



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Tusla Funded Community and Voluntary Sector Family Support Services

Spending Review 2022

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The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth should be acknowledged in all references to this publication.

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List of Acronyms

ABC	Area Based Childhood Programme
AFS	Annual Financial Statement
C&V	Community and Voluntary
CFSN	Child and Family Support Network
DCEDIY	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
DSGBV	Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
FCU	Financial Compliance Unit (Tusla)
FCS	Financial Compliance Statements
FSS	Family Support Services
FSSC	Family Support Service Counselling
FRC	Family Resource Centre
HSE	Health Service Executive
IGEES	Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service
PPFS	Prevention, Partnership and Family Support
SCP	School Completion Programme
SLA	Service Level Agreements
WTE	Whole Time Equivalent

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Tusla, DCEDIY policy colleagues, and the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) for their engagement in this Spending Review process. The authors are particularly grateful to those who provided relevant data and documentation that helped build this Review, and to all those who provided comments on earlier drafts.

The report has been accepted for publication by the Research and Evaluation Unit in DCEDIY and has been subject to the IGEES quality control process for Spending Reviews, as documented in the box below. The report contains an analysis of the available data and does not purport to be a complete or definitive account of all relevant issues. The objective of the report is to inform policy development, and the authors are responsible for the content and any views expressed.

Quality Assurance Process

To ensure accuracy and methodological rigour, the authors engaged in the following quality assurance process.

Internal/Departmental

- ✓ Line management
- ✓ Spending Review Steering group
- ✓ Other divisions/sections

External

- ✓ Other Government Department
- ✓ Quality Assurance Group (QAG)

Executive Summary

This Spending Review of Tusla-funded Community & Voluntary (C&V) sector Family Support Services (FSS) presents the high-level results of a comprehensive analysis conducted by the Research and Evaluation Unit during 2022, which will be published by the DCEDIY in early 2023. The summary analysis presented in this Review focuses on: the FSS policy landscape; Tusla's model for FSS commissioning and governance; trends in FSS expenditure in recent years.

The Review draws on data from publicly available sources, such as Tusla's Annual Financial Statements and Quarterly reports, and from Tusla's internal systems such as the Commissioning Portal, and Human Resources and financial systems. The authors also benefitted from engagement with DCEDIY colleagues and Tusla officials.

Family Support Services (FSS) aim to promote and protect the well-being and rights of all children, young people and their families (universal) while also giving particular attention to those who are vulnerable (targeted). FSS are an important component of Tusla's prevention and early intervention work, with the goal of identifying 'at risk' children, and providing evidence-informed supports to strengthen family functioning and reduce demand for state care.

Between 2018 and 2021, total annual Tusla FSS expenditure increased from €105.5m to €125.1m, or 18.6%. This was slightly higher than the increase in overall annual Tusla expenditure during this time (16.1%). Of this, total annual expenditure on C&V sector FSS organisations increased from €95m per annum to €111m, or 16.8%. Of this €16m increase, the first full year costs of the existing ABC programme in 2019 (which had been transferred to Tusla by the DCEDIY in late 2018) accounted for €6.7m. Additional (once-off) COVID 19 funding provided an additional 4% of annual funding to C&V sector FFS organisations, which also contributed to the increase.

C&V sector FSS accounted for 86.9% of the increase in Tusla FSS expenditure, with Tusla pay accounting for 13.1% of the increase, rising from €8.5m to €11m. Total Tusla FSS expenditure as a proportion of overall Tusla expenditure remained relatively consistent during this time, increasing by 0.3 percentage points, from 13.9% in 2018 to 14.2% in 2021. A key finding is that a large part of the overall increase in FSS expenditure was concentrated among a relatively small number of the highest-funded C&V sector FSS organisations. At the same time, the proportion of organisations receiving funding from multiple FSS funding streams also increased, indicating the diversification and increased complexity of service provision.

The Review also presents the key FSS cost drivers, as well as supply and demand indicators. The Review concludes with recommendations to help strengthen monitoring and evaluation processes. This will need to be pursued in the context of an agreed definition of FSS, grounded in a shared understanding of the activities that constitute this key area of Tusla expenditure. Doing so will help to facilitate the linking of Tusla FSS expenditure to FSS activities at the local and national levels, which is not possible at present.

Introduction

This Spending Review of Tusla-funded Community & Voluntary (C&V) sector Family Support Services (FSS) presents the high-level results of a comprehensive analysis conducted by the DCEDIY Research and Evaluation Unit during 2022, the full results of which will be published by the DCEDIY in early 2023. The purpose of the Review is to track and assess the level of investment that Tusla makes in FSS, and to understand the extent to which Tusla is supported by the C&V sector in providing these services.

The Review draws on data from publicly available sources, such as Tusla's Annual Financial Statements and Quarterly reports, and from Tusla's internal systems such as the Commissioning Portal, and Human Resources and financial systems. The authors also benefitted from engagement with DCEDIY colleagues and Tusla officials. Based on availability of data, the Review presents the following:

- Overall Tusla C&V sector funding: 2014 to 2021
- Trends in the provision of Family Support Services (FSS): 2017 to 2021
- FSS expenditure trends: 2018 to 2021

The Review begins with a brief description of FSS, and then outlines recent changes in FSS funding mechanisms, including the transition to commissioning. The Review proceeds with an overview of Tusla funding for the C&V sector (including FSS and non-FSS services), before summarising key trends in relation to the provision of FSS, including supply and demand data. The Review continues with an overview of FSS expenditure trends, and key cost drivers, and explores some additional hypothetical cost drivers. The final section presents high-level recommendations for future analysis, which will strengthen the future monitoring and evaluation of FSS expenditure and service provision.

What are Tusla-funded Family Support Services?

Tusla was established on the 1st of January 2014 under the provisions of the *Child and Family Agency Act 2013*, which replaced the previous Family Support Agency founded under the *Family Support Agency Act 2001*. Section 8 of the *Child and Family*

Agency Act 2013 outlines the various functions of the Agency, many of which may be met via the provision of Family Support Services (FSS):

Tusla has a statutory obligation to support and promote the development, welfare and protection of children, and support and encourage the effective functioning of families (S.8 Child & Family Agency Act). Tusla provides preventative family support services aimed at promoting the welfare of children. This work is undertaken by Tusla and its funded services across the continuum of need and harm.

In addition to the statutory roles of Tusla in the provision of FSS,¹ other state agencies and organisations provide supports to families in areas such as health, education and justice. Thus while Tusla-funded FSS is a significant part of the family support landscape, its role needs to be understood in the broader context of state services for families and children.

Tusla-funded FSS aim to promote and protect the well-being and rights of all children, young people and their families (universal) while also giving particular attention to those who are vulnerable (targeted). FSS are an important component of Tusla's prevention and early intervention work, with the goal of identifying 'at risk' children, and providing evidence-informed supports to strengthen family functioning and reduce demand for State care.

In defining the scope of this Review, the authors drew on definitions of FSS that highlight activities that improve family functioning and child-rearing, within supportive relationships and resources. However, isolating FSS costs and activities from the broader Tusla landscape proved difficult given the challenge of delineating the activities that constitute family support. The FSS landscape is complex and diverse, featuring overlapping networks of service providers and stakeholders, varying levels of need, and a wide range of funding structures.

FSS is often used as an umbrella term that covers a range of activities such as centre-based and in-home services, parenting programmes, counselling and therapy, as well as youth education and training services. While FSS includes services delivered

¹ Other statutory references to FSS include the following (DCEDIY 2022, 11-12): The Childcare Support Act, Section 14, Child Care Act 1991, Section 45A, Gaeltacht Act 2012, Section 12, Regulations 2013, Citizen's Information Act 2007

directly by Tusla under the Prevention Partnership and Family Support (PPFS) model, they are predominantly delivered via Tusla-commissioned Community and Voluntary (C&V) sector organisations. C&V sector FSS are provided via Family Resource Centres and a range of other C&V family support organisations.

FSS provision in Ireland has been undergoing major changes, including: increasing complexity of need; the integration of the Prevention, Partnership and Family Support (PPFS) Programme with other Tusla services; and, a transition of some services to online delivery.² Other challenges include: concerns about the sustainability of some C&V sector providers; the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic; ongoing policy developments, such as the new *National Model of Parenting Support Services*, and, a new government policy framework for children and young people to succeed *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures*.

