



Trinity College Dublin

Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath

The University of Dublin

Gender Equality: Caring for Children

Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality

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Presentation Outline

Introduction

Models of childcare

Impact of childcare

Policy approaches

Concluding observations

Introduction to the topic

Pre- and post-Covid-19

Childcare has rarely been out of the news since 2000 and has generated numerous documents ... over 100 at a conservative estimate

But it is the Covid-19 pandemic that has highlighted the critical role of childcare to a functioning society and its fragile nature in Ireland

This presents an opportunity to review our approach to childcare and move towards a more robust and sustainable model of provision

Gender Equality and the care of children

Women's participation depends on availability of affordable, quality childcare

Childcare mainly provided by women

EU equality initiatives and financial support led to the growth of childcare services in Ireland

Models of Childcare

Defining Childcare

Unpaid childcare - in the home or through a network of family supports such as grandparents

Paid childcare - the main focus of this presentation

Paid Childcare

Paid childcare is made up of two **distinct** elements reflecting the differing focus:

Early Childcare [ECEC] provides care and education for children from birth to 6 years

School Age Childcare [SAC] provides leisure and sport for children from 6 to 11/12

Early learning environments

Home Learning Environments

Immediate and extended family

Early Childhood Education and Care [ECEC] settings

Childminders, crèches, nurseries, preschools

Primary School classrooms

Junior and senior infants

Impact of ECEC on child development and learning

Children are directly impacted by childcare

Research shows that:

High quality ECEC is beneficial to the social and educational development of ALL children

High quality ECEC is particularly beneficial to children from disadvantaged backgrounds

Poor quality ECEC has limited benefits and may produce negative effects

High quality ECEC

Features of high quality ECEC include:

Staff who are well trained

Warm and positive adult-child interactions

Safe and interesting learning environments

Experiences that are challenging and exciting

Positive links to home learning environments

Stable and sustainable services

Staff who are valued

Policy Approaches

Policy Approaches to ECEC

Three policy drivers:

Equality in the workforce – childcare for working parents

underpins childcare strategy in Ireland

Combatting disadvantage – targeted childcare services

specific schemes ...Early Start/ABCs

School readiness –a preparation for primary school

Free Preschool Years scheme -

3 hours/day, 5 days/week, 38 weeks of the year

Current strategy

A number of departments have responsibilities – primarily the Department of Children, Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Youth [DCEDIY] and the Department of Education and Skills [DES]

In 2018, the then Department of Children published *First 5 – a Strategy for Babies, Children and Families*.

Although childcare is referenced frequently in *First 5* there is no explicit strategy for ECEC.

