification requirement.



The average weekly fees charged by ELC and SAC services varies depending on the age of the child and the type of service provision received, i.e. whether the child receives full day, part-time, or sessional care³⁹ (see Table 41). From 2018-2021, the most expensive fees were charged for fully day care, which ranged from an average⁴⁰ of €184.36 in 2018/19 to €184.84 per week in 2020/21, while the least expensive fees were charged for sessional care, which ranged from an average of €73.49 in 2018/19 to €74.34 per week in 2020/21. Across all years and types of service provision, the most expensive fees were charged for children under 1 year of age, and the least expensive fees were typically charged for children aged over 4 years.

Table 41: Average weekly fees by age range of children and type of childcare provision, 2018-2021

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Full day			
Up to 1 year	€195.51	€187.87	€192.06
1-2 years	€189.68	€183.17	€190.28
2-3 years	€186.01	€180.54	€187.62
3-4 years	€184.39	€177.72	€185.52
4-5 years	€183.43	€176.99	€184.61
5-6 years	€169.64	€177.87	€178.64
Average	€184.36	€186.12	€186.84
Part-time			
Up to 1 year	€122.33	€116.31	€117.97
1-2 years	€116.83	€112.08	€116.48
2-3 years	€112.97	€108.69	€113.19
3-4 years	€110.48	€106.57	€110.72
4-5 years	€109.73	€106.57	€110.13
5-6 years	€105.50	€108.88	€107.91
Average	€109.98	€110.75	€110.92
Sessional			
Up to 1 year	€81.21	€79.55	€81.76
1-2 years	€79.16	€77.58	€78.71
2-3 years	€74.92	€74.40	€75.42
3-4 years	€73.14	€72.92	€73.96
4-5 years	€73.03	€73.46	€73.94
5-6 years	€73.49	€75.76	€74.34
Average	€73.30	€73.90	€74.20

Source: Pobal, 2018-2021

³⁹ Full day places are for more than 5 hours per day; part-time places are between 3hrs 31mins and 5 hours per day; and sessional places are between 2hrs 16mins and 3hrs 30mins per day.

⁴⁰ Refers to the median weekly fees.



Objective 8b: Capacity in ELC settings

Table 42 examines at the number of children aged 4 and under enrolled in ELC settings, and the number on waiting lists.⁴¹ The number enrolled has increased from 124,423 in 2016/17 to 131,592 in 2018/19.⁴² The number on waiting lists has increased from 13,902 in 2016/17 to 16,447 in 2018/19. The most commonly enrolled age group across the three years was the 3-4 age group (49,957-54,837); which was also the most common age group on waiting lists across the three years (3,927-5,042).

Table 42: Numbers enrolled and on ELC waiting lists by age group, 2016-2019

	2016/17		2017/18		2018/19	
	Number enrolled	Number on waiting lists	Number enrolled	Number on waiting lists	Number enrolled	Number on waiting lists
0-1 year	2,982	1,552	3,109	1,799	2,991	2,525
1-2 years	9,138	2,250	10,275	2,537	10,895	3,556
2-3 years	16,169	3,328	18,049	2,977	19,515	4,004
3-4 years	52,573	5,042	54,837	3,927	49,957	4,400
4-5 years	43,561	1,730	47,454	1,698	48,234	1,962
Total 0-4	124,423	13,902	133,724	12,938	131,592	16,447

Source: Pobal, 2016-2019

Table 43 looks at the extrapolated ELC capacity⁴³ for children aged 4 and under. This increased from 151,680 in 2017/18, accounting for 78% of total capacity, to 160,481 in 2018/19, accounting for 74% of total capacity. The age 5+ age group accounted for the remaining capacity. Among the 0-4 age group, children aged 3-4 accounted for the greatest share of total capacity (32% in 2017/18 and 28% in 2018/19)

⁴¹ Note that children can be placed on multiple waiting lists at the same time.

⁴² The number enrolled in 2016/17 represented approximately 38% of the 0-4 population.

⁴³ Extrapolated capacity is a combination of the total number enrolled in ELC settings and the total number of vacancies, extrapolated to the national level.