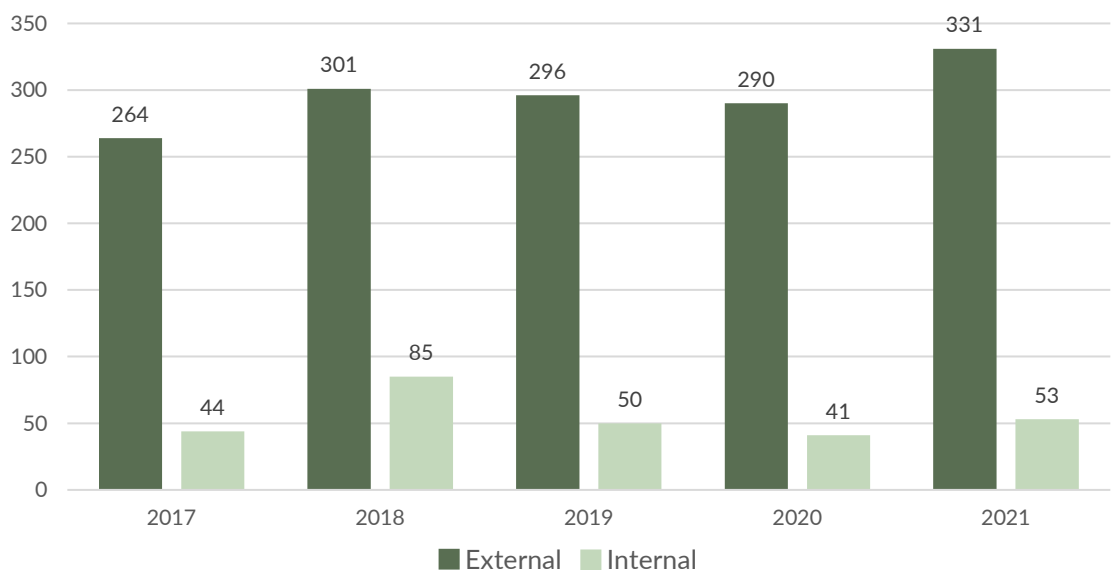
Family Support Services Commissioning and Governance

Tusla commissions external C&V sector FSS organisations at the national, regional, local, and individual level.³ On average over the 2017-2021 period, approximately 85% of FSS were externally commissioned by Tusla. The remainder were delivered internally by Tusla staff. During this time, FSS were increasingly delivered through externally commissioned services. See Figure 1.

² While online service delivery represents a new challenge, it may also help to increase provision in some service areas.

³ Tusla has six regional areas and 17 local areas.

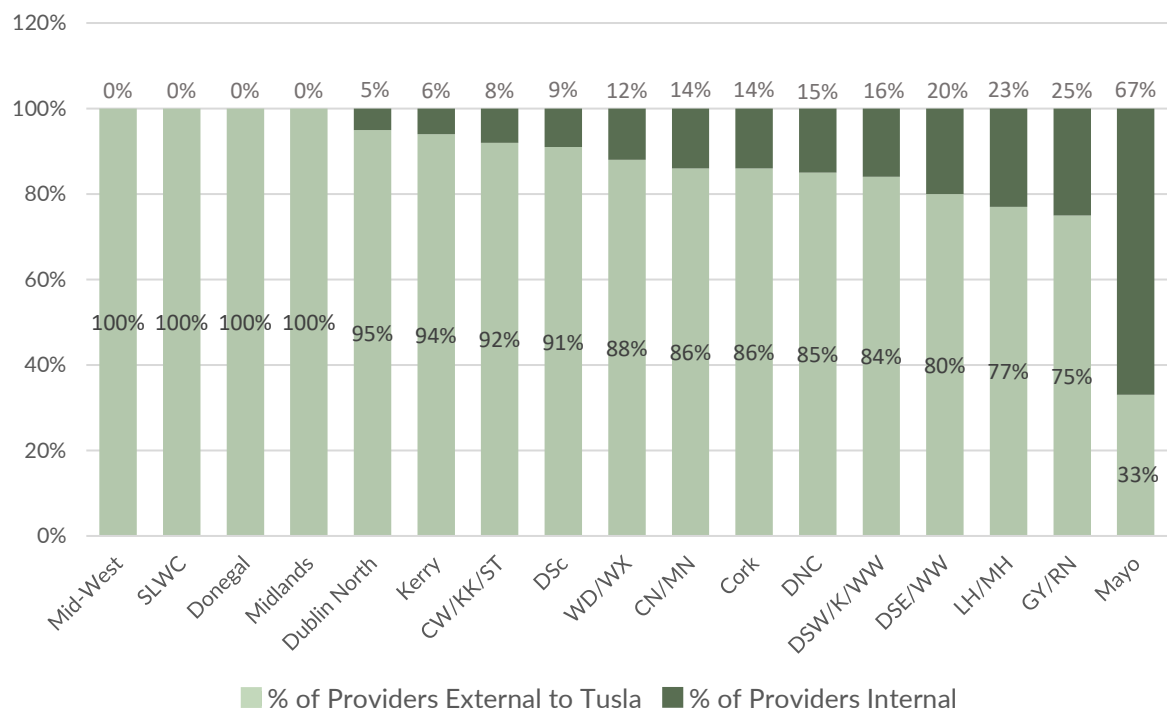
Figure 1. External and internal commissioned FSS at year end, 2017 to 2021



Source: Tusla Quarterly Performance and Activity Reports 2017-2021

The proportion of externally commissioned versus internally commissioned (Tusla-delivered) services varies between Tusla local areas. In 2021, the Tusla local area with the lowest percentage of externally commissioned FSS was Mayo, with 33% of services, while four local areas provided 100% of their FSS via externally commissioned organisations. See Figure 2.

Figure 2. Proportion of Internally and Externally Commissioned Family Support Services by Tusla local area, 2021



Source: Tusla Quarterly Performance and Activity Reports, 2021

Transition from Grants to Commissioning

Tusla has made considerable progress in recent years in transitioning from a 'grant-writing' model to a commissioning-based service model. This transition was motivated by the need to ensure value for money, by improving: needs-based assessments; transparency; removing duplication and resource gaps; and, as a way to address 'legacy' funding arrangements. Under the new commissioning approach, interaction between Tusla and providers has become more formalised, and involves stakeholder partnership and a focus on capacity-building.

Commissioning Plans

A key component of the commissioning model is the drafting and implementation of local area Commissioning Plans to ensure that policy goals are achieved. Tusla requires all local area managers to draft and publish Commissioning Plans. To date, 16 out of 17 local areas have drafted plans, which Tusla intend to publish. According to Tusla's Commissioning Toolkit (2019c), these plans should summarise local area need and provision, identify priorities, and provide evidence to inform decision-making processes. Analysis conducted for this Review found that plans across local areas tended to vary in scope, comprehensiveness, and format. Since 2016, Commissioning Plans have been produced in three phases: phase 1 in 2016/17; phase 2 in 2017/18; phase 3 in 2018/19. There has been a discernible trend toward the provision of more comprehensive detail in more recent (Phase 3) Commissioning Plans.

Governance

Tusla's Financial Compliance Unit (FCU) performs a key governance and oversight role of C&V sector organisations funded by Tusla. The core work of this Unit involves reviewing Financial Compliance Statements (FCS) and Annual Financial Statements (AFS) submitted by funded organisations. Desktop reviews are a tool for Tusla managers and Tusla commissioners to assist with site visits, service reviews, and organisation monitoring. Where the desktop review flags a matter for attention, this is notified to the relevant Tusla Commissioner by the FCU. Desktop reviews are prioritised by level of Tusla funding, with priority given to higher-funded organisations. Any reviews requested by Tusla commissioners are also prioritised.

Where there is a significant concern arising from a review, an organisation will be prioritised for inclusion in Tusla's Internal Audit plan.

The Internal Audit function provides “assurance that controls and procedures are operated in accordance with best practice and with the appropriate regulations”, and also provides, “recommendations for the improvement of these controls and procedures” (Tusla, 2022c). The authors analysed 39 reports from audits of Family Support Service (FSS) providers, which were conducted on behalf of Tusla between 2016 and 2020. Of these audits, most (28) were based on the current four-level assurance scheme (which was standardised in 2020 in line with auditing best practice guidelines), with 43% of the audited FSS providers receiving the lowest possible rating of “unsatisfactory”, while only one FSS provider (3.5%) received the assurance level of “satisfactory”. Of the 11 audits that drew on a previously used three-level assurance scheme, 55% of audited FSS providers received the middle assurance level of “limited”, while 45% received the highest assurance level of “adequate.” Those organisations who receive an ‘Unsatisfactory’ assurance level are managed through the Agency’s Unsatisfactory Audit Process, which includes a monthly monitoring process for service quality, governance, and sign-off on funding.

