

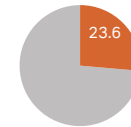
“Country recommendation

Ireland should take action to invest in services to break the cycle of poverty early by rolling out a new equal participation model in early years education and care that addresses accessibility, affordability and targeted wraparound services for those living in disadvantage.

Country
Profile 2023



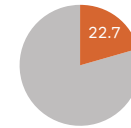
Ireland



Child Population:

1,195,128

23.6% of total population



Child Poverty:

271,294

22.7% (2022)

▼ - 0.1% compared to 2021

RESPONDENT ORGANISATION(S):

Children's Rights Alliance

Children's Rights in Ireland

The [Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth](#) (DCEDIY), has responsibility for children's rights in Ireland. The most recent policy framework, [Better Outcomes Brighter Futures](#) has come to an end. However, a successor policy is at an advanced stage of development with a [blueprint](#) document setting out the scope of the strategy. A ten-year whole-of-government strategy called [First Five](#) sets out the priorities for babies, young children and their families.

In December 2022, Ireland's Taoiseach (Prime Minister) announced a new Child Poverty and Well-being Unit in his department. In August 2023, this unit published its plan [From Poverty to Potential: A Programme Plan for Child Well-being 2023-2025](#) setting out its priorities in relation to child poverty for the next 2.5 years.

Child participation

The [National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020](#) aimed to make sure that children and young people have a voice regarding decisions that affect their lives. A successor strategy is in [development](#). The national 'Hub na nÓg' (Youth Hub) aims to support participation and provides resources to [Comhairle na nÓg](#) (Youth Councils) in every local authority area of the country. A representative from each area is elected to a National Executive which meets once a month for two years. The National Executive is supported by the DCEDIY to ensure they can engage with relevant decision-makers, including Ministers.

The right to vote is restricted to those over 18 years. In 2012, the Convention on the Irish Constitution [considered](#) a constitutional amendment

to reduce the voting age in Ireland. A majority voted in favour of lowering the voting age – 48% in favour of lowering the age to 16 years and 38% in favour of lowering it to 17 years. Despite [commitments](#) to hold a referendum on the issue, and recommendations from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2016, none are currently planned.

Children's Rights Alliance believe that Ireland should lower the voting age to 16 for local and European elections as a first step towards ensuring that younger people have a greater say in the issues impacting them.¹

Child safety and well-being online

The Online Safety and Media Regulation Act 2022 established an Online Safety Commissioner as part of the new Media Commission. The Online Safety

Commissioner is now developing Online Safety Codes. These aim to provide enforceable guidance to online service providers on the application of certain EU and national regulatory instruments and can be a game changer in terms of children's online safety - not only in Ireland but in Europe due to several platforms being headquartered in the country.

Child protection systems

Recent reports spotlight serious issues in the Irish child protection system for some of the most vulnerable children in the State. The latest volume of cases from the [Child Law Project](#) alongside the publication of a letter from [Judge Simms](#) highlighted the lack of care placements for very vulnerable children and young people. Tusla's (Ireland's child protection authority) [2022 Annual Report](#) highlighted the ongoing challenges for recruitment and retention of social workers/

¹ See the [UNCRC Alternative report](#) prepared as part of Ireland's examination by the UN Committee in January 2023.

specialised staff, and the strain on residential and foster care placements. Recent reports from the Health Information and Quality Authority identified serious deficits in governance and oversight of the system, and serious delays for initial child protection assessments to take place. This is resulting in delayed notice of suspected abuse or welfare concerns of an average of four months to An Garda Síochána (the Irish police).

Children in migration and refugees

The situation regarding children in migration and refugees is highlighted in the Children's Rights Alliance's flagship publication [Report Card 2023](#).

There has been an unprecedented increase in the number of people seeking refuge in Ireland as a direct result of the war in Ukraine. This has led to a

sharp deterioration in standards for children and young people seeking asylum. The resulting delay in implementing the [White Paper on Ending Direct Provision](#) requires reconsideration.² Children have been placed in temporary accommodation centres, which is unsuitable in some circumstances, and lacking any level of oversight.

A Government Scheme to regularise the status of undocumented people living in Ireland, including children, took place in 2022, regularising 8,311 people. The scheme was a breakthrough, and its implementation has shown significant positive results. To ensure its impact, necessary legislation needs to be brought forward to advance multiple, sustainable pathways for the regularisation of undocumented children.

