



SIPTU Big Start Campaign
Early Years Education and Care

Pre-Budget 2019 Statement

B is for Budget



Parents, workers, employers, government and child-focused non-governmental organisations all agree that early childhood education and care (childcare) should be high-quality, affordable and accessible.

Evidence clearly shows that high-quality, early-childhood education and care has benefits for children in terms of their cognitive and social development, improving school readiness and life outcomes. The impact is even greater for children from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

However, Ireland's Early Years sector is in crisis. Fees are high for parents, wages are low for educators and many services are struggling with sustainability. Everyone is getting a raw deal. The cause of the crisis is twofold.

Firstly, government is significantly underspending on childcare. Ireland spends just 0.2% of GNI* on Early Childhood Education and Care compared to an EU average of 0.7% and 1.0% in Sweden. This has resulted in Ireland having the second highest childcare fees for couples in the OECD and the highest for lone parents.

Secondly, the current market model of childcare does not support the development of high quality and affordable childcare. In fact, it places these demands in competition with each other. This has left providers, parents and educators caught in the vicious cycle.

In short, the Early Years sector requires (1) an overarching strategy, (2) a new funding model, (3) significantly increase funding and (4) an implementation plan.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the underlying issues of the childcare crisis and the immediate demands SIPTU is recommending:

- 1.** The development of a radically reformed funding model for Early Childhood Education and Care¹ that dramatically reduces fees for parents, ensures provider sustainability and underpins quality with decent wages for educators. Minimum pay and conditions should be supported by government investment and introduced via a Sectoral Employment Order.
- 2.** Increase Early Years Education and Care from the current 0.2% of GNI* spending to the EU average of over a 5-year period. This would increase spending from €485 million in 2018 to €2.1 billion in 2023. Spending should increase to 1% of GNI* by 2027.
- 3.** Develop and implement a 'Continuous Professional Development' plan in consultation with relevant stakeholders to support quality practice within the sector.
- 4.** A timeline and a costed and funded implementation plan for the pending Early Years Strategy.

¹The Minister for Children and Youth Affairs has proposed such a development as part of the upcoming Early Years Strategy

The average rate of pay for an Early Years Educator is €10.88 per hour. Thousands work under precarious 15 hours a week, 38 weeks a year contracts.

The cost of childcare in Ireland is the second most expensive in the EU for couples and the most expensive for lone parents.

Recommendations are in line with ICTU's pre-budget submission which addresses the overall budgetary implications, including generating the required revenue.

F is for **Funding**

P is for **Pay Scales**



Q is for **Qualified**

A is for **Affordable**



According to government, Ireland spends just 0.2% of GDP on Early Years Education and Care compared to an OECD average of 0.7% and the UNICEF benchmark of 1%.

Staff turnover in the early years sector is 28.2%² per year. 86% of services said that they were concerned that problems recruiting and retaining staff will impact on the viability of their service.³

"Until the low remuneration of Early Years educators is addressed we will still rightly feel we are not adequately recognised and are undervalued. We need the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Katherine Zappone, to make good on her commitment to radically overhaul the Early Years funding system and ensure that educators in the sector earn a decent wage for their invaluable work"

Jessica Lee,
Early Years Educator
and SIPTU Activist

"Providers, educators and parents are all struggling. Unless we start working together nothing is going to change. If we want affordable, high quality childcare we need to build a childcare union that can fight for educators, providers and parents"

**Early Years
Provider & SIPTU
Activist**



The Big Start Campaign

SIPTU is the union for the Early Years sector. Historically, the early Years Sector has been non-union, low paid and low status. Through the Big Start campaign SIPTU is organising Early Years Educators and bringing together parents, providers and child focused Non-Governmental Organisations to radically transform sector. We are campaigning for high quality and affordable, accessible Early Years services that are delivered by qualified professionals paid a decent wage within sustainable services.

² Pobal, (2017), Early Years Sector Profile 2016/2017, Dublin

³ Early Childhood Ireland (2017), Early Years Sector Staffing Survey, Dublin

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Together Stronger



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