Model of Service for Family Resource Centres

As of September 2022, Tusla's FRC Programme provides funding to 121 FRCs (and the FRC National Forum) in 109 local communities across Ireland. FRCs use a community development approach in their provision of FSS, aiming to empower communities to help themselves. The FRC programme is geographically targeted, with FRCs tending to be located in disadvantaged areas. FRCs aim to follow a universal ‘cradle to grave’ approach in their provision of services, in collaboration with partner organisations.

Currently there is no resource allocation model or unified national model of service for Family Resource Centres (FRCs). As a result, FRCs vary in the services they provide. In addition, while total FRC costs are classified as FSS, there is uncertainty around what proportion of FRC activities may be regarded as FSS. The example of the FRC programme highlights the difficulties, more generally, in establishing the true

cost of FSS, or the linking of activities (outputs) to expenditure (see 'Recommendations for Additional Analysis').

Tusla C&V Sector expenditure

Tusla C&V sector expenditure can be broken down into four funding streams: Section 56; Family Resource Centres (FRC); Family Support Service Counselling (FSSSC); and, School Completion Programmes (SCP). Tusla's total expenditure on all C&V sector organisations increased by 40.9% between 2014 and 2021, from €137.9m to €194.4m, with an average increase of approximately 6% per annum. These figures include non-FSS services such as Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (DSGBV), SCP and residential care.⁴

The overall increase in C&V sector expenditure was roughly in line with the increase in overall Tusla expenditure during this time.⁵ The proportion of overall Tusla expenditure allocated to the C&V sector remained generally stable, representing 22.1% of total Tusla spend in both 2014 and 2021.

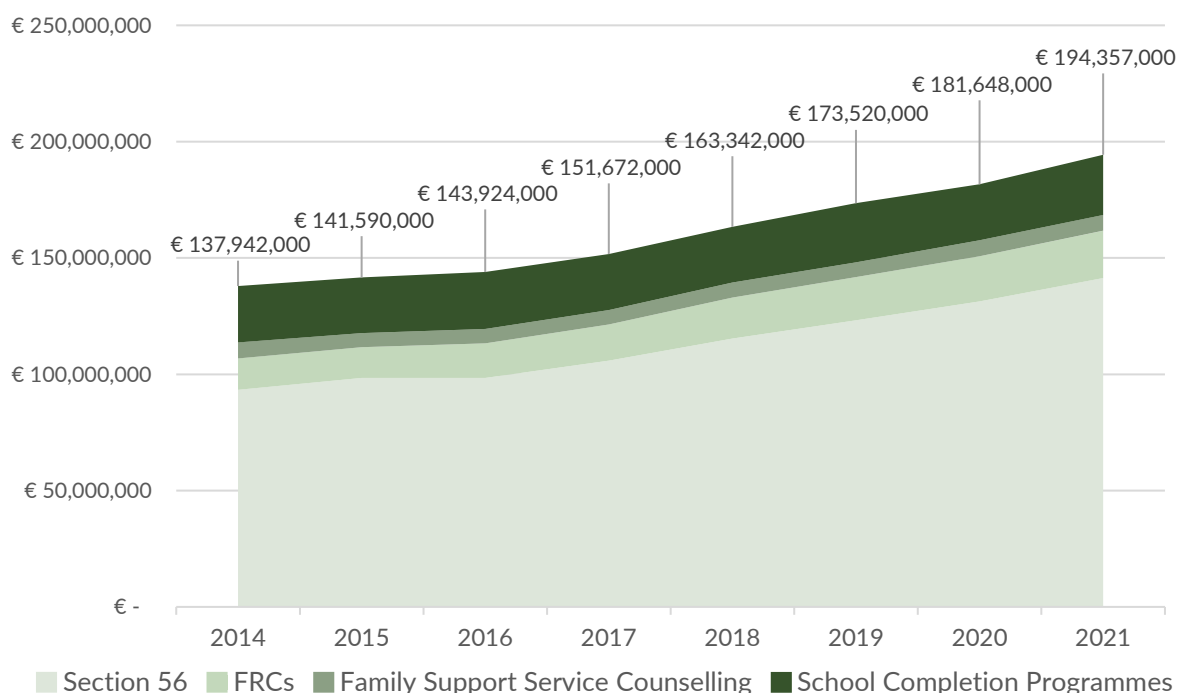
The Section 56 funding stream (which, along with FSS, includes DSGBV and residential care) increased by 51.5% between 2014 and 2021, from €93.3m to €141.4m. Expenditure under the FRC funding stream increased by 50.5% during this time (Note: 28% of the FRC expenditure increase occurred between 2017 and 2018, when 11 new FRCs were incorporated into the programme). Expenditure on the FSSC funding stream decreased by 1.2%. FRC and FSSC expenditure will be discussed in more detail in relation to FSS expenditure below.

The final funding stream, SCP, increased by 6.6% between 2014 and 2021, from €24.3m per annum to €25.9m. However, as SCP was out of scope for this Review, it is not included in the FSS expenditure calculations below. See Figure 3.

⁴ The DCEDIY conducted a Spending Review of Residential Care Services in 2020: [gov.ie - Spending Review 2020 Tusla Residential Care Costs \(www.gov.ie\)](https://www.gov.ie/en/publications-and-statistics/publications/spending-review-2020-tusla-residential-care-costs/)

⁵ For context, over this same period total inflation amounted to 7.1% (CSO CPI Inflation Calculator: <https://visual.cso.ie/?body=entity/cpicalculator>)

Figure 3. Tusla Total C&V Sector Funding broken down by four funding streams, 2014-2021



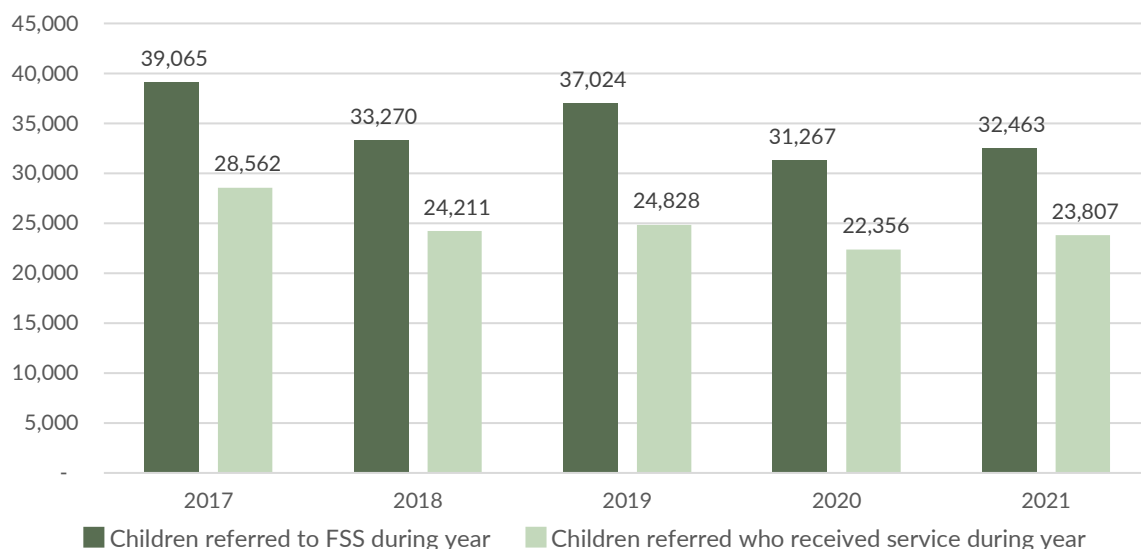
Source: Tusla Annual Financial Statements, 2014-2021

Trends in Family Support Services

Between 2017 and 2021, the total annual number of externally and internally commissioned FSS provided by Tusla (nationally) increased from 308 in 2017 to 384 in 2021 (see Figure 1). During this time, the numbers of children (nationally) referred to FSS (per annum) decreased from 39,065 in 2017 to 32,463 in 2021 (-16.9%). The annual number of children (nationally) who received FSS (per annum) decreased from 28,562 in 2017 to 23,807 in 2021 (-16.6%). The proportion of children who received a service during the year of their referral remained stable at 73% across this period (See Figure 4). It is difficult to provide an explanation for the reduction in demand for and the provision of FSS between 2017 and 2021.

At the same time, the annual numbers of Meitheal processes initiated between 2017 and 2021 increased from 1,409 to 2,373, or by 68.4%. The numbers of operating Child and Family Support Networks (CFSNs) also increased from 99 to 122, or 23.2%. Notwithstanding the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on FSS provision, these trends point to increasing engagement with these often complex prevention and early intervention initiatives.

