



An Ghníomhaireacht um
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency

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

2023



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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
CN/MN	Cavan/Monaghan
CPC	Child Protection Conference
CPNS	Child Protection Notification System
CPW	Child Protection and Welfare
CSO	Central Statistics Office
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
NOHS	National Out of Hours Service
FSS	Family Support Services
FWC	Family Welfare Conference
GY/RN	Galway/Roscommon
HIQA	Health Information Quality Authority
ICO	Interim Care Order
LH/MH	Louth/Meath
NCCIS	National Child Care Information System
NSDF	National Service Delivery Framework
SCO	Special Care Order
SCSIP	Separated Children Seeking International Protection
SofS	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	<p>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.</p> <p>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]</p>
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	Separated children seeking international protection are defined as children under eighteen years of age who are outside their country of origin, who may be in need of

	international protection and are separated from their parents or their legal/customary care giver.
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	<p>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).</p> <p>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.</p>

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.

8 August 2024

Final Version

SUMMARY FINDINGS 2023

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 2023. 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

- ✚ 91,924 referrals received by Child Protection and Welfare Services in 2023¹, 9,069 (11%) more than 2022 (82,855), 18,855 (26%) more than 2021 (73,069) and 22,212 (32%) more than 2020 (69,712).
- ✚ The number of referrals for 2023 (91,924) equates to about 1,770 referrals per week, or eight referrals for every hundred children living in Ireland (Census 2022). *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.*
- ✚ 21% (18,597)² of referrals received in 2023 were re-referrals. A re-referral is defined as a referral on a child who was previously open to social work, but whose referral was closed within 12 months prior to receipt of the re-referral.
- ✚ The most common source of referrals in 2023 was members of An Garda Síochána (AGS), accounting for 33% (30,666) of referrals in 2023, far exceeding any other source.
- ✚ The top five sources of referrals in 2023 (gardaí, social workers, teachers, safe-guarding officers and social care workers) accounted for 71% (65,602) of referrals.
- ✚ 59.5% (54,721) of referrals received in 2023 were for welfare concerns, 38% (34,928) 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, while the report type was not available for the remaining 2.5% (2,275) of referrals.
- ✚ The most common type of child protection concern reported in 2023 was emotional abuse, accounting for 45.5% (15,908) of all child protection referrals (34,928). Neglect was the least common type of child protection concern reported, accounting for 14.8% (5,178) of referrals. A similar pattern to previous years.

¹ Based on data extracted quarterly in arrears from Tusla Case Management (TCM) system

² Based on data extracted monthly from TCM

- ✚ 82% (28,659/34,928) of referrals for child protection concerns received in 2023 were mandated reports (i.e., child protection concerns at or above a defined threshold determined by the mandated reporter), 5,588 (24%) more than 2022 (23,071).
- ✚ Just over half (52%; 47,760) of referrals received in 2023 were closed to social work following screening. Of these, 37% (17,637) were closed with no further action required, while a further 50% (24,115) were closed as assessment/safety planning was already ongoing for these cases.
- ✚ 28% (25,771) of referrals moved to the next stage of the referral process — the preliminary enquiry (PE) stage. These are referrals deemed to require a social work response following screening. The remaining referrals (20%; 18,393) were at the screening stage (awaiting closure/preliminary enquiry) when the data was extracted for reporting (data extracted quarterly in arrears).
- ✚ Of the referrals where the preliminary enquiry was completed (25,274), 31% (7,943) required an initial assessment. The remaining referrals (69%; 17,331) were closed to social work following the preliminary enquiry.
- ✚ 46.4% (1,938) of referrals where the initial assessment was completed were closed to social work after the initial assessment, 49.5% (2,069) required a child protection/safety planning response while the remaining 4.1% (173) required admission to care.

Cases Open to Social Work

- ✚ 22,082 cases open to social work at the end of 2023, a similar number to 2022 (22,033). Equates to less than 2% of the general child population in receipt of social work services from Tusla for child protection and welfare concerns.
- ✚ 76% (16,751) of cases open to social work at the end of 2023 were allocated to a social worker, up from 72% at the end of 2022.
- ✚ 5,331 (24%) cases awaiting allocation to a social worker at the end of 2023, 782 (13%) fewer than 2022 when a high of 6,113 was reported.
- ✚ 56% (2,996) of cases awaiting allocation to a social worker at the end of 2023 were being progressed by dedicated duty teams or rotating social workers on a duty roster.
- ✚ 448 (8%) cases awaiting allocation to a social worker at the end of 2023 were categorised as high priority, up from 391 (6%) at the end of 2022.
- ✚ 61% (3,261) of cases awaiting allocation at the end of 2023 were waiting three months or less, down from 68% (4,131) at the end of 2022. The remaining 39% (2,070) of cases were waiting longer than three months, up from 32% (1,982) at the end of 2022.
- ✚ 6 areas accounted for 68% (3,606) of cases awaiting allocation at the end of 2023 as follows: Dublin South Central (1,067), Cork (746), Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow (549), Dublin North City (448), Louth/Meath (401) and Midwest (395).
- ✚ 12 of the 17 areas had fewer cases awaiting allocation at the end of 2023 than at the end of 2022. The largest decreases were reported by Dublin North (down 339), Waterford/Wexford (down 320), Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow (down 252) and Donegal (down 162).

Children Subject to a Child Protection Plan

- ✚ 962 children “active” on the CPNS at the end of 2023, 117 (14%) more than 2022 (845) when the fewest number for all years 2015–2022 was reported.
- ✚ The number of children “active” on the CPNS equates to about eight children per 10,000 of the 0–17 years population.
- ✚ 35% (335) of children “active” at the end of 2022 were under 5 years, the highest percentage of all age groups. Ten percent (97) of those “active” were 15–17 years.
- ✚ Children under five years are more heavily represented on the CPNS (35%) than the general population (24%) while the older ages account for a smaller proportion of those on the CPNS (10%) than the general population (17%).
- ✚ Neglect continues to be the most common concern for children “active” on the CPNS (64%; 611). Neglect and emotional abuse combined accounted for 91% (878) of cases “active” at the end of 2023.
- ✚ More than half (53%; 512) of children “active” on the CPNS at the end of 2023 were “active” for no longer than six months, while 83% (796) were “active” for no longer than 12 months. Eight percent (73) of children were “active” for more than 18 months.
- ✚ The number of children “active” for more than 18 months is up 12 (20%) on 2022 (61) and down 6 (8%) on 2021 (79).

National Out of Hours Service

Data only available for the first six months of 2023. This service transitioned to the Tusla Case Management (TCM) system in the latter half of 2023 and new metrics are under development.

- ✚ 2,761 referrals to Tusla National Out of Hours Service (NOHS) in the first six months of 2023. There was a total of 4,245 referrals in 2022.
- ✚ 451 children placed by the NOHS in the first six months of 2023. A total of 943 children were placed by the NOHS in 2022.

ALTERNATIVE CARE SERVICES

First-Time Admissions to Care

- ✚ 634 children came into care for the first time in 2023 across the 17 Tusla areas³, 32 (5%) fewer than 2022 (666) and the fewest number for the period 2016–2023. *Data for children admitted to care by the Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection was not available for 2023 [Refer to Section 3.8].*
- ✚ The number of children who came into care for the first time in 2023 equates to about 5 children for every 10,000 children living in Ireland. The rate ranges from about 2 per 10,000 children living in Dublin South East/Wicklow to 11 per 10,000 children living in Waterford/Wexford.

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

- ✚ The most common age of children coming into care for the first time was under one year, accounting for almost one in five children (117; 18%), followed by the younger ages of one to three years.
- ✚ The number of children coming into care for the first time increases with age for the older ages of 12 to 16 years.
- ✚ The most common reason for children coming into care for the first time in 2023 was neglect, accounting for 48% (306) of cases, while the least common reason was sexual abuse accounting for 3% (17) of cases.
- ✚ 57% (361) of children admitted to care in 2023 for the first time were admitted under an order of the court. The remaining 43% (273) of children were admitted under a voluntary arrangement.
- ✚ 85% (539) of children were placed in foster care, 3% (19) were placed in residential general care, while the remaining 12% (76) were placed in “other” care placements.

Total Admissions to Care

- ✚ 892 admissions to care across the 17 Tusla areas in 2023, 79 (10%) more than 2022 (813) and the highest number since 2017 (910). *Data for children admitted to care by the Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection was not available for 2023 [Refer to Section 3.8].*
- ✚ 29% (258) of all admissions (892) were second or subsequent admissions, up from 18% (147) in 2022.
- ✚ The most common age at admission was under one year accounting for 15% (134) of all admissions followed by 1–year (66; 7%), 15–years (66; 7%) and 16–years (60; 7%)
- ✚ The most common reason for admission to care was neglect accounting for 46% (413) of all admissions, followed by welfare concerns accounting for a further 29% (256) of admissions. Sexual abuse is the least common reason for admission to care, accounting for 2% (19) of all admissions.
- ✚ 81% (724) of admissions to care in 2023 were to foster care, 4% (40) were to residential general care and 14% (128) were to “other” care placements. Of the 724 admissions to foster care, 26% (189) were to foster care with relatives.
- ✚ 49% (434) of all admissions to care were voluntary admissions (where it was agreed with the child’s parent/guardian) and 51% (458) were on foot of an application to the court. One in five admissions to care (22%; 192) in 2023 was under an emergency care order.

Children in Care

- ✚ There were 5,615 children in the care of the State at the end of 2023. These children were reported by the 17 Tusla areas. *Data for children in care under the Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection was not available for 2023 [Refer to Section 3.8].*

- ✚ The number of children in care across the 17 Tusla areas is down 11 (<1%) from 2022 (5,626) and is the fewest number reported for the seven years 2017–2023. The number of children in care has fallen year on year over this period and is down 8% (501) overall.
- ✚ The number of children in care equates to about 5 per 1,000 children under 18 years living in Ireland (Census 2022, 1,218,567).
- ✚ The number of children in care increases with increasing age with the highest number aged 16 years (481; 9%) and the fewest number aged under one year (84; 1%).
- ✚ 90% (5,034) of children in care at the end of 2023 were in foster care and of these 29% (1,474) were in relative foster care, a similar pattern to previous years. Residential care (general and special care) makes up a relatively small (7.3%; 410), but significant number of placements within alternative care provision.
- ✚ Neglect is the most common reason for being in care, accounting for almost half 47% (2,637) of all children in care.
- ✚ 83% (4,657) of children in care at the end of 2023 were in care under an order of the court, a slight increase from 2022 (80%) and the highest percentage for all years 2019–2023. The remaining 17% (958) of children in care were in care under a voluntary arrangement.
- ✚ Just under half (47.5%; 2,667) of the children in care at the end of 2023 were in care for 5 years or less and of these one in four (24.3%; 647) was in care for less than a year. The remaining 52.5% (2,948) were in care for more than five years.
- ✚ 4.1% (231) of all children in care at the end of 2023 were in their third or greater placement within the previous 12 months, and similar to that for 2022 (4%; 226/5,626).
- ✚ 16 (0.3%) children in care at the end of 2023 were in a placement outside of Ireland, five more than 2022 (11). All but one of the children were in foster care.
- ✚ 84 children 12 years and younger were in residential placements at the end of 2023, 21 (33%) more than 2022 (63).
- ✚ 15% (828) of children in care at the end of 2023 were placed with private providers.
- ✚ Across the 17 areas there were 15 (2%) more children in care with private providers at the end of 2023 (828) than at the end of 2022 (813).
- ✚ 97% (3,605/3,725) of children in care aged 6–15 years and 93% (892/961) aged 16–17 years were in full-time education (as per their care plan) at the end of 2023²², consistent with previous years.

Discharges from Care

- ✚ 884 discharges from care in 2023 across the 17 Tusla areas, 11 (1%) more than 2022 (873) but 53 (6%) fewer than 2021 (937). *Data for children discharged from care by the Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection was not available for 2023 [Refer to Section 3.8].*
- ✚ Half (52%; 458) of all discharges were for young people turning 18 years, consistent with previous years.

- ✚ 73% (647) of discharges were from foster care, a similar breakdown to previous years and not surprising considering almost 90% of children in care are in foster care.
- ✚ 40% (350) of discharges remained with their foster family with a further 38% (336) returning to parent/s. Seven per cent (63) of discharges were to independent living/supported living.
- ✚ The majority (67%; 305) of young people discharged by virtue of turning 18 years remained with their foster family, with a further 10% (45) returning home/extended family. About one in eight (59; 13%) moved to independent living.
- ✚ 8 more admissions than discharges reported by the 17 Tusla areas for 2023.

Foster Carers

- ✚ 3,856 foster carers (statutory and non–statutory) on the panel of approved foster carers at the end of 2023, 111 (3%) fewer than 2022 (3,967) and the fewest number of the period 2015–2023.
- ✚ 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.
- ✚ 173 general and relative foster carers (statutory) approved in 2023, nine (5%) fewer than 2022 (182) and 41 private foster carers (non-statutory) approved, five (11%) fewer than 2022 (46).
- ✚ 265 general and relative foster carers (statutory) ceased fostering in 2023, eight (3%) more than 2022 (257).
- ✚ 93% (2,071) of general foster carers (statutory) had an allocated link (social) worker at the end of 2023, up from 87% at the end of 2022.
- ✚ 95% (943) of relative foster carers (statutory) had an allocated link (social) worker at the end of 2023, up from 87% at the end of 2022.
- ✚ 94% (197/210) of “unapproved” relative foster carers⁴ with a child placed for more than 12 weeks had a link (social) worker at the end of 2023, up from 91% (138/151) at the end of 2022.

Aftercare

- ✚ 523 referrals for an aftercare service in 2023, 12 (2%) more than 2022 (511).
- ✚ 2,904 young people in receipt of aftercare services, 45 (2%) fewer than 2022 (2,949)
- ✚ 75% (1,676/2,228) of the 18–22 years cohort in receipt of aftercare services at the end of 2023 were in education/training.
- ✚ Almost half (47%; 1,048/2,228) of 18–22 years cohort in receipt of aftercare services at the end of 2023, were continuing to live with their foster families, implying that they continue to experience caring relationships and stable living arrangements. A further 10% (212) had

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 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.

returned home to family, while one in five (21%; 476) had moved to independent living arrangements.

- ✚ 83% (2,423/2,904) of young people in receipt of aftercare services at the end of 2023 had an aftercare plan, with this figure rising to 96% (2,129/2,228) for the 18–22 years cohort. The overall percentage with a plan is down one percentage point from 2022 (84%; 2471/2,949).
- ✚ 90% (2,088) of those with an aftercare plan assessed as needing an aftercare worker (2,310) had an aftercare worker, up from 82% at the end of 2022 (1,933/2,354). A total of 222 young people were awaiting an aftercare worker at the end of 2023, 199 (47%) fewer than 2022 (421).

Adoption Services

- ✚ 230 applications for assessment of eligibility and suitability as adoptive parent(s) were received in 2023. At least 184 (partial figure) applications were received in 2022.
- ✚ The most common type of application received in 2023 was for step–parent adoption accounting for 39% (89) of all applications received, followed by fostering–to–adoption (60; 26%). Applications for domestic adoption accounted for the fewest number of applications received (34; 15%) in 2023.
- ✚ 225 new children were referred for adoption (all types) in 2023. At least 181 (partial figure) new children were referred for adoption in 2022.
- ✚ A total of 176 adoption assessments were presented to local adoption committees in 2023, 22 (14%) more than 2022 (154) and the highest number for all years 2017–2023. The local adoption committees make a recommendation to the Adoption Authority of Ireland.

Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection

- ✚ 530 referrals to Tusla Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection in 2023, 67 (11%) fewer than 2022 (597).
- ✚ 33% (177/530) of referrals for 2023 were for children from Ukraine. This compares to 44% (261/597) in 2022.
- ✚ 432 new children admitted to care/accommodated by the service in 2023, 154 (55%) more than 2022 (278).
- ✚ 40% (171/432) of children admitted to care/accommodated in 2023 were from Ukraine. The remaining 60% (261/432) of children were from about 30 different countries with the most common being Somalia, Afghanistan, Egypt, Algeria, Congo, Pakistan and Nigeria.
- ✚ 330 children and young people were in care/being accommodated by the service at the end of 2023, 135 (69%) more than at the end of 2022 (195).

FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES

Referrals to Family Support Services

- ✚ At least 47,260 children referred to family support services in 2023, with 19,792 children in receipt of family support services at year end (based on a response rate of 86%).

- ✚ The number children referred to family support services equates to about 4% of children living in Ireland and ranges from 1% to 17% across the 17 Tusla areas.
- ✚ In 2023, the most common source of referral was parents/guardians accounting 29% (13,657) of all referrals, followed by Tusla social workers (24%; 11,118), schools (11%; 5,413) and self-referrals (11%; 5,118). These four sources account for 75% (35,306) of all sources.
- ✚ 64% (30,092) of children referred to family support services in 2023 received a service (ranges from 34% to 96% across the 17 Tusla areas).

Meitheal

- ✚ 2,492 Meitheal processes were requested in 2023, 172 (7%) more than 2022 (2,320) and the highest number for all years 2018–2023.
- ✚ 73% (1,820) of Meitheal processes requested in 2023 were requested either by the family themselves, or directly by a practitioner; 20% (490) of Meitheal processes requested were diversions from social work and 7% (182) of Meitheal processes requested were initiated following step-down from social work.
- ✚ 84% (2,095) of Meitheal processes requested in 2023 proceeded to Stage 2 (discussion stage). The Meitheal is considered to be initiated at this point.
- ✚ 1,725 Meitheal processes reached completion of stage 2 (discussion stage) in 2023 and of these 53% (911) proceeded to delivery, 2% (38) were referred to Tusla Social Work Services, 30% (519) were referred “to a single agency response”, 6% (101) were closed, while the remaining 9% (156) requests were categorised as “other”.
- ✚ 1,473 Meitheal processes were closed in 2023. Of these, 23% (334) were closed following submission of the request form (end of stage 1); 36% (535) were closed following completion of the strengths and needs form (stage 2); 12% (177) were closed following commencement of Meitheal support meetings (stage 3); 29% (427) were closed post-delivery (end of process).

Child and Family Support Networks

- ✚ 120 Child and Family Support Networks operating at the end of 2023, no change from 2022.

SUMMARY OF KEY FIGURES

Measure	2022	2023	Δ 2023 v 2022
Child Protection & Welfare			
# Referrals to CPW Services	82,855	91,924	+ 9,069 (11%)
# Welfare Concerns	46,031 (55.6%)	54,721 (59.5%)	+ 8,690 (19%)
# Abuse/Neglect	29,596 (35.7%)	34,928 (38.0%)	+ 5,332 (18%)
# Not recorded	7,228 (8.7%)	2,275 (2.5%)	- 4,953 (68.5%)
# Cases Open to Social Work ⁵	22,033	22,082	+ 49 (<1%)
# / % Allocated	15,920 (72%)	16,751 (76%)	+ 831 (5%)
# / % Awaiting Allocation	6,113 (28%)	5,331 (24%)	- 782 (13%)
# / % High Priority Awaiting	391 (6%)	448 (8%)	+ 57 (15%)
# Children “Active” on CPNS	845	962	+ 117 (14%)
% Allocated	100%	100%	-
Alternative Care			
# First-time Admissions to Care ⁶	666	634	- 32 (5%)
% / # Admitted under Care Order	-	57% (361)	-
% / # Admitted by Voluntary Agreement	-	43% (273)	-
% / # Admitted to Foster Care	83% (556)	85% (539)	↑ 2 % points
# / % 15–17 year-olds admitted to care	132 (20%)	88 (14%)	-44 (33%)
# Total Admissions to Care ¹	813	892	+ 79 (10%)
% / # Admitted under Care Order	43% (346)	51% (458)	↑ 8 % points
% / # Admitted by Voluntary Agreement	57% (467)	49% (434)	↓ 8 % points
% / # Admitted to Foster Care	82% (669)	81% (724)	↓ 1 % points
# / % admissions for 15–17 year-olds	175 (22%)	161 (18%)	-14 (8%)
# Children in Care ¹	5,626	5,615	-11 (<1%)
% / # in Foster Care	90% (5,074)	90% (5,034)	-
% / # in Residential Care	7% (389)	7% (410)	-
% / # in “Other” Care Placements	3% (163)	3% (171)	-
% / # in Care under Court Order	80% (4,480)	83% (4,657)	↑ 3 % points
% / # in Care under Voluntary Agreement	20% (1,146)	17% (958)	↓ 3 % points
% / # in care for 6+ years	52.6% (2,958)	52.5% (2,948)	-
% / # Allocated	85% (4,797)	81% (4,560)	↓ 4 % points
% 6–15 years in Education	94% (3,548)	97% (3,605)	↑ 3 % points
# Total Discharges from Care ¹	873	884	+11 (1%)
# / % discharged – turned 18 years	425 (49%)	458 (52%)	↑ 3 % points
# / % aged out remaining with carers	65% (277)	67% (305)	↑ 2 % points

⁵ 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).

⁶ Figure is for the 17 Tusla areas. Children under the Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection not included.

Measure	2022	2023	Δ 2023 v 2022
# Foster Carers on the Panel	3,967	3,854	-113 (3%)
# General Foster Carers on panel (statutory)	2,329 (59%)	2,227 (58%)	-102 (4%)
# Relative Foster Carers on panel (statutory)	1,039 (26%)	996 (26%)	-43 (4%)
# Private Foster Carers on panel (non-statutory)	599 (15%)	631 (16%)	32 (5%)
# Foster Carers (statutory) Approved	182	173	-9 (5%)
# Foster Carers (statutory) who Ceased	257	267	+7 (3%)
% General Foster Carers (statutory) with Link Worker	87%	93%	↑ 6 % points
% Relative Foster Carers (statutory) with Link Worker	87%	95%	↑ 8 % points
# Young People in Receipt of Aftercare	2,949	2,904	-45 (2%)
#18–22 years in Receipt of Aftercare	2,254 (76%)	2,228 (77%)	-26 (1%)
# <18 years in Receipt of Aftercare	695 (24%)	676 (23%)	-19 (3%)
% 18–22 years in Education / Training	74%	75%	↑ 1 % point
% in Receipt of Aftercare with Aftercare Plan	84% (2,471)	83% (2,423)	↓ 1 % point
% in Receipt of Aftercare with Aftercare Worker ⁷	82% (2,354)	90% (2,088)	↑ 8 % points
# Referrals to Service for SCSIP⁸	597	530	-67 (11%)
# “new” children admitted to care / accommodated	278	432	+154 (55%)
# Children in care / accommodated year end	195	330	+135 (69%)
Family Support Services			
# Children referred to family support services (FSS)	40,510⁹	47,260¹⁰	+6,750 (17%)
# Children in receipt of FSS year end	18,768 ⁵	19,792 ⁶	+1,024 (5%)
% of children referred who received a service	66% (26,792)	64% (30,092)	↓ 2 % points
# Meitheal processes requested	2,320	2,492	172 (7%)
# Meitheal processes requested–direct access	1,566 (70%) ¹¹	1,820 (73%)	↑ 3 % points
# Meitheal processes requested–social work diversion	476 (21%) ⁷	490 (20%)	↓ 1 % point
# Meitheal processes requested–social work step–down	210 (9%) ⁷	182 (7%)	↓ 2 % points
% Meitheal processes that proceeded to Stage 2 ¹²	79% (1,837)	84% (2,095)	↑ 5 % points

⁷ Number with an aftercare worker is based on the number with an aftercare plan assessed as needing an aftercare worker.

⁸ SCSIP: Separated Children Seeking International Protection

⁹ 2022 response rate 84%.

¹⁰ 2023 response rate 86%

¹¹ Access pathway not available for 68 records for 2022

¹² The Meitheal is considered to be initiated at this point (discussion stage).

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 Child Protection and Welfare Services, including services for children being looked after by the State are delivered across 17 geographical areas, configured into six regions¹³ (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

¹³ 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 2023, Tusla had a budgetary allocation of €1,034.3¹⁴ million and had 5,019 staff (whole-time equivalents) on its payroll¹⁵. Social workers are the largest category of staff employed by the Agency, accounting for 32% (1,611.57) of total staff (whole-time equivalents), followed by social care staff accounting for a further 26% (1,322.68) (Figure 2). Management (Grade VIII+) comprises 6% (292.39) of the total workforce.

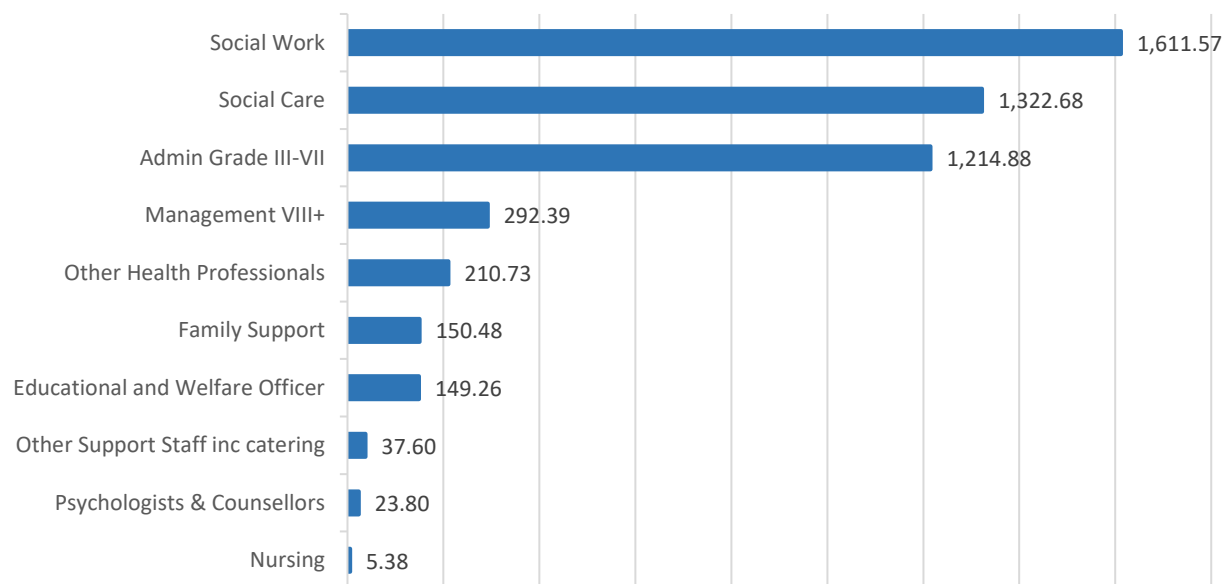


Figure 2: Breakdown of Tusla staff (whole time equivalents) by category at year end 2023

Service delivery in Tusla is guided by the Agency's Response Pathways (Figure 3). 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 who 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.

¹⁴ Net Non-Capital Determination

¹⁵ Figure 31 December 2023 (HR Employment Monitoring Report, December 2023)

Our Response Pathways

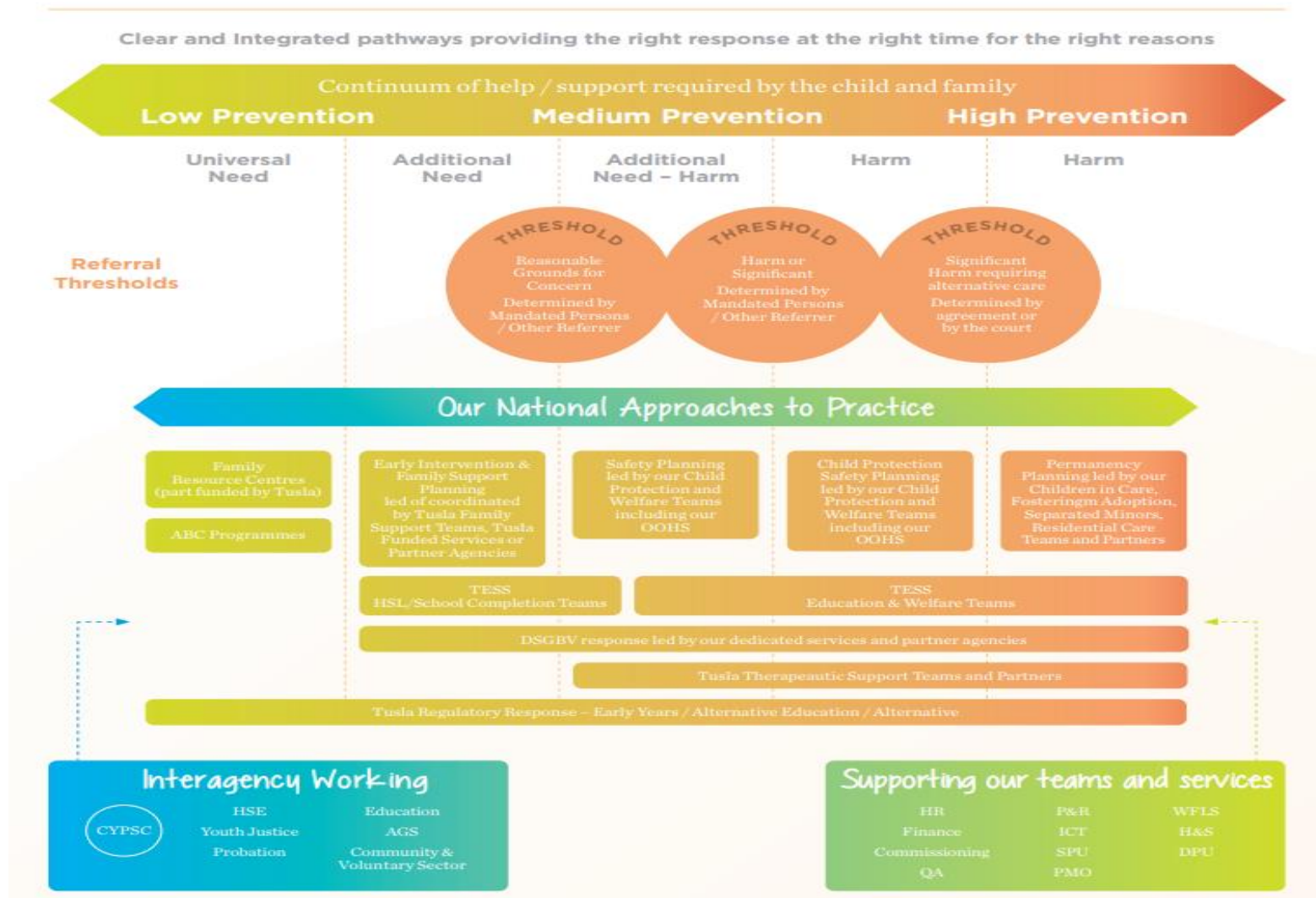


Figure 3: Tusla Response Pathways

1.1 Purpose and Scope

This report presents data and information on Tulsa's Child Protection and Welfare Services including children looked after by the State and children referred to family support services for the year 2023. It is submitted in fulfillment 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., Tulsa Education Support Services; Regulatory Services including the Early Years Inspectorate; Adoption Information and Tracing Services) 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 Tulsa'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 and adoption.

Chapter 4 presents data on family support services including children referred 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 family, and/or refer the child(ren) 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 2023

- ✚ 91,924 referrals received by Child Protection and Welfare Services in 2023¹⁶, 9,069 (11%) more than 2022 (82,855), 18,855 (26%) more than 2021 (73,069) and 22,212 (32%) more than 2020 (69,712).
- ✚ The number of referrals for 2023 (91,924) equates to about 1,770 referrals per week, or eight referrals for every hundred children living in Ireland (Census 2022). *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.*
- ✚ 21% (18,597)¹⁷ of referrals received in 2023 were re-referrals. A re-referral is defined as a referral on a child who was previously open to social work, but whose referral was closed within 12 months prior to receipt of the re-referral.
- ✚ The most common source of referrals in 2023 was members of An Garda Síochána (AGS), accounting for 33% (30,666) of referrals in 2023, far exceeding any other source.