Children's mental health

In [December 2020 there were 2,755](#) children and young people waiting for mental health services. By the end of February 2023 this had risen to 4,434. In July 2023, Ireland's Mental Health Commission published its [Independent Review](#) of the provision of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). The final report lays bare concerns on significant shortcomings with 49 recommendations for action. Alarming, services cannot give assurance to children and families that they will get the support they need, and they deserve, within the current system.

Mental health services are completely stretched thin with most services significantly understaffed. The Health Service Executive needs to consider alternative ways to deliver healthcare to ensure the children that need support the most,

have access to it, regardless of where they live. Special attention is needed for children who face difficulties accessing support, for example: the Traveller Community, asylum seekers, refugees and migrants (including those in Direct Provision), children in care and young LGBTI people.

Poverty and Social Exclusion – Experiences of children, families, and communities

Child poverty in Ireland

Ireland has a total child population of 1.19 million, 22.7% of which live at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2022. The 'At risk of poverty or social exclusion', abbreviated as AROPE, used at EU level, corresponds to the sum of persons either at risk of poverty, severely materially deprived, or living in a household with a very low work intensity. This figure shows a decrease from 2020,

² Direct Provision is the name for Ireland's system of provision of accommodation, food, money, and medical services for people applying for international protection and asylum.

where the rate of children at risk was 23.5% and from 2021, with the rate of children at risk of 22.8%.

However, the national annual poverty statistics captured by the Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) show an increase across all three child poverty measures between 2021 and 2022 – at risk of poverty, households experiencing deprivation, and consistent poverty.

Children are the second highest demographic group in Ireland at risk of poverty, with a poverty rate of 15.2% – higher than the rate among the general population (13.1%). Single parent households with children have a higher rate of 23.8%, versus those in two-adult households (13.1%). A shortcoming of the SILC is that it collects data at a household level and therefore does not contain data on groups such as the Traveller community or those living in Direct Provision.

According to Children's Rights Alliance, the groups of children most in need in Ireland are outlined below.

Children living in Direct Provision

Children living in Direct Provision centres are at a high risk of consistent poverty and are not counted in the official poverty statistics. In April 2023, approximately one in every five applicants for international protection was a child, with 4,331 children being accommodated by the [International Protection Accommodation Service](#).

Children and young people in Direct Provision [have spoken about](#) how a lack of income means they have few opportunities to take part in activities with their friends and peers after school. The financial cost of school trips or the need to take public transport after sports activities is a major barrier in terms of integrating into the community.

Children in Direct Provision [receive a weekly payment](#) of €29.80 currently. Families can access payment support for school uniforms and other necessary costs, such as buggies for babies, and clothing. Historically the rate of the Daily Expense Allowance has been significantly lower than other social welfare payments for children ([in 2013](#) it was €9.60 compared to €29.80 for the Increase for a Qualified Child (IQC) paid to families receiving social welfare). This rate has remained unchanged since 2019 despite increases for other social welfare recipients. Children living in the Direct Provision system do not have access to the child benefit payment given to all children residing in Ireland.

This was the only group of children in Budget 2023 that did not receive any additional help to tackle increased costs-of-living. This is [despite government commitments](#) to introduce a monthly payment at the same rate as the regular child benefit payment as families move into

independent accommodation. This has yet to happen, and children in Direct Provision also do not qualify for the IQC available to children whose parents are in receipt of social welfare payments.

Traveller Children

The prevalence of poverty in Traveller and Roma households is not captured in official statistics. However, [research](#) shows they have greater difficulty making ends meet when compared to the general population. Traveller families face significant barriers to accessing their right to housing and are at greater risk of experiencing homelessness than settled families. It is [calculated](#) that approximately 39% of Travellers are experiencing homelessness.

School completion rates for Travellers are significantly lower than the general population, and [analysis of census data](#) suggests Travellers benefitted less from overall improvements in educational levels since the

1960s. Traveller and Roma children are significantly less likely to attend early years services, with 17% of services [reporting](#) having one Traveller child attending their service, and only 7% reporting a Roma child in their service.

