

The Road to Public Childcare

Donal Swan

National Women's Council



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First steps along the road

- **Pre-1990s/2000s**
 - Minimal role of state, and role/responsibility of women in the home
 - High dependence on childminders in informal economy
 - Changed due to Celtic Tiger and expanding labour force
 - **Turn of the century**
 - Partnership 2000 Expert Working Group on Childcare
 - Barcelona Targets, EU funding and social partnership
 - Stalled as a result of the crash
 - **Strong policy differences**
 - Tax reliefs vs Child Benefit vs direct delivery
 - Ideological importance of (women's) care in the home
 - **NWC's Childcare 2000 Campaign**
 - Followed by Accessible Childcare Model Report in 2005 – campaigning for public model since then
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Where things are now

- **Further development and expansion of private subsidy model**
 - Sector divided between private and community provision
 - Continuing role of childminders
 - **€1.37bn allocated in Budget 2026**, up more than 50% since 2019
 - But still only ~0.4% of GNI*, far from UNICEF recommended 1%
 - Primarily focused on:
 - National Childcare Scheme; ECCE; Core Funding; Equal Start
 - **Affordability**
 - Median cost €823 per month; highest cost €1,386; lowest cost €325 (Pobal, 2023/2024)
 - Highest universally available subsidy is €417.30 per month; plus Income Assessed Subsidies
 - Only available for children over 2
 - **Accessibility**
 - Waitlist of >50,000 for children under 4 (Pobal, 2023/2024)
 - Childcare “deserts”
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The bigger picture

- **International context**
 - Ireland among highest fees in EU, along with Switzerland and Austria (Eurydice)
 - Ireland has highest proportion of private provision in EU (Eurydice)
 - **Educators:** ERO wages set at only 15c higher than minimum wage
 - Ongoing issues with recruitment and retention
 - 97% of educators are women (Pobal, 2023/2024)
 - **Corporate profits:** top 10 childcare providers made €59m in profit between 2019 and 2023, while being subsidised at rate of 69% (Taft)
 - **Climate and biodiversity crisis and our economic model**
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Together for Public Alliance

- Together for Public Alliance
- 43 organisations
- Focused on the creation of a Public System of ECEC
- Targeted General Election 2024 and the new Programme for Government



Programme for Government 2025

- “broad consultation” and “detailed Action Plan”
 - Cap fees for families at €200 per month per child
 - Capital investment to build or purchase state-owned facilities
 - Forward Planning and Delivery Unit, incl. delivering public supply
 - Continue to implement Employment Regulation Orders
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The Road Forward

- **Budget 2026**
 - **Action Plan development**
 - Integration with other supports – eg family leave, employment
 - School Age Care, and integration with education and community
 - Targeted, inclusive supports for marginalised families
 - Pay, conditions and valuing the work of educators
 - Long-term financial sustainability of state involvement in the sector
 - **Towards a Public System of ECEC**
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Go raibh maith agaibh!

donals@nwci.ie