**Table 43:** Extrapolated ELC capacity by age group, 2017-2019

	2017/18		2018/19	
	Capacity	% capacity	Capacity	% capacity
0-1 year	4,003	2%	3,751	2%
1-2 years	12,591	6%	13,127	6%
2-3 years	22,558	11%	23,886	11%
3-4 years	67,556	32%	61,332	28%
4-5 years	57,437	27%	58,385	27%
Total 0-5	151,680	78%	160,481	74%

Source: Pobal, 2017-2019

Objective 8c: Informal and formal childcare attendance

Table 44 examines the percentage of children cared for only by their parents across the EU 27. Among the 0-3 age group, the country with the highest percentage was Slovakia in 2018 (81.6%); Bulgaria in 2019 (69.9%); and Germany in 2020 (80.2%). The country with the lowest percentage for this age group was Greece in 2018 (15.1%); the Netherlands in 2019 (21.2%); and Portugal in 2020 (21.9%). The percentage in Ireland was 43.1% in 2018; 39.3% in 2019; and 56.4% in 2020.

From age 3 to the minimum compulsory school age, the country with the highest percentage of children cared for only by their parents was Croatia in 2018 and 2019 (24.4% and 26.4%); and Germany in 2020 (51.2%). The country with the lowest percentage for this age group was Greece in 2018 (0%); Belgium in 2019 (0.4%); and Spain in 2020 (1.9%). The percentage in Ireland was 3.1% in 2018; 4.5% in 2019; and 5.4% in 2020.


Table 44: Percentage of children cared for only by their parents by age group, EU 27, 2018-2020

	2018		2019		2020	
	0-3 years	From 3 years to minimum compulsory school age	0-3 years	From 3 years to minimum compulsory school age	0-3 years	From 3 years to minimum compulsory school age
Austria	53.0	9.9	55.3	7.4	59.5	8.6
Belgium	37.5	1.1	34.5	0.4	36.3	2.8
Bulgaria	70.6	15.5	69.9	10.1	71.8	5.2
Croatia	58.8	24.4	60.8	26.4	59.0	32.3
Cyprus	32.9	7.0	41.6	10.3	45.0	18.0
Czechia	55.8	10.7	57.6	10.8	66.3	11.3
Denmark	32.3	3.1	31.1	6.6	32.3	7.9
Estonia	52.4	4.6	50.6	3.2	59.7	5.1
EU 27	48.6	7.6	47.1	6.8	53.4	15.2
Finland	59.3	12.6	58.4	10.3	59.1	13.5
France	37.3	3.4	36.4	3.7	36.2	2.0
Germany	59.3	8.5	58.4	7.8	80.2	51.2
Greece	15.1	0.0	40.9	2.4	50.3	8.6
Hungary	58.0	5.2	48.7	6.1	61.2	6.8
Ireland	43.1	3.1	39.3	4.5	56.4	5.4
Italy	52.8	6.4	51.5	5.8	n/a	n/a
Latvia	64.7	9.5	63.8	14.1	60.8	19.0
Lithuania	59.4	11.7	58.6	12.1	69.5	9.5
Luxembourg	25.8	10.2	29.6	6.6	29.5	10.1
Malta	43.6	9.5	45.7	12.8	47.7	13.1
Netherlands	28.9	12.4	21.2	2.2	21.9	5.8
Poland	59.7	21.1	57.6	23.3	56.8	24.6
Portugal	27.6	2.9	22.6	2.2	21.9	7.3
Romania	49.0	10.1	44.0	11.4	55.4	11.0
Slovakia	81.6	22.4	61.2	7.8	63.9	5.7
Slovenia	31.9	3.1	34.9	2.5	39.7	2.2
Spain	42.5	4.9	36.6	1.5	47.9	1.9
Sweden	49.3	4.1	46.3	3.4	45.9	3.9

Source: Eurostat Survey of Income and Living Conditions (SILC), 2018-2020



Table 45 looks at the average number of weekly hours of formal childcare across the EU 27, among children who receive at least one hour of formal childcare. For the 0-3 age group, the country with the highest number of weekly hours of formal childcare was Latvia in 2019 and 2020 (39.0 hours and 40.0 hours), and Portugal in 2018 (39.4 hours). The country with the lowest number of weekly hours for this age group was the Netherlands, with 15.9 hours in 2018; 17.1 hours in 2019; and 18.4 hours in 2020. The average number of hours of formal childcare in Ireland among this age group increased over time, from 21.6 in 2018 to 28.7 in 2020. This trend was in line with the EU27 average, which increased 29.9 hours to 31.2 hours during this time.

