



**CHILDMINDING IRELAND**  
*Supporting Ireland's Childminders; Minding Ireland's Children*

## Introduction:

Childminding Ireland is the National Childminding Body, supporting and promoting quality childminding in Ireland. We are in contact with 2,000 childminders on an ongoing basis.

There are an estimated 35,000<sup>i</sup> childminders nationally, minding approximately 88,000<sup>ii</sup> children. However, there are less than 100 childminders in the State system (Tusla registered). Unless a childminder is minding 4 or more pre-school children, or more than 7 school-aged children, they are not eligible to register with Tusla. The current regulations for childminding are completely inappropriate.

In order to support childminding in Ireland, for benefit of children and their families, a new appropriate system for childminding must be created, by childminders and those proximate to childminding.

## Issues being considered by the Committee:

### Childcare services for front-line workers:

Childminding is the childcare setting of choice for many front-line workers, the flexibility of childminding is a good match for those working shift patterns. Childminders were not given clear instruction around restrictions until 14 May. At that point, the instruction received was that Childminders may work in the home of essential workers, but should not work in their own homes.

We conducted a survey of childminding contacts and 96 confirmed that they had continued to work through the period. However, we know from talking with childminders on a daily basis that a significant number continued to mind the children of our front-line workers in the childminders home, despite the restrictions, as they felt a moral obligation to do so.

Despite being the home based care specialists, childminders were excluded from the Childcare for Healthcare proposed scheme. The rationale given for this decision was that supervision and rotas would be required. We believe if a more pragmatic approach were taken to include childminders (with evidenced quality assurance,

such, as Members of Childminding Ireland would have) this scheme could have succeeded. Childminders are self-employed, work singlehandedly for long hours in a home setting.

#### Childcare for children of parents returning to work

Currently childminding settings can reopen from June 29. Childminding Ireland conducted a reopening survey on behalf of the DCYA, which closed on the 2 June. The survey showed that 43.3% (n=361) of respondents plan to reopen their service on 29 June while 35.5% (n=296) do not plan to reopen and 21.1% (n=176) did not respond to this question.

Some of the concerns around reopening have now been superseded for example concerns were raised around the use of PPE and group sizes, have now been addressed.

Concerns outstanding include:

- Health and safety of their own children or family
- Lack of demand, parents not returning to work until a later date and the service no longer needed by families.
- Other caring commitments as a reason for not re-opening, including caring for vulnerable household members.

Parents also have concerns around the safety in sending their children back into childcare and for themselves returning to office/business premises.

#### Social distancing and clinical guidelines in childcares settings

Due to small group sizes, childminding settings are considered a single pod. As a result, childminders do not face the same challenges as centre-based care. Childminding Ireland are collaborating with the DCYA to create appropriate childminding reopening guidelines.

#### Capacity and staffing

The reopening survey mentioned above shows that just over one fifth of providers (22.4% ELC, n=187 and 16.3% SAC, n=136) reported having additional capacity to take on children if required. Of these, they reported total additional capacity for 600 children, 315 of which ELC and 285 of which SAC.

As childminders work singlehandedly, staffing is not applicable.

#### Financial impact on the childcare sector

As outlined above, many childminders are concerned about the sustainability of their settings. From discussions with childminders, we know that many are considering

their options. Unless they have (including part-time clients) the equivalent of 3 children full-time, generally it becomes unfeasible to reopen their childminding businesses.

For many families, the financial reality is that parents are saving money by working from home. They are incurring no childcare costs or travel costs. However, our primary concern is the children. If a parent is working from home, how can they mind their children and work at the same time? If parents were supported in their childminding costs, in the same way those using centre-based care are, then parents would be more likely to send their children to be minded, while they focus on their work.

The Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment has been of great support to childminders, who are generally poorly paid (average €5 per child per hour). The feedback from childminders has been very positive, about the State support to them as self-employed workers.

A one-off Childminding Reopening Grant totalling €375,000 will be available for childminders who are not in receipt of either the RSP or the COVID-19 capital grant. An individual grant of €500 per childminder will be made to assist with the additional costs of reopening.