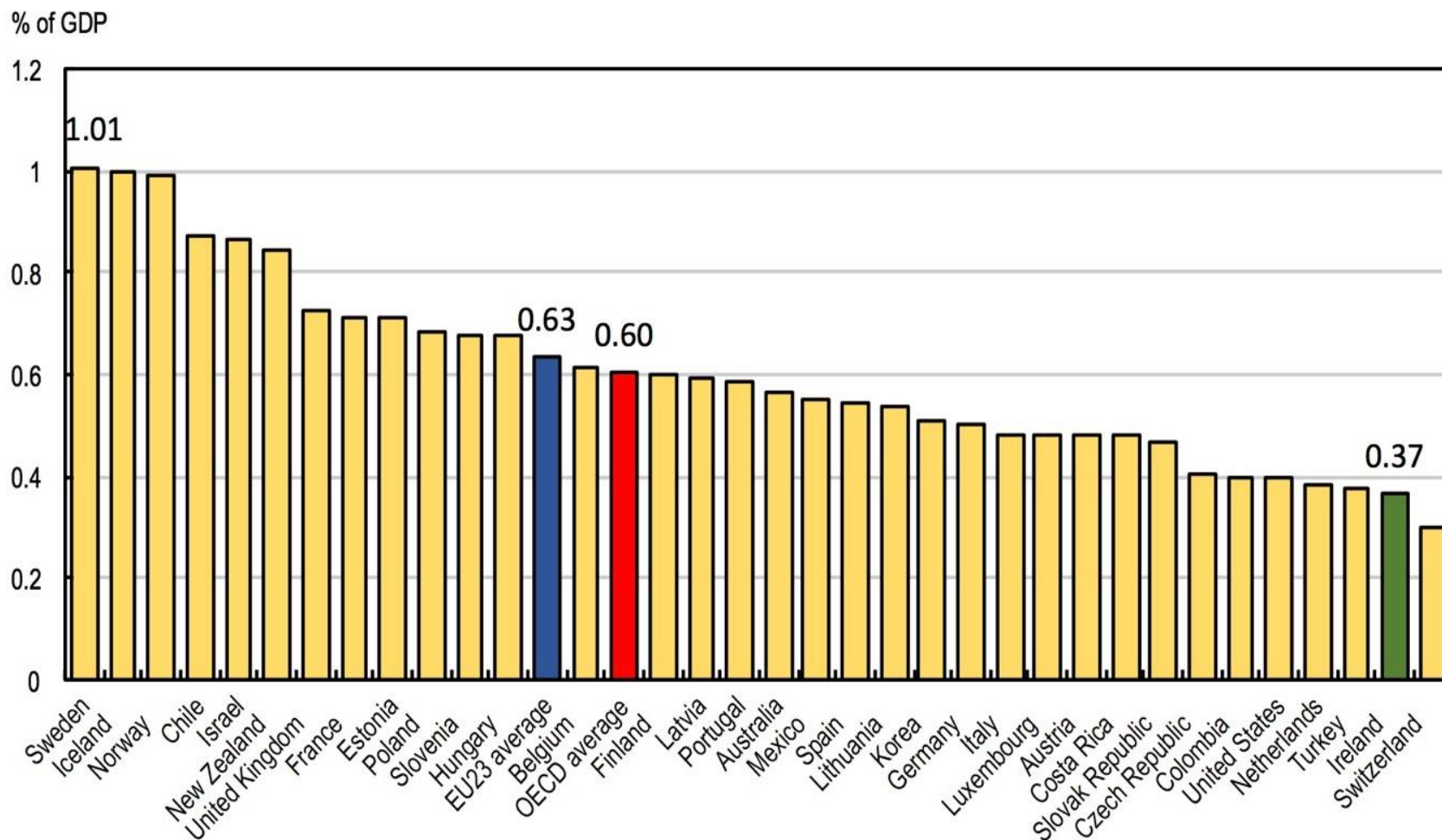
Investment in ECEC

Comparatively speaking Ireland invests relatively little in childcare

Figures indicate that investment for all children aged 3-5 enrolled in ECEC [and primary] is:

0.37% GDP	Ireland
0.63% GDP	EU average
0.60% GDP	OECD average
1.01% GDP	Nordic countries

Expenditure on all children aged 3-5 years enrolled in early childhood education and care (ECEC) and primary education, as a percentage of GDP (2016): (Oireachtas Library & Research Service, 2020, L&RS
 Note: Public provision of early childhood education: an overview of the international evidence)



Funding model and supports

Launched in November 2019, a National Childcare Subsidy scheme was designed to replace the various childcare subsidy schemes by 2021 as a streamlined, user-friendly single subsidy scheme

The scheme will assist access to services registered with Tusla

An Expert Working group is currently reviewing the childcare funding model – established before the Covid-19 pandemic ... terms of reference do not include consideration of a universal public model of childcare.

Quality Supports

City and County Childcare Committees, established in 1999 and National Voluntary Organisations offer local and membership supports

Better Start extends the above supports through a team of Early Years specialists who:

- mentor individual services
- manage the Access and Inclusion Model [AIM] in the Free Preschool Years
- coordinate a number of Continuing Professional Development programmes

Systems of Service Provision

Countries follow either a market model [private] or State model [public] or a blend.