From age 3 to the minimum compulsory school age, the country with the highest number of weekly hours of formal childcare was Latvia in 2018 and 2020 (40.2 hours and 40.0 hours) and Portugal in 2019 (38.8 hours). The country with the lowest number of weekly hours for this age group was the Netherlands in 2018 and 2020 (22.1 hours and 23.1 hours), and Romania in 2019 (22.0 hours). The average number of hours of formal childcare in Ireland among this age group increased slightly, from 25.1 in 2018 to 28.7 in 2020. In contrast, the EU27 average decreased from 31.2 hours to 30.1 hours during this time.


Table 45: Average number of weekly hours of formal childcare by age group, EU 27, 2018-2020

	2018		2019		2020	
	0-3 years	From 3 years to minimum compulsory school age	0-3 years	From 3 years to minimum compulsory school age	0-3 years	From 3 years to minimum compulsory school age
Austria	23.6	25.3	23.5	24.0	n/a	n/a
Belgium	30.2	33.7	32.1	33.5	34.1	32.0
Bulgaria	39.3	38.6	38.4	38.5	35.6	28.7
Croatia	38.2	36.3	36.9	36.0	35.7	38.1
Cyprus	33.1	32.9	34.3	33.0	32.8	34.9
Czechia	24.1	31.1	25.3	30.0	29.8	25.1
Denmark	33.5	33.2	33.9	34.4	35.0	35.0
Estonia	33.7	38.0	33.4	37.4	36.2	31.9
EU 27	29.9	31.2	30.3	31.6	31.2	30.1
Finland	31.1	33.5	32.9	34.0	33.5	32.3
France	31.0	31.5	30.4	31.7	34.0	31.5
Germany	32.0	30.9	32.9	32.2	29.5	29.0
Greece	26.6	27.0	27.1	28.6	28.9	27.3
Hungary	33.8	38.4	35.1	36.5	35.7	33.3
Ireland	21.6	25.1	24.8	27.6	23.7	28.7
Italy	28.9	32.6	32.3	33.3	n/a	n/a
Latvia	39.4	40.2	39.0	38.4	40.0	40.0
Lithuania	37.4	38.2	37.0	37.6	39.5	39.3
Luxembourg	35.7	34.4	37.0	35.0	35.4	35.0
Malta	24.0	28.8	28.4	33.1	28.8	23.8
Netherlands	15.9	22.1	17.1	22.4	23.1	18.4
Poland	34.0	33.2	34.1	33.9	31.2	34.4
Portugal	39.4	38.9	38.2	38.8	38.1	38.4
Romania	25.6	22.6	17.3	22.0	23.5	21.8
Slovakia	29.5	35.5	32.4	34.7	35.0	34.1
Slovenia	37.2	36.8	36.8	36.7	36.8	36.9
Spain	25.5	28.3	26.5	28.8	27.6	27.3
Sweden	30.8	34.1	31.7	33.6	33.4	30.9

Source: Eurostat Survey of Income and Living Conditions (SILC), 2018-2020



Objective 8d: Diversity in ELC settings

Table 46 looks at children and ELC services in receipt of support through the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM), which is provided to assist pre-schools in creating a more inclusive environment for children of all abilities. 41% of ELC services were in receipt of AIM support in 2017/18, which rose to 45% in 2020/21. The number of children supported under AIM also rose during this time, from 3,179 in 2017/18 to 4,244 in 2020/21. However, this represents a decrease from 2019/20, which is largely due to a large number of parents of children with additional needs supporting their children at home rather than availing of centre-based care during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Table 46: Children and services in receipt of AIM support, 2017-2021

	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021
Number of children supported under AIM	3,179	2,388	5,708	4,244
% of services in receipt of AIM support	41%	58%	47%	45%

Source: Pobal, 2017-2021

Table 47 examines at the number of children with additional needs or a diagnosed disability attending ELC services, and the percentage of services providing care to these children. In 2017/18, the number of children with additional needs was 11,636, which decreased to 8,370 in 2019/20. The number of children with a diagnosed disability followed a similar trajectory, dropping from 12,821 in 2017/18 to 8,146 in 2019/20. The percentage of services providing care to children with additional needs also decreased slightly during this time, from 75% to 74%, while the percentage of services providing care to children with a diagnosed disability decreased from 65% in 2017/18 to 61% in 2019/20.