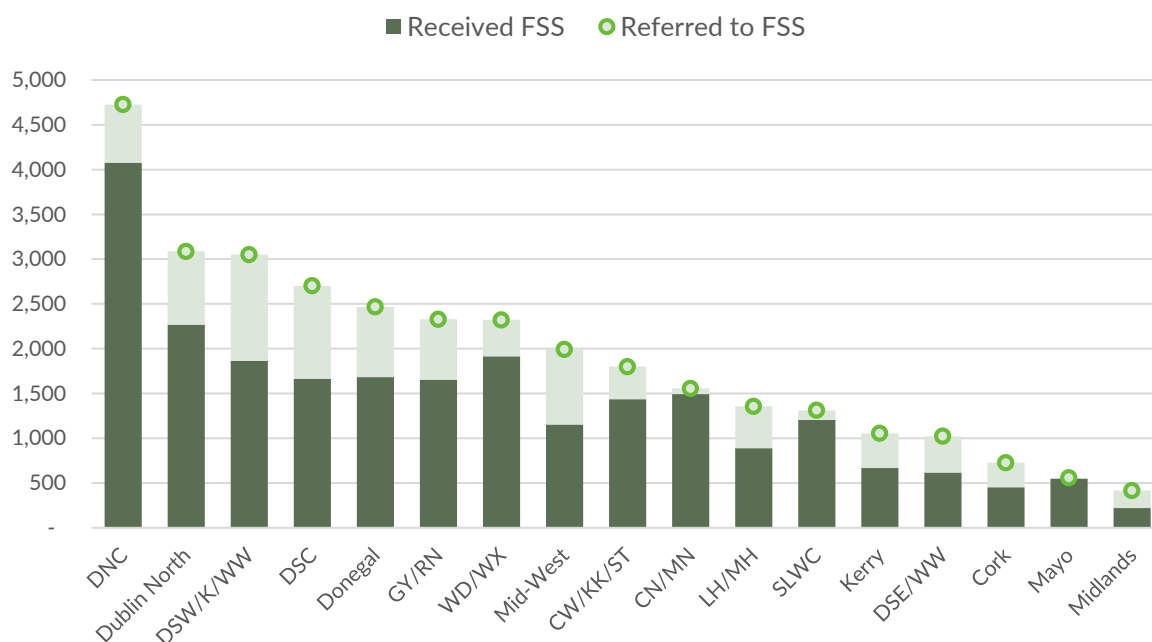
Figure 4. Family Support Service trends: 2017-2021



Source: Tusla's Quarterly Performance and Activity Reports 2017-2021

Not captured by these national-level figures are significant variations at the local area level, including whether a referred child receives FSS. In 2021, the proportion of Tusla-referred children who received a service ranged from 53% in the Midlands to 99% in Mayo. Reasons for area based differences include demand exceeding supply and in some circumstances, families opting not to avail of services. See Figure 5.

Figure 5. Children referred to, and who received, Family Support Services, 2021



Received FSS	4,077	2,270	1,863	1,663	1,683	1,653	1,916	1,153	1,436	1,494	890	1,204	666	617	453	549	220
Referred to FSS	4,725	3,087	3,050	2,702	2,467	2,329	2,322	1,990	1,800	1,556	1,357	1,311	1,054	1,022	728	557	416

Source: Tusla's Quarterly Performance and Activity Reports, 2021

Family Support Services (FSS) Funding Streams

Within its financial reports, Tusla-funded C&V sector FSS expenditure is presented under three funding streams: Section 56-59 Arrangements ('Section 56'); Family Resource Centres (FRC); and Family Support Service Counselling (FSSC).

Organisations may be funded under two or more of these funding streams, based on their FSS activities. In 2021, a total of 461 organisations received funding under the Section 56 funding stream, however only four of the twelve Section 56 sub-categories fall within the scope of this review: National Grants; Regional Service Level Agreements (SLAs) (which include local area SLAs); Creative Community Alternatives (CCA) and; the Area Based Childhood (ABC) Programme. Under the FRC funding stream, Tusla funded 121 FRCs in 2021, while FSSC funding was allocated to 225 organisations (which included 90 FRCs).

Total Family Support Services (FSS) Expenditure

To calculate total FSS expenditure, Tusla provided the authors with a list of 'in-scope' Section 56 organisations that provide FSS services. This list was used to isolate FSS expenditure within the Section 56 funding stream, and is referred to as 'S56 FSS' in this Review.

Between 2018 and 2021, Tusla's overall annual expenditure on FSS increased by 18.6%, from €105.5m to €125.1m. Tusla expenditure on C&V sector FSS organisations (S56 FSS + FRC + FSSC) increased by 16.8%, from €95m to €110.9m. See Table 1.

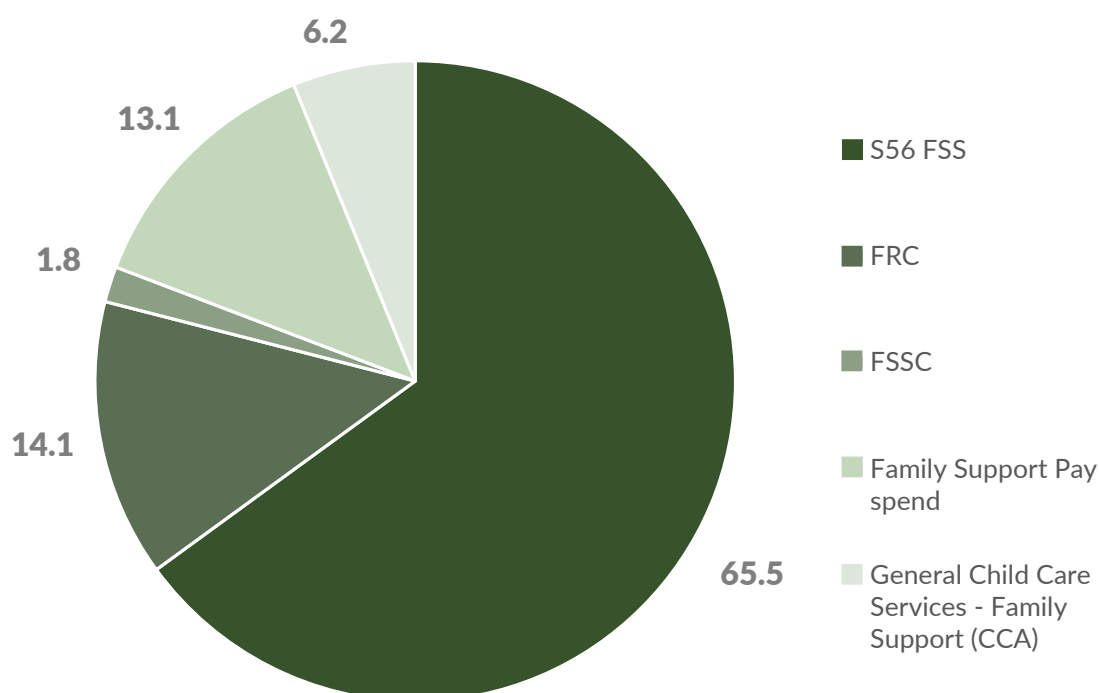
Table 1. Total FSS Expenditure 2018-2021

€m	2018	2019	2020	2021	% Change
FSS C&V spend (3 streams combined)	95	101	105.6	110.9	16.8
FSS admin spend (estimated)	1.2	1.6	1.01	1.1	-12.2
General Childcare Services (CCA)	0.85	1.5	1.6	2.1	144.1
FSS Non-Pay spend	97.1	104.1	108.3	114.1	17.5
FSS Tusla Pay spend	8.5	9.2	10.5	11.03	30.3
Total FSS spend	105.5	113.3	118.8	125.1	18.6%

Source: Tusla data provided to the authors; Annual Financial Statements; authors' calculations

As shown in Table 1, Tusla’s overall expenditure on FSS also includes pay to in-house Tusla staff. The increase in pay during this period, which rose from €8.5m to €11m per annum, represented 13.1% of the total FSS expenditure increase. Payments via the ‘General Childcare Services’ payment category, which includes Creative Community Alternative (CCA) costs paid through the Tusla purchase order system,⁶ rose from €0.85m to €2.07m per annum, and represented 6.2% of the total increase. See Figure 6.