¹⁶ Based on data extracted quarterly in arrears from Tusla Case Management (TCM) system

¹⁷ Based on data extracted monthly from TCM

- ✚ The top five sources of referrals in 2023 (gardaí, social workers, teachers, safe-guarding officers and social care workers) accounted for 71% (65,602) of referrals.
- ✚ 59.5% (54,721) of referrals received in 2023 were for welfare concerns, 38% (34,928) 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, while the report type was not available for the remaining 2.5% (2,275) of referrals.
- ✚ The most common type of child protection concern reported in 2023 was emotional abuse, accounting for 45.5% (15,908) of all child protection referrals (34,928). Neglect was the least common type of child protection concern reported, accounting for 14.8% (5,178) of referrals. A similar pattern to previous years.
- ✚ 82% (28,659/34,928) of referrals for child protection concerns received in 2023 were mandated reports (i.e., child protection concerns at or above a defined threshold determined by the mandated reporter), 5,588 (24%) more than 2022 (23,071).
- ✚ Just over half (52%; 47,760) of referrals received in 2023 were closed to social work following screening. Of these, 37% (17,637) were closed with no further action required, while a further 50% (24,115) were closed as assessment/safety planning was already ongoing for these cases.
- ✚ 28% (25,771) of referrals moved to the next stage of the referral process—the preliminary enquiry (PE) stage. These are referrals deemed to require a social work response following screening. The remaining referrals (20%; 18,393) were at the screening stage (awaiting closure/preliminary enquiry) when the data was extracted for reporting (data extracted quarterly in arrears).
- ✚ Of the referrals where the preliminary enquiry was completed (25,274), 31% (7,943) required an initial assessment. The remaining referrals (69%; 17,331) were closed to social work following the preliminary enquiry.
- ✚ 46.4% (1,938) of referrals where the initial assessment was completed were closed to social work after the initial assessment, 49.5% (2,069) required a child protection/safety planning response while the remaining 4.1% (173) required admission to care.

Number of Referrals

- In 2023, local social work departments received 91,924 referrals¹⁸, 9,069 (11%) more than 2022 (82,855), 18,855 (26%) more than 2021 (73,069) and 22,212 (32%) more than 2020 (69,712) (Figure 4). 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.

¹⁸ Based on data extracted quarterly in arrears from Tusla’s case management system (TCM)

- The number of referrals for 2023 (91,924) equates to about 1,770 referrals per week, or eight referrals for every hundred children living in Ireland (Census 2022). *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.*
- 21% (18,597)¹⁹ of referrals received in 2023 were re-referrals. A re-referral is defined as a referral on a child who was previously open to social work, but whose referral was closed within 12 months prior to receipt of the re-referral. This percentage compares favourably with that England for the year 2023 (22.4%) but needs to be interpreted in the context of slight differences in definitions.²⁰

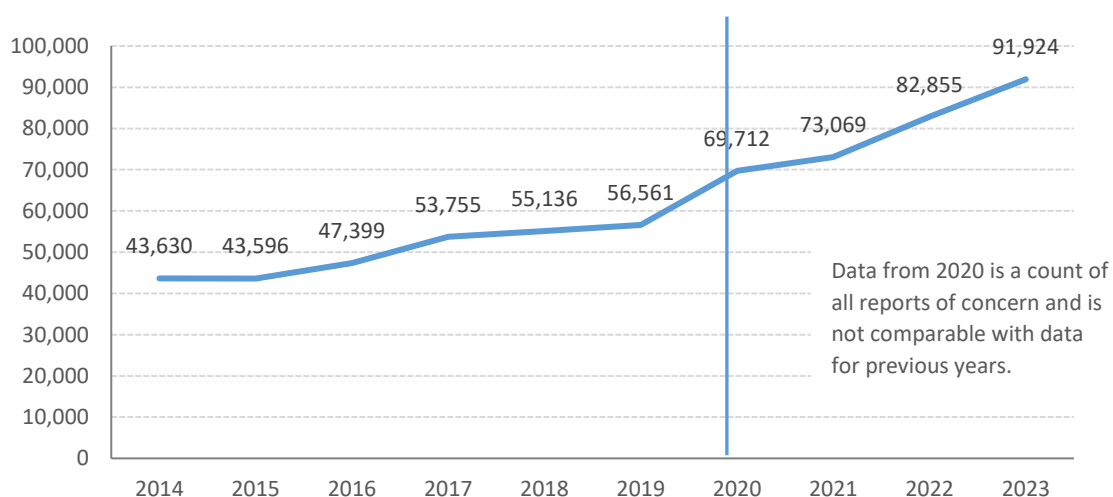


Figure 4: Referrals to Tusla's Child Protection and Welfare Services, 2014–2023

Source of Referrals

- A breakdown of the source of referrals for 2023 and comparison with 2022 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.
- As can be seen from the table, the most common source of referrals in 2023 was members of An Garda Síochána (AGS), accounting for 33% (30,666) of referrals in 2023, far exceeding any other source. The next most common sources of referrals were social workers accounting for 14% (12,565) of referrals and teachers accounting for 11% (9,910) of referrals. A similar pattern to 2022.
- The top five sources of referrals in 2023 (gardaí, social workers, teachers, safe-guarding officers and social care workers) accounted for 71% (65,602) of referrals.
- For the majority of sources, more referrals were received in 2023 than 2022. The largest increases in terms of numbers were for safeguarding officers (up 4,274; 109%) followed by social workers (up 2,460; 24%), teachers (up 1,960; 25%), members of An Garda Síochána (up 1,186; 4%) and anonymous sources (up 1,082; 39%).

¹⁹ Based on data extracted monthly from TCM

²⁰ Children in Need England_Reporting Year 2023

- Mandated persons accounted for 89% (82,020) of all sources of referrals in 2023.

Table 1: Source of referrals, 2022 and 2023 (ranked by number of referrals for 2023)

Source	2022	% 2022	2023	% 2023	2023 v 2022	% Δ
Member of An Garda Síochána	29,480	35.6%	30,666	33.4%	1,186	4.0%
Social worker	10,105	12.2%	12,565	13.7%	2,460	24.3%
Teacher	7,950	9.6%	9,910	10.8%	1,960	24.7%
A safeguarding officer	3,925	4.7%	8,199	8.9%	4,274	108.9%
Social care worker	3,787	4.6%	4,262	4.6%	475	12.5%
Anonymous	2,752	3.3%	3,834	4.2%	1,082	39.3%
Medical practitioner	2,415	2.9%	3,133	3.4%	718	29.7%
Parent/Guardian	2,560	3.1%	2,502	2.7%	-58	-2.3%
Registered nurse /midwife	1,931	2.3%	2,155	2.3%	224	11.6%
Manager of domestic violence shelter	1,932	2.3%	1,866	2.0%	-66	-3.4%
Psychotherapist / person providing counselling	1,637	2.0%	1,707	1.9%	70	4.3%
Psychologist	1,175	1.4%	1,617	1.8%	442	37.6%
Other (non-mandated person) not specified	1,517	1.8%	1,392	1.5%	-125	-8.2%
Mgr. of homeless / emergency accommodation	637	0.8%	1,331	1.4%	694	108.9%
Other family member	1,173	1.4%	1,062	1.2%	-111	-9.5%
Youth worker	775	0.9%	1,039	1.1%	264	34.1%
Mandated reporter– not specified	5,082	6.1%	778	0.8%	-4,304	-84.7%
Management of a youth work service	368	0.4%	575	0.6%	207	56.3%
Courts (Section 20 Child Care Act)	606	0.7%	422	0.5%	-184	-30.4%
Member of the public	869	1.0%	379	0.4%	-490	-56.4%
Probation officer	255	0.3%	335	0.4%	80	31.4%
Child care staff member pre-school service	265	0.3%	281	0.3%	16	6.0%
Manager of asylum seeker accommodation	128	0.2%	278	0.3%	150	117.2%
A person carrying on a pre-school service	145	0.2%	273	0.3%	128	88.3%
Occupational therapist	151	0.2%	203	0.2%	52	34.4%
An addiction counsellor	101	0.1%	189	0.2%	88	87.1%
Physiotherapist	93	0.1%	157	0.2%	64	68.8%
Self	141	0.2%	151	0.2%	10	7.1%
Speech and language therapist	129	0.2%	151	0.2%	22	17.1%
Emergency medical technician	86	0.1%	95	0.1%	9	10.5%
Guardian Ad Litem	62	0.1%	92	0.1%	30	48.4%
Other Court request	74	0.1%	81	0.1%	7	9.5%
Foster carer registered with the Agency	122	0.1%	51	0.1%	-71	-58.2%
International Social Services	339	0.4%	50	0.1%	-289	-85.3%
Institution – child detained by court order	26	<0.1%	50	0.1%	24	92.3%
Immigration Services	0	<0.1%	29	<0.1%	29	-
Manager of a language school...	23	<0.1%	25	<0.1%	2	8.7%
Member of the clergy	18	<0.1%	21	<0.1%	3	16.7%
Dentist	13	<0.1%	16	<0.1%	3	23.1%
Courts (Section 47 Child Care Act 1991)	8	<0.1%	2	<0.1%	-6	-75.0%
Total	82,855	100.0%	91,924	100.0%	9,069	10.9%

Type of Referrals

- 59.5% (54,721) of referrals received in 2023 were for welfare concerns and 38% (34,928) 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 5). The report type was not available for the remaining 2.5% (2,275) 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.

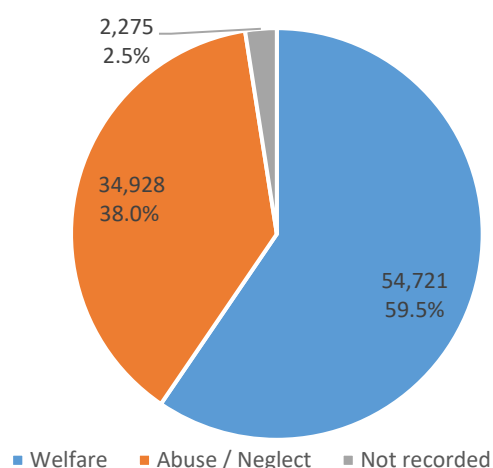


Figure 5: Referrals by primary report type, 2023

- As can be seen from Table 2 below, the higher number of welfare referrals described above is consistent with previous years. The figures also reveal a year-on-year increase in referrals for both types of concern, welfare and abuse/neglect. However, the extent of any increase needs to be considered in the context of the decrease in the number of referrals over the period where the report type was not recorded.

Table 2: Breakdown of referrals by primary report type, 2020–2023

Report Type	2020	2021	2022	2023	Δ 2023 v 2022	% Δ
Welfare	31,024 (45%)	37,758 (52%)	46,031 (56%)	54,721 (59.5%)	8,690	19%
Abuse/Neglect	22,050 (32%)	25,292 (35%)	29,596 (36%)	34,928 (38.0%)	5,332	18%
Not recorded	16,638 (24%)	10,019 (14%)	7,228 (9%)	2,275 (2.5%)	-4,953	69%
Total	69,712 (100%)	73,069 (100%)	82,855 (100%)	91,924 (100%)	9,069	10.9%

- The most common type of child protection concern reported in 2023 was emotional abuse, accounting for 45.5% (15,908) of all child protection referrals (34,928) (Figure 6). Neglect was the least common type of child protection concern reported, accounting for 14.8% (5,178) of referrals.

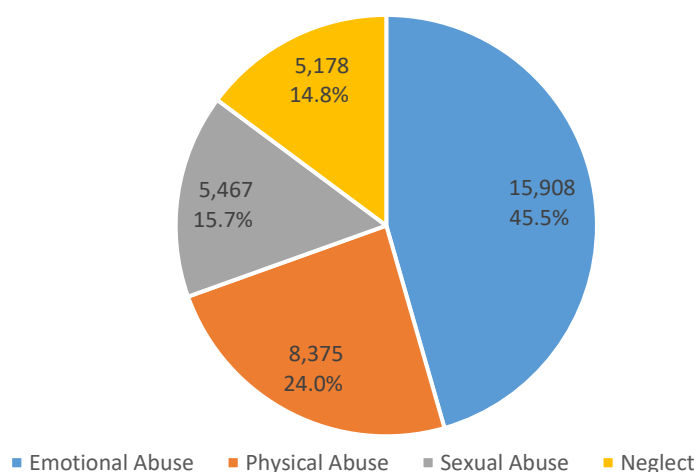


Figure 6: Breakdown of child protection referrals, 2023

- The percentage breakdown of child protection concerns for 2023 is similar to that for previous years (Table 3).

Table 3: Breakdown of child protection referrals by year, 2020–2023

Category of Abuse	2020	2021	2022	2023
Physical abuse	5,511 (25%)	6,391 (25%)	7,324 (25%)	8,375 (24%)
Emotional abuse	9,546 (43%)	10,888 (43%)	12,964 (44%)	15,908 (46%)
Sexual abuse	3,653 (17%)	4,331 (17%)	5,240 (17%)	5,467 (16%)
Neglect	3,340 (15%)	3,682 (15%)	4,068 (14%)	5,178 (15%)
Total	22,050 (100%)	25,292 (100%)	29,596 (100%)	34,928 (100%)

- A breakdown of child protection referrals by the top three sources for each type of concern reveals that teachers were the most common source of referrals of physical abuse accounting for more than one in four referrals (27%; 2,264) and more than double the next most common source, social workers (13%; 1,054) (Table 4).
- An Garda Síochána was the most common source of referrals of emotional abuse, accounting for two-thirds (67%; 10,614) of all referrals and far exceeding the next most common source, safeguarding officers (6.8%; 1,074) (Table 4).
- An Garda Síochána was also the most common source of referrals of sexual abuse and neglect (Table 4).

Table 4: Breakdown of child protection referrals by the top three sources of referrals, 2023

Abuse	Source 1	Source 2	Source 3
Physical abuse	Teacher (2,264; 27.0%)	Social Worker (1,054; 12.6%)	Safeguarding Officer (998; 11.9%)
Emotional abuse	AGS (10,614; 66.7%)	Safeguarding Officer (1,074; 6.8%)	Social Worker (1,021; 6.4%)
Sexual abuse	AGS (1,435; 26.2%)	Teacher (833; 15.2%)	Social worker (721; 13.2%)
Neglect	AGS (971; 18.8%)	Social Worker (842; 16.3%)	Teacher (826; 16%)

- The figures also reveal that more than three out of four child protection referrals (76%; 10,614) from AGS were for emotional abuse (Table 5). This compares to 13% (585) for teachers and 28% (1,021) for social workers, but 66% (468) for managers of domestic violence shelters.

- The most common type of concern reported by teachers was physical abuse accounting for half (50%; 2,264) of their referrals. This compares to 7% for AGS.
- The most common type of concern reported by medical practitioners was sexual abuse accounting for 35% (404) of their referrals.
- Parents/guardians were more likely to report physical abuse accounting for 37% (285) of their referrals, followed by emotional abuse (32%; 246).
- The most common type of concern reported by persons who wished to remain anonymous was neglect (44%; 439).

Table 5: Breakdown of the top 10 sources of child protection referrals by concern type, 2023

Source /Category of Abuse	Physical	Emotional	Sexual	Neglect	Total
An Garda Siochana	917 (7%)	10,614 (76%)	1,435 (10%)	971 (7%)	13,937 (100%)
Teacher	2,264 (50%)	585 (13%)	833 (18%)	826 (18%)	4,508 (100%)
Social worker	1,054 (29%)	1,021 (28%)	721 (20%)	842 (23%)	3,638 (100%)
A safeguarding officer	998 (31%)	1,074 (33%)	512 (16%)	639 (20%)	3,223 (10%)
Social care worker	587 (39%)	365 (24%)	310 (21%)	228 (15%)	1,490 (100%)
Medical practitioner	283 (25%)	220 (19%)	404 (35%)	232 (20%)	1,139 (100%)
Anonymous	263 (27%)	230 (23%)	58 (6%)	439 (44%)	990 (100%)
Psychotherapist	276 (32%)	258 (30%)	279 (32%)	59 (7%)	872 (100%)
Parent/Guardian	285 (37%)	246 (32%)	128 (17%)	103 (14%)	762 (100%)
Mgr. Domestic Violence Shelter	191 (27%)	468 (66%)	26 (4%)	25 (4%)	710 (100%)

Distribution of Referrals by Area

- The number of referrals varies widely across Tusla's 17 operational areas and in 2023 ranged from 1,320 (1.4%) (Mayo) to 9,341 (10.2%) (Dublin North) (Table 6).
- The rate of referrals ranged from 4% of children under 18 years in Dublin South East/Wicklow to 11% of children in Midlands and Dublin North City. Cork – with the highest number of children under 18 years, ranked 4th lowest overall (out of 17) in terms of rate. Eight areas reported a rate equal to or higher than the national average of 7.5% 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. As mentioned previously, 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.

Table 6: Number and rate of referrals by area, 2023 (ranked by rate) (population Census 2022)

Area	# Referrals	# 0–17 years	Rate/100
Midlands	8,889	80,962	11.0
Dublin North City	5,446	49,682	11.0
Dublin South Central	6,895	70,259	9.8
Waterford/Wexford	6,394	69,239	9.2
Dublin North	9,341	103,508	9.0
Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow	8,873	108,927	8.1
Kerry	2,704	34,994	7.7
Louth/Meath	7,261	96,531	7.5
Mid West	7,120	96,764	7.4
Cavan/Monaghan	2,719	37,336	7.3
Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary	4,361	62,366	7.0
Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan	1,517	24,312	6.2
Donegal	2,572	42,144	6.1
Cork	8,333	136,786	6.1
Galway/Roscommon	4,552	81,799	5.6
Mayo	1,320	31,911	4.1
Dublin South East/Wicklow	3,627	91,047	4.0
Total	91,924	1,218,567	7.5

Mandated Reports

- 82% (28,659/34,928) of referrals for child protection concerns received in 2023 were mandated reports (i.e., child protection concerns at or above a defined threshold determined by the mandated reporter), 5,588 (24%) more than 2022 (23,071).
- The breakdown of mandated reports by the report type is broadly consistent with that for 2022 (Table 7) with emotional abuse accounting for the largest proportion of reports (45%) and neglect accounting for the smallest proportion (14%).
- Increases were observed across all report types from 2022 with neglect showing the largest percentage increase (43%; 1,200) followed by emotional abuse (29%; 2,877) and physical abuse (20%; 1,188).

Table 7: Mandated reports by type, 2022–2023

Category	# 2022	% Total 2022	# 2023	% Total 2023	2023 v 2022	%Δ
Physical abuse	5,811	25%	6,999	24%	1,188	20%
Emotional abuse	9,910	43%	12,787	45%	2,877	29%
Sexual abuse	4,554	20%	4,877	17%	323	7%
Neglect	2,796	12%	3,996	14%	1,200	43%
Total	23,071	100%	28,659	100%	5,588	24%

- The top five sources of mandated reports in 2023 were members of An Garda Síochána (40%; 11,424), teachers (15%; 4,260), social workers (11%; 3,263), safeguarding officers (10%; 2,967) and social care workers (5%; 1,334) (Table 8). These five sources account for 81% (23,248) of all reports received.

Table 8: Mandated reports by mandated person, 2022–2023 (ranked by number of referrals for 2023)

Source	# 2022	% Total 2022	# 2023	% Total 2023
Member of An Garda Síochána	9,786	42.4%	11,424	39.9%
Teacher	3,575	15.5%	4,260	14.9%
Social worker	2,768	12.0%	3,263	11.4%
A safeguarding officer	1,311	5.7%	2,967	10.4%
Social care worker	1,165	5.0%	1,334	4.7%
Medical practitioner	832	3.6%	1,053	3.7%
Psychotherapist or a person providing counselling	751	3.3%	834	2.9%
Psychologist	505	2.2%	658	2.3%
Manager of domestic violence shelter	717	3.1%	646	2.3%
Registered nurse /midwife	475	2.1%	559	2.0%
Youth worker	304	1.3%	421	1.5%
Manager of homeless provision / emergency accommodation	129	0.6%	228	0.8%
Person responsible for care/management youth work service	127	0.6%	204	0.7%
Child care staff member employed in a pre–school service	124	0.5%	107	0.4%
A person carrying on a pre–school service	53	0.2%	107	0.4%
Manager of asylum seeker accommodation	54	0.2%	100	0.3%
Occupational therapist	62	0.3%	85	0.3%
Probation officer	68	0.3%	73	0.3%
Physiotherapist	40	0.2%	73	0.3%
Speech and Language therapist	49	0.2%	53	0.2%
Guardian Ad Litem	36	0.2%	48	0.2%
An addiction counsellor	22	0.1%	47	0.2%
Emergency medical technician	25	0.1%	40	0.1%
Foster carer registered with the Agency	62	0.3%	27	0.1%
Director of institution, child is detained by an order of a court	9	<0.1%	21	0.1%
Manager of a language school or other recreational school	12	0.1%	11	<0.1%
Dentist	5	<0.1%	11	<0.1%
Member of the clergy	5	<0.1%	5	<0.1%
Total	23,071	100.0%	28,659	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 to practice 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(ren) 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 7 (page 37).

- Just over half (52%; 47,760) of referrals received in 2023 were closed to social work following screening. Of these, 37% (17,637) were closed with no further action required, while a further 50% (24,115) 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 9 below.

Table 9: Breakdown of the outcome of referrals closed following screening, 2023

Outcome	# Referrals	% Referrals
Closed – assessment/safety planning ongoing	24,115	50%
Closed – no further action	17,637	37%
Closed – diverted to another Agency	757	2%
Closed – diverted to Prevention, Partnership & Family Support Services	3,134	7%
Closed – “Other”/Not specified	2,117	4%
Total	47,760	100%

- 28% (25,771) of referrals moved to the next stage of the referral process – the preliminary enquiry (PE) stage. These are referrals deemed to require a social work response following screening. The remaining referrals (20%; 18,393) were at the screening stage (awaiting closure/preliminary enquiry) when the data was extracted for reporting (data extracted quarterly in arrears).
- At the time the data was extracted for reporting 98% (25,274) of preliminary enquiries were completed.
- Of the referrals where the preliminary enquiry was completed (25,274), 31% (7,943) required an initial assessment. The remaining referrals (69%; 17,331) 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 10 below.

Table 10: Breakdown of the outcome of referrals that underwent a preliminary enquiry, 2023

Outcome	# Referrals	% Referrals
Initial Assessment Required	7,943	31.4%
Closed – assessment/safety planning ongoing	1,458	5.8%
Closed – no further action	11,576	45.8%
Closed – diverted to another Agency	1,814	7.2%
Closed – diverted to Prevention, Partnership & Family Support Services	2,483	9.8%
Total	25,274	100.0%

- Comparison with previous years shows a further decrease in the percentage of referrals that required a preliminary enquiry following screening, while the percentage of referrals that required an initial assessment is similar to that for 2022 (Table 11). Further examination is required to understand the reasons for the variation. The reasons are most likely multi-faceted. However, it should be noted that the data presented is based on the status of referrals when the data is extracted from TCM (quarterly in arrears) and not all referrals would have moved through the preliminary enquiry/assessment process at the time of extraction.

Table 11: Preliminary enquiries and Initial assessments, 2020–2023

Year	# Referrals	# Requiring a PE	% Requiring PE	# Requiring IA	% Requiring IA
2023	91,924	25,771	28%	7,943	31%
2022	82,855	28,792	35%	7,571	30%
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 12).
- The percentage of referrals that moved to the preliminary enquiry stage ranged from 18% in three areas (Midlands, Dublin North City and Dublin South Central) to 48% (Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan). Ten areas reported a percentage equal to or higher than the national average of 28%

- The percentage of referrals that required an initial assessment following a preliminary enquiry ranged from 16% (Kerry) to 47% (Dublin South Central and Dublin North City).
- Further examination is required to understand the varying patterns across the Tusla areas.

Table 12: Breakdown of referrals requiring a preliminary enquiry and initial assessment, by area 2023

Area	# Referrals	# Req. PE	% Req. PE	# Req. IA	% Req. IA*
Dublin South Central	6,895	1,271	18%	580	47%
Dublin South East/Wicklow	3,627	1,364	38%	452	34%
Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow	8,873	1,950	22%	666	35%
Midlands	8,889	1,598	18%	445	28%
Dublin North City	5,446	989	18%	436	47%
Dublin North	9,341	1,891	20%	843	46%
Louth/Meath	7,261	2,875	40%	528	18%
Cavan/Monaghan	2,719	1,066	39%	251	24%
Cork	8,333	2,376	29%	805	35%
Kerry	2,704	1,277	47%	202	16%
Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary	4,361	1,600	37%	378	24%
Waterford/Wexford	6,394	1,648	26%	588	36%
Midwest	7,120	2,175	31%	674	31%
Galway/Roscommon	4,552	2,033	45%	542	27%
Mayo	1,320	382	29%	154	40%
Donegal	2,572	541	21%	176	33%
Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan	1,517	735	48%	223	31%
Total	91,924	25,771	28%	7,943	31%

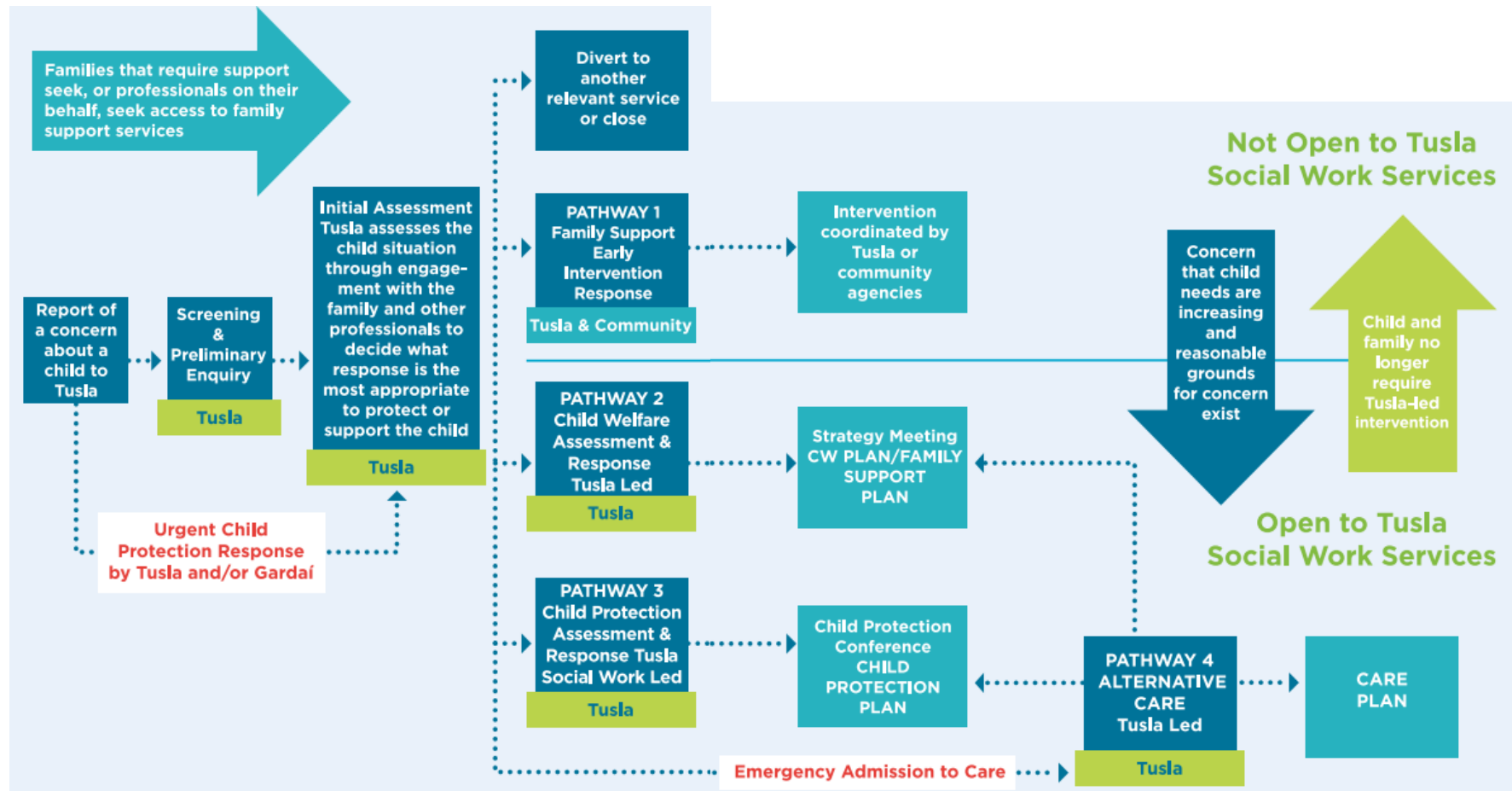
*Note: the percentage of referrals that required an initial assessment is based on preliminary enquiries completed and not preliminary enquiries required following screening.

- At the time the data was extracted for reporting, 53% (4,180) 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.
- 46.4% (1,938) of referrals where the initial assessment was completed were closed to social work after the initial assessment, 49.5% (2,069) required a child protection/safety planning response while the remaining 4.1% (173) required admission to care. A breakdown of the outcome of initial assessments for all referrals is presented in Table 13 below.

Table 13: Outcome of initial assessments for referrals received in 2023

Outcome	# Referrals	% Total
Closed—No Further Action (NFA)	1,141	27%
Closed—Divert to Another Agency	361	9%
Closed—Divert to Prevention Partnership Family Support (PPFS)	307	7%
Closed—No Further Action (NFA)—Assessment/Safety Planning ongoing	129	3%
Safety Planning	1,378	33%
Child Protection/Child Protection Conference Safety Planning	691	17%
Admission to Care	173	4%
Total	4,180	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 7: 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 social worker. It is Tusla policy that all children requiring social work intervention are allocated a social worker. All cases awaiting allocation are reviewed and monitored on an ongoing basis and prioritised accordingly.

KEY FACTS 2023

- ✚ 22,082 cases open to social work at the end of 2023, a similar number to 2022 (22,033). Equates to less than 2% of the general child population in receipt of social work services from Tusla for child protection and welfare concerns.
- ✚ 76% (16,751) of cases open to social work at the end of 2023 were allocated to a social worker, up from 72% at the end of 2022.
- ✚ 5,331 (24%) cases were awaiting allocation to a social worker at the end of 2023, 782 (13%) fewer than 2022 when a high of 6,113 was reported.
- ✚ 56% (2,996) of cases awaiting allocation to a social worker at the end of 2023 were being progressed by dedicated duty teams or rotating social workers on a duty roster.
- ✚ 448 (8%) cases awaiting allocation to a social worker at the end of 2023 were categorised as high priority, up from 391 (6%) at the end of 2022.
- ✚ 61% (3,261) of cases awaiting allocation at the end of 2023 were waiting three months or less, down from 68% (4,131) at the end of 2022. The remaining 39% (2,070) of cases were waiting longer than three months, up from 32% (1,982) at the end of 2022.
- ✚ 6 areas accounted for 68% (3,606) of cases awaiting allocation at the end of 2023 as follows: Dublin South Central (1,067), Cork (746), Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow (549), Dublin North City (448), Louth/Meath (401) and Midwest (395).
- ✚ 12 of the 17 areas had fewer cases awaiting allocation at the end of 2023 than at the end of 2022. The largest decreases were reported by Dublin North (down 339), Waterford/Wexford (down 320), Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow (down 252) and Donegal (down 162).

Open Cases

- At the end of 2023, there were 22,082 cases open to social work. As open cases are recorded on a per child basis, we can say that at the end of 2023, 1.8% of the general child population (Census 2022) were in receipt of a social work service from Tusla for child protection and welfare concerns.
- The number of cases open to social work at the end of 2023 (22,082) was similar to that for 2022 (22,033) (Table 14).

Allocated Cases

- 76% (16,751) of cases open to social work at the end of 2023 were allocated to a social worker, up four percentage points from the 72% reported at the end of 2022 (Table 14).

Cases Awaiting Allocation

- The remaining 24% (5,331) of cases were awaiting allocation to a social worker, down from 28% (6,113) at the end of 2022 (Table 14).
- The number of cases awaiting allocation at the end of 2023 (5,331) was down 782 (13%) from 2022 when a high of 6,113 was reported; the first decrease after two consecutive increases (Table 14 and Figure 8).
- 56% (2,996) of cases awaiting allocation to a social worker at the end of 2023 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 social worker are reviewed and monitored on an ongoing basis and prioritised accordingly. Children at immediate risk get an immediate response.