Table 47: Children with additional needs/a diagnosed disability enrolled in ELC services, 2017-2020

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Number of children with additional needs attending ELC services	11,636	11,698	8,370
Number of children with a diagnosed disability attending ELC services	12,821	9,368	8,146
Percentage of services providing care to children with additional needs	75%	77%	74%
Percentage of services providing care to children with a diagnosed disability	65%	54%	61%

Source: Pobal, 2017-2020

Table 48 looks at the number of Traveller and Roma children attending ELC services and the percentage of services with Traveller and Roma children. The number of Traveller children attending ELC services increased from 2,633 in 2017/18 to 2,831 in 2019/20, and the number of Roma children almost doubled from 688 to 1,209 during this time. The percentage of services with Traveller children attending was 16% in 2017/18, which rose to 18% in 2019/20, while the percentage of services with Roma children attending was 7% in 2017/18, which rose to 9% in 2019/20.

Table 48: Traveller and Roma children enrolled in ELC services, 2017-2020

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Number of Traveller children attending ELC services	2,633	2,601	2,831
Number of Roma children attending ELC services	688	681	1,209
Percentage of services with Traveller children attending	16%	17%	18%
Percentage of services with Roma children attending	7%	7%	9%

Source: Pobal, 2017-2020



Objective 9: Supported transitions

Children will be supported in their transitions to (and through) ELC settings and onwards to primary schooling.

This section presents data to illustrate how children are supported in transitioning from ELC to primary schooling. Table 49 shows how the percentage of children in mainstream junior infant classes who came from a childcare setting or pre-primary education was 93.1% in 2018/19; and increased to 94.2% in 2020/21. This percentage was typically slightly higher among female children.

Objective 9a: Profile of entrants to primary school

Table 49: Percentage of children in mainstream junior infant classes who came from an ELC setting or pre-primary education, 2018-2021

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Male	92.8	93.4	93.1
Female	93.3	93.3	94.3
Both sexes	93.1	93.3	94.2

Source: Department of Education, 2018-2021

Table 50 examines the percentage of children in mainstream junior infant classes by age group. The proportion of entrants to junior infants aged 4 and under decreased from 31.8% in 2015 to 16.5% in 2021, while the proportion aged 5 and over increased from 68.2% in 2015 to 83.5% in 2021. This acceleration may be largely attributed to the expansion of the ECCE scheme from one year to two years in 2016.⁴⁴

Table 50: Percentage of children in mainstream junior infant classes by age group on 1st January, 2015-2022

	2015/16	2017/18	2019/20	2021/2022
4 and under	31.8	23.1	19.5	16.5
5 and over	68.2	76.9	80.5	83.5

Source: Department of Education, 2015-2022

⁴⁴ The ECCE programme is a universal two-year preschool programme available to all children within the eligible age range. ECCE was a one year programme when first introduced in 2010, which increased to two years in 2016.



Looking at the ethnicity of entrants to junior infant classes from 2018 to 2020, the majority (52.4-53.5%) had a “White Irish” background (see Table 51). This was followed by entrants with “Any other white background” (6.6-6.7%) and “Asian/Asian Irish with a non-Chinese background” (1.9-2.1%). The least common ethnicity across all years was “Black/black Irish with a non-African background” (0.2-0.3%); followed by “Roma” (0.3-0.4%); and “Asian/Asian Irish with a Chinese background” (0.6%).

Table 51: Entrants to junior infant classes in mainstream national schools by ethnicity, 2018-2021

	2018/19		2019/20		2020/21	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Any other white background	4,411	6.6	4,324	6.6	4,219	6.7
Asian/Asian Irish with a Chinese background	369	0.6	414	0.6	371	0.6
Asian/Asian Irish with a non-Chinese background	1,286	1.9	1,328	2.0	1,344	2.1
Black/black Irish with an African background	768	1.2	791	1.2	680	1.1
Black/black Irish with a non-African background	156	0.2	177	0.3	184	0.3
Irish Traveller	974	1.5	1,017	1.6	940	1.5
Not provided	22,332	33.6	21,053	32.2	20,760	33.1
Other (including mixed background)	1,091	1.6	1,121	1.7	1,163	1.9
Roma	239	0.4	200	0.3	202	0.3
White Irish	34,776	52.4	35,022	53.5	32,889	52.4
Total	66,402	100	65,447	100	62,752	100

Source: Department of Education, 2018-2021

Objective 9b: Junior infants class size

Table 52 and Figure 4 illustrate the percentage of children in mainstream junior infant classes by class size. From 2018 to 2020, the most common class size was 25-29 pupils, accounting for 36.1% of mainstream junior infant classes in 2018/19 and 35.2% of classes in 2019/20. The most common class size in 2020/21 was 20-24



pupils, accounting for 35.5% of classes that year. The least common class size was 0-9 pupils in 2018/19 (0.3%) and 35-39 pupils in 2019/20 (0.4%) and 2020/21 (0.1%).