Figure 6. Percentage Contribution to Increase in FSS Spend, 2018-2021

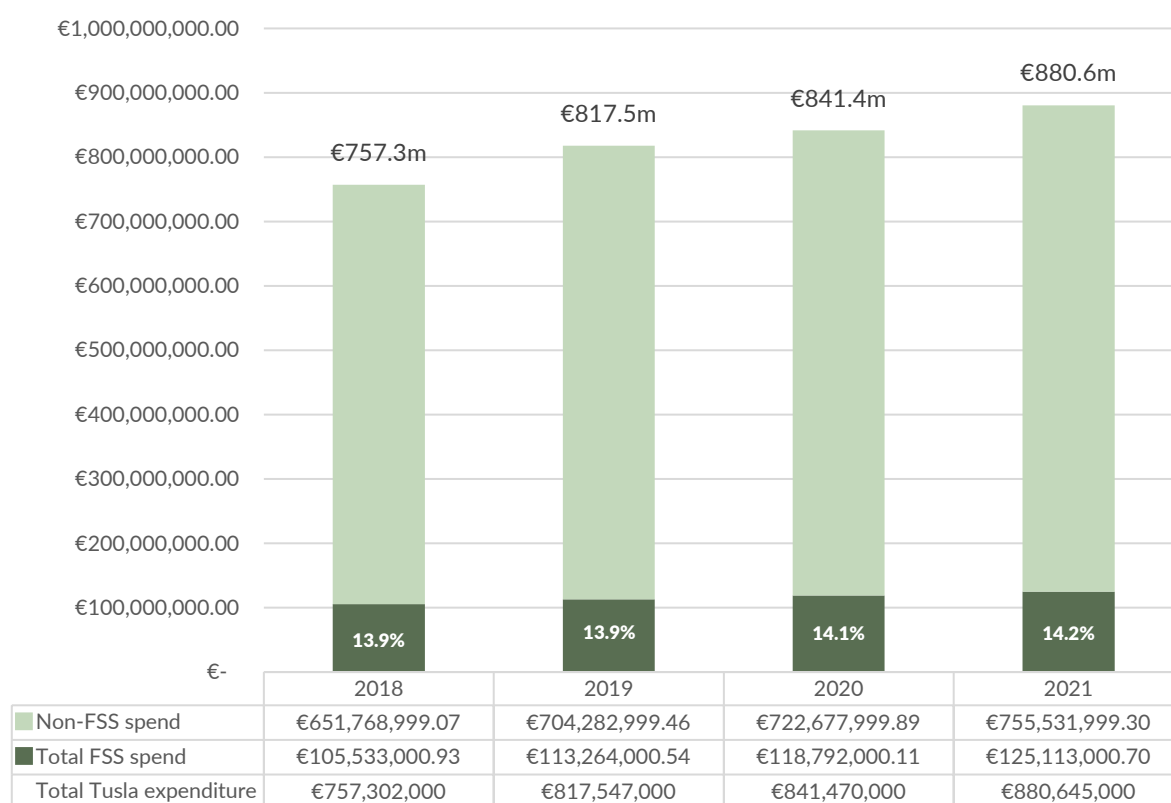


Source: Tusla data provided to the authors; Annual Financial Statements; authors' calculations

Tusla’s expenditure on FSS, as a proportion of Tusla’s total expenditure, remained relatively consistent between 2018 and 2021 increasing by 0.3 percentage points, ranging from 13.9% in 2018 to 14.2% in 2021. See Figure 7.

⁶ These could be payments for e.g. private organisations, room hire, catering, or training.

Figure 7. FSS as a Proportion of Tusla expenditure, 2018-2021



Source: Tusla AFS 2018-2021; authors' calculations

The total FSS spend allocated to organisations in the C&V sector, as a proportion of overall Tusla C&V sector spend, also remained relatively consistent, decreasing slightly from 58.1% in 2018 to 57.1% in 2021.

While the proportion of Tusla expenditure allocated to C&V sector FSS organisations has remained relatively stable, dynamic changes are occurring within Tusla's portfolio of C&V sector FSS spend. These will now be discussed.

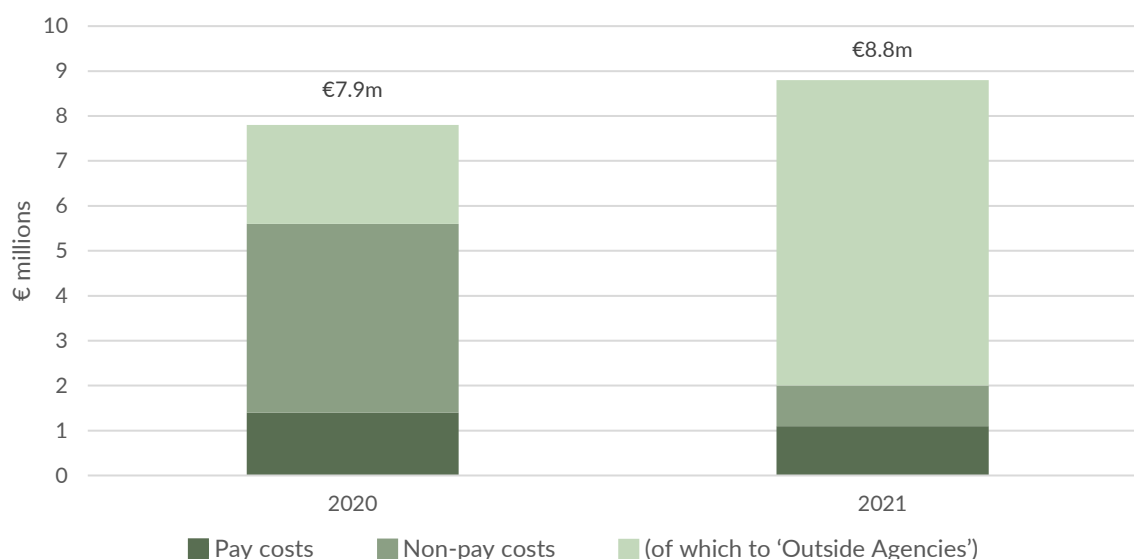
Section 56 Family Support Services (FSS)

Total annual S56 FSS expenditure increased by €12.8m (or 18%) between 2018 and 2021, from €71m in 2018 to €83.8m in 2021. A primary driver was the Area Based Childhood (ABC) programme, with a total of €6.7m of this overall increase occurring between 2018 and 2019 with the transition of existing DCEDIY funding for the ABC Programme from Pobal to Tusla. The Programme has subsequently operated with full year costs as part of the wider Tusla PPFs programme. An additional 4% of (once-off) COVID funding was also provided to all C&V sector FSS organisations in 2021.

COVID 19 Funding

In 2020, Tusla received an additional €8m from DCEDIY in COVID-19 funding, of which €2.2m was allocated to C&V sector organisations, which included FRCs, FSSC, and S56 FSS organisations. In 2021, additional COVID-19 expenditure rose to €8.8m. In this year, €6.8m was allocated to C&V sector organisations including organisations funded under the FRC, FSSC, and Section 56 streams. See Figure 8 (note: 'Outside Agencies' refers to Tusla-funded C&V sector organisations).