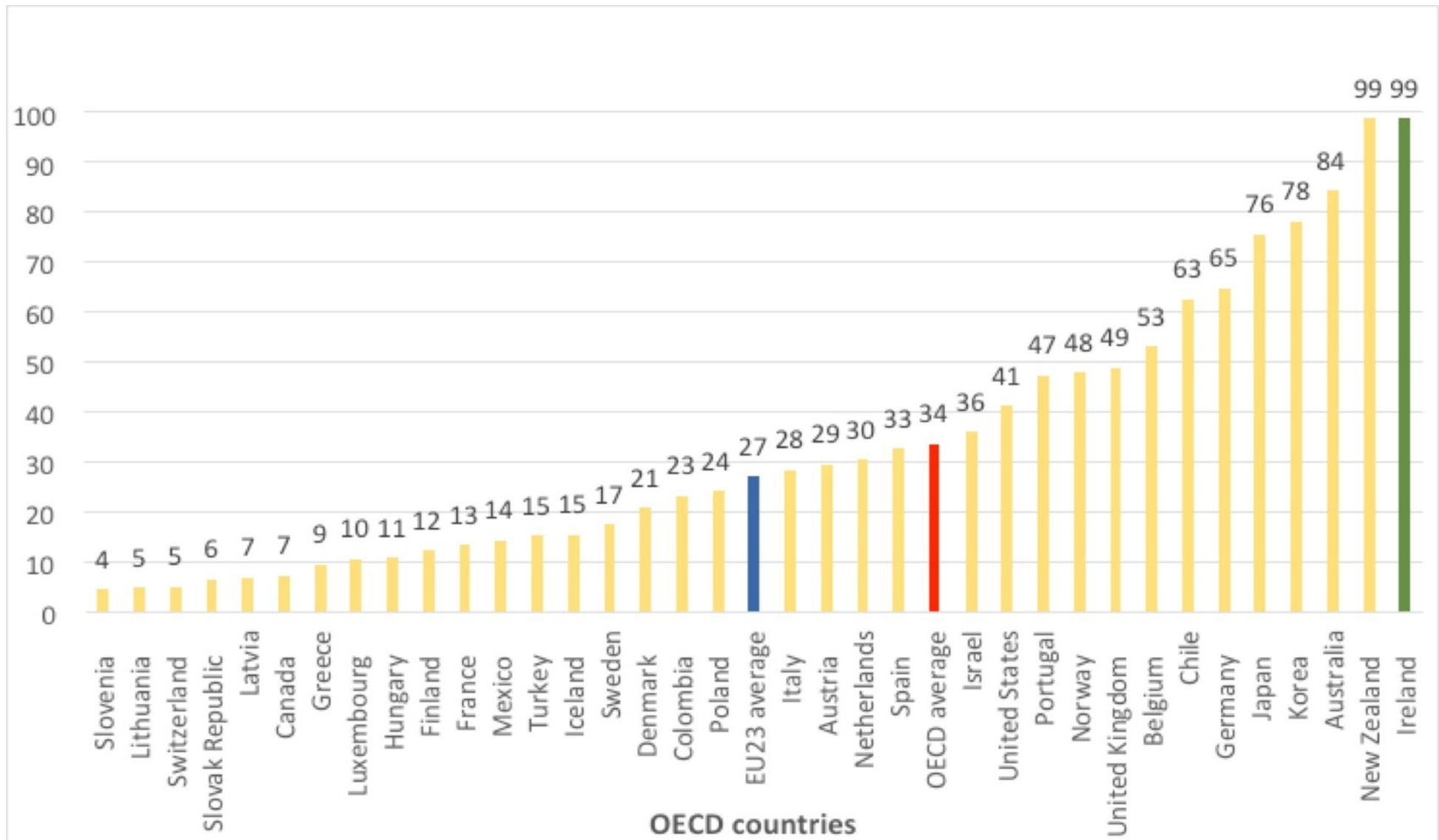
Ireland follows the market model.

ECEC is provided almost exclusively through private services ... although these services are mainly financed through public funding

Private provision varies in type with a proportion made up of large chains run by corporations.

However, the majority of private services are small enterprises.

Percentage of children aged 3-5 years attending private institutions for pre-primary education, by OECD country (2017). (Oireachtas Library & Research Service, 2020, *L&RS Note: Public provision of early childhood education: an overview of the international evidence*)



Concluding Observations

Ireland is not generous to childcare

For parents:

- it is costly [28% of net income compared to EU average of 12% ... and closer to 40% net income for lone parents]
- it is difficult to access particularly for younger children

For providers:

- it is over regulated [3 inspection systems]
- it is administratively burdensome

Ireland is not generous to childcare

For staff:

- wages are low
- administration takes away from direct working with children
- morale is low

This is not good for parents or staff nor is it good for young children's learning and development

Future action

2020 has made clear how interconnected childcare is with other areas of our society and economy

Transforming ECEC is the right thing to do from a gender equality perspective

...but it is also the right thing to do developmentally, socially and economically

... and now is the time

Three recommendations

1. That key departments and agencies [DCEDIY/DES and Tusla] work together to develop a 10-year integrated strategy for early childhood education and care towards developing a model of public provision
2. That the strategy builds on the strengths of the current system [particularly the curriculum and quality frameworks and local supports] while addressing the challenges of a largely private market model
3. That government increase investment over the period of the strategy to 0.6% GDP within five years and 1.0% GDP within ten years



Thank You😊