Table 52: Share of junior infants in mainstream classes by class size, 2018-2021

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
0-9 pupils	0.3%	0.5%	1.0%
10-19 pupils	20.9%	23.1%	26.9%
20-24 pupils	34.5%	34.7%	35.5%
25-29 pupils	36.1%	35.2%	31.4%
30-34 pupils	7.8%	6.0%	5.1%
35-39 pupils	0.4%	0.4%	0.1%

Source: Department of Education, 2018-2021

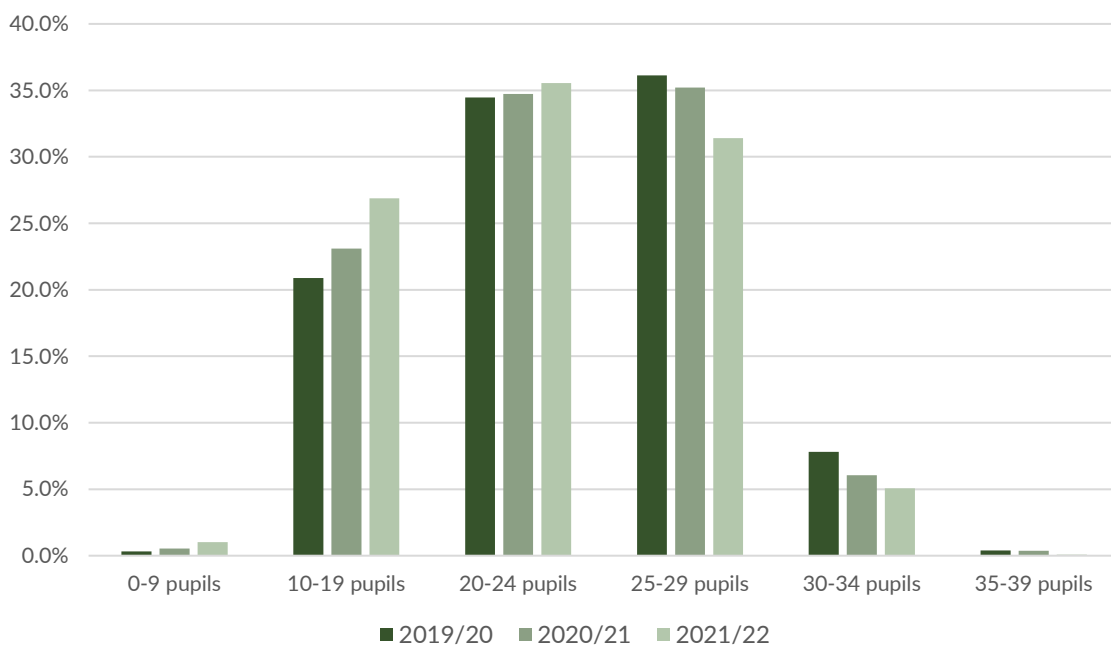


Figure 4: Share of junior infants in mainstream classes by class size, 2018-2021

Objective 9c: Special needs school programmes

Table 53 examines the percentage of 5 year olds with special needs engaged in primary schooling by school programme type. The majority of these children attended mainstream national schools from 2018-2021, ranging from 70.5-75.9% of



enrolments. A minority attended special national schools during this time, ranging from 24.1-29.5% of enrolments.

Table 53: Share of 5 year old pupils with special needs by school programme type, 2018-2021

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Percentage of pupils with special needs in mainstream national schools	74.7%	70.5%	75.9%
Percentage of pupils with special needs in special national schools	25.3%	29.5%	24.1%

Source: Department of Education, 2018-2021

Although data on the number of Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) allocated to junior infants is not available, data available on the number of SNAs allocated to all primary school classes can give an indication of trends in this area (see Table 54). The number of SNAs allocated to all classes in mainstream primary schools increased from 7,900 in 2019/20 to 8,609 in 2020/21. However, it is worth noting that this does not reflect recruitment numbers, as the allocation of one SNA post may be filled by two SNAs working part-time.

Table 54: Number of SNAs allocated to mainstream primary classes, 2019-2022

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Number of SNAs	7,900	8,496	8,609

Source: National Council for Special Education (NCSE), 2019-2022



Summary

In 2016, there were 403,919 children aged 5 and under living in Ireland, accounting for 8.5% of the population. It is estimated that this figure dropped to 365,617 children in 2021. 8.8% of the 0-5 population in 2016 were non-Irish, 1.3% were from the Irish Traveller community, and 3.4% had a disability. Third level education was the most common level of education achieved by mothers of children under 5, but was the least common level (2%) achieved by mothers from the Traveller community.

