

The Irish Policy Context: Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs



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Ireland

Population: 4.46m (2009)

Land Area: 68,890 sq km

EU Member State

Number of children birth to six:
418,612 (10% of population)

Some of the material in this presentation is based on combination of publically available presentations prepared by the OMCYA



Historical Context: Early Childhood in Ireland



- Historically, little state attention paid to early childhood
- Pre-school children considered the responsibility of the family not the state
- Church had considerable influence in terms of family life
- Low female labour market participation (started ↑ in 1970's after removal of the marriage bar)
- Families twice as large as the European average

Contemporary Context: Early Childhood in Ireland



- Significant changes in family patterns
- Smaller families - total fertility rate = 2.1 (in 2008)
- 33% of children born outside marriage (in 2008)
- Divorce legalised in 1996
- Abortion not available in Ireland
- Labour force participation of younger women (25-34) has increased from 30% in 1975 to 77% in 2009

Childhood Policy in Ireland



- 1908 Children's Act
- 1937 Articles 41 and 42.5 of the Irish Constitution
- 1992 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- 1994 Minister of State for Children established
- 1996 Pre-School Regulations
- 1998 Report of the National Forum on Early Childhood Education
- 1999 National Childcare Strategy
- 1999 White Paper on Early Childhood Education
- 2000 National Children's Strategy 2000-2010
- 2000 National Children's Office established
- 2002 Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education established
- 2003 Children's Ombudsman established
- 2004 NCCA Towards a Framework for Early Learning
- 2004 OECD Review of ECCE Policy in Ireland
- 2005 Office of the Minister for Children (OMC) established

Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA)

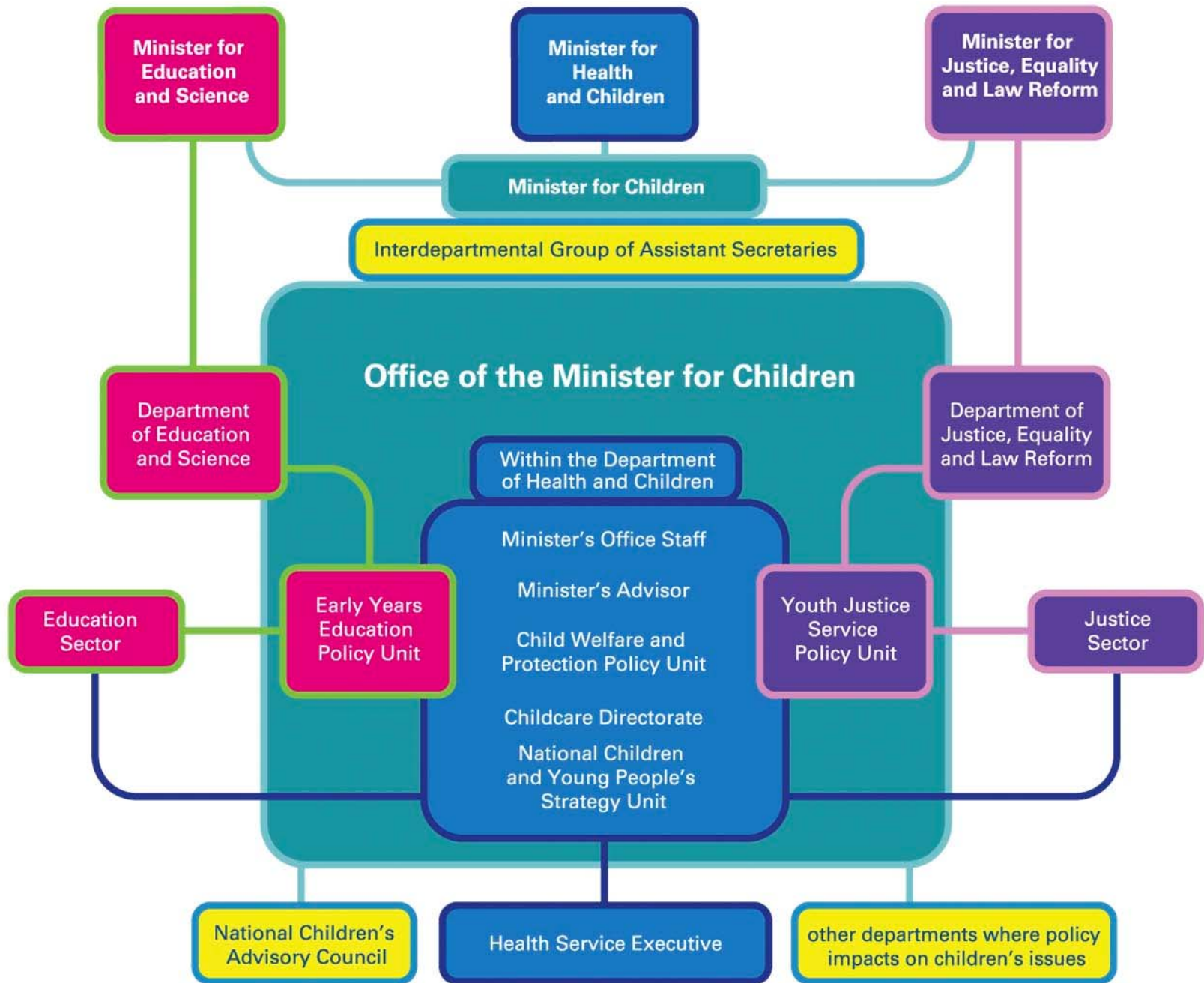


- **Founded in 2006 as Office of the Minister for Children (Youth Affairs joined 2007)**
- **Enhanced role for Minister for Children**
 - Implement the National Children's Strategy (2000-2010)
 - Implement the National Childcare Investment Programme (2006-2010)
 - Develop policy on child welfare and child protection
 - Implement the Children Act, 2001
- **Brought together several ministries involved with children**