Figure 8. COVID-19 income and expenditure, 2020 and 2021



Source: Tusla AFS; Tusla data provided to authors

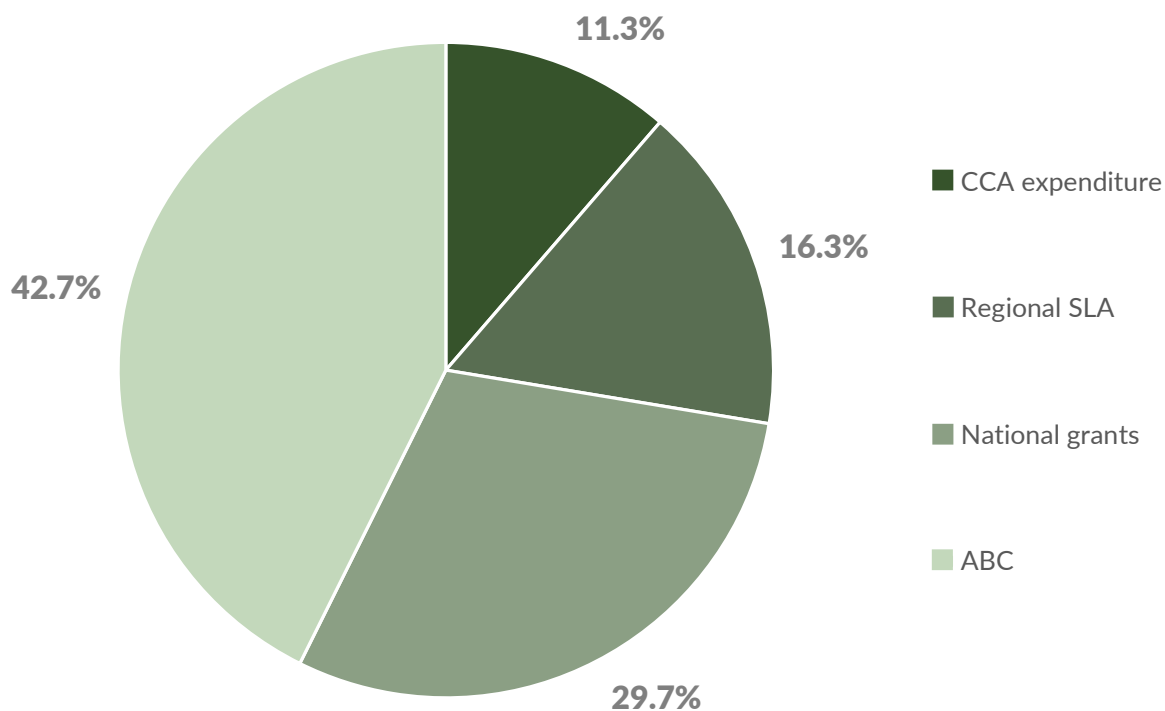
Section 56 FSS sub-categories

As described above, the S56 FSS estimate was based on an agreed list provided by Tusla of individual organisations that provide FSS. It was not possible for the authors to match the individual S56 FSS organisations to organisations in the four FSS categories under the Section 56 funding stream. However, assessing Tusla expenditure on the four FSS-relevant Section 56 subcategories (National Grants; Regional SLAs; Creative Community Alternatives (CCA); the ABC Programme) helps to illustrate the relative contribution of each to the increase in total FSS-related Section 56 expenditure during this time.

The ABC Programme accounted for 42.2% of the increase across these four subcategories between 2018 and 2021 (as mentioned, this related to the transfer of DCEDIY Programme funding from Pobal to Tusla). The National Grants subcategory

accounted for 29.7% of the increase, and Regional SLAs (which include local area SLAs) accounted for 16.3%. The remaining 11.3% of the increase occurred within the CCA programme. See Figure 9.

Figure 9. Contribution of FSS-relevant Section 56 subcategories to 2018-2021 expenditure change



Source: Tusla AFS; authors' calculations

Note: The increase in Tusla expenditure on the ABC programme relates primarily to the transfer of existing DCEDIY expenditure from Pobal to Tusla in late 2018. From 2019, the existing full year costs were paid by Tusla.

Family Resource Centres (FRC)

The increase in annual expenditure on the FRC funding stream during this period represented 14.1% of the total increase in Tusla FSS expenditure. Between 2018 and 2021, total annual expenditure on this funding stream increased by 15.7%, from €17.5m to €20.3m.

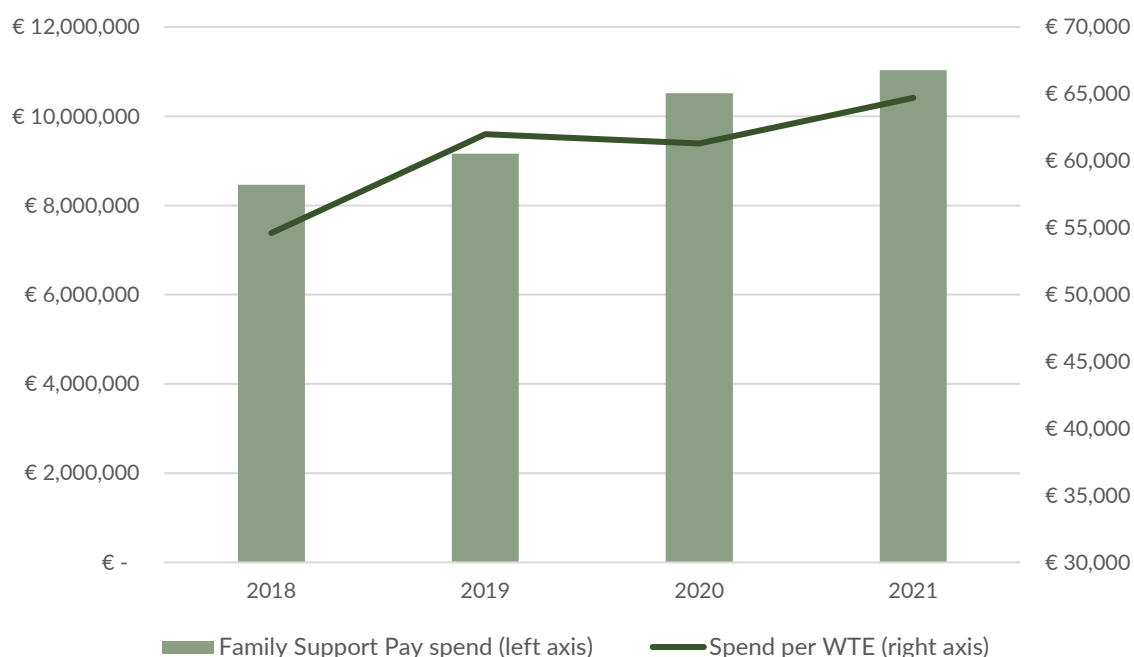
Family Support Service Counselling (FSSC)

The increase in annual expenditure on the FSSC funding stream during this period represented 1.8% of the total increase in Tusla FSS expenditure. Total annual expenditure on this funding stream increased by 5.5% during this time, from €6.4m to €6.8m.

Family support Service Pay (Tusla Staff)

In 2021, Tusla directly employed 11.5 whole time equivalent (WTE) national and regional PPFs staff and 159 WTEs at the local level. The total number of national and regional PPFs staff decreased from 27 in 2018 to 11.5 in 2021. This decrease was mainly due to roles previously funded by Atlantic Philanthropies being mainstreamed as Tusla employees into a range of roles within the Agency during 2019. During the 2018 to 2021 period, the numbers of FSS staff employed directly by Tusla at the local area level increased by 23%, from 128.1 to 159 WTEs. Expenditure by Tusla on its FSS staff increased by slightly over 30% during this time, which was a higher rate of growth than among Tusla staff overall. Average expenditure per FSS Whole Time Equivalent (WTE) also increased over this time, from €54,610 in 2018 to €64,710 in 2021, an increase of 18.5%. See Figure 10.⁷

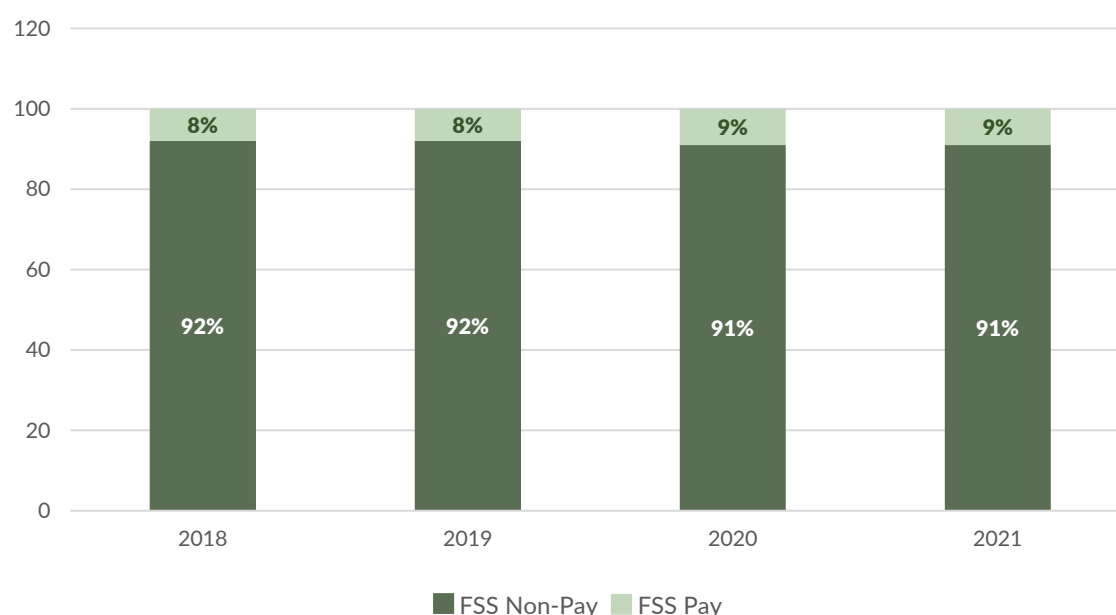
Figure 10. Average spend per Family Support Whole Time Equivalent (WTE)



Source: Tusla data provided to the authors; authors' calculations

During the 2018 to 2021 period, FSS pay as a proportion of overall FSS expenditure, remained stable, increasing by just 1%. See Figure 11.