This grant is available exclusively to childminders who:

- Were providing a childminding service carried out in the childminder's home on 12 March 2020;
- Have completed the Children First e-learning programme;
- Have Garda Vetting in place;
- Are tax compliant;
- Have appropriate insurance in place for their childminding business;
- Commit to operate for a minimum of one year following receipt of the grant;
- Were not in contract to provide DCYA ELC and SAC programmes on 12 March 2020.

Childminders who were in contract to provide DCYA ELC and SAC programmes on 12 March 2020 may eligible for the RSP and the COVID-19 capital grant.

The arrival of Covid-19 has further exacerbated sustainability issues for childminding. In particular, childminding had already been negatively affected by the second Free Preschool ECCE year. Many parents and childminders feel children are too young at 2 years and nine months to start the ECCE programme. Working parents find it is difficult to manage drop-offs and pick-ups associated with it and if Childminder is not in a position to do these trips, the child generally leaves the service. There is also an issue here for children with additional needs, where the parent would like the child to have an additional year in the childminding setting before commencing ECCE. The

age requirement means that if they do not wish to send their child for Year 1, they miss a year of funding.

#### Insurance issues

Childminding Ireland offers a childminding group scheme insurance through Arachas. We are currently working with Arachas to finalise a return to childminding, insurance communication.

In the longer term, we are gravely concerned by the lack of competition in insurance for the childcare sector.

#### Replacing childcare by grandparents

We have no particular information on childminders replacing childcare provided by cocooning Grandparents. We would find in normal times that childminders and grandparents work in tandem supporting families with their childcare needs.

#### Impact of loss of early years education, especially on vulnerable groups (children in care, children in disadvantaged households, children with disabilities)

The care of vulnerable children should have been prioritised along with front-line staff and essential workers.

Many children with additional needs are minded by childminders, the small group size and the one to one continuity of care works well. The impact of the disruption is difficult to estimate at this point.

## Recommendations for action by the Government

If similar situations reoccur, the care of vulnerable children should be prioritised along with front-line staff and essential workers.

We believe a more pragmatic approach should be taken to include childminders (with evidenced quality assurance, such as Members of Childminding Ireland have) and that the Childcare for Healthcare scheme would have had a better chance of success. Childminders are self-employed, work singlehandedly in a home setting.

We would recommend that the Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment should continue in full for those childminders who are not in a position to reopen on 29 June, either due to lack of demand or concerns over health concerns.

Reforms to the childcare insurance market must be undertaken, in order to ensure sustainability of the sector.

A National Policy for Childminding needs to be developed informed by childminders and parents using childminding services, and those working in the childminding sector. This Policy should include incentives for those currently childminding to continue and to encourage more childminders into the sector.

Particularly at this time of uncertainty, childminders and childminding need to be supported. Childminding Ireland is the main source of information and support for childminders and the only organisation in the country dedicated exclusively to supporting quality childminding. A reflection of the lack of recognition of childminding is the fact that this National Associative Body for Childminding is completely under resourced and receives 450% less central & local government funding than its centre-based counterpart. Currently Childminding Ireland has only 1 full-time and 4 part-time members of staff. Childminding needs and deserves more support. Childminding Ireland must be appropriately resourced to support and promote quality childminding in Ireland.

## Executive summary

Childminding was underutilised in the Covid-19 response, with a more pragmatic approach, many vulnerable children, front-line workers and essential workers could have been supported with their childcare needs.

Although there is no statutory requirement, many childminders have the following evidenced quality assurance:

- Garda Vetting for childminding
- Insurance for childminding
- Paediatric First Aid
- Child Safeguarding Training
- Code of Ethics and Safety declaration
- Tax compliant

The childminding reopening grant is the first time this group has been recognised.

The current [Draft Childminding Action Plan](#) has serious failings and needs to be rewritten with childminders and those proximate to childminding.

A suitable State system must be created for childminding with parity of esteem, in which parents could then choose the childcare that best suits their family needs rather than the funding dictating the childcare.

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<sup>i</sup> [Pathway to a quality support and assurance system for childminding](#), 26th March 2018 by the Working Group on Reforms and Supports for the Childminding Sector. Volume 1, page 20.

<sup>ii</sup> [Pathway to a quality support and assurance system for childminding](#), 26th March 2018 by the Working Group on Reforms and Supports for the Childminding Sector. Volume 1, page 20.