Oifig an Aire Leanaí
agus Gnóthaí Óige

Office of the Minister for
Children and Youth Affairs



Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA)



- Responsible for harmonising policy issues that affect children in:
 - early childhood care and education
 - youth justice
 - child welfare and protection
 - children and young people's participation
 - research on children and young people
 - youth affairs
 - cross-cutting initiatives for children

Early Childhood Care & Education



- No public pre-school system in Ireland, BUT state funded service for 4-5 year olds in primary schools
- But since 2000, sustained programme of investment in child care
 - Creation of childcare infrastructure - €525m over 7 years (capital 50%, staff 34%, quality supports 16%)
 - Development of regulation and inspection of childcare settings
 - Development of Síolta, the National Quality Framework
 - Development of Aistear, a Framework for Early Learning

Early Childhood Care & Education



- **2005- Early Childcare Supplement (ECS)**
 - Universal payment of €1,000 for all children under 6
- **2009 – Replaced ECS with the Universal Free Preschool Provision: Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme (ECCE)**
 - Free pre-school year for all children between the ages of 3 years 3 months and 4 years 6 months
 - 3 hours a day, 5 days a week, over 38 weeks

OMCYA:

Prevention and Early Intervention Program (2006)



- Move from crisis intervention to early intervention/prevention in children's services
- Philanthropy active in this area
- **Aim:** to support the development, implementation and evaluation of strategies for children, which are developed by statutory, voluntary and community agencies operating in disadvantaged communities
- Features of the PEIP:
 - To examine innovative methods for improving outcomes for children
 - Evidence of *what works*, proven models of intervention
 - Outcomes orientation
 - Services designed for families, communities and agencies working together
 - Support integration of services
 - Evaluated using rigorous experimental or quasi-experimental design

OMCYA: Prevention and Early Intervention Program (2006)



- **Three candidate projects approved in 2007**
 - 3 disadvantaged areas/strong community development
- **Co-funded between The Atlantic Philanthropies and Government - total funding €36 mil.**
- **If successful – enhanced resource allocation and policy changes to improve outcomes for all children**

Childhood Development Initiative in Tallaght West



- **2007-2011: €15m investment**
 - Early Childhood Care and Education programme
 - “Doodle Den” afterschool literacy programme
 - “Mate-Tricks” afterschool pro-social behaviour programme
 - Health Schools Initiative
 - Community Safety Initiative
 - A Safe and Healthy Place
 - Quality Enhancement Programme
- **Combination of evaluation designs, incl. cluster randomisation**

Youngballymun



- **2007-2012: €15m investment**
 - 0-3 years “Ready, Steady, Grow”, pre-birth support and baby and toddler development
 - 3-5 years: “3, 4, 5 Learning Years” Highscope
 - 5-12 years: “Incredible Years”, teacher-parent-child training and support programme
 - 12-22 years: “Jigsaw Youngballymun”, youth well being programme
 - 4-18 years: “Write Minded”, literacy support programme
- **Combination of evaluation designs, but no RCT**

Preparing for Life (*PFL*)



- 2007-2013: €6m investment
 - Five year school readiness programme beginning during pregnancy
 - Aims: improve parenting skills to promote child development
 - Multiple components
 - ✦ Weekly home visits from a trained *PFL* mentor
 - ✦ Group training for parents using the Triple P Positive Parenting Programme
 - ✦ Public health workshops
 - ✦ Child development materials
 - ✦ 1 year pre-school place
 - ✦ Information support worker to help access existing services
 - Dosage experiment
- Evaluated using multiple designs, incl. RCT

New Government: March 2011



- Minister for children – full ministry
- Maintaining the free school year provision
- Maintaining, where possible, targeted early intervention programmes
- But huge economic challenges...so only time will tell

Centre for Effective Services



- CES was set up in 2008 as a partnership between government and philanthropy to promote evidence-based policy and practice in child, family and community services across the island of Ireland.
- A multidisciplinary team who provide assistance to service providers and to commissioning bodies to access and apply the latest international learning in 'what works'.
- Funders are The Atlantic Philanthropies, the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, and the Department for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs.
- www.effectiveservices.org

REPPP



- The aim of the project is to document the learning for the research community across the sites involved.

Function of the Working Group

- To explore the learning from research in community settings so far;
- To identify the challenges, solutions and shared experiences;
- To identify core principles and required actions in order to improve the research process;
- To guide a literature review, identifying best research practice and experiences;
- To identify and agree themes (e.g. for Chapter headings, seminar papers, etc);
- To collaboratively document the experience to date; and
- To ensure comprehensive participation in the process.



- <http://www.whatsworkingforchildren.org>