⁷ These figures include overhead costs, and so are not salary rates

Figure 11. FSS Pay and Non-pay as a % of Total Tusla FSS Spend (2018-2021)

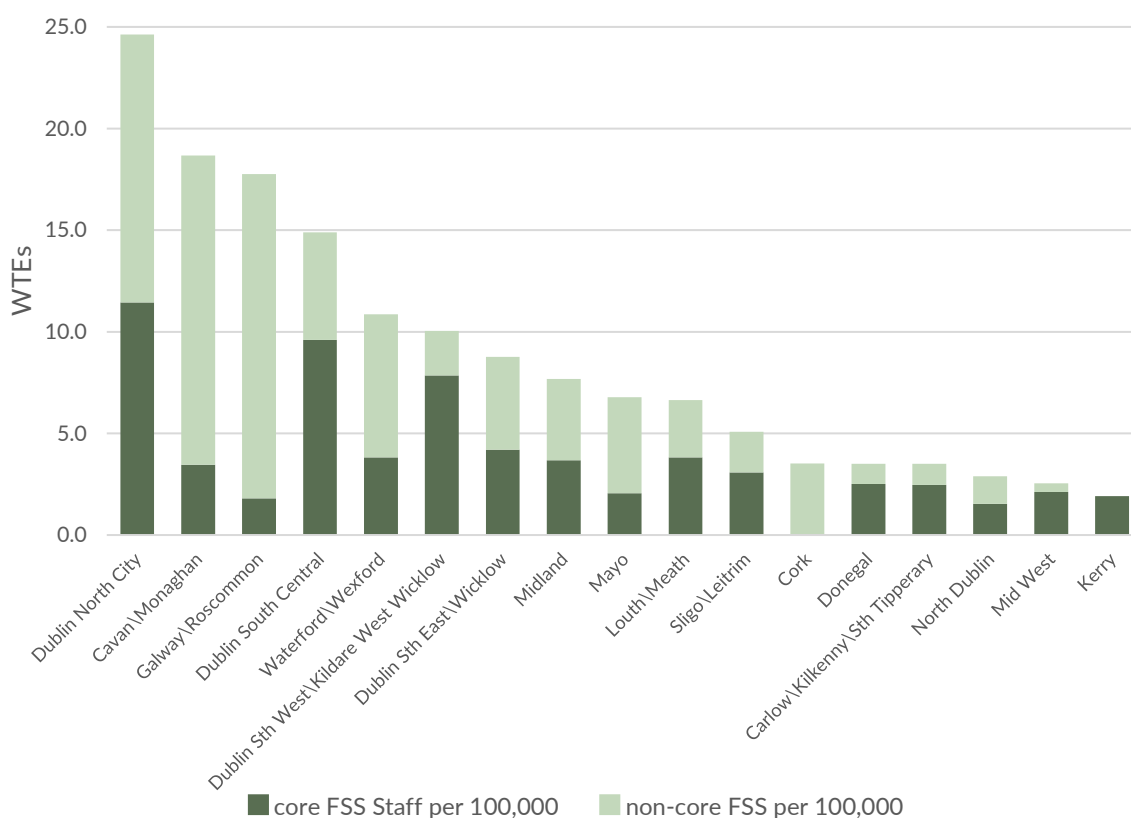
Source: Tusla; authors' calculations

There are two main ways of measuring Tusla-employed FSS WTEs at the local area level. One is to include only those staff directly involved in delivering FSS, referred to as 'core' FSS staff. However, this measure excludes some staff, such as social workers, who are likely to devote a portion of their time to FSS. For this reason, counting all local area Prevention Partnership and Family Support Programme (PPFS) staff is a second way of measuring Tusla-employed FSS staff. Combining the total 'core' FSS staff with other 'non-core' FSS staff gives a total of 380 FSS WTEs. In reality the actual number of Tusla WTEs engaging in FSS work is likely to lie somewhere in between these measures, and so the true cost of Tusla FSS staffing is unclear. Further analysis would help to provide a better understanding of Tusla FSS staffing expenditure and how it interacts with FSS outputs and outcomes over time.

In addition to the challenge of calculating how many Tusla WTEs actually deliver FSS, the numbers of Tusla-employed FSS WTEs per head of population⁸ varies across Tusla local areas. When accounting for population, Dublin North City had the highest number of Tusla FSS staff of all Tusla areas in 2021, whereas Kerry had the lowest. See Figure 12. As noted in Figure 5, Dublin North City also had the highest number of children who received a FSS (4,077) while Kerry had one of the lowest (666).

⁸ includes all PPFS staff, i.e. 'core' and 'non-core' staff

Figure 12. Tusla PPFs Staff WTEs by area, per 100,000 population, 2021



Source: Tusla data provided to authors

As a result, the balance between Tusla-employed FSS staff and staff delivering FSS within the C&V sector also varies across these areas. According to Tusla, this is mainly due to differing historical patterns of FSS provision, with some areas relying more heavily on Tusla staff and others relying more on staff working in the C&V sector. Other factors that affect this mix include organisational and governance factors, as well as differing local area needs profiles. Further analysis is required to determine the cost effectiveness of the mix of Tusla and C&V sector staff across the 17 Tusla local areas (and six regions), and in particular how staff remuneration across each may be driving Tusla FSS costs.

FSS expenditure on the highest-funded organisations

In terms of average expenditure per C&V sector organisation, those organisations under the Section 56 stream rose by 23.6% between 2014 and 2021 (which includes Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence (DSGBV) and residential care services), by 16.7% under the FRC funding stream, and by 12.8% under the FSSC stream.

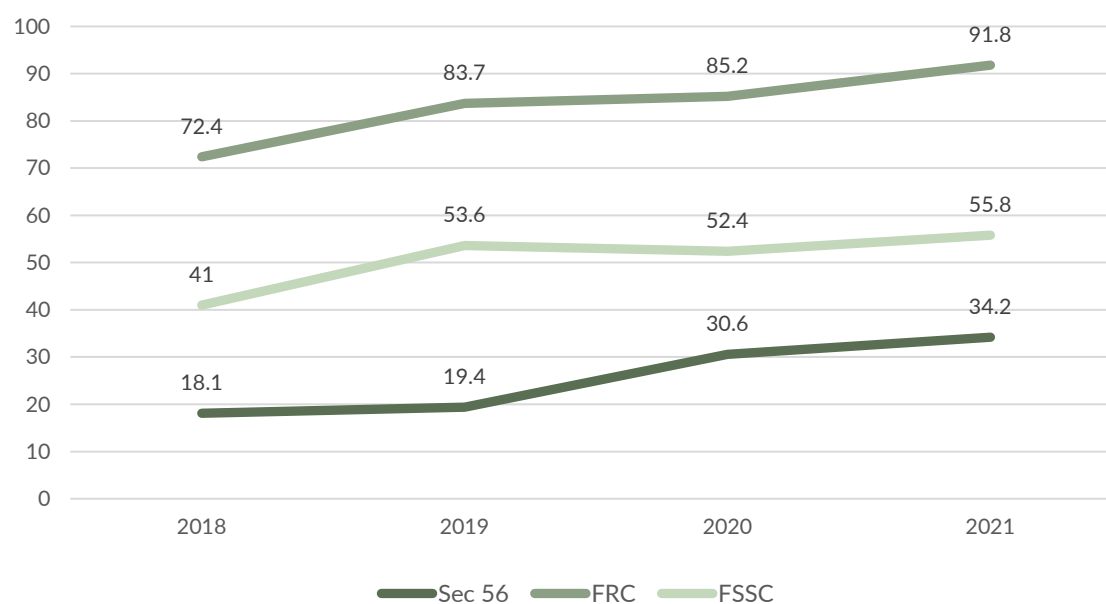
Tusla FSS funding in the C&V sector has become increasingly concentrated among a relatively small number of higher-funded organisations, in particular within the S56 FSS funding stream. The amount of annual Tusla funding provided to the ten highest-funded S56 FSS organisations increased by 39.5% between 2014 and 2021. These ten organisations accounted for 52.3% of overall S56 FSS funding in 2021. The proportion of the FRC funding stream going to the ten highest-funded FRCs increased from 8.9% in 2014 to 13.2% in 2021, and the proportion of the FSSC funding stream going to the top ten FSSC organisations increased from 39.9% to 45.1% during this time.