Reflecting Objective 1 of First 5, this Spotlight has presented the available evidence that can illustrate how parents are coping with balancing their work and caring responsibilities. Some of the data relevant to Objective 1 reveal that in 2020, Ireland was the EU country with the highest percentage of children aged 0-5 living in a very low work intensity household with parents with tertiary education. The percentage of children aged 5 and under living in jobless households has decreased from q4 2018 to q4 2021. The share of households with children aged 5 and under that availed of some form of remote working increased from 10% pre-Covid to 46% post-Covid.

Objective 2 in this Spotlight presents data on parenting supports and services that are available to support child development positive family relationships. Looking at government support for parent and toddler groups, the number of parent and toddler grants approved by local County Childcare Committees decreased from 2019 to 2021, mainly due to the impact of the pandemic. The number of children referred to a Family Support Service also decreased from 2019 to 2021, although the percentage of referred children who received a service increased during this time, as did the number of Child and Family Support Networks.

Objective 3 of this Spotlight aims to get a better understanding of how many children aged 5 and under may not have the necessary resources to encourage positive development in the early years. The at-risk of poverty rate; consistent poverty rate; and deprivation rate among this age group all experienced a large reduction from 2017 to 2021. The share of children aged 5 and under experiencing food poverty also decreased between 2017 and 2019, although the percentage experiencing energy poverty increased during this time.



Objective 4 of this Spotlight examines the different kinds of supports and services used by families to support positive development and health behaviours in young children. Looking at the number of maternities who received antenatal care in the first trimester from 2017-2019, the most common occupation group was “lower professional”, and the most common age group was the 30-34 age group. The majority of mothers who gave birth from 2017 to 2019 were also from the “lower professional” occupation group. The percentage of live births that were preterm ranged from 6.7%-6.9% from 2017-2019, however preterm births accounted for over half of all live multiple births during this time. The mean length of a maternity stay in hospital from 2017-2019 was 2.7 days for maternities with non-preterm infants, and ranged from 12.5-12.8 days for maternities with preterm infants. Mothers born in the EU15 (excluding Ireland and the UK) had the highest rates of exclusive breastfeeding at discharge during this time, while mothers born in Ireland had the lowest rates.

Objective 5 of this Spotlight focuses on data that can illustrate if children aged 5 and under have access to safe and high quality healthcare services. Acute bronchiolitis was the most common in-patient diagnosis among this age group in 2018 and 2019, while disorders related to short gestation and low birth weight were the most common in 2020. The number of children aged 5 and under on in-patient waiting lists increased from 2019 to 2021; and the number waiting more than one year almost doubled during this time. The number of children in this age group on out-patient waiting lists decreased from 2019 to 2021; however, the number waiting for more than one year increased during this time. The share of Assessment of Need applications for children aged 5 and under also increased from 2019 to 2021.

Objective 6 of this Spotlight presents data that can shed light on the mental health of parents and young children. From 2019 to 2020, there was a reduction in the percentage of children with parents who entered treatment for problem alcohol use that were aged under 5 years. During this time, there was a slight increase in the percentage of children with parents who entered treated for problem alcohol use that were aged under 5 years.

Objective 7 of this Spotlight presents information on the uptake of services that are provided families to support a nurturing environment for children’s early learning. The



frequency of parental engagement in early numeracy activities with their children before the first grade of primary school was relatively similar between boys and girls in 2011 and 2015, however, larger differences were apparent between parents with few home resources for learning and parents with many home resources for learning.

Objective 8 of this Spotlight looks at data that can illustrate if young children have access to high quality ELC that can reflect diversity of need. The percentage of ELC and SAC staff with a level 7 qualification or higher increased between 2018/19 and 2020/21. The average weekly childcare fees charged to parents increased slightly from 2018/19 to 2020/21, and were highest for children under 1 year and lowest for children over 4 years. The number of children enrolled in ELC settings and the number of children on ELC waiting lists have both increased from 2016/17 to 2018/19, as did the extrapolated ELC capacity. The percentage of children aged 0 – under 3 cared for only by their parents in Ireland was lower than the EU 27 average in 2018 and 2019 but higher in 2020, while the percentage of children aged 3 – under 6 cared for only by their parents was consistently lower than the EU 27 average from 2018-2020. The average number of weekly hours of formal childcare in Ireland used by both the 0-3 and 3-6 age groups were lower than the EU 27 averages from 2018 to 2020.

