An Ghníomhaireacht um Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency

Annual Review on the Adequacy of Child Care and Family Support Services Available

2021

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ABBREVIATIONS

AGS	An Garda Síochána
CCA	Child Care Act 1991
CW/KK/ST	Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary
CFSN	Child and Family Support Network
CISP	Crisis Intervention Service Partnership
CN/MN	Cavan/Monaghan
CPC	Child Protection Conference
CPNS	Child Protection Notification System
CPW	Child Protection and Welfare
CSO	Central Statistics Office
CSP	Calais Special Project
DCEDIY	Dept of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration & Youth
DML	Dublin Mid-Leinster
DNC	Dublin North City
DNE	Dublin North East
DSC	Dublin South Central
DSE/WW	Dublin South East/Wicklow
DSW/K/WW	Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow
ECO	Emergency Care Order
EFSS	Emergency Fostering Support Service
NOHS	National Out of Hours Service
FCO	Full Care Order
FSS	Family Support Services
FWC	Family Welfare Conference
GNIB	Garda National Immigration Bureau
GY/RN	Galway/Roscommon
HIQA	Health Information Quality Authority
ICO	Interim Care Order
IRPP	Irish Refugee Protection Programme
LH/MH	Louth/Meath
NCCIS	National Child Care Information System
NSDF	National Service Delivery Framework
NSPCC	National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (UK)
ORAC	Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner
SCO	Special Care Order
SCSIP	Separated Children Seeking International Protection
S*of*S	Signs of Safety
SLWC	Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan
WD/WX	Waterford/Wexford

GLOSSARY

Emergency Care Order	Tusla can apply to the District Court for an emergency care order when there is reasonable cause to believe that there is an immediate and serious risk to the health or welfare of a child. An emergency care order can be for a period of up to 8 days [Section 13 Child Care Act 1991]
Interim Care Order	Tusla applies to the Court for an interim care order where an application for a care order has been or is about to be made (whether or not an emergency care order is in force) and, there is reasonable cause to believe that it is necessary for the child's health or welfare, for the child to be placed or maintained in the care of Tusla pending the determination of the application of the care order. The limit on an interim care order is 28 days; however, a Court can grant an extension to that period if it is satisfied it is still necessary [Section 17 Child Care Act 1991]
Care Order	A care order is applied for when a child needs protection and is unlikely to receive it without the use of one. The Court may make a care order when: the child has been or is being neglected, assaulted, ill-treated, or sexually abused; or the child's health, development, or welfare has been or is being avoidably impaired or neglected; or the child's health, development or welfare is likely to be avoidably impaired or neglected. A care order is usually made for as short a period as possible, and this decision is made by the Court. However, if necessary, the Court may decide to place a child in care up to their 18th birthday [Section 18 Child Care Act 1991]
Supervision Order	A supervision order is granted by a District Court Judge and allows Tusla to visit and monitor the health and welfare of the child and to give the parents any necessary advice and support. The order is for up to a maximum of 12 months but can be renewed [Section 19 Child Care Act 1991]
Voluntary care	This is where the parents request or agree to their child being taken into the care of Tusla. In these cases, Tusla must consider the parents' wishes on aspects of how care is provided. As long as a child requires safety and welfare - Tusla must provide this. If this arrangement breaks down, Tusla may still seek a care order through the Court [Section 4 Child Care Act 1991]

Foster care	Foster care is full-time or part-time substitute care for children outside their own home by people other than their biological or adoptive parents or legal guardians. Foster care is the preferred option for children who cannot live with their parents as a result of abuse and /or neglect and their parents' inability to care for them due to a combination of difficulties in their own lives [Child Care Act 1991]
General foster carer	A general foster carer is a person approved by the Child and Family Agency having completed a process of assessment and who has been placed on the panel of approved foster carers, in accordance with the Child Care Act 1991 and the Child Care (Placement of Children in Foster Care) Regulations 1995.
Relative foster care	A relative foster carer is defined as a person who is a friend, neighbour or relative of a child, or a person with whom the child or the child's family has had a relationship prior to the child's admission to care (Child Care (Placement of Children with Relatives) Regulations 1995). A relative foster carer takes care of a child on behalf of and by agreement with the Child and Family Agency, having completed (or having agreed to undertake) an assessment of suitability within 12 weeks of a child being placed with them.
Residential care	Any home or institution for the residential care of children in the care of Tusla or other children who are not receiving adequate care or attention (Child Care Act 1991). Residential care aims to meet in a planned way the physical, educational, emotional, spiritual, health and social needs of each child. Residential care can be provided by a statutory, voluntary or private provider [Child Care Act 1991]
Special Care	Special care provides for short-term, stabilising intervention that prioritises safe care in a therapeutic environment for children at risk and with challenging behaviour. It is an exceptional intervention restricting the liberty of the child and involves detention of the child for his/her own welfare and protection in a Special Care Unit. The child is detained under a High Court Order and not on the basis of criminal activity [Child Care (Amendment) Act 2011]
Separated children	"Children under 18 years of age who are outside their country of origin and separated from parents, or previous/legal customary primary care giver". *Separated Children in*

	Europe Programme (as cited by Ombudsman for Children, 2009)
Aftercare	Aftercare services are support services that build on and support the work that has already been undertaken by foster carers, social workers, residential workers and others in preparing young people for adulthood. Section 45A of the Child Care Amendment Act 2015 places a statutory duty on Tusla to form a view in relation to each person leaving care as to whether there is a "need for assistance" and if it forms such a view to provide services in accordance with the section and subject to resources.
Family Support Services	Family Support Services is an umbrella term covering a broad range of interventions provided to children and families usually in their own homes and communities. The primary focus is on early intervention and prevention. The services provided vary along a number of dimensions according to their target group (such as mothers, fathers, toddlers, teenagers, etc.), professional background of service provider (e.g. family worker, social worker, childcare worker, youth and community worker, public health nurses, psychologist, etc.), orientation of service provider (e.g. therapeutic, child development, community development, youth work, etc.), problem addressed (e.g. parenting problems, family conflict, child neglect, educational underachievement, etc.), programme of activities (e.g. home visits, pre-school facility, youth club, parenting course, etc.) and service setting (e.g. home-based, clinic-based or community-based). As well as services provided directly by Tusla, a wide range of private and voluntary agencies are commissioned and funded by Tusla to provide services on its behalf on a local, regional and national basis. This is in accordance with the provisions of Sections 56 - 59 of the Child and Family Agency Act 2013.

TECHNICAL NOTES

- In this report, the term 'children' is used to describe all children under the age of 18 years other than a person who is or has been married.
- In most tables the figures are presented as whole numbers while in some tables percentages are displayed to one decimal point. The rounding convention is as follows: any fractions of 0.5 and above are rounded up, anything less than 0.5 are rounded down. Due to this rounding, percentages may not total 100.
- Data presented in this report may vary from data previously reported and published due to the on-going validation of data that is done at a local level.
- Tusla implemented its national child care information system (NCCIS) for child protection and welfare services including children in care in 2017 / 2018. The roll-out of this system involved a review and validation of data held on a number of legacy systems maintained by the areas and as a result the data presented in this report needs to be interpreted with this in mind.
- The data presented in sections 3.1 – 3.4 and 3.6 includes (for all years where available) children and young people reported by the Social Work Team for Separated Children Seeking International Protection (SCSIP). These children and young people were not included in figures reported in previous "review of adequacy" reports; they were reported on in a separate section of the reports. Figures reported for previous years (where available) have been adjusted to reflect these children and young people.
- A cyber-attack on HSE systems on 14 May 2021 caused significant disruption to Tusla. The NCCIS and other ICT systems were shut down for a number of weeks causing widespread disruption to service provision including the recording and retrieval of data and information on children and families accessing services. Once systems were back up and running staff undertook the significant task of updating the systems retrospectively. While there was no impact on the data presented in this report, the publishing of some data from NCCIS (e.g., cases allocated / awaiting allocation at month end) for the months May and June 2021 was suspended. This is due to the fact that NCCIS is a live case management system that automatically assigns dates some actions are recorded on NCCIS (e.g., sign-off of assessments by team leaders). It is not designed for retrospective inputting of this information. Hence it would not have been meaningful to report any data reliant on the accuracy of these dates.

SUMMARY FINDINGS 2021

This report presents data and information on Tusla's child protection and welfare services, children in the care of Tusla and children referred to family and community support services, for the year 2021. It is submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for an annual report on the adequacy of child care and family support services available (Section 8 Child Care Act 1991). The data in this report are drawn from the activity and performance metric data collated on a routine basis by the Agency. Additional information on the quality and adequacy of services delivered can be found in other reports published by the Agency along with reports published by oversight bodies including the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA), the Ombudsman and the Ombudsman for Children.

CHILD PROTECTION AND WELFARE SERVICES

Referrals to Child Protection and Welfare Services

- 73,069 referrals received by Child Protection and Welfare Services in 2021[1], 3,357 (5%) more than 2020 (69,712). Equates to about 200 referrals a day, or six referrals for every hundred children living in Ireland (Census 2016). *Note: more than one referral can be received in relation to a child and as a result the number of children involved is likely to be fewer than the number of referrals.*
- 18% (12,984)[2] of referrals received in 2021 were re-referrals. A re-referral is defined as a referral on a child who was previously open social work, but whose referral was closed within 12 months prior to receipt of re-referral.
- The most common source of referrals in 2021 was members of An Garda Síochána, accounting for 37% (26,922) of referrals, far exceeding any other source.
  - The top five sources of referrals in 2021 (gardaí, social workers, teachers, parent/guardian and anonymous) accounted for 64% (46,888) of referrals.
- 52% (37,758) of referrals in 2021 were for welfare concerns and 35% (25,292) were for child protection concerns, or where there were grounds to believe that there was a risk of physical, sexual or emotional abuse or neglect. The report type was not available for the remaining 14% (10,019) of referrals.
  - The most common type of child protection concern reported in 2021 was emotional abuse, accounting for 43% (10,888) of all child protection referrals (25,292). Neglect was the least common type of child protection concern reported, accounting for 15% (3,682) of referrals. A similar pattern to 2020.
- 73% (18,373/25,292) of referrals for child protection concerns received in 2021 were mandated reports (i.e., child protection concerns at or above a defined threshold determined by the mandated reporter), 5,244 (40%) more than 2020 (13,129). This

[1] Based on data extracted from NCCIS on the 26 April 2022
[2] Figure based on data extracted monthly from NCCIS

increase needs to be interpreted in the context of the increased percentage of referrals that had a report type recorded on NCCIS in 2021 when compared to 2020.

- Half (50%; 36,784) of referrals received in 2021 were closed to social work following screening. Of these, 42% (15,297) were closed with no further action required while a further 40% (14,760) were closed as assessment / safety planning was already ongoing for these cases.
- 46% (33,422) of referrals moved to the next stage of the referral process – the preliminary enquiry stage. These are referrals deemed to require a social work response following screening.
- 28% (8,780) of referrals that had a preliminary enquiry required an initial assessment. The remaining referrals were closed to social work following the preliminary enquiry.
- One-third (33%; 1,529) of referrals where the initial assessment was completed were closed with no further action required, 42% (1,953) required a child protection / safety planning response and 4% (184) required admission to care.

Cases Open to Social Work

- 21,248 cases open to social work at the end of 2021: little or no change from 2020 (21,143). Equates to less than 2% of the general child population in receipt of social work services from Tusla for child protection and welfare concerns.
- 77% (16,441) of cases open to social work were allocated to a named social worker at the end of 2020, down from 80% at the end of 2020.
- 4,807 (23%) of cases awaiting allocation to a named social worker at the end of 2021, 568 (13%) more than 2020 when the fewest number (4,239) for the period 2014 – 2020 was reported.
- Almost a two-thirds (62%; 2,985) of cases awaiting allocation to a named social worker at the end of 2021 were being progressed by dedicated duty teams or rotating social workers on a duty roster.
- 436 (9%) of the cases awaiting allocation to a named social worker at the end of 2021 were categorised as high priority, 60 (16%) more than 2020 (376).
- 73% (3,526) of cases awaiting allocation at the end of 2021 were waiting three months or less, a similar breakdown to 2020.
- 6 areas accounted for 64% (3,085) of cases awaiting allocation as follows: Waterford/Wexford (598), Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow (543), Louth/Meath (494), Dublin South Central (493), Dublin South East/Wicklow (486) and Cork (471).

Children Subject to a Child Protection Plan

- 983 children "active" on the CPNS at the end of 2021, a 5% (44) increase from 2020 (939) and a 12% (107) increase from 2019 (876) when the fewest number for the period 2015 - 2019 was reported.
- Neglect continues to be the most common concern for children "active" on the CPNS (54%; 534).
- The proportion of children "active" because of emotional abuse is growing year on year and is up nine percentage points overall from 2018 (28% v 37%).
- 41% (406) of children "active" at the end of 2021 were 0-4 years, the highest percentage of all age groups; 10% (96) were 15-17 years.
- Majority (83%; 817) of children "active" on the CPNS at the end of 2021 were "active" for no longer than 12 months.

National Out of Hours Service

- Referrals to Tusla's National Out of Hours Service (NOHS) continue to increase; 2,718 referrals in 2021, a 19% (437) increase on 2020 (2,281).
- 698 children placed by the NOHS in 2021, 173 (33%) more than 2020 (525).

ALTERNATIVE CARE SERVICES

Note: the data presented on first-time admissions to care, children in care, discharges from care and aftercare includes (for all years where available) children and young people reported by the Social Work Team for Separated Children Seeking International Protection (SCSIP). These children and young people were not included in figures reported in previous "review of adequacy" reports; they were reported on in a separate section of the reports. Figures reported for previous years (where available) have been adjusted to reflect these children and young people.

First-Time Admissions to Care

- 792 children came into care for the first time in 2021[3], 104 (15%) more than 2020 (688) after an 11% (86) decrease between 2019 and 2020.
- This equates to about 7 children for every 10,000 living in Ireland. Ranges from about 3 per 10,000 children living in Dublin South East/Wicklow to 10 per 10,000 children living in Dublin South Central and Donegal.
- Most common age of children coming into care for the first-time, was under 1 year (14%; 109), followed by the older ages of 16 years (92; 12%), 15 years (70; 9%) and 17 years (59; 7%). Young people 15-17 years account for 28% (221) of children and young people coming into care for the first-time.
- Neglect continues to be the most common reason for children coming into care for the first-time, accounting for 39% (310) of all children coming into care for the first-time in

[3] Note: these children were never in State care prior to this admission

2021 and followed closely by welfare concerns accounting for a further 37% (295) of admissions.

- 75% (592) of children coming into care for the first time were placed in foster care and of these one in four (25%; 150) was placed with relatives.

Total Admissions to Care

- 962 admissions to care, 74 (8%) more than 2020 (888) after a decrease of 60 (6%) between 2019 and 2020.
- 18% (170) of all admissions (962) were second or subsequent admissions, down from 23% in 2020 and like that for 2019 (18%).
- Most common age at admission was under 1 year (12%; 118) followed by 16 years (11%; 105).
- Most common reason for admission was neglect accounting for 39% (373) of all admissions and followed closely by welfare concerns accounting for a further 38% (369) of admissions.
- 75% (725) of admissions to care in 2021 were to foster care and of these 27% (193) were to foster care with relatives.
- 54% (520) of all admissions to care were voluntary admissions (where it was agreed with the child's parent/guardian). While the remaining 46% (442) of admissions were on foot of an application to the court.
- Almost one in five admissions (18%; 174) was under an emergency care order, down from 23% (201) in 2020.

Children in Care

- The number of children in care continues to decrease; 5,863 children in care at the end of 2021, 19 fewer than 2020 (5,882) and 333 (5%) fewer than 2017 (6,196).
- The number of children in care equates to about 5 children for every 1,000 living in Ireland.
- The number of children in care is increased with increasing age with the highest number aged 17 years (557; 10%).
- 90% (5,272) of children in care at the end of 2021 were in foster care, consistent with previous years.
- Neglect is the most common reason being in care, accounting for almost half (48%; 2,786) of all children in care, an increase of two percentage points on 2020.
- 79% (4,626) of children in care at the end of 2021 were in care under an order of the court, up from 77% (4,531) at the end of 2020.

- Just under half (48.6%; 2,849/5,863) of children in care at the end of 2021 were in care for 5 years or less and of these one in four (24%; 672) was in care for less than a year.
- 3.8% (220) of all children in care at the end of 2021 were in their third or greater placement within the previous 12 months. This is an increase from the 3% (179) reported in 2020 and the highest percentage for all years 2017 to 2021.
- 12 (0.2%) children in care at the end of 2021 where is a placement outside of Ireland, four fewer than 2020. All but one, were in foster care.
- 63 children 12 years and younger were in residential placements at the end of 2021, three more than 2020 (60).
- The number of children in care in placements with private providers continues to increase with 785 (13%) children in placements with private providers at the end of 2021, 56 (8%) more than 2020 (729) and the highest number for the period 2017 – 2021.
- 95% of children in care aged 6-15 years and 93% of those aged 16 -17 years were in full-time education (as per their care plan) at the end of 2021, consistent with previous years.

Discharges from Care

- 970 discharges from care in 2021, 34 fewer than 2020 (1,004).
- Over half of all discharges (55%; 531) were young people turning 18 years, consistent with previous years.
- 73% (709) of discharges were from foster care. This is consistent with previous years and not surprising considering that over 90% of children in care are in foster care.
- Almost half of discharges (47%; 454) were to home / extended family with a further 34% (325) remaining with their foster family. Eight per cent (78) of discharges were to independent living, a 42% (23) increase on 2020 (55).
- More than half (58%; 308) of young people discharged by virtue of turning 18 years remained with their foster family, with 12% (64) returning home/extended family. One in seven (78; 15%) moved to independent living.
- Eight more discharges than admissions reported in 2021, consistent with previous years and the decreasing number of children in care.

Foster Carers

- 4,039 foster carers (statutory and non-statutory) on the panel of approved foster carers at the end of 2021, four more than 2020 (4,035) and the first increase after four consecutive decreases.
- The number of general foster carers (statutory) on the panel of approved foster carers continues to decrease, while the number of private foster carers (non-statutory) continues to increase.

- 219 general and relative foster carers (statutory) approved in 2021, seven fewer than 2020 (226) and 62 private foster carers approved, 17 (38%) more than 2020 (45).
- 90% of general and relative foster carers (statutory) had an allocated link (social) worker at the end of 2021.
- 100% of "unapproved" relative foster carers[4] with a child placed for more than 12 weeks had a link (social) worker at the end of 2021.

Aftercare

- The number of young people in receipt of aftercare services (3,059) continues to grow, up 4% (116) from 2020 (2,943) and 10% (285) from 2019 (2,774).
- 76% (1,788/2,339) of the 18-22 years cohort in receipt of aftercare services at the end of 2021 were in education/training.
- Almost half (45%; 1,047/2,339) of the 18-22 years cohort were continuing to live with their foster families, while a further 9% (213) had returned home to family. One in four (27%; 639) had moved to independent living.
- 82% (2,500/3,059) of all young people in receipt of an aftercare service at the end of 2021 had an aftercare plan, with this figure rising to 96% (2,247/2,339) for the 18-22 years cohort.
- 94% (2,080) of those with an aftercare plan (2,500) assessed as needing aftercare worker (2,203) had an aftercare worker, with 12 of the 17 areas along with the Social Work Team for Separated Children Seeking International Protection reporting 100%.

Services for Separated Children Seeking International Protection

- 152 referrals to Tusla's Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection in 2021, 72 (90%) more than 2020 (80) when the fewest number since 2012 (71) was reported.
- 98 children were placed in care in 2021, 47 (92%) more than 2020 (51) when the fewest number since 2012 was reported. All of these children were taken into care on a voluntary basis and all were taken in for welfare concerns.
- 86 children were in care at the end of 2021, three fewer than 2019 (67). 22 (34%) more than 2020 (64). The majority (78%; 67) of these children were male, 22% (19) were female. All but four of the children in care were in the 15-17 years age bracket.
- Half (46; 53%) of the children in care were in general residential care, with the next highest number in supported lodgings (30; 35%).
- The majority of children in care (69%; 59) were in care for less than 1 year. No child was in care for greater than 5 years.

[4] Unapproved foster carer: An "unapproved" foster carer is a person(s) who has a child or children placed with them under Section 36.1 (d) of the Child Care Act 1991 who is either (a) awaiting an assessment, (b) in the process of assessment, or (c) whose assessment has yet to go before the Child and Family Agency Foster Care Committee for approval.

- All of the children in care had an up-to-date care plan at the end of 2021 and all but four had an allocated social worker.
- 118 young people in receipt of aftercare services, 10 more than 2020 (108).
- 94% (101/107) of the 18-22 years cohort in receipt of aftercare services were in education / training.
- The majority (69%; 74) of the 18-22 years cohort in receipt of aftercare services were in independent living.
- 93% (110) of young people in receipt of aftercare services at the end 2021 had an aftercare plan and all of those with an aftercare plan had an aftercare worker.

Adoption Services

- 199 applications for assessment of eligibility and suitability as adoptive parent(s) received in 2021, up 26% (41) from 2020 when the fewest number (158) for the period 2017 – 2020 was reported. Fewer application in 2020 possibly due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The most common type of application received in 2021 was for step-parent adoption accounting for a third (33%; 65) of all applications received. Applications for fostering to adoption accounted for the fewest number of applications received (37; 18%) in 2021.
- 208 new children were referred for adoption (all types) in 2021, 12 more than 2020 (196). More than half (123; 59%) of all children referred for adoption in 2021 were referred for step-parent adoption.
- 170 adoption assessments were presented to local adoption committees in 2021, 15 more than 2020 (155) and the highest number for the years 2017 – 2021. The highest number of assessments presented were for step-parent adoption (67; 40%), while the fewest number were presented for domestic adoption (7%; 12).

FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES

Referrals to Family Support Services

- 32,473 children were referred to family support services in 2021, with 17,075 children in receipt of family support services at year end. (based on a response rate of 80%).
- The number children referred to family support services equates to about 3% of children living in Ireland and ranges from <1% to 10.5% across the 17 Tusla areas.
- The most common source of referral was Tusla social workers accounting for more than a quarter (28%; 9,178) of all referrals, followed by parents / guardians (22%; 7,148), self-referrals (13%; 4,192), HSE Officers (10%; 3,269) and schools (9%; 2,772). These five sources accounted for 82% (26,559) of all referrals.
- 73% (23,807) of children referred to family support services in 2021, received a service (ranges from 53% to 99% across the 17 Tusla areas).

Meitheal

- 2,373 Meitheal processes were requested in 2021, 86 (4%) more than 2020 (2,287) and the highest number for the five years 2017 – 2021.
- 67% (1,584) of Meitheal processes requested in 2021, were requested either by the family themselves, or directly by a practitioner; 21% (488) of Meitheal processes requested in 2021 were diversions from social work and 13% (301) of Meitheal processes requested in 2021 were initiated following step-down from social work.
- 86% (2,041) of Meitheal processes requested in 2021 proceeded to Stage 2 (discussion stage). The Meitheal is considered to be initiated at this point.
- 1,596 Meitheal processes reached completion of stage 2 (discussion stage) in 2021 and of these 46% (741) proceeded to delivery, 3% (42) were referred to Tusla social work services, 34% (543) were referred "to a single agency response", 7% (108) were closed, while the remaining 10% (162) requests were categorised as "other".
- 1,580 Meitheal processes were closed in 2021. Of these 24% (386) were closed following submission of the request form (end of stage 1); 39% (617) were closed following completion of the strengths and needs form (stage 2); 11% (171) were closed following commencement of Meitheal support meetings (stage 3); 26% (406) were closed post-delivery (end of process).

Child and Family Support Networks

- 122 Child and Family Support Networks operating at the end of 2021, one more than 2020 (121).

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Tusla – Child and Family Agency ("the Agency") holds statutory responsibility under the Child Care Act 1991 ("the Act") and other legislation to safeguard children who are not receiving adequate care and protection. This means assisting vulnerable children, who have been, or are at risk of being abused, neglected or otherwise harmed, or whose parents are unable to provide adequate care or protection. The aim is to intervene early to provide a timely response that is appropriate and proportionate to the identified need. Tusla conducts this work in partnership with other statutory services, such as health, education, An Garda Síochána, local authorities, the voluntary sector and most importantly families and their communities.

Tusla's Child Protection and Welfare Services, including services for children being looked after by the State are delivered across 17 geographical areas, configured into six regions[5] (Figure 1). Each area is managed by an area manager and each region is managed by a regional chief officer. Regional chief officers report to the Director of Services and Integration who in turn reports to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). The CEO reports to the Chairperson of the Board and is responsible for leading the Agency in all its management decisions and for implementing the Agency's long and short-term plans. The Board, consisting of a Chairperson, a Deputy Chairperson and a number of ordinary members, all appointed by the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY), is accountable to the Minister for the performance of its functions in accordance with Section 21 (3) Child and Family Agency Act 2013.

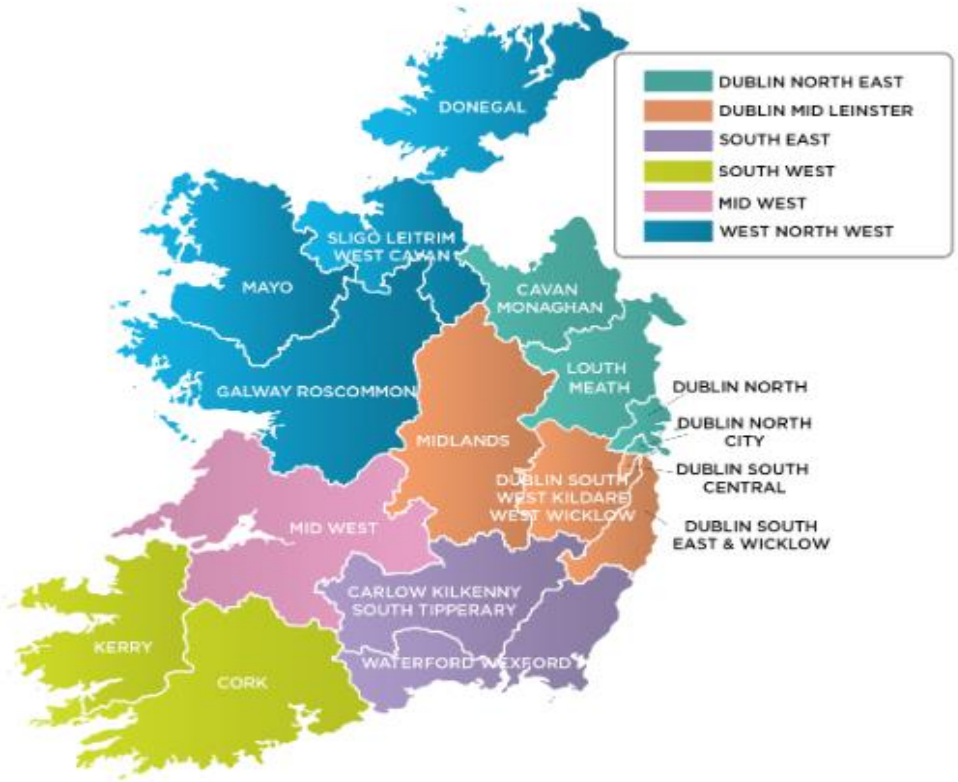


Figure 1: Tusla Regional and Area Management Structure

[5] The Agency has commenced a major improvement programme with significant focus on Practice, Culture and Structure. A new executive management team and regional structure commenced in early 2022. The six regions replace the former four regions, Dublin North East, Dublin Mid Leinster, South, West.

In 2021, Tusla had a budgetary allocation of about €865 million[6] and had 4,579 staff (whole-time equivalents) on its payroll[7]. The majority (63%; 2,869) of the workforce are social workers (1,669; 36%) and social care staff (1,200; 26%). Management (Grade VIII+) comprises 5% (230 whole-time equivalents) of the total workforce.

Service delivery in Tusla is guided by the Agency's Response Pathways (Figure 2). These response pathways are designed to ensure intervention in a preventative and timely manner to support the child and family's needs and enhance the family's ability to meet those needs. The goal is always to build on the family's strengths, utilising their own naturally connected family and community supports with the professional supports and services offered. In this context, Tusla also works with other key agencies and partners to ensure a child and family receives an integrated multi-agency response. Tusla's national approaches to practice ensure that responses are consistent across the country and embedded with the values and behaviours of the Agency. Tusla wants its referral community to know that, based on whatever reason they refer a child to Tusla, it will make an informed, collaborative, and respectful decision about what will assist the child and their family. This can be a family support plan to help a child that has additional needs, a safety plan where there is worry that a child has been harmed or a care plan where a child requires a period of out of home care and support. Tusla also provides educational supports, domestic, sexual and gender-based violence supports and therapeutic support across this range of need. Tusla's regulatory services work to ensure that the services are safe and happy places for children and young people to play, learn and develop.

[6] Net Non - Capital Determination for 2021.

[7] Figure 31 December 2021 (HR Employment Monitoring Report, December 2021)

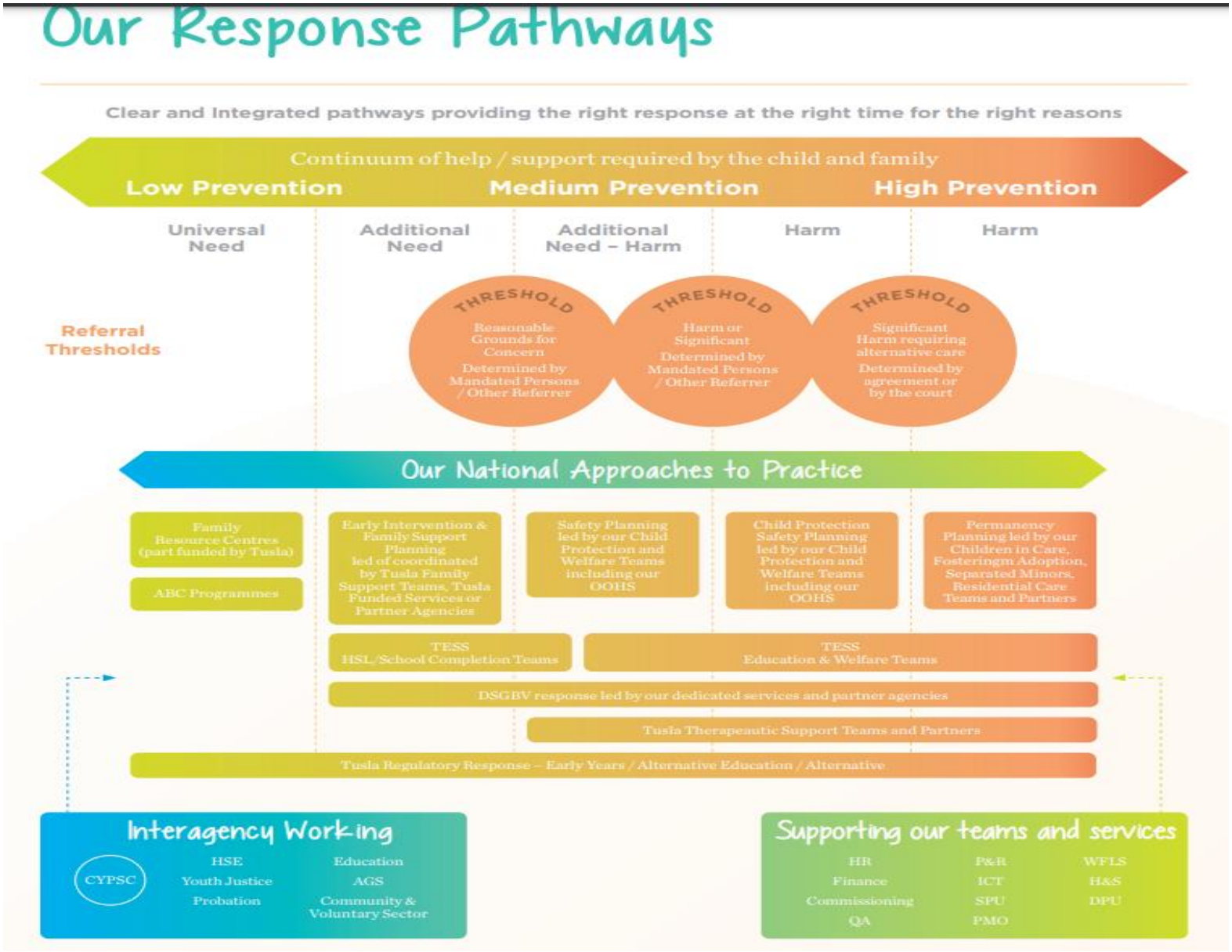


Figure 2: Tusla Response Pathways

1.1 Purpose of Scope

This report presents data and information on Tusla's Child Protection and Welfare Services including children looked after by the State and children referred to family support services for the year 2021. It is submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for an annual report on the adequacy of child care and family support services available (Section 8 Child Care Act 1991).

In preparing the report the Act states that the Agency shall have regard to the needs of children who are not receiving adequate care and protection and, in particular:

(a) children whose parents are dead or missing;

(b) children whose parents have deserted or abandoned them;

(c) children who are in the care of the Agency;

(d) children who are homeless;

(e) children who are at risk of being neglected or ill-treated; and

(f) children whose parents are unable to care for them due to ill health, or for any other reason.

The data in this report is drawn from the activity and performance metric data collated on a routine basis by the Agency. Additional information on the quality and adequacy of services can be found in other reports published by the Agency along with reports published by oversight bodies including the Health Information Quality Authority (HIQA), the Ombudsman, and the Ombudsman for Children.

Other services provided by the Agency (e.g., Tusla Education Support Services, Regulatory Services including the Early Years Inspectorate, Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Services, Adoption Information and Tracing Service) are outside the scope of this report.

Following this introductory chapter, there are three chapters as follows:

Chapter 2 presents data on the child protection and welfare referral and assessment process including children subject to a child protection plan (i.e., listed on the national Child Protection Notification System). It also presents data on Tulsa's National Out of Hours Service.

Chapter 3 presents data on Tusla's Alternative Care Services. This includes data on children in the care of the Agency including admissions to, and discharges from care, foster carers, aftercare, separated children seeking international protection and adoption.

Chapter 4 presents data on family support services including referrals to family support services and Meitheal (early intervention national practice model for all agencies working with children, young people and their families).

2.0 CHILD PROTECTION AND WELFARE SERVICES

2.1 Referrals

A referral or a report of concern is the first stage of the child protection and welfare process. It is a request for services to be provided and can be made by anyone who has concerns about the safety or welfare of a child.

On receipt of a referral the first consideration for social work teams is the immediate safety of the child and whether protective action is required. All reports to Tusla are normally reviewed (screened) on the day they are received.

If the concern does not meet the threshold for a social work response, social workers will give information and advice on the most appropriate ways of addressing the needs of the child(ren) and their family, and/or refer the child and family to an early intervention response that does not require Tusla social work intervention.