The funding awarded to the ten highest-funded S56 FSS organisations contributed almost 29% to the increase in all FSS expenditure. These organisations also accounted for 44% of the increase in S56 FSS expenditure between 2018 and 2021, while the ten highest-funded FRCs accounted for 37.9% of the increase in overall FRC spending, and the ten highest-funded FSSC organisations accounted for 32.5% of the rise in FSSC expenditure.

Therefore, a large part of the overall increase in FSS expenditure was concentrated among a relatively small number of C&V sector organisations. At the same time, the proportion of organisations receiving funding from multiple FSS funding streams also increased, indicating the diversification and increased complexity of service provision, which is likely to have contributed to FSS expenditure.

FSS Service Providers in Receipt of Multiple Funding Streams

External providers of FSS can receive funding from more than one of the three family support-related funding streams (Section 56, FRC, FSSC). Figure 13 shows that the proportion of organisations receiving funding from more than one stream has increased in recent years. The rising number of C&V service providers availing of multiple funding streams is likely to reflect Tusla capacity-building measures, resulting in organisations expanding and diversifying the services they offer.

Figure 13. Proportion of commissioned providers availing of multiple funding streams (2018 to 2021)

Source: Tusla AFS and author calculations

Other Potential Cost Drivers

The Review included an analysis of a range of other theoretical potential cost drivers. For example, the authors considered whether greater reliance on Tusla among C&V sector organisations was driving Tusla costs upwards. In order to explore this, the authors assessed Tusla income as a proportion of total organisational income, for a sample of the highest-funded C&V sector FSS organisations (and for which data was available), across the three FSS funding streams. Income data was assessed over three years (2018 to 2020). The analysis did not provide evidence to support the hypothesis that increased reliance on Tusla funding in recent years may have acted as a FSS cost driver. However, further analysis could help to assess trends over a broader time period, in order to monitor Tusla funding relative to other income sources.

In order to explore if non-FSS spending is driving FSS costs, the Review also included an analysis of a sample of Tusla and C&V sector FSS provider Service Level Agreements (SLAs). The analysis found that 27.7% of activities related entirely to FSS, 23.4% mostly related to FSS, and 25.8% included some activities related to FSS. 23.0% of the sampled organisations' listed activities did not relate to FSS. Within the sample SLAs, some of the non-FSS funded activities included training and materials as

well as DSGBV and residential care. Average staffing costs within the sample amounted to 47.6% of total SLA funding, while other programme costs amounted to 24.6%. Cost drivers could not be determined from the analysis as the data was incomplete, and related to one year only; however, the analysis did demonstrate that while all of the sampled costs were included as FSS costs in Tusla reports, not all of this expenditure related to FSS activities.

Further analysis of the SLAs showed that for 83.3% of the sample, there was no difference between the funding requested by the service provider and the funding allocated by Tusla. This suggests a strong level of agreement on the level of necessary funding between Tusla and its commissioned providers.

Since many FSS providers also provide other types of government-funded services, it is possible that some funding intended for FSS may be displaced to non-FSS areas (and vice versa), due to the close intermixing of FSS and non-FSS service provision. To explore this hypothesis, the authors conducted an analysis of the National Childcare Scheme (NCS) sponsorship subsidy for Tusla FSS-funded Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) services. The analysis indicated that services that also receive Tusla FSS funding were disproportionately more likely to avail of the subsidy. Poor uptake of the NCS sponsorship subsidy is therefore unlikely to be a FSS cost driver. However, the analysis suggests that there may be scope for additional sponsorship opportunities within the sample, given that some sampled services drew more on Tusla sponsorship (with all of their ELC children receiving the sponsorship) than others (with none of their ELC children receiving the sponsorship). It is unclear whether differences in uptake were due to differing client needs and/or a lack of awareness of the sponsorship subsidy. Further analysis could help to improve understanding in this regard, and could include analysis of the potential for displacement of funding in other policy areas such as mental health, education and training, and youth services.

FSS Supply and Demand Indicators

Analysis of FSS supply and demand indicators suggests that FSS provision may be becoming more expensive on a per-child basis, as the complexity of cases increases. The sections above 'Trends in Family Support Services' and 'FSS Service Providers in

Receipt of Multiple Funding Streams', points to the possibility of more complex FSS work during the period considered, although this will depend on local area, and type of service delivered.

In future, this complexity of FSS is likely to be exacerbated by the current challenging economic context for households. Moreover, the possibility of demand deferred during the pandemic translating into greater numbers of FSS referrals, the recent arrival of Ukrainian temporary protection applicants, and increase in international protection applicants, could help to drive increased demand for FSS in the near term. It will be important to monitor FSS demand and supply indicators in order to develop a shared understanding of the relationship between Tusla FSS expenditure and service provision, as demand and supply dynamics shift over time.

Recommendations for Additional Analysis

The following recommendations draw on the comprehensive analysis conducted by the Research and Evaluation Unit (REU) in DCEDIY in 2022, which informs the key findings presented in this Spending Review (the results of the broader project will be published by the DCEDIY in early 2023). The recommendations relate to enhanced FSS data collection to help strengthen the monitoring and evaluation of this key policy area.

Defining FSS

FSS data collection, monitoring, and evaluation processes will be strengthened by agreement on a shared definition of FSS. In this regard, Tusla and the DCEDIY should agree a list of activities included under this shared definition in order to facilitate the delineation of Tusla FSS from other funded supports.

Delineating FSS from other Activity

In order to delineate FSS activities from those under other areas of Tusla responsibility, C&V sector organisations and Tusla frontline staff should be categorised according to whether they engage primarily in FSS, DSGBV, Residential Care, Child Protection, Fostering, etc. This categorisation should be included in the Commissioning Portal, Tusla reports, and provided to Tusla from the FRC SPEAK

system. This will facilitate the analysis of expenditure and outputs for all areas of Tusla responsibility, including FSS.

Measurement of FSS Activity

A clearer understanding of FSS activities (outputs) is necessary in order to determine the value for money of Tusla expenditure on FSS. The following areas of FSS output data could help to link expenditure to activities, and ultimately contribute to analysis of the impact of these activities on children and families:

- The reporting of the **number of internally and externally commissioned services** in Quarterly Performance and Activity Reports would benefit from a clear definition and defined methodology. What constitutes an internally/externally commissioned service should be clear to all Local Area Managers generating this data.
- The reporting of the **number of children who receive FSS in a year** would benefit from a clear definition of what constitutes one 'unit' of FSS provided, so that the true quantum of family support behind these figures can be known. Currently, the metric of one 'child in receipt of FSS' could mean a once-off visit or a weeks-long treatment programme. Defining a unit of service could reconcile/make commensurate these variable time and resource commitments. This metric should be broken down by whether the service was internally or externally commissioned.
- FRC SPEAK data should be incorporated into other FSS activity data as reported in Performance and Activity as well as Review of Adequacy reports.
- Activity data in the Commissioning Portal should be kept in a format that allows for comparison of activity data between SLAs and organisations, as well as over time.
- Tusla should report on the mix of Tusla-employed and C&V sector-employed staff providing FSS across the 17 Tusla local areas (and 6 regions), and link this data to the numbers of internally and externally commissioned services, numbers of children who receive FSS in a year, and FSS expenditure at each local area (and regional) level.

Conclusion

Tusla funding of the overall C&V sector (FSS and non-FSS provision) has increased in recent years in line with overall Tusla expenditure, indicating that Tusla's support of the C&V sector has remained consistent. Increases in FSS expenditure have been concentrated in certain areas, such as the incorporation of the ABC programme in late 2018 from the DCEDIY (who had previously funded Pobal to administer the programme), as well as the movement of organisations into higher funding levels across each of the FSS funding streams. FSS provision varies widely across the country, with different areas varying in: the numbers of commissioned FSS providers; the types of FSS offerings; the mix of externally and internally commissioned service provision. The analysis and suggestions presented in this report may help to provide clarity around these differences, thereby assisting with efforts to better understand FSS expenditure and activities.

Tusla has made progress in transitioning from a grants-based to a commissioning-based service provision model in the C&V sector. Commissioning processes have been firmly embedded in Tusla practices at the local, regional, and national levels. However, there remains a need to develop a clear, shared understanding of what constitutes a 'family support service' and what specific activities fall within this designation. This will be a necessary step towards determining a more definitive assessment of Tusla expenditure on FSS, and enabling the monitoring and evaluation of expenditure on this important component of Tusla's work. Tusla's ongoing improvements in data collection and reporting will support this objective, helping to build a more accurate and comprehensive knowledge of Tusla FSS activities in the coming years.

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