



National Action Plan for Childminding (2021 – 2028)

In May 2021, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth published the [National Action Plan for Childminding](#). Childminding is defined as paid, non-relative, home-based care of children aged from birth to 14. The report uses the term 'childminder' for those who care for children in their own home and the term 'nanny' or 'au pair' for those who care for children in the child's home.

In Ireland, childminding is almost entirely unregulated. Many childminders are exempt from regulations due to a clause in the Child Care Act 1991. Before February 2019, only childminders who cared for more than three preschool children from different families had to register with Tusla and, therefore, were subject to regulation. Section 22 of the Childcare Support Act 2018 came into force in February 2019. This broadened the scope of the regulation to include childminders who care for more than six children of any age at one time. However, childminding is understood to imply the care of six children or fewer.

As most childminders are outside of regulation, supports were established to help them raise standards and move out of the informal economy. The National Childminding Initiative began in 2002. It contained National Guidelines for Childminders as well as a voluntary notification system so that childminders who did not have to register with Tusla could notify their local City/County Childcare Committee and begin benefitting from supports.

The Childminding Development Grant was introduced in 2004 and was designed to help childminders with the costs associated with their work. Childcare Services Tax Relief allowed childminders to receive a tax exemption on up to €15,000 of income earned through childminding. Childminding Advisory Officers were also appointed to offer information, support, and training to childminders, but these were discontinued between 2012 and 2013. Participation in the other supports also declined between 2014 and 2020.

The Action Plan was developed following repeated calls to widen the scope of childminding regulation. A Working Group on Reforms and Supports for the Childminding Sector was established in 2016. This group's report was published in 2018, with the Action Plan drawing heavily on it. The objective of the Action Plan is *"to improve access to high quality and affordable early learning and school-aged childcare through childminding"*. It is split into three phases: preparatory, transition, and full implementation.

Phase 1 – Preparatory

The first phase is planned to last between two and three years and work has so far advanced during 2022. In this phase, a considerable amount of research will take place, including research into the number of childminders who will remain in the sector and will be legally required to register with Tusla in phase 2. The cost for childminders to deliver their services will also be examined along with the costs of phase 2 reforms.

A consultation process on new regulations and inspection processes will begin and amendments to the Child Care Act 1991 will be introduced to remove legal exemptions. A Foundation Training programme for childminders will be developed and rolled out, as will a Quality Development Programme. Reforms to quality and financial supports and the costs involved with delivering these supports will be identified.

A consultation and communications strategy will be established to ensure that childminders and parents are aware of the benefits of these changes. Regional Childminding Development Officers, City/County Childcare Committees and voluntary Childcare organisations will also be involved in supporting childminders with registering with Tusla and accessing the National Childcare Scheme (NCS).

Phase 2 – Transition

Phase 2 is scheduled to take three to five years. It will begin when current legal exemptions from regulation are removed, and childminder-specific regulations come into force. With this phase comes eligibility for any childminder, who meets the registration requirements, to take part in the NCS. The Quality Development Programme will be rolled out for childminders. Childminders registered with Tusla will be required to complete the programme over a period of years. To remain registered, childminders will need to demonstrate that they have progressed through training and mentoring. Inspection services will be expanded, with a process that is appropriate for childminders.

Quality supports and training for childminders will be established. This will include piloting and the introduction of staffed local childminding networks led by trained network leaders. Financial supports for childminders will be reformed in this phase and communications actions, designed to inform childminders and parents about the new regulations and available supports, will begin.

Phase 3 – Full Implementation

Phase 3 will begin by 2028 at the latest. The regulatory requirements for the initial cohort of childminders will be completed, along with the Quality Development Programme. This phase will include the completion of infrastructure reforms as well as childminders being included in the full range of quality and funding supports. The rollout of staffed local childminding networks will accelerate. New childminders may continue to have access to the phased training requirements. Post-2028 timelines for the completion of the Quality Development Programme will be determined in advance.

Early Childhood Ireland's Work

Early Childhood Ireland sees the National Action Plan for Childminding as a positive step forward. Childminders play an integral role in the provision of Early Years and School Age Care in Ireland. It is crucial that children of all ages can benefit from quality experiences, whether their parents avail of a childminder and/or centre-based care.

Click [here](#) to read more about Early Childhood Ireland's work on the National Action Plan for Childminding.