In December 2017, mandatory reporting was introduced under the Children First Act 2015, placing a legal obligation on certain people, many of whom are professionals (reference Schedule 2 Children First Act 2015), to report child protection concerns at or above a defined threshold to Tusla. Mandated persons are people who have contact with children and families, by virtue of their qualifications, training and experience, and are in a key position to help protect children from harm. Through the provisions of the Act, it is intended to:

- Raise awareness of child abuse and neglect.
- Improve child safeguarding arrangements in organisations providing services to children.
- Provide for co-operation and information sharing between agencies when Tusla – Child and Family Agency, is undertaking child protection.

KEY FACTS 2021

- 73,069 referrals received by Child Protection and Welfare Services in 2021[8], 3,357 (5%) more than 2020 (69,712). Equates to about 200 referrals a day, or six referrals for every hundred children living in Ireland (Census 2016). *Note: more than one referral can be received in relation to a child and as a result the number of children involved is likely to be fewer than the number of referrals.*
- 18% (12,984)[9] of referrals received in 2021 were re-referrals. A re-referral is defined as a referral on a child who was previously open social work, but whose referral was closed within 12 months prior to receipt of re-referral.
- The most common source of referrals in 2021 was members of An Garda Síochána, accounting for 37% (26,922) of referrals, far exceeding any other source.
  - The top five sources of referrals in 2021 (gardaí, social workers, teachers, parent/guardian and anonymous) accounted for 64% (46,888) of referrals.

[8] Based on data extracted from NCCIS on the 26 April 2022
[9] Figure based on data extracted monthly from NCCIS

- 52% (37,758) of referrals in 2021 were for welfare concerns and 35% (25,292) were for child protection concerns, or where there were grounds to believe that there was a risk of physical, sexual or emotional abuse or neglect. The report type was not available for the remaining 14% (10,019) of referrals.
  - The most common type of child protection concern reported in 2021 was emotional abuse, accounting for 43% (10,888) of all child protection referrals (25,292). Neglect was the least common type of child protection concern reported, accounting for 15% (3,682) of referrals. A similar pattern to 2020.
- 73% (18,373/25,292) of referrals for child protection concerns received in 2021 were mandated reports (i.e., child protection concerns at or above a defined threshold determined by the mandated reporter), 5,244 (40%) more than 2020 (13,129). This increase needs to be interpreted in the context of the increased percentage of referrals that had a report type recorded on NCCIS in 2021 when compared to 2020.
- Half (50%; 36,784) of referrals received in 2021 were closed to social work following screening. Of these, 42% (15,297) were closed with no further action required while a further 40% (14,760) were closed as assessment / safety planning was already ongoing for these cases.
  - 46% (33,422) of referrals moved to the next stage of the referral process – the preliminary enquiry stage. These are referrals deemed to require a social work response following screening.
  - 28% (8,780) of referrals that had a preliminary enquiry required an initial assessment. The remaining referrals were closed to social work following the preliminary enquiry.
  - One-third (33%; 1,529) of referrals where the initial assessment was completed were closed with no further action required, 42% (1,953) required a child protection / safety planning response and 4% (184) required admission to care.

Number of Referrals

- In 2021, local social work departments received 73,069 referrals[8], 3,357 (5%) more than 2020 (69,712) (Figure 3). Like 2021, this figure is a count of all reports of concern received by the Agency and is not comparable with data for 2019 and previous years. In 2019 and previous years, the count of referrals was based on referrals deemed to require a social work response following screening – referrals "screened out" were not included in the count. The counting of all reports of concern provides a more accurate account of activity and demand on child protection and welfare services.
- The number of referrals for 2021 (73,069) equates to about 200 referrals a day, or six referrals for every hundred children living in Ireland (Census 2016). *Note: more than one referral can be received in relation to a child and as a result the number of children involved is likely to be fewer than the number of referrals.*

- 18% (12,984)[10] of referrals received in 2021 were re-referrals. A re-referral is defined as a referral on a child who was previously open social work, but whose referral was closed within 12 months prior to receipt of re-referral. This percentage compares favourably with that (23%) England for the year 2020/2021 but needs to be interpreted in the context of slight differences in definitions.[11]

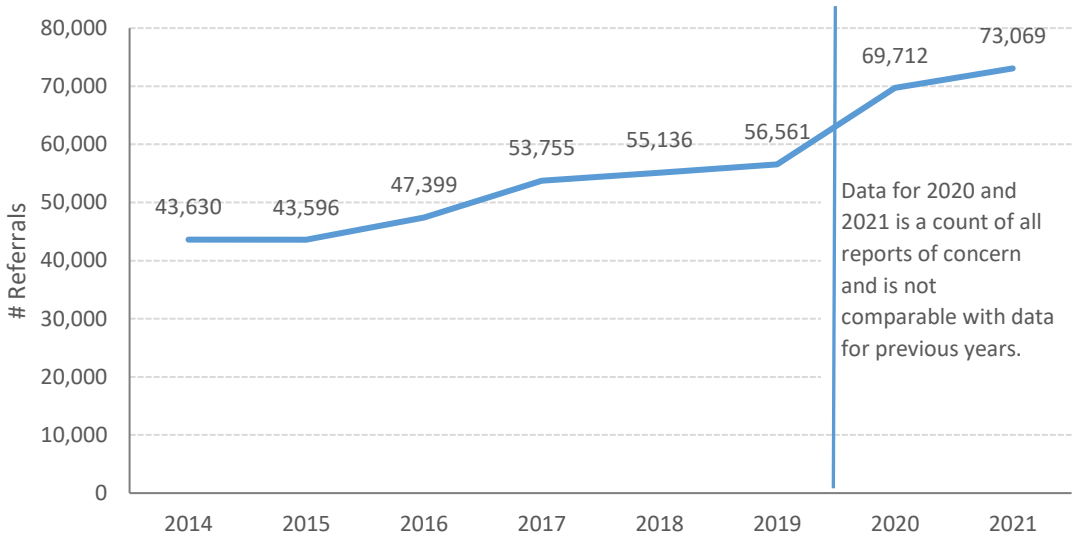


Figure 3: Referrals to Tusla's Child Protection and Welfare Services, 2014 – 2021

Source of Referrals

- A breakdown of the source of referrals for 2021 and comparison with 2020 is presented in Table 1 below. This list of sources includes the list of mandated persons as per Schedule 2 of the Children First Act 2015. It should also be noted that the list of sources for 2020 includes some broad categories / organisations that are not included in the 2021 list e.g., HSE officer, Tusla officer, voluntary agency, government agency / department, local authority. These categories / organisations were removed in mid-2020 due to the potential for overlap with mandated persons e.g., a referral from a Tusla social worker could be recorded under Tusla officer or social worker.

- As can be seen from the table, the most common source of referrals is members of An Garda Síochána, accounting for 37% (26,922) of referrals in 2021, far exceeding any other source. The next most common source of referrals is social workers accounting for 11% (8,066) of referrals in 2021, followed by teachers accounting for a further 8% (6,146) of referrals. A similar pattern to 2020.

- The top five sources of referrals in 2021 (gardaí, social workers, teachers, parent/guardian and anonymous) accounted for 64% (46,888) of referrals.

[10] Figure based on data extracted monthly from NCCIS

[11] Gov.Uk: Characteristics of children in need.

- For the majority of sources more referrals were received in 2021 than 2020. The largest increases in terms of numbers were for members of An Garda Síochána (up 3,713; 16%), social workers (up 2,226; 38%), safeguarding officers (up 985; 74%), teachers (up 838; 16%), social care workers (up 664; 34%), managers of domestic violence shelters (up 365; 30%) and medical practitioners (up 347; 20%). While the fewer number of referrals received in 2020 from some sources (e.g., teachers) may be due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the associated closure of schools and other services for periods of time, the data also needs to be interpreted in the context of the change to the NCCIS system in mid-2020 to remove categories / organisations where there was potential for overlap with mandated persons. For example, referrals that could have been recorded under Tusla officer in 2020 would be recorded under social worker or social care worker in 2021. Another factor to note is the decrease in the number of referrals where the mandated reporter was not specified, down from 11% in 2020 to 8% in 2021. This would imply a higher number in the specified categories in 2021, like members of An Garda Síochána, teachers, social workers etcetera.
- Mandated persons accounted for 85% (62,108) of all sources of referrals in 2021.

Table 1: Source of referrals, 2020 and 2021 (ranked by number of referrals for 2021)

Source	2020	% 2020	2021	% 2021	2021 v 2020	% Δ
Member of An Garda Síochána	23,209	33.3%	**26,922**	**36.8%**	3,713	16.0%
Social worker	5,840	8.4%	**8,066**	**11.0%**	2,226	38.1%
Teacher	5,308	7.6%	**6,146**	**8.4%**	838	15.8%
Mandated reporter - not specified	7,832	11.2%	**5,713**	**7.8%**	-2119	-27.1%
Parent/Guardian	2,844	4.1%	**2,977**	**4.1%**	133	4.7%
Anonymous	2,709	3.9%	**2,777**	**3.8%**	68	2.5%
Social care worker	1,976	2.8%	**2,640**	**3.6%**	664	33.6%
Other source (non-mandated person) not specified	4,693	6.7%	**2,576**	**3.5%**	-2,117	-45.1%
A safeguarding officer	1,332	1.9%	**2,317**	**3.2%**	985	73.9%
Medical practitioner	1,758	2.5%	**2,105**	**2.9%**	347	19.7%
Registered nurse /midwife	1,718	2.5%	**1,812**	**2.5%**	94	5.5%
Manager of domestic violence shelter	1,204	1.7%	**1,569**	**2.1%**	365	30.3%
Other family member	1,307	1.9%	**1,143**	**1.6%**	-164	-12.5%
Psychotherapist / person providing counselling	809	1.2%	**1,103**	**1.5%**	294	36.3%
Psychologist	712	1.0%	**1,059**	**1.4%**	347	48.7%
Member of the public	804	1.2%	**696**	**1.0%**	-108	-13.4%
Youth worker	419	0.6%	**626**	**0.9%**	207	49.4%
Manager of homeless provision or emergency accommodation facility	377	0.5%	**565**	**0.8%**	188	49.9%
Courts (Section 20 Child Care Act)	401	0.6%	**548**	**0.7%**	147	36.7%
Person responsible for the care or management of a youth work service	290	0.4%	**367**	**0.5%**	77	26.6%
Child care staff member employed in a pre-school service	161	0.2%	**158**	**0.2%**	-3	-1.9%

Self	140	0.2%	**147**	**0.2%**	7	5.0%
Foster carer registered with the Agency	111	0.2%	**138**	**0.2%**	27	24.3%
Probation officer	144	0.2%	**125**	**0.2%**	-19	-13.2%
Occupational therapist	109	0.2%	**102**	**0.1%**	-7	-6.4%
Speech and language therapist	68	0.1%	**97**	**0.1%**	29	42.6%
A person carrying on a pre-school service	86	0.1%	**96**	**0.1%**	10	11.6%
Physiotherapist	66	0.1%	**94**	**0.1%**	28	42.4%
An addiction counsellor	79	0.1%	**87**	**0.1%**	8	10.1%
Manager of asylum seeker accommodation	82	0.1%	**69**	**0.09%**	-13	-15.9%
Emergency medical technician	69	0.1%	**52**	**0.07%**	-17	-24.6%
International Social Services	64	0.1%	**49**	**0.07%**	-15	-23.4%
Other Court request	56	0.1%	**46**	**0.06%**	-10	-17.9%
Guardian Ad Litem	28	0.0%	**31**	**0.04%**	3	10.7%
Member of the clergy	10	0.0%	**16**	**0.02%**	6	60.0%
Director of any institution where a child is detained by an order of a court	38	0.1%	**15**	**0.02%**	-23	-60.5%
Manager of a language school, other recreational school, children reside away from home	12	0.02%	**10**	**0.01%**	-2	-16.7%
Dentist	17	0.02%	**8**	**0.01%**	-9	-52.9%
HSE officer	873	1.3%	**2***	**<0.01%**	-871	-99.8%
Tusla officer	818	1.2%	**-**			
Voluntary agency	878	1.3%	**-**			
Government agency / department	170	0.2%	**-**			
Local Authority	91	0.1%	**-**			
Total	**69,712**	**100.0%**	**73,069**	**100.0%**	**3,357**	**4.8%**

*2 reports from HSE officers in 2021 is an anomaly

Type of Referrals

- 52% (37,758) of referrals received in 2021 were for welfare concerns and 35% (25,292) were for child protection concerns, or where there were grounds to believe that there was a risk of physical, sexual or emotional abuse or neglect (Figure 4). The report type was not available for the remaining 14% (10,019) of referrals. The report type (primary) reported at this point is based on the view of the referrer and not that of the social worker and hence can change following assessment by the social worker.

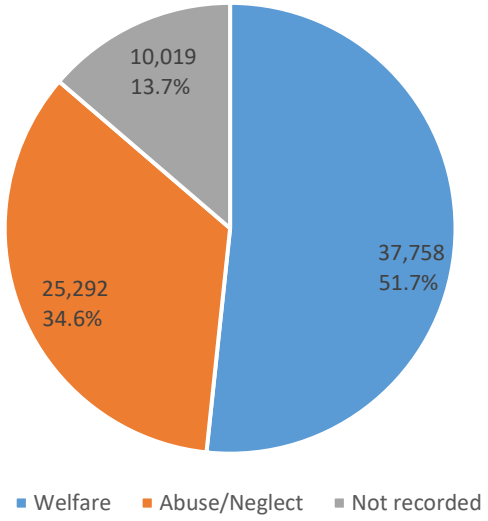


Figure 4: Referrals by primary report type, 2021

- As can be seen from the Table 2 below, the higher number of welfare referrals described above is consistent with that for 2020. It is difficult to comment on the increase from 2020 in the percentage of welfare and abuse/neglect cases due to the decrease in the percentage of cases where the report type was not recorded.

Table 2: Breakdown of referrals by primary report type, 2020 - 2021

Report Type	2020	2021	Δ 2021 v 2020	% Δ
Welfare	31,024 (45%)	**37,758 (52%)**	+ 6,734	+ 22%
Abuse/Neglect	22,050 (32%)	**25,292 (35%)**	+ 3,242	+ 15%
Not recorded	16,638 (24%)	**10,019 (14%)**	-6,619	- 40%
Total	**69,712 (100%)**	**73,069 (100%)**	**+3,357**	**+ 5%**

- The most common type of child protection concern reported in 2021 was emotional abuse, accounting for 43% (10,888) of all child protection referrals (25,292) (Figure 5). Neglect was the least common type of child protection concern reported, accounting for 15% (3,682) of referrals.

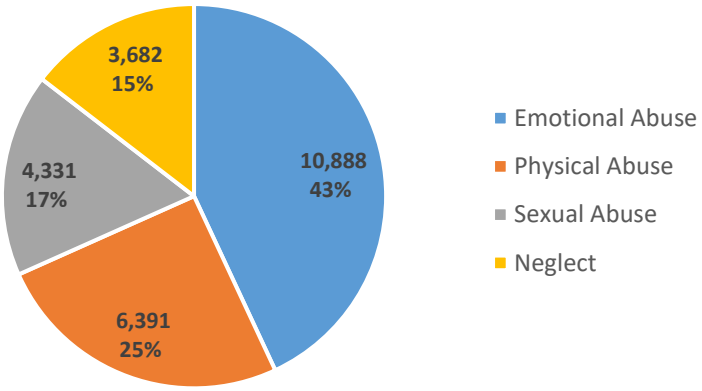


Figure 5: Breakdown of child protection referrals, 2021

- The percentage breakdown of child protection concerns for 2021 is the same as that for 2020 (Table 3).

Table 3: Breakdown of child protection referrals by year, 2020 - 2021

Category of Abuse	2020	2021
Physical abuse	5,511 (25%)	**6,391 (25%)**
Emotional abuse	9,546 (43%)	**10,888 (43%)**
Sexual abuse	3,653 (17%)	**4,331 (17%)**
Neglect	3,340 (15%)	**3,682 (15%)**
Total	**22,050 (100%)**	**25,292 (100%)**

Distribution of Referrals by Area

- The number of referrals varies widely across Tusla's 17 operational areas and in 2021 ranged from 1,415 (2%) (Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan) to 7,254 (10%) (Midlands) (Table 4).
- The rate of referrals ranged from just under 4/100 children under 18 years in Dublin South East/Wicklow to over 10/100 children in Dublin North City. Cork - with the highest number of children under 18 years, ranked 3rd lowest overall (out of 17) in terms of rate while Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan - with the fewest number of children, ranked 8th lowest overall. Eight areas reported a rate equal to or higher than the national average of 6.1/100 children. Although further analysis is required, this would imply that there are other factors influencing referral rates, and possibly include factors like deprivation rates, the level of access to family support services within an area and differences across areas in how thresholds for accepting referrals are applied.

Table 4: Number and rate of referrals by area, 2021 (ranked by rate) (population Census 2016)

Area	# Referrals	0 -17 years population	Rate/100
Dublin North City	4,755	44,927	10.6
Midlands	7,254	80,193	9.0
Dublin South Central	5,080	65,564	7.7
Waterford/Wexford	5,146	68,513	7.5
Dublin North	6,982	100,654	6.9
Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow	6,834	108,186	6.3
Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary	3,938	63,009	6.2
Cavan/Monaghan	2,231	36,446	6.1
Kerry	2,085	34,527	6.0
Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan	1,415	23,554	6.0
Midwest	5,383	96,266	5.6
Louth/Meath	4,956	93,093	5.3
Donegal	2,097	42,865	4.9
Galway/Roscommon	3,848	79,912	4.8
Cork	6,448	134,015	4.8
Mayo	1,531	31,968	4.8
Dublin South East/Wicklow	3,086	86,810	3.6
Total	**73,069**	**1,190,502**	**6.1**

Mandated Reports

- 73% (18,373/25,292) of referrals for child protection concerns received in 2021 were mandated reports (i.e., child protection concerns at or above a defined threshold determined by the mandated reporter), 5,244 (40%) more than 2020 (13,129). This increase needs to be interpreted in the context of the increased percentage of referrals that had a report type recorded on NCCIS in 2021 when compared to 2020. In 2021, 14% (10,019) of referrals did not have a report type recorded on NCCIS compared to 24% (16,638) in 2020.
- The breakdown of mandated reports by the report type is consistent with that for 2020 (Table 5) with emotional abuse accounting for the largest proportion of reports (41%) and neglect accounting for the smallest proportion (12%).

Table 5: Mandated reports by type, 2020 - 2021

Category	# Reports 2020	% Total 2020	# Reports 2021	% Total 2021
Physical abuse	3,610	27%	**4,836**	**26%**
Emotional abuse	5,113	40%	**7,611**	**41%**
Sexual abuse	2,712	21%	**3,646**	**20%**
Neglect	1,694	13%	**2,280**	**12%**
Total	**13,129**	**100%**	**18,373**	**100%**

- The top five sources of mandated reports in 2021 were members of An Garda Síochána (43%; 7,915), teachers (14%; 2,648), social workers (13%; 2,326), social care workers (6%; 1,048) and

safeguarding officers (4%; 762) (Table 6). These five sources account for 80% (14,699) of all reports received.

Table 6: Mandated reports by mandated person, 2020 - 2021 (ranked by top sources 2021)

Source	# Reports 2020	% Total 2020	# Reports 2021	% Total 2021
Member of An Garda Siochana	4,810	36.6%	**7,915**	**43.1%**
Teacher	2,053	15.6%	**2,648**	**14.4%**
Social worker	2,100	16.0%	**2,326**	**12.7%**
Social care worker	802	6.1%	**1,048**	**5.7%**
A safeguarding officer	478	3.6%	**762**	**4.1%**
Medical practitioner	550	4.2%	**757**	**4.1%**
Manager of domestic violence shelter	505	3.8%	**571**	**3.1%**
Psychologist	352	2.7%	**492**	**2.7%**
Psychotherapist or a person providing counselling	335	2.6%	**471**	**2.6%**
Registered nurse /midwife	338	2.6%	**370**	**2.0%**
Youth worker	155	1.2%	**239**	**1.3%**
Manager of homeless provision or emergency accommodation facility	112	0.9%	**174**	**0.9%**
Person responsible for the care or management of a youth work service	103	0.8%	**128**	**0.7%**
Foster carer registered with the Agency	66	0.5%	**72**	**0.4%**
Child care staff member employed in a pre-school service	71	0.5%	**69**	**0.4%**
Physiotherapist	35	0.3%	**56**	**0.3%**
Occupational therapist	41	0.3%	**46**	**0.3%**
A person carrying on a pre-school service	37	0.3%	**41**	**0.2%**
Manager of asylum seeker accommodation (direct provision centre)	29	0.2%	**41**	**0.2%**
Speech and Language therapist	28	0.2%	**38**	**0.2%**
Probation officer	23	0.2%	**26**	**0.14%**
Emergency medical technician	33	0.3%	**22**	**0.12%**
An addiction counsellor	25	0.2%	**21**	**0.11%**
Guardian Ad Litem	17	0.1%	**19**	**0.10%**
Member of the Clergy	4	<0.1%	**8**	**<0.1%**
Director of any institution where a child is detained by an order of a court	10	0.1%	**5**	**<0.1%**
Dentist	13	0.1%	**4**	**<0.1%**
Manager of a language school or other recreational school where children reside away from home	4	<0.1%	**4**	**<0.1%**
Total	**13,129**	**100%**	**18,373**	**100.0%**

2.2 Assessment

Referrals deemed appropriate for child protection and welfare services move to the next stage of the referral process where a preliminary enquiry is carried out. During this step the social worker

- Gathers and considers relevant information regarding the reported concern about the child.
- Considers the immediate safety of the child and takes necessary immediate protective action, if required.
- Decides the priority status of the referral and responds in a proportionate and timely manner.

Under the *Signs of Safety (SofS)* approach introduced in February 2018, the practitioner gathers information using a questioning approach and records this information on an Intake Record. The *Signs of Safety* Harm Matrix is used to map harm and determine whether the harm meets the threshold for an initial assessment. The outcome of the preliminary enquiry step will be either:

- An initial assessment is required.
- The case can be appropriately diverted to other services, or an early intervention response.
- The case will be closed with no further action.

The timeline recommended for the preliminary enquiry is five working days.

The purpose of the initial assessment is to determine whether there is harm or future harm and if there is any existing safety present to address this harm. The initial assessment will recommend whether the child/children require a child welfare safety plan; a child protection safety plan or whether the harm to the child is at a level where the child should be removed from the care of their parents until such time as a safety plan can be established. The initial assessment will also determine whether the report can be closed or diverted to an early intervention response that doesn't require Tusla social work intervention.

A summary of the response process is depicted in Figure 6 (page 36).

- Half (50%; 36,784) of referrals received in 2021 were closed to social work following screening. Of these, 42% (15,297) were closed with no further action required while a further 40% (14,760) were closed as assessment / safety planning was already ongoing for these cases. A breakdown of the outcome of the referrals closed following screening is presented in Table 7 below.

Table 7: Breakdown of the outcome of referrals closed following screening, 2021

Outcome	# Referrals	% Referrals
Closed – assessment / safety planning ongoing	14,760	40%
Closed – no further action	15,297	42%
Closed – diverted to Another Agency	736	2%
Closed – diverted to Prevention, Partnership & Family Support Services	2,287	6%
Closed – "Other"	294	1%
Closed – not specified	3,410	9%
Total	**36,784**	**100%**

- 46% (33,422) of referrals moved to the next stage of the referral process – the preliminary enquiry stage. These are referrals deemed to require a social work response following

screening. At the time the data was extracted for reporting 93% (31,072) of preliminary enquiries were completed.

- 28% (8,780) of referrals required an initial assessment following the preliminary enquiry. The remaining referrals were closed to social work following the preliminary enquiry. A breakdown of the outcome of referrals that underwent a preliminary enquiry is presented in Table 8 below.

Table 8: Breakdown of the outcome of referrals that underwent a preliminary enquiry, 2021

Outcome	# Referrals	% Referrals
Initial Assessment Required	8,780	28%
Closed – assessment / safety planning ongoing	3,868	12%
Closed – no further action	14,477	47%
Closed – diverted to Another Agency	1,760	6%
Closed – diverted to Prevention, Partnership & Family Support Services	2,186	7%
Closed - not specified	1	<1%
Total	**31,072**	**100%**

- Comparison with 2020 shows a significant decrease in the percentage of referrals that required a preliminary enquiry following screening (46% v 63%), while the percentage of referrals that required an initial assessment (28%) is up slightly on 2020 (23%) (Table 9). Further examination is required to understand the reasons for the variation. The reasons are most likely multi-faceted.

Table 9: Preliminary enquiries and Initial assessments, 2020 - 2021

Year	# Referrals	# Requiring a preliminary enquiry	% Requiring Preliminary Enquiry	# Requiring initial assessment following PE	% Requiring initial assessment
2021	73,069	33,422	46%	8,780	28%
2020	69,712	44,264	63%	9,997	23%

*Note: the percentage of referrals that required an initial assessment is based on preliminary enquiries completed and not preliminary enquiries required following screening

- Like the rate of referrals discussed earlier, there are significant differences across the 17 areas in the percentage of referrals moving to the preliminary enquiry and initial assessment stages of the referral process (Table 10).

- The percentage of referrals that moved to the preliminary enquiry stage ranged from 26% (1,328/5,080) in Dublin South Central to 67% (951/1,415) in Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan. Ten areas reported a percentage equal to or higher than the national average of 46%.

- The percentage of referrals that required an initial assessment following a preliminary enquiry ranged from 21% (212/1,020) in Cavan/Monaghan and Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary (212/2,190) to 41% (232/572) in Mayo. Eight areas reported a percentage equal to or higher than the national average of 28%.

- Further examination is required to understand the varying patterns across the Tusla areas.

Table 10: Breakdown of referrals requiring a preliminary enquiry and initial assessment, by area 2021

Area	# Referrals	# Req. PE	% Req. PE	# Req. IA	% Req. IA*
Dublin South Central	5,080	1,328	26%	318	26%
Dublin South East/Wicklow	3,086	1,508	49%	518	35%
Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow	6,834	2,273	33%	555	27%
Midlands	7,254	3,304	46%	814	26%
Dublin North City	4,755	2,610	55%	600	27%
Dublin North	6,982	3,140	45%	970	36%
Louth/Meath	4,956	1,819	37%	476	29%
Cavan/Monaghan	2,231	1,123	50%	212	21%
Cork	6,448	3,619	56%	894	27%
Kerry	2,085	1,144	55%	245	23%
Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary	3,938	2,211	56%	456	21%
Waterford/Wexford	5,146	2,617	51%	599	24%
Midwest	5,383	2,422	45%	722	31%
Galway/Roscommon	3,848	1,883	49%	534	30%
Mayo	1,531	593	39%	232	41%
Donegal	2,097	877	42%	333	39%
Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan	1,415	951	67%	302	32%
Total	**73,069**	**33,422**	**46%**	**8,780**	**28%***

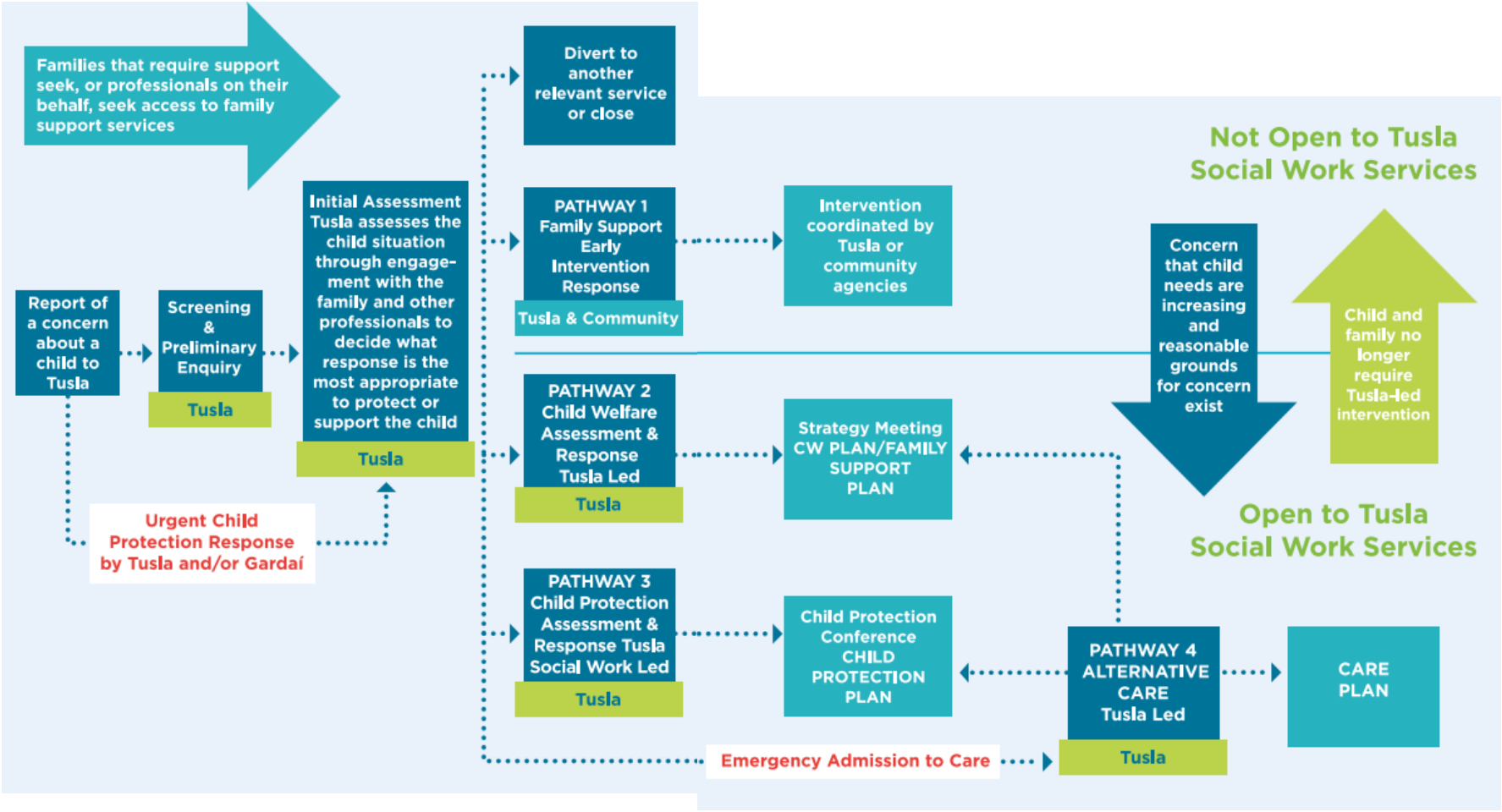
*Note: the percentage of referrals that required an initial assessment is based on preliminary enquiries completed and not preliminary enquiries required following screening

- At the time the data was extracted for reporting, 53% (4,623) of initial assessments required following a preliminary enquiry were completed. The remaining assessments were awaiting sign-off, in progress, or not started at the time the data was extracted.
- One-third (33%; 1,529) of referrals where the initial assessment was completed were closed with no further action required, 42% (1,953) required a child protection / safety planning response and 4% (184) required admission to care. A breakdown of the outcome of initial assessments for all referrals is presented in Table 11 below.

Table 11: Outcome of initial assessment for referrals received in 2021

Outcome	# Referrals	% Total
No Further Action (NFA) - Close	1,529	33.1%
Safety Planning	1,210	26.2%
Child Protection / Child Protection Conference Safety Planning	743	16.1%
Divert to Another Agency - Close	501	10.8%
Divert to Prevention Partnership Family Support (PPFS) - Close	250	5.4%
No Further Action (NFA) - Close - Assessment/Safety Planning ongoing	158	3.4%
Admission to Care	184	4.0%
Family Welfare Conference	48	1.0%
Total	**4,623**	**100%**

Response Pathways



It should be noted that a referral can close / be diverted at any stage during the process depicted above – all referrals do not have to journey along this pathway.

Figure 6: Child Protection and Welfare Services, Response Pathways

2.3 Cases Open to Social Work

Cases open to social work include all children going through the preliminary enquiry/assessment process, children requiring social work support including children in the care of the Agency and children "active" on the Child Protection Notification System (CPNS). Open cases include cases both allocated and awaiting allocation to a named social worker. It is Tusla policy that all children requiring social work intervention are allocated a named social worker. All cases awaiting allocation are reviewed and monitored on an ongoing basis and prioritised accordingly.

KEY FACTS 2021

- 21,248 cases open to social work at the end of 2021: little or no change from 2020 (21,143). Equates to less than 2% of the general child population in receipt of social work services from Tusla for child protection and welfare concerns.
- 77% (16,441) of cases open to social work were allocated to a named social worker at the end of 2020, down from 80% at the end of 2020.
- 4,807 (23%) of cases awaiting allocation to a named social worker at the end of 2021, 568 (13%) more than 2020 when the fewest number (4,239) for the period 2014 – 2020 was reported.
- Almost a two-thirds (62%; 2,985) of cases awaiting allocation to a named social worker at the end of 2021 were being progressed by dedicated duty teams or rotating social workers on a duty roster.
- 436 (9%) cases awaiting allocation to a named social worker at the end of 2021 were categorised as high priority, 60 (16%) more than 2020 (376).
- 73% (3,526) of cases awaiting allocation at the end of 2021 were waiting three months or less, a similar breakdown to 2020.
- 6 areas accounted for 64% (3,085) of cases awaiting allocation as follows: Waterford/Wexford (598), Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow (543), Louth/Meath (494), Dublin South Central (493), Dublin South East/Wicklow (486) and Cork (471).

Open Cases

- At the end of 2021, there were 21,248 cases open to social work. As open cases are recorded on a per child basis, we can say that 1.8% of the general child population (Census 2016) were in receipt of a social work service from Tusla for child protection and welfare concerns at the end of 2021.
- The number of cases open to social work at the end of 2021 (21,248) was similar to the number open at the end of 2020 (21,143) (Table 12).

Allocated Cases

- 77% (16,441) of cases open to social work at the end of 2021 were allocated to a named social worker, down from 80% at the end of 2020 (Table 12).

Cases Awaiting Allocation

- The remaining 23% (4,807) of cases were awaiting allocation to a named social worker (Table 12).
- The number of cases awaiting allocation at the end of 2021 (4,807) was up 13% (568) on 2020 (4,239) when the fewest number for the years 2014 – 2020 was reported (Table 12 and Figure 7).
- 62% (2,985) of cases awaiting allocation to a named social worker at the end of 2021 were being progressed by dedicated duty teams or rotating social workers on a duty roster e.g., children were being visited, initial assessments were being completed, child in care reviews were taking place. All cases awaiting allocation to a named social worker are reviewed and monitored on an ongoing basis and prioritised accordingly. Children at immediate risk get an immediate response.