Table 14: Cases open to social work, 2014–2023

Year	# Open cases	# Allocated	% Allocated	# Unallocated	% Unallocated
2023	22,082	16,751	76%	5,331	24%
2022	22,033	15,920	72%	6,113	28%
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%

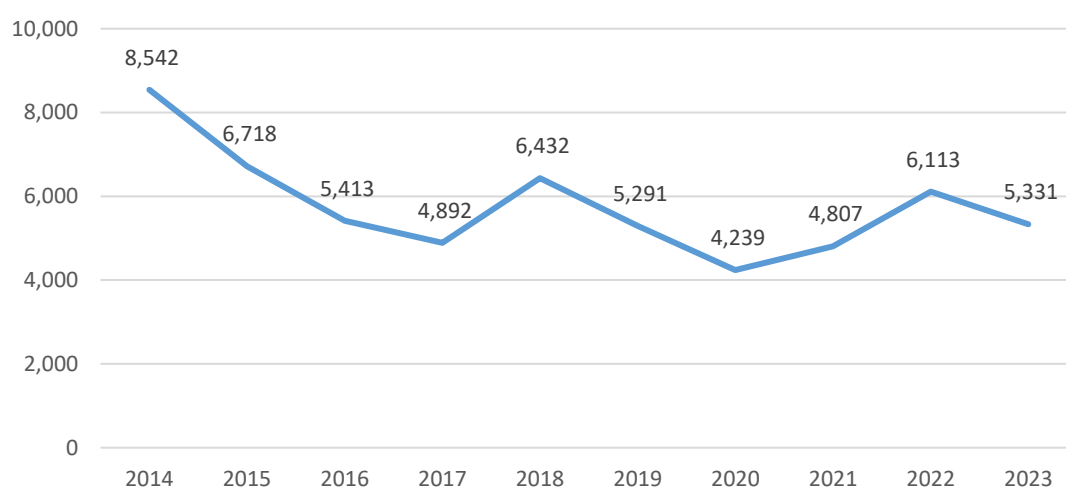


Figure 8: Number of open cases awaiting allocation, 2014–2023

Cases Awaiting Allocation by Priority Level

- 8% (448) of cases awaiting allocation at the end of 2023 were categorised as high priority, up from 6% (391) at the end of 2022 (Table 15).
- 56% (2,990) of cases awaiting allocation at the end of 2023 were categorised as medium priority, 32% (1,728) were categorised as low priority while the remaining 3% (165) were awaiting categorisation at the time the data was extracted for reporting (Table 15).
- The decrease in the percentage of high priority cases in recent years reflects the Agency's ongoing focus on the management of high priority cases.

Table 15: Cases awaiting allocation by priority level, 2014–2023

Year	# High	# Medium	# Low	# Awaiting Cat	Total
2023	448 (8%)	2,990 (56%)	1,728 (32%)	165 (3%)	5,331
2022	391 (6%)	3,213 (53%)	2,509 (41%)	-	6,113
2021	436 (9%)	2,546 (53%)	1,825 (38%)	-	4,807
2020 ²¹	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

- 61% (3,261) of cases awaiting allocation at the end of 2023 were waiting three months or less, down from 68% (4,131) at the end of 2022. The remaining 39% (2,070) of cases were waiting longer than three months, up from 32% (1,982) at the end of 2022 (Table 16).

Table 16: Cases awaiting allocation by length of time waiting 2018–2023

Year	< 1 month	1-3 months	>3 months	Total
2023	1,683 (32%)	1,578 (30%)	2,070 (39%)	5,331
2022	2,221 (36%)	1,910 (31%)	1,982 (32%)	6,113
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

²¹ Revised guidance on categorisation of cases was issued by Tusla in 2020. The revised guidance is based on Signs of Safety – Tusla's national approach to practice and replaces the guidance issued in 2012.

Cases Awaiting Allocation by Tusla Area

- At the end of 2023, the number of cases open across the 17 areas ranged from 334 (1.5% of open cases) in Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan to 2,630 (11.9% of open cases) in Cork (Table 17).
- In eight of the 17 areas, at least 80% of open cases were allocated to a social worker. Rates reported by Dublin South Central (52%), Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow (65%) and Dublin South East/Wicklow (69%) were lower than all other areas (Table 17).
- The areas with the highest numbers of cases awaiting allocation at the end of 2023 were Dublin South Central (1,067), Cork (746), Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow (549), Dublin North City (448), Louth/Meath (401) and Midwest (395). These six areas accounted for 68% (3,606) of all cases awaiting allocation.

Table 17: Area breakdown of open cases by allocation status, 2023 (ranked by # awaiting allocation)

Area	# Open	# Allocated	% Allocated	# Awaiting	% Awaiting
Dublin South Central	2,208	1,141	52%	1067	48%
Cork	2,630	1,884	72%	746	28%
Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow	1,573	1,024	65%	549	35%
Dublin North City	1,839	1,391	76%	448	24%
Louth/Meath	1,432	1,031	72%	401	28%
Mid West	1,375	980	71%	395	29%
Waterford/Wexford	1,438	1,083	75%	355	25%
Dublin South East/Wicklow	1,039	720	69%	319	31%
Midlands	1,919	1,667	87%	252	13%
Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary	827	584	71%	243	29%
Dublin North	2,105	1,957	93%	148	7%
Cavan/Monaghan	692	550	79%	142	21%
Donegal	830	692	83%	138	17%
Galway/Roscommon	1,062	1,015	96%	47	4%
Kerry	385	346	90%	39	10%
Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan	334	301	90%	33	10%
Mayo	394	385	98%	9	2%
Total	22,082	16,751	76%	5,331	24%

- 12 of the 17 areas had fewer cases awaiting allocation at the end of 2023 than at the end of 2022 (Figure 9). The largest decreases were reported by Dublin North (down 339), Waterford/Wexford (down 320), Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow (down 252) and Donegal (down 162).
- Of the five areas that reported an increase the largest increase was reported by Midwest (up 272) followed by Dublin South Central (up 270) and Louth/Meath (up 146).

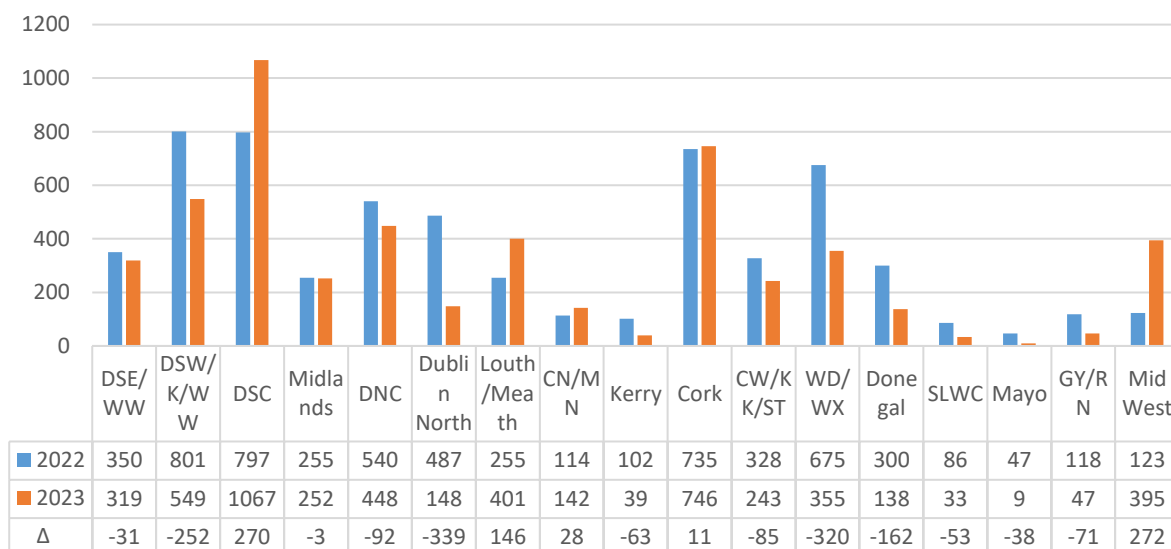


Figure 9: Area breakdown of cases awaiting allocation, 2022–2023

- The area with the highest number of high priority cases awaiting allocation at the end of 2023 was Midwest (71; 16%) followed by Midlands (63; 14%), Dublin South Central (62; 14%), Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary (53; 12%), Louth/Meath (51; 11%) and Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow (40; 9%) (Figure 10). These six areas account for 76% (340) of all high priority cases awaiting allocation (448).

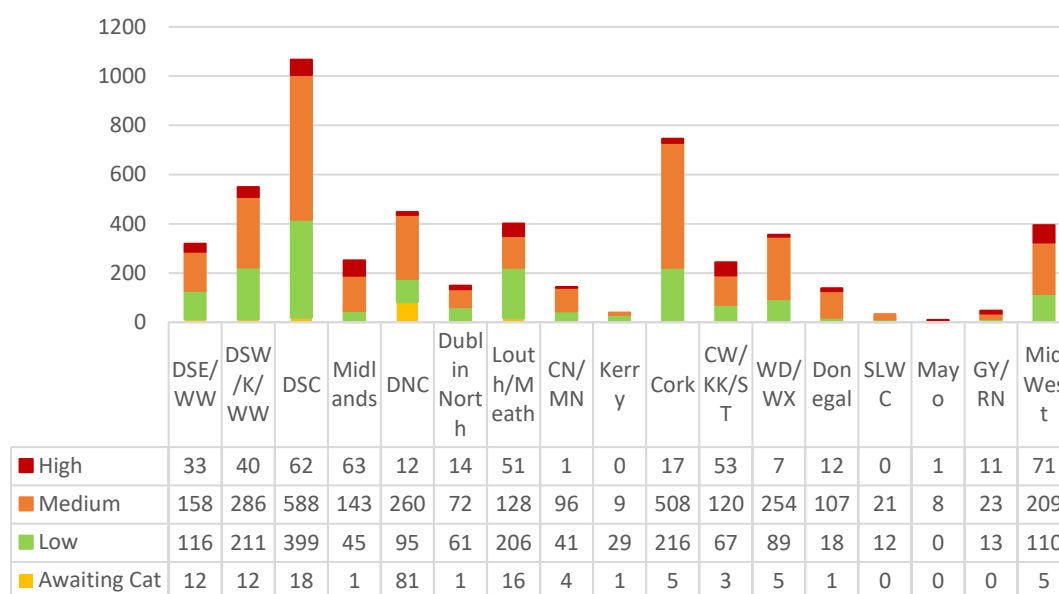


Figure 10: Area breakdown of cases awaiting allocation by priority status, 2023

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 conference²² 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)²³. 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

- ✚ 962 children “active” on the CPNS at the end of 2023, 117 (14%) more than 2022 (845) when the fewest number for all years 2015 – 2022 was reported.
- ✚ The number of children “active” on the CPNS equates to about eight children per 10,000 of the 0–17 years population.
- ✚ 35% (335) of children “active” at the end of 2022 were under 5 years, the highest percentage of all age groups. Ten percent (97) of those “active” were 15–17 years.
- ✚ Children under five years are more heavily represented on the CPNS (35%) than the general population (24%) while the older ages account for a smaller proportion of those on the CPNS (10%) than the general population (17%).
- ✚ Neglect continues to be the most common concern for children “active” on the CPNS (64%; 611). Neglect and emotional abuse combined accounted for 91% (878) of cases “active” at the end of 2023.
- ✚ More than half (53%; 512) of children “active” on the CPNS at the end of 2023 were “active” for no longer than six months, while 83% (796) were “active” for no longer than 12 months. Eight percent (73) of children were “active” for more than 18 months.
- ✚ The number of children “active” for more than 18 months is up 12 (20%) on 2022 (61) and down 6 (8%) on 2021 (79).
- ✚ Eleven of the 17 areas had more children listed as “active” at the end of 2023 than at the end of 2022, ranging from 38 to four additional children.

²² 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. If 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.

²³ 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.

Number of Children “Active” on CPNS

- 962 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 2023.
- There were 117 (14%) more children “active” on the CPNS at the end of 2023 than at the end of 2022 (845) when the fewest number for all years 2015–2022²⁴ was reported (Figure 11).

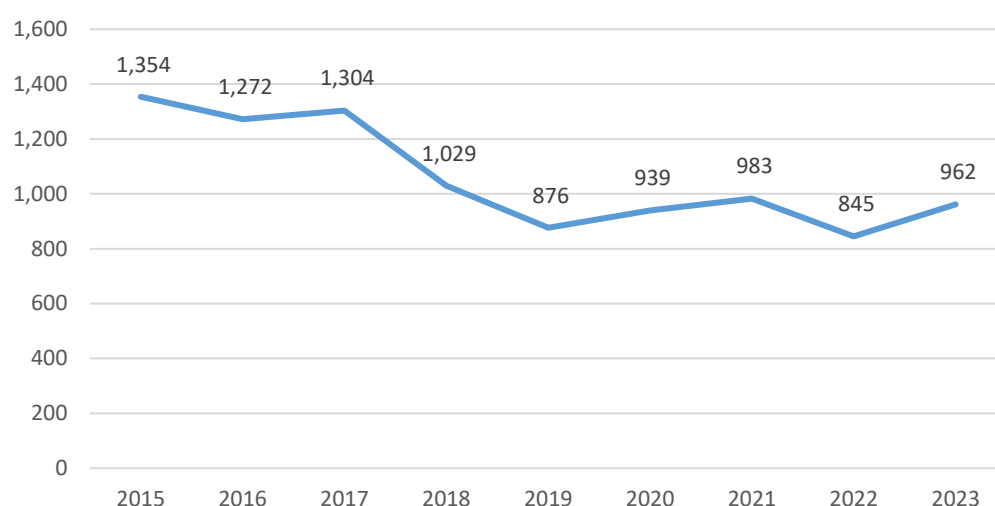


Figure 11: Number of children “active” on the CPNS, 2015–2023

- The number of children “active” (962) equates to about eight children per 10,000 of the population under 18 years (Table 18).
- The number of children “active” accounts for a small (4.4%), but significant percentage of cases open to social work (22,082).

Table 18: Number and rate of children “active” on the CPNS at year end, 2015–2023

Number / Rate	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
# “active”	1,354	1,272	1,304	1,029	876	939	983	845	962
Rate/10,000*	11.4	10.7	11	8.6	7.4	7.7	8.1	6.9	7.9

*Source CSO: Rates for 2015–2019 based on Census 2016 (1,190,502 children). Rates for 2020–2023 based on Census 2022 (1,218,567 children)

- 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 19 shows the rate of children on child protection registers or subject to child protection plans in UK countries²⁵. 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

²⁴ 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

²⁵ Data for countries can be found from the Supporting Files, Additional Tables (Table 1.16) download at the following link Children's Social Work Statistics Scotland: 2021 to 2022

the highest rate at 53 per 10,000 children. As can be seen from the table, Ireland falls well below these rates at eight per 10,000 children.

Table 19: Children on child protection registers in other jurisdictions

Country	– Rate per 10,000 children
Ireland	8 (31 December 2023)
Northern Ireland	53 (31 March 2022)
England	42 (31 March 2022)
Wales	47 (31 March 2022)
Scotland	22 (31 March 2022)

- All children “active” on the CPNS at the end of 2023 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 962 children “active” on the CPNS at the end of 2023, 51% (492) were male and 47% (451) were female which is broadly consistent with the general population (Census 2022, 51% males and 49% females); the remaining 2% (19) were in-utero (Figure 12).

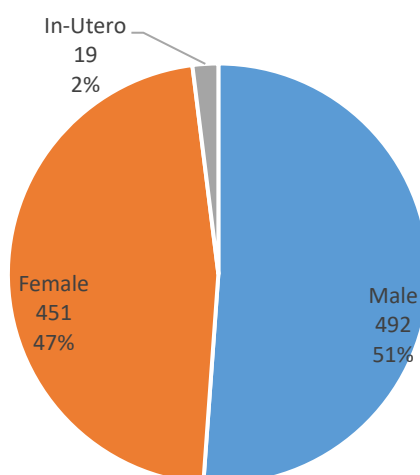


Figure 12: Number of children “active” on the CPNS at year end 2023, by gender

- 35% (335) of children “active” on the CPNS at the end of 2023 were under 5 years, the highest percentage of all age groups (Figure 13). Ten percent (97) of those “active” were 15–17 years.

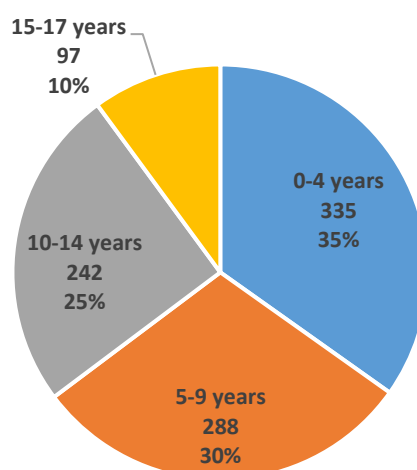


Figure 13: Number of children "active" on the CPNS at year end 2023, by age group

- These figures indicate that the 0–4 years age group is more heavily represented on the CPNS (35%) than the general population (24%) while the older ages (15–17 years) account for a smaller proportion of those on the CPNS (10%) than the general population (17%) (Table 20). 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 2023 there were more children "active" across all age groups than at the end 2022 with the largest increase observed in the 10–14 years age group (up 22%; 43).

Table 20: Breakdown of children "active" on the CPNS at year end by age group, 2021–2023

Age group	2021	2022	2023	General population	2023 v 2022
0–4 years	406 (41%)	315 (37%)	335 (35%)	295,415 (24%)	20 (6%)
5–9 years	263 (27%)	249 (29%)	288 (30%)	342,670 (28%)	39 (16%)
10–14 years	218 (22%)	199 (24%)	242 (25%)	374,202 (31%)	43 (22%)
15–17 years	96 (10%)	82 (10%)	97 (10%)	206,280 (17%)	15 (18%)
Total	983 (100%)	845 (100%)	962 (100%)	1,218,567 (100%)	117 (14%)

Source CSO: General population based on Census 2022 population (1,218,567 children under 18 years)

Reason for being "Active" on CPNS

- The most common type of abuse recorded for children "active" on the CPNS at the end of 2023 was neglect accounting for almost two-thirds all cases (64%; 611), followed by emotional abuse accounting for a further 28% (267) of cases. The least common type of abuse was sexual abuse accounting for 3% (26) of cases (Figure 14).
- Comparison with previous years shows a significant increase in the proportion of children "active" due to neglect – up nine percentage points from 2022 (55%) and ten percentage points from 2021 (54%), while the proportion of children "active" due to emotional abuse (28%) is down 10 percentage points from 2022 (38%) and nine percentage points from 2021 (37%) (Table 21). The proportions of children "active" due to physical and sexual abuse are broadly similar to previous years.

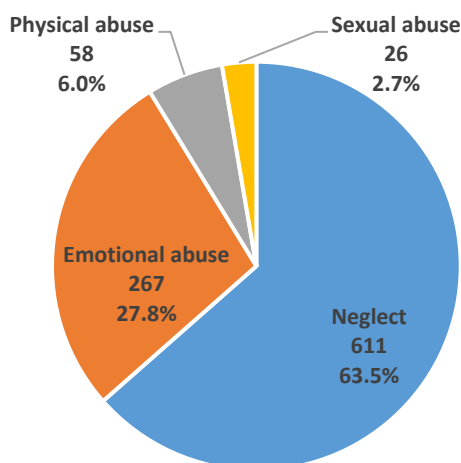


Figure 14: Type of abuse recorded for children “active” on the CPNS at year end 2023

Table 21: Type of abuse recorded for children “active” on the CPNS at year end, 2021–2023

Type of Abuse	# 2021	% 2021	# 2022	% 2022	# 2023	% 2023	2023 v 2022	% Δ
Neglect	534	54%	463	55%	611	64%	148	32%
Emotional abuse	360	37%	323	38%	267	28%	-56	-17%
Physical abuse	61	6%	36	4%	58	6%	22	61%
Sexual abuse	28	3%	23	3%	26	3%	3	13%
Total	983	100%	845	100%	962	100%	117	14%

Length of Time “Active” on CPNS

- More than half (53%; 512) of children “active” on the CPNS at the end of 2023 were “active” for no longer than six months, while 83% (796) were “active” for no longer than 12 months (Figure 15). Eight percent (73) of children were “active” for more than 18 months.

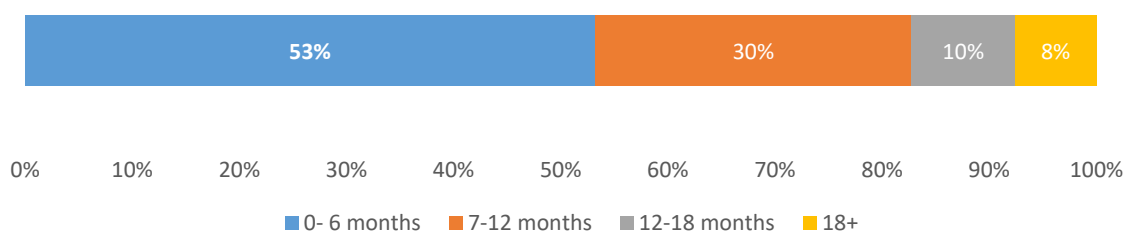


Figure 15: Percentage breakdown of children “active” at year end 2023, by length of time “active”

- The number of children “active” for more than 18 months (73) is up 12 (20%) on 2022 (61) and down 6 (8%) on 2021 (79) (Table 22).

Table 22: Children listed as "active" at year end, by length of time "active", 2021–2023

LOT active	# 2021	% 2021	# 2022	% 2022	# 2023	% 2023	2023 v 2022	% Δ
0–6 months	572	58%	479	57%	512	53%	33	7%
7–12 months	245	25%	236	28%	284	30%	48	20%
12–18 months	87	9%	69	8%	93	10%	24	35%
18+ months	79	8%	61	7%	73	8%	12	20%
Total	983	100%	845	100%	962	100%	117	14%

Children “Active” on CPNS by Area

- The number of children “active” on the CPNS at the end of 2023 in the different Tusla areas ranged from nine in Cavan/Monaghan to 116 in Cork. The corresponding rate per 10,000 children ranged from 2.4/10,000 in Cavan/Monaghan to 17.5/10,000 in Dublin North City, more than double the national rate (7.9/10,000) (Table 23).
- 7 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 the variation across the areas.

Table 23: Children “active” on the CPNS by area at year–end 2023 (ranked by rate)

Area	# Active 2023	Population*	Rate / 10,000
Dublin North City	87	49,682	17.5
Donegal	70	42,144	16.6
Sligo / Leitrim / West Cavan	26	24,312	10.7
Dublin North	110	103,508	10.6
Dublin South West / Kildare / West Wicklow	102	108,927	9.4
Carlow / Kilkenny / South Tipperary	53	62,366	8.5
Cork	116	136,786	8.5
Midwest	72	96,764	7.4
Midlands	60	80,962	7.4
Kerry	25	34,994	7.1
Dublin South Central	45	70,259	6.4
Mayo	20	31,911	6.3
Louth / Meath	57	96,531	5.9
Dublin South East / Wicklow	46	91,047	5.1
Waterford / Wexford	33	69,239	4.8
Galway / Roscommon	31	81,799	3.8
Cavan / Monaghan	9	37,336	2.4
Total	962	1,218,567	7.9

*Source CSO: Child population (0–17 years) Census 2022

- 11 of the 17 areas had more children listed as “active” at the end of 2023 than at the end of 2022 (Table 24). The largest increases (in terms of numbers) were reported by Donegal (up 38), Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow (up 28), Louth/Meath (up 26) and Cork (up 20).

- Of the six areas that reported a decrease, the largest decrease was reported by Cavan/Monaghan (down 27) followed by Waterford/Wexford (down 18) and Dublin South Central (down 14).
- 3 areas (Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow, Dublin North and Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan) reported two consecutive increases over the two-year period 2021 – 2023, while four areas (Midlands, Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary, Waterford/Wexford and Cavan/Monaghan) reported two consecutive decreases over the same period.

Table 24: Children "active" on the CPNS by area at year end, 2021–2023 (ranked by difference 2023 v 2022)

Area	# 2021	# 2022	# 2023	2023 v 2022	% Δ
Donegal	59	32	70	38	119%
Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow	69	74	102	28	38%
Louth/Meath	36	31	57	26	84%
Cork	96	96	116	20	21%
Dublin North	80	91	110	19	21%
Dublin South East/Wicklow	61	30	46	16	53%
Galway/Roscommon	42	19	31	12	63%
Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan	9	16	26	10	63%
Mayo	29	12	20	8	67%
Kerry	29	20	25	5	25%
Midwest	83	68	72	4	6%
Midlands	81	61	60	-1	-2%
Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary	77	56	53	-3	-5%
Dublin North City	83	93	87	-6	-6%
Dublin South Central	47	59	45	-14	-24%
Waterford/Wexford	63	51	33	-18	-35%
Cavan/Monaghan	39	36	9	-27	-75%
Total	983	845	962	117	14%

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.

Out-of-hours services are provided by the National Out of Hours Service (NOHS) which is based in Tusla's Offices, Brunel Building, Dublin. 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 NOHS 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

Data is only available for the first six months of 2023. This service transitioned to the Tusla Case Management (TCM) system in the latter half of 2023 and new metrics are under development.

- ✚ 2,761 referrals to Tusla–National Out of Hours Service (NOHS) in the first six months of 2023. There was a total of 4,245 referrals in 2022.
- ✚ 451 children placed by the NOHS in the first six months of 2023. A total of 943 children were placed by the NOHS in 2022.

- In the first six months of 2023, there were 2,761 referrals to Tusla–National Out of Hours Service (NOHS). There were 4,245 referrals in 2022 (Figure 16).
- The increase in referrals in recent years is attributed to an increase in referrals for unaccompanied minors from Ukraine and separated children seeking international protection.
- There were 451 children placed by the NOHS in the first six months of 2023. A total of 943 children were placed in 2022.
- The NOHS supplied 2,665 nights' accommodation in the first six months of 2023. A total of 7,577 nights' accommodation were supplied in 2022.

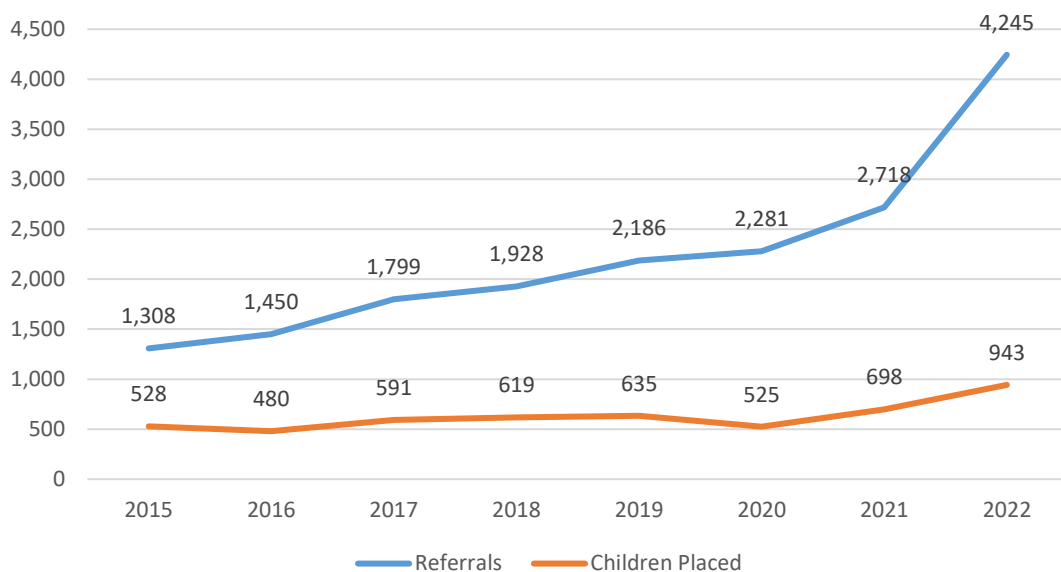


Figure 16: Referrals to Tusla–National Out of House Service & Number of Children Placed, 2015–2022

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 7 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 a 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 7 for definitions.

3.1 First-time Admissions to Care

KEY FACTS

- ✚ 634 children came into care for the first time in 2023 across the 17 Tusla areas²⁶, 32 (5%) fewer than 2022 (666) and the fewest number for the period 2016–2023.
- ✚ The number of children who came into care for the first time in 2023 equates to about 5 children for every 10,000 children living in Ireland. The rate ranges from about 2 per 10,000 children living in Dublin South East/Wicklow to 11 per 10,000 children living in Waterford/Wexford.
- ✚ The most common age of children coming into care for the first time was under one year, accounting for almost one in five children (117; 18%), followed by the younger ages of one to three years.
- ✚ The number of children coming into care for the first time increases with age for the older ages of 12 to 16 years.
- ✚ The most common reason for children coming into care for the first time in 2023 was neglect, accounting for 48% (306) of cases, while the least common reason was sexual abuse accounting for 3% (17) of cases.

²⁶ Note: these children were never in State care prior to this admission

- ✚ 57% (361) of children admitted to care in 2023 for the first time were admitted under an order of the court. The remaining 43% (273) of children were admitted under a voluntary arrangement.
- ✚ 85% (539) of children were placed in foster care, 3% (19) were placed in residential general care, while the remaining 12% (76) were placed in “other” care placements.

Number of First-Time Admissions

- In 2023, 634 children came into care for the first time across the 17 Tusla areas, representing about five children for every 10,000 under 18 years living in Ireland (Census 2022). *Data for children admitted to care by the Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection was not available for 2023 [Refer to Section 3.8].*
- The number of children admitted to care for the first time by the 17 areas, is down 32 (5%) from 2022 (666) and is the fewest number reported for the seven-year period 2016–2023 (orange line Figure 17).
- Overall, the number of children admitted to care for the first time by the 17 areas has varied little over the years 2017–2023.

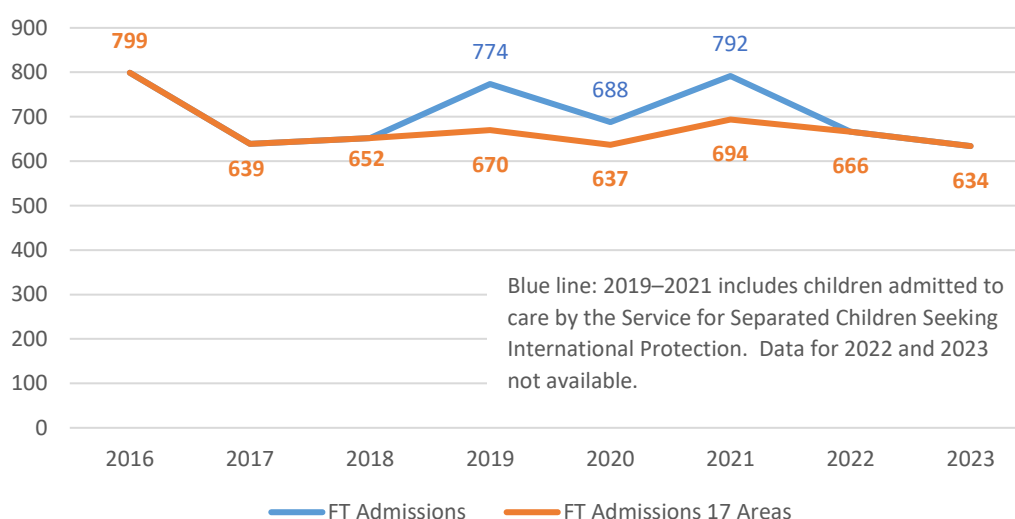


Figure 17: Number of children coming into care for the first time, 2016–2023

Age and Gender

- 51% (322) of children who came into care in 2023 for the first time were male, 49% (310) were female, a similar breakdown to the general population (Census 2022, 51% boys and 49% girls). The gender of the remaining two children was recorded as “other”.
- The most common age of children coming into care for the first time was under one year, accounting for almost one in five children (117; 18%), followed by the younger ages of one to three years (Figure 18).
- The data also shows admissions increasing with age across the older ages of 12 to 16 years (Figure 18).