Children Experiencing Homelessness

The numbers in homeless accommodation increased throughout 2022, with a small seasonal decline in December. While there was some stagnation of figures at the start of 2023, by [August](#) there were almost 13,000 people living in Emergency Accommodations. These latest statistics show that there were 3,895 children living in Emergency Accommodation and 1,520 young people between the ages of 18 and 24 years.

Organisations working with families experiencing homelessness have identified a

need for targeted interventions for children living in emergency accommodation. These interventions, which could be delivered by a dedicated child or family support worker, should provide tailored support to help children and their families deal with the trauma of homelessness and/or the challenges that they faced before becoming homeless.

To effectively reduce child poverty and social exclusion in Ireland, the government should:

- Benchmark all social welfare rates to a Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) to ensure that all households with children can afford a minimum standard of living.
- Prioritise investment in the development and implementation of the Equal Participation Model of early years over the next number of Budget cycles.
- Appoint an expert on play in the Department of Children,

Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth to lead the development of a new National Play Plan. The Plan should have a focus on the need for green spaces and recreational facilities in local communities. In developing this plan, a review should be carried out of what exists at local authority levels.

Further analysis of issues facing these children can be found in the Children's Rights Alliance's [Civil Society Alternative Report in response to the Fifth and Sixth Combined Report of Ireland under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#). The 2023 edition of the Alliance's [Child Poverty Monitor](#) also spotlights eight best practices solutions to address child poverty.

The European Child Guarantee

Ireland's National Action Plan

2023 marked the third year of the European Child Guarantee's implementation, and two years since Member States were requested to submit their National Action Plans (NAPs) to outline how they would address child poverty at national level.

The NAP of Ireland was published in June 2022³, developed by the Irish National Coordinator for the EU Child Guarantee, responsibility for which lies with the EU and International Unit in the DCEDIY.

The [NAP](#) provides details of the key statistics in relation to children in Ireland, including a profile of those who are most in need. This includes identifying the proportion of children living in lone-parent families, those engaged in caring duties and those who are members of the Traveller

³ The lists of Child Guarantee National Coordinators and National Action Plans, where published, are available at the bottom of [this page](#).

community. In addition, the NAP presents the key barriers to accessing services that families and children face. However, there is little discussion about targeted action, or the specific actions needed for target groups.

The Irish NAP restates the current services, programmes, and supports in place across relevant government departments within the scope of the Guarantee. In addition, the plan proposes to pilot Local Area Child Poverty Plans developed between Local Community Development Committees and Children and Young People's Services Committees in four sites.

The NAP states that a new monitoring and evaluation framework will be developed to meet the needs of the implementation of both the EU Child Guarantee and Ireland's new policy framework being developed for children and young people.

In May 2023 the DCEDIY hosted the national EU Child Guarantee

Coordinators in Dublin. On the second day, a stakeholder event took place including Irish civil society organisations (CSOs) and other stakeholders. There was opportunity at this event for CSOs to network with colleagues from across the EU as well as with officials from key Irish government departments.

Since the publication of the NAP, the DCEDIY have begun to develop a new model of early years – informally referred to as the Equal Participation Model – to develop a new model of provision for families experiencing disadvantage.

European Semester 2023 – Country reports and recommendations

Overview of the Country Report: identification of the children in need

While this year's European Semester Country Report for Ireland references poverty, there is no specific focus on children.

The report captures some of the key areas of reform over the past number of years (such as those noted in the Children's Rights Alliance [Report Card](#)). However, there is little focus on the need to develop a new model of early years for children experiencing disadvantage. The focus on early childhood education and care is promising, but there is a need to shift the focus away from the perspective of labour force activation and participation towards a child-centred approach.

There is no substantial consideration of educational disadvantage. The Country Report failed to include children in alternative care, children's rights to be heard, children with a migrant background, children's mental health and well-being. There is a strong focus on digital in terms of economic/employment and business but no focus on children's rights.

Children's Rights Alliance were not involved in the Semester Process 2023.

Needs analysis: alignment at country-level

There is a lack of specific focus on children's rights and the key areas in need of reform for children such as: child protection and welfare, mental health, housing and early childhood education and care from a children's rights perspective.



Eurochild advocates for children's rights and well-being to be at the heart of policymaking. We are a network of organisations working with and for children throughout Europe, striving for a society that respects the rights of children. We influence policies, build internal capacities, facilitate mutual learning and exchange practice and research. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is the foundation of all our work.



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