Data under Objective 8 also reveal that the percentage of ELC services that were in receipt of AIM support increased from 2017/18 to 2020/21, and the number of children supported under AIM also rose during this time. The number of children with additional needs attending ELC services decreased from 2018/18 to 2019/20, as did the number of children with a diagnosed disability. The percentage of services providing care to children with additional needs and the percentage of services providing care to children with a diagnosed disability both decreased during this time. The number of Traveller children attending ELC services increased from 2017/18 to 2019/20, and the number of Roma children almost doubled during this time. The percentage of services with Traveller children attending and the percentage of services with Roma children attending both increased during this time.

Section 9 of this Spotlight looks at data to illustrate how children are supported in transitioning from ELC to primary schooling. The percentage of children in



mainstream junior infant classes who came from a childcare setting or pre-primary education increased from 2018/19 to 2020/21. The proportion of entrants to junior infants aged 4 and under decreased from 2015-2021, while the proportion that were aged 5 and over increased during this time. The most common ethnicity among entrants to junior infants from 2018 to 2020 was “white Irish”, while the least common was “black/black Irish with a non-African background”. The most common class size was 25-29 pupils in 2018/19 and 2019/20, and was 20-24 pupils in 2021/21. Approximately three quarters of five year olds with special needs were attending mainstream national schools from 2018-2021, while the remainder were attending special national schools. The number of SNAs allocated to mainstream primary classes increased from 2019/20 to 2021/22.

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**DATA +
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Background notes

This is the eight publication in the Statistical Spotlight series. A statistical spotlight is a short publication focused on a different topic, gathering together available statistical data highlighting trends or patterns in the data. These are intended to be short, statistical-based publications bringing together available information for interested users. The publications include some commentary detailing (where relevant) trends and comparisons as appropriate (e.g. comparisons between sex, region, age group etc.).

The primary purpose is to gather together the most relevant data, highlight those most recent, and draw attention to the most evident features or trends. Therefore, although it could serve as the basis for such further research, none of the information contained therein should in and of itself be used to ascribe cause and effect between any two variables. In any case, much of the data considered in the Spotlight is insufficiently detailed to give anything other than to give a high-level snapshot of the experience of children aged 5 and under living in Ireland.



Sources

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National Council for Special Education (NCS):

<https://ncse.ie/>

Pobal:

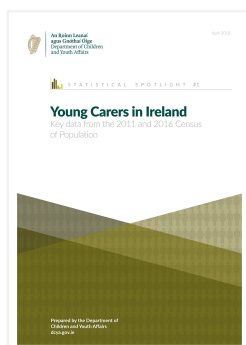
<https://www.pobal.ie/research-analysis/early-years/>

Tusla:

<https://www.tusla.ie/data-figures/>



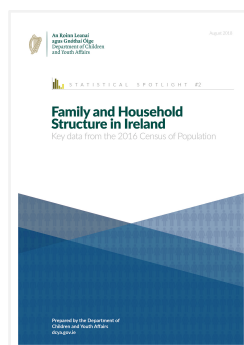
Previous Statistical Spotlights in the series