Table 12: Cases open to social work, 2014 - 2021

Year	# Open cases	# Allocated	% Allocated	# Unallocated	% Unallocated
2021	**21,248**	**16,441**	**77%**	**4,807**	**23%**
2020	21,143	16,904	80%	4,239	20%
2019	24,827	19,536	79%	5,291	21%
2018	26,433	20,001	76%	6,432	24%
2017	24,891	19,999	80%	4,892	20%
2016	25,034	19,621	78%	5,413	22%
2015	26,655	19,937	75%	6,718	25%
2014	27,967	19,425	69%	8,542	31%

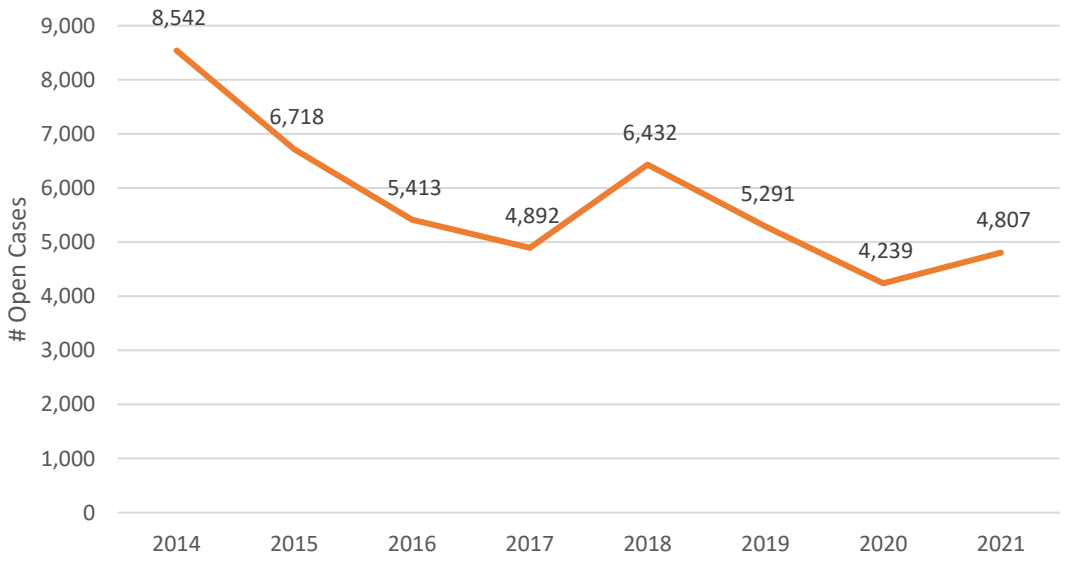


Figure 7: Number of open cases awaiting allocation, 2014 -2021

Cases Awaiting Allocation by Priority Level

- 9% (436) of cases awaiting allocation at the end of 2021 were categorised as high priority, a 16% (60) increase on 2020 when a low of 376 was reported (Table 13). In terms of the data presented in Table 13 it should be noted that revised guidance on categorisation of cases was issued in 2020. The revised guidance is based on *Signs of Safety* – Tusla's national approach to practice and replaces the guidance issued in 2012. It should also be noted that children identified at immediate risk continue to receive an immediate response and in addition, cases awaiting allocation are monitored on an ongoing basis for a change in circumstance.
- 53% (2,546) of cases awaiting allocation at the end of 2021 were categorised as medium priority while the remaining 38% (1,825) were categorised as low priority (Table 13).
- The decrease in the percentage of high priority cases in recent years along with the concomitant increase in the percentage of low priority cases reflects the Agency's ongoing focus on the management of high priority cases.

Table 13: Cases awaiting allocation by priority level, 2014 - 2021

Year	# High Priority Awaiting	# Medium Priority Awaiting	# Low Priority Awaiting	Total
2021	**436 (9%)**	**2,546 (53%)**	**1,825 (38%)**	**4,807**
2020	376 (9%)	2,353 (56%)	1,510 (36%)	**4,239**
2019	653 (12%)	2,782 (53%)	1,856 (35%)	**5,291**
2018	1,003 (16%)	3,296 (51%)	2,133 (33%)	**6,432**
2017	818 (17%)	2,925 (60%)	1,149 (23%)	**4,892**
2016	801 (15%)	3,262 (60%)	1,350 (25%)	**5,413**
2015	999 (15%)	3,617 (54%)	2,102 (31%)	**6,718**
2014	2,836 (33%)	4,383 (51%)	1,323 (15%)	**8,542**

Cases Awaiting Allocation by Length of Time Waiting

- 73% (3,526) of cases awaiting allocation at the end of 2021 were waiting three months or less; the remaining 27% (1,281) of cases were waiting longer than three months, a similar breakdown to 2020 (Table 14).

Table 14: Cases awaiting allocation by length of time waiting 2018 - 2021

Year	< 1 month	1-3 months	>3 months	Total
2021	**1,865 (39%)**	**1,661 (35%)**	**1,281 (27%)**	**4,807**
2020	1,669 (39%)	1,481 (35%)	1,089 (26%)	**4,239**
2019	1,677 (32%)	1,568 (30%)	2,046 (39%)	**5,291**
2018	1,461 (23%)	1,907 (30%)	3,064 (48%)	**6,432**

Cases Awaiting Allocation by Tusla Area

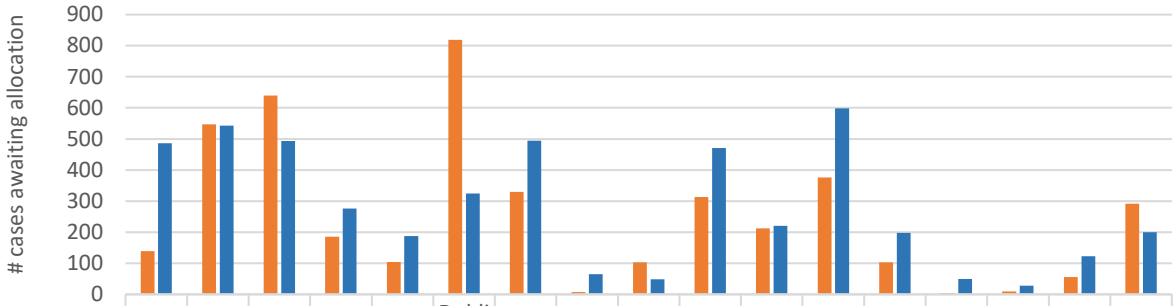
- At the end of 2021, the number of cases open across the 17 areas ranged from 317 (1% of open cases) (Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan) to 2,448 (12% of open cases) (Dublin North) (Table 15).

- The areas with the highest numbers of cases awaiting allocation were Waterford/Wexford (598), Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow (543), Louth/Meath (494), Dublin South Central (493), Dublin South East/Wicklow (486) and Cork (471). These six areas accounted for 64% (3,085) of all cases awaiting allocation.
- In nine of the 17 areas, at least 80% of open cases were allocated to a named social worker. Rates reported by Dublin South East/Wicklow (62%), Dublin South Central (65%), Waterford/Wexford (66%), Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow (67%) and Louth/Meath (68%) were lower than all other areas (Table 15).

Table 15: Area breakdown of cases open to social work by allocation status, 2021 (ranked by # awaiting allocation)

Area	# Open Cases	# Allocated	% Allocated	# Unallocated	% Unallocated
Waterford/Wexford	1,761	1,163	66%	598	34%
Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow	1,625	1,082	67%	543	33%
Louth/Meath	1,528	1,034	68%	494	32%
Dublin South Central	1,407	914	65%	493	35%
Dublin South East / Wicklow	1,286	800	62%	486	38%
Cork	2,092	1,621	77%	471	23%
Dublin North	2,448	2,124	87%	324	13%
Midlands	1,692	1,416	84%	276	16%
Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary	806	585	73%	221	27%
Midwest	1,328	1,128	85%	200	15%
Donegal	695	497	72%	198	28%
Dublin North City	1,770	1,582	89%	188	11%
Galway/Roscommon	920	797	87%	123	13%
Cavan/Monaghan	570	505	89%	65	11%
Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan	317	267	84%	50	16%
Kerry	450	401	89%	49	11%
Mayo	553	525	95%	28	5%
Total	21,248	16,441	77%	4,807	23%

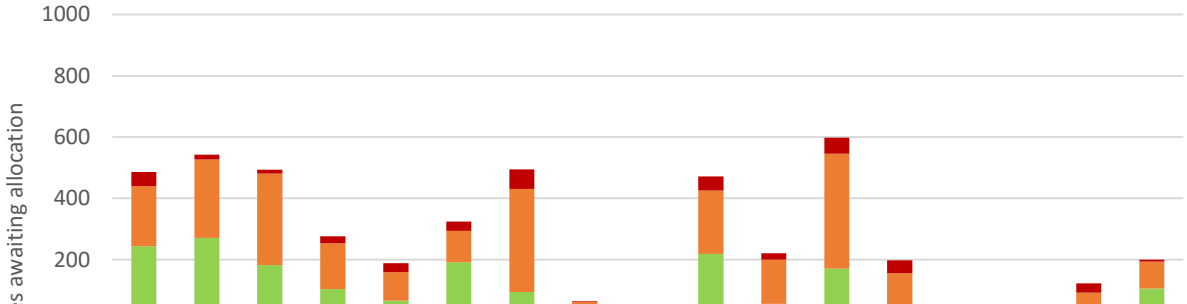
- Five of the 17 areas had fewer cases awaiting allocation at the end of 2021 than at the end of 2020 (Figure 8). The largest decrease was reported by Dublin North (down 495; 60%) followed by Dublin South Central (down 147; 23%), Midwest (down 92; 32%), Kerry (down 54; 52%) and Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow (down 4; 1%).
- Of the 12 areas that reported an increase, the largest increase was reported by Dublin South East/Wicklow (up 347; 250%) followed by Waterford/Wexford (up 222; 59%), Louth/Meath (up 164; 50%) and Cork (up 158; 50%).



	DSE/ WW	DSW /K/W W	DSC	Midl and	DNC	Dublin North	LH/ MH	CN/ MN	Kerry	Cork	CW/ KK/S T	WD/ WX	Done gal	SLW C	May o	GY/R N	Mid west
2020	139	547	640	185	104	819	330	7	103	313	212	376	103	4	9	56	292
2021	486	543	493	276	188	324	494	65	49	471	221	598	198	50	28	123	200
2021 v 2020	347	-4	-147	91	84	-495	164	58	-54	158	9	222	95	46	19	67	-92

Figure 8: Area breakdown of cases awaiting allocation, 2020 -2021

- The area with the highest number of high priority cases awaiting allocation at the end of 2021 was Louth/Meath (63) followed by Waterford/Wexford (52), Dublin South East/Wicklow (46), Cork (46) and Donegal (42) (Figure 9). These five areas account for 57% (249) of all high priority cases awaiting allocation. One area (Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan) reported no high priority cases awaiting allocation at the end of 2021.



	DSE/ WW	DSW /K/W W	DSC	Midl ands	DNC	Dublin North	LH/M H	CN/ MN	Kerry	Cork	CW/ KK/S T	WD/ WX	Done gal	SLWC	May o	GY/R N	Mid west
High	46	16	12	23	29	30	63	2	5	46	21	52	42	0	12	31	6
Medium	196	256	299	149	93	102	337	43	30	206	144	375	127	32	12	57	88
Low	244	271	182	104	66	192	94	20	14	219	56	171	29	18	4	35	106
Total	486	543	493	276	188	324	494	65	49	471	221	598	198	50	28	123	200

Figure 9: Area breakdown of cases awaiting allocation by priority status, 2021

2.4 Children Subject to a Child Protection Plan

If following assessment, a child protection plan is recommended (i.e., there are grounds for believing that a child is at ongoing risk of significant harm from abuse, including neglect) a child protection conference[12] is convened to discuss the case. If it is agreed at the conference that the child should have a formal child protection plan, the plan is formulated and his or her name and details are entered on the national Child Protection Notification System (CPNS)[13]. Reviews of children listed on the system must occur at intervals of not more than six months. A child will be listed as inactive on the system if it is established at a review conference that the child is no longer at on-going risk of significant harm. It is important to note that children who have experienced harm outside the family or are at risk to themselves from their own behaviour are not listed on the CPNS.

KEY FACTS

- 983 children "active" on the CPNS at the end of 2021, a 5% (44) increase from 2020 (939) and a 12% (107) increase from 2019 (876) when the fewest number for the period 2015 - 2019 was reported.
- Neglect continues to be the most common concern for children "active" on the CPNS (54%; 534).
- The proportion of children "active" because of emotional abuse is growing year on year and is up nine percentage points overall from 2018 (28% v 37%).
- 41% (406) of children "active" at the end of 2021 were 0-4 years, the highest percentage of all age groups; 10% (96) were 15-17 years.
- Majority (83%; 817) of children "active" on the CPNS at the end of 2021 were "active" for no longer than 12 months.

Number of Children "Active" on CPNS

- There were 983 children "active" on the CPNS (i.e., at ongoing risk of significant harm from abuse, including neglect and still living with their parents/carers) at the end of 2021.
- The number of children "active" at the end of December 2021 was up 5% (44) on 2020 (939) and 12% (107) on 2019 (876) when the fewest number for the period 2015 - 2019[14] was reported (Figure 10).

[12] A Child Protection Conference (CPC) is an interagency and inter-professional meeting convened by the designated person in the area. The purpose of the conference is to facilitate the sharing and evaluation of information between professionals and parents/carers to consider the evidence as to whether a child is at ongoing risk of significant harm from abuse, including neglect. It the CPC determines that the child is at ongoing risk of significant harm from abuse, including neglect a child protection plan is developed and the child is listed on the CPNS.

[13] The CPNS is a securely held national record of all children who are subject of a child protection plan agreed at a child protection conference. It exists to enable the effective sharing of information between professionals working with vulnerable children and families. Access to the system is strictly controlled and confined to gardaí, hospital emergency staff, maternity hospitals and out-of-hours general practitioners. Tusla introduced a single national system in 2015, replacing all area/regional stand-alone systems that were in place at the time.

[14] Figure for 2016 includes one child who was visiting from another jurisdiction and placed on the CPNS for the duration of their stay in Ireland

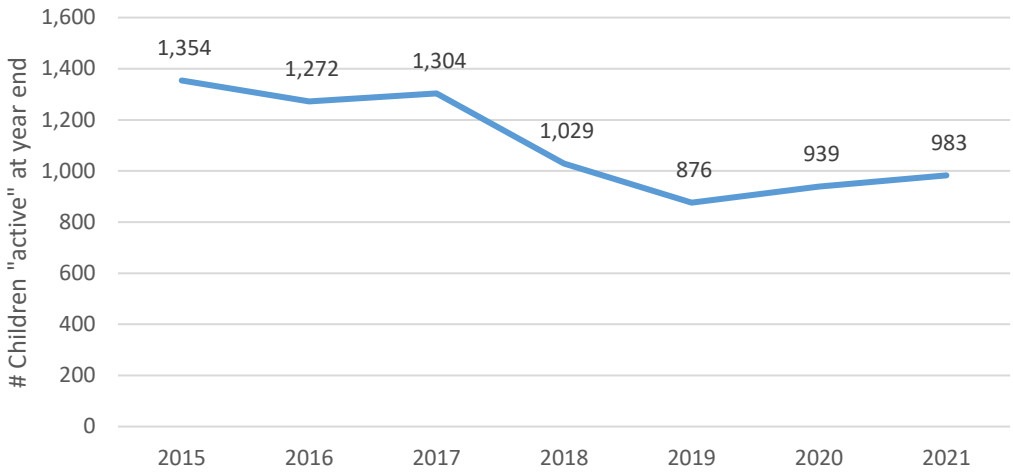


Figure 10: Number of children "active" on the CPNS, 2015 – 2021

- The number of children "active" (983) equates to about eight children per 10,000 of the population under 18 years (Table 16).
- The number of children "active" accounts for a small (4.6%), but nonetheless significant percentage of cases open to social work (21,248).

Table 16: Number and rate of children "active" on the CPNS at year end, 2015-2021

Number / Rate	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
# "active"	1,354	1,272	1,304	1,029	876	939	**983**
Rate/10,000*	11.4	10.7	11	8.6	7.4	7.9	**8.3**

*Rate based on Census 2016 population (1,190,502 children under 18 years)

- Different criteria and thresholds for listing children on the CPNS in this jurisdiction do not allow for easy comparison with rates in other countries where systems/registers are in operation. Table 17 shows the rate of children on child protection registers or subject to child protection plans in UK countries[15]. Of the four countries, Scotland reports the lowest rate of children on child protection registers at 22 per 10,000 children while Northern Ireland reports the highest rate at 52 per 10,000 children. As can be seen from the table, Ireland falls well below these rates at eight per 10,000 children.

Table 17: Children on child protection registers in other jurisdictions

Country	Children on child protection registers – rate per 10,000 children
Ireland	**8 (31 December 2021)**
Northern Ireland	52 (31 March 2021)
England	43 (31 March 2021)
Wales	50 (31 March 2021)
Scotland	22 (31 March 2021)

[15]Data for countries can be found from the Supporting Files, Additional Tables (Table 4.9) download at the following link Supporting documents - Children's Social Work Statistics, Scotland 2020-21 - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)

- All but two children “active” on the CPNS at the end of 2021 had an allocated social worker in line with Tusla policy. Despite challenges with the allocation of social workers, areas continue to prioritise these children for allocation.

Gender and Age of Children “Active” on CPNS

- Of the 983 children “active” on the CPNS at the end of 2021, 53% (517) were male and 45% (438) were female which is broadly consistent with the general population (Census 2016, 51% males and 49% females); the remaining 3% (28) were in-utero (Figure 11).

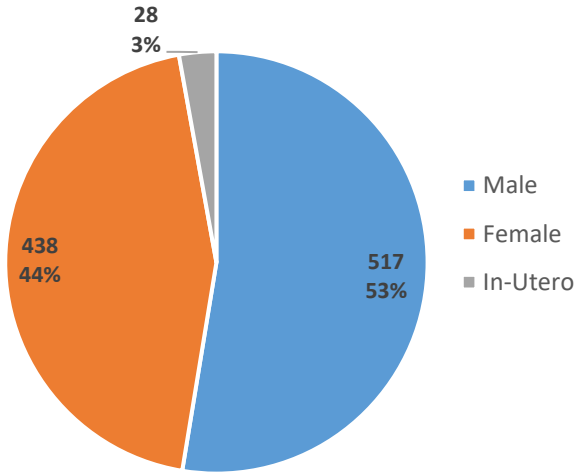


Figure 11: Number of children "active" on the CPNS at the end of December 2021, by gender

- 41% (406) of children “active” on the CPNS were under 5 years, the highest percentage of all age groups (Figure 12). Ten percent (96) of those “active” were 15-17 years.

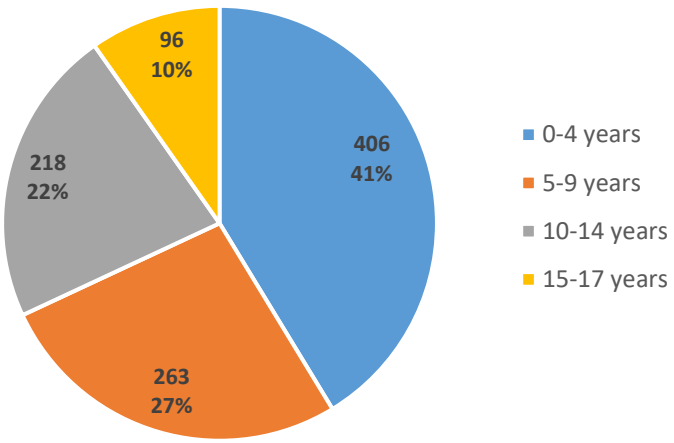


Figure 12: Number of children "active" on the CPNS at the end of December 2021, by age group

- These figures indicate that the 0-4 years age group is more heavily represented on the CPNS (41%) than the general population (28%) while the older ages account for a smaller proportion of those on the CPNS (10%) than the general population (15%) (Table 18). These data correspond with most

international data, which generally identify younger children at most risk, marginally reducing as they get older.

- At the end of 2021 there were 48 (13%) more children 0-4 years "active" than at the end of 2020, and 94 (30%) more than the end of 2019, year-on-year increase. In contrast the numbers in the other ages groups have varied little over the same period.

Table 18: Age of children "active" on the CPNS by age group at year-end, 2018 - 2021

Age group	2018	2019	2020	2021	General population
0-4 years	391 (38%)	312 (36%)	358 (38%)	**406 (41%)**	331,515 (28%)
5-9 years	303 (29%)	264 (30%)	257 (27%)	**263 (27%)**	355,561 (30%)
10-14 years	255 (25%)	218 (25%)	231 (25%)	**218 (22%)**	319,476 (28%)
15 – 17 years	80 (8%)	82 (9%)	93 (10%)	**96 (10%)**	183,950 (15%)
Total	**1,029 (100%)**	**876 (100%)**	**939 (100%)**	**983 (100%)**	**1,190,502**

Reason for being "Active" on CPNS

- The most common type of abuse recorded for children "active" on the CPNS at the end of 2021 was neglect accounting for more than half of all cases (54%; 534), followed by emotional abuse accounting for a further 37% (360) of cases (Figure 13). Combined, these two types of abuse account for 91% (894) of cases. The least common type of abuse was sexual abuse accounting for 3% (28) of cases.

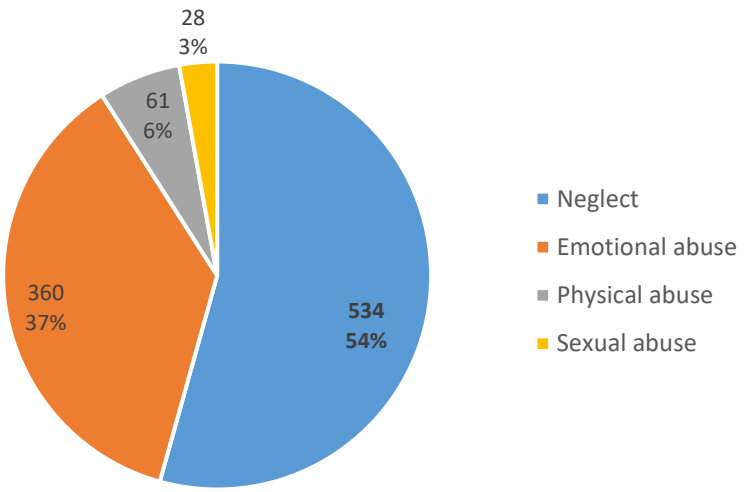


Figure 13: Type of abuse recorded for children "active" on the CPNS, year-end 2021

- The data shows a 19% (58) increase from 2020 in the number of children "active" because of emotional abuse (Table 19). The proportion of children "active" because of emotional abuse is growing year on year and is up nine percentage points overall from 2018 (28% v 37%)
- In contrast, the proportion of children "active" because of neglect is showing a year-on-year decrease and is down six percentage points overall from 2018 (60% v 54%).

Table 19: Type of abuse recorded for children on the CPNS, by year, 2018 – 2021

Type of Abuse	# 2018	% 2018	# 2019	% 2019	# 2020	% 2020	# 2021	% 2021	2021 v 2020	%
Neglect	621	60%	519	59%	546	58%	**534**	**54%**	-12	-2%
Emotional abuse	293	28%	252	29%	302	32%	**360**	**37%**	58	19%
Physical abuse	76	7%	62	7%	58	6%	**61**	**6%**	3	5%
Sexual abuse	39	4%	43	5%	33	4%	**28**	**3%**	-5	-15%
Total	**1,029**	**100%**	**876**	**100%**	**939**	**100%**	**983**	**100%**	**44**	**5%**

Length of Time "Active" on CPNS

- More than half (58%; 572) of children "active" on the CPNS at the end of 2021 were "active" for no longer than six months, while 83% (817) were "active" for no longer than 12 months (Figure 14). Eight percent (79) of children were "active" for more than 18 months.

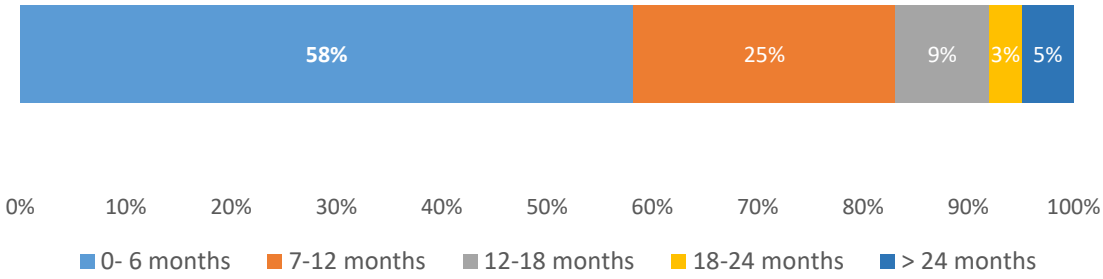


Figure 14: Children active by length of time active, year-end 2021

- Slight increase from 2020 in the number (7) and percentage (17%) of children "active for more than 24 months, but decreases observed across time bands, 7-12 months, 12-18 months and 18-24 months (Table 20).

Table 20: Children listed as "active" by length of time "active", 2018 - 2021

Length of time active	# 2018	% 2018	# 2019	% 2019	# 2020	% 2020	# 2021	% 2021	2021 v 2020	% Diff
0-6 months	541	53%	467	53%	485	52%	**572**	**58%**	87	18%
7-12 months	209	20%	233	27%	254	27%	**245**	**25%**	-9	-4%
12-18 months	135	13%	97	11%	116	12%	**87**	**9%**	-29	-25%
18-24 months	75	7%	30	3%	43	5%	**31**	**3%**	-12	-28%
24+ months	69	7%	49	6%	41	4%	**48**	**5%**	7	17%
Total	**1,029**	**100%**	**876**	**100%**	**939**	**100%**	**983**	**100%**	44	5%

Children "Active" on CPNS by Area

- The number of children "active" on the CPNS at the end of 2021 in the different Tusla areas ranged from nine in Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan to 96 in Cork. The corresponding rate per 10,000 children ranged from 3.8/10,000 in Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan to 18.5/10,000 in Dublin North City, more than double the national rate (8.3/10,000) (Table 21).

- Cork, Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow and Dublin North - with the higher populations of children, reported rates well below the average at 8.3/10,000 population. Nine areas reported a rate equal to or higher than the national average. As with the referral rates, it is likely that there are number of underlying factors leading to this variation.

Table 21: Children "active" on the CPNS by area, year-end 2021 (ranked by rate)

Area	# Active 2021	Population	Rate / 10,000
Dublin North City	83	44,927	18.5
Donegal	59	42,865	13.8
Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary	77	63,009	12.2
Cavan/Monaghan	39	36,446	10.7
Midlands	81	80,193	10.1
Waterford/Wexford	63	68,513	9.2
Mayo	29	31,968	9.1
Midwest	83	96,266	8.6
Kerry	29	34,527	8.4
Dublin North	80	100,654	7.9
Dublin South Central	47	65,564	7.2
Cork	96	134,015	7.2
Dublin South East/Wicklow	61	86,810	7.0
Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow	69	108,186	6.4
Galway/Roscommon	42	79,912	5.3
Louth/Meath	36	93,093	3.9
Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan	9	23,554	3.8
Total	**983**	**1,190,502**	**8.3**

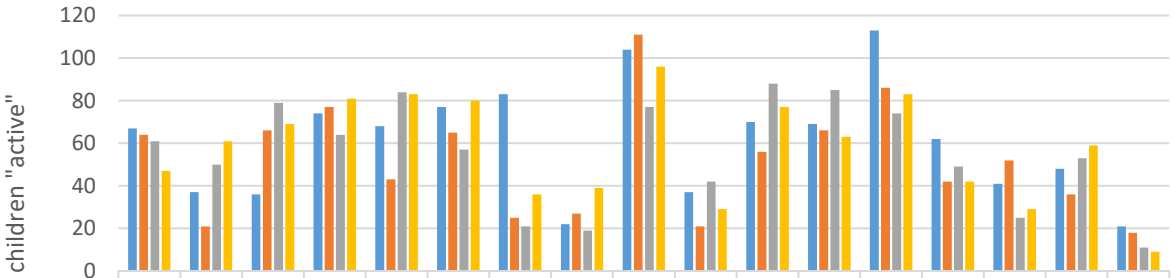
- Eight of the 17 areas had fewer children listed as "active" at the end of 2021 than 2020 (Table 22 and Figure 15). The largest decrease (in terms of numbers) was reported by Waterford/Wexford (down 22) followed by Dublin South Central (down 14) and Kerry (down 13)
- Of the nine areas that reported an increase, the largest increase was reported by Dublin North (up 23) followed by Cavan/Monaghan (up 20) and Cork (up 19).

Table 22: Number of children "active" on the CPNS by area at year end, 2018 – 2021 (ranked by difference 2021 v 2020)

Area	# Active 2018	# Active 2019	# Active 2020	# Active 2021	2021 v 2020	% Diff
Dublin North	77	65	57	**80**	**23**	40%
Cavan/Monaghan	22	27	19	**39**	**20**	105%
Cork	104	111	77	**96**	**19**	25%
Midlands	74	77	64	**81**	**17**	27%
Louth/Meath	83	25	21	**36**	**15**	71%
Dublin South East/Wicklow	37	21	50	**61**	**11**	22%
Midwest	113	86	74	**83**	**9**	12%
Donegal	48	36	53	**59**	**6**	11%
Mayo	41	52	25	**29**	**4**	16%

Dublin North City	68	43	84	**83**	**-1**	-1%
Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan	21	18	11	**9**	**-2**	-18%
Galway/Roscommon	62	42	49	**42**	**-7**	-14%
Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow	36	66	79	**69**	**-10**	-13%
Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary	70	56	88	**77**	**-11**	-13%
Kerry	37	21	42	**29**	**-13**	-31%
Dublin South Central	67	64	61	**47**	**-14**	-23%
Waterford/Wexford	69	66	85	**63**	**-22**	-26%
Total	**1,029**	**876**	**939**	**983**	**44**	**5%**

- Two of the 17 areas (Dublin South Central and Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan) reported three consecutive decreases from 2018. No area reported three consecutive increases.
- Two areas (Dublin South East/Wicklow and Donegal) reported two consecutive increases from 2019. No area reported two consecutive decreases.



	DSC	DSE/ WW	DSW /K/W W	Midl ands	DNC	Dubli n Nort h	LH/ MH	CN/ MN	Cork	Kerry	CW/ KK/S T	WD/ WX	Mid west	GY/R N	May o	Done gal	SLW C
# Active 2018	67	37	36	74	68	77	83	22	104	37	70	69	113	62	41	48	21
# Active 2019	64	21	66	77	43	65	25	27	111	21	56	66	86	42	52	36	18
# Active 2020	61	50	79	64	84	57	21	19	77	42	88	85	74	49	25	53	11
# Active 2021	47	61	69	81	83	80	36	39	96	29	77	63	83	42	29	59	9

Figure 15: Number of children "active" on the CPNS at year-end by area, 2018- 2021

2.5 Out of Hours Services

Tusla provides out-of-hours services to ensure the provision of an appropriate response and place of safety for children found to be at risk outside normal working hours.

The Crisis Intervention Service comprises the National Out of Hours Service (NOHS), the Crisis Intervention Service Partnership (CISP) and the Emergency Fostering Support Service (EFSS).

Out-of-hours services are provided by the National Out of Hours Service (NOHS) which is based in Tusla's Offices, Brunel Building, Dublin. This service replaces the former Out of Hours Service which operated in Dublin/Wicklow/Kildare, the Cork Out of Hours Service and the Emergency Out of Hours Service (EOHS) which covered all other counties.

A team of NOHS social workers are available from Monday to Sunday between 6pm and 7am 365 days a year and each Saturday/Sunday and Public Holiday from 9am - 5pm. The CISP team provides a service from Monday to Friday 9pm to 5pm.

The National Out-of-Hours Service provides a service to children and young people in the areas of Dublin, Kildare and Wicklow and nationally through a phone support service to An Garda Síochána (AGS), hospital staff and mandated reporters. It primarily supports AGS in the execution of their duties and responsibilities to children and young persons under Section 12 of the Child Care Act 1991 and provides the following services:

- A National Call Centre providing social work consultation and advice to AGS, hospital staff and mandated reporters;
- Placements for children under Section 12 (3) of the Child Care Act 1991 provided on contract by an external contractor;
- Access for AGS and hospital staff to a National On-Call Local Social Worker;
- Access to an On-Call Principal Social Worker for consultation on escalated cases.

Types of referrals to the National Out of Hours include:

- Where there are concerns that a child has suffered, or is likely to suffer significant harm;
- There is suspected or confirmed abuse of a child;
- In cases where there is a serious and imminent risk of family breakdown both in the community, foster care or a family placement.

Where possible the NOHS tries to avoid placement of children in emergency accommodation. Preferred options include placement of the child or young person with other family/friends or facilitating the child or young person to return home through mediating between parties where a breakdown in family relations has occurred.

KEY FACTS

- Referrals to Tusla's National Out of Hours Service (NOHS) continue to increase; 2,718 referrals in 2021, a 19% (437) increase on 2020 (2,281).
- 698 children placed by the NOHS in 2021, 173 (33%) more than 2020 (525).

In 2021, there were 2,718 referrals to Tusla's National Out of Hours Service (NOHS), 437 (19%) more than 2020 (2,281) and the highest number for the seven years 2015 – 2021 (Figure 16). Since the establishment of the NOHS there has been a steady increase in the number of children/families referred to the service. This may be due to a number of factors including better awareness among professionals of the availability of out of hours social work services, in addition to the provision of a mandated persons' support line.

There were 698 children placed by the NOHS in 2021, 173 (33%) more than 2020 (525).

The NOHS supplied 5,499 nights' accommodation in 2021, 223 (4%) more than 2020 (5,276).

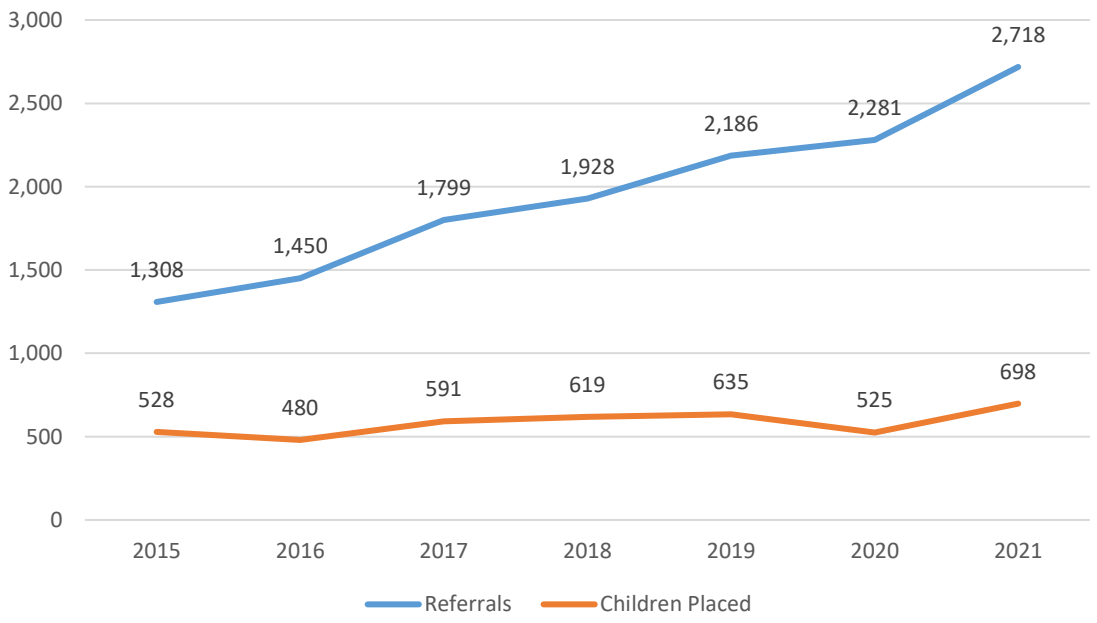


Figure 16: Referrals to Tusla's National Out of House Service & Number of Children Placed, 2015 - 2021

3.0 ALTERNATIVE CARE SERVICES

Alternative care is the term used to describe State provision for children who cannot remain in the care of their parents. Under the provisions of the Child Care Act 1991 and its amendments Tusla has a statutory responsibility to provide alternative care services. Such care is usually provided in the form of foster care and residential care by State employees or through private and voluntary providers. Refer to Glossary on page 8 for definitions.