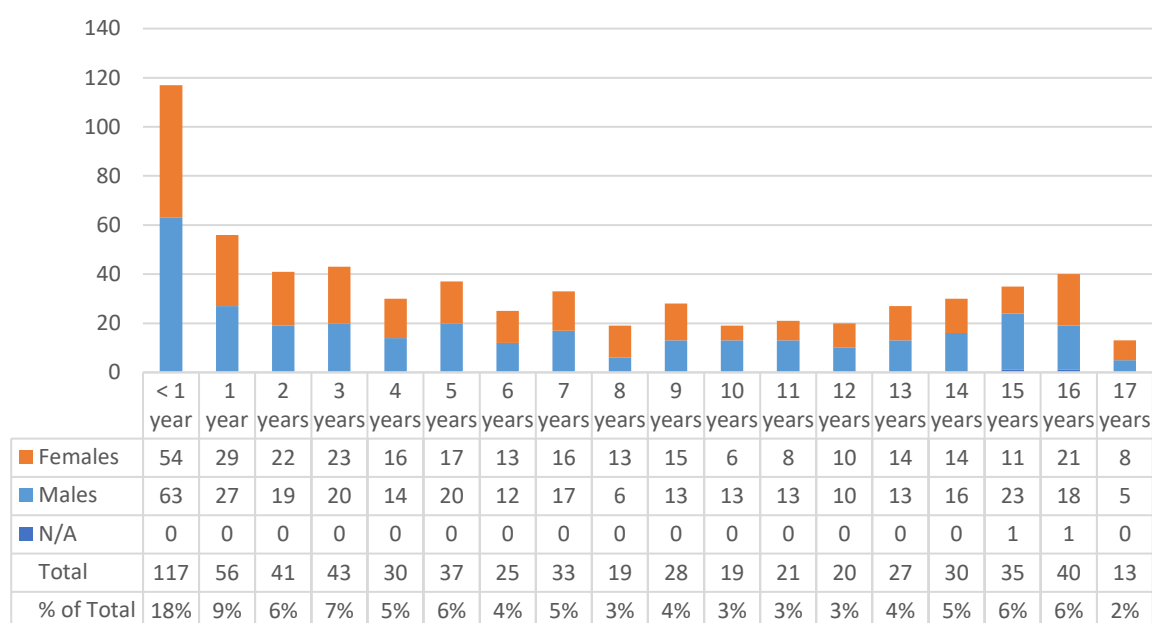


Figure 18: Children coming into care for the first time by age and gender, 2023

- When the number of children coming into care for the first time is disaggregated by age group the figures indicate that the 0–4 years cohort is more heavily represented than in the general child population (45% v 24%) (Table 25).
- Looking across the age groups there were 43 (18%) more 0–4 year-olds and 20 (16%) more 5–9 year-olds admitted to care in 2023 when compared to 2022.
- In contrast, there were 51 (30%) fewer 10–14 year-olds and 44 (33%) fewer 15–17 year-olds admitted to care in 2023 than in 2022.
- In interpreting this data, it should be noted that a small number of large sibling groups can have a significant effect on the figures.

Table 25: Children coming into care for the first time, by age group and year, 2020–2023

Age Band	2020	2021	2022*	2023*	General Pop**
0–4 years	254 (37%)	243 (31%)	244 (37%)	287 (45%)	295,415 (24%)
5–9 years	153 (22%)	142 (18%)	122 (18%)	142 (22%)	342,670 (28%)
10–14 years	138 (20%)	186 (23%)	168 (25%)	117 (18%)	374,202 (31%)
15–17 years	143 (21%)	221 (28%)	132 (20%)	88 (14%)	206,280 (17%)
Total	688 (100%)	792 (100%)	666 (100%)	634 (100%)	1,218,567 (100%)

*Data for 2022 and 2023 does not include children admitted to care by the Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection. **Census 2022.

Reasons for Admissions

- The most common reason for children coming into care for the first time in 2023 was neglect, accounting for 48% (306) of cases, while the least common reason was sexual abuse accounting for 3% (17) of cases (Figure 19).

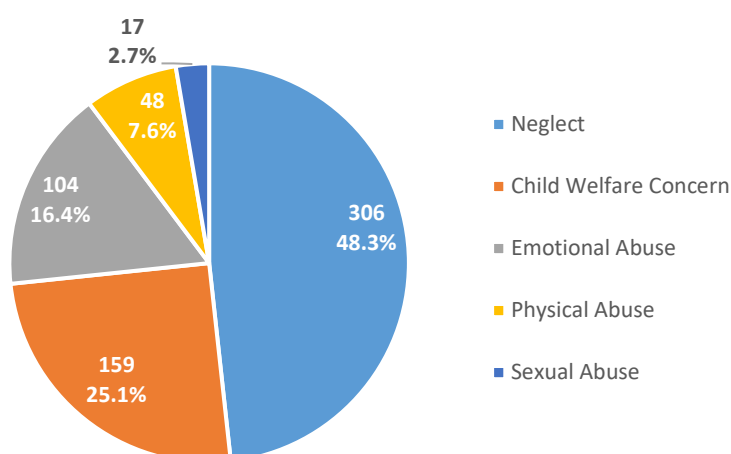


Figure 19: Breakdown of the reasons for children coming into care for the first time, 2023

- A breakdown of the reasons for children coming into care for the first time for the period 2020–2023 is presented in the chart below (Figure 20). As can be seen from the chart the percentage of children coming into care for the first time due to neglect is increasing (up five eight points from 2022) while the percentage of children coming into care for the first time due to welfare concerns is decreasing (down six percentage points from 2022). The breakdown for the other three types of abuse is broadly similar to previous years.

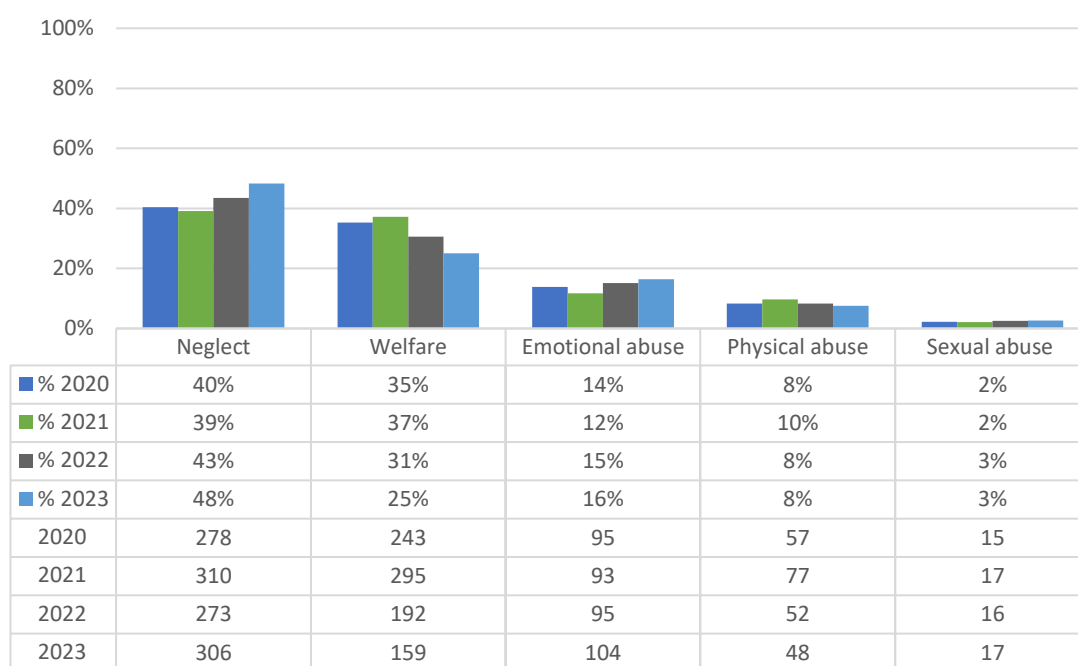


Figure 20: Breakdown of the reasons for children coming into care for the first time, 2020–2023.

Reason not available for 38 cases for 2022 and data for 2022 and 2023 does not include children admitted to care by the Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection.

Legal Status

- 57% (361) of children admitted to care in 2023 for the first time were admitted to care under an order of the court. The remaining 43% (273) of children were admitted to care under a voluntary arrangement.
- Of the children admitted under a court order (361), 35% (125) were admitted under an emergency care order and 65% (235) admitted under an interim care order. The remaining child was admitted to care under a care order.

Care Placements

- Of the 634 children who came into care for the first time in 2023, 85% (539) were placed in foster care, 3% (19) were placed in residential general care, while the remaining 12% (76) were placed in “other” care placements²⁷ (Figure 21). Of the 539 children placed in foster care 29% (156) were placed with relatives.

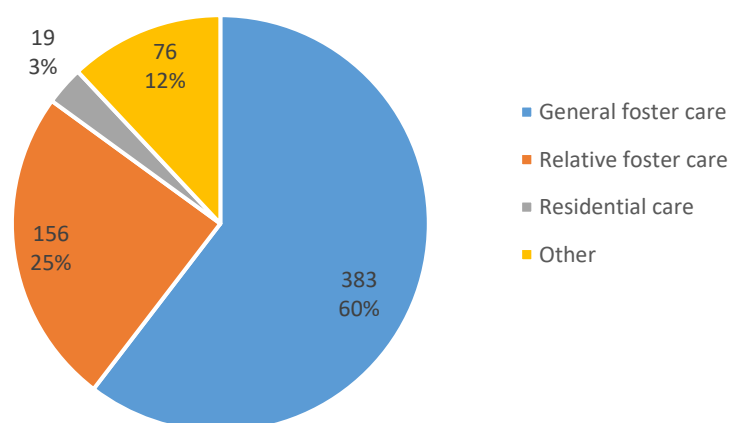


Figure 21: Breakdown of children coming into care for the first time, by placement type, 2023

- A breakdown of first-time admissions to care by placement type for the years 2020–2023 is presented in Figure 22 below.
- Figures reveal that while the overall percentage of children placed in foster care (general and relative) in 2023 (85%) is similar to that for 2022 (84%), there was a decrease in the percentage of children admitted to general foster care (60% v 66%) and an increase in the percentage of children admitted to relative foster care (25% v 18%). In terms of numbers, there were 56 (13%) fewer children placed in general foster care and 39 (33%) more children placed in relative foster care in 2023 compared to 2022.
- There were 13 (40%) fewer children placed in residential care in 2023 than in 2022 (19 v 32). While the number in other care placements is similar to that for 2022 (76 v 78).

²⁷ Other care placements include other residential centres (e.g., disability, drug/alcohol rehabilitation centre), supported lodgings, hospital, at home under a care order, special emergency arrangements, other – not specified.

- Comparison with data for 2020 and 2021 is not meaningful due to the inclusion of children admitted to care by the Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection.

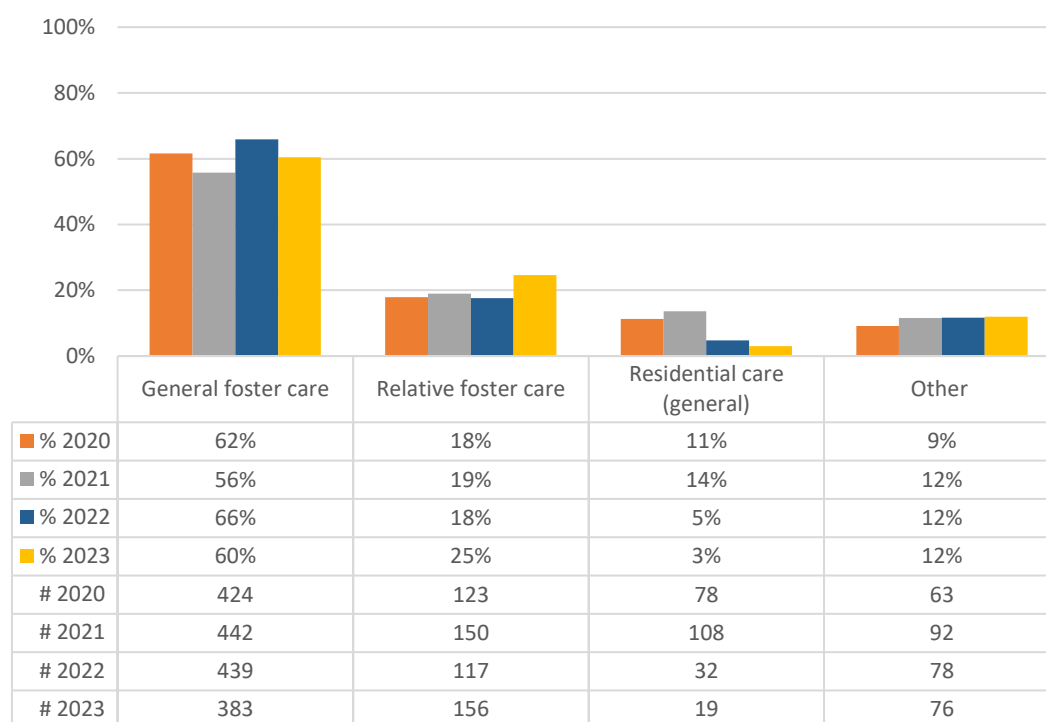


Figure 22: Breakdown of children coming into care for the first time, by placement type, 2020–2023

Data for 2022 and 2023 does not include children admitted to care by the Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection.

First-Time Admissions by Area

- A breakdown of children admitted to care in 2023 for the first time by Tulsa area is presented in the table below (Table 26).
- The three areas with the highest numbers of children admitted to care for the first time in 2023 were Waterford/Wexford (78), Cork (71) and Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow (51) (Table 26). Mayo and Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan reported the fewest number (16) of children admitted to care for the first time.
- 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 2 per 10,000 children living in Dublin South East/Wicklow to 11 per 10,000 children living in Waterford/Wexford (Table 26). Eight areas reported a rate higher than the national average (5.2/10,000).
- Areas like Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan, Kerry, Cavan/Monaghan and Donegal with fewer numbers of children under 18 years report some of the highest rates of children coming into care for the first time. Whereas areas like Dublin South East/Wicklow, Midwest, Dublin North and Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow 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 26: Children coming into care for the first time, by area, 2020–2023 (ranked by rate for 2023)

Area	2020	2021	2022	2023	0–17 pop	Rate / 10,000
Waterford/Wexford	50	40	49	78	69,239	11.3
Dublin North City	25	38	63	44	49,682	8.9
Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary	30	21	41	46	62,366	7.4
Kerry	16	30	22	25	34,994	7.1
Cavan/Monaghan	25	24	27	25	37,336	6.7
Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan	21	13	18	16	24,312	6.6
Donegal	24	44	18	27	42,144	6.4
Cork	91	71	65	71	136,786	5.2
Mayo	12	22	25	16	31,911	5.0
Louth/Meath	47	52	55	48	96,531	5.0
Galway/Roscommon	60	39	30	40	81,799	4.9
Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow	44	77	46	51	108,927	4.7
Dublin North	48	58	75	48	103,508	4.6
Dublin South Central	51	68	48	30	70,259	4.3
Midwest	50	35	20	32	96,764	3.3
Midlands	29	38	34	20	80,962	2.5
Dublin South East/Wicklow	14	24	30	17	91,047	1.9
SCSIP	51	98	N/A	N/A	-	-
Total	688	792	666	634	1,218,567	5.2

- Nine of the 17 areas reported a decrease from 2022 in the number of children coming into care for the first time (Figure 23). The largest decreases were reported by Dublin North (down 27), Dublin North City (down 19) and Dublin South Central (down 18).
- Of the eight areas that reported an increase from 2022, the largest increase was reported by Waterford/Wexford (up 29), followed to a lesser extent by Midwest (up 12) and Galway/Roscommon (up 10).
- Over the three-year period 2020–2023, no area reported more than two consecutive increases or decreases. Fluctuation from one year to the next is common, while a small number of large sibling groups can also have a significant effect on the data.

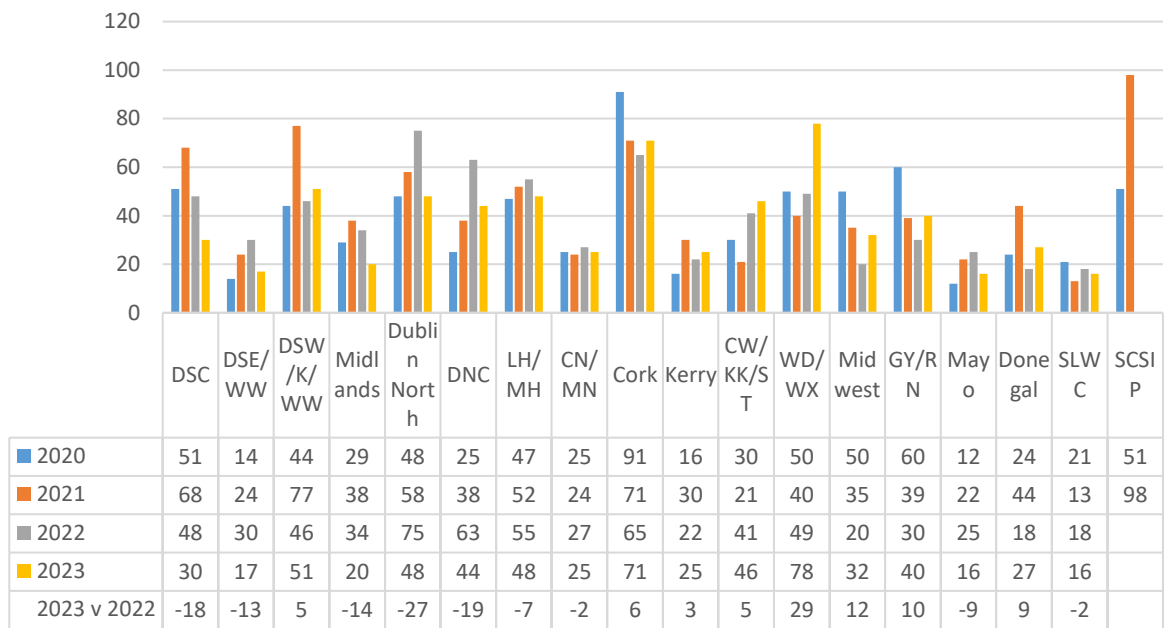


Figure 23: Children coming into care for the first time, by area, 2020–2023

3.2 Total Admissions to Care

KEY FACTS

- ✚ 892 admissions to care across the 17 Tusla areas in 2023, 79 (10%) more than 2022 (813) and the highest number since 2017 (910).
- ✚ 29% (258) of all admissions (892) were second or subsequent admissions, up from 18% (147) in 2022.
- ✚ The most common age at admission was under one year accounting for 15% (134) of all admissions followed by 1–year (66; 7%), 15–years (66; 7%) and 16–years (60; 7%)
- ✚ The most common reason for admission to care was neglect accounting for 46% (413) of all admissions, followed by welfare concerns accounting for a further 29% (256) of admissions. Sexual abuse is the least common reason for admission to care, accounting for 2% (19) of all admissions.
- ✚ 81% (724) of admissions to care in 2023 were to foster care, 4% (40) were to residential general care and 14% (128) were to “other” care placements. Of the 724 admissions to foster care, 26% (189) were to foster care with relatives.
- ✚ 49% (434) of all admissions to care were voluntary admissions (where it was agreed with the child’s parent/guardian) and 51% (458) were on foot of an application to the court. One in five admissions to care (22%; 192) in 2023 was under an emergency care order.

Number of Admissions

- The data presented in this section of the report refers to all admissions to care in the year, and not just children admitted to care for the first time (previous section of the report).
- In 2023, there were 892 admissions to care across the 17 Tusla areas, 79 (10%) more than 2022 (813) and the highest number since 2017 (Figure 24 orange line). *Data for the Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection was not available for 2023. Refer to Section 3.8.*
- The total number of admissions in 2023 (892) pertains to 854 individual children; 30 children had two admissions and four children had three admissions.
- 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.

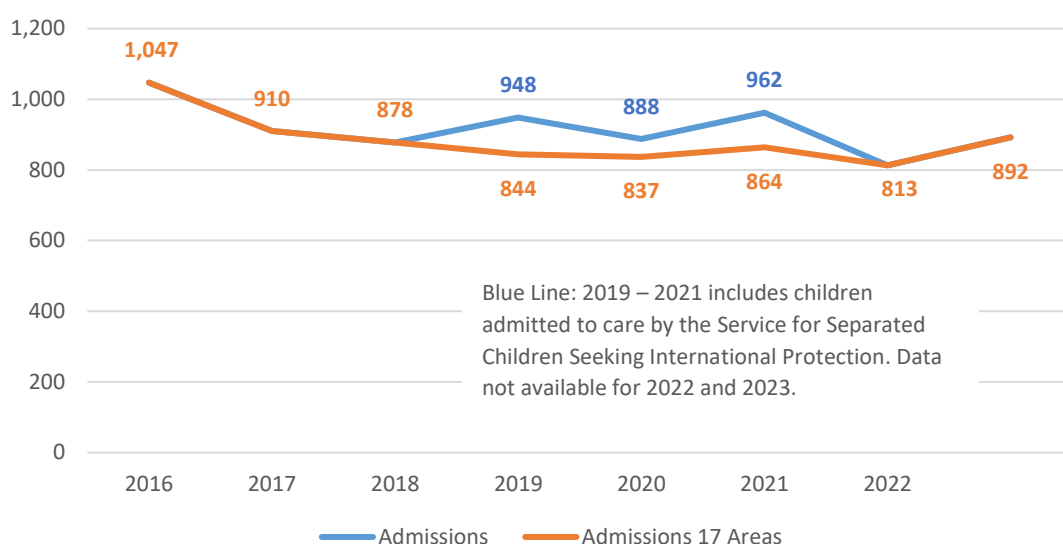


Figure 24: Total admissions to care, 2016–2023

- In 2023, 29% (258) of all admissions (892) were second or subsequent admissions, up from 18% (147) in 2022 (Table 27).

Table 27: First-time admissions to care and repeat admissions to care, 2020–2023

Year	# First-time Admissions	# Total Admissions	≥ 2 admissions	% Admissions 2 nd or subsequent
2023*	634	892	258	29%
2022*	666	813	147	18%
2021	792	962	170	18%
2020	688	888	200	23%

*Data for 2022 and 2023 does not include children admitted to care by the Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection.

Age and Gender

- In 2023, 51.2% (457) of admissions were male and 48.2% (430) were female, a similar breakdown to the general population (Census 2022, 51% boys and 49% girls). The gender of the remaining five children was recorded as “other”.
- The most common age at admission was under one year accounting for 15% (134) of all admissions followed by 1–year (66; 7%), 15–years (66; 7%) and 16–years (60; 7%) (Figure 25).
- The number of admissions to care is increased with increasing age from 11 to 15 years (Figure 25).

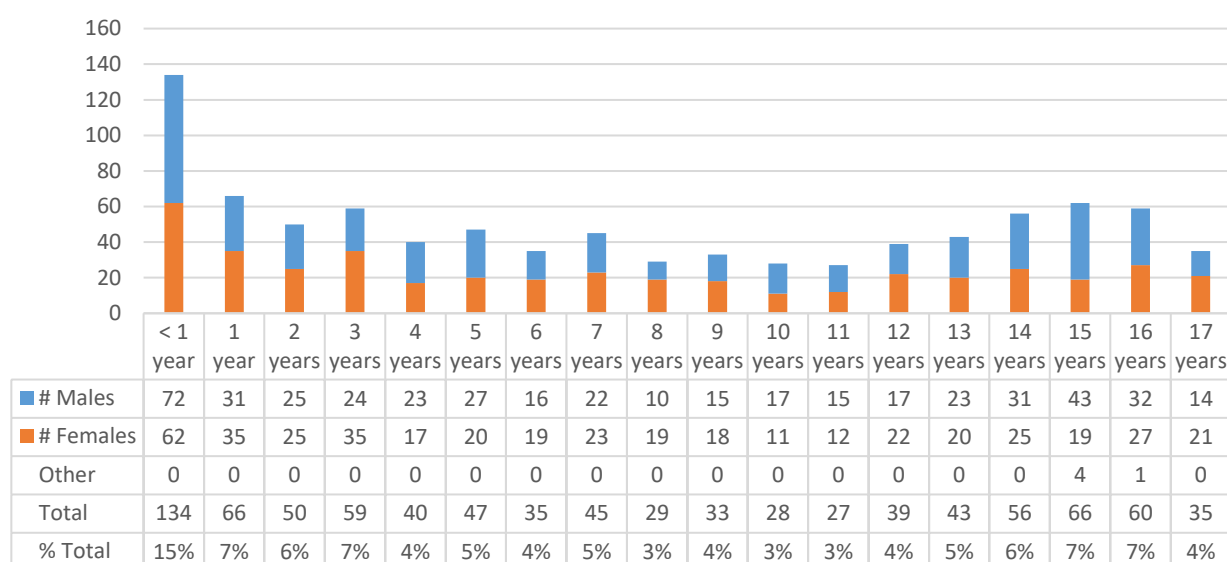


Figure 25: Admissions to care by age and gender, 2023

- A breakdown of admissions to care by age group is presented in Table 28. Looking across the age groups there were 70 (25%) more admissions for 0–4 year–olds and 46 more admissions for 5–9 year–olds in 2023 when compared to 2022.
- In contrast there were 23 (11%) fewer admissions for 10–14 year–olds and 14 (8%) fewer admissions for 15–17 year–olds in 2023 when compared to 2022.

Table 28: Admissions to care by age group, 2020–2023

Age Group	2020	2021	2022*	2023*	2023 v 2022
0–4 years	304 (34%)	280 (29%)	279 (34%)	349 (39%)	+70 (25%)
5–9 years	197 (22%)	177 (18%)	143 (18%)	189 (21%)	+46 (32%)
10–14 years	188 (21%)	232 (24%)	216 (27%)	193 (22%)	-23 (11%)
15–17 years	199 (22%)	273 (28%)	175 (22%)	161 (18%)	-14 (8%)
Total	888 (100%)	962 (100%)	813 (100%)	892 (100%)	+79 (10%)

*Data for 2022 and 2023 does not include children admitted to care by the Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection.

Reasons for Admissions

- In 2023, the most common reason for admission was neglect accounting for 46% (413) of all admissions, followed by welfare concerns accounting for a further 29% (256) of admissions (Figure 26). The least common reason for admission to care was sexual abuse, accounting for 2% (19) of all admissions.

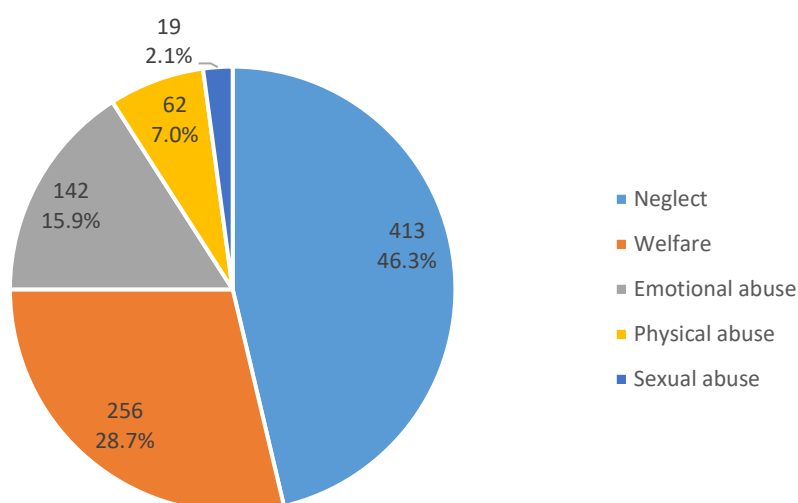


Figure 26: Admissions to care by reason for admission, 2023.

- The percentage breakdown of admissions to care by reason for admission for the years 2020–2023 is presented in the chart below (Figure 27). The percentage of admissions due to neglect is up five percentage points from 2022 while the percentage of admissions due to welfare concerns is down four percentage points. The percentages for the other types of abuse are broadly similar to previous years.

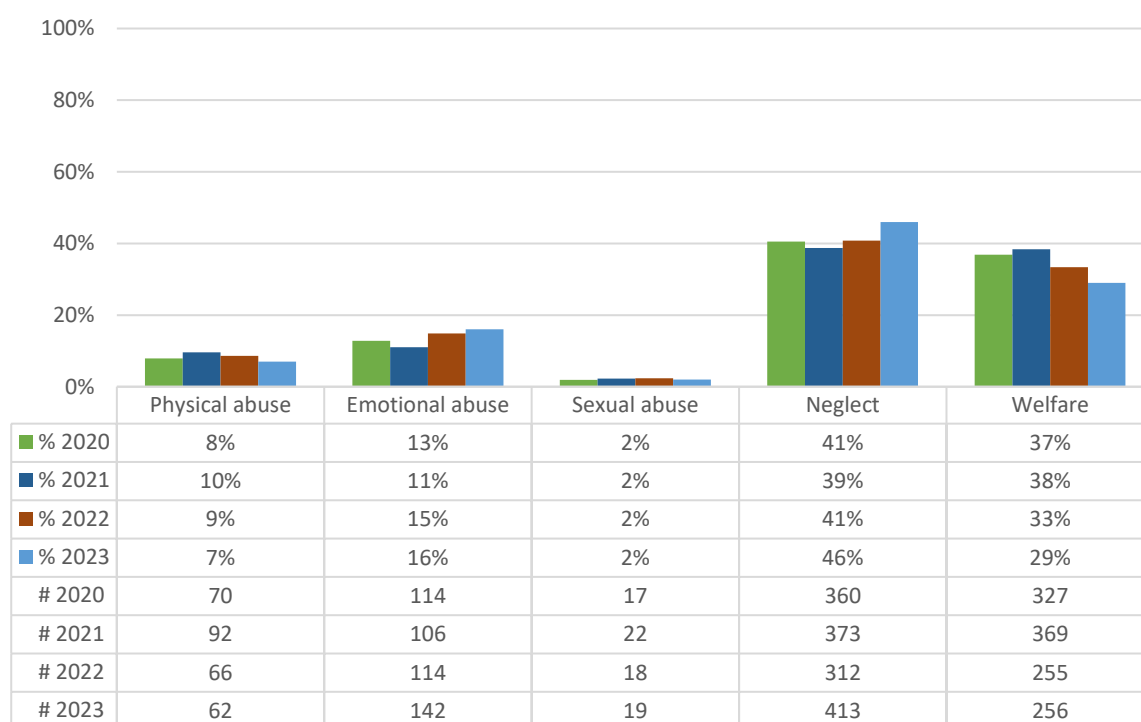


Figure 27: Admissions to care by reason for admission, 2020–2023.

Reason not available for 48 records in 2022 and data for 2022 and 2023 does not include children admitted to care by the Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection.

Care Placements

- 81% (724) of all admissions to care in 2023 were to foster care, 4% (40) were to residential general care and 14% (128) were to “other” care placements. Of the 724 admissions to foster care, 26% (189) were to foster care with relatives (Table 29).

Table 29: Admissions to care by placement type, 2020–2023

Placement type	# 2020	% 2020	# 2021	% 2021	# 2022*	% 2022	# 2023*	% 2023
Residential general care	99	11%	130	14%	47	6%	40	4%
General foster care	548	62%	532	55%	527	65%	535	60%
Foster care with relatives	166	19%	193	20%	142	17%	189	21%
Other	75	8%	107	11%	97	12%	128	14%
Total	888	100%	962	100%	813	100%	892	100%

*Data for 2022 and 2023 does not include children admitted to care by the Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection.

Legal Reasons for Admission

- In 2023, 49% (434) of all admissions to care were voluntary admissions (where it was agreed with the child’s parent/guardian) and 51% (458) were on foot of an application to the court (Table 30).
- The number of admissions under a voluntary arrangement is down 33 (7%) from 2022, while the number of admissions under a court order is up 112 (32%) from 2022.
- One in five admissions to care (22%; 192) in 2023 was under an emergency care order, no change from 2022.

Table 30: Admissions to care by legal status, 2020–2023

Legal Status	# 2020	% 2020	# 2021	% 2021	# 2022*	% 2022	# 2023*	% 2023
Emergency Care Order	201	23%	174	18%	175	22%	192	22%
Interim Care Order	241	27%	255	27%	162	20%	265	30%
Care Order	12	1%	11	1%	9	1%	1	<1%
Other Court Order	2	0.2%	2	0.2%	0	0%	0	0%
Voluntary	432	49%	520	54%	467	57%	434	49%
Total	888	100%	962	100%	813	100%	892	100%

*Data for 2022 and 2023 does not include children admitted to care by the Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection.

Admissions by Area

- A breakdown of admissions to care for 2023 by Tulsa area is presented in the table below (Table 31).
- As can be seen from the table below, Cork—the Tulsa area with the largest child population—reported the highest number of admissions to care in 2023 (108; 12%), while Mayo reported the fewest number (16; 2%).

- 10 of the 17 areas reported more admissions in 2023 than 2022 with the largest increase reported by Galway/Roscommon (up 32) followed by Waterford/Wexford (up 27) and Cork (up 25).
- Of the six areas that reported fewer admissions in 2023 than 2022, the largest decrease was reported by Louth/Meath (down 21) followed by Mayo (down 17) and Dublin South Central (down 14). The remaining area (Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan) reported no change from 2022. As before, this data needs to be interpreted in the context of small numbers and the effect of any large sibling groups.
- In 2023, the percentage of admissions that were second or subsequent admissions ranged from 43% (30/70) in Galway/Roscommon to 0% (0/16) in Mayo (Table 31). Nine areas reported a percentage equal to or higher than the national average of 29%. The reason(s) for the variation in second and subsequent admissions requires further examination.

Table 31: Admissions to care by area, 2022–2023 (ranked by number of admissions for 2023).

Area	2022	2023	2023 v 2022	# FT 2023	# repeat	% repeat
Cork	83	108	25	71	37	34%
Waterford/Wexford	59	86	27	78	8	9%
Dublin South West / Kildare/West Wicklow	65	82	17	51	31	38%
Dublin North	80	76	-4	48	28	37%
Dublin North City	66	73	7	44	29	40%
Galway/Roscommon	38	70	32	40	30	43%
Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary	44	62	18	46	16	26%
Louth/Meath	77	56	-21	48	8	14%
Dublin South Central	58	44	-14	30	14	32%
Midwest	33	39	6	32	7	18%
Donegal	25	36	11	27	9	25%
Midlands	42	32	-10	20	12	38%
Cavan/Monaghan	27	32	5	25	7	22%
Dublin South East/Wicklow	37	29	-8	17	12	41%
Kerry	23	28	5	25	3	11%
SLWC	23	23	0	16	7	30%
Mayo	33	16	-17	16	0	0%
SCSIP	NA	NA	-	-	-	-
Total	813	892	79	634	258	29%

- As with the first-time admissions, fluctuation in admissions to care across the areas from one year to the next is common (Figure 28). Over the three-year period, 2020–2023, no area reported more than two consecutive increases or decreases.

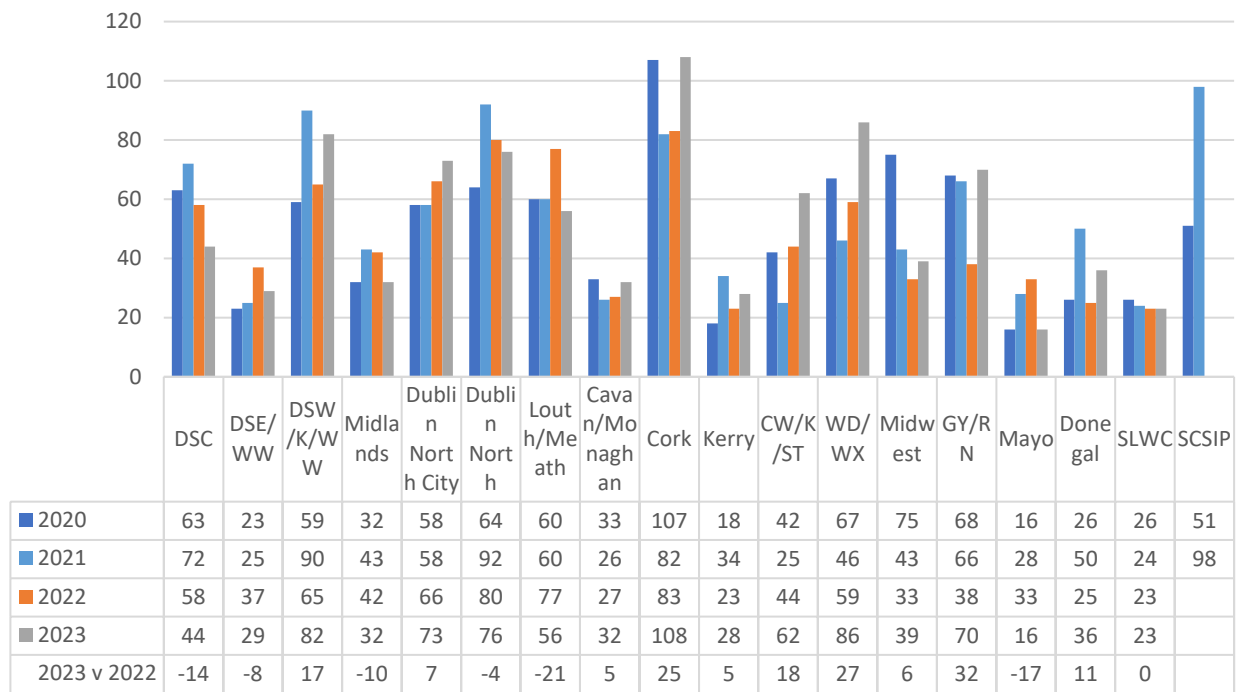


Figure 28: Admissions to care by area, 2020–2023.

Data for 2022 and 2023 does not include children admitted to care by the Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection.

3.3 Children in Care

KEY FACTS

- ✚ There were 5,615 children in the care of the State at the end of 2023. These children were reported by the 17 Tusla areas. *Data for children in care under the Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection not available for 2022 and 2023 [Refer to Section 3.8].*
- ✚ The number of children in care across the 17 Tusla areas is down 11 (<1%) from 2022 (5,626) and is the fewest number reported for the seven years 2017–2023. The number of children in care has fallen year on year over this period and is down 8% (501) overall.
- ✚ The number of children in care equates to about 5 per 1,000 children under 18 years living in Ireland (Census 2022, 1,218,567).
- ✚ The number of children in care increases with increasing age with the highest number aged 16 years (481; 9%) and the fewest number aged under one year (84; 1%).
- ✚ 90% (5,034) of children in care at the end of 2023 were in foster care and of these 29% (1,474) were in relative foster care, a similar pattern to previous years. Residential care (general and special care) makes up a relatively small (7.3%; 410), but significant number of placements within alternative care provision.
- ✚ Neglect is the most common reason being in care, accounting for almost half 47% (2,637) of all children in care.
- ✚ 83% (4,657) of children in care at the end of 2023 were in care under an order of the court, a slight increase from 2022 (80%) and the highest percentage for all years 2019–2023. The remaining 17% (958) of children in care were in care under a voluntary arrangement.
- ✚ Just under half (47.5%; 2,667) of the children in care at the end of 2023 were in care for 5 years or less and of these one in four (24.3%; 647) was in care for less than a year. The remaining 52.5% (2,948) were in care for more than five years.
- ✚ 4.1% (231) of all children in care at the end of 2023 were in their third or greater placement within the previous 12 months, similar to that for 2022 (4%; 226/5,626).
- ✚ 16 (0.3%) children in care at the end of 2023 were in a placement outside of Ireland, five more than 2022 (11). All but one of the children were in foster care.
- ✚ 84 children 12 years and younger were in residential placements at the end of 2023, 21 (33%) more than 2022 (63).
- ✚ 15% (828) of children in care at the end of 2023 were placed with private providers.
- ✚ Across the 17 areas there were 15 (2%) more children in care with private providers at the end of 2023 (828) than at the end of 2022 (813).
- ✚ 97% (3,605/3,725) of children in care aged 6–15 years and 93% (892/961) aged 16–17 years were in full-time education (as per their care plan) at the end of 2023²², consistent with previous years.

Number of Children in Care

- There were 5,615 children in the care of the State at the end of 2023. These children were reported by the 17 Tusla areas. *Data for children in care under the Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection was not available for 2023 [Refer to Section 3.8].*
- The number of children in care across the 17 Tusla areas is down 11 (<1%) from 2022 (5,626) and is the fewest number reported for the seven years 2017–2023 (Figure 29 blue line). The number of children in care has fallen year on year over this period and is down 8% (501) overall.
- The reason(s) for this downward trend across the 17 Tusla areas is not easily understood and most likely reflects a combination of internal and external factors, for example greater focus on early intervention and prevention, 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.
- While data for 2023 is not available for children in care under the Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection it is clear from the chart below (Figure 29) that the number of separated children seeking international protection is increasing with a doubling of figures between 2020 and 2022. This reflects the ongoing increase in global movement.

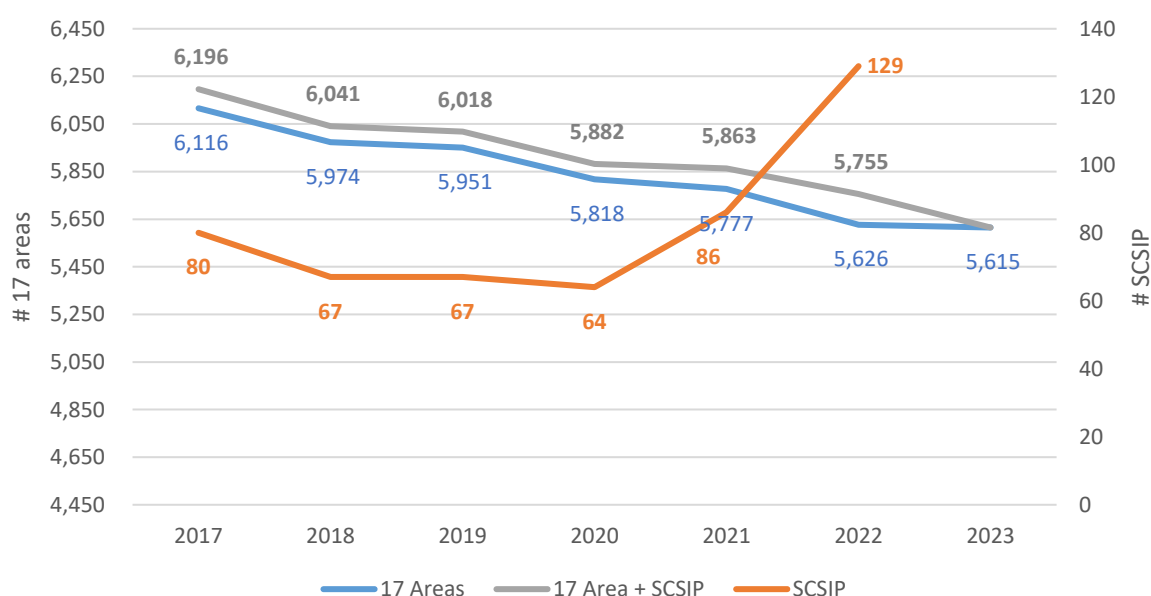


Figure 29: Children in care, 2017–2023

- The number of children in care equates to about 5 per 1,000 children under 18 years living in Ireland (Census 2022, 1,218,567). Table 32 shows the rate of children in care per 1,000 child population in other jurisdictions²⁸. While Ireland reports the lowest rate, interpretation needs

²⁸ [Children's Social Work Statistics - Looked After Children 2022-23 Additional Tables. Table 2.7](#)

to be considered in the context of differing processes and procedures and definitions that may exist in other jurisdictions.

Table 32: Children in care in other jurisdictions, rate per 1,000 child population

Jurisdiction	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Ireland (Dec)	5.2	5.1	5.1	4.8	4.8	4.7	4.6*
Northern Ireland (March)	6.8	7.1	7.4	7.7	8.0	8.2	8.7
England (March)	6.2	6.4	6.5	6.7	6.7	7.0	7.1
Wales (March)	9.6	10.3	11.0	11.6	11.7	11.4	11.6
Scotland (March)	10.8	10.5	10.4	10.4	10.2	9.8	9.7

Rates for 2017–2019 (inclusive) based on Census 2016 (1,190,502). Rates for 2020–2023 (inclusive) based on Census 2022 (1,218,567). *Data for 2023 does not include children in care under the Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection.

Age and Gender

- Slightly more males (2,880; 51.3%) than females (2,726; 48.5%) were in care at the end of 2023; a similar pattern to previous years and consistent with the general population (Census 2022, 51% boys and 49% girls). Gender was recorded as “Other” for the remaining nine (0.2%) children.
- The number of children in care increases with increasing age with the highest number aged 16 years (481; 9%) and the fewest number aged under one year (84; 1%) (Figure 30).

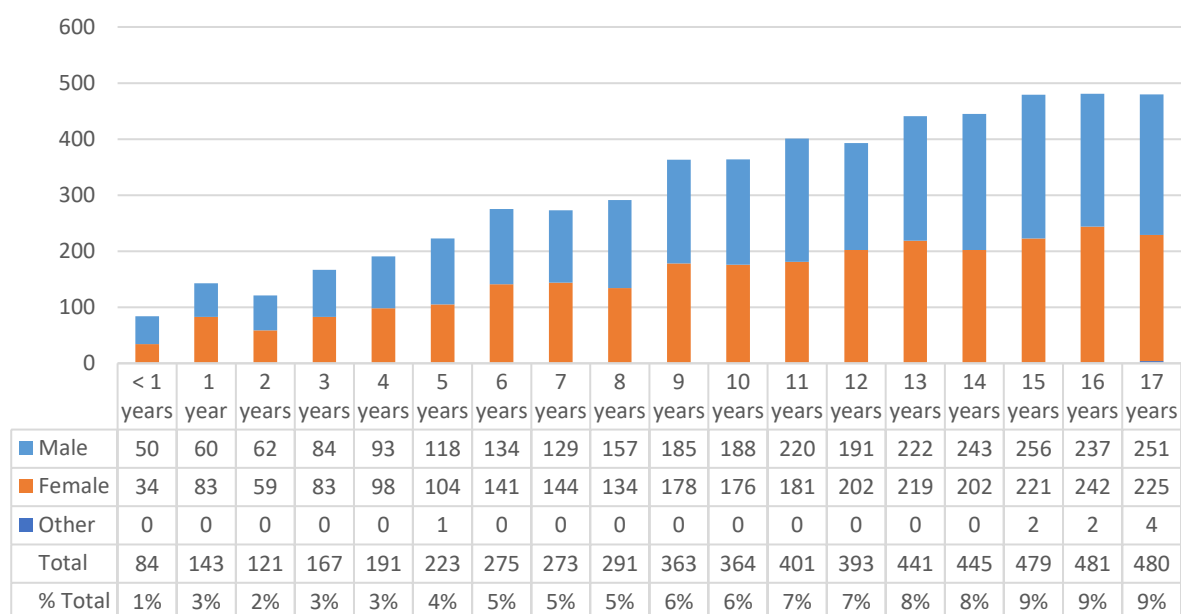


Figure 30: Children in care by age and gender, 2023.

- 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 33). More than one in four children in care (26%; 1,440) are 15 years or older.
- The percentage breakdown of children in care by age group is similar across the four years 2020–2023.

Table 33: Children in care by age group and year, 2020–2023

Age Group	# 2020	# 2021	# 2022*	# 2023*	General Population
0–4	742 (13%)	713 (12%)	647 (12%)	706 (13%)	295,415 (24%)
5–9	1,587 (27%)	1,557 (27%)	1,461 (26%)	1,425 (25%)	342,670 (28%)
10–14	2,022 (34%)	2,066 (35%)	2,083 (37%)	2,044 (36%)	374,202 (31%)
15–17	1,531 (26%)	1,527 (26%)	1,435 (26%)	1,440 (26%)	206,280 (17%)
Total	5,882 (100%)	5,863 (100%)	5,626 (100%)	5,615 (100%)	1,218,567 (100%)

General population based on Census 2022. *Data for 2022 and 2023 does not include children in care under the Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection.

Children in Care by Area

- As with all datasets there is wide variation in the number and rate of children in care across the 17 Tusla areas.
- At the end of 2023, the number of children in care ranged from 705 in Cork to 108 in Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan (Table 34). Similarly, the rate per 1,000 children under 18 years ranged from 9.3/1,000 children under 18 years in Dublin North City to 2.1/1,000 in Dublin South East/Wicklow. Eight areas reported a rate equal to or higher than the national average of 4.6/1,000 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 behind the number of children in care.

Table 34: Children in care by area, 2020–2023 (ranked by rate/1,000 children for 2023)

Area	2020	2021	2022	2023	< 17 years	Rate
Dublin North City	486	470	463	460	49,682	9.3
Waterford/Wexford	429	413	404	427	69,239	6.2
Midwest	582	550	531	504	96,764	5.2
Cork	772	749	706	705	136,786	5.2
Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary	328	325	307	319	62,366	5.1
Donegal	220	226	217	213	42,144	5.1
Dublin South Central	362	365	355	335	70,259	4.8
Kerry	153	159	158	165	34,994	4.7
Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan	115	109	109	108	24,312	4.4
Louth/Meath	397	418	420	428	96,531	4.4
Mayo	130	144	137	141	31,911	4.4
Galway/Roscommon	378	370	350	356	81,799	4.4
Cavan/Monaghan	154	153	149	157	37,336	4.2
Midlands	339	334	328	322	80,962	4.0
Dublin North	340	351	374	388	103,508	3.7
Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow	402	429	413	393	108,927	3.6
Dublin South East/Wicklow	231	212	205	194	91,047	2.1
SCSIP	64	86	129	-	-	-
Total	5,882	5,863	5,755	5,615	1,218,567	4.6

- 9 of the 17 areas reported a decrease in children in care from 2022 with the largest decreases reported by Midwest (down 27), Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow (down 20), Dublin South Central (down 20) and Dublin South East/Wicklow (down 11) (Figure 31).
- 8 areas reported an increase, with the largest increases reported by Waterford/Wexford (up 23), Dublin North (up 14) and Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary (up 12).
- 11 of 17 areas had fewer children in care at the end of 2023 than at the end of 2018. Over this five-year period, the largest decreases were reported by Midwest (down 91), Dublin South East/Wicklow (down 79), Cork (down 76) and Midlands (down 57).
- 5 areas had more children in care at the end of 2023 than at the end of 2018 as follows, Dublin North (up 66), Louth/Meath (up 22), Mayo (up 17), Cavan/Monaghan (up 1) and Kerry (1). The remaining area (Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan) reported no change.
- In terms of an underlying trend, one area (Dublin North) has reported five consecutive increases from 2018, while three areas (Dublin North City, Midlands and Dublin South East/Wicklow) have reported five consecutive decreases.

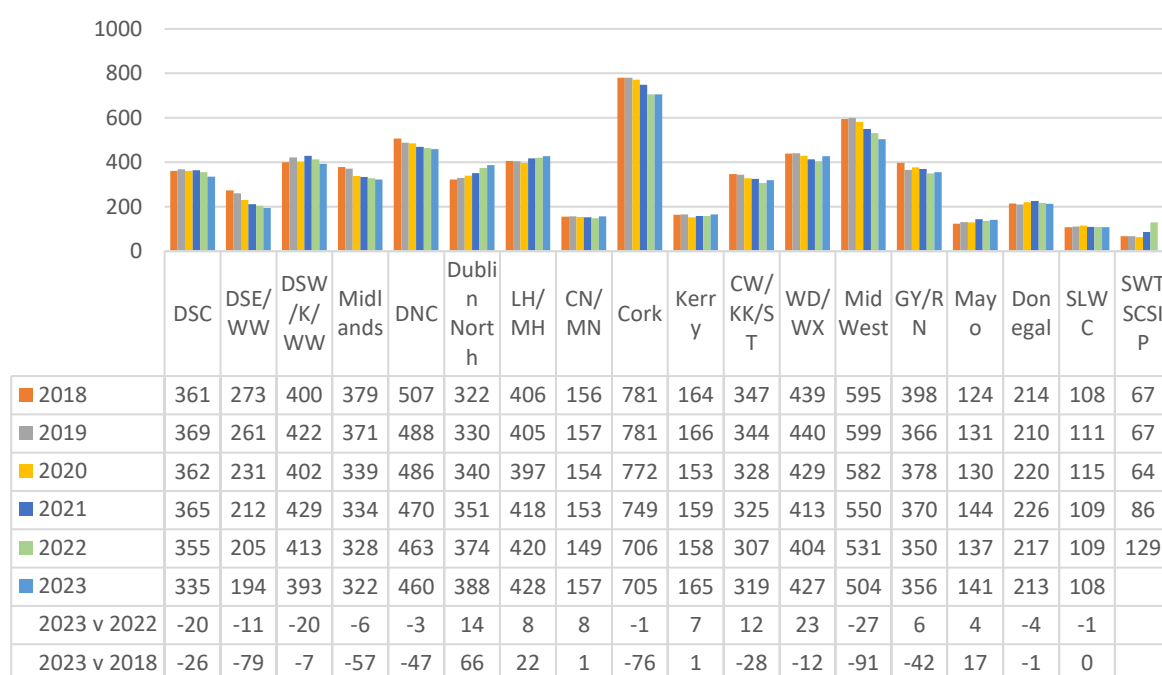


Figure 31: Children in care by area, 2018–2023

Placement Type

- 90% (5,034) of children in care at the end of 2023 were in foster care and of these 29% (1,474) were in relative foster care, a similar pattern to previous years (Tables 35 and 36). Residential care (general and special care) makes up a relatively small (7.3%; 410), but significant number of placements within alternative care provision.
- The placement “Other” comprises 3% (171) of placements and includes children in supported lodgings (11); at home under a care order (24); in a detention school/centre (4); in a disability unit (65); in a hospital (4), in special emergency arrangements and “other” placements—not specified (63).

- Special emergency arrangements (SEAs) refer to emergency settings where a child is accommodated in a non–statutory or non–procured placement e.g., hotel, B&B, holiday centre, activity centre, Tusla non–registered property, privately leased property. They provide a short–term placement response for children who need to be taken into care in an emergency, or where a more appropriate placement cannot be provided. The children placed in these arrangements are generally older and tend to have complex needs, often related to challenging behaviour due to the trauma they have experienced, substance misuse, mental health issues or involvement in criminality. Due to their needs they also tend to require an interagency response involving access to services across the HSE, Tusla and in some cases the services of juvenile justice. All young people in an SEA in the community have an allocated worker, a care plan in place, and a staffing ration of at least 2:1 when in single occupancy arrangements. Tusla has seen an increase in the numbers of children requiring emergency placements since the Covid–19 pandemic.
- There was a total of 312 children in SEAs in 2023 (excludes children under the Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection). This figure includes 255²⁹ “new” children placed in an SEA in 2023 and 57 children who were in an SEA at the end of 2022 and continued in their SEA placement into 2023 or who may have been discharged from an SEA at some point between week ending 9 Oct 2022³⁰ and year end and re–placed during 2023).
- There was an average of 57 children in SEAs at the end of any week in 2023, ranging from 51 to 69.

Table 35: Breakdown of children in care by placement type, 2018–2023

Placement Type	# 2018	# 2019	# 2020	# 2021	# 2022	# 2023*
General foster care	3,967	3,936	3,829	3,770	3,656	3,560
Relative foster care	1,594	1,559	1,517	1,502	1,453	1,474
General residential	367	395	403	438	425	397
Special care	14	14	18	16	14	13
Other	99	114	115	137	207	171
Total	6,041	6,018	5,882	5,863	5,755	5,615

**Data for 2023 does not include children in care under the Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection*

Table 36: Percentage breakdown of children in care by placement type, 2018–2023

Placement Type	% 2018	% 2019	% 2020	% 2021	% 2022	% 2023*
General foster care	65.7%	65.4%	65.1%	64.3%	63.5%	63.4%
Relative foster care	26.4%	25.9%	25.8%	25.6%	25.2%	26.3%
General residential	6.1%	6.6%	6.9%	7.5%	7.4%	7.1%
Special care	0.2%	0.2%	0.3%	0.3%	0.2%	0.2%
Other	1.6%	1.9%	2.0%	2.3%	3.6%	3.0%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

**Data for 2023 does not include children in care under the Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection*

²⁹ Figure adjusted for possible duplicates. The Agency moved from one caseload management system (NCCIS) to another (TCM) in February 2023, hence depending on when a child was placed in an SEA, a small number may have been reported at one point with an NCCIS ID and at another with a TCM ID (data collated manually). Also, a small number of children brought to an immediate place of safety by the National Out of Hours Service may not have had an NCCIS/TCM ID at the time of reporting but were subsequently returned by a Tusla area with an NCCIS/TCM ID.

³⁰National collation of data on special emergency arrangements commenced in Oct 2022.

- Looking across the 17 areas, there has been a year-on-year decrease in the number of children in general foster care over the five-year period 2018–2023, with the number down 10% (397) overall (Table 37 and Figure 32). Similarly, there has also been a year-on-year decrease in the number of children in relative foster care over the same period, with the number down 8% (120) overall.
- In contrast, the number of children in residential has grown over the period 2018–2023 with 64 (18%) more children in residential care at the end of 2023 compared to 2018.
- The number of children in “other” care placements has also grown over the same five-year period reflecting the increased use of special emergency arrangements described above.

Table 37: Children in care by placement type (17 areas), 2018–2023

Year	General foster care	Relative foster care	Residential care	Other	Total
2018	3,957	1,594	346	77	5,974
2019	3,924	1,558	377	92	5,951
2020	3,822	1,516	389	91	5,818
2021	3,760	1,502	408	107	5,777
2022	3,621	1,453	389	163	5,626
2023	3,560	1,474	410	171	5,615

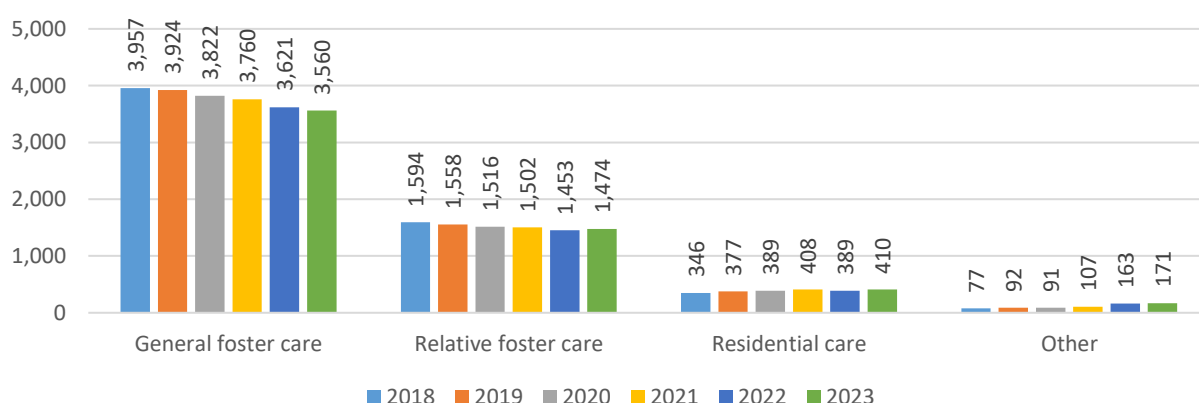


Figure 32: Children in care by placement type (17 years), 2018–2023

Reason for Being in Care

- The most common reason for being in care at the end of 2023 was neglect accounting for 47% (2,637) of all children in care (Figure 33). This was followed by welfare concerns accounting for a further 34% (1,906) of all children in care. Combined, these two reasons account for 81% (4,543) of children in care.

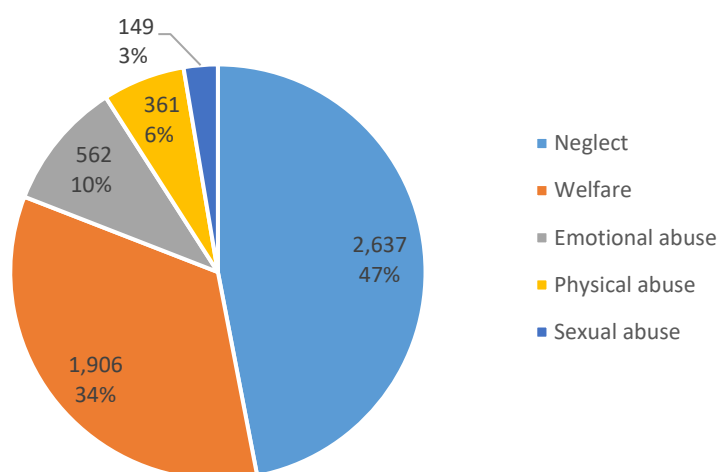


Figure 33: Children in care by reason for being in care, 2023

- As can be seen from the chart below (Figure 34), the percentage breakdown of the reason for being in care is broadly similar to previous years.

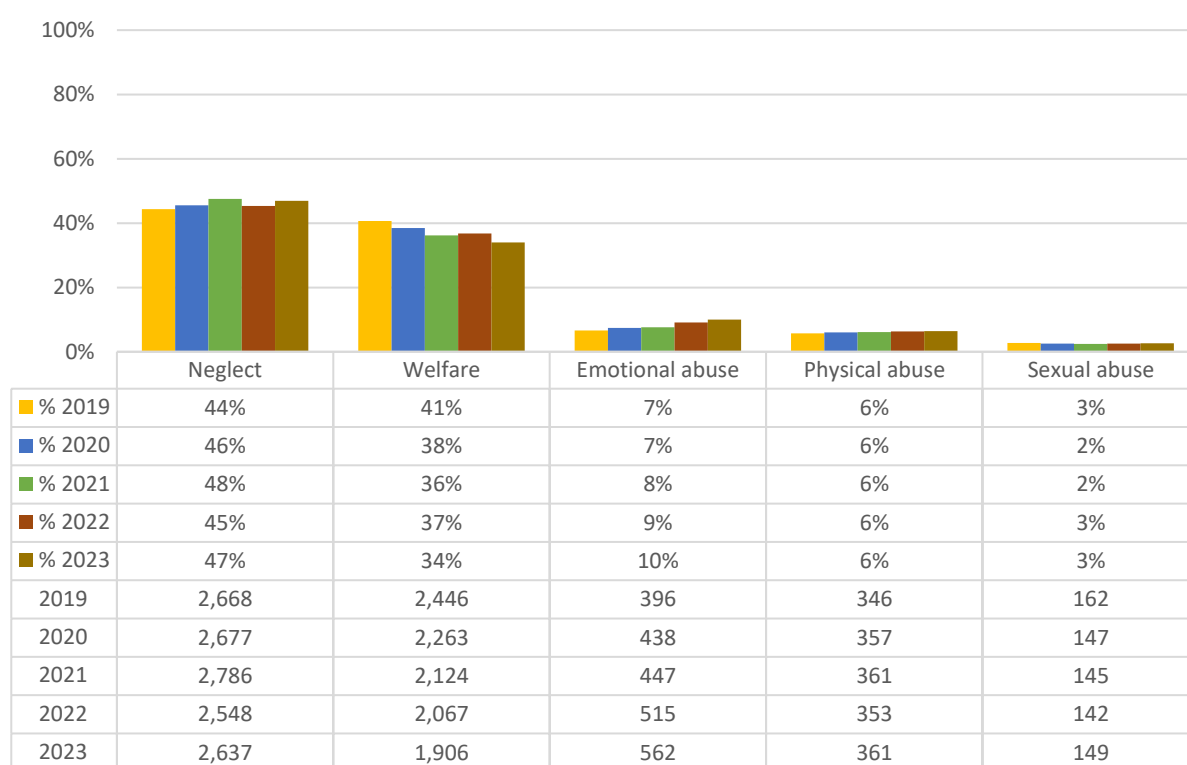


Figure 34: Children in care by reason for being in care, 2019–2023

Data for 2022 and 2023 does not include children in care under the Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection

Legal Status

- 83% (4,657) of children in care at the end of 2023 were in care under an order of the court, a slight increase from 2022 (80%) and the highest percentage for all years 2019–2023 (Tables 38 and 39). The remaining 17% (958) of children in care were in care under a voluntary arrangement.

Table 38: Children in care by legal status, 2019–2023

Legal Status	# 2019	# 2020	# 2021	# 2022*	# 2023*
Order of the Court	4,430	4,531	4,626	4,480	4,657
Voluntary	1,588	1,351	1,237	1,146	958
Total	6,018	5,882	5,863	5,626	5,615

**Data for 2022 and 2023 does not include children in care under the Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection*

Table 39: Children in care by legal status (%), 2019–2023

Legal Status	% 2019	% 2020	% 2021	% 2022*	% 2023*
Order of the Court	73.6%	77.0%	78.9%	79.6%	83.0%
Voluntary	26.4%	23.0%	21.1%	20.4%	17.0%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

**Data for 2022 and 2023 does not include children in care under the Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection*

- Of the 4,657 children in care under a care order at the end of 2023, the majority (81%; 3,778) were in care under a care order while 18.6% (864) were in care under an interim care order. A total of 13 children were under a special care order while two 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 40). Looking across the areas, the percentage of children in care under a court order ranges from over 90% in Kerry (99%), Cork (99%), Midwest (98%) and Mayo (91%) to 65% in Dublin North. Nine areas reported a percentage equal to or higher than the national average of 83%.

Table 40: Children in care by legal status and area, 2023 (ranked by % under a court order)

Area	# Court Order	% Court Order	# Voluntary	% Voluntary	Total
Kerry	163	99%	2	1%	165
Cork	695	99%	10	1%	705
Mid West	492	98%	12	2%	504
Mayo	129	91%	12	9%	141
Dublin South Central	295	88%	40	12%	335
Cavan/Monaghan	138	88%	19	12%	157
Donegal	184	86%	29	14%	213
Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan	90	83%	18	17%	108
Dublin South East/Wicklow	161	83%	33	17%	194
Waterford/Wexford	350	82%	77	18%	427
Galway/Roscommon	281	79%	75	21%	356

Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary	248	78%	71	22%	319
Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow	294	75%	99	25%	393
Dublin North City	341	74%	119	26%	460
Louth/Meath	317	74%	111	26%	428
Midlands	227	70%	95	30%	322
Dublin North	252	65%	136	35%	388
Total	4,657	83%	958	17%	5,615

Length of Time in Care

- Just under half (47.5%; 2,667/5,615) of the children in care at the end of 2023 were in care for 5 years or less and of these one in four (24.3%; 647) was in care for less than a year (Figure 35 & Table 41). The remaining 52.5% (2,948) were in care for more than five years.
- The breakdown of children in care at the end of 2023 by time band (< 1 year, 1–5 years, 6+ years), reveals a 16% (89) increase from 2022 in the number of children in care for less than a year and a 4% (90) decrease in the number in care for 1–5 years, while the number in care for more than 5 years (2,948) is broadly similar to that for 2022 (2,958) (Figure 35 & Table 41).

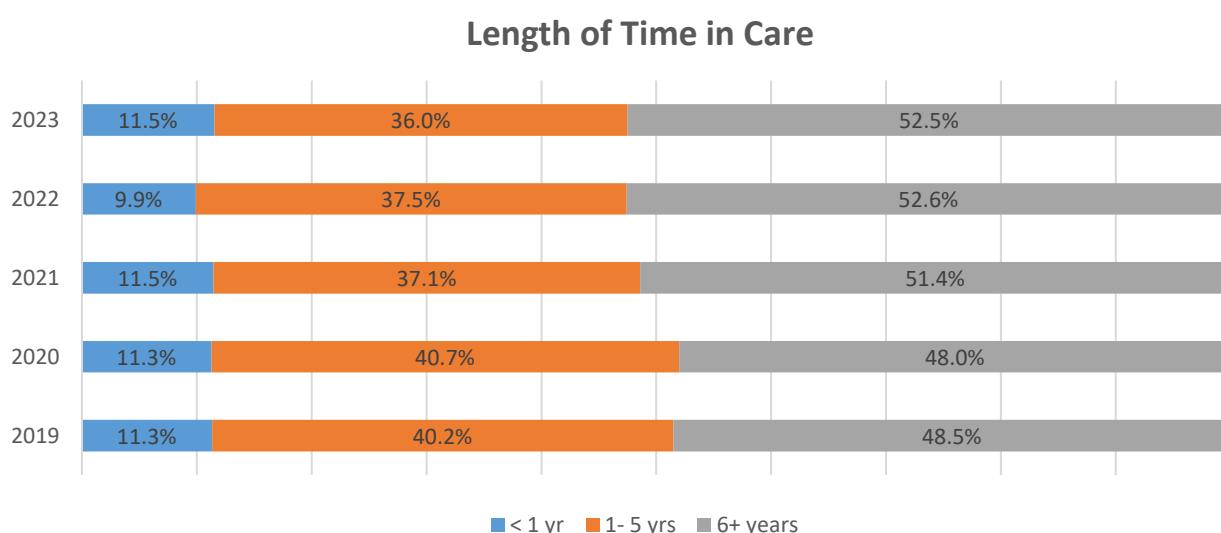


Figure 35: Percentage of children in care by length of time in care, 2019–2023

Data for 2022 and 2023 does not include children in care under the Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection.

Table 41: Children in care by length of time in care, 2019–2023

Year/ Length	< 1 year	1–5 years	6+ years	Total
2023*	647 (11.5%)	2,020 (36.0%)	2,948 (52.5%)	5,615 (100%)
2022*	558 (9.9%)	2,110 (37.5%)	2,958 (52.6%)	5,626 (100%)
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%)

*Data for 2022 and 2023 does not include children in care under the Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection

- A breakdown of the number and percentage of children in care by time band (< 1 year, 1–5 years and 6+ years) and area is presented below (Figure 36 and Table 42).
- 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 67% (130/194) while Mayo reported the lowest percentage at 38% (53/141). Six areas reported a percentage equal to or higher than the national average of 52.5%.
- Waterford/Wexford reported the highest percentage of children in care for less than 1 year at 17% (74/427) while Midlands (22/322) and Midwest (35/504) areas reported the lowest percentage at 7%.

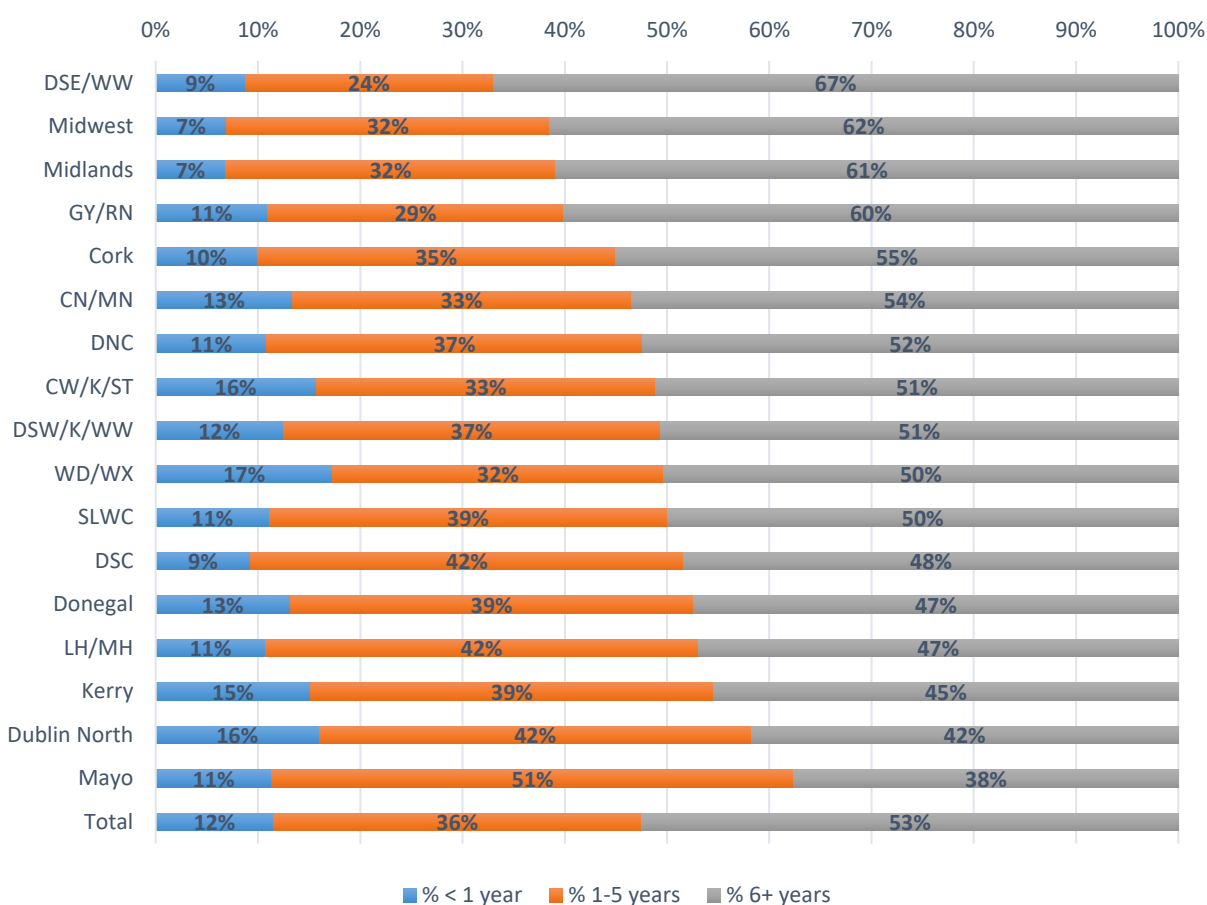


Figure 36: Percentage of children in care by time band (<1 year, 1–5 years, 6+ years), 2023 (ranked by % in care for 6+ years)

Table 42: Children in care by length of time in care by area, 2023 (ranked by % in care for 6+ years)

Area	< 1 year	% < 1– year	1–5 years	% 1–5 years	6+ years	% 6+ years	Total
Dublin South East/Wicklow	17	9%	47	24%	130	67%	194
Mid West	35	7%	159	32%	310	62%	504
Midlands	22	7%	104	32%	196	61%	322
Galway/Roscommon	39	11%	103	29%	214	60%	356
Cork	70	10%	247	35%	388	55%	705
Cavan/Monaghan	21	13%	52	33%	84	54%	157

Dublin North City	50	11%	169	37%	241	53%	460
Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary	50	16%	106	33%	163	51%	319
Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow	49	12%	145	37%	199	51%	393
Waterford/Wexford	74	17%	138	32%	215	50%	427
Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan	12	11%	42	39%	54	50%	108
Dublin South Central	31	9%	142	42%	162	48%	335
Donegal	28	13%	84	39%	101	47%	213
Louth/Meath	46	11%	181	42%	201	47%	428
Kerry	25	15%	65	39%	75	45%	165
Dublin North	62	16%	164	42%	162	42%	388
Mayo	16	11%	72	51%	53	38%	141
Total	647	12%	2,020	36%	2,948	53%	5,615

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 2023, there were 231 children in care in their third or greater placement within the previous 12 months. This amounts to 4.1% of children in care (Table 43).
- The percentage of children in their third or greater placement within the previous 12 months is similar to that for 2022 (4.0%).
- While the percentage compares favourably with percentages reported in other jurisdictions including England 6%³¹; Wales 9%³² and Scotland 4%³³, interpretation needs to be considered in the context of differing processes and procedures and definitions that may exist in other jurisdictions.

Table 43: Children in their third or greater placement within the previous 12 months, 2019–2023

	2019	2020	2021	2022*	2023*
# children in care	6,018	5,882	5,863	5,626	5,615
# 3 rd or greater placement	141	179	220	226	231
% 3 rd or greater placement	2.3%	3.0%	3.8%	4.0%	4.1%

* Data for 2022 and 2023 does not include children in care under the Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection

³¹ <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoptions#releaseHeadlines-tables>

³² <https://stats.wales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Health-and-Social-Care/Social-Services/Childrens-Services/Children-Looked-After/children-looked-after-childrenlookedafterat31march-by-localauthority-numberofplacementsduringyear-measure>

³³ [Children's Social Work Statistics - Looked After Children 2022-23 Additional Tables. Table 2.5](#)

- Almost one in four children (23.4%; 93/397) in general residential care at the end of 2023 were in their third or greater placement within the year (Table 44). This compares to the significantly lower 1.8% (91/5,034) for children in foster care (general and relative combined).
- Almost half (46.2%; 6/13) of children in special care were in their third or greater placements within the year. This is not surprising considering 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 to return to a less secure placement as soon as possible based on need.

Table 44: Children in care in their third or greater placement, by care type 2022–2023

Placement Type	# CIC 2022	# ≥ 3rd 2022	% ≥ 3rd 2022	# CIC 2023	# ≥ 3rd 2023	% ≥ 3rd 2023
General foster care	3,621	90	2.5%	3,560	73	2.1%
Relative foster care	1,453	21	1.4%	1,474	18	1.2%
General residential	375	64	17.1%	397	93	23.4%
Special care	14	4	28.6%	13	6	46.2%
Other	163	47	28.8%	171	41	24.0%
Total	5,626	226	4.0%	5,615	231	4.1%

- 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 45). The percentage in their third or greater placement ranges from 7% (27/388) in Dublin North to 0.6% in Cavan/Monaghan.

Table 45: Children in their 3rd or greater placement within the previous 12 months, by area 2023 (ranked by %)

Area	# ≥ 3 rd placement	# in care	% ≥ 3 rd placement
Dublin North	27	388	7.0%
Kerry	11	165	6.7%
Cork	41	705	5.8%
Donegal	11	213	5.2%
Dublin South Central	17	335	5.1%
Dublin South West/Kildare West Wicklow	20	393	5.1%
Waterford/Wexford	21	427	4.9%
Dublin South East/Wicklow	9	194	4.6%
Midlands	14	322	4.3%
Galway/Roscommon	14	356	3.9%
Dublin North City	13	460	2.8%
Carlow Kilkenny/South Tipperary	9	319	2.8%
Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan	3	108	2.8%
Mid West	13	504	2.6%
Louth/Meath	6	428	1.4%
Mayo	<5	141	0.7%
Cavan/Monaghan	<5	157	0.6%
Total	231	5,615	4.1%

Out of State Placements

Tusla seeks to place all children requiring care in a placement within Ireland, albeit 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 2023, there were 16 children in a placement outside of Ireland, five more than 2022 (11). Children in placements abroad account for 0.3% of the total number of children in care.
- All but one (15) of the children in placements outside of Ireland were in foster care, of which 12 (80%) were in foster care with relatives.

Children in Care with Private Providers

- At the end of 2023, there were 828 children in care in placements with private providers (Table 46).
- Across the 17 areas there were 15 (2%) more children in care with private providers at the end of 2023 (828) than at the end of 2022 (813).
- Children in placements with private providers account for 15% of all children in care. These children are included in the overall number of children in care presented above.
- The majority (61%; 508) of children in placements with private providers at the end of 2023 were in foster care, 32% (267) were in residential care while the remaining 6% (53) were in "Other" care placements—disability units (Table 47).
- 67% (267/397) of children in general residential placements are in placements with private providers compared to 14% (508/3,560) 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 46: Children in care in placements with private providers, 2017–2023

Placement	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023*
General residential	195	235	255	273	269	251	267
General foster care	395	393	405	412	453	503	508
Other ³⁴	18	27	33	44	63	119	53
Total	608	655	693	729	785	873	828*

*Data for 2023 does not include children in care under the Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection.

Table 47: % Breakdown of children in care in placements with private providers, 2017–2023

Placement	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
General residential	32%	36%	37%	37%	34%	29%	32%
General foster care	65%	60%	58%	57%	58%	58%	61%
Other	3%	4%	5%	6%	8%	14%	6%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

- A breakdown of children in placements with private providers by area is presented in Table 48. As can be seen from the table, Dublin South Central reported the highest percentage (32%; 107/335) of children in care with private providers, followed by Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow (27%; 106/393) and Dublin South East Wicklow (26%; 50/194).
- 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 (56%; 462) of all children in placements with private providers.

Table 48: Children in care with private providers by care type and area at year end 2023 (ranked by % in private)

Area	Residential	Foster Care	Other	Total Private	Total in Care	% Private
Dublin South Central	22	81	4	107	335	32%
Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow	28	73	5	106	393	27%
Dublin South East/Wicklow	15	31	4	50	194	26%
Dublin North	22	65	10	97	388	25%
Dublin North City	22	77	3	102	460	22%
Midlands	7	55	3	65	322	20%
Kerry	13	16	0	29	165	18%
Louth/Meath	17	29	4	50	428	12%
Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan	5	6	1	12	108	11%
Waterford/Wexford	28	13	4	45	427	11%
Donegal	17	3	2	22	213	10%
Cork	31	29	3	63	705	9%
Mid West	21	13	2	36	504	7%
Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary	9	6	6	21	319	7%
Galway/Roscommon	6	8	2	16	356	4%
Cavan/Monaghan	3	3	0	6	157	4%
Mayo	1	0	0	1	141	1%
Total	267	508	53	828	5,615	15%

³⁴ The placement “Other” includes children in supported lodgings, in a disability unit or drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre, special emergency arrangements 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 2023, there were 84 children 12 years and younger in a residential placement, 21 (33%) more than 2022 (Table 49). The majority (69%; 58) of these children were 10 years or older. The increase in the number of children 12 years and younger in residential placements reflects the ongoing difficulty the Agency is experiencing in identifying appropriate placements for children.

Table 49: Children 12 years and younger in residential placements at year end, 2017–2023

Children in residential care	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
# children aged ≤12 years in residential care	39	42	47	60	63	63	84
Total number of children in residential care (incl. special care)	358	381	409	421	454	439	410
% aged ≤12 years in residential care	10.9%	11.0%	11.5%	14.3%	13.9%	14.4%	20.5%

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 2023, 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 along with the lack of appropriate step-down placements.

Ballydowd — 5 bed mixed gender unit

Coovagh House — 2 bed mixed gender unit

Crannóg Nua — 6 bed mixed gender unit

- During 2023, there were 40 referrals to special care, 12 (23%) fewer than 2022 (52) (Table 50). Two (5%) of the 40 referrals were re-referrals. Fifty per cent (20) of referrals were approved (5 of which were subsequently withdrawn). The remaining referrals were deemed

not suitable, withdrawn prior to being considered, or inappropriate. A total of 15 children were admitted to special care in 2023, five fewer than 2022 (20).

- In 2023, Special Care Services operated at about 50% capacity due to ongoing challenges with staff recruitment and retention, resulting in the Agency not meeting its statutory obligations in providing placements to a number of children deemed to require a placement as directed by the High Court.

Table 50: Referrals to Special Care, 2017–2023

Year	# referrals	# re-referrals	Total referrals	Referrals approved	Children admitted
2023	38	2	40	20	15
2022	43	9	52	24	20
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 (24; 60%) than females (16; 40%) were referred. The most common age of those referred was 14 years (14; 35%) followed by 16 years (12; 30%) (Table 51).

Table 51: Referrals to Special Care by age, 2023

Age at time of referral	# referrals	% Total
≤13 years	3	8%
14 years	14	35%
15 years	5	13%
16 years	12	30%
17 years	6	15%
Total	40	100%

- 15% (6) of the children referred were in education at the time of referral.
- 90% (36) were engaging in drug and alcohol misuse at the time of referral.
- 65% (26) were presenting with mental health difficulties (unassessed) at the time of referral.
- 70% (28) were involved with the criminal justice system at the time of referral.
- 67.5% (27) of children referred were under an order of the court at the time of referral (Table 52). The majority (20; 74%) of whom were under a full care order. One-third (32.5%; 13) of children were in care under a voluntary arrangement with parents/guardians.

Table 52: Referrals to special care by care status at time of referral, 2023

Care Status	# referrals	% Total
Full care order	20	50.0%
Interim care order	7	17.5%
Voluntary care arrangement	13	32.5%
Total	40	100.0%

- On the 31 December 2023, there were 13 children in special care. The number of children in special care accounted for 0.2% (13/5,615) of the total number of children in care and 3% of all children in residential care (410).

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 2023, 97% (3,605/3,725) of children in care aged 6–15 years were in full time education³⁵ with 16 of the 17 Tusla areas reporting 90% or higher (Table 55). This data does not include children in care under the Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection.
- A breakdown of education by type for these children is presented in the table below (Table 53).

Table 53: Children in care (6–15 years) in full-time education by type, 2023

Age at time of referral	# referrals	% Total
Primary School	2,416	67%
Post-Primary	981	27%
Special Education	136	4%
Pre-School	35	1%
Education / Training Facility	20	1%
Other	8	0.2%
Boarding School	6	0.2%
Home Tuition	3	0.1%
Total	3,605	100%

- 93% (892/961) of children aged 16 and 17 years were in full time education with 12 of the 17 Tusla areas reporting 90% or higher with two of these areas (Kerry and Carlow/Kilkenny /South Tipperary) reporting 100% (Table 55).
- A breakdown of education by type for these children is presented in the table below (Table 54).

³⁵ 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.

Table 54: Children in care (16–17 years) in full-time education by type, 2023

Age at time of referral	# referrals	% Total
Post-Primary	737	82.6%
Special Education	73	8.2%
Education / Training Facility	47	5.3%
Other	12	1.3%
Primary School	11	1.2%
Home Tuition	6	0.7%
Boarding School	3	0.3%
Third Level/ Higher	3	0.3%
Total	892	100%

- A breakdown of the number and percentage of children in care in education by area at year end 2023 is presented below (Table 55).

Table 55: Children in care in full-time education at year end, 2023

Area	6–15 years	# in Educ.	% Educ.	16–17 years	# Educ.	% Educ.
Dublin South Central	219	205	93.6%	59	52	88.1%
Dublin South East/Wicklow	131	126	96.2%	41	39	95.1%
Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow	257	228	88.7%	58	52	89.7%
Midlands	221	216	97.7%	52	49	94.2%
Dublin North City	290	285	98.3%	81	71	87.7%
Dublin North	279	259	92.8%	54	47	87.0%
Louth/Meath	284	277	97.5%	61	58	95.1%
Cavan/Monaghan	105	105	100.0%	31	29	93.5%
Cork	470	462	98.3%	143	133	93.0%
Kerry	104	102	98.1%	26	26	100.0%
Carlow/Kilkenny/Soth Tipperary	210	209	99.5%	43	43	100.0%
Waterford/Wexford	274	265	96.7%	76	73	96.1%
Midwest	348	345	99.1%	86	81	94.2%
Galway/Roscommon	231	228	98.7%	75	69	92.0%
Mayo	89	87	97.8%	21	20	95.2%
Donegal	138	132	95.7%	35	34	97.1%
Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan	75	74	98.7%	19	16	84.2%
Total	3,725	3,605	96.8%	961	892	92.8%

Children in care with an allocated social worker and care plan

- At the end of 2023, 81% (4,560/5,615) of children in care had an allocated social worker (Table 56) down four percentage points from 2022 (85%). In terms of numbers, 1,055 children were awaiting allocation of a social worker at the end of 2023, 212 (25%) more than 2022 (843).

Table 56: Children in care with an allocated social worker at year end, 2022 and 2023

Care Type	# in Care 2022	# with SW 2022	% with SW 2022	# in Care 2023*	# with SW 2023	% with SW 2023
Foster Care General	3,656	3,119	85.3%	3,560	2,888	81.1%
Foster Care Relative	1,453	1,193	82.1%	1,474	1,132	76.8%
Residential (General)	425	400	94.1%	397	371	93.5%
Special Care	14	13	92.9%	13	13	100%
Other	207	187	90.3%	171	156	91.2%
Total	5,755	4,912	85.4%	5,615	4,560	81.2%

*Data for 2023 does not include children in care under the Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection.

- For the same period, 76% (4,259/5,615) of children had an up-to-date care plan. Tusla moved to reporting on up-to-date care plans (as opposed to a child just having a care plan) in 2023 (Table 57). In terms of numbers 1,356 children did not have an up-to-date care plan.

Table 57: Children in care with an up-to-date care plan at year end, 2023

Care Type	# in Care 2023*	# with UTD CP 2023	% with UTD CP 2023
Foster Care General	3,560	2,779	78.1%
Foster Care Relative	1,474	1,108	75.2%
Residential (General)	397	256	64.5%
Special Care	13	6	46.2%
Other	171	110	64.3%
Total	5,615	4,259	75.9%

*Data for 2023 does not include children in care under the Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection.

- A breakdown of the number of children in care with an allocated social worker and an up-to-date care plan, by area at the end of 2023 is presented in Table 58.
- Seven areas reported at least 90% of children in care with an allocated social worker with two of these areas (Mayo and Donegal) reporting 100%. Rates reported by Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary (35%), Midwest (55%) and Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow (65%) lower than all other areas.
- Three areas reported at least 90% of children in care with an up-to-date care plan. Rates reported by Dublin North City (63%), Dublin South Central (64%), Louth/Meath (65%) and Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan (66%) lower than all other areas.

Table 58: Children in care with a social worker and up-to-date care plan by area, 2023

Area	# in Care	# Allocated	% Allocated	UTD CP	UTD CP
Dublin South Central	335	241	71.9%	215	64.2%
Dublin South East/Wicklow	194	188	96.9%	153	78.9%
Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow	393	255	64.9%	275	70.0%
Midlands	322	257	79.8%	228	70.8%
Dublin North City	460	458	99.6%	288	62.6%
Dublin North	388	358	92.3%	323	83.2%
Louth/Meath	428	315	73.6%	277	64.7%

Cavan/Monaghan	157	132	84.1%	119	75.8%
Cork	705	670	95.0%	576	81.7%
Kerry	165	144	87.3%	128	77.6%
Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary	319	113	35.4%	291	91.2%
Waterford/Wexford	427	376	88.1%	311	72.8%
Midwest	504	281	55.8%	390	77.4%
Galway/Roscommon	356	330	92.7%	285	80.1%
Mayo	141	141	100.0%	129	91.5%
Donegal	213	213	100.0%	200	93.9%
Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan	108	88	81.5%	71	65.7%
Total	5,615	4,560	81.2%	4,259	75.9%

3.4 Discharges from Care

KEY FACTS

- 884 discharges from care in 2023 across the 17 Tusla areas, 11 (1%) more than 2022 (873) but 53 (6%) fewer than 2021 (937). *Data for children discharged from care by the Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection was not available [Refer to Section 3.8]*
- Half (52%; 458) of all discharges were for young people turning 18 years, consistent with previous years.
- 73% (647) of discharges were from foster care, a similar breakdown to previous years and not surprising considering almost 90% of children in care are in foster care.
- 40% (350) of discharges remained with their foster family with a further 38% (336) returning to parent/s. Seven per cent (63) of discharges were to independent living/supported living.
- The majority (67%; 305) of young people discharged by virtue of turning 18 years remained with their foster family, with a further 10% (45) returning home/extended family. About one in eight (59; 13%) moved to independent living.
- 8 more admissions than discharges reported by the 17 Tusla areas for 2023.

Number of Discharges

- In 2023, there were 884 discharges from care across the 17 Tusla areas, 11 (1%) more than 2022 (873), but 53 (6%) fewer than 2021 (937) (Figure 37). *Data for children discharged from care by the Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection was not available.*
- The discharges pertain to 857 individual children; 22 children had more than one discharge in the year.

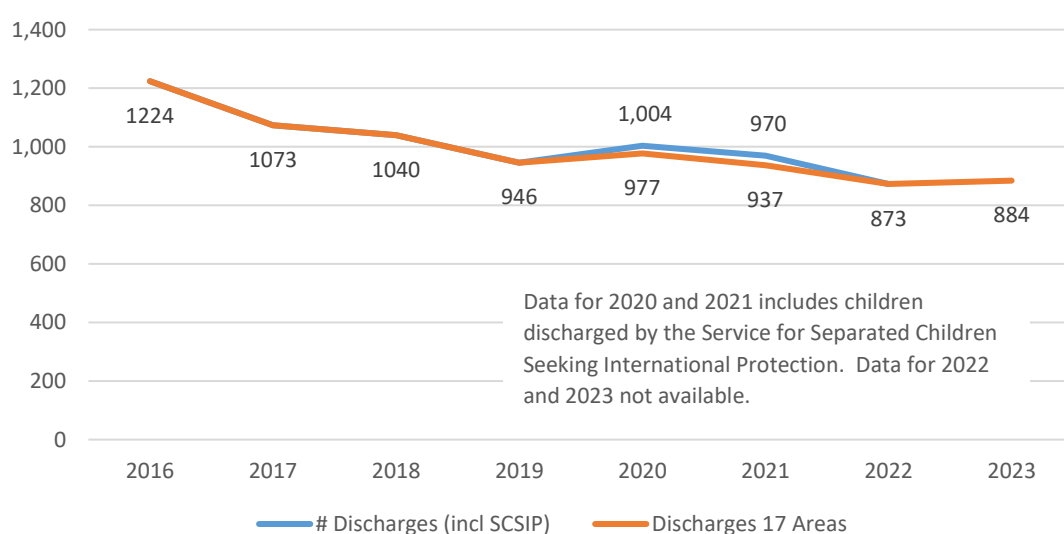


Figure 37: Discharges from care, 2016–2023

- Half (52%; 458) of all discharges were for young people turning 18 years which is consistent with previous years (Table 59). The next most common age of discharge was 17 years (excluding those turning 18 years) (7%; 60) and followed by the older ages of 15 years and 16 years. This is consistent with the number of children in care increasing with age.

Table 59: Discharges from care by age, 2020–2023

Age	# 2020	% 2020	# 2021	% 2021	# 2022	% 2022	# 2023	% 2023
< 1 year	29	3%	31	3%	31	4%	17	2%
1 year	19	2%	24	2%	14	2%	19	2%
2 years	28	3%	20	2%	22	3%	16	2%
3 years	25	2%	14	1%	15	2%	18	2%
4 years	25	2%	9	1%	14	2%	18	2%
5 years	21	2%	15	2%	17	2%	16	2%
6 years	14	1%	12	1%	19	2%	22	2%
7 years	11	1%	20	2%	17	2%	20	2%
8 years	21	2%	19	2%	11	1%	13	1%
9 years	13	1%	15	2%	19	2%	15	2%
10 years	20	2%	21	2%	14	2%	14	2%
11 years	18	2%	23	2%	19	2%	10	1%
12 years	23	2%	20	2%	28	3%	24	3%
13 years	28	3%	24	2%	28	3%	29	3%
14 years	34	3%	26	3%	40	5%	28	3%
15 years	33	3%	44	5%	38	4%	48	5%
16 years	40	4%	39	4%	37	4%	39	4%
17 years	64	6%	63	6%	65	7%	60	7%
17 years reaching majority	538	54%	531	55%	425	49%	458	52%
Total	1,004	100%	970	100%	873	100%	884	100%

*Data for 2022 and 2023 does not include children discharged by the Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection.

- 73% (647) of discharges were from foster care, a similar breakdown to previous years and not surprising considering almost 90% of children in care are in foster care (Table 60).

Table 60: Discharges from care by care type, 2020–2023

Care Type	2020	% Total 2020	2021	% Total 2021	2022	% Total 2022	2023	% Total 2023
General Foster Care	529	53%	514	53%	454	52%	441	50%
Relative Foster Care	219	22%	195	20%	190	22%	206	23%
Residential Care (incl. special care)	160	16%	153	16%	134	15%	134	15%
Other	96	10%	108	11%	95	11%	103	12%
National	1,004	100%	970	100%	873	100%	884	100%

*Data for 2022 and 2023 does not include children discharged by the Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection.

Location Discharged

- 40% (350) of discharges remained with their foster family with a further 38% (336) returning to parent/s (Table 61; Figure 38). Seven per cent (63) of discharges were to independent living/supported living.

Table 61: Location on discharge, 2020–2023

Location on Discharge	2020	% 2020	2021	% 2021	2022**	% 2022	2023**	% 2023
Returned to parent	406	40%	407	42%	368	42%	336	38%
Returned to extended family	54	5%	47	5%	58	7%	62	7%
Remained with foster family	397	40%	325	34%	309	35%	350	40%
Adopted	15	1%	21	2%	22	3%	9	1%
Independent living	55	5%	78	8%	68*	8%	63	7%
Supported lodgings	4	0.4%	4	0.4%	-	-	-	-
Shared accommodation	9	1%	13	1%	4	<1%	1	<1%
Other—not specified	64	6%	75	8%	44	5%	63	7%
Total	1,004	100%	970	100%	873	100%	884	100%

*Includes supported living **Data for 2022 and 2023 does not include children discharged by the Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection.

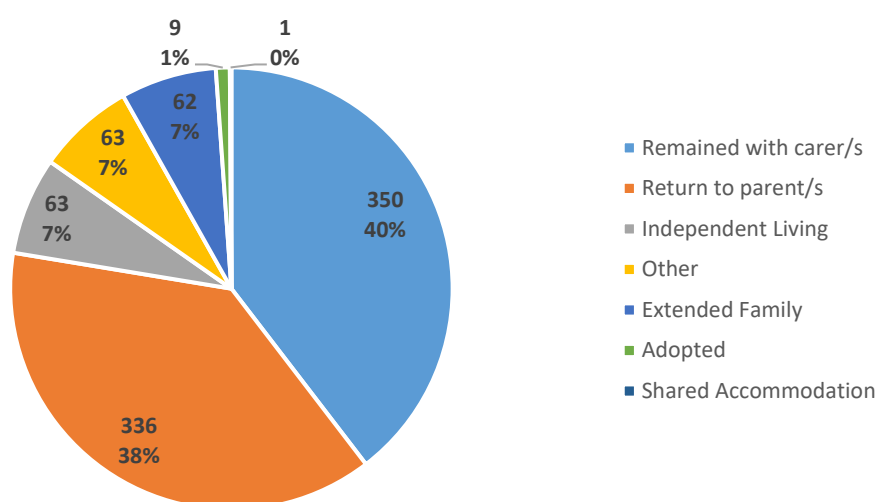


Figure 38: Breakdown of location on discharge, 2023

- Of those who were discharged by virtue of turning 18 years (458), the majority (67%; 305) remained with their foster family, with a further 10% (45) returning home/extended family. About one in eight (59; 13%) moved to independent living (Figure 39).

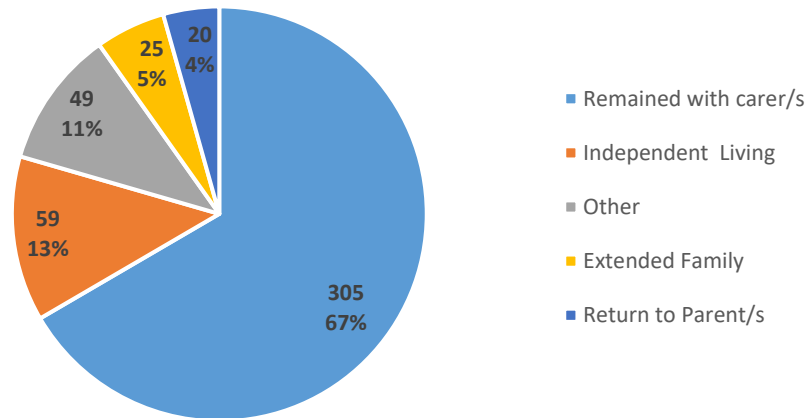


Figure 39: Breakdown of location on discharge for those discharged by virtue of turning 18 years, 2023

Discharges by Area

- A breakdown of discharges by area is presented in the table below (Table 62). As can be seen from the table, there is wide variation in the number of discharges ranging from 108 in Cork—the area with the largest number of children in care — to 13 in Mayo.
- 10 of the 17 areas reported more discharges in 2023 than 2022 with the largest increases reported by Midwest (up 20), Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow (up 19), Dublin North (up 15) and Galway/Roscommon (up 12). Of the seven areas that reported a decrease the largest decrease was reported by Mayo (down 22) followed by Cork (down 18), Dublin South Central (down 12) and Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary (down 10).

Table 62: Discharges from care by area, 2020–2023 (ranked by # discharges 2023)

Area	# 2020	% 2020	# 2021	% 2021	# 2022	% 2022	# 2023	% 2023	2023 v 2022
Cork	127	13%	101	10%	126	14%	108	12%	-18
Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow	82	8%	72	7%	71	8%	90	10%	19
Waterford/Wexford	70	7%	62	6%	73	8%	67	8%	-6
Galway/Roscommon	74	7%	69	7%	55	6%	67	8%	12
Midwest	79	8%	76	8%	45	5%	65	7%	20
Dublin North City	54	5%	83	9%	73	8%	64	7%	-9
Louth/Meath	69	7%	63	6%	51	6%	59	7%	8
Dublin North	56	6%	82	8%	43	5%	58	7%	15
Dublin South Central	72	7%	69	7%	62	7%	50	6%	-12
Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary	57	6%	29	3%	57	7%	47	5%	-10
Dublin South East/Wicklow	51	5%	41	4%	43	5%	44	5%	1
Midlands	59	6%	44	5%	38	4%	41	5%	3
Donegal	18	2%	42	4%	33	4%	41	5%	8
Cavan/Monaghan	37	4%	30	3%	25	3%	24	3%	-1
Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan	23	2%	30	3%	22	3%	24	3%	2
Kerry	32	3%	27	3%	21	2%	22	2%	1

Mayo	17	2%	17	2%	35	4%	13	1%	-22
SCSIP	27	3%	33	3%	NA	-	NA	-	-
Total	1,004	100%	970	100%	873	100%	884	100%	11

**Data for 2022 and 2023 does not include children discharged by the Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection.*

Admissions versus Discharges

- In 2023, there were eight more admissions than discharges reported by the 17 Tusla areas (Table 63). Eight areas reported more admissions than discharges, with the largest differences reported by Waterford/Wexford (19), Dublin North (18) and Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary (15). Eight of the 17 areas reported more discharges than admissions, ranging from 26 (Midwest) to one (Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan). The remaining area (Cork) reported the same number of admissions and discharges (108).

Table 63: Admissions and discharges by area, 2023

Area	Admissions 2023	Discharges 2023	Discharges v Admissions
Dublin South Central	44	50	6
Dublin South East/Wicklow	29	44	15
Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow	82	90	8
Midlands	32	41	9
Dublin North City	73	64	-9
Dublin North	76	58	-18
Louth/Meath	56	59	3
Cavan/Monaghan	32	24	-8
Cork	108	108	0
Kerry	28	22	-6
Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary	62	47	-15
Waterford/Wexford	86	67	-19
Midwest	39	65	26
Galway/Roscommon	70	67	-3
Mayo	16	13	-3
Donegal	36	41	5
Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan	23	24	1
Total	892	884	-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 by non-statutory, voluntary or private fostering agencies. All foster carers (statutory and non-statutory), excluding those under Section 36 (1) (d)³⁶ 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 carer³⁷ and a relative foster carer³⁸.

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

- ✚ 3,856 foster carers (statutory and non-statutory) on the panel of approved foster carers at the end of 2023, 111 (3%) fewer than 2022 (3,967) and the fewest number of the period 2015–2023.
- ✚ 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.
- ✚ 173 general and relative foster carers (statutory) approved in 2023, nine (5%) fewer than 2022 (182) and 41 private foster carers (non-statutory) approved, five (11%) fewer than 2022 (46).
- ✚ 265 general and relative foster carers (statutory) ceased fostering in 2023, eight (3%) more than 2022 (257).
- ✚ 93% (2,071) of general foster carers (statutory) had an allocated link (social) worker at the end of 2023, up from 87% at the end of 2022.

³⁶ 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.

³⁷ 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.

³⁸ 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.

- 95% (943) of relative foster carers (statutory) had an allocated link (social) worker at the end of 2023, up from 87% at the end of 2022.
- 94% (197/210) of “unapproved” relative foster carers³⁹ with a child placed for more than 12 weeks had a link (social) worker at the end of 2023, up from 91% (138/151) at the end of 2022.

Number of Foster Carers on the Panel

- At the end of 2023, there were 3,856 foster carers (statutory and non–statutory) nationally on the panel of approved foster carers. The number of foster carers on the panel is down 111 (3%) from 2022 (3,967) and is the fewest number for the period 2015–2023 (Figure 40). The number of foster carers on the panel is down 681 (15%) from 2016 when a high of 4,537 was reported.

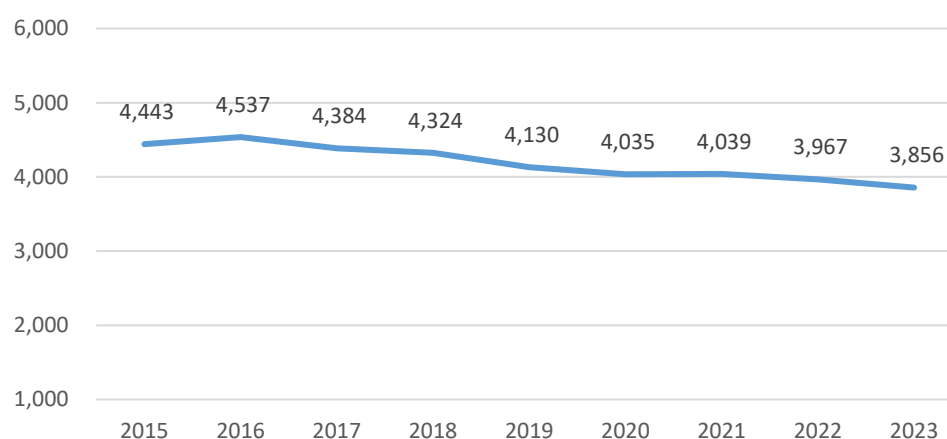


Figure 40: Number of approved foster carers on the panel of approved foster carers, 2015–2023

- The majority (58%; 2,227) of foster carers on the panel at the end of 2023 were general foster carers (statutory); one in four (26%; 996) was a relative foster carer (statutory), while the remaining 16% (633) were private foster carers (non-statutory) (Figure 41).

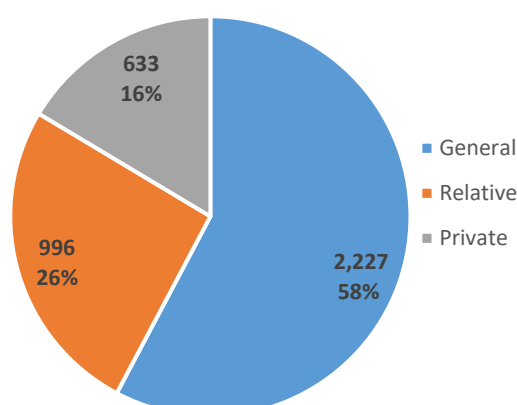


Figure 41: Breakdown of approved foster carers by type, 2023

³⁹ 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.

- There were 2,227 general foster carers (statutory) on the panel at the end of 2023, 102 (4%) fewer than 2022 (2,329) and the fewest number for the period 2018–2023. The number of general foster carers is down 448 (17%) from 2018 (2,675) (Table 64).
- There were 996 relative foster carers (statutory) on the panel at the end of 2023, 43 (4%) fewer than 2022 (1,039) and the fewest number for the period 2018–2023. The number of relative foster carers is down 150 (13%) on 2018 (1,146) (Table 64).
- There were 633 private foster carers (non–statutory) on the panel at the end of 2023, 34 (6%) more than at the end of 2022 (599) and the highest number for the period 2018–2023 (Table 64). 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 64: Foster carers (approved) by type, 2018–2023

Type	# 2018	# 2019	# 2020	# 2021	# 2022	# 2023	2023 v 2022	% Δ
General (statutory)	2,675	2,574	2,476	2,435	2,329	2,227	-102	4%
Relative (statutory)	1,146	1,095	1,056	1,062	1,039	996	-43	4%
Private (non-statutory)	503	461	503	542	599	633	34	6%
Total (approved)	4,324	4,130	4,035	4,039	3,967	3,856	-111	3%

Foster Carers Approved and Ceased

- A total of 173 general and relative foster carers (statutory) were approved and placed on the panel of approved foster carers in 2023, while an additional 41 private foster carers (non–statutory) were also approved and placed on the panel. Note this figure (41) includes a small number of “Brussels II foster carers”.⁴⁰ A further 28 applicants to be general foster carers (statutory) were awaiting assessment or approval by the foster care committee at the end of 2023.
- The number of general and relative foster carers (statutory) approved in 2023 (173) is down nine (5%) on the number approved in 2022 (182) while the number of private foster carers (non-statutory) approved in 2023 (41) is down five (11%) from 2022 (46). Note this figure (46) also includes a small number of “Brussels II foster carers”.
- A total of 265 general and relative foster carers (statutory) ceased fostering in 2023. Of these 91% (240) ceased voluntarily while the remaining 9% (25) ceased statutorily. Eight (3%) more

⁴⁰ **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 ceased fostering in 2023 (265) than 2022 (257, of which 233 ceased voluntarily and 24 ceased statutorily).

- In 2022, Tusla produced a 3-year strategic plan for foster care services⁴¹. One of the key aims of this strategy is to increase statutory foster care provision by strengthening recruitment of, support to and retention of foster carers.

Foster Carers by Area

- The number of foster carers (all types) on the panel at the end of 2023 across the 17 areas ranged from 506 in Cork to 88 in Kerry (Figure 42).

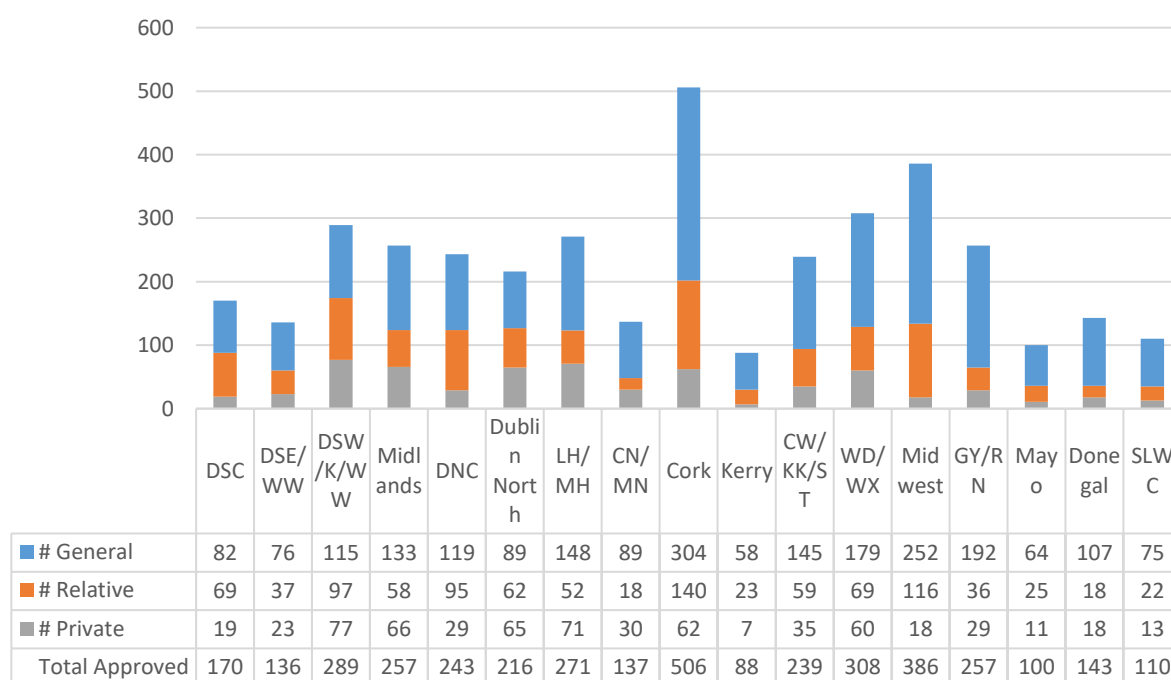


Figure 42: Foster carers by type and area, 2023

- As can be seen from Table 65, while 58% of foster carers nationally are general foster carers (statutory), there is wide variation across the areas, ranging from 40% to 75%. The areas reporting the highest percentages of general foster carers are Galway/Roscommon (75%), and Donegal (75%) with general foster carers comprising three out of four foster carers in these areas. This is in contrast to Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow (40%), Dublin North (41%), Dublin South Central (48%) 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 (statutory), it ranges from 13% to 41% across the areas. The areas reporting the highest percentages of relative foster carers are Dublin South Central (41%), Dublin North City (39%) and Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow (34%). Cavan/Monaghan and Donegal report the lowest percentage of relative foster carers at 13% followed by Galway/Roscommon (14%) and Louth/Meath (19%). The higher percentages seen in the Dublin area most likely reflect

⁴¹ Tusla, Strategic Plan for Foster Care Services for Children and Young People 2022 - 2025

families living in close proximity, unlike the more rural areas of Cavan/Monaghan and Donegal.

- Also, while 16% of foster carers on the panel are private foster carers (non-statutory), it ranges from 5% to 30% across the areas. The areas reporting the highest percentages of private foster carers were Dublin North (30%), Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow (27%), Midlands (26%) and Louth/Meath (26%). Midwest (5%), Kerry (8%), Galway/Roscommon (11%), Mayo (11%) and Dublin South Central (11%) report the lowest rates of private foster carers.

Table 65: Percentage breakdown of foster carers on the panel, by area 2023

Area	% General (Statutory)	% Relative (Statutory)	% Private (Non-Statutory)
Dublin South Central	48%	41%	11%
Dublin South East/Wicklow	56%	27%	17%
Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow	40%	34%	27%
Midlands	52%	23%	26%
Dublin North City	49%	39%	12%
Dublin North	41%	29%	30%
Louth/Meath	55%	19%	26%
Cavan/Monaghan	65%	13%	22%
Cork	60%	28%	12%
Kerry	66%	26%	8%
Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary	61%	25%	15%
Waterford/Wexford	58%	22%	19%
Midwest	65%	30%	5%
Galway/Roscommon	75%	14%	11%
Mayo	64%	25%	11%
Donegal	75%	13%	13%
Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan	68%	20%	12%
Total	58%	26%	16%

“Unapproved” Relative Foster Carers

- In addition to the 3,856 approved foster carers detailed above, there were also 245 relative foster carers who were “unapproved” at the end of 2023, 60 (32%) more than 2022 (185) when the fewest number for the period 2015–2022 was reported (Figure 43). 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 245 relative foster carers who were “unapproved” at the end of 2023, 86% (210) 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 up 59 (39%) on 2022 (151) when the fewest number for the period 2015 – 2022 was reported.

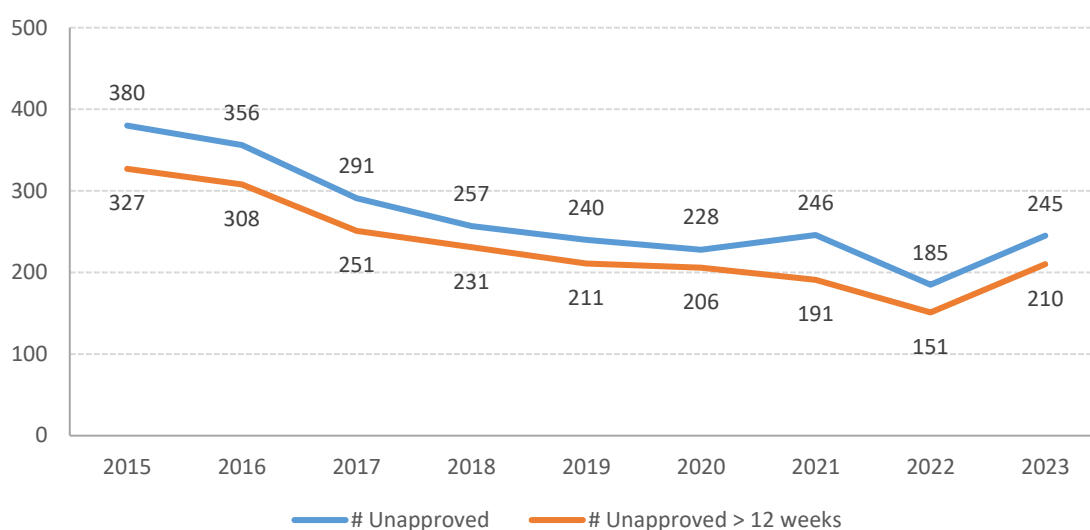


Figure 43: Number of unapproved relative foster carers, 2015–2023

Foster Carers with a Link (Social) Worker

- At the end of 2023, 93% (2,071) of general foster carers (statutory) had an allocated link (social) worker, up from 87% in 2022. A total of 156 general foster carers were awaiting a link (social) worker, 137 (47%) fewer than 2022 (293) (Table 66).
- 95% (943) of approved relative foster carers (statutory) had an allocated link (social) worker at the end of 2023, up from 87% in 2022. A total of 53 relative foster carers were awaiting a link (social worker), 79 (60%) fewer than 2022 (132) (Table 66).

Table 66: General and approved relative foster carers with a link (social) worker, 2015–2023

Year	# General (Statutory)	# General with Link Worker	% General with Link Worker	# Approved Relative (Statutory)	# Approved Relative with Link worker	% Approved Relative with Link Worker
2023	2,227	2,071	93%	996	943	95%
2022	2,329	2,036	87%	1,039	907	87%
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 (statutory) with a link (social) worker ranged from 76% (Dublin South Central) to 100% in five areas (Dublin South East/Wicklow, Dublin North, Cork, Kerry and Galway/Roscommon (Table 67). Eight of the 17 areas reported a percentage equal to or higher than the national average of 93%.

- The percentage of approved relative foster carers (statutory) with a link (social) worker ranged from 78% (Dublin South Central) to 100% in nine areas (Dublin South East/Wicklow, Dublin North City, Dublin North, Cork, Kerry, Waterford/Wexford, Galway/Roscommon, Mayo, and Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan). Eleven of the 17 areas reported a percentage equal to or higher than the national average of 95% (Table 67).

Table 67: Percentage of approved foster carers (statutory) with an allocated link worker by area, 2023

Area	# General	# General with LW	% General with LW	# Relative	# Relative with LW	% Relative With LW
Dublin South Central	82	62	76%	69	54	78%
Dublin South East/Wicklow	76	76	100%	37	37	100%
Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow	115	88	77%	97	81	84%
Midlands	133	119	89%	58	54	93%
Dublin North City	119	101	85%	95	95	100%
Dublin North	89	89	100%	62	62	100%
Louth/Meath	148	129	87%	52	43	83%
Cavan/Monaghan	89	81	91%	18	15	83%
Cork	304	304	100%	140	140	100%
Kerry	58	58	100%	23	23	100%
Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary	145	137	94%	59	57	97%
Waterford/Wexford	179	178	99%	69	69	100%
Midwest	252	228	90%	116	113	97%
Galway/Roscommon	192	192	100%	36	36	100%
Mayo	64	58	91%	25	25	100%
Donegal	107	97	91%	18	17	94%
Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan	75	74	99%	22	22	100%
Total	2,227	2,071	93%	996	943	95%

- 94% (197/210) of “unapproved” relative foster carers who had a child placed with them for longer than 12 weeks at the end of 2023, had an allocated link (social) worker, up from 91% (138/151) at the end of 2022. A total of 13 “unapproved” foster carers who had a child placed with them for longer than 12 weeks were awaiting a link (social) worker. These 13 carers were reported across three Tusla areas.

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 persons/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

- ✚ 523 referrals for an aftercare service in 2023, 12 (2%) more than 2022 (511).
- ✚ 2,904 young people in receipt of aftercare services, 45 (2%) fewer than 2022 (2,949)
- ✚ 75% (1,676/2,228) of the 18–22 years cohort in receipt of aftercare services at the end of 2023 were in education/training.
- ✚ Almost half (47%; 1,048/2,228) of 18–22 years cohort in receipt of aftercare services at the end of 2023, were continuing to live with their foster families, implying that they continue to experience caring relationships and stable living arrangements. A further 10% (212) had returned home to family, while one in five (21%; 476) had moved to independent living arrangements.
- ✚ 83% (2,423/2,904) of young people in receipt of aftercare services at the end of 2023 had an aftercare plan, with this figure rising to 96% (2,129/2,228) for the 18–22 years cohort. The overall percentage with a plan is down one percentage point from 2022 (84%; 2,471/2,949).
- ✚ 90% (2,088) of those with an aftercare plan assessed as needing an aftercare worker (2,310) had an aftercare worker, up from 82% at the end of 2022 (1,933/2,354). A total of 222 young people were awaiting an aftercare worker at the end of 2023, 199 (47%) fewer than 2022 (421).

Referrals for an Aftercare Service

- The agency received 523 referrals for an aftercare service in 2023, 12 (2%) more than 2022 (511). Of the 523 young people referred, 97% (508) were eligible for an assessment of need.
- Of those eligible for an assessment of need, 94% (479) were under 18 years and in care.
- A total of 466 assessments of need were completed in 2023, 44 (10%) more than 2022 (422). Of the 508 referrals received in 2023 and eligible for an assessment of need, 69% (349) had an assessment of need completed. It was determined in 97% (339) of cases that the young person

required an aftercare worker and of these 99% (335) had an aftercare worker at the end of 2023.

Number of Young Persons / Adults in Receipt of Aftercare Services

- At the end of 2023, there were 2,904 young people in receipt of aftercare services, 45 (2%) fewer than 2022 (2,949) (Table 68). Note: the data presented in this chapter includes young people reported by the Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection (SCSIP).
- Of those in receipt of aftercare services at the end of 2023, 51.0% (1,482) were male and 48.5% (1,409) were female. Of the remaining 13 cases, six were transgender, while gender was recorded as “other” for remaining seven.
- 55% (1,592) of those in receipt of aftercare services were 18–20 years inclusive, 22% (636) were 21–22 years inclusive, while the remaining 23% (676) were less than 18 years.

Table 68: Young persons / adults in receipt of aftercare services by age group, 2019–2023

Age Group	# 2019	# 2020	2021	2022	2023	2023 v 2022	Δ%
< 18 years	666	700	720	695	676	-19	-3%
18–20 years	1,580	1,613	1,618	1,631	1,592	-39	-2%
21–22 years	528	630	721	623	636	+13	2%
Total	2,774	2,943	3,059	2,949	2,904	-45	2%

Aftercare Services and Education

- 76% (1,215/1,592) of the 18–20 years cohort in receipt of aftercare services at the end of 2023 were in education/training, up slightly from 75% (1,228/1,631) in 2022. The highest number in education/training (379; 31%) were in second level, followed by third level colleges/university (266; 22%) and post-leaving cert courses (212; 17%) (Table 69).
- The breakdown of young people in education/accredited training by education type is broadly similar to that for 2022 and previous years.

Table 69: Adults 18–20 years in receipt of aftercare services in education/accredited training, 2020–2023

Education/Training	# 2020	% 2020	# 2021	% 2021	# 2022	% 2022	# 2023	% 2023
Second level	325	26%	350	27%	351	29%	379	31%
Vocational Training	163	13%	191	15%	155	13%	140	12%
PLCs	284	23%	250	19%	253	21%	212	17%
Third Level College/University	271	22%	296	23%	307	25%	266	22%
Accredited Training (e.g., Solas)	151	12%	128	10%	116	9%	157	13%
Other ⁴²	51	4%	74	6%	46	4%	61	5%
Total	1,245	100%	1,289	100%	1,228	100%	1,215	100%

⁴² Other is not specified, but generally includes disability schools.

- 72% (461/636) of those 21–22 years in receipt of an aftercare service at the end of 2023 were in education/accredited training, no change from 2022 (448/623). The largest proportion of those in education/training were in third level colleges/university (46%; 212), followed by post leaving cert colleges (83; 18%) and accredited training (17%; 80) (Table 70).
- The breakdown of young people in education/accredited training by education type is broadly similar to that for 2022 and previous years.

Table 70: Adults 21–22 years in receipt of aftercare services in education/accredited training, 2020–2023

Education/Training	# 2020	% 2020	# 2021	% 2021	# 2022	% 2022	# 2023	% 2023
Second level	3	1%	7	1%	6	1%	11	2%
Vocational Training	38	8%	77	15%	47	10%	51	11%
PLCs	87	19%	102	20%	86	19%	83	18%
Third Level College/University	240	53%	231	46%	187	42%	212	46%
Accredited Training (e.g., Solas)	63	14%	54	11%	105	23%	80	17%
Other ⁴³	21	5%	28	6%	17	4%	24	5%
Total	452	100%	499	100%	448	100%	461	100%

Aftercare Services and Accommodation

- Of those 18–22 years in receipt of aftercare services at the end of 2023 (2,228), almost half (47%; 1048) were continuing to live with their foster families, implying that they continue to experience caring relationships and stable living arrangements (Figure 44). A further 10% (212) had returned home to family, while one in five (21%; 476) had moved to independent living arrangements⁴⁴.

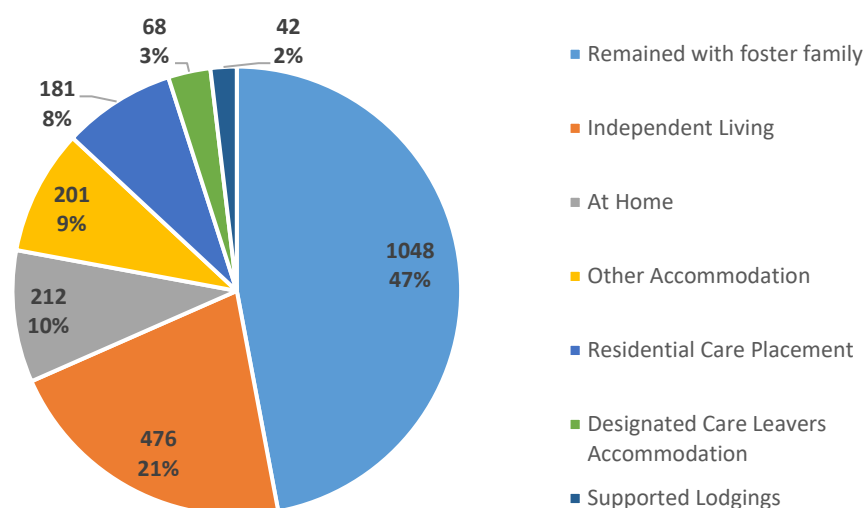


Figure 44: Living arrangements for 18–22 years cohort in receipt of aftercare services, 2023

⁴³ Other is not specified, but generally includes disability schools.

⁴⁴ Other includes psychiatric services, disability services, prison, staying with friends, homeless etc.

Aftercare Plan and Aftercare Worker

- More than eight out of 10 (83%; 2,423/2,904) young people in receipt of an aftercare service at the end of 2023 had an aftercare plan (Table 71), with this figure rising to 96% (2,129/2,228) for the 18–22 years cohort. The overall percentage with a plan is down one percentage point from 2022 (84%; 2,471/2,949).
- 90% (2,088) of those with an aftercare plan assessed as needing an aftercare worker (2,310) had an aftercare worker at the end of 2023, up from 82% (1,933/2,354) at the end of 2022 (Table 71). A total of 222 young people were awaiting an aftercare worker at the end of 2023, 199 (47%) fewer than 2022 (421).

Aftercare Services by Area

- Looking across the areas, the highest number of young people in receipt of aftercare services at the end of 2023 was reported by Cork (345) followed by Dublin North City (268), Midwest (244) and Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow (228) while the fewest number was reported by Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan (42) followed by Mayo (77) and Kerry (79) (Table 71).
- The percentage of young people with an aftercare plan across the areas ranged from 63% (Louth/Meath) to 100% (Mayo). Nine of the 17 areas along with the Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection reported a percentage equal to or higher than the national average of 83% (Table 71).
- The percentage of young people assessed as needing an aftercare worker with an aftercare worker, ranged from 48% (Dublin South Central) to 100% in 12 areas as well as the Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection.
- In some areas young people who are settled and doing well are assessed as not needing an allocated aftercare worker and moved to the drop-in service. This allows the service to prioritise those with greatest need for allocation to an aftercare worker.

Table 71: Persons in receipt of aftercare services with an aftercare plan and allocated worker, 2023

Area	# Referrals	# in aftercare	# with plan	% with plan	# assessed AC worker	% assessed AC worker	# with AC worker	% with AC worker
Dublin South Central	23	187	138	74%	138	100%	66	48%
Dublin South East/Wicklow	20	128	123	96%	123	100%	123	100%
Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow	28	228	205	90%	168	82%	102	61%
Midlands	25	139	129	93%	96	74%	96	100%
Dublin North City	51	268	212	79%	212	100%	212	100%
Dublin North	17	137	119	87%	119	100%	119	100%
Louth/Meath	25	134	84	63%	84	100%	84	100%
Cavan/Monaghan	17	83	75	90%	75	100%	75	100%
Cork	73	345	259	75%	246	95%	233	95%
Kerry	13	79	66	84%	66	100%	66	100%
Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary	22	169	134	79%	104	78%	76	73%

Waterford/Wexford	40	193	155	80%	155	100%	155	100%
Midwest	57	244	230	94%	230	100%	187	81%
Galway/Roscommon	25	219	173	79%	173	100%	173	100%
Mayo	12	77	77	100%	77	100%	77	100%
Donegal	14	91	80	88%	80	100%	80	100%
Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan	11	42	31	74%	31	100%	31	100%
Service for SCSIP	50	141	133	94%	133	100%	133	100%
Total	523	2,904	2,423	83%	2,310	95%	2,088	90%

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 (AAI) for a decision to grant a Declaration of Eligibility and Suitability to Adopt. The provision of counselling to birth parents considering adoption as an option for their child and the placing of children for adoption with 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 (through the AAI) 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

- ✚ 230 applications for assessment of eligibility and suitability as adoptive parent(s) were received in 2023. At least 184 (partial figure) applications were received in 2022.
- ✚ The most common type of application received in 2023 was for step-parent adoption accounting for 39% (89) of all applications received, followed by fostering-to-adoption (60; 26%). Applications for domestic adoption accounted for the fewest number of applications received (34; 15%) in 2023.
- ✚ 225 new children were referred for adoption (all types) in 2023. At least 181 (partial figure) new children were referred for adoption in 2022.
- ✚ A total of 176 adoption assessments were presented to local adoption committees in 2023, 22 (14%) more than 2022 (154) and the highest number for all years 2017–2023. The local adoption committees make a recommendation to the Adoption Authority of Ireland.

Applications for Assessment to Adopt a Child

- In 2023, Tusla received 230 applications for assessment of eligibility and suitability as adoptive parent(s). At least 184 (partial figure) applications were received in 2022.
- The most common type of application received in 2023 was for step-parent adoption accounting for 39% (89) of all applications received, followed by fostering-to-adoption (60; 26%) (Figure 45). Applications for domestic adoption accounted for the fewest number of applications received (34; 15%) in 2023.

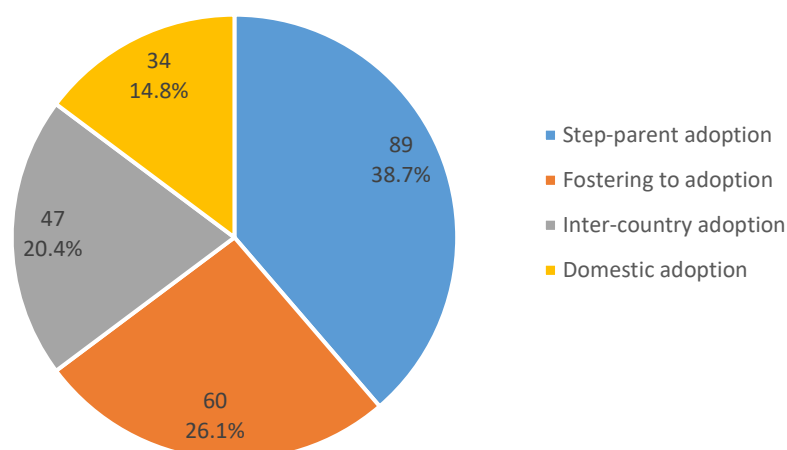


Figure 45: Applications for assessment as adoptive parent(s) by type, 2023

- A breakdown of the applications by type for the years 2017–2023 is presented in the table below (Table 72).

Table 72: Applications for assessment as adoptive parent(s) by type, 2017–2023

Applications	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	% Total
Inter-country adoption	92	76	50	34	56	42	47	20%
Step-parent adoption	43	68	94	48	65	57	89	39%
Domestic adoption	28	41	25	25	41	29	34	15%
Fostering to adoption	27	27	25	51	37	56	60	26%
Total	190	212	194	158	199	184*	230	100%

*2022—partial data (data from one Tusla Office not available for Q4 2022)

Children Subject of an Adoption Application

- 225 new children were referred for adoption (all types) in 2023 (Table 73). At least 181 (partial figure) new children were referred for adoption in 2022.
- The highest number of children referred in 2023 were referred for fostering to adoption (111; 49%), followed by step-parent adoption (88; 39%) (Figure 46). Children referred for domestic adoption accounted for just over one in 10 children referred (12%; 26).

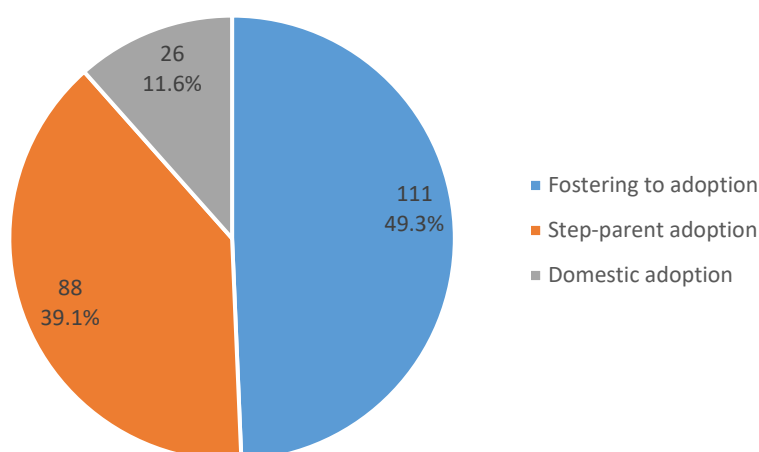


Figure 46: Children referred for adoption by type, 2023

- A breakdown of new children referred for adoption for the years 2017–2023 by type is presented in the table below.

Table 73: Children referred for adoption by type, 2017–2023

Referrals	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	% Total
Step-parent adoption	79	136	109	98	123	82	88	39%
Fostering to adoption	76	45	48	76	67	84	111	49%
Domestic adoption	22	16	22	22	18	15	26	12%
Total	177	197	179	196	208	181*	225	100%

*2022—partial data (data from one Tusla Office not available for Q4 2022)

Adoption Assessments

- A total of 176 adoption assessments were presented to adoption committees in 2023, 22 (14%) more than 2022 (154) and the highest number for all years 2017–2023 (Table 74). The adoption committees make a recommendation to the Adoption Authority of Ireland.
- The highest number of assessments presented in 2023 was for step-parent adoption (74; 42%). Assessments for domestic adoption accounted for 7% (12) of all assessments presented (Figure 47 and Table 74).
- Assessments presented for step-parent adoption (74) were up 54% (26) on 2022 and the highest number for all years 2017–2023 (Table 74).

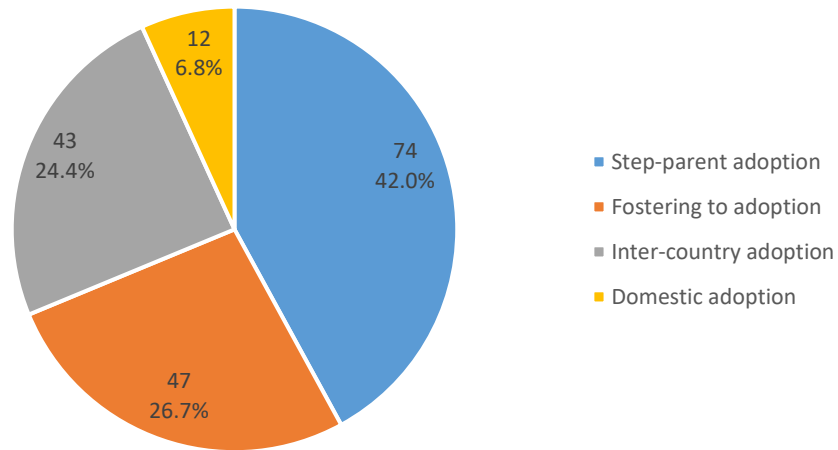


Figure 47: Number of assessments presented to adoption committees by type, 2023

Table 74: Assessments presented to adoption committees, 2017–2023

Assessments	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2023 v 2022	% Δ
Inter-country adoption	71	52	46	37	41	41	43	2	5%
Step-parent adoption	42	45	56	66	67	48	74	26	54%
Domestic adoption	20	22	25	22	12	24	12	-12	-50%
Fostering to adoption	19	32	25	30	50	41	47	6	15%
Total	152	151	152	155	170	154	176	22	14%

3.8 Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection

Tusla provides specialist services for separated children seeking international protection (SCSIP). Its primary function is to promote the welfare of children who are not receiving adequate care and protection in accordance with the Child Care Act 1991.

Separated children seeking international protection are defined as children under 18 years of age who are outside their country of origin, who may be in need of international protection and are separated from their parents or their legal/customary care giver.

The SCSIP service offers an urgent response to the presenting needs of unaccompanied minors who arrive in the jurisdiction. The service has a dual mandate to:

- offer care and protection to the young people while in the care of Tusla, to assist them with integration into Irish life, and
- to support them through their international protection application.

While young people who have been displaced by the war in Ukraine in 2022 are unaccompanied minors, they are not seeking international protection as they are beneficiaries of the European Temporary Protection Directive. They fall under the remit of the SCSIP as they may be in need of care and protection under the Child Care Act 1991.

The SCSIP team is a multi-disciplinary team comprising social workers, social care workers, aftercare workers and family support practitioners. It is also a diverse team with over 20 nationalities.

All referrals to the SCSIP team from the Department of Justice are screened for eligibility for services, and where required, an initial assessment helps determine the appropriate next steps to be taken. Where it appears that an unaccompanied minor reaches the threshold for receipt of Tusla services, they are admitted into the care of the State and provided with a child protection and welfare service from Tusla.

The social work team also operates a family reunification assessment service whereby immigration authorities, in accordance with the International Protection Act 2015, refers children presenting with families or adults in cases where parentage or guardianship is unclear. The social work team conduct an assessment, and based on the outcome children are either returned to the adults or families presenting or are taken into care where there are concerns around parentage, guardianship and or their safety and welfare.

KEY FACTS

- ✚ 530 referrals to Tusla's Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection in 2023, 67 (11%) fewer than 2022 (597).
- ✚ 33% (177/530) of referrals for 2023 were for children from Ukraine. This compares to 44% (261/597) in 2022.
- ✚ 432 new children admitted to care/accommodated by the service in 2023, 154 (55%) more than 2022 (278).

- ✚ 40% (171/432) of children admitted to care/accommodated in 2023 were from Ukraine. The remaining 60% (261/432) of children were from about 30 different countries with the most common being Somalia, Afghanistan, Egypt, Algeria, Congo, Pakistan and Nigeria
- ✚ 330 children and young people were in care/being accommodated by the service at the end of 2023, 135 (69%) more than at the end of 2022 (195).

Referrals

- In 2023, there were 530 referrals to Tusla's Service for Separated Children Seeking International Protection, 67 (11%) fewer than 2022 (597) (Figure 48).
- The high number of referrals is consistent with the ongoing war in Ukraine and the well documented increase in people seeking international protection.
- 33% (177/530) of referrals for 2023 were for children from Ukraine. This compares to 44% (261/597) in 2022.

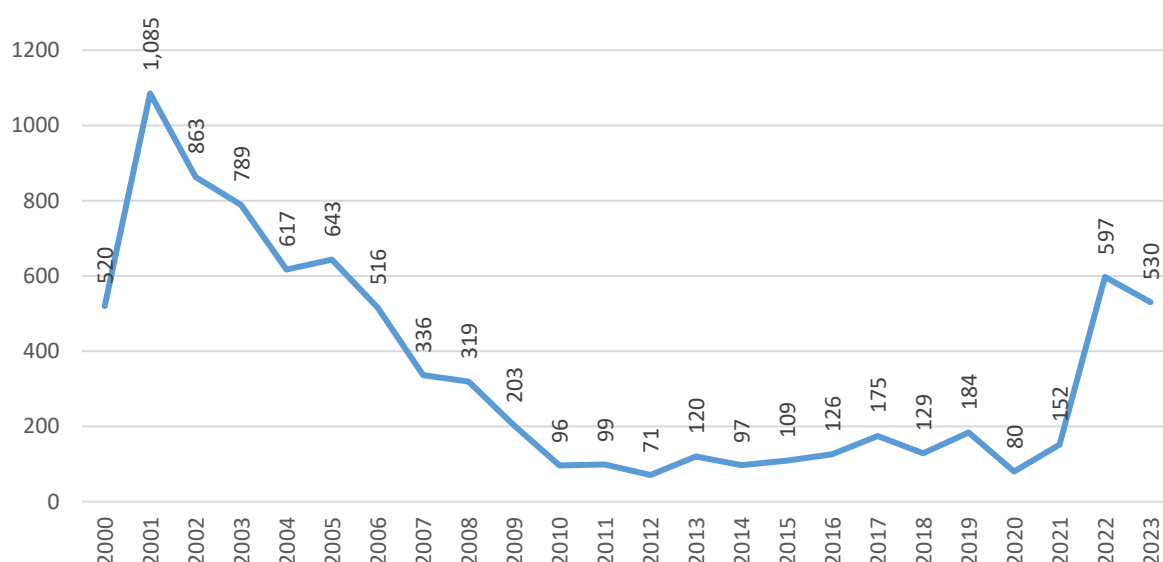


Figure 48: Referrals to Tusla Social Work Team for Separated Children Seeking International Protection, 2000–2023

Children in Care / Accommodated

- 432 new children admitted to care/accommodated⁴⁵ by the service in 2023, 154 (55%) more than 2022 (278).
- 40% (171/432) of children admitted to care/accommodated in 2023 were from Ukraine. The remaining 60% (261/432) of children were from about 30 different countries with the most common being Somalia, Afghanistan, Egypt, Algeria, Congo, Pakistan and Nigeria.
- 330 children were in care/being accommodated at the end of 2023, 135 (69%) more than at the end of 2022 (195) (Table 75 and Figure 49).

⁴⁵ Note: Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection (BOTP) are, in general accommodated under Section 5 of the Child Care Act 1991 and are therefore not in state care.

- 29% (97/330) of children in care/being accommodated at the end of 2023 were from Ukraine.
- Quarter-on-quarter increase in the number of children in care/being accommodated over the two years 2022–2023 (Table 75).

Table 75: Children in care/accommodated at the end of each quarter Q1 2022–Q4 2023 by type

Quarter	# Ukraine	# Other Nationalities	# All Children	% Ukraine	% Other Nationalities
Q1 2022*	24	NA	NA		
Q2 2022	62	106	168	37%	63%
Q3 2022	67	109	176	38%	62%
Q4 2022	73	122	195	37%	63%
Q1 2023	76	135	211	36%	64%
Q2 2023	72	184	256	28%	72%
Q3 2023	104	215	319	33%	67%
Q4 2023	97	233	330	29%	71%

*Data for all children not available for Q1 2022

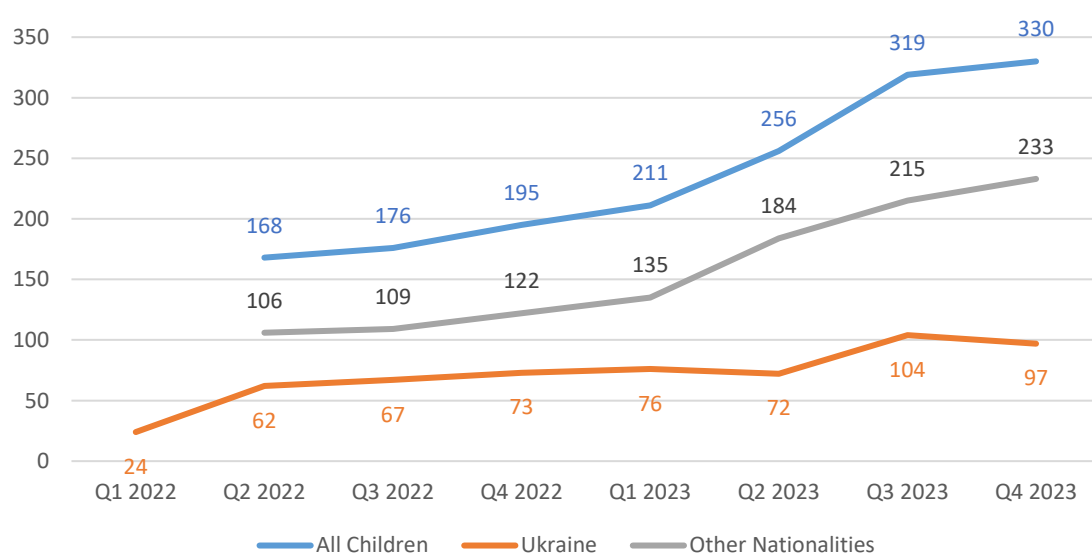


Figure 49: Breakdown of children in care/accommodated at the end of each quarter Q1 2022–Q4 2023 by type

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 2023, services commissioned under Sections 56–59 received funding of €216.3 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.

KEY FACTS

- ✚ At least 47,260 children referred to family support services in 2023, with 19,792 children in receipt of family support services at year end (based on a response rate of 86%).
- ✚ The number children referred to family support services equates to about 4% of children living in Ireland and ranges from 1% to 17% across the 17 Tusla areas.
- ✚ In 2023, the most common source of referral was parents/guardians accounting 29% (13,657) of all referrals, followed by Tusla social workers (24%; 11,118), schools (11%; 5,413) and self-referrals (11%; 5,118). These four sources account for 75% (35,306) of all sources.
- ✚ 64% (30,092) of children referred to family support services in 2023 received a service (ranges from 34% to 96% across the 17 Tusla areas).

4.1 Referrals to Family Support Services

- Over 400 family support services were commissioned by Tusla in 2023 to deliver services (Table 76). This includes services where providers were both internal and external to Tusla. On average about 86% of services returned data for 2023.

Table 76: Family Support Services Commissioned in 2023

Family Support Commissioned	Jan–Jun 2023	Jul–Dec 2023
Number of family support services commissioned, where providers were external to Tusla	359	356
Number of family support services commissioned, where providers were internal to Tusla	62	43
Total number of family support services commissioned (external + internal)	421	399
Number of responses received	347	356
% Response rate	82%	89%

- In 2023, at least 47,260 children were referred to family support services, with 19,792 children in receipt of family support services at year end. As this data is based on an average response rate of 86%, the total number of children involved is likely to be higher and is not directly comparable with data for 2022 and previous years. The number of children referred to family support services equates to about 3.9% of children under 18 years (based on Census 2022 data).
- In 2022, 40,510 children (0–17 years) were referred to family support services (based on a response rate of 84%) with 18,768 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 2023, the most common source of referral was parents/guardians accounting 29% (13,657) of all referrals, followed by Tusla social workers (24%; 11,118), schools (11%; 5,413) and self-referrals (11%; 5,118). These four sources account for 75% (35,306) of all sources (Figure 50).

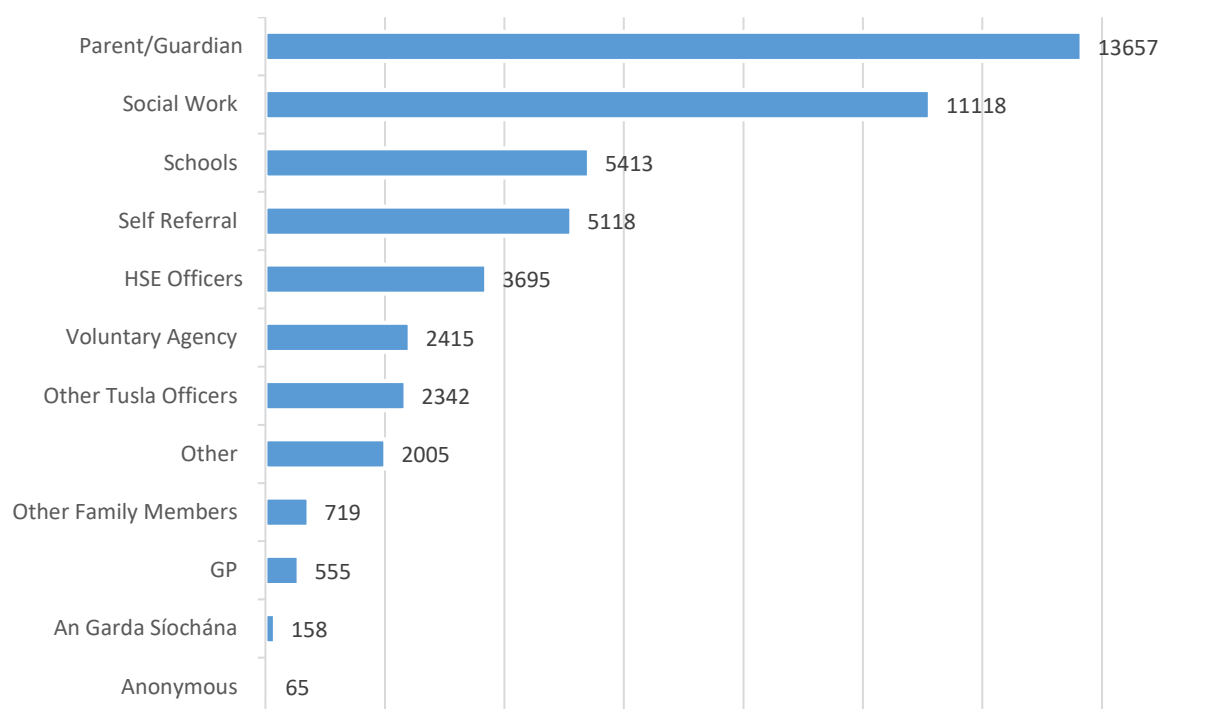


Figure 50: Children referred to Family Support Services by source, 2023

- 64% (30,092) of children referred to family support services in 2023 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 plan underpinning the service to the child and his/her family. The percentage who received a service is down two percentage points on 2022 (66%; 26,792). However, this comparison needs to be interpreted with caution due to incomplete returns.
- Of the number of children referred in 2023 who received a service:
 - 5% (1,373) were subject of a child in care plan; 54% (740) of these children participated in the development of their plan, 53% (734) participated in the implementation of their plan and 52% (709) participated in the review of the plan.
 - 8% (2,513) were subject of a Tusla child protection and welfare safety plan; 53% (1,322) of these children participated in the development of their plan, 49% (1,237) participated in the implementation of their plan and 47% (1,186) participated in the review of the plan.
 - 7% (2,045) were subject of a Meitheal support plan; 67% (1,375) of these children participated in the development of their plan, 65% (1,326) participated in the implementation of their plan and 58% (1,183) participated in the review of the plan.
 - 45% (13,630) were subject of a single agency family support plan; 59% (8,101) of these children participated in the development of their plan, 57% (7,709) participated in the implementation of their plan and 52% (7,038) participated in the review of the plan.
 - 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, Donegal reported the highest number of children referred to family support services (4,327) followed by Dublin North City (4,264), Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow (4,170) and Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan (4,133). Midlands reported the fewest number (921) followed by Mayo (1,108) and Cavan/Monaghan (1,215) (Table 77).
- Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan reported the highest rate of children referred (17%), followed to a lesser extent by Donegal (10%) and Dublin North City (9%). The lowest rate (1%) was reported by Midlands followed by Dublin South East/Wicklow (2%) and Louth/Meath (2%). Nine of the 17 areas reported a rate equal to or higher than the national average of 4% (Table 77).
- The percentage of children referred to family support services in 2023 who received a service ranged from 34% in Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan to 96% in Mayo. Nine of the 17 areas reported a percentage equal to or higher than the national average of 64% (Table 77). The types of services received vary depending on the needs of the child and family.

Table 77: Children referred to family support service, by area 2023 (ranked by number referred)

Area	# Referred	Pop < 18 years	Rate/100 pop	# received a service	% received a service	Response rate*
Donegal	4,327	42,144	10%	3,763	87%	100%
Dublin North City	4,264	49,682	9%	2,355	55%	78%
Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow	4,170	108,927	4%	3,029	73%	95%
Sligo Leitrim West Cavan	4,133	24,312	17%	1,416	34%	89%
Dublin South Central	3,945	70,259	6%	2,406	61%	98%
Dublin North	3,937	10,3508	4%	1,645	42%	88%
Carlow Kilkenny South Tipperary	3,214	62,366	5%	2,302	72%	92%
Galway Roscommon	2,927	81,799	4%	2,240	77%	100%
Cork	2,784	136,786	2%	1,723	62%	69%
Midwest	2,674	96,764	3%	2,114	79%	98%
Waterford Wexford	2,225	69,239	3%	1,422	64%	64%
Kerry	1,947	34,994	6%	1,128	58%	95%
Louth Meath	1,874	96,531	2%	964	51%	88%
Dublin South East Wicklow	1,595	91,047	2%	701	44%	87%
Cavan Monaghan	1,215	37,336	3%	1,088	90%	97%
Mayo	1,108	31,911	3%	1,066	96%	69%
Midlands	921	80,962	1%	730	79%	67%
Total	47,260	1,218,567	4%	30,092	64%	86%

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

- In 2023, 19,877 parents/guardians/carers were referred to a parenting support service and of these 78% (15,498) received a service. A parenting support service is defined as a formal intervention undertaken with a parent/guardian/carer that is specifically intended and designed to support the parent/carer in their parenting role.
- The number of parenting support services commissioned in 2023 is presented in the table below (Table 78).

Table 78: Parenting support services commissioned in 2023

Parenting Support Services Commissioned	Jan–Jun 2023	Jul–Dec 2023
# Individual (one-to-one) parenting support services commissioned internally	2,836	3,477
# Individual (one-to-one) parenting support services commissioned externally	1,782*	2,867
# parenting support services that are group-based interventions commissioned internally	2,275	2,123
# parenting support services that are group-based interventions commissioned externally	877*	1,381

**Based on data from 16/17 areas*

4.2 MEITHEAL

Tusla has developed a national practice model referred to as Meitheal⁴⁶ 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 timelier 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

-  2,492 Meitheal processes were requested, 172 (7%) more than 2022 (2,320) and the highest number for all years 2018–2023.
-  73% (1,820) of Meitheal processes requested in 2023 were requested either by the family themselves, or directly by a practitioner; 20% (490) of Meitheal processes requested were diversions from social work and 7% (182) of Meitheal processes requested were initiated following step-down from social work.
-  84% (2,095) of Meitheal processes requested in 2023 proceeded to Stage 2 (discussion stage). The Meitheal is considered to be initiated at this point.
-  1,725 Meitheal processes reached completion of stage 2 (discussion stage) in 2023 and of these 53% (911) proceeded to delivery, 2% (38) were referred to Tusla Social Work Services, 30% (519) were referred "to a single agency response", 6% (101) were closed, while the remaining 9% (156) requests were categorised as "other".
-  1,473 Meitheal processes were closed in 2023. Of these, 23% (334) were closed following submission of the request form (end of stage 1); 36% (535) were closed following completion

⁴⁶ Meitheal is an old Irish term that describes how neighbours would come together to assist in the saving of crops or other tasks.

of the strengths and needs form (stage 2); 12% (177) were closed following commencement of Meitheal support meetings (stage 3); 29% (427) were closed post-delivery (end of process).

Meitheal Requests

- In 2023, some 2,492 Meitheal processes were requested, 172 (7%) more than 2022 (2,320) and the highest number for all years 2018–2023 (Table 79).

Table 79: Number of Meitheal requests, by Year, 2018–2023

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2023 v 2022	%Δ
# requests	1,734	2,330	2,287	2,373	2,320	2,492	172	7%

- 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 2023, these requests accounted for 73% (1,820) of all requests where the pathway was provided, up three percentage points 2022 (70%) (Table 80).
- A further 20% (490) of requests were cases that were diverted by child protection and welfare social work teams, down one percentage point from 2022 (21%). 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 80).
- The remaining 7% (182) of requests were cases that were stepped down by child protection and welfare social work teams, down two percentage points for 2022 (9%). 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 80: Pathways into Meitheal, 2021–2023

Pathway	# 2021	% Total	# 2022	% Total	# 2023	% Total
Direct Access	1,584	67%	1,566	70%	1,820	73%
Social Work Diversion	488	21%	476	21%	490	20%
Social Work Step-Down	301	13%	210	9%	182	7%
Total	2,373	100%	2,252*	100%	2,492	100%

*Pathway was not provided for 68 records

Meitheal Requests by Area

- As can be seen from the table below (Table 81), the number of processes requested varies across the 17 Tusla areas. In 2023, the number of requests ranged from 38 (Mayo) to 352 (Waterford / Wexford) (Table 81). Five areas reported fewer than 100 requests, nine areas reported between 100 and 200 requests, while the remaining three areas reported in excess of 200 requests.
- 13 areas reported more requests in 2023 than 2022, with the largest increases reported by Cork (up 74; 38%), Dublin North (up 51; 25%), Waterford/Wexford (up 36; 11%) and Midlands (up 36; 51%).

- Of the four areas that reported a decrease, the largest decrease was reported by Cavan/Monaghan (down 104; 45%) followed by Kerry (down 50; 22%) and Galway/Roscommon (down 24; 18%).

Table 81: Meitheal processes requested by area, 2021–2023

Area	# 2021	# 2022	# 2023	2023 v 2022	% Δ
Dublin South Central	73	68	86	18	26%
Dublin South East/Wicklow	88	76	91	15	20%
Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow	105	138	167	29	21%
Midlands	50	71	107	36	51%
Dublin North City	65	83	103	20	24%
Dublin North	429	208	259	51	25%
Louth/Meath	134	130	162	32	25%
Cavan/Monaghan	156	232	128	-104	-45%
Cork	242	197	271	74	38%
Kerry	293	224	174	-50	-22%
Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary	120	183	194	11	6%
Waterford/Wexford	203	316	352	36	11%
Midwest	114	108	131	23	21%
Galway/Roscommon	146	135	111	-24	-18%
Mayo	46	37	38	1	3%
Donegal	57	68	75	7	10%
Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan	52	46	43	-3	-7%
Total	2,373	2,320	2,492	172	7%

- Looking across the areas the pathways into Meitheal also vary considerably across the 17 areas (Table 82). The percentage of direct or self-initiated requests ranged from 49% (Louth/Meath) to 95% (Mayo). Eleven of the 17 areas reported a percentage equal to or higher than the national average of 73%.
- The percentage of Meitheal requests that were diverted from social work ranged from <1% (Dublin North) to 45% (Louth/Meath) (Table 82). Five of the 17 areas reported a percentage equal to or higher than the national average of 20%.
- The percentage of requests that were stepped down from social work ranged from 0% (Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow and Mayo) to 23% (Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan) (Table 82). Eight of the 17 areas reported a percentage equal to or higher than the national average of 7%.

Table 82: Breakdown of pathways into Meitheal by area, 2023

Area	# Direct Access	% Direct Access	# SW Diversion	% SW Diversion	# SW Step- Down	% SW Step- Down	Total Requests
Dublin South Central	81	94%	2	2%	3	3%	86
Dublin South East/Wicklow	71	78%	14	15%	6	7%	91
Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow	139	83%	28	17%	0	0%	167
Midlands	85	79%	16	15%	6	6%	107

Dublin North City	90	87%	7	7%	6	6%	103
Dublin North	214	83%	1	<1%	44	17%	259
Louth/Meath	80	49%	73	45%	9	6%	162
Cavan/Monaghan	73	57%	43	34%	12	9%	128
Cork	138	51%	98	36%	35	13%	271
Kerry	113	65%	39	22%	22	13%	174
Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary	115	59%	76	39%	3	2%	194
Waterford/Wexford	293	83%	55	16%	4	1%	352
Midwest	111	85%	10	8%	10	8%	131
Galway/Roscommon	91	82%	17	15%	3	3%	111
Mayo	36	95%	2	5%	0	0%	38
Donegal	63	84%	3	4%	9	12%	75
Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan	27	63%	6	14%	10	23%	43
Total	1,820	73%	490	20%	182	7%	2,492

- Of the number of Meitheal requests received in 2023, 84% (2,095) 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.
- 1,725 Meitheal processes reached completion of stage 2 (discussion stage) in 2023. At this point the Strengths and Needs Record Form is signed and dated and next steps are clearly outlined.
 - Of these 53% (911) 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.
 - 2% (38) were referred to Tusla Social Work Services. This is where a member of the Meitheal deems it appropriate under Children First 2015 for the involvement of Tusla Social Work Services and accordingly a standard report is made to the Social Work Services.
 - 30% (519) 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.
 - 6% (101) 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 9% (156) requests were categorised as “other”.
- 1,473 Meitheal processes were closed in 2023. Of these,
 - 23% (334) were closed following submission of the request form (end of stage 1).
 - 36% (535) were closed following completion of the strengths and needs form (stage 2).

- 12% (177) were closed following commencement of Meitheal support meetings (stage 3).
- 29% (427) were closed post-delivery (end of process).

4.3 Child and Family Support Networks

- There were 120 Child and Family Support Networks (CFSN) operating at the end of 2023, no change from 2022. A further eight were planned/at pre-planning stage (Table 83).
- 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'⁴⁷ 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.

Table 83: Number of CFSN by area, December 2023

Area	# CFSN Operating
Dublin South Central	8
Dublin South East/Wicklow	7
Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow	10
Midlands	4
Dublin North City	6
Dublin North	4
Louth/Meath	5
Cavan/Monaghan	8
Cork	12
Kerry	3
Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary	8
Waterford/Wexford	8
Midwest	13
Galway/Roscommon	12
Mayo	4
Donegal	5
Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan	3
Total	120

⁴⁷ 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).

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