



Enhancing Quality in Family Day Care



Ireland (Republic)

Introduction

This fact sheet describes the key aspects of Ireland's Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) system, mainly in relation to family day care.

NOTE: Ireland uses the terms 'childminding', not 'family day care'. The 'childminder' is the professional in family day care workforce.

Children's lives

- 367,360 children under six years old in Ireland, 31% of people under 18 years (Census 2022).
- 97% of eligible children participate in the universal two-year free ECCE Programme (preschool) and 27% of children under age three in ECEC group-based centres.

ECEC services

- Centre-based ECEC settings are privately owned and managed - 26% community non-profit and 74% for-profit. Childminders work alone and are self-employed.
- 4,065 registered group care centres. 58 registered childminders, as most legally exempt.

Policy

- Centralised policy and funding in ECEC, with a system split between Department of Children and Department of Education, although primarily funded by Department of Children.
- Milestone publication in April 2021 of Ireland's first national plan for family day care, the *National Action Plan for Childminding 2021- 2028* (NAPC).
- Initial NAPC implementation includes removal of childminding registration exemption; development of specific regulations and inspection framework and foundation training; new Regional Childminding Development Officers supporting locally. The following phase includes the introduction of staffed local childminding networks.

Workforce & professional development

- Recruitment and retention are major issues in ECEC centres. National staff turnover rate is 19%. There are no data on the recruitment and retention of childminders as so few are registered but there is concern that reforms may close existing provision.
- All educators/childminders in registered services must hold a minimum of a relevant European Qualifications Framework level 4/Irish National Qualifications Framework level 5 qualification. Over time, childminders will be required to meet this qualification, but it will be less onerous.

Challenges

- Keeping political/policy focus on funding quality for children as well as affordability for parents.
- Workforce recruitment and retention, in both homes and centres.
- Bringing a market-led system to being regarded as a public good that is publically funded.
- Identifying childminders operating services in their own homes and encouraging them into a formal ECEC system.