The decision about a child being received into care is based on the child's needs following an assessment. There are different reasons why a child may be placed in care. The child's family may be unable to provide a suitable level of care and protection for the child. This may be due to long-term illness, an ongoing mental health issue or addiction problems. Other reasons for admission to care include abuse (physical, sexual, emotional) or neglect.

Where a child is taken into care it is frequently agreed on a voluntary basis with the child's parents/guardians. In these cases, while the Agency has care of the child it must consider the parents' wishes as to how the care is provided. If no agreement is reached the Agency may apply to the courts for a number of different orders. These orders give the courts a range of powers, including decision-making about the type of care necessary and about access to the child for parents and other relatives. Refer to Glossary on page 8 for definitions.

3.1 First-time Admissions to Care

KEY FACTS

- 792 children came into care for the first time in 2021[16], 104 (15%) more than 2020 (688) after an 11% (86) decrease between 2019 and 2020.
- This equates to about 7 children for every 10,000 living in Ireland. Ranges from about 3 per 10,000 children living in Dublin South East/Wicklow to 10 per 10,000 children living in Dublin South Central and Donegal.
- Most common age of children coming into care for the first-time, was under 1 year (14%; 109), followed by the older ages of 16 years (92; 12%), 15 years (70; 9%) and 17 years (59; 7%). Young people 15-17 years account for 28% (221) of children and young people coming into care for the first-time.
- Neglect continues to be the most common reason for children coming into care for the first-time, accounting for 39% (310) of all children coming into care for the first-time in 2021 and followed closely by welfare concerns accounting for a further 37% (295) of admissions.
- 75% (592) of children coming into care for the first time were placed in foster care and of these one in four (25%; 150) was placed with relatives.

[16] Note: these children were never in State care prior to this admission

Number of First-Time Admissions

- In 2021, 792 children came into care for the first time, representing about 7 children for every 10,000 under 18 years living in Ireland. The number of children coming into care for the first-time is up 15% (104) on 2020 (688) after an 11% (86) decrease between 2019 and 2020 (Figure 17). Comparison with years prior to 2019 in not meaningful due to the inclusion of children reported by the Social Work Team for Separated Children Seeking International Protection for the years 2019 – 2021 inclusive. In interpreting these data, it should be noted that a small number of large sibling groups can have a significant effect on the data.

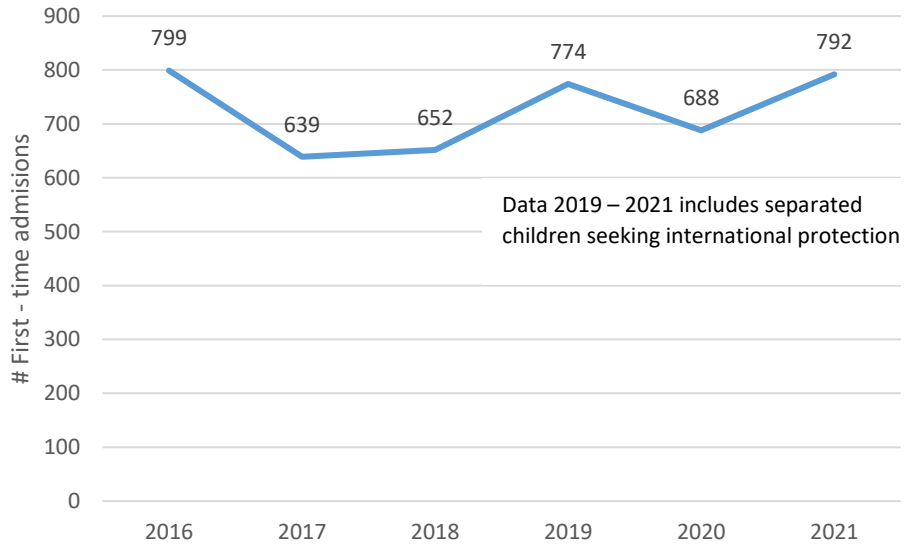
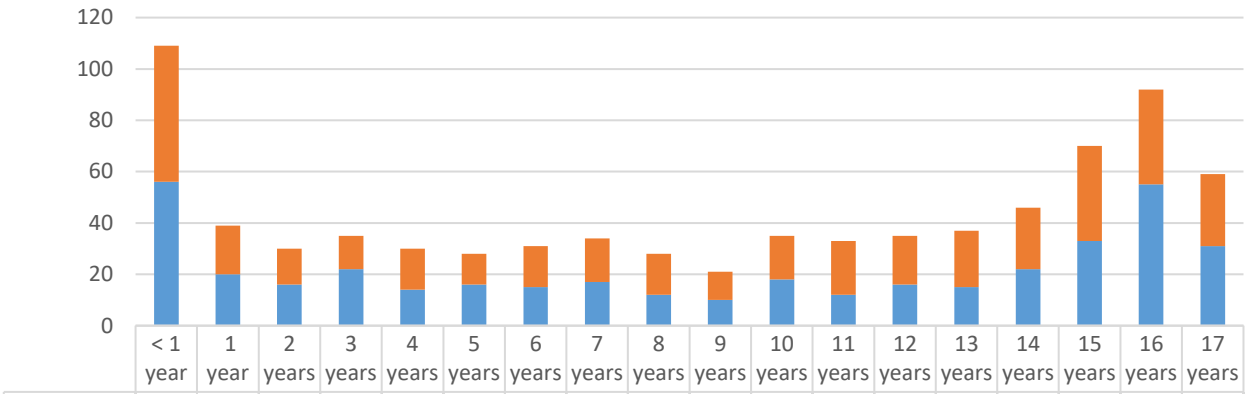


Figure 17: Number of children coming into care for the first-time, 2016 – 2021

Age and Gender

- Slightly more males (400; 51%) than females (392; 49%) came into care for the first-time in 2021.
- The most common age of children coming into care for the first-time was under one year, accounting for one in seven children (109; 14%), followed by the older ages of 16 years (92; 12%), 15 years (70; 9%) and 17 years (59; 7%) (Figure 18). The number of children coming into care for the first-time is increased with age from 11 years to 16 years.



	< 1 year	1 year	2 years	3 years	4 years	5 years	6 years	7 years	8 years	9 years	10 years	11 years	12 years	13 years	14 years	15 years	16 years	17 years
Females	53	19	14	13	16	12	16	17	16	11	17	21	19	22	24	37	37	28
Males	56	20	16	22	14	16	15	17	12	10	18	12	16	15	22	33	55	31
Total	109	39	30	35	30	28	31	34	28	21	35	33	35	37	46	70	92	59
% of Total	14%	5%	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%	3%	4%	4%	4%	5%	6%	9%	12%	7%

Figure 18: Children coming into care for the first-time, by age and gender, 2021

- When the number of children coming into care for the first-time is disaggregated by age group the figures indicate that the 15-17 years age group, making up 28% of first-time admissions, is more heavily represented that in the general population (15%) (Table 23).
- The 5-9 years and the 10-14 years cohorts account for smaller proportions than in the general population while the proportion of 0–4-year-olds coming into care is like that in the general population.
- The number of children 0-4 years coming into to care in 2021 is also the fewest number for the three years 2019 – 2021 and is down 13% (35) overall. The number of 15-17 year olds coming into care for the first-time in 2021 (221) was up 78 (55%) on 2020 (143).

Table 23: Children coming into care for the first-time, by age group and year, 2019 - 2021

Age Band	2019	2020	2021	Δ 2021 v 2020	% Δ	General Pop*
0-4 years	278 (36%)	254 (37%)	243 (31%)	-11	-4%	331,515 (28%)
5-9 years	140 (18%)	153 (22%)	142 (18%)	-11	-7%	355,561 (30%)
10-14 years	161 (31%)	138 (20%)	186 (23%)	+48	+35%	319,476 (28%)
15-17 years	195 (25%)	143 (21%)	221 (28%)	+78	+55%	183,950 (15%)
Total	**774 (100%)**	**688 (100%)**	**792 (100%)**	**+104**	**+15%**	**1,190,502 (100%)**

*Census 2016

Reasons for Admissions

- The most common reason for children coming into care for the first-time in 2021 was neglect, accounting for 39% (310) of all first-time admissions and followed closely by welfare concerns accounting for a further 37% (295) of admissions (Figure 19).

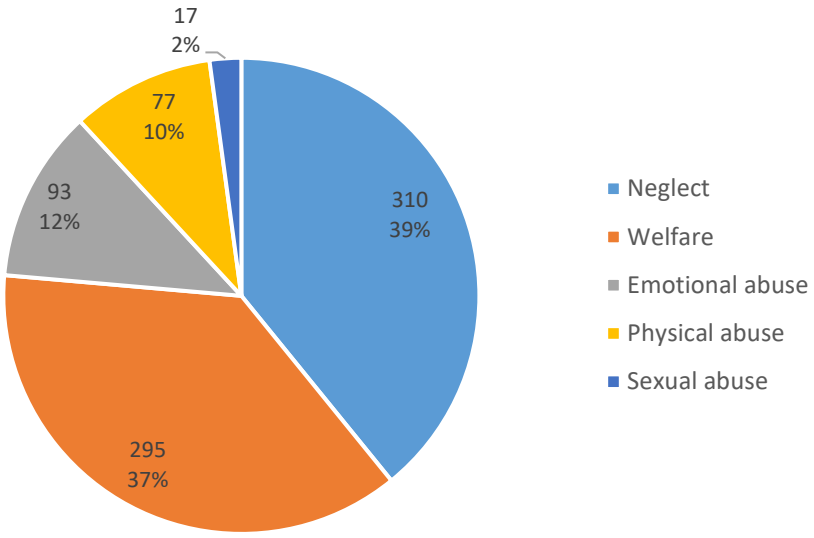
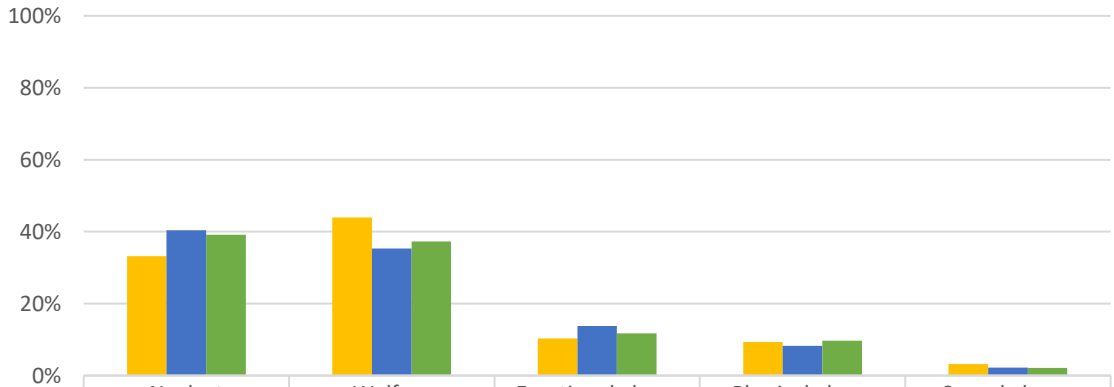


Figure 19: Breakdown of the reasons for children coming into care for the first-time, 2021

- As can be seen from the chart below (Figure 20) the percentage breakdown of the reasons for children coming into care for the first-time is broadly consistent with 2020.



	Neglect	Welfare	Emotional abuse	Physical abuse	Sexual abuse
% 2019	33%	44%	10%	9%	3%
% 2020	40%	35%	14%	8%	2%
% 2021	39%	37%	12%	10%	2%
2019	257	340	80	72	25
2020	278	243	95	57	15
2021	310	295	93	77	17

Figure 20: Breakdown of the reasons for children coming into care for the first-time, 2019 – 2021

Care Placements

- Of the 792 children who came into care for the first-time in 2021, 75% (592) were placed in foster care and of these one in four (25%; 150) was placed with relatives (Figure 21). A further 14% (108)

were placed in residential care, of which two were placed in special care. The remaining 11% (92) were placed in "other" care placements[17].

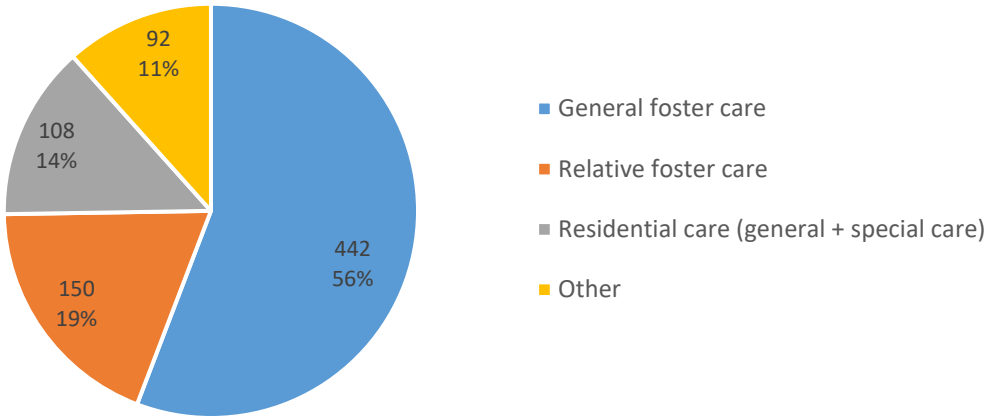
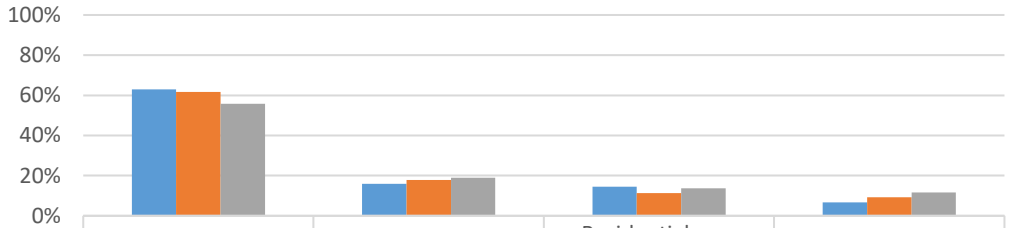


Figure 21: Breakdown of children coming into care, by placement type, 2021

- A breakdown of first-time admissions by placement type for the years 2019 – 2021 is presented in Figure 22 below. As can be seen from the chart, the percentage of admissions to general foster care has fallen year on year and is down seven percentage points overall while the percentage of admissions to relative foster care has increased year on year, albeit not to the same extent but is up three percentage points overall. The percentage of admissions to "other" care placements has also increased year on year and is up five percentage points overall. For the same period, there has been no overall change in the percentage of admissions to residential care (general + special care). In 2019 and 2020 one of the admissions to residential care was to special care, while in 2021 two of the admissions were to special care.



	General foster care	Relative foster care	Residential care (general + special care)	Other
% 2019	63%	16%	14%	7%
% 2020	62%	18%	11%	9%
% 2021	56%	19%	14%	12%
# 2019	487	123	112	52
# 2020	424	123	78	63
# 2021	442	150	108	92

Figure 22: Breakdown of children coming into care, by placement type, 2019 – 2021

[17] Other care placements include other residential centres (e.g., disability, drug/alcohol rehabilitation centre), supported lodgings, detention centres, at home under a care order, other – not specified.

First-Time Admissions by Area

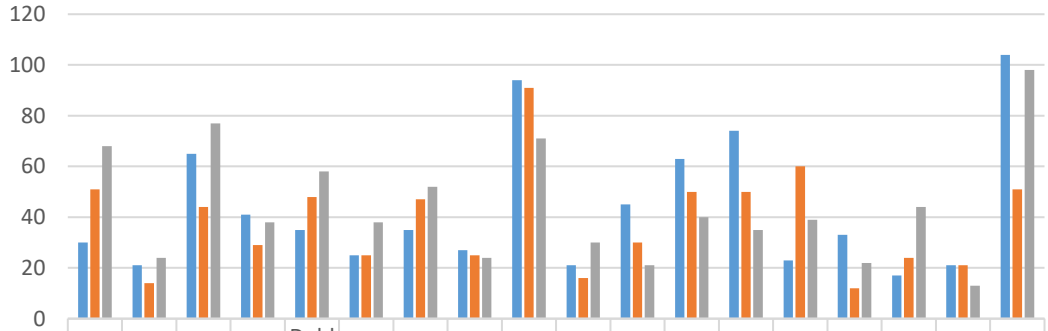
- The Social Work Team for Separated Children Seeking International Protection reported the highest number of first-time admissions to care (98) in 2021 followed by Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow (77) and Cork (71) – two areas with higher populations of young people under 18 years (Table 24).
- As with other data presented in this report, the rate of children coming into care for the first-time varies widely across the 17 areas, ranging from about 3 per 10,000 children living in Dublin South East/Wicklow to 10 per 10,000 children living in Dublin South Central and Donegal (Table 24). Six areas reported a rate higher than the national average (6.7/10,000).
- Areas like Kerry, Donegal and Dublin North City with the smaller numbers of children under 18 years report some of the highest rates of children coming into care. Whereas areas like Midwest, Dublin South East/Wicklow and Midlands with higher numbers of children under 18 years report some of the lowest rates of admission, implying as with other data presented in this report, that there are other factors influencing admissions to care.

Table 24: Children coming into care for the first-time, by area, 2019 - 2021 (ranked by rate for 2021)

Area	2019	2020	2021	0-17 years pop	2021 Rate / 10,000
Dublin South Central	30	51	**68**	65,564	**10.4**
Donegal	17	24	**44**	42,865	**10.3**
Kerry	21	16	**30**	34,527	**8.7**
Dublin North City	25	25	**38**	44,927	**8.5**
Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow	65	44	**77**	108,186	**7.1**
Mayo	33	12	**22**	31,968	**6.9**
Cavan/Monaghan	27	25	**24**	36,446	**6.6**
Waterford/Wexford	63	50	**40**	68,513	**5.8**
Dublin North	35	48	**58**	100,654	**5.8**
Louth/Meath	35	47	**52**	93,093	**5.6**
Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan	21	21	**13**	23,554	**5.5**
Cork	94	91	**71**	134,015	**5.3**
Galway/Roscommon	23	60	**39**	79,912	**4.9**
Midlands	41	29	**38**	80,193	**4.7**
Midwest	74	50	**35**	96,266	**3.6**
Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary	45	30	**21**	63,009	**3.3**
Dublin South East/Wicklow	21	14	**24**	86,810	**2.8**
Social Work Team SCSIP	104	51	**98**	-	-
Total	**774**	**688**	**792**	**1,190,502**	**6.7**

- Ten of the 17 areas along with the Social Work Team for Separated Children Seeking International Protection reported an increase from 2020 in the number of children coming into care for the first-time (Figure 23). The largest increase was reported by the Social Work Team for Separated Children Seeking International Protection (up 47) followed by Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow (up 33), Donegal (up 20), Dublin South Central (up 17), Kerry (up 14) and Dublin North City (up 13).

- For the three years 2019 – 2021, four areas reported two consecutive increases with the largest increase reported by Dublin South Central (up 38) followed by Donegal (up 27), Dublin North (up 23) and Louth/Meath (up 17). A further five areas reported two consecutive decreases with the largest decrease reported by Midwest (down 39), Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary (down 24), Waterford/Wexford (down 23), Cork (down 23) and Cavan/Monaghan (down 3).
- As can be seen from the chart below, fluctuation from one year to the next in the number of children coming into care for the first-time is common. As mentioned previously, a small number of large sibling groups can also have a significant effect on the data.



	DSC	DSE/ WW	DSW /K/ WW	Midl ands	Dubl in Nort h	DNC	Lout h/M eath	CN/ MN	Cork	Kerr y	CW/ KK/S T	WD/ WX	Mid west	GY/R N	May o	Don egal	SLW C	SWT SCSI P
2019	30	21	65	41	35	25	35	27	94	21	45	63	74	23	33	17	21	104
2020	51	14	44	29	48	25	47	25	91	16	30	50	50	60	12	24	21	51
2021	68	24	77	38	58	38	52	24	71	30	21	40	35	39	22	44	13	98
2021 v 2020	17	10	33	9	10	13	5	-1	-20	14	-9	-10	-15	-21	10	20	-8	47

Figure 23: Children coming into care, by area, 2019-2021

3.2 Total Admissions to Care

KEY FACTS

- 962 admissions to care, 74 (8%) more than 2020 (888) after a decrease of 60 (6%) between 2019 and 2020.
- 18% (170) of all admissions (962) were second or subsequent admissions, down from 23% in 2020 and like that for 2019 (18%).
- Most common age at admission was under 1 year (12%; 118) followed by 16 years (11%; 105).
- Most common reason for admission was neglect accounting for 39% (373) of all admissions and followed closely by welfare concerns accounting for a further 38% (369) of admissions.
- 75% (725) of admissions to care in 2021 were to foster care and of these 27% (193) were to foster care with relatives.
- 54% (520) of all admissions to care were voluntary admissions (where it was agreed with the child's parent/guardian). While the remaining 46% (442) of admissions were on foot of an application to the court.
- One in five admissions (18%; 174) was under an emergency care order, down from 23% (201) in 2020.

Number of Admissions

- The data presented in this section of the report refers to all admissions to care in the year, as opposed to children admitted to care for the first-time (previous section of the report). The data also refers to incidences of admission that occurred during the year and not the number of individual children admitted – a child can have more than one admission into care during the year.
- In 2021, there were 962 admissions to care, 74 (8%) more than 2020 (888) after a decrease of 60 (6%) between 2019 and 2020 (Figure 24). *Note data from 2019 – 2021 includes children and young people reported by the Social Work Team for Separated Children Seeking International Protection*. As with the data on first-time admissions, it should be noted that a small number of large sibling groups can have a significant effect on the data.

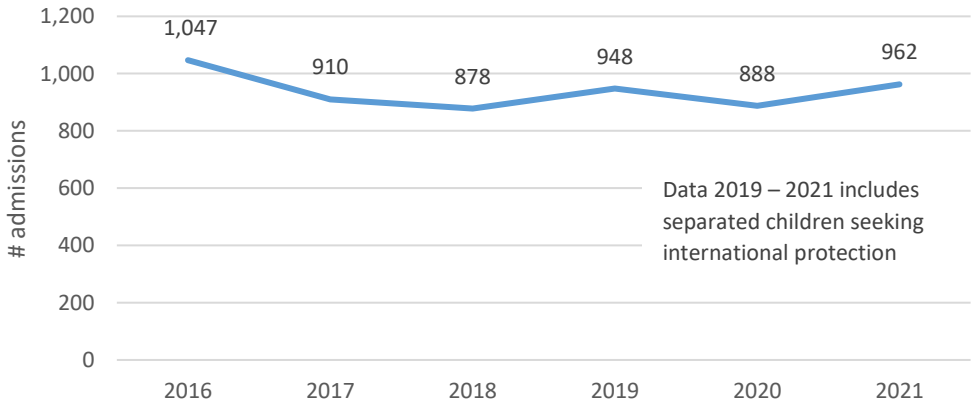


Figure 24: Total admissions to care, 2016 – 2021

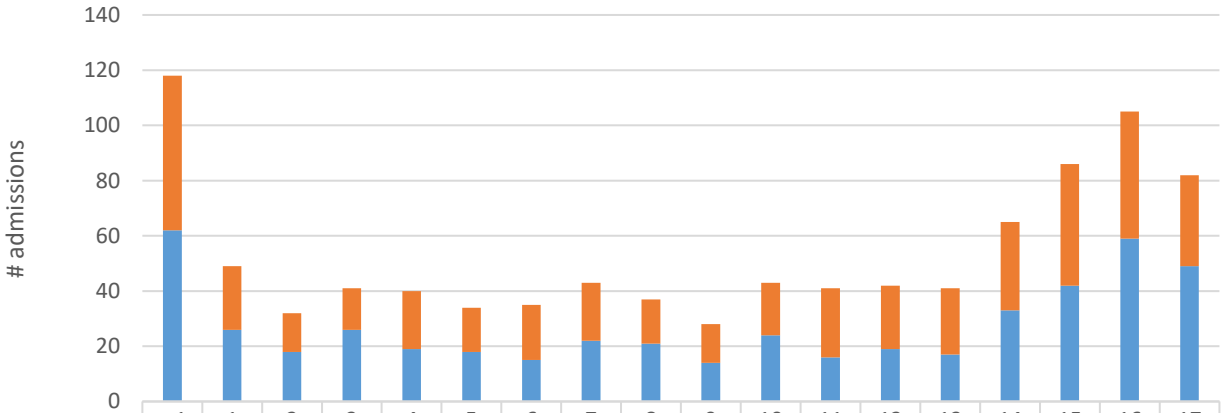
- In 2021, 18% (170) of all admissions (962) were second or subsequent admissions, down from 23% in 2020 and similar to that for 2019 (18%) (Table 25).

Table 25: First time admissions to care and repeat admissions to care, 2019 - 2021

Year	# First-time Admissions	# Total Admissions	≥ 2 admissions	% Admissions 2nd or subsequent
2021	**792**	**962**	**170**	**18%**
2020	688	888	200	23%
2019	774	948	174	18%

Age and Gender

- Of the 962 admissions to care, 52% (500) were male and 48% (462) were female which broadly consistent with the general population (Census 2016, 51% males and 49% females).
- The most common age at admission was under 1 year (12%; 118) followed by the older ages of 16 years (11%; 105), 15 years (9%; 86) and 17 years (9%; 82). As can be seen from the chart below the number of admissions to care is increased with age from 13 years to 16 years (Figure 25).
- As with the first-time admissions, the older ages of 15- 17 years make up 28% (273) of all admissions to care (Table 26). There were 74 (37%) more admissions for this age group in 2021 (273) than 2020 (199).
- Similarly, there were 44 (235) more admissions for the 10-14 years cohort in 2021 than in 2020.
- Again, as with the first-time admissions the number of admissions for 0-4 years (280) is the lowest number for the three years 2019 – 2021, showing a year-on year decrease and down 49 (15%) overall.



	< 1 year	1 year	2 years	3 years	4 years	5 years	6 years	7 years	8 years	9 years	10 years	11 years	12 years	13 years	14 years	15 years	16 years	17 years
# Females	56	23	14	15	21	16	20	21	16	14	19	25	23	24	32	44	46	33
# Males	62	26	18	26	19	18	15	22	21	14	24	16	19	17	33	42	59	49
Total	118	49	32	41	40	34	35	43	37	28	43	41	42	41	65	86	105	82
% Total	12%	5%	3%	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%	3%	4%	4%	4%	4%	7%	9%	11%	9%

Figure 25: Admissions to care by age and gender, 2021

Table 26: Admissions to care, by age group, 2019 - 2021

Age Group	2019	2020	2021	2021 v 2020
0-4 years	329 (35%)	304 (34%)	280 (29%)	-24 (8%)
5-9 years	174 (18%)	197 (22%)	177 (18%)	-20 (10%)
10-14 years	203 (21%)	188 (21%)	232 (24%)	+44 (23%)
15-17 years	242 (26%)	199 (22%)	273 (28%)	+74 (37%)
Total	**948 (100%)**	**888 (100%)**	**962 (100%)**	**+74 (8%)**

Reasons for Admissions

- In 2021, the most common reason for admission was neglect accounting for 39% (373) of all admissions and followed closely by welfare concerns accounting for a further 38% (369) of admissions (Figure 26). Combined, these two reasons account for 77% (742) of all admissions. The least common reason for admission to care was sexual abuse, accounting for 2% (22) of all admissions.

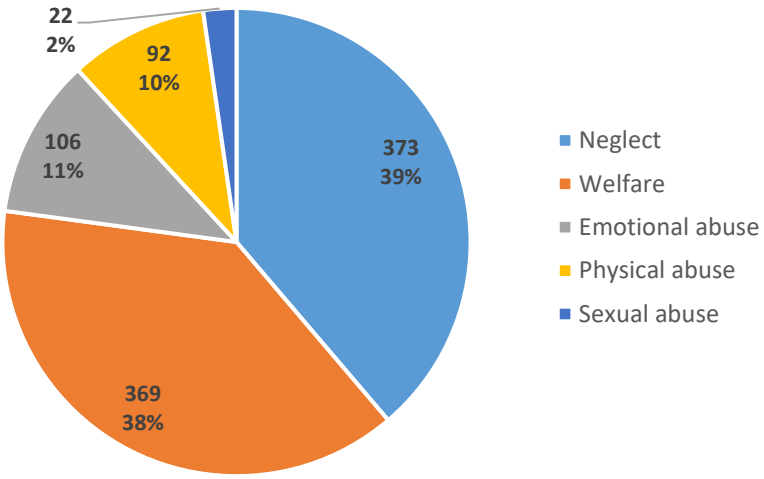
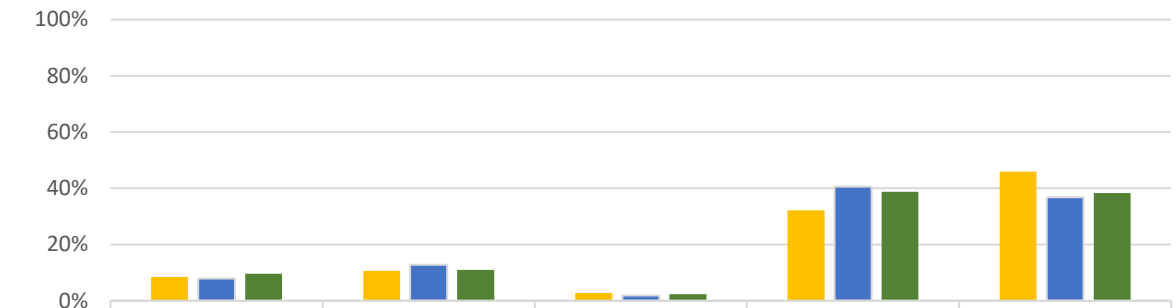


Figure 26: Admissions to care by reason, 2021

- The percentage breakdown of admissions by reason for admission is broadly consistent with that for 2020 (Figure 27).



	Physical abuse	Emotional abuse	Sexual abuse	Neglect	Welfare
% 2019	8%	11%	3%	32%	46%
% 2020	8%	13%	2%	41%	37%
% 2021	10%	11%	2%	39%	38%
# 2019	80	101	26	305	436
# 2020	70	114	17	360	327
# 2021	92	106	22	373	369

Figure 27: Reasons for admission, 2019 – 2021

Care Placements

- 75% (725) of admissions to care in 2021 were to foster care and of these 27% (193) were to foster care with relatives (Table 27). A further 14% (130) of admissions to care were to residential care, of which two were to special care. The remaining 11% (107) of admissions were to "other" care placements.
- The percentage of admissions to general foster care (55%) is down seven percentage points from 2020 and 10 percentage points from 2019. In contrast, the percentage of admissions to relative foster care is up one percentage point from 2020 and five percentage points from 2019.
- The percentage of admissions to residential care has changed little over the three years, while the percentage of admissions to "other" care placements has increased year on year and is up five percentage points overall. In 2019 one of the admissions to residential care was to special care, while in 2020 and 2021 two of the admissions were to special care.

Table 27: Admissions to care by placement type, 2019 - 2021

Placement type	# 2019	% 2019	# 2020	% 2020	# 2021	% 2021
Residential care (general + special care)	126	13%	99	11%	**130**	**14%**
General foster care	618	65%	548	62%	**532**	**55%**
Foster care with relatives	145	15%	166	19%	**193**	**20%**
Other	59	6%	75	8%	**107**	**11%**
Total	**948**	100%	**888**	100%	**962**	**100%**

Legal Reasons for Admission

- In 2021, 54% (520) of all admissions to care were voluntary admissions (where it was agreed with the child's parent/guardian). The remaining 46% (442) of admissions were on foot of an application to the court of which the largest number (255; 58%) were admissions under an interim care order (Section 17 Child Care Act 1991). One in five admissions to care (18%; 174) was under an emergency care order.
- A breakdown of admissions by legal status for the years 2019 – 2021 is presented in Table 28 below. Admissions under a voluntary agreement were up 20% (88) on 2020, but down 6% (35) on the number reported in 2019. While admissions under an emergency care order were down 13% (27) on 2020 and 2% (4) on 2019 (178).

Table 28: Admissions to care by legal status, 2019 – 2021

Legal Status	# 2019	% 2019	# 2020	% 2020	# 2021	% 2021
Emergency Care Order	178	19%	201	23%	**174**	**18%**
Interim Care Order	194	20%	241	27%	**255**	**27%**
Care Order	11	1%	12	1%	**11**	**1%**
Other Court Order	10	1%	2	0.2%	**2**	**0.2%**
Voluntary admissions	555	59%	432	49%	**520**	**54%**
Total	**948**	**100%**	**888**	**100%**	**962**	**100%**

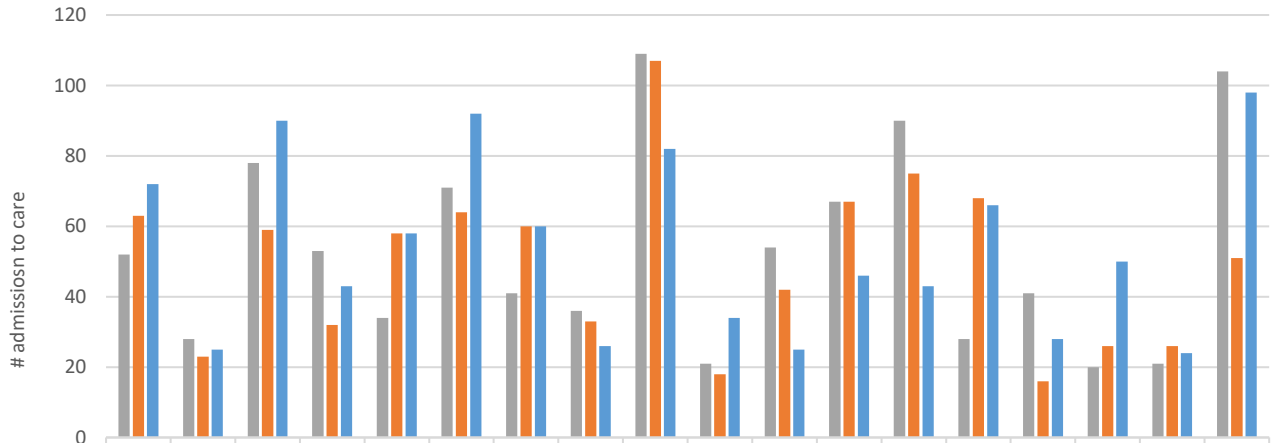
Admissions by Area

- As can be seen from the table below (Table 29), there is wide variation in the number of admissions to care across the areas with the highest number for 2021 reported by the Social Work Team for Separated Children Seeking International Protection (98) and the fewest number reported by Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan (24).
- Eight areas along with the Social Work Team for Separated Children Seeking International Protection reported an increase in admissions from 2020. Seven areas reported a decrease, while the remaining two areas (Dublin North City and Louth/Meath) reported no change. As before, this data needs to be interpreted in the context of small numbers and the effect of any large sibling groups.
- The largest increase was reported by the Social Work Team for Separated Children Seeking International Protection (up 47) followed by Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow (up 31) and Dublin North (up 28).
- Midwest reported the largest decrease (down 32) followed by Cork (down 25) and Waterford/Wexford (down 21).
- In 2021, the percentage of admissions that were second or subsequent admissions ranged from 46% (11/24) in Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan to 0% for the Social Work Team for Separated Children Seeking International Protection (Table 29). Five areas reported a percentage equal to or higher than the national average of 18%. The reason(s) for the variation in second and subsequent admissions requires further examination.

Table 29: Admissions to care by area, 2019 – 2021

Area	# 2019	# 2020	# 2021	2021 v 2020	# First-Time 2021	# repeat	% repeat
Dublin South Central	52	63	**72**	9	68	4	6%
Dublin South East/Wicklow	28	23	**25**	2	24	1	4%
Dublin South/West/Kildare/West Wicklow	78	59	**90**	31	77	13	14%
Midlands	53	32	**43**	11	38	5	12%
Dublin North City	34	58	**58**	0	38	20	34%
Dublin North	71	64	**92**	28	58	34	37%
Louth/Meath	41	60	**60**	0	52	8	13%
Cavan/Monaghan	36	33	**26**	-7	24	2	8%
Cork	109	107	**82**	-25	71	11	13%
Kerry	21	18	**34**	16	30	4	12%
Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary	54	42	**25**	-17	21	4	16%
Waterford/Wexford	67	67	**46**	-21	40	6	13%
Midwest	90	75	**43**	-32	35	8	19%
Galway/Roscommon	28	68	**66**	-2	39	27	41%
Mayo	41	16	**28**	12	22	6	21%
Donegal	20	26	**50**	24	44	6	12%
Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan	21	26	**24**	-2	13	11	46%
Social Work Team SCIP	104	51	**98**	47	98	0	0%
Total	**948**	**888**	**962**	**74**	**792**	**170**	**18%**

- As with the first-time admissions, fluctuation in admissions to care across the areas from one year to the next is common (Figure 28). For the years 2019 – 2021, two areas (Dublin South Central and Donegal) reported two consecutive increases while four areas reported two consecutive decreases, Cavan/Monaghan, Cork, Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary and Midwest.



	DSC	DSE/WW	DSW/K/WW	Midlands	DNC	Dublin North	LH/MH	CN/MN	Cork	Kerry	CW/KK/ST	WD/WX	Midwest	GY/RN	Mayo	Donegal	SLWC	SWTS CSIP
2019	52	28	78	53	34	71	41	36	109	21	54	67	90	28	41	20	21	104
2020	63	23	59	32	58	64	60	33	107	18	42	67	75	68	16	26	26	51
2021	72	25	90	43	58	92	60	26	82	34	25	46	43	66	28	50	24	98
2021 v 2020	9	2	31	11	0	28	0	-7	-25	16	-17	-21	-32	-2	12	24	-2	47

Figure 28: Admissions to care by area, 2019 - 2021

3.3 Children in Care

KEY FACTS

- The number of children in care continues to decrease; 5,863 children in care at the end of 2021, 19 fewer than 2020 (5,882) and 333 (5%) fewer than 2017 (6,196).
- The number of children in care equates to about 5 children for every 1,000 living in Ireland.
- The number of children in care is increased with increasing age with the highest number aged 17 years (557; 10%).
- 90% (5,272) of children in care at the end of 2021 were in foster care, consistent with previous years.
- Neglect is the most common reason being in care, accounting for almost half (48%; 2,786) of all children in care, an increase of two percentage points on 2020.
- 79% (4,626) of children in care at the end of 2021 were in care under an order of the court, up from 77% (4,531) at the end of 2020.
- Just under half (48.6%; 2,849/5,863) of children in care at the end of 2021 were in care for 5 years or less and of these one in four (24%; 672) was in care for less than a year
- 3.8% (220) of all children in care at the end of 2021 were in their third or greater placement within the previous 12 months. This is an increase from the 3% (179) reported in 2020 and the highest percentage for all years 2017 to 2021.
- 12 (0.2%) children in care at the end of 2021 where is a placement outside of Ireland, four fewer than 2020. All but one, were in foster care.
- 63 children 12 years and younger were in residential placements at the end of 2021, three more than 2020 (60).
- The number of children in care in placements with private providers continues to increase with 785 (13%) children in placements with private providers at the end of 2021, 56 (8%) more than 2020 (729) and the highest number for the period 2017 – 2021.
- 95% of children in care aged 6-15 years and 93% of 16 -17 years olds in full-time education (as per their care plan) at the end of 2021, consistent with previous years.

Number of Children in Care

- The year 2021 saw a further decrease in the number of children in the care of the State. There were 5,863 children in the care at the end of 2021, 19 fewer than 2020 (5,882) and the fewest number for the five years 2017 to 2021 (Figure 29). The number of children in care has fallen year on year over the period and is down at 5% (333) overall. *Note data from 2017 – 2021 includes children and young people reported by the Social Work Team for Separated Children Seeking International Protection.*

- The reason(s) for this downward trend is not easily understood and most likely reflects a combination of internal and external factors, for example greater focus on early intervention and prevention from the establishment of Tusla, ongoing development of family support services, changes in approach to practice (*Signs of Safety* approach), enhanced oversight and supervision of case management, improved data quality and a possible reduction in the number of care orders sought and/or granted.

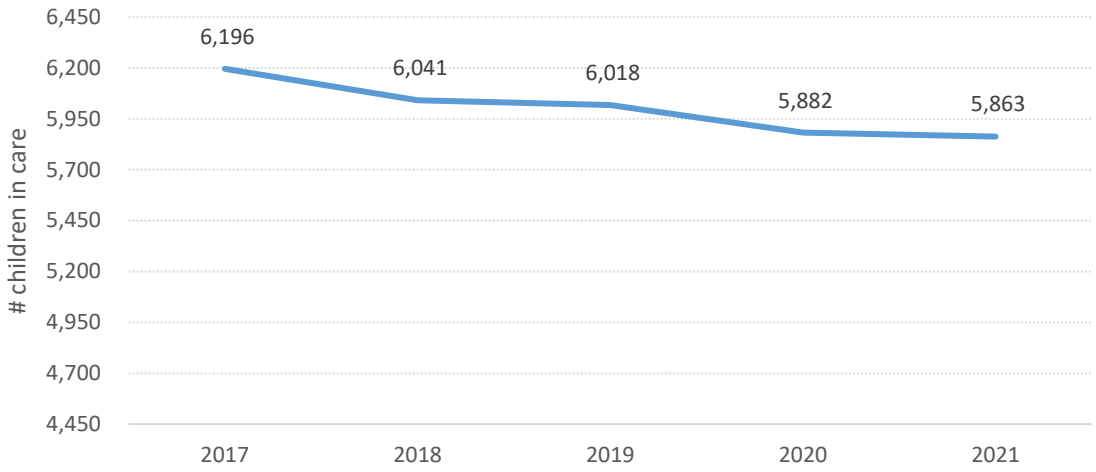


Figure 29: Children in care, 2017 – 2021

- The number of children in care equates to about 5 per 1,000 children under 18 years living in Ireland. Table 30 shows the rate of children in care per 1,000 child population in other jurisdictions[18]. While Ireland reports the lowest rate, interpretation needs to be considered in the context of differing processes and procedures and definitions that may exist in other jurisdictions.

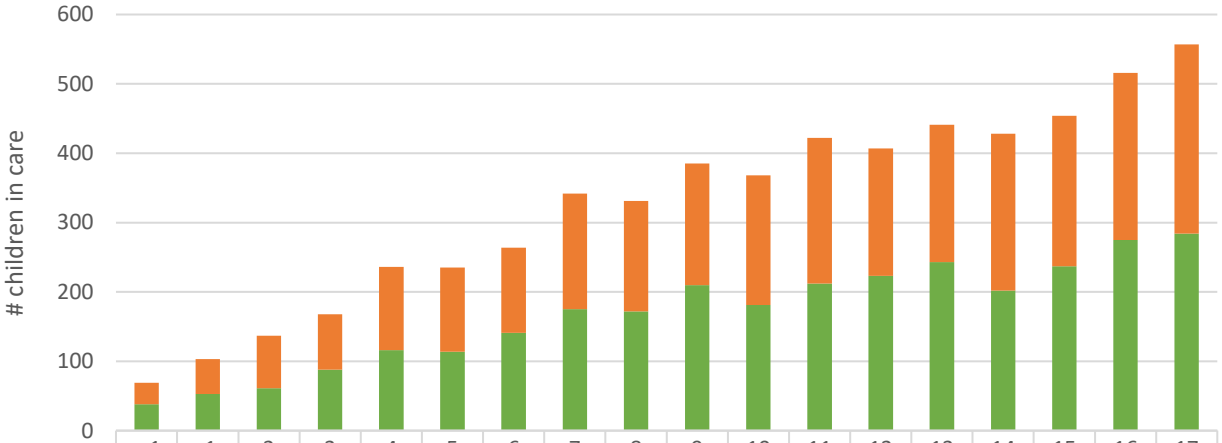
Table 30: Children in care in other jurisdictions, rate per 1,000 child population

Jurisdiction	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Ireland (Dec)	**5.2**	**5.1**	**5.1**	**4.9**	**4.9**
Northern Ireland (March)	6.9	7.1	7.5	7.7	8.0
England (March)	6.2	6.4	6.5	6.7	6.7
Wales (March)	9.5	10.2	10.9	10.9	11.5
Scotland (March)	10.8	10.5	10.4	10.4	10.2

[18] Supporting documents - Children's Social Work Statistics, Scotland 2020-21 - gov.scot (www.gov.scot) Table 2.8 cross-comparison table for the UK

Age and Gender

- Slightly more males (3,025; 52%) than females (2,838; 48%) were in care at the end of 2021; a similar pattern to previous years and consistent with the general population (Census 2016, 51% boys and 49% girls).
- The number of children in care is increased with increasing age with the highest number aged 17 years (10%; 557) and the fewest number under a year 1 (1%; 69) (Figure 30).



	< 1 years	1 year	2 years	3 years	4 years	5 years	6 years	7 years	8 years	9 years	10 years	11 years	12 years	13 years	14 years	15 years	16 years	17 years
Female	31	50	76	80	120	121	123	167	159	175	187	210	184	198	226	217	241	273
Male	38	53	61	88	116	114	141	175	172	210	181	212	223	243	202	237	275	284
Total	69	103	137	168	236	235	264	342	331	385	368	422	407	441	428	454	516	557
% Total	1.2%	1.8%	2.3%	2.9%	4.0%	4.0%	4.5%	5.8%	5.6%	6.6%	6.3%	7.2%	6.9%	7.5%	7.3%	7.7%	8.8%	9.5%

Figure 30: Children in care by age and gender, 2021

- When the number of children in care is disaggregated by age group, the figures indicate that the 10 – 14 years cohort and the 15-17 years cohort are more heavily represented than in the general population (Table 31). The 0-4 years age group comprises the smallest percentage of children in care (12%) and accounts for a smaller proportion than in the general population. Sixty-one percent of children in care (3,593) at the end of 2021 were 10 years or older, a similar breakdown to previous years. The percentage breakdown of children in care by age group is similar across the three years 2019 – 2021.

Table 31: Children in care by age group and year, 2019 - 2021

Age Group	# 2019	# 2020	# 2021	2021 v 2020	% Δ	General Population
0-4	796 (13%)	742 (13%)	713 (12%)	-29	-3.9%	331,515 (28%)
5-9	1,625 (27%)	1,587 (27%)	1,557 (27%)	-30	-1.9%	355,561 (30%)
10-14	2,025 (34%)	2,022 (34%)	2,066 (35%)	44	2.2%	319,476 (28%)
15 - 17	1,572 (26%)	1,531 (26%)	1,527 (26%)	-4	-0.3%	183,950 (15%)
Total	**6,018 (100%)**	**5,882 (100%)**	**5,863 (100%)**	**-19**	**-0.3%**	**1,190,502 (100%)**

General population based on Census 2016

Children in Care by Area

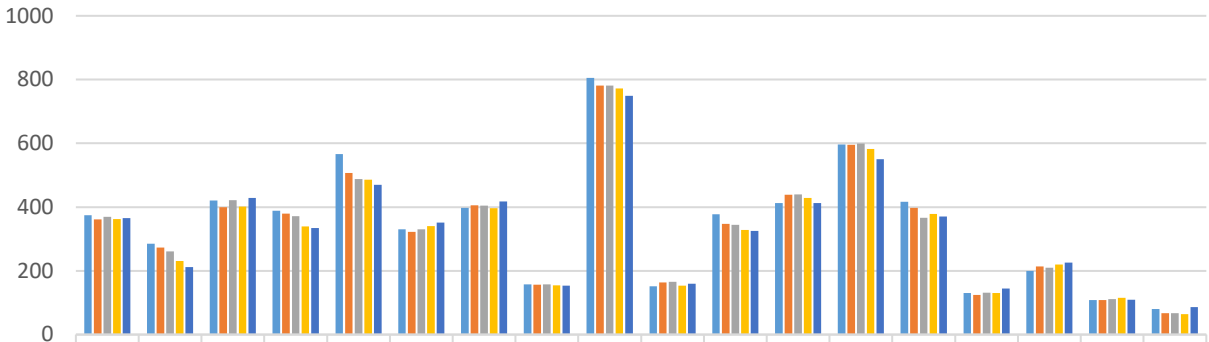
- As with all datasets there is wide variation in the number and rate of children in care across Tusla's 17 areas.
- At the end of 2021, the number of children in care ranged from 749 in Cork to 109 in Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan (Table 32). Similarly, the rate per 1,000 children under 18 years ranged from 10.5/1,000 children under 18 years in Dublin North City to 2.4/1,000 in Dublin South East / Wicklow. Seven areas reported a rate equal to or higher than the national average of 4.9/1,000 children under 18 years.
- Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow and Dublin North with the second and third highest numbers of children under 18 years, reported some of the lowest rates, again implying that there are other factors besides population driving the number of children in care.

Table 32: Children in care by area, 2017 – 2021 (ranked by rate)

Area	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Pop < 17 years	Rate/ 1,000
Dublin North City	566	507	488	486	**470**	44,927	**10.5**
Waterford/Wexford	413	439	440	429	**413**	68,513	**6.0**
Midwest	596	595	599	582	**550**	96,266	**5.7**
Cork	805	781	781	772	**749**	134,015	**5.6**
Dublin South Central	374	361	369	362	**365**	65,564	**5.6**
Donegal	200	214	210	220	**226**	42,865	**5.3**
Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary	377	347	344	328	**325**	63,009	**5.2**
Galway/Roscommon	417	398	366	378	**370**	79,912	**4.6**
Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan	108	108	111	115	**109**	23,554	**4.6**
Kerry	151	164	166	153	**159**	34,527	**4.6**
Mayo	130	124	131	130	**144**	31,968	**4.5**
Louth/Meath	398	406	405	397	**418**	93,093	**4.5**
Cavan/Monaghan	157	156	157	154	**153**	36,446	**4.2**
Midlands	388	379	371	339	**334**	80,193	**4.2**
Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow	421	400	422	402	**429**	108,186	**4.0**
Dublin North	330	322	330	340	**351**	100,654	**3.5**
Dublin South East/Wicklow	285	273	261	231	**212**	86,810	**2.4**
Social Work Team SCSIP	80	67	67	64	**86**	-	**-**
National	**6,196**	**6,041**	**6,018**	**5,882**	**5,863**	**1,19,0502**	**4.9**

- Ten of the 17 areas reported a decrease in children in care from 2020 with the largest decreases reported by Midwest (down 32), Cork (down 23) and Dublin South East/Wicklow (down 19). (Figure 31).
- Of the seven areas that reported an increase, the largest increase was reported by Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow with 27 more children in care followed by Louth/Meath (up 21) and Mayo (up 14). The Social Work Team for Separated Children Seeking International Protection reported an increase of 22.

- Nine of 17 areas had fewer children in care at the end of 2021 than 2017. Of the areas that reported a decrease from 2017, the largest decreases were reported by Dublin North City (down 96; 17%), Dublin South East/Wicklow (down 73; 26%) and Cork (down 56; 7%).
- In terms of an underlying trend, four areas have reported four consecutive decreases from 2017 (Dublin South East/Wicklow, Midlands, Dublin North City and Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary) while one area (Dublin North) has reported three consecutive increases from 2018.



	DSC	DSE/ WW	DSW/ K/WW	Midlands	DNC	Dublin North	LH/MH	CN/MN	Cork	Kerry	CW/KK/ST	WD/ WX	Mid West	GY/RN	Mayo	Donegal	SLWC	SWTS CSIP
2017	374	285	421	388	566	330	398	157	805	151	377	413	596	417	130	200	108	80
2018	361	273	400	379	507	322	406	156	781	164	347	439	595	398	124	214	108	67
2019	369	261	422	371	488	330	405	157	781	166	344	440	599	366	131	210	111	67
2020	362	231	402	339	486	340	397	154	772	153	328	429	582	378	130	220	115	64
2021	365	212	429	334	470	351	418	153	749	159	325	413	550	370	144	226	109	86
2021 v 2020	3	-19	27	-5	-16	11	21	-1	-23	6	-3	-16	-32	-8	14	6	-6	22
2021 v 2017	-9	-73	8	-54	-96	21	20	-4	-56	8	-52	0	-46	-47	14	26	1	6

Figure 31: Children in care by area, 2017 – 2021

Placement Type

- 90% (5,272) of children in care at the end of 2021 were in foster care and of these 28% (1,502) were in relative foster care, a pattern similar to previous years (Table 33). Residential care (general and special care) makes up a relatively small (7.7%; 454), but significant number of placements within alternative care provision. The placement "Other" includes children in supported lodgings, at home under a care order, in a detention school/centre, in a disability unit or drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre etc.

Table 33: Children in care by placement type, 2017 – 2021

Placement Type	# 2017	% 2017	# 2018	% 2018	# 2019	% 2019	# 2020	% 2020	# 2021	% 2021
General foster care	4,042	65.2%	3,967	65.7%	3,936	65.4%	3,829	65.1%	**3,770**	64.3%
Relative foster care	1,667	26.9%	1,594	26.4%	1,559	25.9%	1,517	25.8%	**1,502**	25.6%
General residential	346	6%	367	6%	395	7%	403	7%	**438**	7%
Special care	12	0.2%	14	0.2%	14	0.2%	18	0.3%	**16**	0.3%
Other	129	2.1%	99	1.6%	114	1.9%	115	2.0%	**137**	2.3%
Total	**6,196**	**100%**	**6,041**	**100%**	**6,018**	**100%**	**5,882**	**100%**	**5,863**	**100%**

- In terms of numbers, there were 59 (2%) fewer children in general foster care and 15 (1%) fewer children in relative foster care at the end of 2021 than there were at the end of 2020 (Figure 32). Since 2017, there has been a 7% (272) decrease in the number of children in general foster care and a 10% (165) decrease in the number of children in relative foster care.
- The number of children in residential care (general and special care) is up 8% (33) on 2020 and 27% (96) on 2017.

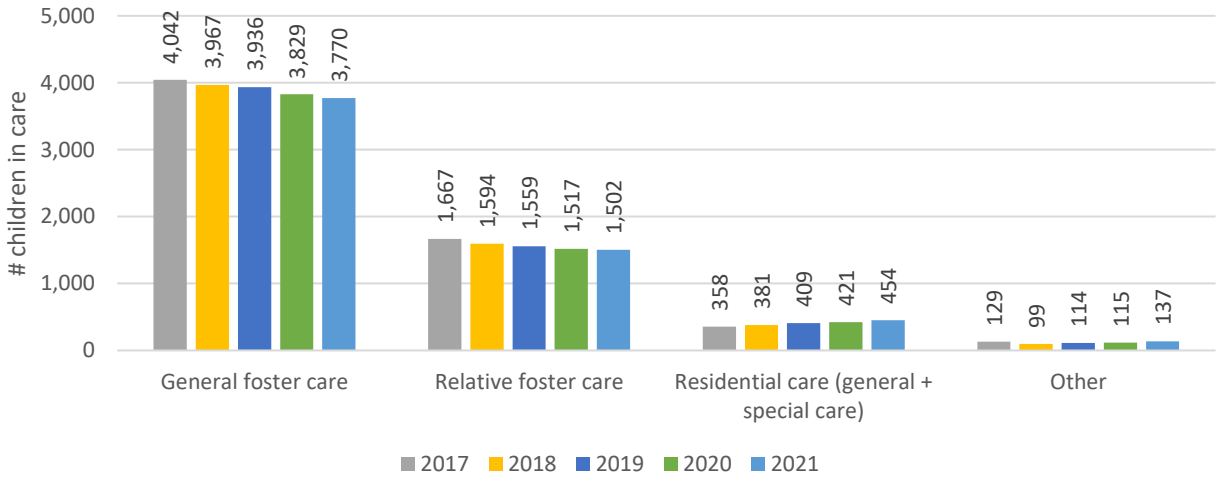


Figure 32: Children in care, by care type, 2017 -2021

Reason for Being in Care

- The most common reason for being in care at the end of 2021 was neglect accounting for 48% (2,786) of all children in care (Figure 33). This was followed by welfare concerns accounting for a further 36% (2,124) of all children in care. Combined, these two reasons account for 84% (4,910) of children in care.

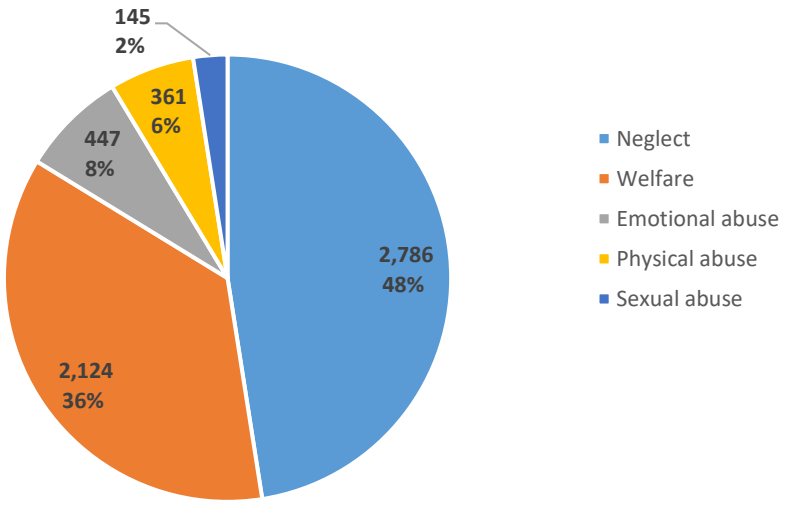
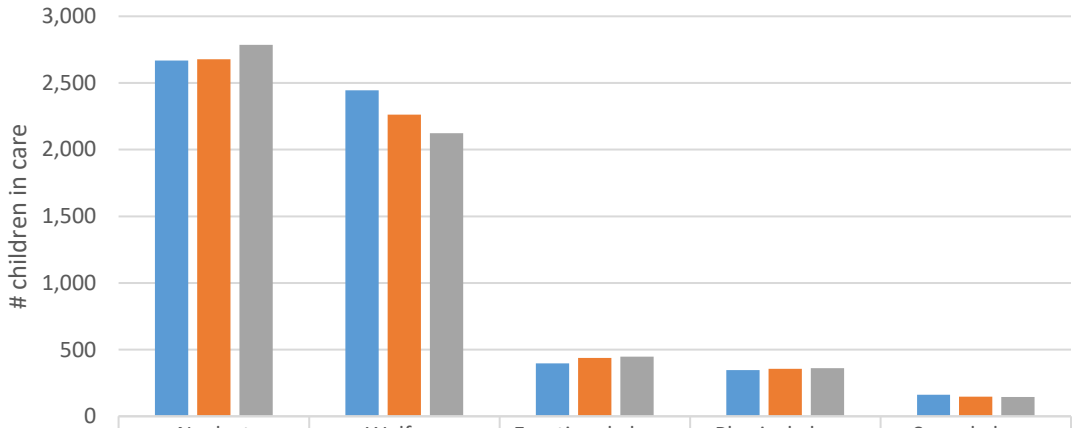


Figure 33: Breakdown on children in care by reason, 2021

- As can be seen from the chart below (Figure 34), the percentage of children in care because of welfare concerns is decreasing; down five percentage points from 41% in 2019 to 36% in 2021. In contrast, the percentages of children in care because of neglect and emotional abuse are showing a slight increase, while there has been little or no overall change in the percentages of children in care because of physical and sexual abuse.



	Neglect	Welfare	Emotional abuse	Physical abuse	Sexual abuse
2019	2,668	2,446	396	346	162
2020	2,677	2,263	438	357	147
2021	2,786	2,124	447	361	145
% 2019	44%	41%	7%	6%	3%
% 2020	46%	38%	7%	6%	2%
% 2021	48%	36%	8%	6%	2%

Figure 34: Children in care by reason for being in care, 2017 – 2021

Legal Status

- 79% (4,626) of children in care at the end of 2021 were in care under an order of the court, up from 77% (4,531) at the end of 2020 and 74% (4,430) at the end of 2019 (Table 34). In terms of numbers there were 95 (2%) more children in care under an order of the court at the end 2021 than at the end of 2020 and 196 (4%) more than at the end of 2019.
- The remaining 21% (1,237) of children in care were in care under a voluntary arrangement.

Table 34: Children in care by legal status, 2019 – 2021

Legal Status	# 2019	% 2019	# 2020	% 2020	# 2021	% 2021
Order of the Court (all types)	4,430	**74%**	4,531	**77%**	4,626	**79%**
Voluntary arrangement	1,588	**26%**	1,351	**23%**	1,237	**21%**
Total	**6,018**	**100%**	**5,882**	**100%**	**5,863**	**100%**

- Of the 4,626 children in care under a care order at the end of 2021, the majority (79%; 3,658) were in care under a care order (Section 18 Child Care Act 1991) while 20% (944) were in care under an interim care order (Section 17 Child Care Act 1991). A total of 17 children were under a special care order (Section 23B Child Care Act 1991) while seven children were in care under an emergency care order.

- A breakdown of the percentage of children in care under a court order and a voluntary arrangement, by area is presented in the table below (Table 35). Looking across the areas, the percentage of children in care under a court order ranges from over 90% in Cork (97%), Kerry (96%) and Midwest (95%) to 60% in Dublin North. Eight areas reported a percentage equal to or higher than the national average of 79%.
- More than half (52%; 45/86) of the children in care under the Social Work Team for Separated Children Seeking International protection were in care under a voluntary arrangement.

Table 35: Breakdown of children in care by legal status and area 2021 (ranked by % under a court order)

Area	# Court Order	% Court Order	# Voluntary	% Voluntary	Total
Cork	728	97%	21	3%	**749**
Kerry	152	96%	7	4%	**159**
Midwest	521	95%	29	5%	**550**
Cavan/Monaghan	134	88%	19	12%	**153**
Mayo	124	86%	20	14%	**144**
Dublin South East/Wicklow	176	83%	36	17%	**212**
Donegal	185	82%	41	18%	**226**
Waterford/Wexford	326	79%	87	21%	**413**
Galway/Roscommon	278	75%	92	25%	**370**
Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary	240	74%	85	26%	**325**
Dublin South Central	266	73%	99	27%	**365**
Dublin North City	342	73%	128	27%	**470**
Louth/Meath	304	73%	114	27%	**418**
Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan	79	72%	30	28%	**109**
Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow	298	69%	131	31%	**429**
Midlands	223	67%	111	33%	**334**
Dublin North	209	60%	142	40%	**351**
Social Work Team SCSIP	41	48%	45	52%	**86**
National	**4,626**	**79%**	**1,237**	**21%**	**5,863**

Length of Time in Care

- Just under half (48.6%; 2,849/5,863) of the children in care at the end of 2021 were in care for 5 years or less and of these one in four (24%; 672) was in care for less than a year (Figure 35). The remaining 51.4% (3,014) were in care for more than five years. There was a slight increase in the percentage of children in care for more than 5 years at year end 2021 when compared to the previous two years; too early to predict if this is a start of an increasing trend. The percentage of children in care for less than a year has remained consistent over the three years 2019 – 2021.

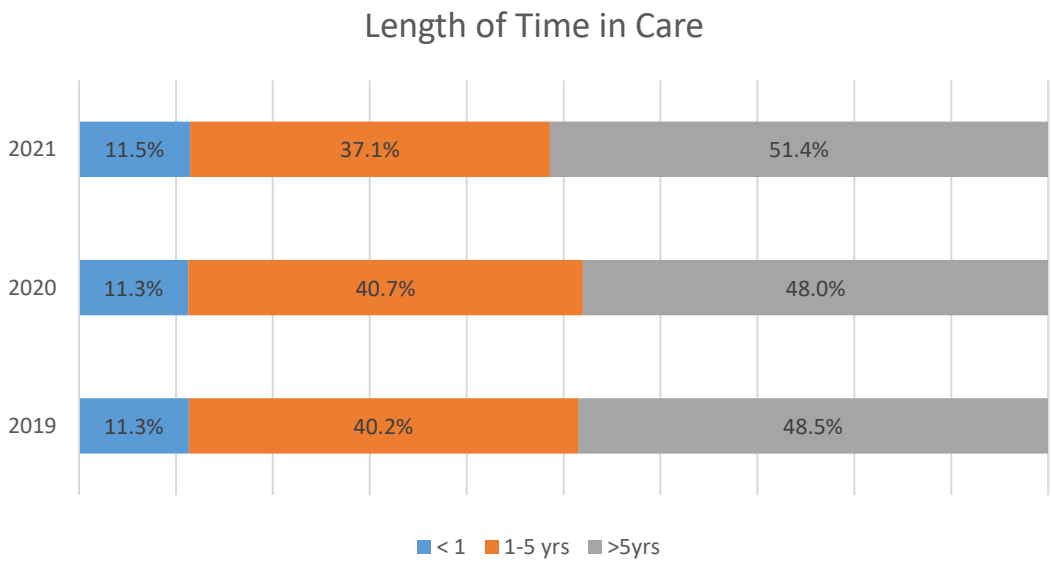


Figure 35: Percentage of children in care by length of time in care, 2019 - 2021

- In terms of numbers, the number of children in care for less than 1 year is up nine on 2020, the number in care for 1-5 years is down 219 (9%) (second consecutive decrease) while the number in care for greater than 5 years is up 191 (7%) (Figure 36 and Table 36).

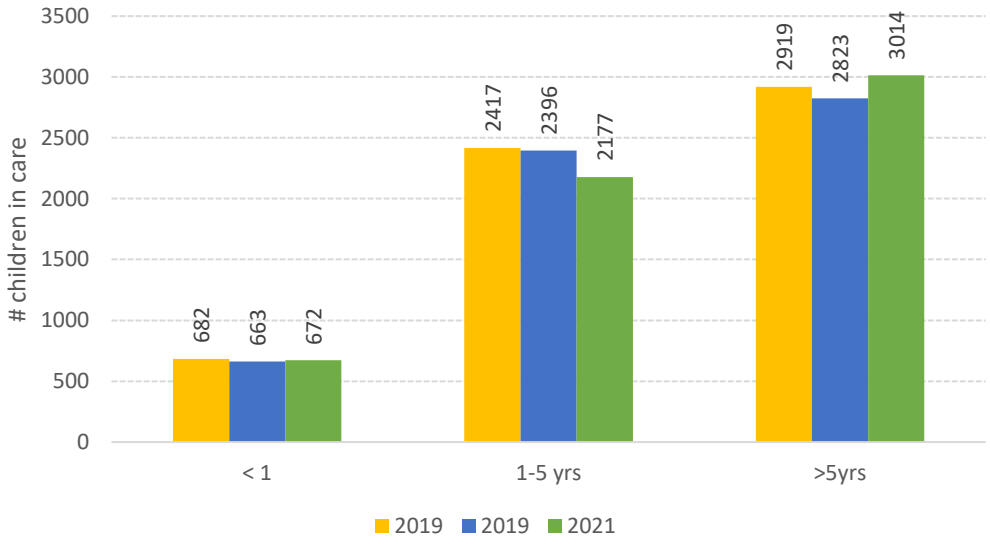


Figure 36: Number of children in care by length of time in care, 2019 – 2021

Table 36: Children in care by length of time in care, 2019 - 2021

Year/ Length	< 1 year	1-5 years	>5 years	Total
2021	**672 (11.5%)**	**2,177 (37.1%)**	**3,014 (51.4%)**	**5,863 (100%)**
2020	663 (11.3%)	2,396 (40.7%)	2,823 (48.0%)	5,882 (100%)
2019	682 (11.3%)	2,417 (40.2%)	2,919 (48.5%)	6,018 (100%)

- A breakdown of the percentage and number of children in care by time band (< 1 year, 1-5 years and > 5 years) is presented below (Figure 37 and Table 37).

- Looking across the data for the 17 areas, Dublin South East/Wicklow reported the highest percentage of children in care for more than 5 years at 68% while Mayo reported the lowest percentage at 38%. Seven areas reported a percentage equal to or higher than the national average of 52%. The Social Work Team for Separated Children Seeking International Protection reported no child in care for more than 5 years.

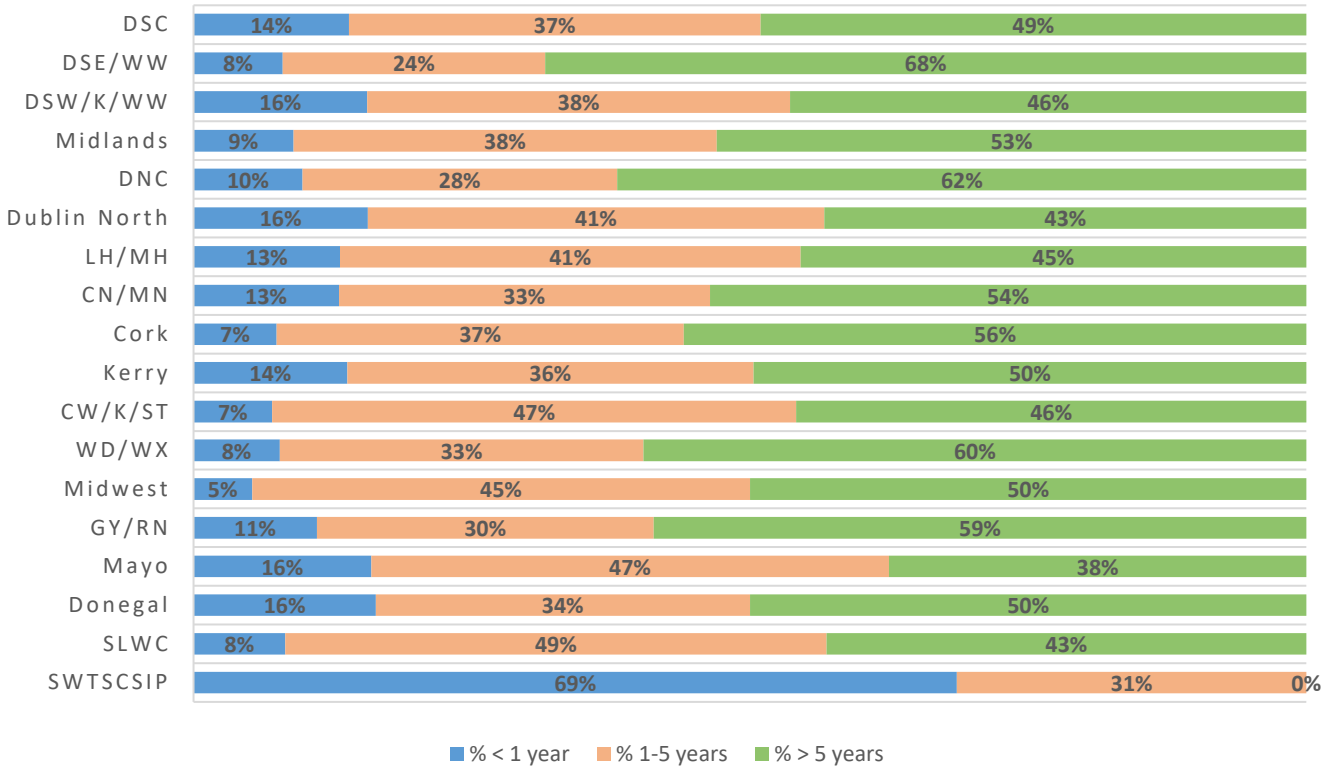


Figure 37: Percentage of children in care by time band (< 1 year, 1-5 years, > 5 years), 2021

Table 37: Children in care by length of time in care by area, 2021

Area	< 1 year	% < 1 Year	1-5 years	% 1-5 years	> 5 years	% > 5 years	Total
Dublin South Central	51	14%	135	37%	179	49%	**365**
Dublin South East/Wicklow	17	8%	50	24%	145	68%	**212**
Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow	67	16%	163	38%	199	46%	**429**
Midlands	30	9%	127	38%	177	53%	**334**
Dublin North City	46	10%	133	28%	291	62%	**470**
Dublin North	55	16%	144	41%	152	43%	**351**
Louth/Meath	55	13%	173	41%	190	45%	**418**
Cavan/Monaghan	20	13%	51	33%	82	54%	**153**
Cork	56	7%	274	37%	419	56%	**749**
Kerry	22	14%	58	36%	79	50%	**159**
Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary	23	7%	153	47%	149	46%	**325**
Waterford/Wexford	32	8%	135	33%	246	60%	**413**
Midwest	29	5%	246	45%	275	50%	**550**
Galway/Roscommon	41	11%	112	30%	217	59%	**370**

Mayo	23	16%	67	47%	54	38%	**144**
Donegal	37	16%	76	34%	113	50%	**226**
Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan	9	8%	53	49%	47	43%	**109**
Social Work Team SCSIP	59	69%	27	31%	0	0%	**86**
National	**672**	**11%**	**2,177**	**37%**	**3,014**	**52%**	**5,863**

Placement Stability

- The number of children in care in their third or greater placement within the previous 12 months is used as a proxy for placement stability. Tusla collates data on the third or greater placement as it gives an indication of the moves from the more stable placement, as depending on the circumstances or reason for admission a child can be placed in an emergency placement and then moved to a more long-term placement.
- At the end of 2021, there were 220 children in care in their third or greater placement within the previous 12 months. This amounts to 3.8% of all children in care, up from 3% (179/5,882) in 2020 and the highest percentage for the three years 2019 - 2021 (Table 38).
- While the percentage compares favourably with percentages reported in other jurisdictions including England 9%[19]; Wales 7%[20] and Scotland 4%[21], interpretation needs to be considered in the context of differing processes and procedures and definitions that may exist in other jurisdictions.

Table 38: Children in their third or greater placement within the previous 12 months, 2019 – 2021

	2019	2020	2021
# children in care	6,018	5,882	**5,863**
# 3rd or greater placement	141	179	**220**
% 3rd or greater placement	2.3%	3.0%	**3.8%**

- Looking at the data across the various placement types (Table 39), the highest percentage of children in care in their third or greater placements within the year were in special care (50%; 8/16). This is not surprising consider the small number of children involved and the fact that special care provides for short term stabilising care in a secure therapeutic environment with the aim of enabling a child return to a less secure placement as soon as possible based on need.
- Almost one in five children (15.8%; 69/438) in general residential care at the end of 2021 were in their third or greater placement within the year. This compares to the significantly lower 2.2% (117/5,272) for children in foster care (general and relative combined).
- The percentage of children in general residential care in their third or greater placement at year end (15.8%) is down almost three percentage points from 2020 (18.4%), while the percentage in foster care (general & relative) (2.2%) is up 0.7 percentage points from 1.5%. The percentage in "other" care placements is also up almost nine percentage points on 2020.

[19] https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/fast-track/de21526b-96d6-4ece-bea8-856c33ccf395

[20] https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Health-and-Social-Care/Social-Services/Childrens-Services/Children-Looked-After/children-looked-after-childrenlookedafterat31march-by-localauthority-numberofplacementsduringyear-measure

[21] https://www.gov.scot/publications/childrens-social-work-statistics-scotland-2020-21/documents/ [Additional Tables Metric 2.6]

Table 39: Children in care in their third or greater placement, by care type 2020 and 2021

Placement Type	# CIC 2020	# ≥ 3rd 2020	% ≥ 3rd 2020	# CIC 2021	# ≥ 3rd 2021	% ≥ 3rd 2021
General foster care	3,829	65	**1.7%**	3,770	92	**2.4%**
Relative foster care	1,517	17	**1.1%**	1,502	25	**1.7%**
General residential	403	74	**18.4%**	438	69	**15.8%**
Special care	18	11	**61.1%**	16	8	**50.0%**
Other	115	12	**10.4%**	137	26	**19.0%**
Total	**5,882**	**179**	**3.0%**	**5,863**	**220**	**3.8%**

- A breakdown of the percentage of children in their third or greater placement within the year, by area is presented in the table below (Table 40).

Table 40: Children in their third or greater placement within the previous 12 months, by area 2021 (ranked by %)

Area	# ≥ 3rd placement	# in care	% ≥ 3rd placement
Cork	62	749	8.3%
Kerry	12	159	7.5%
Mayo	9	144	6.3%
Social Work Team SCSIP	5	86	5.8%
Galway/Roscommon	21	370	5.7%
Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary	16	325	4.9%
Cavan/Monaghan	7	153	4.6%
Waterford/Wexford	17	413	4.1%
Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan	4	109	3.7%
Dublin South East/Wicklow	6	212	2.8%
Donegal	6	226	2.7%
Dublin South Central	9	365	2.5%
Dublin North City	11	470	2.3%
Dublin South West/Kildare/ West Wicklow	9	429	2.1%
Midlands	6	334	1.8%
Dublin North	6	351	1.7%
Midwest	8	550	1.5%
Louth/Meath	6	418	1.4%
Total	**220**	**5,863**	**3.8%**

Out of State Placements

Tusla seeks to place all children requiring care in a placement within Ireland, albeit that this does not always happen in a small number of cases. Children placed abroad are generally those requiring placement with relatives who happen to live abroad and those requiring highly specialised care currently not available in Ireland, e.g., specialist secure forensic mental health services and therapeutic residential services addressing specific needs identified in the child's care plan. In seeking such specialist placements, the needs of children are prioritised over the location of placement. Each child is placed in a care setting appropriate to his/her needs in accordance with his/her care plan. The majority of children return to Ireland once their specific intervention has concluded. Children in foster care abroad often remain in that country if it is in their best interests. When children are placed abroad, they remain in the care of the State. They have an allocated social worker who visits them in their placement and a care plan that is reviewed within the statutory framework. All centres in which children are placed are subject to the regulatory and inspection framework of that jurisdiction. Tusla makes itself aware of inspection reports prior to the placing of a child.

- At the end of 2021, there were 12 children in a placement outside of Ireland, four fewer than 2020 (16) and the fewest number for the three years 2019 - 2021 (Table 41). Children in placements abroad account for 0.2% of the total number of children in care.
- All but one of the children in placements outside of Ireland were in foster care, of which seven were in foster care with relatives (Table 41).

Table 41: Children in care in an out-of-state placement, 2019 - 2021

Placement	2019	2020	2021
General residential	4	2	1
General foster care	5	5	4
Relative foster care	6	8	7
Other	5	1	0
Total	20	16	12

Children in Care with Private Providers

- At the end of 2021, there were 785 children in care in placements with private providers, 56 (8%) more than 2020 (729) and the highest number for the period 2017 – 2021 (Table 42). The number of children in placements with private providers has gone up year on year since 2017 and is up 29% (177) overall. Children in placements with private providers account for 13% of all children in care. *These children are included in the overall number of children in care presented above.*
- The majority (58%; 453) of children in placements with private providers at the end of 2021 were in foster care, 41 (10%) more than 2020 (412) and the highest number for the five years 2017 – 2021 (Table 42).
- Over a third (34%; 269) of children in placements with private providers were in general residential care, four fewer than 2020 (273). The number of children in private residential placements is up 38% (74) on 2017.
- 61% (269/438) of children in general residential placements are in placements with private providers compared to 12% (453/3,770) for general foster care.

- The increase in demand for private placements is due to an on-going lack of availability of suitable placements to meet demand and also in some cases the challenging behaviours and complex needs of older children requiring a placement.

Table 42: Children in care in placements with private providers, 2017 -2021

Placement	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
General residential	195	235	255	273	**269**
General foster care	395	393	405	412	**453**
Other[22]	18	27	33	44	**63**
Total	**608**	**655**	**693**	**729**	**785**

- A breakdown of children in placements with private providers by area is presented in Table 43. As can be seen from the table, the Social Work Team for Separated Children Seeking International Protection reported the highest percentage (44%) of children in care with private providers, followed by Dublin South Central (29%), Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow (25%) and Dublin North (23%).
- The five Dublin and wider surrounding areas report the highest percentages of children in care in placements with private providers, and account for over half (55%; 435) of all children in placements with private providers.

Table 43: Children in care with private providers by care type and area, December 2021 (ranked by % in private)

Area	General Residential	Foster care	Other	Total private	Total in care	% private
Social Work Team SCSIP	24	2	12	**38**	86	44%
Dublin South Central	24	80	3	**107**	365	29%
Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow	26	78	4	**108**	429	25%
Dublin North	10	61	11	**82**	351	23%
Dublin North City	13	81	2	**96**	470	20%
Dublin South East/Wicklow	10	26	6	**42**	212	20%
Midlands	15	47	4	**66**	334	20%
Kerry	8	8	0	**16**	159	10%
Donegal	17	4	1	**22**	226	10%
Waterford/Wexford	25	6	5	**36**	413	9%
Louth/Meath	13	20	3	**36**	418	9%
Cork	31	28	2	**61**	749	8%
Midwest	30	5	2	**37**	550	7%
Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan	4	3	0	**7**	109	6%
Cavan/Monaghan	5	1	2	**8**	153	5%
Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary	6	3	3	**12**	325	4%
Galway/Roscommon	7	0	2	**9**	370	2%
Mayo	1	0	1	**2**	144	1%
National	**269**	**453**	**63**	**785**	**5,863**	**13%**

[22] The placement "Other" includes children in supported lodgings, in a disability unit or drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre etc.

Children 12 Years and Under in Residential Placements

It is Tusla policy to place children 12 years and younger requiring admission to care in foster care. However, circumstances do arise where this is not possible and where it may not be in the best interests of the child e.g., where the child is part of a sibling group, it being in the children's best interests that they remain together and the Agency is finding it difficult to source an appropriate placement for the children in a single foster care or relative care setting; where an emergency/long term foster/relative care setting is not immediately available and the option of the child remaining in their current home/residence would put that child at risk or where there are identified therapeutic needs which are best met within a residential setting.

- At the end of 2021, there were 63 children 12 years and younger in a residential placement, three more than 2020 (Table 44). The majority (67%; 42) of these children were 10 years or older.

Table 44: Children 12 years and younger in residential placements, Year End 2017 – 2021

Children in residential care	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
# children aged ≤12 years in residential care	39	42	47	60	**63**
Total number of children in residential care (incl. special care)	358	381	409	421	**454**
% aged ≤12 years in residential care	**10.9%**	**11.0%**	**11.5%**	**14.3%**	**13.9%**

Children in Special Care

Special care provides for short-term, stabilising intervention that prioritises safe care in a therapeutic environment for children at risk and with challenging behaviour. It is an exceptional intervention restricting the liberty of the child and involves detention of the child for his/her own welfare and protection in a special care unit. The child is detained under a High Court Order and not on the basis of criminal activity. Special care units differ from ordinary residential care units in that such units offer higher staff ratios, on-site education, as well as specialised input such as clinical/therapeutic services. In 2021, there were three special care units in Ireland as set out below. Special care units have a limited capacity and the units are not appropriate as general residential care facilities for children. The bed capacity within special care can fluctuate, with reduced capacity due to challenges with the recruitment and retention of staff.

Ballydowd - 6 bed mixed gender unit
Coovagh House – 4 bed mixed gender unit
Crannóg Nua – 8 bed mixed gender unit

- During 2021, there were 43 referrals to special care, four fewer than 2020 (Table 45). Three (7%) of the 43 referrals were re-referrals. Fifty-eight percent (25) of the referrals were approved; 15 were deemed not suitable, while the remaining three were withdrawn/removed prior to being considered. A total of 23 children were admitted to special care in 2021, five fewer than 2020.

Table 45: Referrals to Special Care, 2017 – 2021

Year	# referrals	# re-referrals	Total referrals	Referrals approved	Children admitted
2021	**40**	**3**	**43**	**25**	**23**
2020	39	8	47	29	28
2019	37	6	43	25	27
2018	34	5	39	20	19
2017	45	11	56	33	17

- More males (27; 63%) than females (16; 37%) were referred. The most common age of those referred was 16 years (16; 37%) followed by 15 years (9; 21%) (Table 46).

Table 46: Referrals to Special Care by age, 2021

Age at time of referral	# referrals
≤13 years	5
14 years	8
15 years	9
16 years	16
17 years	5
Total	**43**

- 16% (7) of the children referred were in education at the time of referral.
- 72% (31) were engaging in drug and alcohol misuse at the time of referral.
- 67% (29) were presenting with mental health difficulties (unassessed) at the time of referral.
- 81% (35) were involved with the criminal justice system at the time of referral.
- 74% (32) of children referred were under an order of the court at the time of referral (Table 47). The majority (22; 69%) of whom were under a full care order. Twenty-three percent (10) of children were in care under a voluntary agreement with parents/guardians.

Table 47: Referrals to special care by care status at time of referral, 2021

Care Status	# referrals
Full care order	22
Interim care order	9
Voluntary care arrangement	10
Other court order	1
Other	1
Total	**43**

- On the 31 December 2021, there were 16 children in special care. The number of children in special care accounted for 0.3% (16/5,863) of the total number of children in care and 4% of all children in residential care (454).

Children in Care in Education

Educational progress is critical for the long-term social and economic well-being of every child, and especially so for children in care, where good progress in education may help compensate for difficulties in other areas of their lives (Darmody et al. 2013). The child's social worker is responsible for ensuring that the education needs of a child in care are addressed in the care plan and any specific needs of the child are clearly identified.

The National Standards for Foster care (2003) state that "the educational needs of children and young people in foster care are given high priority and they are encouraged to attain their full potential. Education is understood to include the development of social and life skills" (Standard 12).

The National Standards for Children's Residential Centres (2001) state that "all young people have a right to education. Supervising social workers and centre management ensure each young person in the centre has access to appropriate education facilities (Standard 8).

- At the end of 2021, 95% (3,630/3,837) of children in care aged 6–15 years were in full time education[23] and 93% (930/1,005) of children aged 16 and 17 years were in full time education (Table 48). These percentages are consistent with data for previous years.
- A breakdown of the number and percentage of children in care in education at year end 2021 is presented below (Table 48).

Table 48: Children in care in full-time education, 2021

Area	# 6-15 years	# in Educ.	% Educ.	# 16 & 17 years	# Educ.	% Educ.
Dublin South Central	217	235	92%	69	75	92%
Dublin South East/Wicklow	147	147	100%	43	43	100%
Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow	264	287	92%	64	81	79%
Midlands	227	227	100%	41	41	100%
Dublin North City	270	306	88%	79	85	93%
Dublin North	235	243	97%	55	58	95%
Louth/Meath	258	263	98%	63	67	94%
Cavan/Monaghan	106	109	97%	25	27	93%
Cork	497	513	97%	122	128	95%
Kerry	96	102	94%	27	31	87%
Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary	210	221	95%	55	56	98%
Waterford/Wexford	264	265	100%	69	72	96%
Midwest	298	366	81%	78	96	81%
Galway/Roscommon	250	259	97%	60	62	97%
Mayo	89	90	99%	21	21	100%

[23] For the purposes of reporting, the measurement of full-time education is the care plan specification for the child's educational requirements measured against the child's achievement of same. It is expected that each child's educational arrangement is outlined in their care plan.

Donegal	137	139	99%	41	42	98%
Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan	65	65	100%	18	20	90%
National	**3,630**	**3,837**	**95%**	**930**	**1,005**	**93%**

Source: Q4 2021 data return. Hence, slight variation from the number of 6—17 year olds reported earlier in this report. Data does not include children reported by the Social Work Team for Separated Children Seeking International Protection.

Children in care with an allocated social worker and care plan

- At the end of 2021, 88% (5,139/5,863) of children in care had an allocated social worker against a target of 100% (Table 49) and down five percentage points from 2020 (93%). In terms of numbers 724 children were awaiting allocation of a social worker at the end of 2021, 325 (81%) more than 2020 (399).

Table 49: Children in care with an allocated social worker, December 2020 and 2021

Care Type	# in Care 2020	# with SW 2020	% with SW 2020	# in Care 2021	# with SW 2021	% with SW 2021
Foster Care General	3,829	3,584	94%	3,770	**3,293**	**87%**
Foster Care Relative	1,517	1,379	91%	1,502	**1,280**	**85%**
Residential (General)	403	392	97%	438	**418**	**95%**
Special Care	18	18	100%	16	**16**	**100%**
Other	115	110	96%	137	**132**	**96%**
National	**5,882**	**5,483**	**93%**	**5,863**	**5,139**	**88%**

- For the same period, 97% (5,659/5,863) of children had a written care plan[24] no change from 2020 (Table 50). In terms of numbers 204 children did not have a written care plan, four more than 2020 (200).

Table 50: Children in care with a written care plan, December 2020 and 2021

Care Type	# in Care 2020	# with CP 2020	% with CP 2020	# in Care 2021	# with CP 2021	% with CP 2021
Foster Care General	3,829	3,703	97%	3,770	**3,662**	**97%**
Foster Care Relative	1,517	1,469	97%	1,502	**1,436**	**96%**
Residential (General)	403	383	95%	438	**420**	**96%**
Special Care	18	18	100%	16	**16**	**100%**
Other	115	109	95%	137	**125**	**91%**
National	**5,882**	**5,682**	**97%**	**5,863**	**5,659**	**97%**

- A breakdown of the number of children in care with an allocated social worker and a written care plan, by area at the end of 2021 is presented in Table 51.

[24] It should be noted that variances have been identified in how data on this metric are being reported by the areas. The data provided for the most part is a count of children with a care plan which may / may not require review.

Table 51: Children in care with a social worker and written care plan by area, 2021

Area	# in Care	# Allocated SW	% Allocated SW	# Care Plan	% Care Plan
Dublin South Central	365	330	**90%**	334	**92%**
Dublin South East/Wicklow	212	212	**100%**	211	**100%**
Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow	429	409	**95%**	388	**90%**
Midlands	334	315	**94%**	333	**100%**
Dublin North City	470	440	**94%**	445	**95%**
Dublin North	351	302	**86%**	314	**89%**
Louth/Meath	418	328	**78%**	394	**94%**
Cavan/Monaghan	153	149	**97%**	150	**98%**
Cork	749	684	**91%**	739	**99%**
Kerry	159	154	**97%**	150	**94%**
Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary	325	214	**66%**	325	**100%**
Waterford/Wexford	413	269	**65%**	413	**100%**
Midwest	550	452	**82%**	538	**98%**
Galway/Roscommon	370	339	**92%**	365	**99%**
Mayo	144	144	**100%**	143	**99%**
Donegal	226	221	**98%**	223	**99%**
Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan	109	95	**87%**	108	**99%**
Social Work Team SCSIP	86	**82**	**95%**	**86**	**100%**
National	**5,863**	**5,139**	**88%**	**5,659**	**97%**

3.4 Discharges from Care

KEY FACTS

- 970 discharges from care in 2021, 34 fewer than 2020 (1,004).
- Over half of all discharges (55%; 531) were young people turning 18 years, consistent with previous years.
- 73% (709) of discharges were from foster care. This is consistent with previous years and not surprising considering that over 90% of children in care are in foster care.
- Almost half of discharges (47%; 454) were to home / extended family with a further 34% (325) remaining with their foster family. Eight per cent (78) of discharges were to independent living, a 42% (23) increase on 2020 (55).
- More than half (58%; 308) of young people discharged by virtue of turning 18 years remained with their foster family, with 12% (64) returning home/extended family. One in seven (78; 15%) moved to independent living.
- Eight more discharges than admissions reported in 2021, consistent with previous years and the decreasing number of children in care.

Number of Discharges

- In 2021, there were 970 discharges from care, 34 fewer than 2020 (1,004) (Figure 38).
- Like the data on admissions to care, these data refer to incidences of discharge that occurred during the year and not the number of individual children discharged from care – a small number of children can have more than one discharge from care during the year. *Note data from 2020 – 2021 includes children and young people reported by the Social Work Team for Separated Children Seeking International Protection.*

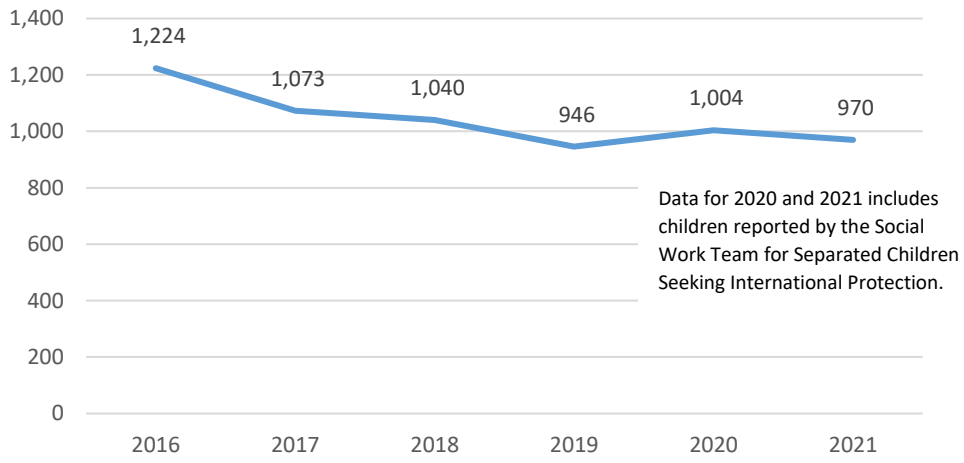


Figure 38: Discharges from care, 2016 - 2021

- Like previous years, more than half (55%; 531) of all discharges were for young people turning 18 years (Table 52). The next most common age of discharge was 17 years (excluding those turning 18 years)

followed by the older ages of 15 years to 16 years. This is consistent with the increasing number of children in care with age.

Table 52: Discharges from care by age, 2019-2021

Age	# 2019	% 2019	# 2020	% 2020	# 2021	% 2021
< 1 year	27	3%	29	3%	**31**	3%
1 year	30	3%	19	2%	**24**	2%
2 years	28	3%	28	3%	**20**	2%
3 years	21	2%	25	2%	**14**	1%
4 years	23	2%	25	2%	**9**	1%
5 years	14	1%	21	2%	**15**	2%
6 years	17	2%	14	1%	**12**	1%
7 years	12	1%	11	1%	**20**	2%
8 years	16	2%	21	2%	**19**	2%
9 years	16	2%	13	1%	**15**	2%
10 years	18	2%	20	2%	**21**	2%
11 years	21	2%	18	2%	**23**	2%
12 years	14	1%	23	2%	**20**	2%
13 years	18	2%	28	3%	**24**	2%
14 years	20	2%	34	3%	**26**	3%
15 years	38	4%	33	3%	**44**	5%
16 years	44	5%	40	4%	**39**	4%
17 years	50	5%	64	6%	**63**	6%
17 years reaching majority	519	55%	538	54%	**531**	55%
Total	**946**	**100%**	**1,004**	**100%**	**970**	**100%**

- 73% (709) of discharges were from foster care, a similar breakdown to previous years and not surprising considering 90% of children in care are in foster care (Table 53).

Table 53: Discharges from care by care type, 2019 - 2021

Care Type	2019	% of Total (2019)	2020	% Total (2020)	2021	% Total (2021)
General Foster Care	545	58%	529	53%	**514**	**53%**
Relative Foster Care	215	23%	219	22%	**195**	**20%**
Residential Care (incl. special care	127	13%	160	16%	**153**	**16%**
Other	59	6%	96	10%	**108**	**11%**
National	**946**	**100%**	**1,004**	**100%**	**970**	**100%**

Location Discharged

- 47% (454) of discharges were to home/extended family with a further 34% (325) remaining with their foster family (Table 54; Figure 39). Eight per cent (78) of discharges were to independent living.

Table 54: Location on discharge, 2019 – 2021

Location on Discharge	2019	% 2019	2020	% 2020	2021	% 2021
Returned to parent	386	41%	406	40%	**407**	42%
Returned to extended family	61	6%	54	5%	**47**	5%
Remained with foster family	335	35%	397	40%	**325**	34%
Adopted	20	2%	15	1%	**21**	2%
Independent living	48	5%	55	5%	**78**	8%
Supported lodgings	9	1%	4	0.4%	**4**	0.4%
Shared accommodation	18	2%	9	1%	**13**	1%
Other - not specified	69	7%	64	6%	**75**	8%
Total	**946**	**100%**	**1004**	**100%**	**970**	**100%**

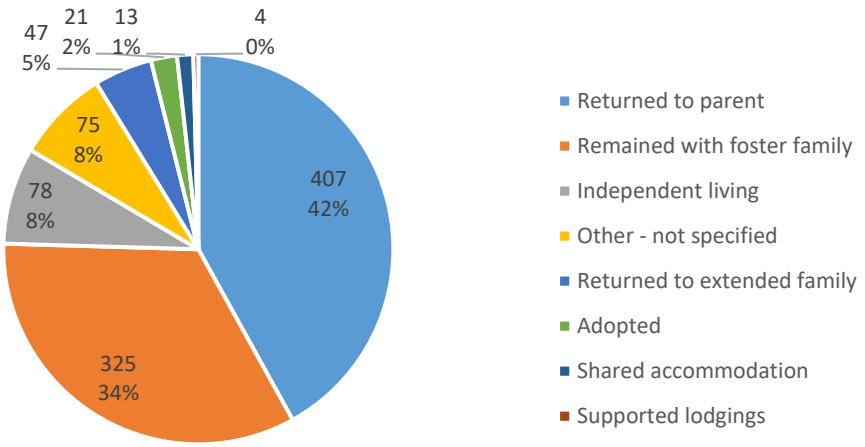


Figure 39: Breakdown of location on discharge, 2021

- Of those who were discharged by virtue of turning 18 years (531), the majority (58%; 308) remained with their foster family, with a further 12% (64) returning home/extended family. About one in seven (78; 15%) moved to independent living (Figure 40)

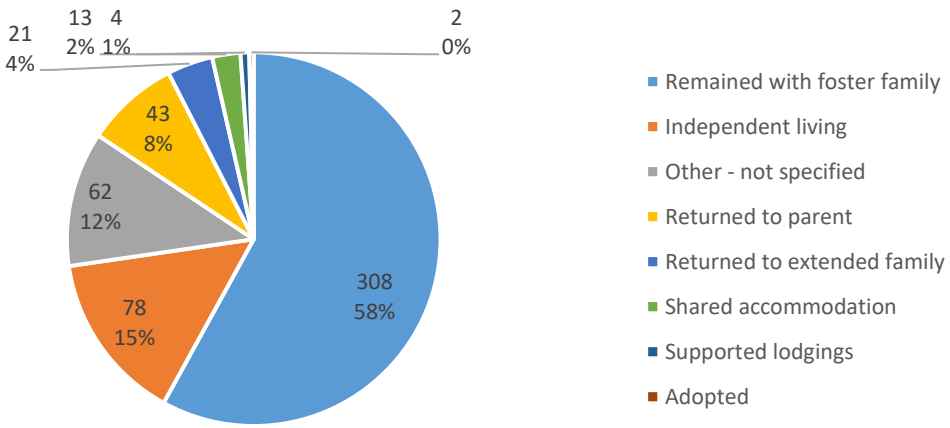


Figure 40: Breakdown of location on discharge for those discharged by virtue of turning 18 years, 2021

Discharges by Area

- A breakdown of discharges by area is presented in the table below (Table 55). As can be seen from the table, there is wide variation in the number of discharges ranging from 101 in Cork - the area with the largest number of children in care - to 17 in Mayo, the area with the second fewest number of children in care.
- Four of the 17 areas along with the Social Work Team for Separated Children Seeking International Protection reported an increase in discharges from 2020 with the largest increase reported by Dublin North City (up 29) followed by Dublin North (up 26) and Donegal (up 24). Of the remaining 13 areas, 12 areas reported a decrease with the largest decreases reported by Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary (down 28), Cork (down 26) and Midlands (down 15).

Table 55: Discharges from care by area, 2019-2021 (ranked by # discharges 2021)

Area	# 2019	% 2019	# 2020	% 2020	# 2021	% 2021	2021 v 2020
Cork	111	12%	127	13%	**101**	**10%**	-26
Dublin North City	73	8%	54	5%	**83**	**9%**	29
Dublin North	69	7%	56	6%	**82**	**8%**	26
Midwest	104	11%	79	8%	**76**	**8%**	-3
Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow	64	7%	82	8%	**72**	**7%**	-10
Dublin South Central	50	5%	72	7%	**69**	**7%**	-3
Galway/Roscommon	61	6%	74	7%	**69**	**7%**	-5
Louth/Meath	63	7%	69	7%	**63**	**6%**	-6
Waterford/Wexford	66	7%	70	7%	**62**	**6%**	-8
Midlands	58	6%	59	6%	**44**	**5%**	-15
Donegal	28	3%	18	2%	**42**	**4%**	24
Dublin South East/Wicklow	42	4%	51	5%	**41**	**4%**	-10
Social Work Team SCSIP	-	-	27	3%	**33**	**3%**	6
Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan	18	2%	23	2%	**30**	**3%**	7
Cavan/Monaghan	31	3%	37	4%	**30**	**3%**	-7
Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary	59	6%	57	6%	**29**	**3%**	-28
Kerry	18	2%	32	3%	**27**	**3%**	-5
Mayo	31	3%	17	2%	**17**	**2%**	0
Total	**946**	**100%**	**1,004**	**100%**	**970**	**100%**	**-34**

Admissions versus Discharges

- In 2021, there were eight more discharges than admissions reported (Table 56). Eleven of the 17 areas reported more discharges than admissions, ranging from 33 (Midwest) to one (Midlands). Six areas along with the Social Work Team for Separated Children Seeking International Protection reported more admissions than discharges, with the largest difference reported by the Social Work Team for Separated Children Seeking International Protection (65 more admissions than discharges).
- The higher number of discharges than admissions in 2021 is consistent with 2020 and previous years and the decreasing number of children in care.

Table 56: Admissions and discharges by area, 2020 - 2021

Area	# Admissions 2020	# Discharges 2020	# Admissions 2021	# Discharges 2001	2021 Discharges v Admissions
Dublin South Central	63	72	**72**	**69**	-3
Dublin South East/Wicklow	23	51	**25**	**41**	16
Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow	59	82	**90**	**72**	-18
Midlands	32	59	**43**	**44**	1
Dublin North City	58	54	**58**	**83**	25
Dublin North	64	56	**92**	**82**	-10
Louth/Meath	60	69	**60**	**63**	3
Cavan/Monaghan	33	37	**26**	**30**	4
Cork	107	127	**82**	**101**	19
Kerry	18	32	**34**	**27**	-7
Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary	42	57	**25**	**29**	4
Waterford/Wexford	67	70	**46**	**62**	16
Midwest	75	79	**43**	**76**	33
Galway/Roscommon	68	74	**66**	**69**	3
Mayo	16	17	**28**	**17**	-11
Donegal	26	18	**50**	**42**	-8
Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan	26	23	**24**	**30**	6
Social Work Team SCSIP	51	27	**98**	**33**	-65
Total	**888**	**1,004**	**962**	**970**	**8**

3.5 Foster Carers

Foster care is provided by the State (i.e., Child and Family Agency) and in a small number of cases (~10%) by non-statutory, voluntary or private fostering agencies. All foster carers (statutory and non-statutory), excluding those under Section 36 (1) (d)[25] of the Child Care Act 1991 (emergency placements), regardless of the method of recruitment must be approved by the Child and Family Agency prior to any child being placed with them.

Foster care applicants participate in a comprehensive assessment of their ability to carry out the fostering of a child and are formally approved by the foster care committee in the area. The decision to place a child with a particular foster carer is based on their assessed ability to meet the child's needs. Each decision is judged on its own merits, considering the fit between the carer and the child.

In terms of statutory provision, there are two main types of foster carer: a general foster carer[26] and a relative foster carer[27].

All foster carers are allocated a link (social) worker. Link (social) workers provide training, support and supervision for foster carers. Foster carers also participate in regular reviews of their continuing capacity to provide high-quality care to children in their care and to assist with the identification of gaps in the fostering service.

KEY FACTS

- 4,039 foster carers (statutory and non-statutory) on the panel of approved foster carers at the end of 2021, four more than 2020 (4,035) and the first increase after four consecutive decreases.
- The number of general foster carers (statutory) on the panel of approved foster carers continues to decrease, while the number of private foster carers (non-statutory) continues to increase.
- 219 general and relative foster carers (statutory) approved in 2021, seven fewer than 2020 (226) and 62 private foster carers approved, 17 (38%) more than 2020 (45).
- 90% of general and relative foster carers (statutory) had an allocated link (social) worker at the end of 2021.
- 100% of "unapproved" relative foster carers[28] with a child placed for more than 12 weeks had a link (social) worker at the end of 2021.

[25] Section 36(1)(d) of the Child Care Act 1991 and Section 6 of the 1995 Child Care Regulations allow for the emergency placement of a child or young person with relative foster carers prior to full approval. Emergency approval is only permissible with relatives.

[26] A general foster carer is a person approved by the Child and Family Agency, having completed a process of assessment and has been placed on the panel of approved foster carers, to care for children in State care in accordance with the Child Care Act 1991 and the Child Care (Placement of Children in Foster Care) Regulations 1995.

[27] A relative foster carer is defined as a person who is a friend, neighbour or relative of a child, or a person with whom the child or the child's family has had a relationship prior to the child's admission to care (Child Care (Placement of Children with Relatives) Regulations1995). A relative foster carer takes care of a child on behalf of and by agreement with the Child and Family Agency, having completed (or having agreed to undertake) an assessment of suitability within 12 weeks of a child being placed with them.

[28] Unapproved foster carer: An "unapproved" foster carer is a person(s) who has a child or children placed with them under Section 36.1 (d) of the Children Care Act 1991 who is either (a) awaiting an assessment, (b) in the process of assessment, or (c) whose assessment has yet to go before the Child and Family Agency Foster Care Committee for approval.

Number of Foster Carers on the Panel

- At the end of 2021, there were 4,039 foster carers (statutory and non-statutory) nationally on the panel of approved foster carers. The number of foster carers on the panel is up four from 2020 when the fewest number for the period 2015 – 2020 was reported and is the first increase after four consecutive decreases (Figure 41).

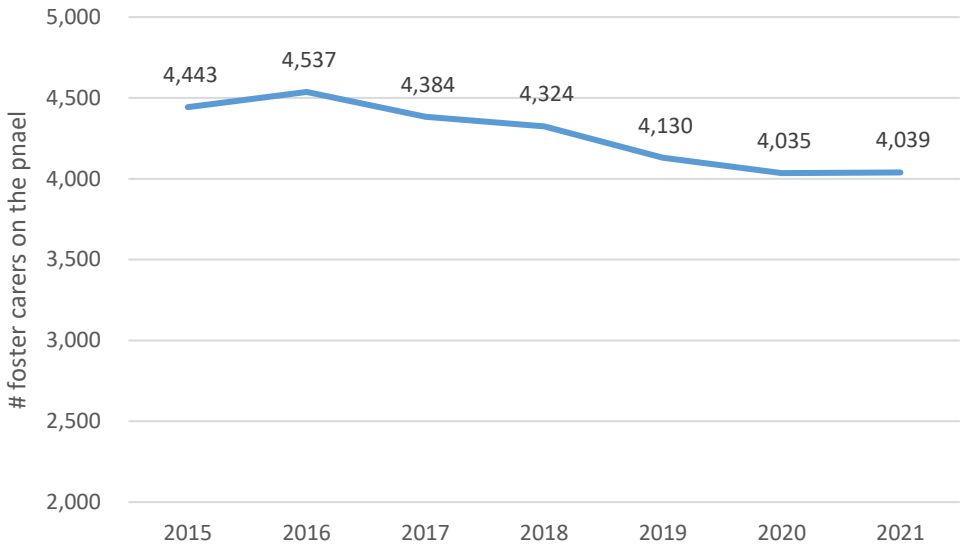


Figure 41: Number of approved foster carers on the panel of approved foster carers, 2015 – 2021

- The majority (60%; 2,435) of foster carers on the panel at the end of 2021 were general foster carers; one in four (26%; 1,062) was a relative foster carer, while the remaining 14% (542) were private foster carers (non-statutory) (Figure 42).

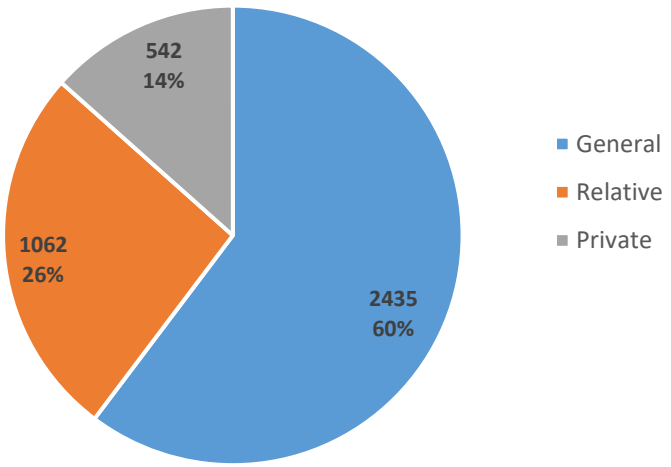


Figure 42: Breakdown of approved foster carers by type, 2021

- There were 2,435 general foster carers on the panel at the end of 2021, 41 fewer than 2020 (2,476) and the fewest number for the period 2015 – 2022. The number of general foster carers is down 18% (520) from 2015 (Table 57).
- There were 1,062 relative foster carers on the panel at the end of 2021, six more than 2020 (1,056) and the first increase after four consecutive decreases (Table 57).
- There were 542 private foster carers on the panel at the end of 2021, 39 (8%) more than at the end of 2020 (503) and the highest number for the period 2015 – 2022 (Table 57). The increase in private foster carers over this period reflects the ongoing difficulty in recruiting suitable foster carers to meet demand and the complex / special needs of some children requiring placement. *The decrease in the number of private foster carers between 2018 and 2019 needs to be interpreted with caution, due to a discrepancy in the number of private foster carers identified in one area following validation of their foster carers' register in 2019.*

Table 57: Foster carers (approved) by type, 2015 – 2021

Type	# 2015	# 2016	# 2017	# 2018	# 2019	# 2020	# 2021	Δ+/- 2021 v 2020	% Δ
General foster carers (approved)	2,955	2,913	2,756	2,675	2,574	2,476	**2,435**	-41	-2%
Relative foster carers (approved)	1,194	1,221	1,152	1,146	1,095	1,056	**1,062**	+6	<1%
Private foster carers (approved)	294	403	476	503	461	503	**542**	+39	+8%
Total (approved)	**4,443**	**4,537**	**4,384**	**4,324**	**4,130**	**4,035**	**4,039**	**+4**	**<1%**

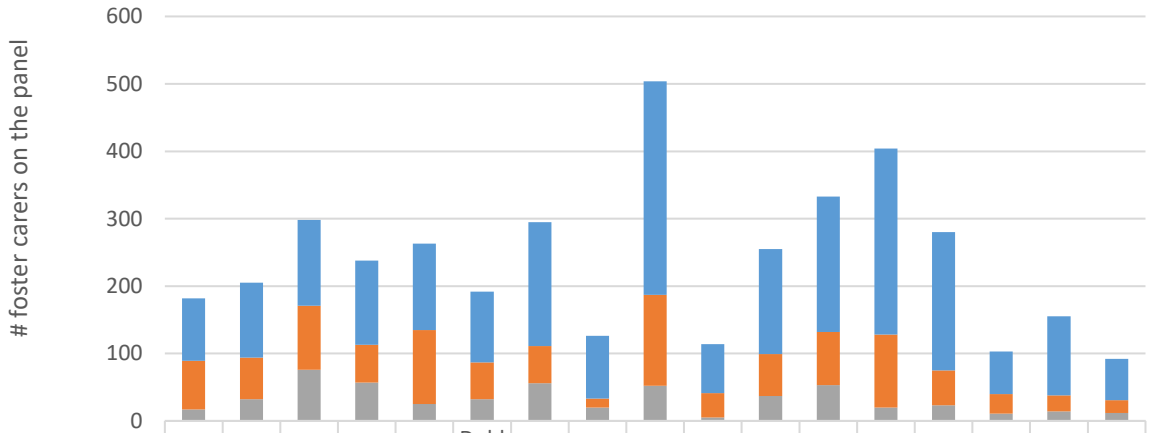
Foster Carers Approved

- A total of 219 general and relative foster carers (statutory) were approved and placed on the panel of approved foster carers in 2021, while an additional 62 private foster carers were also approved and placed on the panel. *Note this figure (62) includes a small number of "Brussels II foster carers".*[29]
- The number of general and relative foster carers approved in 2021 (219) is up seven on the number approved in 2020 (226) while the number of private foster carers approved in 2021 (62) is up 17 (38%) on 2020 (45). *Note this figure (45) includes a small number of "Brussels II foster carers".*

[29] **Brussels II Foster Carers:** These are carers who have been assessed by another EU state and who have been approved by the Child and Family Agency Foster Care Committee and placed on the panel of approved foster carers as per the National Policy: Procedure on the Placement of Children in the Care of Another European Member State in the Republic of Ireland (Brussels II Regulation). Articles 55 and 56 of Regulation EC 2201/2003 (known as the Brussels 11a Regulation), an International Instrument of 2003, applies to a placement of a child for whom the authority of another State is responsible in another Member State

Foster Carers by Area

- The number of foster carers (all types) on the panel at the end of 2021 across the areas ranged from 504 in Cork - the area with the highest number of children in care, to 92 in Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan - the area with the fewest number of children in care (Figure 43).



	DSC	DSE/ WW	DSW /K/ WW	Midl ands	DNC	Dubl in Nort h	LH/ MH	CN/ MN	Cork	Kerr y	CW/ KK/S T	WD/ WX	Mid west	GY/R N	May o	Don egal	SLW C
# General	93	111	127	125	128	105	184	93	317	73	156	201	276	205	63	117	61
# Approved Relative	72	62	95	56	110	55	55	13	135	36	62	79	108	52	29	24	19
# Private	17	32	76	57	25	32	56	20	52	5	37	53	20	23	11	14	12
Total Approved	182	205	298	238	263	192	295	126	504	114	255	333	404	280	103	155	92

Figure 43: Foster carers by type and area, 2021

- As can be seen from Table 58, while 60% of foster carers nationally are general foster carers, there is wide variation across the areas, ranging from 43% to 75%. The three areas reporting the highest percentages of general foster carers are Donegal (75%), Cavan/Monaghan (74%) and Galway/Roscommon (73%). Three in four foster carers in these areas are general foster carers. This is in contrast to Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow (43%) and Dublin North City (49%) where fewer than half of the foster carers in these areas are general foster carers.

- Similarly, while 26% of foster carers on the panel nationally are relative foster carers, it ranges from 10% to 42% across the areas. The areas reporting the highest percentages of relative foster carers are Dublin North City (42%), Dublin South Central (40%), Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow (32%) and Kerry (32%). Cavan/Monaghan reports the lowest percentage of relative foster carers at 10% followed by Donegal (15%), Galway/Roscommon (19%) and Louth/Meath (19%). The higher percentages seen in the Dublin area most likely reflect families living in close proximity, unlike the more rural areas like Cavan/Monaghan and Donegal.

- Also, while 13% of foster carers on the panel are private foster carers, it ranges from 4% to 26% across the areas. The three arears reporting the highest percentages of private foster carers were Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow (26%), Midlands (24%) and Louth/Meath (19%). Kerry (4%), Midwest (5%) and Galway/Roscommon (8%) report the lowest rates of private foster carers.

Table 58: Percentage breakdown of foster carers on the panel, by area 2021

Area	% General Foster Carers	% Relative Foster Carers	% Private Foster Carers
Dublin South Central	51%	40%	9%
Dublin South East/Wicklow	54%	30%	16%
Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow	43%	32%	26%
Midlands	53%	24%	24%
Dublin North City	49%	42%	10%
Dublin North	55%	29%	17%
Louth/Meath	62%	19%	19%
Cavan/Monaghan	74%	10%	16%
Cork	63%	27%	10%
Kerry	64%	32%	4%
Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary	61%	24%	15%
Waterford/Wexford	60%	24%	16%
Midwest	68%	27%	5%
Galway/Roscommon	73%	19%	8%
Mayo	61%	28%	11%
Donegal	75%	15%	9%
Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan	66%	21%	13%
Total	**60%**	**26%**	**13%**

"Unapproved" Relative Foster Carers

- In addition to the 4,039 approved foster carers detailed above, there were also 246 relative foster carers who were "unapproved" at the end of 2021, 18 (8%) more than 2020 (228) when the fewest number for the period 2015 – 2020 was reported and the first increase after five consecutive decreases (Figure 44). *An "unapproved" foster carer is a person(s) who has a child or children placed with them under Section 36.1 (d) of the Children Care Act 1991 who is either (a) awaiting an assessment, (b) in the process of assessment, or (c) whose assessment has yet to go before the Child and Family Agency Foster Care Committee for approval.*

- Of the 246 relative foster carers who were "unapproved" at the end of 2021, 78% (191) had a child placed for longer than 12 weeks. The timeframe for approval of relative foster carers is as soon as practicable, but no later than 12 weeks after placement of a child(ren) (Child Care (Placement of Children with Relatives) Regulations 1995). The number of "unapproved" relative foster carers with a child placed for longer than 12 weeks is down 15 (7%) on 2020 (206) and is the fewest number for the period 2015 – 2021.

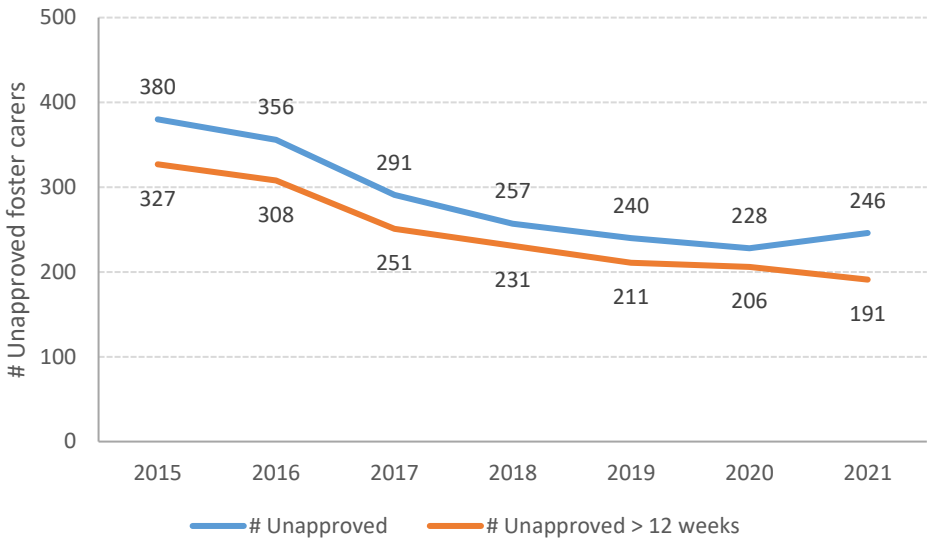


Figure 44: Number of unapproved relative foster carers, 2015 -2021

Foster Carers with a Link (Social) Worker

- At the end of 2021, 90% (2,201) of general foster carers had an allocated link (social) worker; a total of 234 were awaiting a link (social) worker (Table 59).
- 90% (953) of approved relative foster carers had an allocated link (social) worker at the end of 2021; a total of 109 were awaiting a link (social worker) (Table 59).

Table 59: General and approved relative foster carers with a link (social) worker, 2015 - 2021

Year	# General	# General with Link Worker	% General with Link Worker	# Approved Relative	# Approved Relative with Link worker	% Approved Relative with Link Worker
2021	2,435	2,201	**90%**	1,062	953	**90%**
2020	2,476	2,247	**91%**	1,056	978	**93%**
2019	2,574	2,428	**94%**	1,095	995	**91%**
2018	2,675	2,405	**90%**	1,146	1,027	**90%**
2017	2,756	2,551	**93%**	1,152	1,003	**87%**
2016	2,913	2,395	**82%**	1,221	981	**80%**
2015	2,955	2,419	**82%**	1,194	856	**72%**

- Across the 17 areas, the percentage of general foster carers with a link (social) worker ranged from 73% (Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow) to 100% in four areas (Table 60). Fourteen of the 17 areas reported a percentage equal to or higher than the national average of 90%.
- The percentage of approved relative foster carers with a link (social) worker ranged from 60% (Midwest) to 100% in six areas. Ten of the 17 areas reported a percentage equal to or higher than the national average of 90% (Table 60).

Table 60: Percentage of approved foster carers with an allocated link worker by area, 2021

Area	# General FC	# General with Link Worker	% General with Link Worker	# Approved Relative FC	# Relative with Link Worker	% Relative With Link Worker
Dublin South Central	93	84	**90%**	72	63	**88%**
Dublin South East/Wicklow	111	105	**95%**	62	54	**87%**
Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow	127	93	**73%**	95	76	**80%**
Midlands	125	114	**91%**	56	54	**96%**
Dublin North City	128	124	**97%**	110	101	**92%**
Dublin North	105	105	**100%**	55	55	**100%**
Louth/Meath	184	140	**76%**	55	50	**91%**
Cavan/Monaghan	93	93	**100%**	13	8	**62%**
Cork	317	285	**90%**	135	135	**100%**
Kerry	73	70	**96%**	36	36	**100%**
Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary	156	149	**96%**	62	61	**98%**
Waterford/Wexford	201	185	**92%**	79	79	**100%**
Midwest	276	225	**82%**	108	65	**60%**
Galway/Roscommon	205	205	**100%**	52	52	**100%**
Mayo	63	57	**90%**	29	24	**83%**
Donegal	117	106	**91%**	24	21	**88%**
Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan	61	61	**100%**	19	19	**100%**
Total	**2,435**	**2,201**	**90%**	**1,062**	**953**	**90%**

- 100% (191/191) of "unapproved" relative foster carers who had a child placed with them for longer than 12 weeks at the end of 2021, had an allocated link worker at the end of 2021, up from 99% at the end of 2020 and a low of 64% at the end of 2015.

3.6 Aftercare

Tusla Aftercare Services is a dedicated service provided within Tusla in partnership with a wide range of statutory, voluntary and community agencies in collaboration with young people and young adults. The aim of this service is to support young persons in preparation for leaving care and young adults who have left care. Aftercare provision incorporates advice, guidance and practical (including financial) support. The social worker, aftercare worker, young person, carers and others consider what the young person will need for support and how this will best be met.

The Child Care Amendment Act 2015 strengthened the legislative basis for the provision of aftercare services. The Act places an obligation on Tusla to prepare an aftercare plan that sets out the assistance to be provided to the young person/adult who has had a care history with Tusla. The core eligible range for aftercare is from 18 years up to 21 years. This can be extended until the completion of a course of education in which the young person is engaged, up until the age of 23 years.

The provision of an appropriate needs led aftercare service has been highlighted as one of the key elements in achieving positive outcomes for young people upon leaving care.

KEY FACTS

- The number of young people in receipt of aftercare services (3,059) continues to grow, up 4% (116) from 2020 (2,943) and 10% (285) from 2019 (2,774).
- 76% (1,788/2,339) of the 18-22 years cohort in receipt of aftercare services at the end of 2021 were in education/training.
- Almost half (45%; 1,047/2,339) of the 18-22 years cohort were continuing to live with their foster families, while a further 9% (213) had returned home to family. One in four (27%; 639) had moved to independent living.
- 82% (2,500/3,059) of all young people in receipt of an aftercare service at the end of 2021 had an aftercare plan, with this figure rising to 96% (2,247/2,339) for the 18-22 years cohort.
- 94% (2,080) of those with an aftercare plan (2,500) assessed as needing aftercare worker (2,203) had an aftercare worker, with 12 of the 17 areas along with the Social Work Team for Separated Children Seeking International Protection reporting 100%.

Number of Young Persons / Adults in Receipt of Aftercare Services

- The year 2021 saw a further increase in the number of young people in receipt of aftercare services. At the end of 2021, there were 3,059 young people in receipt of aftercare services, 116 (4%) more than 2020 (2,943) and 285 (10%) more than 2019 (2,774) (Table 61). *Note: the data presented in this section includes young people reported by the Social Work Team for Separated Children Seeking International Protection (SCSIP).*
- Of those in receipt of aftercare services at the end of 2021, 52.2% (1,598) were male and 47.6% (1,455) were female. Of the remaining six, five were gender neutral, while gender was not declared for the remaining person.

- 53% (1,618) of those in receipt of aftercare services were 18-20 years inclusive, 24% (721) were 21-22 years inclusive, while the remaining 24% (720) were less than 18 years. Increases were observed across all age groups with the largest increase observed for the 21 -22 years cohort, up 14% (91) from 2020 (Table 61).

Table 61: Young persons / adults in receipt of aftercare services by age group, 2019 – 2021

Age Group	# 2019	# 2020	2021	2021 v 2020	Δ%
< 18 years	666	700	**720**	+20	2.9%
18-20 years	1,580	1,613	**1,618**	+5	0.3%
21-22 years	528	630	**721**	+91	14.4%
Total	**2,774**	**2,943**	**3,059**	**116**	**3.9%**

Aftercare Services and Education

- 80% (1,289) of the 18–20 years cohort in receipt of aftercare services at the end of 2021 were in education/training, up from 77% (1,245/1,613) in 2021. The highest number in education/training (350; 27%) were in second level, followed by third level colleges/university (23%; 296) and post-leaving cert courses (250; 19%) (Table 62).

Table 62: Adults 18-20 years in receipt of aftercare services in education/accredited training, 2019 – 2021

Education/Training	# in education 2019	% 2019	# in education 2020	% 2020	# in education 2021	% 2021
Second level	293	25%	325	26%	**350**	**27%**
Vocational Training	135	11%	163	13%	**191**	**15%**
PLCs	297	25%	284	23%	**250**	**19%**
Third Level College / University	256	21%	271	22%	**296**	**23%**
Accredited Training (e.g., Solas)	141	12%	151	12%	**128**	**10%**
Other[30]	70	6%	51	4%	**74**	**6%**
Total	**1,192**	**100%**	**1,245**	**100%**	**1,289**	**100%**

- 69% (499/721) of those 21-22 years in receipt of an aftercare service at the end of 2021 were in education/accredited training, down slightly from 72% (452/630) at the end of 2020. Almost half (46%; 231) of those in education/training were in third level college / university, with a further 20% (102) in post leaving cert courses (Table 63). The percentage of young people in vocational training is up seven percentage points from 2019/2020 while the percentage in third level colleges/university is down seven percentage points from 2020.

[30] Other is not specified, but generally includes disability schools.

Table 63: Adults 21-22 years in receipt of aftercare services in education/accredited training, 2019 -2021

Education/Training	# in education 2019	2019%	# in education 2020	2020%	# in education 2021	% 2021
Second level	8	2%	3	1%	**7**	**1%**
Vocational Training	28	8%	38	8%	**77**	**15%**
PLCs	83	24%	87	19%	**102**	**20%**
Third Level College / University	165	48%	240	53%	**231**	**46%**
Accredited Training (e.g., Solas)	42	12%	63	14%	**54**	**11%**
Other[31]	15	4%	21	5%	**28**	**6%**
Total	**341**	**100%**	**452**	**100%**	**499**	**100%**

Aftercare Services and Accommodation

- Of those 18-22 years in receipt of aftercare services, almost half (45%; 1,047/2,339) were continuing to live with their foster families, implying that they continue to experience caring relationships and stable living arrangements (Figure 45). A further 9% (213) had returned home to family, while one in four (27%; 639) had moved to independent living arrangements[32].

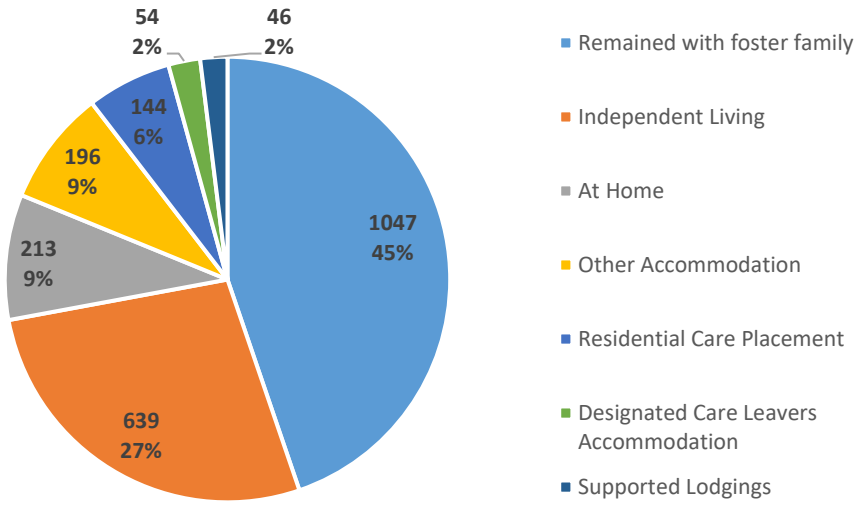


Figure 45: Living arrangements for 18-22 years cohort in receipt of aftercare services, 2021

Aftercare Plan and Aftercare Worker

- More than eight out of 10 (82%; 2,500/3,059) young people in receipt of an aftercare service had an aftercare plan at the end of 2021, with this figure rising to 96% (2,247/2,339) for the 18-22 years cohort.

[31] Other is not specified, but generally includes disability schools.
[32] Other includes psychiatric services, disability services, prison, staying with friends, homeless etc.

- 94% (2,080) of those with an aftercare plan (2,500) assessed as needing aftercare worker (2,203) had an aftercare worker.

Aftercare Services by Area

- Looking across the areas, the highest number of young people in receipt of aftercare services at the end of 2021 was reported by Cork (360) followed by Dublin North City (309), Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow (284) and Midwest (256), while the fewest number was reported by Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan (46) followed by Mayo (68) (Table 64).
- The percentage of young people with an aftercare plan across the areas ranged from 72% (Dublin North City) to 99% (Dublin South East/Wicklow). Nine of the 17 areas along with the Social Work Team for Separated Children Seeking International Protection reported a percentage equal to or higher than the national average of 82% (Table 64).
- The percentage of young people assessed as needing an aftercare worker with one, ranged from 71% (Dublin South Central) to 100% in 12 areas as well as the Social Work Team for Separated Children Seeking International Protection.

Table 64: Persons in receipt of aftercare services with an aftercare plan and allocated worker, 2021

Area	# in aftercare	# with plan	% with plan	# assessed as needing AC worker	% assessed as needing AC worker	# with AC worker	% with AC worker
Dublin South Central	232	182	78%	181	99%	129	71%
Dublin South East/Wicklow	131	130	99%	130	100%	130	100%
Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow	284	221	78%	144	65%	103	72%
Midlands	163	135	83%	90	67%	90	100%
Dublin North City	309	224	72%	224	100%	224	100%
Dublin North	184	143	78%	94	66%	94	100%
Louth/Meath	132	112	85%	112	100%	112	100%
Cavan/Monaghan	74	72	97%	68	94%	68	100%
Cork	360	271	75%	233	86%	227	97%
Kerry	77	61	79%	61	100%	61	100%
Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary	168	134	80%	86	64%	73	85%
Waterford/Wexford	175	151	86%	151	100%	151	100%
Midwest	256	215	84%	215	100%	204	95%
Galway/Roscommon	191	155	81%	122	79%	122	100%
Mayo	68	56	82%	54	96%	54	100%
Donegal	91	89	98%	89	100%	89	100%
Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan	46	39	85%	39	100%	39	100%
Social Work Team SCSIP	118	110	93%	110	100%	110	100%
Total	**3059**	**2500**	**82%**	**2203**	**88%**	**2080**	**94%**

Services for Separated Children Seeking International Protection

Tusla provides specialist services for separated children seeking international protection (SCSIP) under two discrete but sometimes overlapping streams; family reunification and unaccompanied minors. Children are referred to the service by the International Protection Office (formerly ORAC - Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner) and by the Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB). In the latter half of 2016, the service began working with the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP) and also set up the Calais Special Project (CSP). Children are received into the care of Tusla, either on a voluntary basis or through a court order under the Child Care Act 1991. Some of the children are received into care pending the outcome of a family reunification risk assessment, or while family tracing is being facilitated. All unaccompanied children under 12 years are placed with a foster family on arrival.

All children are seen by a social worker on the day of referral and an initial assessment takes place. The on-going social work assessment is multi-disciplinary in nature and involves a medical examination, an educational assessment and a child protection risk assessment. A statutory care plan is developed and, if appropriate, an application for asylum is made on behalf of the child. After assessment, children are placed in the most appropriate placement option depending on their assessed needs. After time in the intake units, the most common form of placement is with a foster family.

Note: the data presented below under admissions to care, children in care and aftercare is also included in Sections 3.1 – 3.3 and 3.6 of this report.

KEY FACTS

- 152 referrals to Tusla's Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection in 2021, 72 (90%) more than 2020 (80) when the fewest number since 2012 (71) was reported.
- 98 children were placed in care in 2021, 47 (92%) more than 2020 (51) when the fewest number since 2012 was reported. All of these children were taken into care on a voluntary basis and all were taken in for welfare concerns.
- 86 children were in care at the end of 2021, three fewer than 2019 (67). 22 (34%) more than 2020 (64). The majority (78%; 67) of these children were male, 22% (19) were female. All but four of the children in care were in the 15-17 years age bracket.
- Half (46; 53%) of the children in care were in general residential care, with the next highest number in supported lodgings (30; 35%).
- The majority of children in care (69%; 59) were in care for less than 1 year. No child was in care for greater than 5 years.
- All of the children in care had an up-to-date care plan at the end of 2021 and all but four had an allocated social worker.
- 118 young people in receipt of aftercare services, 10 more than 2020 (108).
- 94% (101/107) of the 18-22 years cohort in receipt of aftercare services were in education / training.
- The majority (69%; 74) of the 18-22 years cohort in receipt of aftercare services were in independent living.

- 93% (110) of young people in receipt of aftercare services at the end 2021 had an aftercare plan and all of those with an aftercare plan had an aftercare worker.

Referrals

- In 2021, there were 152 referrals to Tusla's Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection, 72 (90%) more than 2020 (80) when the fewest number since 2012 (71) was reported. The lower number reported in 2020 is most likely due the Covid-19 pandemic (Figure 46).

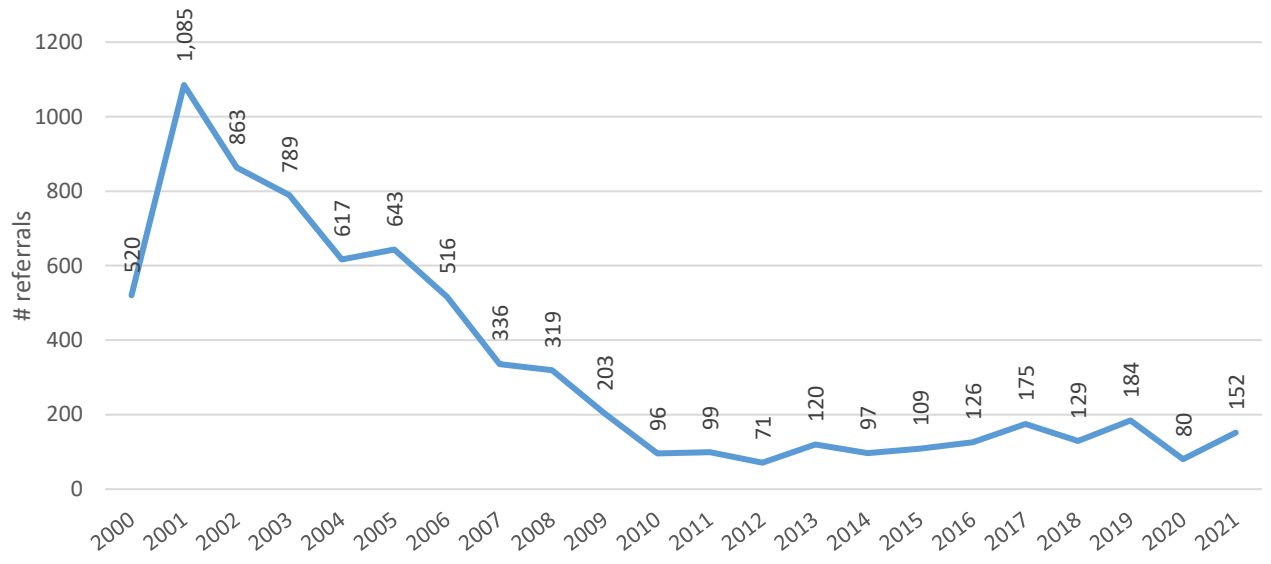


Figure 46: Referrals to Tusla Social Work Team for Separated Children Seeking International Protection, 2000 – 2021

- A total of 98 children were placed in care in 2021, 47 (92%) more than 2020 (51) when the fewest number since 2012 was reported (Table 65).
- Family reunifications (regardless of placement care status) were completed for 21 children in 2021, three more than 2020 (18). The service received 53 inappropriate/other referrals in 2021, 27 (51%) more than 2020 (26) and the highest number for the period 2000 – 2021.

Table 65: Referrals to Tusla's Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection, 2000 - 2021

Year	# Referrals	# Children placed in care	# Completed family reunifications	# Inappropriate referrals/other
2021	**152**	**98**	**21**	**53**
2020	80	51	18	26
2019	184	104	61	31
2018	129	81	35	19
2017	175	111	70	36
2016	126	82	42	21
2015	109	82	32	24
2014	97	86	49	14
2013	120	62	43	15
2012	71	48	31	12
2011	99	66	31	7
2010	96	70	21	5

2009	203	126	66	11
2008	319	156	157	26
2007	336	130	185	29
2006	516	188	308	22
2005	643	180	441	22
2004	617	174	418	25
2003	789	277	439	73
2002	863	335	506	22
2001	1,085	846	231	8
2000	520	406	107	7

Admissions to Care

- Of the 98 children placed in care in 2021, 72% (71) were male and 28% (27) were female. Children and young people aged 15-17 years accounted for 92% (90) of children placed in care in 2021. All, but two of the children were 13+ years.
- The majority (54; 55%) of children placed in care in 2021 were placed in general residential care (Figure 47).

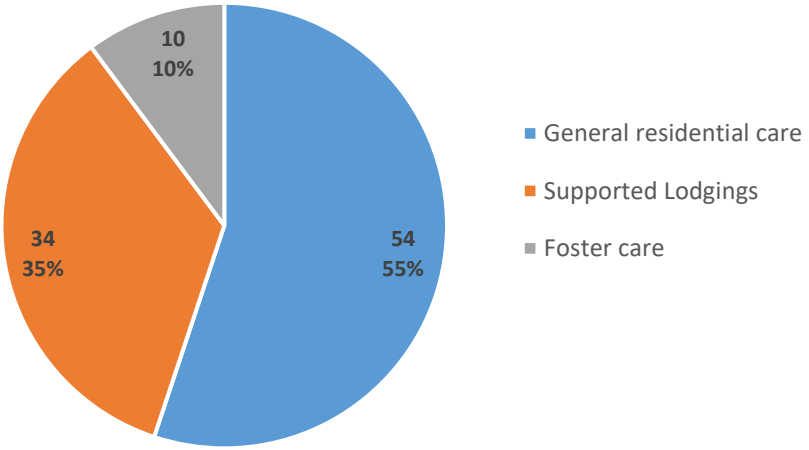


Figure 47: Breakdown of admissions to care, by placement type, 2021

- All of the children were placed in care because of welfare concerns and all were placed on a voluntary basis.

Children in Care

- At the end of 2021, there were 86 children in care, 22 (34%) more than 2020 (64). The majority (78%; 67) of these children were male, 22% (19) were female. All but four of the children in care were in the 15-17 years age bracket, with the highest number (40; 47%) aged 17 years, followed by 16 years (29; 34%) and 15 years (13; 15%).
- The primary reason for being in care was reported as welfare concerns of all 86 children concerned.

- Half (46; 53%) of the children in care were in general residential care, with the next highest number in supported lodgings (30; 35%) (Figure 48).

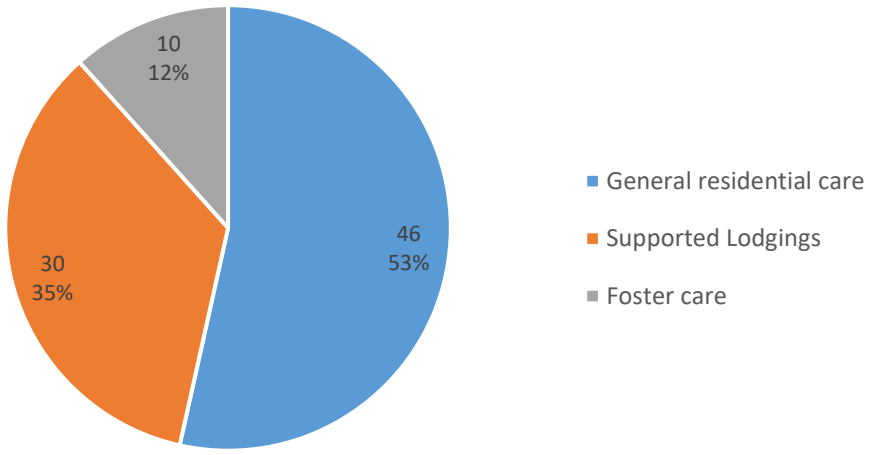


Figure 48: Breakdown of children in care by placement type, 2021

- 44% (38) of the children in care (86) were in placements with private providers, the majority (63%; 24) of whom were in residential care.
- 52% (45) of children were in care under a voluntary arrangement. The remaining 48% (41) were in care under an order of the court, of which 59% (24) were in care under a care order and 41% (17) were in care under an interim care order.
- The majority of children in care (69%; 59) were in care for less than 1 year. No child was in care for greater than 5 years.
- All of the children in care had an up-to-date care plan at the end of 2021 and all but four had an allocated social worker.

Aftercare

- At the end of 2021, there were 118 young people in receipt of aftercare services, 10 more than 2020 (108).
- Of the 118 young people in receipt of aftercare services, the majority (67%; 79) were 18 – 20 years inclusive (Figure 49). A further 28 (24%) were 21-22 years while the remaining 11 were less than 18 years.
- The majority of the young people in receipt of aftercare services were male (79%; 93); 21% (25) were female.
- Of the 79 young people aged 18-20 years, almost all (95%; 75) were in education / training, while 93% (26/28) of the 21 -22 years cohort were in education / training.

- In terms of living arrangements, the majority (69%; 74) of the 18-22 years cohort (107) were in independent living. A breakdown of living arrangements is presented in the chart below (Figure 49).
- 93% (110) of young people in receipt of aftercare services at the end 2021 had an aftercare plan and all of those with an aftercare plan had an aftercare worker.

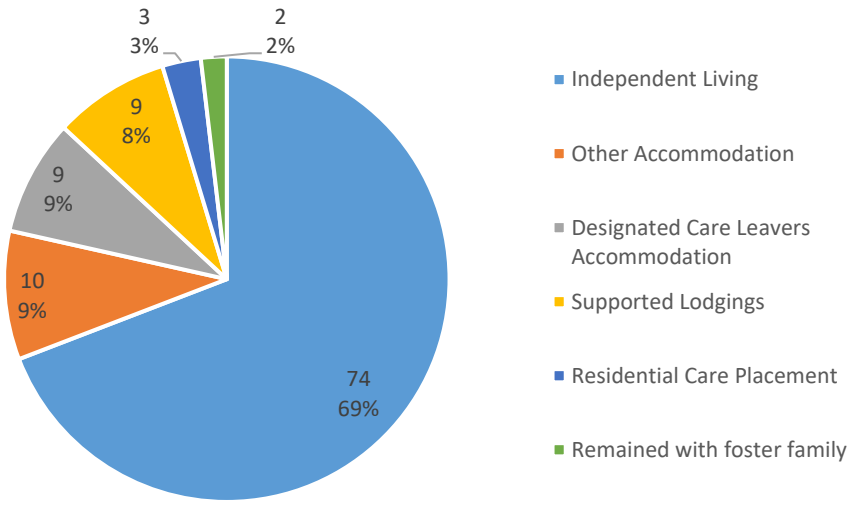


Figure 49: 18-22 years in receipt of aftercare services, by accommodation type, 2021

3.7 Adoption

Adoption is the process whereby a child becomes a member of a new family. It creates a permanent, legal relationship between the adoptive parents and the child. There are four types of adoption, three of which relate to children resident in Ireland. These are:

- Infant domestic adoption
- Step-parent / family adoption
- Fostering to adoption.

Children outside the State can be adopted through a process known as inter country adoption.

Tusla is the competent authority for assessing the eligibility and suitability of prospective adoptive parents, which they then submit to the Board of the Adoption Authority of Ireland for review and approval. Counselling of birth parents considering adoption as an option for their child and the placing of children for adoption at birth parents' consent is also a significant part of the work. The views and best interests of the child are at the centre of adoption in Ireland. In the event that the birth parent is not consenting, and it is deemed in the child's best interest to pursue the adoption then an application is made to the High Court to dispense with consent. The Agency applies to dispense with the birth mother's consent. In the case of birth fathers, this application is taken by the Adoption Authority of Ireland.

Children who are placed for adoption as infants are placed in foster care under Section 4 of the Child Care Act 1991 for the purposes of Section 6 of the Child Care Act. Upon receipt of the necessary consents and approvals children are then transitioned from foster care to their adoption placements where they are subject to post placement reporting until such time as the adoption order is granted. In certain circumstances post placement adoption reporting is required for children placed through inter-country adoption.

KEY FACTS

- 199 applications for assessment of eligibility and suitability as adoptive parent(s) received in 2021, up 26% (41) from 2020 when the fewest number (158) for the period 2017 – 2020 was reported. Fewer application is 2020 possibly due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The most common type of application received in 2021 was for step-parent adoption accounting for a third (33%; 65) of all applications received. Applications for fostering to adoption accounted for the fewest number of applications received (37; 18%) in 2021.
- 208 new children were referred for adoption (all types) in 2021, 12 more than 2020 (196). More than half (123; 59%) of all children referred for adoption in 2021 were referred for step-parent adoption.
- 170 adoption assessments were presented to local adoption committees in 2021, 15 more than 2020 (155) and the highest number for the years 2017 – 2021. The highest number of assessments presented were for step-parent adoption (67; 40%), while the fewest number were presented for domestic adoption (7%; 12).

Applications for Assessment as Adoptive Parents

- In 2021, Tusla received a total of 199 applications for assessment of eligibility and suitability as adoptive parent(s). The number of applications received was up 26% (41) on 2020 when the fewest number (158) for the period 2017 – 2020 was reported (Table 66). Although difficult to determine with certainty, it is possible that the dip in applications in 2020, was due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The most common type of application received in 2021 was for step-parent adoption accounting for a third (33%; 65) of all applications received (Figure 50). Applications for fostering to adoption accounted for the fewest number of applications received (37; 18%) in 2021.

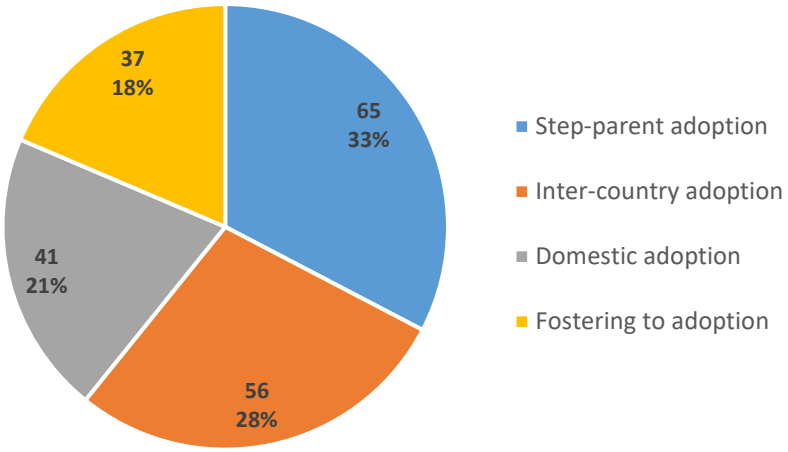


Figure 50: Applications for assessment as adoptive parent(s) by type, 2021

- Looking at the various types of applications, the data is showing an increase from 2020 for three of the four adoption types, inter-country, step-parent and domestic, and a decrease for fostering to adoption applications (Table 66).
- The largest increase was reported for inter-country adoption applications, up 22 (65%) from 2020. Fostering to adoption applications were down 27% (14) from 2020.

Table 66: Applications for assessment as adoptive parent(s) by type, 2017 – 2021

Applications	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2021 v 2020	% Δ
Inter-country adoption	92	76	50	34	**56**	22	65%
Step-parent adoption	43	68	94	48	**65**	17	35%
Domestic adoption	28	41	25	25	**41**	16	64%
Fostering to adoption	27	27	25	51	**37**	-14	-27%
Total	**190**	**212**	**194**	**158**	**199**	**41**	26%

Children Referred for Adoption

- A total of 208 new children were referred for adoption (all types) in 2021, 12 more than 2020 (196) (Table 67). More than half (123; 59%) of all children referred for adoption in 2021 were referred for step-parent adoption (Figure 51). This was followed by fostering to adoption accounting for 32% (67) of referrals and then domestic adoption accounting for about one in ten referrals (9%; 18).

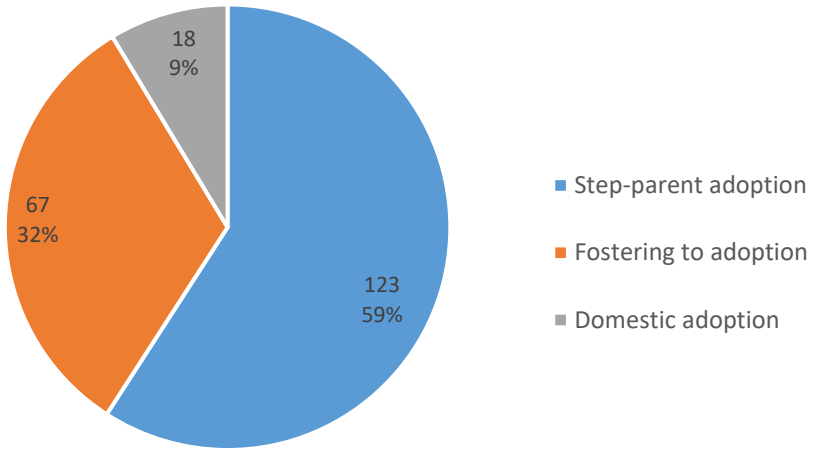


Figure 51: Children referred for adoption by type, 2021

- The number children referred for step-parent adoption was up 26% (25) on 2020, while the number of children referred for fostering to adoption was down 12% (9) and the number of children referred for domestic adoption was down 18% (4) (Table 67).
- There number of children referred for domestic adoption has remained relatively consistent over the five years 2017 to 2021.

Table 67: Children referred for adoption by type, 2017 – 2021

Referrals	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2021 v 2020	% Δ
Step-parent adoption	79	136	109	98	**123**	25	26%
Fostering to adoption	76	45	48	76	**67**	-9	-12%
Domestic adoption	22	16	22	22	**18**	-4	-18%
Total	**177**	**197**	**179**	**196**	**208**	12	6%

Adoption Assessments

- A total of 170 adoption assessments were presented to local adoption committees in 2021, 15 more than 2020 (155) and the highest number for the years 2017 - 2021 (Table 68). The local adoption committees make a recommendation to the Adoption Authority of Ireland.
- The highest number of assessments presented were for step-parent adoption (67; 40%), while the fewest number were presented for domestic adoption (7%; 12) (Figure 52 and Table 68).

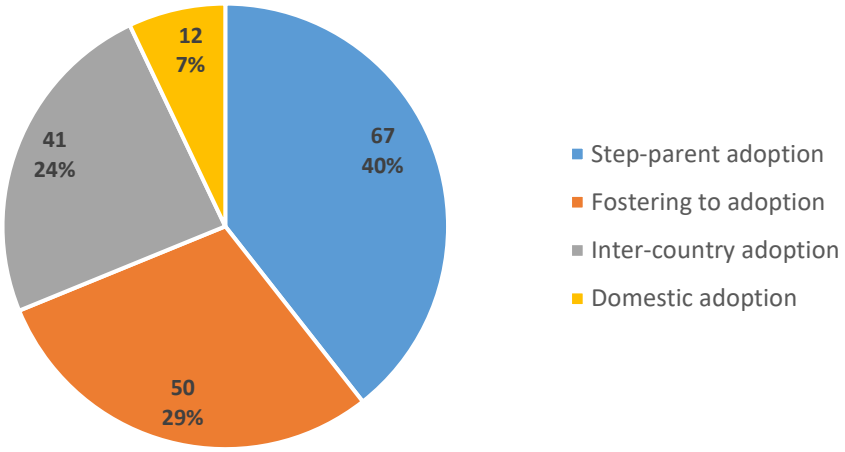


Figure 52: Number of assessments presented to local adoption committees by type, 2021

Table 68: Assessments presented to local adoption committees, 2017 - 2021

Assessments	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2021 v 2020	% Δ
Inter-country adoption	71	52	46	37	**41**	4	11%
Step-parent adoption	42	45	56	66	**67**	1	2%
Domestic adoption	20	22	25	22	**12**	-10	-45%
Fostering to adoption	19	32	25	30	**50**	20	67%
Total	**152**	**151**	**152**	**155**	**170**	**15**	10%

Post-Adoption Service

- Children who have been adopted can be referred to the Adoption Service for a post adoption service. Services provided include, post placement reports, social work support and sign posting to other services. In 2021, 34 adopted children were the subject of a 1st post placement report.
- Tusla also commissions therapeutic services for adopted children and their parents through Barnardos. In 2021, a total of 121 new families were referred to the Barnardos Post Adoption Service. The 121 families comprised 105 children and 192 parents. Some 104 families were open to the service at the end of 2021. The majority of new families referred (95; 79%) self-referred, while the remaining (26; 21%) were referred by a professional. Inter-country adoption was the most common type of adoption (110; 91%) for new families referred. A total of 29 families were on a waiting list for a service at the end of 2021.

4.0 FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES

The Child Care Act 1991, requires Tusla, when promoting the welfare of children who do not receive adequate care and protection, to pay due regard to the principle that in general it is in the best interest of the child to be brought up in his/her own family. Therefore, unless this puts the child at risk, Tusla seeks to address problems within the family in the first instance. The Act places a general obligation on Tusla to provide family support services.

Family Support Services is an umbrella term covering a broad range of interventions provided to children and families usually in their own homes and communities. The primary focus is on early intervention and prevention. The services provided vary along a number of dimensions according to their target group *(such as mothers, fathers, toddlers, teenagers, etc.)*, professional background of service provider *(e.g. family worker, social worker, childcare worker, youth and community worker, public health nurses, psychologist, etc.*), orientation of service provider *(e.g. therapeutic, child development, community development, youth work, etc.)*, problem addressed *(e.g. parenting problems, family conflict, child neglect, educational underachievement, etc.)*, programme of activities (*e.g. home visits, pre-school facility, youth club, parenting course, etc.*) and service setting *(e.g. home-based, clinic-based or community-based)*.

In addition to services provided directly by Tusla, a wide range of private and voluntary agencies are commissioned and funded by Tusla to provide services on its behalf on a local, regional and national basis. This is in accordance with the provisions of Sections 56 - 59 of the Child and Family Agency Act 2013. In 2021 services commissioned under Sections 56 - 59 received funding of €141.390 million.

Family Support Services aim to prevent risks to children and young people arising or escalating through building sustainable services within Tusla and partner organisations to perform preventative and early intervention work. It addresses Tusla's statutory requirement under the Child and Family Agency Act to provide 'preventative family support services aimed at promoting the welfare of children'. The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth continues to support this work as central to realising the potential of prevention and early intervention for children, young people and their families.

4.1 Referrals to Family Support Services

KEY FACTS

- 32,473 children were referred to family support services in 2021, with 17,075 children in receipt of family support services at year end (based on a response rate of 80%).
- The number children referred to family support services equates to about 3% of children living in Ireland and ranges from <1% to 10.5% across the 17 Tusla areas.
- The most common source of referral was Tusla social workers accounting for more than a quarter (28%; 9,178) of all referrals, followed by parents / guardians (22%; 7,148), self-referrals (13%; 4,192), HSE Officers (10%; 3,269) and schools (9%; 2,772). These five sources accounted for 82% (26,559) of all referrals
- 73% (23,807) of children referred to family support services in 2021, received a service (ranges from 53% to 99% across the 17 Tusla areas).

- In 2021, at least 32,473 children were referred to family support services, with 17,075 children in receipt of family support services at year end. This data is based on data from 80% of services, hence the total number of children involved is likely to be higher and is not directly comparable with data for 2020 and previous years. The number of children referred to family support services equates to about 3% of children under 18 years (based on Census 2016 data).
- In 2020, 31,267 children (0-17 years) were referred to family support services (based on a response rate of 81%) with 17,516 children in receipt of family support services at year end.
- Referrals for Tusla's Family Support Services and services funded under Sections 56-59 of the Child and Family Agency Act 2013, are received from a wide range of external sources and inter-departmentally within Tusla. In 2021, the most common source of referral was Tusla social workers accounting for more than a quarter (28%; 9,178) of all referrals, followed by parents / guardians (22%; 7,148), self-referrals (13%; 4,192), HSE Officers (10%; 3,269) and schools (9%; 2,772). These five sources accounted for 82% (26,559) of all referrals (Figure 53).

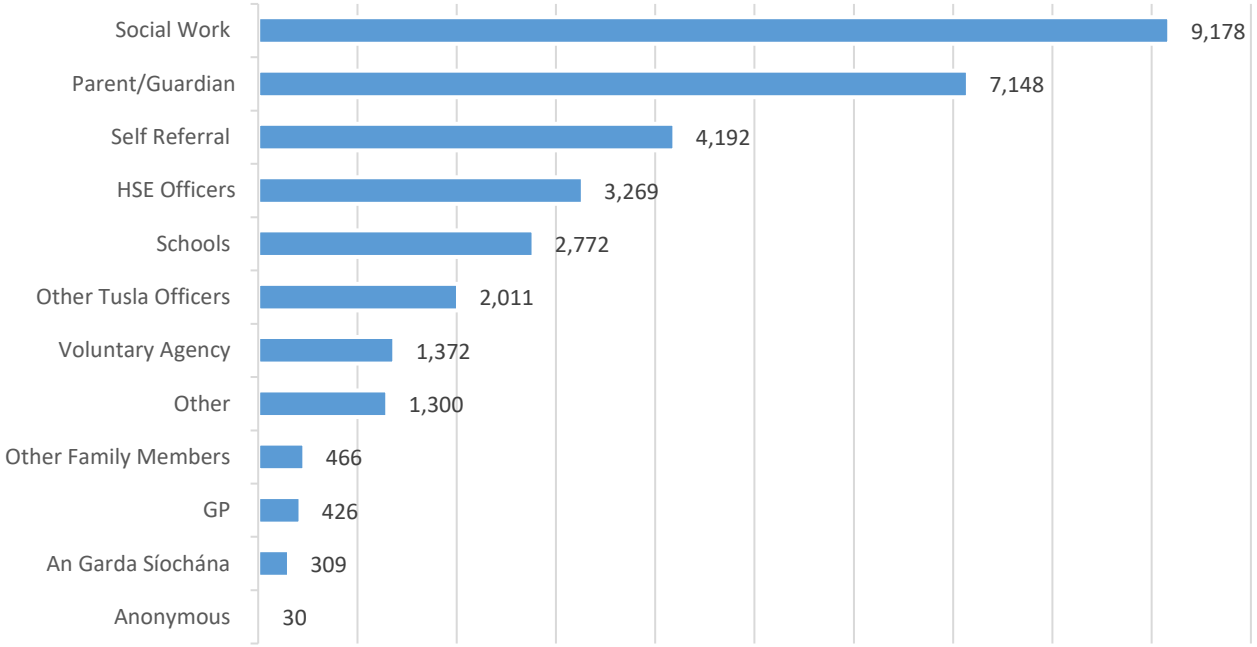


Figure 53: Children referred to Family Support Services by source, 2021

- 73% (23,807) of children referred to family support services in 2021 received a service. A service is defined as received when there is any formal intervention undertaken with a child and their family as a result of the receipt of a written referral and arising in a written service plan. The percentage who received a service is up one percentage point on 2020 (72%). However, this comparison needs to be interpreted with caution due to incomplete returns.
- Further development of the metrics to provide more granular data on the types and quantities of family support services provided is also required.

Referrals to Family Support Services by Area

- As can be seen from the table below, there is significant variation in the number and percentage of children referred to family support services across the 17 areas, most likely reflecting a

combination of factors relating to how services are funded and provided in areas. For example, in some areas similar family support services may be funded by the HSE or other sources and hence lower rates may not necessarily indicate that families are not receiving adequate supports. Family support is provided by the Departments of Health, Education and Justice. Additional data is required to examine this more fully.

- Based on the data returned, Dublin North City reported the highest number of children referred to family support services (4,725) followed by Dublin North (3,087) and Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow (3,050). Midlands reported the fewest number (416) followed by Mayo (557) and Cork (728) - the area with the highest number of children under 18 years (Table 69).
- Dublin North City reported the highest percentage of children referred (10.5%), nearly four times the national rate 2.7% and was followed by Donegal (5.8%) and Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan (5.6%). The lowest rate (0.5%) was reported by Midlands and Cork. Eleven of the 17 areas reported a rate equal to or higher than the national average of 2.7% (Table 69).
- The percentage of children referred to family support services who received a service ranged from 53% in the Midlands area to 99% in Mayo. Seven of the 17 areas reported a percentage equal to or higher than the national average of 73% (Table 69). The types of services varies depending on the needs of the child and family.

Table 69: Children referred to family support service, by area 2021 (ranked by number referred)

Area	# Referred	Population < 18 years	Rate referrals / 100 pop	# who received a service	% who received a service	Response rate*
Dublin North City	4,725	44,927	10.5%	4,077	86%	74%
Dublin North	3,087	100,654	3.1%	2,270	74%	84%
Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow	3,050	108,186	2.8%	1,863	61%	95%
Dublin South Central	2,702	65,564	4.1%	1,663	62%	94%
Donegal	2,467	42,865	5.8%	1,683	68%	92%
Galway/Roscommon	2,329	79,912	2.9%	1,653	71%	43%
Waterford/Wexford	2,,322	68,513	3.4%	1,916	83%	67%
Midwest	1990	96,266	2.1%	1,153	58%	88%
Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary	1,800	63,009	2.9%	1,436	80%	90%
Cavan/Monaghan	1,556	36,446	4.3%	1,494	96%	81%
Louth/Meath	1,357	93,093	1.5%	890	66%	81%
Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan	,1311	23,554	5.6%	,1204	92%	100%
Kerry	1,054	34,527	3.1%	666	63%	28%
Dublin South East/Wicklow	1,022	86,810	1.2%	617	60%	93%
Cork	728	134,015	0.5%	453	62%	100%
Mayo	557	31,968	1.7%	549	99%	59%
Midlands	416	80,193	0.5%	220	53%	100%
Total	**32,473**	**1,190,502**	**2.7%**	**23,807**	**73%**	**80%**

*Response rate is based on the average of the rates reported for the two data returns (data reported bi-annually). #Response rate reported for Kerry is based on the rate for one data return.

4.2 MEITHEAL

Tusla has developed a national practice model referred to as Meitheal[33] for children and families with additional needs who require multi-agency intervention, but who do not meet the threshold for referral to the Social Work Department under Children First. It is one part of the family support system of services for children and families that is all about child and family well-being and improving outcomes. Included in this system is the Parenting Support Strategy 2022 - 2027. The Parenting Support Strategy is about supporting parents within their communities to be the best parents they can be. The Parenting Support Strategy promotes positive parenting and key messages for supporting parenting including parenting24seven.

The way Meitheal works is a lead practitioner identifies a child's and their family's needs and strengths and then brings together a 'team around the child'. The team deliver preventative support that is properly planned, is focused on the child's developmental needs, is documented and evaluated. The child and their family are fully involved and participate in this process. It results in a more timely response to family needs to prevent problems from getting worse which may require more specialised support from social workers. The implementation of Meitheal is supported by the development of Child and Family Support Networks (CFSN).

There are three stages to the Meitheal process as follows:

Stage 1: Preparation – Consider whether a Meitheal is necessary; Introduce Meitheal Model to the family; Pre-Meitheal checks with CFSN co-ordinator

Stage 2: Discussion – Identification of strengths and needs; Consider appropriate response

Stage 3: Delivery – Plan and deliver support; Monitor and review progress; Ending and close

KEY FACTS

- 2,373 Meitheal processes were requested in 2021, 86 (4%) more than 2020 (2,287) and the highest number for the five years 2017 – 2021.
- 67% (1,584) of Meitheal processes requested in 2021, were requested either by the family themselves, or directly by a practitioner; 21% (488) of Meitheal processes requested in 2021 were diversions from social work and 13% (301) of Meitheal processes requested in 2021 were initiated following step-down from social work.
- 86% (2,041) of Meitheal processes requested in 2021 proceeded to Stage 2 (discussion stage). The Meitheal is considered to be initiated at this point.
- 1,596 Meitheal processes reached completion of stage 2 (discussion stage) in 2021 and of these 46% (741) proceeded to delivery, 3% (42) were referred to Tusla social work services, 34% (543) were referred "to a single agency response", 7% (108) were closed, while the remaining 10% (162) requests were categorised as "other".
- 1,580 Meitheal processes were closed in 2021. Of these 24% (386) were closed following submission of the request form (end of stage 1); 39% (617) were closed following completion of the

[33] Meitheal is an old Irish term that describes how neighbours would come together to assist in the saving of crops or other tasks.

strengths and needs form (stage 2); 11% (171) were closed following commencement of Meitheal support meetings (stage 3); 26% (406) were closed post-delivery (end of process).

- 122 Child and Family Support Networks operating at the end of 2021, one more than 2020 (121).

Meitheal Requests

- In 2021, some 2,373 Meitheal processes were requested, 86 (4%) more than 2020 (2,287) and the highest number for the five years 2017 – 2021 (Table 70). The fewer number of requests received in 2020, is most likely due to the Covid-19 pandemic and associated restrictions making it difficult for professionals and children and families to meet and participate in the process.

Table 70: Number of Meitheal requests, by Year, 2017 -2021

Year	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2021 v 2020	%Δ
# requests	1,409	1,734	2,330	2,287	2,373	86	4%

- The most common pathway into Meitheal is direct or self-initiated, where a request is made by a practitioner or by a family themselves. In 2021, these requests accounted for 67% (1,584) of all requests, up from 65% in 2020 (Table 71).
- A further 21% (488) of requests were cases that were diverted by child protection and welfare social work teams, a decrease of three percentage points on 2020 (24%). In these situations, social workers are satisfied that there are no child protection concerns, but that there are unmet needs, which can potentially be addressed through the Meitheal process (Table 71).
- The remaining 13% (301) of requests were cases that were stepped down by child protection and welfare social work teams, and up three percentage points on 2020 (10%). Step-down occurs when child protection concerns have been dealt with by child protection and welfare social workers, but where social workers feel that further support would be beneficial as the family transition out of the system, or where there are still some unmet welfare needs.

Table 71: Pathways into Meitheal, 2020 - 2021

Pathway	# 2020	% Total	# 2021	% Total	2021 v 2020	%Δ
Direct Access	1,494	65%	1,584	67%	90	6%
SW Diversion	556	24%	488	21%	-68	-12%
Social Work-Step Down	237	10%	301	13%	64	27%
Total	**2,287**	**100%**	**2,373**	**100%**	86	4%

Meitheal Requests by Area

- As can be seen from the table below (Table 72), the number of processes requested varies across the 17 Tusla areas. In 2021, the number of requests ranged from 46 (Mayo) to 429 (Dublin North) (Table 72). Seven areas reported fewer than 100 requests, six areas reported between 100 and 200 requests, while the remaining four areas reported in excess of 200 requests.

- Eight areas reported more requests in 2021 than 2020, with the largest increases reported by Dublin North (up 99; 30%), Louth/Meath (up 97; 262%) and Cork (up 44; 22%).
- Of the eight areas that reported a decrease, the largest decrease was reported by Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary (down 84; 41%) followed by Cavan/Monaghan (down 58; 27%) and Midlands (down 43; 46%). The remaining area (Sligo/Leitrim/West Cava) reported no change.

Table 72: Meitheal processes requested by access pathway and area, 2017 - 2021

Area	# 2017	# 2018	# 2019	# 2020	# 2021	2021 v 2020	% Δ
Dublin South Central	35	18	43	**76**	**73**	-3	-4%
Dublin South East/Wicklow	66	55	73	**58**	**88**	30	52%
Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow	74	79	134	**122**	**105**	-17	-14%
Midlands	36	39	84	**93**	**50**	-43	-46%
Dublin North City	79	98	104	**99**	**65**	-34	-34%
Dublin North	135	480	565	**330**	**429**	99	30%
Louth/Meath	31	56	77	**37**	**134**	97	262%
Cavan/Monaghan	28	30	111	**214**	**156**	-58	-27%
Cork	18	38	289	**198**	**242**	44	22%
Kerry	25	47	89	**262**	**293**	31	12%
Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary	433	170	153	**204**	**120**	-84	-41%
Waterford/Wexford	178	113	179	**232**	**203**	-29	-13%
Midwest	53	88	92	**111**	**114**	3	3%
Galway/Roscommon	96	312	147	**106**	**146**	40	38%
Mayo	56	39	54	**54**	**46**	-8	-15%
Donegal	21	52	94	**39**	**57**	18	46%
Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan	45	20	42	**52**	**52**	0	0%
Total	**1409**	**1734**	**2,330**	**2,287**	**2,373**	**86**	**4%**

- Looking across the areas the pathways into Meitheal also vary considerably across the 17 areas (Table 73). The percentage of direct or self-initiated requests ranged from 57% (Louth/Meath) to 94% (Midlands). Eleven of the 17 areas reported a percentage equal to or higher than the national average of 67%.
- The percentage of Meitheal requests that were diverted from social work ranged from 4% (Midwest) to 43% (Louth/Meath) (Table 73). Six of the 17 areas reported a percentage equal to or higher than the national average of 21%.
- Similarly, the percentage of requests that were stepped down from social work ranged from 0% (Midlands and Louth/Meath) to 33% (Galway/Roscommon) (Table 73). Seven of the 17 areas reported a percentage equal to or higher than the national average of 13%.

Table 73: Breakdown of pathways into Meitheal by area, 2021

Area	# Direct Access	% Direct Access	# SW Diversion	% SW Diversion	# SW Step-Down	% SW Step-Down	# Requests
Dublin South Central	55	75%	4	5%	14	19%	**73**
Dublin South East/Wicklow	55	63%	22	25%	11	13%	**88**
Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow	78	74%	20	19%	7	7%	**105**
Midlands	47	94%	3	6%	0	0%	**50**
Dublin North City	54	83%	5	8%	6	9%	**65**
Dublin North	286	67%	61	14%	82	19%	**429**
Louth/Meath	77	57%	57	43%	0	0%	**134**
Cavan/Monaghan	108	69%	31	20%	17	11%	**156**
Cork	140	58%	60	25%	42	17%	**242**
Kerry	170	58%	92	31%	31	11%	**293**
Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary	73	61%	45	38%	2	2%	**120**
Waterford/Wexford	139	68%	60	30%	4	2%	**203**
Midwest	91	80%	4	4%	19	17%	**114**
Galway/Roscommon	89	61%	9	6%	48	33%	**146**
Mayo	36	78%	5	11%	5	11%	**46**
Donegal	47	82%	6	11%	4	7%	**57**
Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan	39	75%	4	8%	9	17%	**52**
Total	**1,584**	**67%**	**488**	**21%**	**301**	**13%**	**2,373**

- Of the number of Meitheal requests received in 2021, 86% (2,041) proceeded to Stage 2 (discussion stage). The Meitheal is considered to be initiated at this point. The Meitheal request form has been completed and a check has been undertaken to ensure that the child who is subject to the request is not currently in receipt of a service from the Tusla Social Work Department and the lead practitioner is advised to proceed to the discussion stage of the Meitheal process.
- 1,596 Meitheal processes reached completion of stage 2 (discussion stage) in 2021. At this point the Strengths and Needs Record Form is signed and dated and next steps are clearly outlined.
    - Of these 46% (741) proceeded to delivery. This is where the lead practitioner and parent(s) decide in partnership that it is necessary to plan, deliver and review support using Stage 3 (Delivery) of the Meitheal Process. The decision to proceed is explicitly recorded on the Meitheal Strengths and Needs Record Form. The delivery stage may or may not involve multiple agencies.
    - 3% (42) were referred to Tusla social work services. This is where a member of the Meitheal deems it appropriate under Children First for the involvement of the Child and Family Agency Social Work Department and accordingly a standard report is made to the Social Work Department.
    - 34% (543) were referred "to a single agency response". This where the lead practitioner and parent(s) decide in partnership that the child's needs can be sufficiently met through receiving service(s) from one particular agency specifically.

- 7% (108) were closed. This is where the lead practitioner and parent(s) decide in partnership to close the Meitheal process after the discussion stage.
- The remaining 162 (10%) requests were categorised as "other".

- 1,580 Meitheal processes were closed in 2021.
  - Of these 24% (386) were closed following submission of the request form (end of stage 1).
  - 39% (617) were closed following completion of the strengths and needs form (stage 2).
  - 11% (171) were closed following commencement of Meitheal support meetings (stage 3).
  - 26% (406) were closed post-delivery (end of process).

4.3 Child and Family Support Networks

- There were 122 Child and Family Support Networks (CFSN) operating at the end of 2021, one more than at the end of 2020 (121). A further 15 were planned / at pre-planning stage (Table 74).
- CFSNs are collaborative networks of community, voluntary and statutory providers intended to improve access to support services for children and their families. These partnership-based networks are open to any service that has an input into families' lives, including Tusla staff as well as other statutory organisations and community and voluntary agencies. The model's goals are to work with families to ensure that there is 'No Wrong Door'[34] and that services are available to support them as locally as possible. Members' roles include supporting the implementation of Meitheal by agreeing to act as lead practitioners or participating in a process in other ways, and working in a collaborative way with other agencies in their network.
- Galway/Roscommon reports the highest number (12) of CFSNs followed by Midwest and Cork with both areas reporting 11 CFSNs. Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan reports the fewest number (3) followed by Dublin North and Mayo with both area reporting four CFSNs.

Table 74: Number of CFSN by area, December 2021

Area	# CFSN Operating
Dublin South Central	7
Dublin South East/Wicklow	7
Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow	10
Midlands	6
Dublin North City	6
Dublin North	4
Louth/Meath	5
Cavan/Monaghan	8
Cork	11
Kerry	8
Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary	7
Waterford/Wexford	8
Midwest	11

[34] This is based on the idea that service providers are able to direct families to the appropriate agency even if they or the sector they operate in do not offer that service themselves ('No Wrong Door', 2014).

Galway/Roscommon	12
Mayo	4
Donegal	5
Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan	3
Total	**122**

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