Statistical Spotlight #1

Young Carers in Ireland

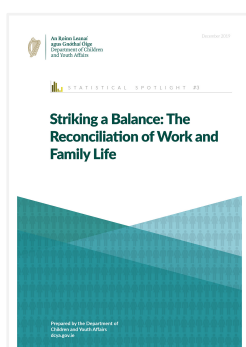
Publication Date
April 2018



Statistical Spotlight #2

Family and Household Structure in Ireland

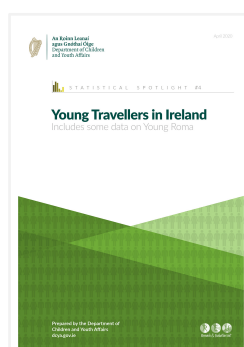
Publication Date
August 2018



Statistical Spotlight #3

Striking a Balance: The Reconciliation of Work and Family Life

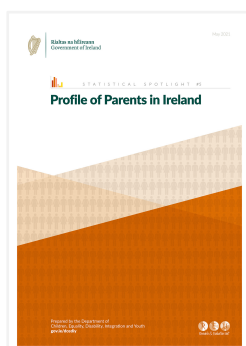
Publication Date
December 2019



Statistical Spotlight #4

Young Travellers in Ireland

Publication Date
April 2020



Statistical Spotlight #5

Profile of Parents in Ireland

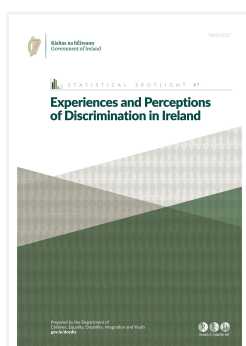
Publication Date
May 2021



Statistical Spotlight #6

Gender Norms in Ireland

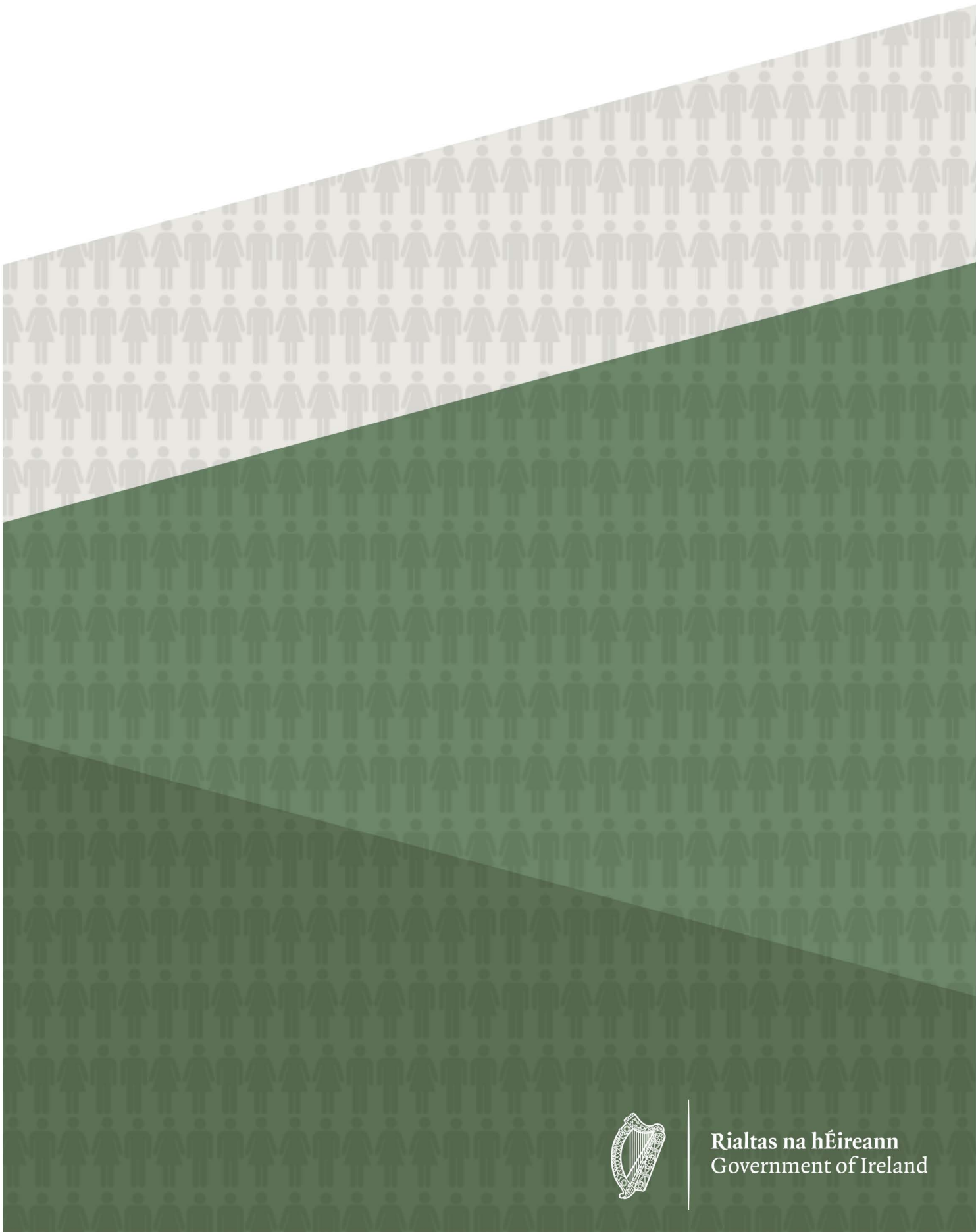
Publication Date
December 2021



Statistical Spotlight #7

Experiences and Perceptions of Discrimination in Ireland

Publication Date
March 2022



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland