



Rialtas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland



## Annual Implementation Report 2021/2022



First 5



Rialtas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland



Molly, age 5

# CONTENTS

<b>Forewords</b>	<b>4</b>
Taoiseach’s Foreword	5
Minister’s Foreword	6
Chairperson of the Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures Advisory Council Foreword	7
<b>Background to First 5</b>	<b>10</b>
Overview of First 5	11
First 5 Big Steps	14
The Story of Early Childhood	16
A Vision for Early Childhood	20
First 5 at a Glance	22
<b>First 5 Implementation in 2021/22 and Progress on 2021/22 Milestones</b>	<b>24</b>
Introduction	25
Implementation in context	26
Overall Progress in 2021/22 and on 2021/22 Milestones	27
Implementation by numbers	27
Progress Made Towards the First 5 Targets	28
<b>Progress Across the First 5 Goals, Objectives and Building Blocks</b>	<b>30</b>
Goal A: Strong and supportive families and communities	31
Goal B: Optimum physical and mental health	37
Goal C: Positive play-based early learning	42
Goal D: An effective early childhood system	50
<b>Progress on 2021/22 Milestones</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Endnotes</b>	<b>179</b>

# FOREWORDS



# TAOISEACH'S FOREWORD

Our vision is to make Ireland the best country in Europe in which to be a child. The early years of a child's life is a critical window setting children up for lifelong success. Action in this period is important to us realising our vision, articulated in First 5, and to improve the lives of babies, young children and their families.

In 2021 and 2022, we honoured on our commitments under the First 5 Strategy by transforming family leave, with each parent now entitled to 7 weeks' leave during the first 2 years of a child's life. We invested significantly in making high quality early learning and childcare more affordable and accessible – exceeding the First 5 investment target. We introduced Supporting Parents, A New Model of Parenting Support Services to improve awareness of and access to parenting services. We are also helping families struggling with the cost of living and reducing the risk of childhood poverty through programmes like free school books in all primary schools and hot school meals in DEIS & special schools. We also abolished fees for paediatric patients.

A new Child Poverty and Well-being Programme Office has been established in the Department of the Taoiseach to co-ordinate and focus Government action on our vision.

Our actions are making real improvements in the lives of babies, young children and their families, and are enhancing the life-long outcomes of children right across the country.

As we move to develop the First 5 Implementation Plan for 2023-2025 we will act with ambition to meet to the needs of all babies, young children and families in Ireland ensuring they get the best start in life.

**Leo Varadkar, T.D.**

*An Taoiseach*

# MINISTER'S FOREWORD

I welcome the publication of the third annual implementation report for First 5, the whole-of-Government strategy for babies, young children and their families.

In publishing this report, I do so with thanks to the Government Departments, State Agencies, the Community and Voluntary Sector and many others for their considerable collective commitment to implementation of this Strategy over 2021 and 2022 and for their engagement with the reporting of progress.

Further thanks is extended to the First 5 implementation structures; in particular the First 5 Inter-Departmental Group and the Better Outcomes Brighter Futures Consortium and Advisory Council who continue to support and champion this ambitious plan.

The First 5 Annual Implementation Report 2021/2022 illustrates the considerable work that has taken place right across Government and society in 2021 and 2022 to ensure children get the best possible start in life. Its publication marks the end of the first phase of implementation of this ambitious ten-year strategy for early childhood.

When Government published the first implementation plan in 2019, no one could have predicted a global pandemic at the scale of Covid-19 or the current humanitarian crisis that we now face, which has placed an enormous strain on essential supports and services for families and lies behind the cost of living crisis and inflationary pressures.

I am extremely proud of the enormous progress that we have made in implementing First 5 in 2021 and 2022 and the many achievements we have marked over the lifetime of this Strategy so far, including the new and extended entitlements to family leaves; the range of new measures to promote healthier childhoods; the historic reforms to the early learning and care system backed by unprecedented levels of state investment, the improvements to parenting support services and new measures introduced to tackle early childhood poverty.

We will now take the learnings from this first phase of First 5 implementation as we agree priorities for the next phase of implementation - current, new and emerging. I am pleased to say work on the development of the First 5 Implementation Plan 2023-2025 is underway and my Department and I look forward to working with all stakeholders in its development and rollout.

**Roderic O’Gorman TD**

*Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth*

# CHAIRPERSON OF THE BETTER OUTCOMES, BRIGHTER FUTURES ADVISORY COUNCIL FOREWORD

The period covered in this report, 2021-2022, deals with some of the most significant developments in the implementation of policy and services for young children. In early 2021, Ireland was still grappling with the Covid-19 pandemic, resulting in school closures and a serious curtailment of key services for children. It is notable that the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Roderic O’Gorman, and his department made a critical decision to reopen early learning and childcare services in January 2021 for children experiencing disadvantage. The Government adopted a broad definition of ‘disadvantage’ meaning that services remained open for a wide range of the most vulnerable children in the country. The Government also made additional funds available to support services to reopen during a critical juncture. It is also important to mention the agility, dedication and constructive approach of early learning and childcare services and staff, and their representative bodies, in reopening services when many others remained shut. This is something I hope is acknowledged in the State’s inquiry into the State’s handling of Covid-19.

In terms of commitments in First 5, the Government delivered on many goals set out in the Strategy, particularly when it comes to Reform of the Early Learning and Care sector. The culmination of this is reflected in the announcement, in Budget 2023, of €1bn in investment in early learning and childcare, five years ahead of target. In monetary terms alone this is significant. However, behind this figure are a series of critical milestones helping to transform the provision of early learning and childcare in Ireland.

The publication of several reports, particularly, Partnership for the Public Good, Nurturing Skills and the National Action Plan for Childminding, provide a roadmap for the systemic change needed in how the sector is funded and the development of its workforce. Arising from Partnership for the Public Good the introduction of Core Funding demonstrates a commitment from the sector as a whole to ensure quality outcomes, staff retention and a reduction in costs for parents. Progress towards the regulation of childminding places a further emphasis on quality provision for children in all settings.

The finalisation of the review of the Early Learning and Care (ELC) and the School Aged Childcare (SAC) operating model was an important foundational step towards establishing what shape a new agency may take.

As we look to the future, it is critical that momentum is maintained. The interventions provided in children's earliest years can have the greatest impact. While the Government has delivered the most significant investment in early learning and childcare in a generation, it is important that the next Implementation Plan sets a new and ambitious investment target for 2028. There is tremendous public support for investment in early learning and childcare as evidenced by Early Childhood Ireland's national barometer, and a pressing need to ensure that services continue to be funded, that staff are paid sufficiently, and that early learning and childcare services become more accessible and affordable.

One area deserving particular attention in the next Implementation Plan for First 5 is the commitment to develop a child-health workforce. This is needed more than ever given that so many young children missed out on developmental checks. The Government's attention now needs to move to establishing a national child health workforce that is universal and accessible to all young children in the country.



Moreover, further progress is needed on Measures to Tackle Early Childhood Poverty. Research by Professor Mary Daly makes clear that early learning and childcare services targeting young children living in poverty are the most important intervention in ending child poverty. Indeed, other research published by the ESRI and commissioned by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth also shows the impact of living in poverty on the emotional wellbeing of young children. The development of a new Equal Participation Model has the potential to break the cycle of poverty and ensure that young children reach their full potential in later life. The establishment of a Child Poverty and Wellbeing Unit in the Department of An Taoiseach can provide a further driver to ensure that all young children can have access to the best start in life. I hope that this new national development provides a mechanism to bring a renewed emphasis on early childhood poverty and supports increased funding for new measures, such as the Equal Participation Model.

**Tanya Ward**

*Former Chairperson of the National Advisory Council for Children and Young People*

# BACKGROUND TO FIRST 5



# OVERVIEW OF FIRST 5

## Vision, Goals, Principles and Framework for Action

All babies' and young children's early years will be valued as a critical and distinct period which should be enjoyed. Families will be assisted and enabled to nurture babies and young children and support their development, with additional support for those who need it. Those providing services for babies, young children and their families will be equipped to contribute to their learning, development, health and wellbeing. Community contexts will help babies and young children make the most of their early years and fulfil their potential.

## Goals

**Goal A:** Strong and supportive families and communities

---

**Goal B:** Optimum physical and mental health

---

**Goal C:** Positive play-based early learning

---

**Goal D:** An effective early childhood system



Layla, age 4

## Principles

The principles which underpin First 5 are drawn from Right from the Start.

- Early childhood is a significant and distinct time in life that must be nurtured, respected, valued and supported in its own right.
- Relationships and interactions with significant others, and the environments in which they take place, play a central role in the quality of children's experiences in early childhood.
- Services and supports to children and their families should be of a high quality, affordable and accessible to all, while recognising that some children and families will need additional support.
- The provision of quality services requires everyone working with children and families to communicate and cooperate with one another and with children and families in an atmosphere of mutual respect and common purpose/partnership.
- Society must value and support parents, guardians, families and everyone who promotes the wellbeing, learning and development of young children.
- Government policies pertaining to children should be informed by evidence, by international standards of best practice and by children's rights.



Rebecca, age 3

## Framework for action

The four Goals will be delivered through nine interlocking Objectives (under Goals A, B and C) and five Building Blocks (under Goal D). Under each Objective and Building Block, Strategic Actions are set out. This is the framework for action for the duration of First 5 and forms the basis to monitor implementation. Over 150 actions to be progressed over the first four years have been identified. By and large, these actions represent additionality and will complement existing work.

As a living Strategy with a built-in review after four years, it is expected that new specific actions for delivery in the medium- to long-term will be added as implementation progresses. Implementation will include a First 5 Trials programme and a First 5 Research and Evaluation programme.

The First 5 Trials programme will explore innovative initiatives to test effectiveness in an Irish context, and determine suitability for nationwide implementation. The First 5 Research and Evaluation programme will support these trials, and deepen understanding of the lives of young children and their families and the services and supports that will make the most difference to them.



Aimee, age 5

# FIRST 5 BIG STEPS



1

## Access to a broader range of options for parents to balance working and caring

In order to ensure children can spend more time with their parents, especially in the first year, First 5 sets out plans to deliver extended entitlements to paid and unpaid leave for both fathers and mothers. This will be accompanied by a range of measures to develop greater family-friendly flexible working arrangements.



2

## A new model of parenting support

First 5 will streamline and improve existing parenting supports provided across a range of Government Departments and State Agencies. Accessible, high-quality information and guidance will be made available for parents to promote healthy behaviours, facilitate positive play-based early learning and create the conditions to form and maintain strong parent-child relationships. A continuum of parenting services – ranging from universal to targeted – including high-quality parenting programmes, will also be made available. A new Parenting Unit has been established by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth to lead this important work.



3

## New developments in child health

A key action is the development of a dedicated child health workforce, focussed initially in areas of high population density and disadvantage. The Strategy also sets out new measures to promote positive health behaviours and the mental health of babies, young children and their families, and to enhance the National Healthy Childhood Programme. The delivery of these measures are being led by the Healthy Ireland Office in the Department of Health in partnership with other key Government Departments and State Agencies.





4

#### Reform of the Early Learning and Care (ELC) system

First 5 builds on the very significant developments in Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School-Age Childcare (SAC) over recent years and seeks to further improve affordability, accessibility and quality. Measures include: introduction and ongoing enhancements to the National Childcare Scheme, moving progressively towards a graduate-led professional ELC workforce, the extension of regulations and supports to all paid childminders and SAC services, and the introduction of a new funding model for ELC and SAC. Under this model, employers will be supported to provide more favourable working conditions that will attract and retain staff. These reforms will be underpinned by a strengthened governance structure at a national and local level.



5

#### A package of measures to tackle early childhood poverty

First 5 identifies new measures that will address poverty in early childhood. These include expanded access to free and subsidised ELC, extension to the Warmth and Wellbeing and Warmer Homes Schemes, Community Cooking Programmes and the introduction of a meals programme to some ELC settings. In addition, the introduction of a DEIS-type model for ELC settings will create further opportunities to narrow the gap for disadvantaged children.



# THE STORY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD

## Vision

**All babies' and young children's early years will be valued as a critical and distinct period which should be enjoyed.**

Families will be assisted and enabled to nurture babies and young children and support their development, with additional support for those who need it. Those providing services for babies, young children and their families will be equipped to contribute to their learning, development, health and wellbeing. Community contexts will help babies and young children make the most of their early years and fulfil their potential.

In the opening pages of the First 5 Strategy, an optimum vision for early childhood is sketched out. First 5 aims to make this vision a reality. The vision is based on the most important chapters in young children's lives: good health in early childhood that starts in pregnancy, time with parents in a nurturing and playful home environment where material needs are met, high-quality play-based Early Learning and Care experiences, positive transitions to primary school, and a supportive, inclusive, wider community context.

A well-functioning early childhood system ensures maximum support in all of these areas for babies and young children.

The First 5 Strategy sets out how to develop a system of integrated, cross-sectoral and high-quality supports and services – an effective early childhood system<sup>1</sup> – that will help all babies and young children in Ireland to have positive early experiences. The Strategy explains why this system should be developed, what it should look like, and most importantly, the necessary actions.

The family is considered throughout First 5 across all areas given its critical role in supporting positive experiences for young children. The early years journey is exciting and important.

Let's make sure that this is a great story for all children.





## A healthy childhood starting from pregnancy

Learning starts before birth. What happens before conception and during pregnancy impacts child development<sup>2,3</sup>. Early health checks can identify problems before they develop. The right type of services at the right time can make all the difference<sup>4,5</sup>.

An effective early childhood system will support parents to prepare well for pregnancy, access good quality antenatal care, make healthy choices during pregnancy and have positive birth experiences. This means making available high quality information resources, and enhancing health services, including additional contacts with expectant mothers, to ensure excellent maternity care<sup>6</sup>.



In a child's early months and years, an effective early childhood system will support parents to form strong attachments, maintain positive mental health, make healthy choices, and will provide child health reviews, vaccinations and screening on a universal basis. Children with additional needs will be identified as early as possible, and receive appropriate support<sup>7,8</sup>.

## Time together with parents especially in the first year in a nurturing and playful home environment where children's material needs are met

The parent-child relationship, inter-parental relationships, and the home environment<sup>9</sup> are the foundations of early childhood development<sup>10</sup>. The phase before a child's third birthday is particularly important for the growing brain. Breastmilk is the gold standard of infant nutrition<sup>11</sup>. Babies benefit most from individual attention from a loving and responsive caregiver, enabling them to form strong bonds. Throughout and after these vital months, nurturing family relationships<sup>12,13</sup>, along with play and discovery, are at the heart of a child's development<sup>14</sup>.

Parents' employment circumstances – whether they work outside the home or not, where they work, when they work and how much they earn – have huge implications for children<sup>15</sup>, not least because of the value young children and parents alike place on time spent together as a family<sup>16</sup>.



An effective early childhood system will enable children to be cared for at home by fathers and mothers during their first year through more generous parental leave entitlements. It will support mothers to begin, and continue, breastfeeding and equip parents to understand and support child development, nutrition and safety and promote early learning and play. More intensive interventions will support vulnerable families to overcome short- or long-term challenges<sup>17</sup>.

An effective early childhood system will give parents choices about balancing working and caring. That means access to family-friendly arrangements that support work-life balance, and ensuring that income from work is sufficient to support a family, supplementing it where necessary so that all families have adequate resources and children's material needs are met. It also means making Early Learning and Care, of different types, affordable and of high quality so that participation in employment, whether full time or part time, is a viable option for parents, in the confidence that their children are being well cared for<sup>18</sup>.

### High-quality play-based Early Learning and Care (ELC) experiences

Many young children spend much of their day being cared for by those other than their parents. Non-parental care can be provided by a combination of wider family members and home- or centre-based ELC. The individuals involved in providing learning and care are the key determinant of quality and, for children to thrive, the carers must be equipped to foster the types of relationships and create environments that characterise positive experiences. High-quality ELC is particularly valuable for children who have challenges at home.

An effective early childhood system will ensure that those caring for young children are equipped to support early childhood development. In the case of care by family, friends and neighbours, this means making information, resources and supports more widely available in the local community. In more formal, paid-for provision, this means an appropriately qualified and valued workforce, a consistently implemented curriculum framework and adherence to quality standards and regulations<sup>19</sup>, particularly for publicly subsidised ELC.



### Positive transitions to primary school

The move to primary education is a major transition in young children's lives. A smooth transition can ensure a positive start to school for children. Important factors are the age at which a child starts school, the structure of the learning environment and the supports provided by parents, ELC practitioners and teachers<sup>20</sup>.

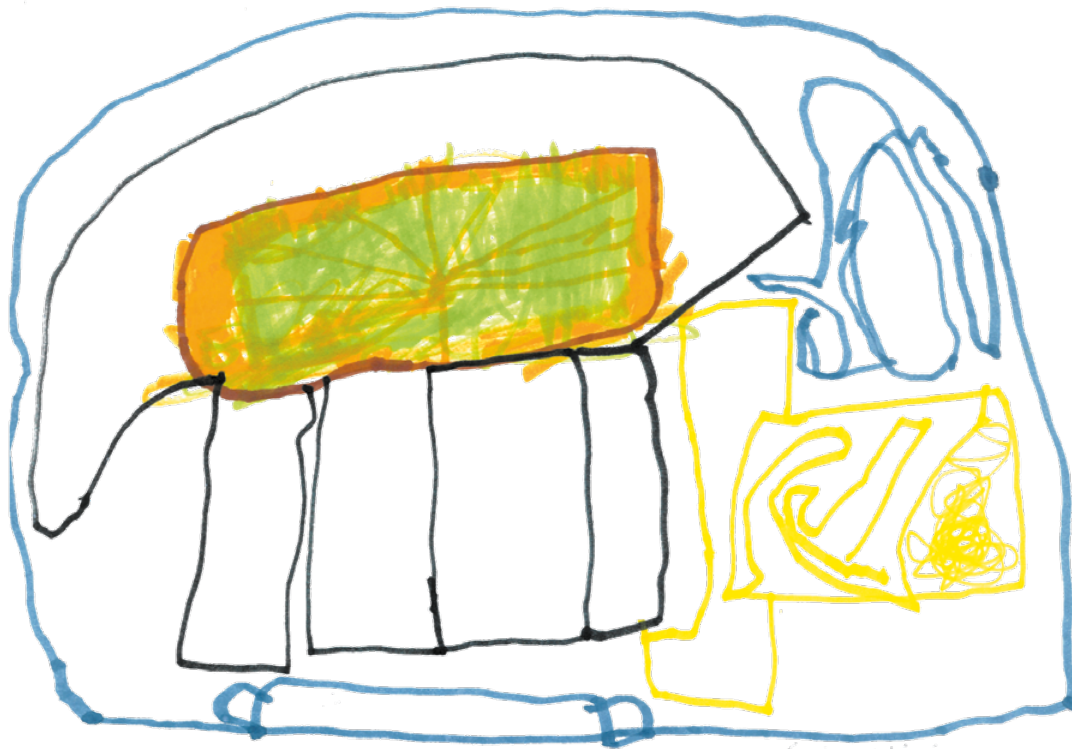
An effective early childhood system will support the transition to school by enabling greater communication between ELC settings, primary schools and parents, particularly for children with additional needs; supporting more play-based, child-centred learning in the early years of primary school; equipping primary schools to accommodate young children through smaller class sizes, more time and space to play, and interactive teaching styles<sup>21</sup>.

## Supportive community contexts

The community in which babies, young children and their families live is the backdrop for development throughout the early years and shapes daily experiences<sup>22</sup>.

An effective early childhood system will ensure that communities are inclusive, with places to play and learn, opportunities for parents and young children to meet, and comprehensive supports and services that foster early development and respond to additional needs, proactively engaging all children and parents<sup>23</sup>.

This means community public space designed with babies and young children in mind, support for parent and toddler groups and other places for young families to meet, along with integrated services where the workforce within and across health, Early Learning and Care, primary education and family support services share a common language and work together<sup>24</sup>.



Alex, age 4

# A VISION for EARLY CHILDHOOD

**A HEALTHY CHILDHOOD STARTING FROM PREGNANCY**



**NURTURING AND PLAYFUL HOME ENVIRONMENT WHERE MATERIAL NEEDS ARE MET**



**HIGH QUALITY PLAY-BASED EARLY LEARNING AND CARE EXPERIENCES**



**SUPPORTIVE**



**COMMUNITIES**



**SERVICES**

**TIME TOGETHER WITH PARENTS, ESPECIALLY IN THE FIRST YEAR**



**POSITIVE TRANSITIONS TO PRIMARY SCHOOL**





# AT A GLANCE

## Goals

# A

**Strong and supportive families and communities**

# B

**Optimum physical and mental health**

# C

**Positive play-based early learning**

# D

**An Effective Early Childhood System**

## Objectives

## Strategic Actions

<b>1. Balance working and caring</b>	1.1 Parental care for children particularly during the first year	1.2 Family-friendly flexible working
<b>2. Information, services and supports for parents</b>	2.1 Information and resources for parents	2.2 Tiered model of parenting support
<b>3. Practical and material resources</b>	3.1 Measures to address family income and early childhood poverty	3.2 Suitable accommodation for families with children 3.3 Child-friendly communities

<b>4. Positive health behaviours</b>	4.1 Positive health behaviours in families	4.2 Health behaviour supports in child-serving settings and communities	4.3 Child safety and injury prevention
<b>5. High-quality health services</b>	5.1 Develop National Healthy Childhood Programme	5.2 Therapeutic and medical care for babies and children	
<b>6. Positive mental health</b>	6.1 Early identification of mental health issues	6.2 Access to mental health supports	

<b>7. Positive home learning environment</b>	7.1 Playful home learning environments	7.2 Parental engagement in children's early learning	7.3 Participation in out-of-home learning
<b>8. Affordable, high-quality Early Learning and Care (ELC)</b>	8.1 Affordable high-quality ELC	8.2 Availability of subsidised high-quality ELC	8.3 ELC that promotes participation, social inclusion and diversity
<b>9. Supported transitions</b>	9.1 Information exchange to support transitions	9.2 Continuity between ELC and primary settings	9.3 Supports to sustain learning during transitions

<b>1</b>	<b>Building Block 1: Leadership, governance, collaboration</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Building Block 2: Regulation, inspection, quality assurance</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>Building Block 3: Skilled and sustainable workforce</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Building Block 4: Research, data, monitoring and evaluation</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Building Block 5: Strategic investment</b>
<b>Strategic Actions</b> 1.A Implementation and governance 1.B Early childhood system leadership 1.C Collaborative projects		<b>Strategic Actions</b> 2.A Develop, enhance, implement standards 2.B Reform regulation and inspection		<b>Strategic Actions</b> 3.A Identify and address staff requirements 3.B Improve initial training and CPD for all early childhood staff 3.C Professionalise ELC; support employers to attract and retain high quality workforce		<b>Strategic Actions</b> 4.A Support early childhood research 4.B Develop administrative and outcomes data 4.C Robust monitoring		<b>Strategic Actions</b> 5.A Public funding 5.B Strategic investment 5.C Tracking progress	

# FIRST 5 IMPLEMENTATION IN 2020 AND PROGRESS ON 2020 MILESTONES



# INTRODUCTION

First 5, the ten-year whole-of-government, whole-of-society strategy for babies, young children and their families was published in November 2018 fulfilling a key action in Better Outcomes Brighter Futures (BOBF): the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People (2014–2020).

First 5 focuses on the period of early childhood, from the antenatal period to age five, and takes a joined-up, cross-government approach to supporting babies, young children and their families during these critical early years. The Strategy identifies more than 150 initial actions across Government Departments and State Agencies, which will be substantially progressed in the initial implementation phase.

The First 5 Implementation Plan, published in May 2019, covers this first phase of implementation. It identifies key milestones for each action across 2019, 2020 and 2021 as well as the key output for the action by 2021. Note that owing to the impacts of Covid-19, the first phase of implementation was extended to end 2022. For 2021/22, 234 milestones were identified.

This First 5 Annual Implementation Report reviews progress made over 2021/22 on these 2021/22 milestones.

The Report focuses on key achievements overall and describes progress across the First 5 targets, goals, strategic objectives and building blocks. A detailed progress update on each individual milestone is also presented.



Holly, age 4

## Implementation in context

As in 2020, implementation of First 5 continued to be impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Work on some actions was delayed as resources were redeployed to address the challenges presented by the pandemic. Moreover, the way in which services for babies and young children were delivered continued to be massively affected.

In early 2021, the ECCE programme was suspended and access to ELC and SAC settings was restricted to children of essential workers and vulnerable children only. Schools were also closed over the same period. While ELC, SAC and schools reopened from end March 2021, significant restrictions remained in place until end February 2022 to minimise the spread of Covid-19. This demanded changes to the operation of ELC, SAC and schools, which was facilitated by a suite of State supports that were put in place.

Throughout 2021, personnel and resources continued to be reallocated by Department of Health and the HSE, to assist with the pandemic response. This included the redeployment of public health practitioners

Owing to these impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, the period of implementation of 2021 milestones was extended to 2022.

In addition to Covid-19, impacts of the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine were felt from early 2022 and since. Responding to a crisis of this scale presented challenges, notably in terms of finding sufficient and suitable accommodation for the Ukrainian families arriving to Ireland and providing essential supports and services. It also presented challenges in terms of rising costs of living.

Notwithstanding this, substantial progress was made in First 5 implementation across all goals, objectives and building blocks in 2021 and 2022.

The First 5 interim target of an individual entitlement to seven weeks of paid parent's leave for parents by 2021 was achieved, the First interim target of 30% of staff working directly with children in centre-based ELC settings held an appropriate degree-level qualification by 2021 was exceeded and the First 5 investment target of at least doubling state investment in ELC and SAC by 2028 was achieved five years ahead of schedule.

Key achievements across the *First 5 Big Steps* included:

- The extension of Parent's Leave and Benefit to seven weeks per parent;
- The publication of Supporting Parents: A National Model of Parenting Support Services;
- The publication of implementation for the National Maternity Strategy (2016-2026) setting out in detail the roadmap to ensure the Strategy is implemented in full within the timeframe originally intended.
- The publication and initial implementation of the National Action Plan for Childminding (2021-2028); Partnership for the Public Good, A New Funding Model for ELC and SAC (2021), Nurturing Skills, the A Workforce Plan for ELC and SAC (2022-2028), the Report of the Independent Review of the Operating Model (2022) and the introduction of Together for Better, the new funding model for ELC and SAC – comprising the NCS, the ECCE programme, and a new Core Funding Scheme, the latter of which supported the introduction of historic Employment Regulation Orders for the sector and fee management measures in 2022; and



- The introduction of measures specifically aimed at supporting families on low incomes, including increases in qualified child (IQC) rates, the introduction of separate rates for children aged under and over 12, increases in earnings disregards for One Parent Family and Jobseeker Transition payments, increases in the income thresholds for Working Family Payment, as well as an increase in the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance and significant developments with regard to the provision of hot meals to children in ELC settings and schools.

## OVERALL PROGRESS IN 2021/22 AND ON 2021/22 MILESTONES

### Implementation by numbers

Overall, 88 of all 234 milestones for 2021/22 were met by end 2021 – a completion rate of 37.8%.

By end 2022, 73.5% of all 2021/22 milestone were met. The level of progress across all of the four goals of First 5 is shown below.

	2021/22 Milestones	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Completion rate end 2021	Completion rate end 2022
Goal A	30	21	2	4	3	70.0%	90.0%
Goal B	74	23	10	18	23	31.1%	68.9%
Goal C	43	16	8	7	12	37.2%	72.1%
Goal D	87	28	15	20	24	32.5%	72.4%
<b>First 5</b>	<b>234</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>37.8%</b>	<b>73.5%</b>

# PROGRESS MADE TOWARDS THE FIRST 5 TARGETS

First 5 includes three targets. Progress made on these targets in 2021/22 are set out below:

## TARGET 1

### **Paid parent's leave**

By 2028, parents will be supported to look after their babies at home for the whole of their first year through a combination of paid family leave schemes. By 2021, parents will each have an individual entitlement to seven weeks of paid parent's leave, which can be taken during their child's earliest years, to potentially allow children to benefit from an additional 14 weeks parental care in their first year.

### **Progress Achieved**

Parent's leave and benefit was extended to seven weeks per parent from 1 July 2022.

## TARGET 2

### A graduate-led early learning and care workforce

By 2028, all regulated childminders will hold a minimum qualification, all regulated school-age childcare staff will hold a minimum qualification; and a graduate-led early learning and care workforce, with at least 50% of staff working directly with children in centre-based early learning and care settings and coordinators supporting the work of childminders, will hold an appropriate degree-level qualification (with an initial target of 30% reached by 2021).

### Progress Achieved

In 2021 34% of staff working directly with children in centre-based early learning and care settings held an appropriate degree-level qualification. This increased to 37% in 2022. This exceeds the initial target of 30% by 2021.

## TARGET 3

### A doubling of public investment in early learning and care and school-age childcare

By 2028, the level of public investment in early learning and care and school-age childcare will be at least doubled (i.e. an addition €485m in public investment).

### Progress Achieved

In Budget 2023, an additional €346m was allocated to early learning and care and school-age childcare. The 2023 allocation of €1.025m exceeds the First 5 investment target five years ahead of time.

# PROGRESS ACROSS THE FIRST 5 GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND BUILDING BLOCKS



# GOAL A

## STRONG AND SUPPORTIVE FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

### Objective 1

Parents will be assisted to balance working and caring to contribute to optimum child development and to best suit their family circumstances.

### Objective 2

Parents will benefit from high-quality, evidence-based information and services on various aspects of parenting to support child development and positive family relationships along a continuum of need.

### Objective 3

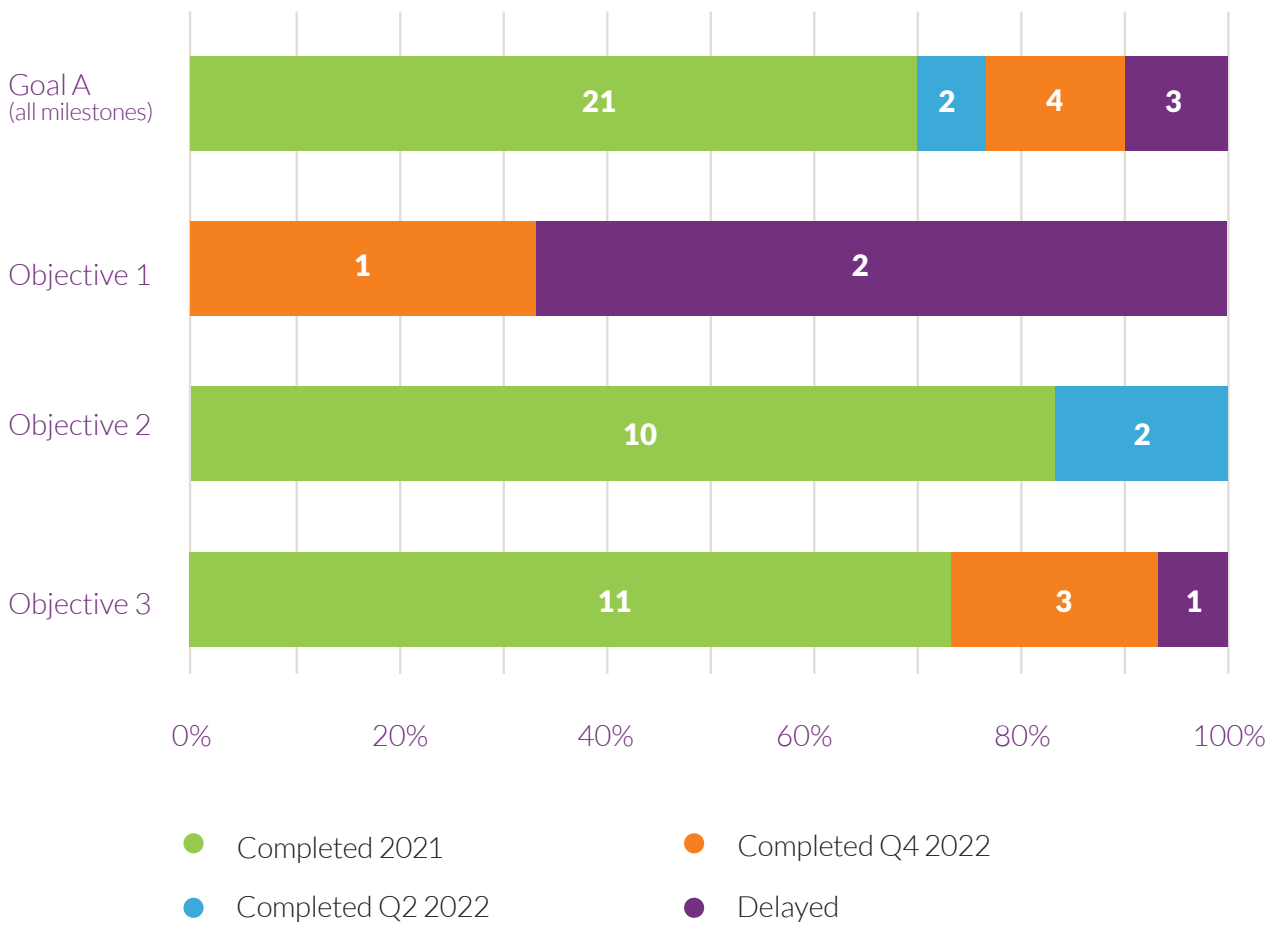
Families and communities will be supported to provide children with the necessary material and practical resources to encourage positive development in the early years.



Faye, age 3

# GOAL A

## 2021/22 MILESTONES



# OBJECTIVE 1

## **Parents will be assisted to balance working and caring to contribute to optimum child development to best suit their family circumstances.**

The Parent's Leave and Benefit Act 2019 introduced two weeks of paid Parent's Leave for each parent to be taken in the first year after the birth or adoptive placement of a child. In April 2021, a further three weeks of Parent's Leave and Benefit became available to each parent and the period in which the leave could be taken was extended to the first two years after the birth or adoptive placement of a child. In July 2022, **Parent's Leave and Benefit increased by a further two weeks, bringing the current entitlement to seven weeks and meeting the First 5 target.**

A General Scheme of the Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Bill, which **transposes provisions of the EU Directive (2019/1158) on work life balance for parents and carers**, was published in April 2022 and referred to the Joint Committee on Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth for Pre-legislative Scrutiny. The Joint Committee issued its Report on Pre-Legislative Scrutiny on 9 June 2022 and the Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Bill 2022 was published on 5 October 2022.

The Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Bill will introduce a range of measures to improve family-friendly work practices and support women in the workforce. The Bill, which incorporates the Right to Request Remote Working Bill, will introduce:

- **A right to request flexible working arrangements** for caring purposes, for parents and carers;
- **A right to request remote working** for all workers;
- **A right to leave for medical care purposes**, both for employees with children up to age 12 and carers; and
- Extension of the current entitlement to **breastfeeding/lactation breaks** from six months to two years.

The Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Bill passed all Stages in the Oireachtas in March 2023.

## OBJECTIVE 2

**Parents will benefit from high-quality, evidence-based information and services on various aspects of parenting to support child development and positive family relationships along a continuum of need.**

**Supporting Parents: A National Model of Parenting Support Services** was launched in 2022. This aims is to develop a more coherent and strategic approach to the development and delivery of parenting support services so that all parents can access the support they need when they need it.

The **Supporting Children and Parents** platform was also launched in 2022 on gov.ie bringing together new and existing resources that parents may find helpful. The platform also includes resources for Ukrainian parents in Ireland.

In addition to this, the Tusla **Prevention, Partnership and Family Support (PPFS)** programme continued to be sustained and is now mainstreamed as part of Tusla's response pathways and integrated approach to practice.

Implementation of Tusla's national approach to Practice in Child Protection and Welfare - **Signs of Safety** – continued to be monitored and training was rolled out, including:

- **Introductory Signs of Safety Training**, a blended learning programme of 18 hours over a four week period and;
- **Advanced Signs of Safety Training: Safety Planning in Action** that involves intensive workshop with area based teams applying the Safety Planning Process to their casework.



## OBJECTIVE 3

### **Families and communities will be supported to provide children with the necessary material and practical resources to encourage positive development in the early years.**

A total of **23,312 social housing supports** were provided to households in 2021, including 5,202 new build social homes, 1,270 acquisitions, 2,711 leased social homes, 13,095 supports through the Housing Assistance Payment and 1,034 through the Rental Accommodation Scheme.

Delivery also continued on **family-focused facilities or family hubs**. At the end of 2021, there were 36 hubs operational nationally, offering 870 units of family accommodation.

The **National Quality Standards Framework (NQSF) for homeless services** was also in place nationally by end 2021 for all local authority and NGO delivered services and the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive adapted the NQSF to apply to privately operated facilities in the Dublin Region. The standards are designed to ensure a consistent approach to how local authorities and service providers respond to the needs of those experiencing homelessness and to improve the quality of service provided.

In addition, a Programme Board was established to oversee the implementation of the recommendations contained in the **Traveller Accommodation Expert Review Report** in 2021. Progress was made on one of the key recommendations in the report - to introduce an 'ethnic identifier' so that Traveller applicants for mainstream social housing can be identified and progress in meeting their housing needs monitored effectively. Regulation S.I. 73 of 2022, allowing for the inclusion of a Traveller identifier on the statutory Social Housing Support application form, came into operation on 14 March 2022.

Also in 2021 and 2022, **new libraries** were opened in Wicklow, Longford, Cork and South Dublin, all specifically designed with **designated children's libraries** and 'Ireland Reads Campaign 2022' the national campaign to get the whole country reading in the lead up to a national day of reading on 25 February, had a **specific focus on the delivery of storytime events online offered to ELC settings**. A Friendship Storytime Initiative was held in April and May during the annual Spring into Storytime campaign. A friendship package of a book and support material was provided to ELC settings, along with storytime events in library branches and online.

## White Paper to End Direct Provision

In the 19 months since the publication of the White Paper, a significant focus has been placed on delivering these reforms. Much progress was made between September 2021 and March 2022. A priority was placed on progressing elements of Phase Two including the development of the accommodation in the community model, the acquisition of properties, the development of the income support payment policy and mechanism, the development of the local Integration model, all with a view to commencing the movement of IPAS residents into Phase Two accommodation towards the end of 2022.

In March 2022 due to the war in Ukraine, staff in DCEDIY were temporarily seconded to help with Ireland's obligation to respond to the impact of the war. The necessity to divert the resources has had an unavoidable impact on the timelines for the implementation of the White Paper. Alongside this, there has been a substantial increase in the number of people seeking International Protection.

In this vastly changed context since the publication of the White Paper, an overall review of the projected timelines and deliverables is currently underway.

While the review of the White Paper is ongoing, work has and is progressing in certain key areas including:

- The Vulnerability Assessment Programme has been in operation since December 2020 and was extended to all new IP applicants from February 2021. Whilst children are deemed vulnerable by default under the Directive, the Programme helps IPAS to identify children and young people with additional vulnerabilities and to address their reception needs more efficiently.
- DCEDIY is working with HIQA to put in place an independent monitoring of IPAS accommodation centres against the National Standards, which became effective since 2021. HIQA will monitor standards in IPAS permanent accommodation centres. HIQA will assume an independent monitoring role with regular inspections in 2023 once legislation is in place and following on from a series of pilot inspection.

A Request for Tender (RfT) to procure additional accommodation for singles, couples and families seeking international protection was published in January 2022. This tender process is a key step in the Government's strategy to end reliance on emergency accommodation for IP applicants. The RfT encourages tenders from not-for-profit organisations and promotes tenderers to work with not-for-profit organisations in the delivery of related services. Additional procurement competitions for IPPS services, such as transport and resident supports, have been delayed due to the unprecedented Ukraine and international protection crises. This includes the running of the tender for the provision of housing supports to persons with permission to remain.

## GOAL B

# OPTIMUM PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

### Objective 4

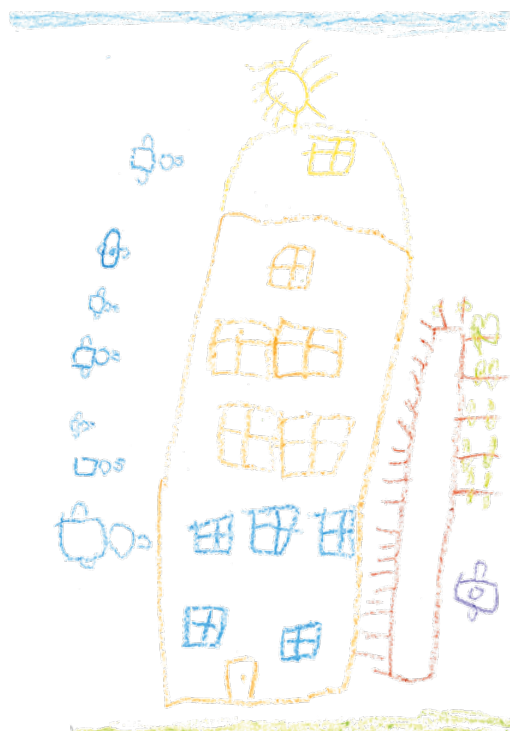
Parents, families and communities will be supported to engage in and promote positive health behaviours among babies and young children, starting from the pre-conception period.

### Objective 5

Babies and young children have access to safe, high-quality, evidence-based integrated primary, preventative and specialist healthcare services.

### Objective 6

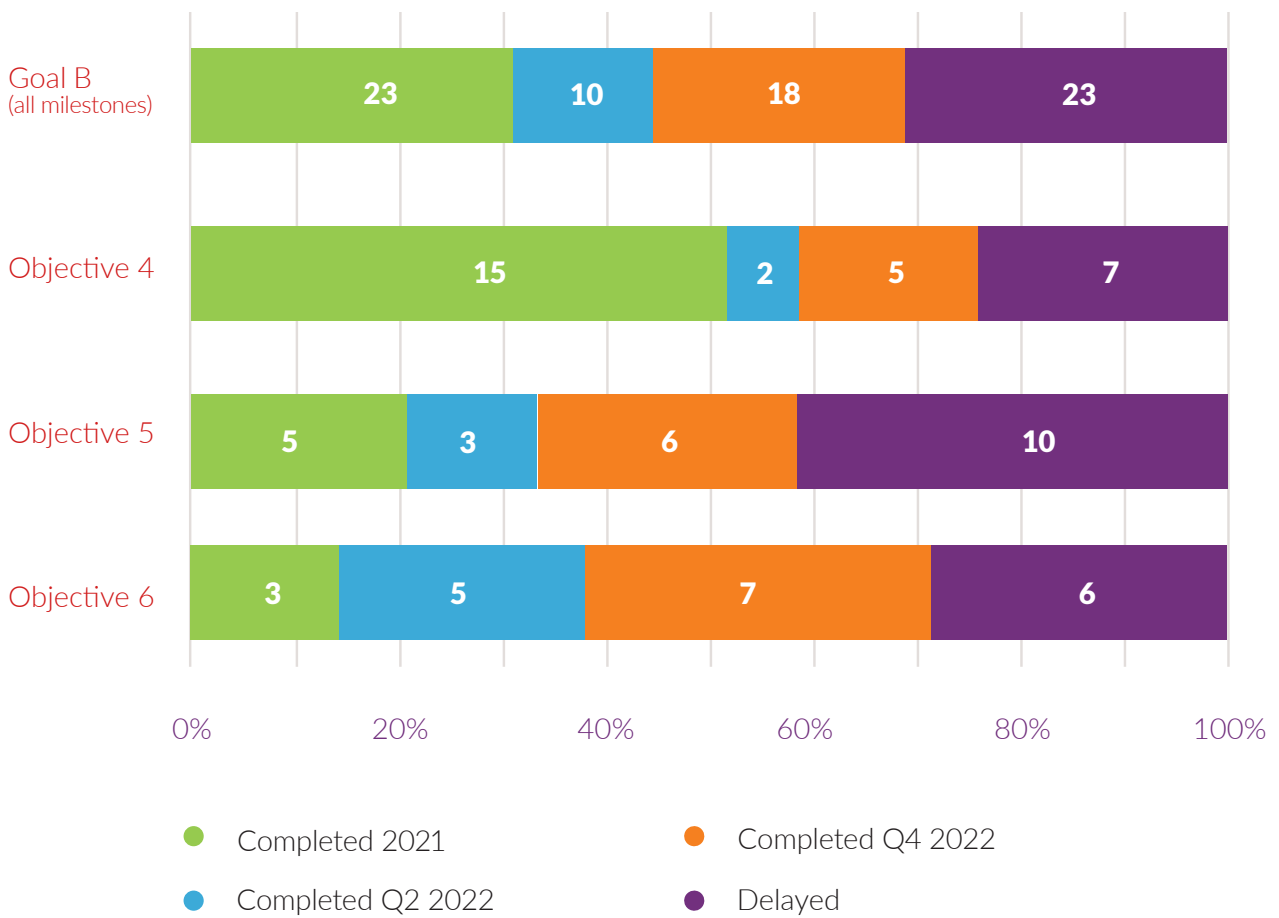
Babies, young children and their parents enjoy positive mental health.



Erin, age 5

# GOAL B

## 2021/22 MILESTONES



## OBJECTIVE 4

### **Parents, families and communities will be supported to engage in and promote positive health behaviours among babies and young children, starting from the pre-conception period.**

The implementation of the **National Maternity Strategy** (2016-2026) continued in line with a revised implementation plan for the Strategy, published in Q4 2021. This plan sets out in detail the roadmap to ensure the Strategy is implemented in full within the timeframe originally intended.

Funding of €7.3m provided under Budget 2021 and €8.7m under Budget 2022 ensured that there was significant progress under all four strategic priorities in the Strategy

The funding provided in 2021 allowed for further development of community midwifery as well as specialist services. It has enabled the expansion of breastfeeding supports and strengthened training and education supports for staff.

The funding allocated in 2022 provided for the recruitment of an additional 87.8 Whole Time Equivalent staff (WTE) into maternity services across the country, including consultants, midwives/nurses, Allied Health professionals, healthcare assistants and administrative staff. These posts are supporting the realisation of the Strategy's vision of a new model of integrated, team-based care that provides increased choice to women, as well as improving outcomes and experiences for women and babies accessing maternity services.

In addition, there was a range of key publications, including the **Healthy Ireland Strategic Action Plan**, the **Folic Acid Supplementation Report** and the **'Stop Smoking' National Clinical Guideline**, with the recommendation of the latter being implemented across maternity services.

There was also progress on actions to provide hot meals to children in ELC settings and schools. The **Hot Meals Pilot for ELC settings** was allocated €150,000 to test a range of meal options for children in ELC settings operating in areas of concentrated disadvantage. The pilot will be subject to an evaluation that will include consultation with children and their families, early years educators and managers. The results of the pilot will inform decisions about wider roll out as well as work ongoing in to develop a DEIS-type model for ELC and SAC. An additional €5.5m was secured under Budget 2021 to extend the provision of **hot school meals** to an additional 35,000 primary school children, in receipt of the cold lunch option while Budget 2022 provided for hot school meals to be extended from January 2022 to the 81 DEIS schools that submitted an expression of interest but were not selected in the initial extension. In July 2022, provision of the hot school meal option was extended to the 42,213 children in the 273 new DEIS primary schools and the cold lunch option to the 16,436 children in the new 37 DEIS secondary schools. An evaluation of the hot school meals is currently being undertaken to inform future policy decisions on the scheme.

## OBJECTIVE 5

### **Babies and young children have access to safe, high-quality, evidence-based integrated primary, preventative and specialist healthcare services.**

The **mychild** website was continually updated with child health advice. Guides available on **mychild.ie** now include: advice on colds, coughs and viral infections; the new children's food pyramid with advice on portion sizes, snacks, drinks and recommendation for children aged 1 to 4 years to take a vitamin D supplement during winter months; exercise after pregnancy; toilet training; dehydration; vitamin K for newborns; cutting your baby's nails; age and trying for a baby, dressing and undressing your baby; and assisted vaginal birth. These guides are part of an ongoing Sláintecare-funded project to publish 100 new guides.

The **National Child Health Record** for Public Health Nurses and Community Medical Doctors was rolled out nationally in 2021. Aligned with the roll out of the National Child Health Record was the delivery of clinical skills training to 1,800 Public Health Nurses nationally. The Public Health Nurses ensures that the timing and content of the **childhood surveillance programme** are consistent and all content included is based on evidence-based information and best practice. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the timing of the surveillance checks in some areas were affected and local areas are working to address the backlog.

Also in 2021, all 91 **Children's Disability Network Teams** were established to provide services for children with complex needs within a defined geographic area and the **Paediatric Outpatient and Emergency Care Centre at Tallaght** opened. The Paediatric Outpatient and Emergency Care Centre accommodates the existing children's emergency care unit relocated from the adult hospital and will expand outpatient services to children and young people from Dublin South West, South City and the surrounding areas of Kildare and Wicklow.

In addition, the **Review of the Maternity and Infant Care Scheme** commenced in 2022 while funding was awarded in Budget 2023 for the development and rollout of comprehensive **oral healthcare packages for children** aged from birth to seven years. These packages will include oral health promotion, routine and emergency oral healthcare and oral health evaluation. This evaluation element will support the targeted screening/surveillance programme.

## OBJECTIVE 6

### Babies and young children and their parents enjoy positive mental health.

The first of three planned implementation plans for **Sharing the Vision** was published in March 2022. **Sharing the Vision Implementation Plan 2022 – 2024** outlines a programme of work for the next three years to progress the 100 policy recommendations.

In addition “**Stronger Together: The HSE Mental Health Promotion Plan 2022-2027**” was launched in April 2022. An Oversight Group for the Mental Health Promotion Plan was established to oversee the implementation.

Other progress under Objective 6 included the launch of **three infant mental health e-learning units** and the addition of a **mental health and well-being module** to the Making Every Contact County e-learning programme. Work to extend **post-natal depression screening** using a standardised approach was also progressed, with a review of current practice and an evidence review complete.

While development of a fully costed model for a **National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)** extension to ELC settings was delayed, a **Critical Incident Plan Framework** was developed by DCEDIY with input from NEPS and support from NEPS for critical incidents in ELC settings is available on request.



Maria, age 4

## GOAL C

# POSITIVE PLAY-BASED EARLY LEARNING

### Objective 7

Parents, families and communities are supported to provide a nurturing and stimulating environment for children's early learning, starting from birth.

### Objective 8

Babies and young children have access to safe, high-quality, developmentally-appropriate, integrated ELC (and school-age childcare), which reflects diversity of need.

### Objective 9

Children will be supported in their transitions to (and through) ELC settings and onwards to primary schooling.

0195/C6

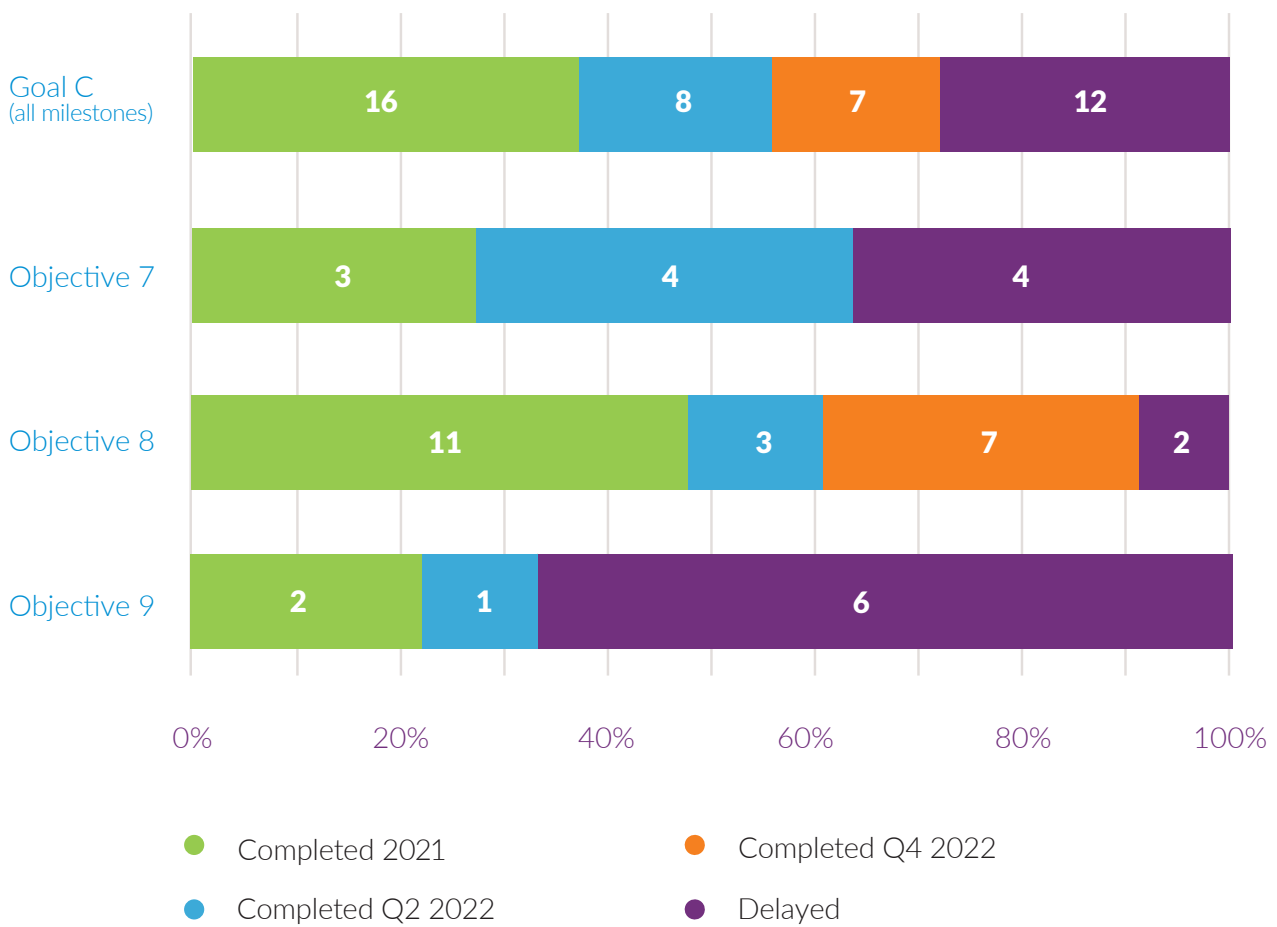


Abbie, age 5



# GOAL C

## 2021/22 MILESTONES



## OBJECTIVE 7

### **Parents, families and communities are supported to provide a nurturing and stimulating environment for children's early learning, starting from birth.**

In addition to work progressed under Objective 2, other measures were advanced to support parents to provide a nurturing and stimulating environment for children's early learning, to encourage greater parental involvement in early learning and to take steps that will encourage positive enrolment and participation in ELC.

Annual campaigns - **Let's Play Ireland** and **National Play Day** - took place in 2021 and again in 2022.

Under the **Little Library Initiative 2021**, 4,500 ELC settings, including childminders, were offered an opportunity to connect with their local library and receive a series of book bags.

Book bags were made available in May and again in October 2021, to ensure ELC settings build a library of quality books for young children, and to encourage them to make greater use of their local library. Books were made available in the Irish and English language. In addition, accessible versions of some titles were developed by the National Council for the Blind of Ireland (NCBI).

Under the **Little Library Initiative 2022 - My Little Library** - a free book bag with storybooks and resources was offered to every 4 and 5 year old who started school in September 2022.

The children received an invitation to participate in the initiative through their ELC setting.

The objective of this initiative was that all children starting school in September 2022 would have storybooks in their home and be members of their local library.

My Little Library was available in English and Irish.

Over 24,000 children in the target age group have joined the library since the initiative started and a further 10,000 children have renewed their library membership.

An evaluation of the First 5 Little Library Initiative is currently underway.

The **Little Baby Bundle Pilot Initiative** commenced in 2022 in collaboration with the Rotunda Hospital, Dublin and University Hospital, Waterford. Five hundred expectant parents are participating in this Pilot initiative.

The Little Baby Bundle is an acknowledgement from the State of the very significant and special moment for parents, and is designed to promote the health and wellbeing of newborns and support new parents in the first days and weeks after the birth of a baby. It has an estimated value of €300 and will be filled with a range of useful items, including play items to encourage early communication and bonding, household items for help with safe bathing and safe sleep, as well as a range of other items to support new parents after the birth.

An evaluation of the First 5 Little Baby Bundle Pilot Initiative is currently underway.

Although the review of the **Parent and Toddler Grant Initiative** was delayed, an enhancement to the Initiative - funding to support **Buggy Walking Groups** – was introduced in 2022. These Buggy Walking Groups are organised social walks for parents/guardians and young children. The grant is open to any existing or new organisations or groups who wish to offer a minimum of six organised walks within their community

There was also a range of supports put in place to support Ukrainian children and their families. In longer stay temporary accommodation including hotels and guest houses, **'stay and play' sessions** were delivered. These sessions organised by the City/County Childcare Committees, are facilitated by early years educators and offered in all emergency and short-term refugee accommodation. The aim of the sessions is to allow young Ukrainian children to engage in play and learning while remaining attached to their parents, thus readying them for eventual integration into a formal early learning and care setting, while also allowing Ukrainian parents to build social connections with each other and offer some respite in areas of isolation. In addition, **'My Place to Play' play mats** were distributed to families with children under three to support play in accommodation with limited space.

## OBJECTIVE 8

### **Babies and young children have access to safe, high-quality, developmentally-appropriate, integrated ELC (and school-age childcare), which reflects diversity of need.**

The 12-month review of the National Childcare Scheme was published in December 2021. The findings from this review informed a number of significant enhancements to the **National Childcare Scheme (NCS)**. Specifically, Budget 2022 introduced two enhancements to the NCS from April and August 2022 respectively, the practice of deducting hours in pre-school and school from NCS subsidised hours was discontinued and the universal subsidy was extended to all children under 15. Budget 2023 introduced further enhancements to the NCS, with an increase to the minimum subsidy from 50c to €1.40 taking effect from 2 January 2023.

The introduction of **fee management** measures - one of the recommendations of the Expert Group for a new funding model - started in 2022 with a requirement for providers to maintain fees at or below September 2021 levels to access the new Core Funding scheme and a once-off Transition Fund. This measure will ensure that parents feel the full affordability benefits of the NCS and the ECCE programme. This approach to fee management will be developed over time.

Also in 2022, a review of the **ECCE programme**, a precursor to putting the ECCE programme on a statutory footing commenced. Work also commenced on the **Equal Participation Model** in fulfilment of a commitment in First 5 to develop a DEIS type model of ELC and SAC. The evaluation of the **Access and Inclusion Model (AIM)** was also completed and planning enhancements to, and/or extensions of AIM commenced.

As part of the review of the **National Development Plan**, the DCEDIY developed a plan to deliver large scale capital investment over the period 2023-2025. Arising from this, almost €70 million was secured for the **Building Blocks Capital Programme**. This Programme includes three Pillars:

- A €9 million Modernisation Grant to improve energy efficiency standards, while also supporting the continuous improvement of the physical environment of services.
- A €45 million Capacity Grant to address capacity gaps, to fund an expansion in existing services and investing in the development of new services where needed
- A €15 million Innovation Grant to pilot a range of innovative initiatives such as outdoor ELC/SAC settings.

€435,000 was provided to Comhar Naíonraí na Gaeltachta for the provision of additional services in the Gaeltacht under the Language Planning Process. Two additional staff were recruited, and 27 have or are being supported in undertaking third level qualification courses. Comhar Naíonraí na Gaeltachta is managing an additional 21 services in Irish, and supporting 32 services operating through English regarding the use of the Irish language in their services.

## Covid-19 Supports

Multiple Covid-19 support packages were developed in response to evolving circumstances to support the ELC and SAC sector in 2021 and 2022. The objective of these support packages were to:

- support ELC and SAC providers' sustainability to enable services return to normal once restrictions were lifted;
- ensure that ELC and SAC could reopen after temporary closure periods and remain open, particularly for children of essential workers and vulnerable children, even at very low levels of occupancy;
- ensure that ELC and SAC services could operate safely for children, families and staff;
- support ELC and SAC providers to retain (and upskill) their staff, particularly during periods of closures and restricted access;
- ensure increased delivery costs associated with public health requirements, and lower demand / occupancy were not passed on to parents;
- ensure parents were not charged when not using ELC and SAC services during periods of closures and restricted access;
- ensure continuity of learning experiences to children during periods of closures and restricted access through the provision of remote supports;

Measures in 2021 and 2022 developed to support the achievement of these objectives included:

- Continuation of DCEDIY subsidy schemes (with the Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme (EWSS)) (4 January – 31 January 2021)
- Funding arrangements for ELC and SAC during extended Level 5 restrictions (with EWSS) (1 February – 5 March 2021) including a new Covid-19 Operating Support Payment and a new Covid-19 strand of the Sustainability Fund.
- Funding arrangements for ELC and SAC during the phased lifting of restrictions (with EWSS) from 8 March-29 March 2021 including an extension to the Covid-19 Operating Support Payment.
- A range of one-grants (including the €5.5m playing outside grant in June 2021 and the €10 million Grant Programme for Improved Ventilation and Other Measures to Reduce Transmission in December 2021) and other measures such as Student Temporary Employment Arrangements and an Antigen Programme for ELC and SAC (both introduced in December 2021).

In addition, there was an extensive range of public health resources to assist services to reopen and operate safely; CPD resources for educators and practitioners to upskill and resources to prepare children for the transition back to services following periods of closures/restricted access and to ensure children's continued access to learning opportunities at home .

The EWSS continued to be available to employers in the ELC and SAC sector with an exemption to the requirement to demonstrate a 30% drop in turnover as required by all other employers until April 2022. Between May and August 2022, ELC and SAC providers had access to a new once-off Transition Fund to ensure there continued was no increases in parents' fees for ELC and SAC in the period leading up to the introduction of the new Core Funding stream in September 2022. 95% of ELC and SAC providers signed up to the Transition Fund.



*Roisin, age 5*

## OBJECTIVE 9

### Children will be supported in their transitions to (and through) ELC settings and onwards to primary school.

Progress on a new **national model of transitions supports** experienced further delays; however, some important transition initiatives were progressed. For example, the annual campaign **Let's Get Ready** took place in 2021 and again in 2022. Let's Get Ready includes guidance for parents on practical steps they can take to support their children and tips on what children and parents can expect on their transition to pre-school and primary school. Let's Get Ready also includes a transitions pack for children starting pre-school and primary school that was distributed through a range of channels, including through CCCs, ELC settings, Home School Liaison Officers and gov.ie. This pack includes a tip sheet for parents, a transitions card for children and a '**Mo Scéal**' **transitions template** developed by the National Council of Curriculum and Assessment for completion by parents. This template enables parents to share key information with their child's early years educators or teacher. In addition, under the **Little Library Initiative 2022 - My Little Library** - a free book bag with storybooks and resources was offered to every 4 and 5 year old who started school in September 2022.

Significant progress was also made on the Primary Curriculum Framework. Consultation on the Framework, which was delayed due to Covid-19, was completed at the end of February 2022 and the **Primary Curriculum Framework** was launched on 9 March 2023. This framework will guide the NCCA's work in developing a specification for each curriculum area. Consultation on the **Primary Mathematics Curriculum** from junior infants to sixth class commenced in April 2022 and ran to end June 2022. The new Primary Mathematics Curriculum will be introduced to schools in 2023.

Moreover, Budgets 2021 and 2022 collectively improved the **pupil teacher ratio**. Schools are now provided with class teachers on the basis of one teacher for every 24 pupils which means that primary schools will be staffed at the most favourable level ever seen in September 2022.

A pilot scheme of in the **School Inclusion Model** - initially designed as a one year pilot involving up to 75 participating schools in the CHO 7 region - was disrupted by school closures and the redeployment of therapists during Covid-19. The pilot scheme recommenced in November 2021 in CHO7.

# GOAL D

## AN EFFECTIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEM

### Building Block 1

Committed leadership, strong governance and positive collaboration and engagement aligned around a shared vision for babies, young children and their families.

### Building Block 2

A robust regulation, inspection and quality assurance regime to enforce and raise standards.

### Building Block 3

An appropriately skilled and sustainable professional workforce that is supported and valued and reflects the diversity of babies, young children and their families.

### Building Block 4

A strong national infrastructure for research and data that is used to inform policy and practice alongside an ongoing programme of monitoring and evaluation.

### Building Block 5

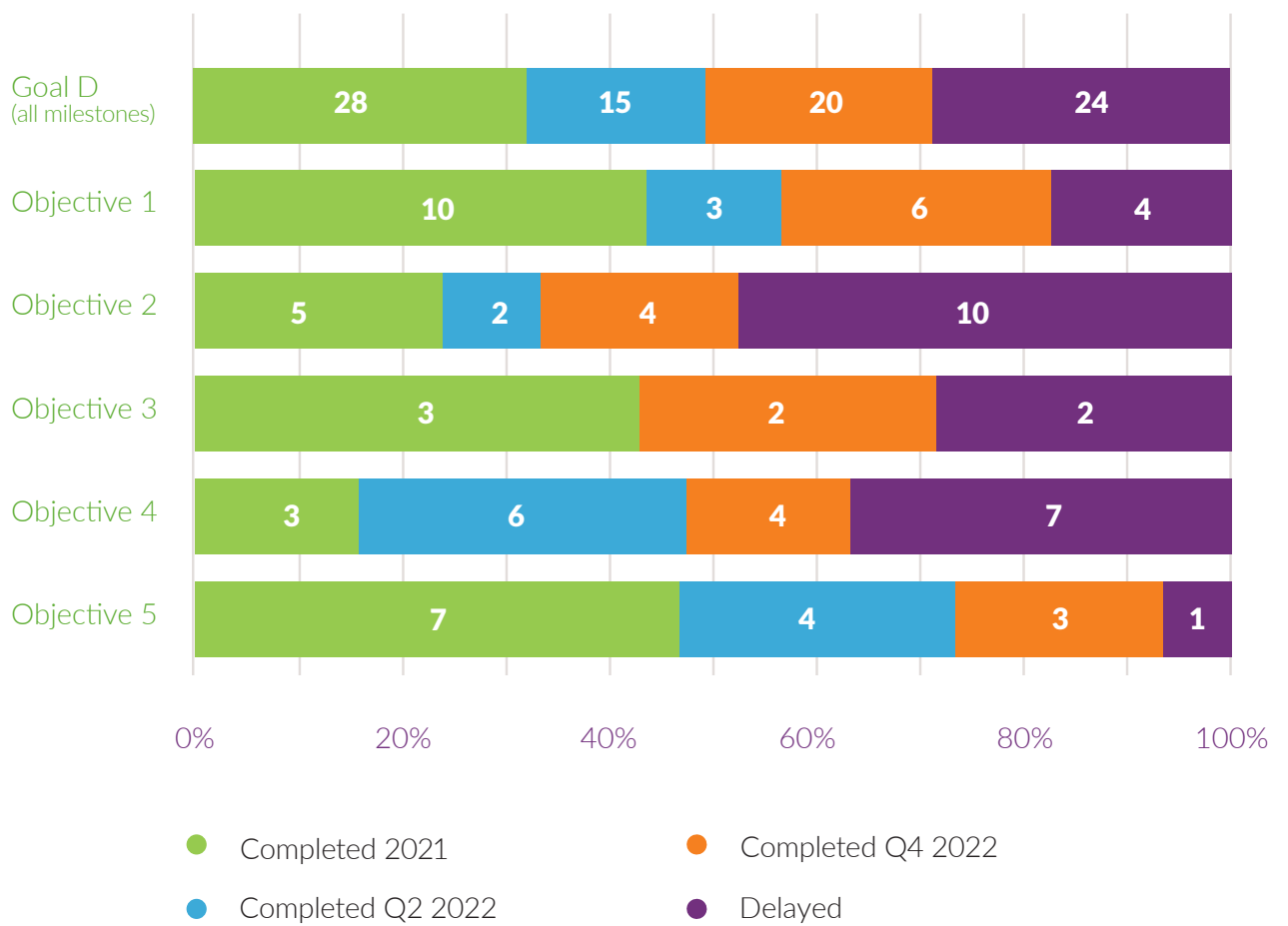
Additional public funding that is strategically invested to achieve the best outcomes for babies, young children and their families.





# GOAL D

## 2021/22 MILESTONES



# BUILDING BLOCK 1

## **Committed leadership, strong governance and positive collaboration and engagement aligned around a shared vision for babies, young children and their families.**

In 2020 and 2021, the First 5 Implementation Office continued to engage with the **Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures Advisory Council**. The Council was invited to publish a commentary on 2020 and 2021/22 progress reports and to make a submission on the Phase 2 Implementation Plan. As well as this, the **First 5 Inter-Departmental Group** continued to contribute to the implementation and monitoring of First 5 and will provide guidance for the development of the Phase 2 Implementation Plan (2023-2025).

The **First 5 twitter account and website** continued to be very effective communications' tools for raising awareness and engaging with stakeholders on the deliverables of the First 5 Strategy. The **website** also continued in use throughout 2021 and 2022 as a resource for early years educators and school-age childcare practitioners and parents, providing information on outdoor learning and play; providing public health guidance; as well as hosting the **Pre-school at Home hub**. In addition, in response to the war in Ukraine and the arrival of Ukrainian refugees in Ireland, the First 5 website was extended to offer a range of supports and resources for early years' educators, school-age practitioners, children and families.

A pilot of the training programme on the **Everyday Checklist of the National Participation Framework** commenced in 2022 with ELC providers. This pilot will inform a train the trainer programme that will rollout via City/County Childcare Committees in 2023.

In April 2021, the Department of Social Protection established a **Food Poverty Working Group**, comprising a range of Government Departments, including DCEDIY, DoE and DoH, along with representatives from the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Crosscare and the Children's Rights Alliance. The Working Group conducted a mapping exercise to identify the various programmes across Government that address food poverty and provide related supports. 'Food Poverty: Government Programmes, Schemes and Supports' is the report on this mapping exercise which was published in July 2022.

DCEDIY and DoE continued to work closely on a range of aspects of ELC, facilitated by the on-going co-location arrangement. Work on revising the current MOU between the two Departments in relation to ELC has commenced.

The Independent Review of the ELC and SAC Operating Model was published in March 2022. The Review concluded that a new **dedicated State agency** under the remit of the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth is the optimal operating model for the ELC and SAC sector for the years ahead. This agency would undertake the functions currently carried out by Pobal Early Years (including Better Start), the 30 City/County Childcare Committees, as well as operational functions undertaken by DCEDIY. DCEDIY has commenced the design and implementation planning-phase of this project. DCEDIY will revert to Government to seek further approval to proceed to full implementation of the recommendations arising out of the review, and formally commence the establishment of a dedicated State agency for the ELC and SAC sector.



Ciara, age 3

## BUILDING BLOCK 2

### **A robust regulation, inspection and quality assurance regime to enforce and raise standards.**

Following the publication of **National Standards for Antenatal Education** in Ireland in 2020, progress was made on the development of a **curriculum programme for antenatal educators**. The roll out of this programme is expected to commence in 2023.

Progress was also made on the development of training supports for the **National Quality Guidelines for School-Age Childcare**, also published in 2020.

Other progress in 2022 included work to update **Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework**, with the completion of a public consultation by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.

A review of the **Early Years Services Regulations 2016** recommenced in Q4 2021. A comprehensive public consultation was launched in Q1 2022 and concluded in Q4 2022. The report on the public consultation is being finalised for publication in Q2 2023. The Government has given **approval to draft Heads of Bill to amend the primary legislation**. Drafting of Heads is under way and publication of the Bill is expected to take place in Q3 2023 with enactment by Q2 2024.

The public consultation on the development of Early Years Education Inspection: Birth to Six was also completed in 2022 and '**The Guide to Early Years Education Inspection: Birth to Six**' was published on 2 September 2022. This document provides details of how the Department of Education Inspectorate carries out Early Years Education Inspection in ELC settings. It replaces the previous Guide to Early Years Education Inspection (2018). Pilots have been successfully concluded and the first inspections are due to take place in Q2 of 2023.

Planning also commenced in late 2022 for development of a **single integrated quality framework** to be used as the common reference point for all inspection activities and for self-evaluation by settings, reflecting the recommendations of the **OECD Country Policy Review of ELC Quality in Ireland** published in December 2021.

Work on the development of **comprehensive regulations for School-Age Childcare** was delayed due to a re-prioritisation of work during the Covid-19 pandemic. In the interim, Tusla continue to register School-Age Childcare services in line with the initial regulations and will inspect services where concerns are raised in relation to service provision.

## BUILDING BLOCK 3

**An appropriately skilled and sustainable professional workforce that is supported and valued and reflects the diversity of babies, young children and their families.**

**Nurturing Skills, the Workforce Plan for Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare, 2022 – 2028**, including a detailed implementation plan for the initial three years (2022-2024) was published in 2021 setting out actions to achieve workforce commitments in First 5, including:

- Achieving a graduate-led workforce in ELC by 2028, with new financial supports to assist early years educators to study while continuing to work in the sector;
- Supporting school-age childcare practitioners to meet new qualification requirements that will be introduced incrementally over the coming years;
- Development of a career framework and strengthening career pathways, including new supports for leadership development;
- Building a national infrastructure for Continuing Professional Development for the sector; and
- Supporting staff recruitment, retention and diversity in the workforce.

Also in 2021, 34% of staff working directly with children in centre-based early learning and care settings held an appropriate degree-level qualification. This increased to 37% in 2022 and exceeds the initial First 5 target in of 30% by 2021.

The **Joint Labour Committee for Early Years Services** – a recognised enabler for the successful implementation of Nurturing Skills - was established in 2021 and its work intensified in 2022. The work of the JLC culminated in the submission of two draft **Employment Regulation Orders (EROs)** to the Labour Court in mid-2022. The Minister of State for Enterprise, Trade and Employment accepted the recommendations of the Labour Court, and the two EROs came into force on 15 September 2022.

It is estimated that the EROs improved the wages of 73% of workers in the sector, with the wages of 50% of employees in the sector estimated to have risen by 10% or more, and the wages of 20% of employees estimated to have risen by 20% or more. The EROs gave the roles in Nurturing Skills – early years educator, lead educator and early years manager - legal meaning and, with higher minimum rates of pay for different roles (lead educators and early years managers) and those with graduate qualifications, the EROs also helped to establish a wage structure associated with the **Nurturing Skills career framework**.

The EROs are being supported by the new Core Funding scheme – which has an allocation of €259 million in its first year. As well as improved pay, this new scheme also facilitated the removal the exclusive link between graduate / higher capitation payments and the ECCE programme by extending a **graduate premium** to lead educators working with pre-school children of any age from birth to 6, as well as in relation to graduate managers of ELC settings.

Building on this initial step of improving pay and conditions, in Budget 2023 it was announced that the Core Funding allocation was increased by €28 million for year 2 of the new scheme. €4 million of that allocation will support the **removal of the 3-year experience rule for graduate premiums**, with the allocation of the remaining €24 million to be informed by the emerging data from Year 1 of operation.

Work by the Department of Health to develop a **dedicated child health workforce**, delayed owing to the Covid-19 pandemic, will recommence in 2023. The 2020 Working Group will be re-established tasked with scoping out of the most appropriate approach to developing a model of practice for a dedicated child health workforce, informed by international best practice and outcomes and the implications for the Irish context.

In addition, the **Employment Support Scheme** was developed by Tusla to assist Traveller students in education programmes (social work and social care) through to completion of degrees and then on to employment. There are currently 11 students being supported with bursaries and placements through the scheme at various stages in their courses. Tusla plans to support additional students in 2023.



Katelyn, age 3-

## BUILDING BLOCK 4

### **A strong national infrastructure for research and data that is used to inform policy and practice alongside an ongoing programme of monitoring and evaluation.**

First 5 recognises the centrality of research and data to the early childhood system. A strong national infrastructure for research and data, including longitudinal measurement, improves understanding of what leads to good outcomes for children and how families can be supported. In addition to the First 5 Research and Evaluation Plan referred to earlier and the range of research and evaluation projects (including the evaluation of AIM, the review of the NCS and the review of the ECCE programme), significant progress was made in 2021 and 2022 on specific commitments under Building Block 4.

Government approved the establishment of a **new Growing Up in Ireland birth cohort** in 2022. In addition, data collection took place with the '08 cohort, who had reached 13 years old.

The **What Works Initiative**, funded through Dormant Accounts, provided funding to three Tusla projects (scaling proven models from Area Based Childhood Interventions, expanding Early Talk Boost, and extending the Traveller Parenting Pilot Project) and the **What Works 'Sharing Knowledge' Fund** was allocated over €400,000, building on the **What Works 'Learning Together' Fund 2021**.

A project to replace the National Childcare Information System (NCCIS) with the new Tusla Case Management System (TCM) system was successfully completed in Q1 2023. TCM provides a single integrated case management system for all Tusla Services. As of Q1 2023 TCM now supports six Tusla Services (Tusla Education Support Service (TESS), Fostering enquires, Barnahus, Child Abuse Substantiation Procedure (CASP), Birth Information and Tracing and Adoption, Child Protection and Welfare and Alternative Care). The further extension of the system for PPFs and After Care services will be completed by Q4 2023.

In addition, a number of key reports were also published. These included the **OECD Country Policy Review** of Early Childhood Education and Care in Ireland, entitled 'Strengthening Early Childhood Education and Care in Ireland' (2021), a **2021 Update of the Indicator Set for Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures** (2022), a **First 5 Statistical Spotlight** (2022) and results from the 2021 **Personal and Work-Life Balance** survey (2022).

DCEDIY is now participating in a 2-year project, led by the Children's Rights Alliance. The project has received funding under the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme (CERV). One aspect of the project is to explore how Child Rights Impact Assessments (CRIAs) can embed a **children's rights approach**, including during times of emergency. A prototype CRIA will be developed and training supports aimed at embedding children's rights. The project started in September 2022.

## BUILDING BLOCK 5

### **Additional public funding that is strategically invested to achieve the best outcomes for babies, young children and their families.**

On 7 December 2021, a report on a new funding model for Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare, entitled **Partnership for the Public Good** was published. This report was delivered by an Expert Group, which was independently chaired and comprised national and international experts. Its recommendations were accepted in full by Government.

€716 million (an increase of €78 million from €638 million in 2021) was allocated in **Budget 2022** to begin implementing the recommendations of the Expert Group. This €716 million included funding for a new scheme - Core Funding stream - from September 2022 to, inter alia, support the introduction of an Employment Regulation Orders (EROs) to determine minimum rates of pay for workers as well as conditions of employment and the introduction of fee management measures. It also included funding for a Transition Fund to bridge the gap between the end of Covid-19 supports and the introduction of Core Funding and for two enhancements to the NCS, specifically, to discontinue the practice of deducting hours in pre-school and school from NCS subsidised hours (introduced in April 2022) and the extension of the universal subsidy all children under 15 (introduced in August 2022).

On 15 September 2022, **Together for Better**, the new funding model for ELC and SAC was launched, coinciding with the commencement of the EROs. Together for Better brings together three major elements, the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme, including the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM), the National Childcare Scheme (NCS) and the new Core Funding Scheme, with a fourth element – the Equal Participation Model under development that will fulfil the First 5 commitment to develop a DEIS type model for ELC and SAC.

A landmark €1.025 billion was announced in **Budget 2023** for ELC and SAC. This represented a €346m increase on 2022 funding and **exceeded the First 5 investment target of €1 billion by 2028, five years ahead of target.**

This €1.025 billion investment includes €266m to support continued implementation of the Core Funding Scheme for the first full programme year, September 2022 to August 2023 and into the next programme year from September 2023, with additional funding of €59m being made available to cover the costs of increased levels of capacity and numbers of graduates in year one and for a number of enhancements in year two of the Scheme.



In addition to the continued support for the new funding stream, Budget 2023 saw €357.6m allocated for the continued implementation of the NCS, offering supports to a greatly expanded cohort of children and families at significantly higher subsidy levels—with additional funding of €121m ensuring the hourly universal subsidy under the NCS can increase from 0.50c per hour to €1.40 per hour from January 2023.

Funding in 2023 also provides €308.2m for the continuation of the ECCE programme that will benefit more than 108,000 children in 2023 and the continuation of the AIM to ensure more than 5,000 children with a disability can access and meaningfully participate in the ECCE Programme. €84.5m was allocated to support the delivery of a range of regulatory and quality supports for the implementation of the National Action Plan for Childminding, Nurturing Skills: the Workforce Plan, and the ongoing development of the registration and inspection system as well as policy development commitments set out in First 5.

In addition to progress in ELC and SAC under Building Block 5, Budgets 2022 and 2023 also included measures specifically aimed at **supporting families on low incomes** through increases in qualified child (IQC) rates, including the introduction of separate rates for children aged under and over 12, increases in earnings disregards for One Parent Family and Jobseeker Transition payments, increases in the income thresholds for Working Family Payment, as well as an increase in the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance.



Rhys, age 4

# PROGRESS ON 2021/2022 MILESTONES



# GOAL A STRONG AND SUPPORTIVE FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES



## Goal A

### Strong and supportive families and communities

## Objective 1

Parents will be assisted to balance working and caring to contribute to optimum child development and to best suit their family circumstances.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
1.1 Facilitate mothers and fathers to care for their child at home during their first year.	<b>A.1.1.1.</b> A new paid Parental Leave scheme available to both parents will be established and operational by 2019. Following its establishment, the new Parental Leave scheme will aim to build incrementally over the course of the Strategy so that by 2028 parents in Ireland will be supported to look after their babies at home for the whole of their first year through a combination of paid family leave schemes. By 2021 parents will each have an individual entitlement to seven weeks of paid parental leave, which can be taken during their child’s earliest years, to potentially allow children to benefit from an additional 14 weeks parental care in their first year. Over the remaining years of the Strategy, as resources allow, the paid Parental Leave scheme will be further extended. Once the new scheme is established, consideration will be given to reviewing Maternity and Paternity Leave/Benefit schemes, particularly in respect of rates of payment and eligibility requirements. Further efforts to promote uptake of leave entitlements may also be required.	<b>Lead:</b> DSP	Period of paid parental leave increased to seven weeks per parent, having regard to financial and resource considerations by the Government.			X		The Parent’s Leave and Benefit Act 2019 introduced two weeks of paid Parent’s Leave for each parent to be taken in the first year after the birth or adoptive placement of a child. In April 2021, a further three weeks of Parent’s Leave and Benefit became available to each parent and the period in which the leave could be taken was extended to the first two years after the birth or adoptive placement of a child. In July 2022, Parent’s Leave and Benefit increased by a further two weeks, bringing the current entitlement to seven weeks and meeting the First 5 target.

## Goal A

Strong and supportive families and communities

## Objective 1

Parents will be assisted to balance working and caring to contribute to optimum child development and to best suit their family circumstances.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
1.2 Enhance access to family-friendly flexible working.	<b>A.1.2.1.</b> Undertake a review of the relevant provisions of the 2004 Maternity Protection (Amendment) Act on the issue of extending current entitlement to paid breastfeeding/lactation breaks or paid reduction in working hours for breastfeeding mothers in the workforce from 26 to 104 weeks after the baby's birth to facilitate the combination of breastfeeding and working in line with the WHO recommendation to continue breastfeeding, in combination with suitably nutritious and safe complementary foods, until children are two years old.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY	No Key Milestone for 2021					N/A
	<b>A.1.2.2.</b> Extend provision for unpaid parental leave from 18 to 26 weeks and amend the upper age limit of the child for which leave can be taken from 8 to 12 allowing for greater flexibility for parents.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY	No Key Milestone for 2021					N/A

## Goal A

### Strong and supportive families and communities

## Objective 1

Parents will be assisted to balance working and caring to contribute to optimum child development and to best suit their family circumstances.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
1.2 Enhance access to family-friendly flexible working.	<b>A.1.2.3.</b> Undertake a review existing statutory and non-statutory policies and research on their effectiveness in supporting family-friendly and flexible working for parents with young children. On the basis of findings of review and research, develop guidance and tools to facilitate employers to offer more family-friendly working options, so that over the course of the Strategy employment legislation, culture and practice enables parents to balance working with caring, while also promoting gender equality.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY <b>Partners:</b> DETE, DSP	Transposition of provisions in EU WLB Directive completed in line with the anticipated three-year timeframe.				X	<p>The deadline of August 2022 for transposition was not met but significant work on it was progressed. The Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Bill 2022 was published on 5 October 2022. A General Scheme of the Bill was published in April 2022 and was referred to the Joint Committee on Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth on 25 April 2022. The Joint Committee issued its Report on Pre-Legislative Scrutiny on 9 June 2022.</p> <p>The Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Bill 2022 proposes to give further effect to Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council on work-life balance for parents and carers.</p> <p>Under the proposed legislation, parents and carers will see a right to request flexible working in line with Article 9 of the Directive and the introduction of five days leave per year for medical care purposes in line with Article 6. It also proposes an extension to the current entitlement to breastfeeding/lactation breaks from 26 weeks to 104 weeks.</p> <p>The Right to Request Remote Working Bill has been integrated into the Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Bill following recommendations of the Pre-Legislative Scrutiny Reports of both Bills. As a result, the Bill will deliver an integrated approach that gives a right to request remote working to all workers, while the right to request other forms of flexible working will remain limited to parents and carers as defined in the Bill.</p> <p>The Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Bill passed all stages in the Oireachtas in March 2023.</p>

## Goal A

Strong and supportive families and communities

## Objective 1

Parents will be assisted to balance working and caring to contribute to optimum child development and to best suit their family circumstances.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
1.2 Enhance access to family-friendly flexible working.	<b>A.1.2.4.</b> Building on the innovative Athena Swan model in the higher education sector and experience from other countries, develop a system to recognise family-friendly employers, in line with preliminary work underway to consider the feasibility and benefits of an “Equality, Diversity and Inclusion mark” for business	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY  <b>Partners:</b> DETE	Refinements to selected model based on testing and wider rollout initiated.				X	Action delayed, milestone not met.

## Goal A

Strong and supportive families and communities

## Objective 2

Parents will benefit from high-quality, evidence-based information and services on various aspects of parenting to support child development and positive family relationships along a continuum of need.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones	
2.1 Lead collaboration across Government Departments and State Agencies to develop, design and disseminate information resources to support parenting.	A.2.1.1. Consolidate, streamline and strengthen parenting information resources into a single, coherent platform, to ensure consistent, high-quality and accessible information and develop user-friendly, attractive, high-quality information resources across multiple platforms, building on the suite of existing resources.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY  <b>Partners:</b> All relevant Government Departments and Agencies	Testing of proposed changes with parents completed.	X				User testing completed. Supporting Children and Parents platform on gov.ie is regularly updated and Advisory Group is in place.	
			Consolidation and streamlining of existing parenting information resources completed.	X					
			Measures for ongoing monitoring of the provision of parenting information agreed.	X					
	A.2.1.2. Lead a national public information campaign on positive parenting. The online and offline campaign should include practical messages and suggestions for parents and signposting to available information resources and services.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY  <b>Partner:</b> Government Information Service	Information campaign strategy completed.	X					Information campaign undertaken in 2021.
			Network of Department, Agency and NGO staff involved with parenting support established to share, disseminate and promote best practice.	X					
			Phase 2 background papers prepared. Public information campaign commenced.	X					



## Goal A

Strong and supportive families and communities

## Objective 2

Parents will benefit from high-quality, evidence-based information and services on various aspects of parenting to support child development and positive family relationships along a continuum of need.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<p><b>2.1</b> Lead collaboration across Government Departments and State Agencies to develop, design and disseminate information resources to support parenting.</p>	<p><b>A.2.1.3.</b> Pilot the development and implementation of Baby Boxes and Book Bags initiatives to support parenting with a focus on parent-baby bonding, information on baby development and early learning and promotion of baby safety.</p>	<p><b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY</p>	<p>Pilot underway.</p>					<p>See update on C.7.1.2</p>
			<p>Concurrent evaluation of pilot underway.</p>					

## Goal A

### Strong and supportive families and communities

## Objective 2

Parents will benefit from high-quality, evidence-based information and services on various aspects of parenting to support child development and positive family relationships along a continuum of need.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
2.2 Develop a tiered model of parenting services built on a foundation of universal provision, with extra support available for parents in line with their level of need on a progressive basis.	<p><b>A.2.2.1.</b> Develop a national model of parenting services, from universal to targeted provision, covering key stages of child development, taking account of parents and children in a range of contexts and parenting relationships. Universal parenting services under the model will be based on two key foundations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The further development of the HSE's National Healthy Childhood Programme in providing services for parents and babies (antenatal to age three), and</li> <li>The development of ELC services as a delivery mechanism to provide supports for parents. This will be planned and resourced through a reformed funding model and piloted.</li> </ul> <p>Over and above this, and building on the current PHN home visitation programme, an approach to home visiting services, across a continuum of need, will be agreed, having regard to Irish evidence on the implementation of prevention and early intervention initiatives.</p>	<p><b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY</p> <p><b>Partners:</b> Tusla, HSE and voluntary sector</p>	Development of national model of parenting services completed.		X			Supporting Parents was approved by Government in Q1 2022 and implementation is underway.
			Government approval of national model of parenting services including home visiting		X			

## Goal A

Strong and supportive families and communities

## Objective 2

Parents will benefit from high-quality, evidence-based information and services on various aspects of parenting to support child development and positive family relationships along a continuum of need.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<p><b>2.2</b> Develop a tiered model of parenting services built on a foundation of universal provision, with extra support available for parents in line with their level of need on a progressive basis.</p>	<p><b>A.2.2.2.</b> Sustain the Tusla Prevention Partnership and Family Support programme through continued investment.</p>	<p><b>Lead:</b> Tusla  <b>Partner:</b> DCEDIY</p>	<p>Continued implementation of PPFS Operational Plan and integration within Tusla.</p>	<p>X</p>				<p>The PPFS is now mainstreamed as part of Tusla's response pathways and integrated approach to practice.</p>

## Goal A

Strong and supportive families and communities.

## Objective 2

Parents will benefit from high-quality, evidence-based information and services on various aspects of parenting to support child development and positive family relationships along a continuum of need.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<b>2.2</b> Develop a tiered model of parenting services built on a foundation of universal provision, with extra support available for parents in line with their level of need on a progressive basis.	<b>A.2.2.3.</b> Continue to implement the Tusla Transformation Programme targeted at achieving better outcomes for vulnerable children and families. In the development of policies and practice, Tusla will have cognisance of this Strategy, the work streams relevant to child protection and welfare, and the particular vulnerabilities of the age groups covered by the Strategy.	<b>Lead:</b> Tusla	Continue to implement Signs of Safety.	X				The Integrated Steering Group for Practice Reform through the Embedding Signs of Safety Working Group continues to monitor the implementation of Signs of Safety Practice. Quarterly reports are prepared for areas to assist them in implementation planning and improvement. In support of this improvement, the continued focus is on training and learning through Introductory Signs of Safety Training: Blended Learning Program: 18 hours over a four week period. This training has been rolled out as planned on three separate occasions during Q1 and Q2. Eight courses have been offered in total. Advanced Signs of Safety Training: Safety Planning in Action – Intensive workshop with area based teams applying the Safety Planning Process to their casework. In Q1 and Q2, it was planned to pilot this programme and roll it out to a number of areas. Approximately 286 people have attended the two day workshop. The initial feedback from participants has been overwhelmingly positive.
			Child Protection training identifies the particular vulnerabilities of babies and young children.	X				Through ongoing training of Signs of Safety and through the Evidence Informed Practitioner Programme there is ongoing support to staff in the analysis of harm and the impact of complicating factors/vulnerabilities that are seen to increase the likelihood of future danger to a child.
			Open child protection cases of babies and young children are prioritised for social work intervention.	X				National Case Prioritisation Policy was approved in 2020. This approach focuses the response to cases where future risk of harm and the severity of that harm is prioritised for response. Such assessments would consider the vulnerability (including age) of a child in this context but age would be considered alongside other factors that would be indicators of future danger to a child.

## Goal A

Strong and supportive families and communities

## Objective 3

Families and communities will be supported to provide children with the necessary material and practical resources to encourage positive development in the early years.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<p><b>3.1</b> Building on the existing infrastructure of supports, review and develop initiatives to maximise the incomes of families with young children, with a particular focus on children at risk of poverty.</p>	<p><b>A.3.1.1.</b> Undertake research and analysis of the Home Carer Tax Credit scheme, in line with the Tax Expenditure Guidelines. This will include an examination of the beneficiaries of the scheme and an assessment of the extent that it is effective at supporting working families who take care of young children at home.</p>	<p><b>Lead:</b> DoF</p>	<p>Consideration of the results of the 2019 review in the context of Budget 2022.</p>	X				<p>Budget 2022 included an income tax package of €520m. Within the fiscal resources available, the income tax package effectively indexed the income tax standard rate bands and main personal tax credits (personal, employee and earned income tax credit).</p> <p>The Programme for Government includes a commitment in relation to increasing the Home Carer Tax Credit to support stay at home parents. This matter may be considered in the context of Budget 2023 and/or subsequent years.</p>

## Goal A

Strong and supportive families and communities

## Objective 3

Families and communities will be supported to provide children with the necessary material and practical resources to encourage positive development in the early years.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<b>3.1</b> Building on the existing infrastructure of supports, review and develop initiatives to maximise the incomes of families with young children, with a particular focus on children at risk of poverty.	<b>A.3.1.2.</b> Commence and progress a review of the effectiveness and accessibility of arrangements for recovery of maintenance payments by non-resident parents, including an examination of arrangements in other jurisdictions to ascertain the possibilities for making the maintenance recovery process easier for parents, improving the outcomes for children and reducing as far as possible the need for court proceedings for maintenance recovery. Review to be commenced within two years of the publication of the Strategy.	<b>Lead:</b> DSP	Progress on the review.			X		The Report of the Child Maintenance Review Group was published in November 2022. On foot of the report, the Government is taking a number of immediate actions to support lone parents.
			Development of policy options and proposals.			X		In relation to the treatment of Child Maintenance within the Social Welfare system: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lone Parents will no longer have child maintenance payments assessed against them in means tests for payments from the Department of Social Protection</li> <li>the requirement for Lone Parents to seek maintenance (often through the Courts) as a condition of eligibility for payments such as One Parent Family Payment will be removed</li> </ul> In relation to Child Maintenance within the Courts System: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the Minister for Justice announced significant reforms to make the family courts system more accessible and family friendly</li> <li>the Department of Justice will lead a review of enforcement of Child Maintenance Orders in the first half of 2023 and make proposals for reform if appropriate, such as strengthening attachment orders and examining the feasibility of introducing guidelines on child maintenance amounts</li> </ul>

## Goal A

Strong and supportive families and communities

## Objective 3

Families and communities will be supported to provide children with the necessary material and practical resources to encourage positive development in the early years.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<p><b>3.1</b> Building on the existing infrastructure of supports, review and develop initiatives to maximise the incomes of families with young children, with a particular focus on children at risk of poverty.</p>	<p><b>A.3.1.3.</b> Develop schemes to address energy poverty; continue to target young children with respiratory conditions in consideration of the extension, evaluation and possible mainstreaming of the Warmth and Wellbeing scheme to explore ways to make the benefits of the Warmer Homes Scheme available to more families of young children who are in or at risk of energy poverty, including in the rental sector.</p>	<p><b>Lead:</b> DECC</p>	<p>Continue to fund and develop schemes to address energy poverty, including among families with young children.</p>	X				<p>Following a successful study with almost 1,500 homes upgraded since 2016, a Report is being prepared by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, due in 2022. Given that the research element of the Scheme has now closed to participants, having reached a sufficient number, the Scheme closed to new applications in February 2022.</p> <p>The Exchequer investment in this Scheme has significantly improved the warmth and comfort of the homes involved. Initial reports have indicated that the upgrades are also delivering benefits to the health and wellbeing of participants, including reports of needing fewer GP and hospital visits, fewer prescriptions for antibiotics as well as increased engagement with other support services in the community.</p>

## Goal A

Strong and supportive families and communities

## Objective 3

Families and communities will be supported to provide children with the necessary material and practical resources to encourage positive development in the early years.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
3.2 Support the development of suitable accommodation to meet the needs of babies, young children and their families.	<b>A.3.2.1.</b> In line with the policies outlined in Rebuilding Ireland, the Government's Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness, implement a range of actions to ensure an increased supply of social, affordable and private homes so that children and their families are provided with suitable accommodation.	<b>Lead:</b> DHLGH	22,000 social housing solutions to be delivered.	X				<p>A total of 23,312 social housing supports were provided to households in 2021, including 5,202 new build social homes, 1,270 acquisitions and 2,711 leased social homes. The Housing Assistance Payment (13,095 supports) and Rental Accommodation Scheme (1,034 supports) make up the balance.</p> <p>Housing for All is the Government's plan to increase the supply of housing to an average of 33,000 per year over the next decade. This includes the delivery of 90,000 social homes, 36,000 affordable purchase homes and 18,000 cost rental homes.</p> <p>Housing for All is supported by an investment package of over €4bn per annum, through an overall combination of €12bn in direct Exchequer funding, €3.5bn in funding through the Land Development Agency and €5bn funding through the Housing Finance Agency.</p>



## Goal A

### Strong and supportive families and communities

## Objective 3

Families and communities will be supported to provide children with the necessary material and practical resources to encourage positive development in the early years.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
3.2 Support the development of suitable accommodation to meet the needs of babies, young children and their families.	<b>A.3.2.2.</b> Provide increased accommodation facilities appropriate for families experiencing homelessness and ensure that the appropriate supports are provided to these families to support them being re-homed in suitable homes within the shortest possible timeframe and having regard to their individual requirements and circumstances.	<b>Lead:</b> DHLGH	<p>Dependent on 2020 developments..</p> <p>2020 milestone: All State-funded emergency accommodation is in accordance with the NQSF. 2020 update: Work is ongoing</p> <p>At the end of 2020 there were 35 hubs operational nationally, offering more than 766 units of family accommodation in urban areas. Further facilities will become operation during the course of 2021, details of which will become available as projects are finalised by housing authorities. Supports are provided to these families in order for them to exit from homelessness into suitable homes with the shortest timeframe possible.</p> <p>All emergency accommodation, whether provided by local authorities, NGOs, voluntary bodies or privately are required to comply with standards and these standards are monitored. The National Quality Standards Framework (NQSF) for homeless services is in place nationally for local authority and NGO delivered services. Local authorities also carry out inspections on facilities that are not covered under the Framework, as they determine to be appropriate. This regime operates in parallel with, and is based on, the NQSF arrangements.</p>	X				<p>Delivery continued on family-focused facilities or family hubs. At the end of 2021, there were 36 hubs operational nationally, offering 870 units of family accommodation. Family hubs offer a greater degree of stability to families than is possible in hotels, with access to more appropriate living space as well as cooking and laundry facilities. Families in hubs are supported to identify suitable homes. Where need is identified, the Department will continue to support the development of further family hubs.</p> <p>By the end of 2021, the National Quality Standards Framework (NQSF) for homeless services was in place nationally for all local authority and NGO delivered services. The standards are designed to ensure a consistent approach to how local authorities and service providers respond to the needs of those experiencing homelessness and to improve the quality of service provided. In 2021, the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive adapted the NQSF to apply to privately operated facilities in the Dublin Region.</p>

## Goal A

### Strong and supportive families and communities

## Objective 3

### Families and communities will be supported to provide children with the necessary material and practical resources to encourage positive development in the early years.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<b>3.2</b> Support the development of suitable accommodation to meet the needs of babies, young children and their families.	<b>A.3.2.3.</b> Following consultation process, publish standards for accommodation offered to people in the protection process to ensure that the delivery of services and supports for people living in this type of accommodation, including babies, young children and their parents, is of high quality, appropriate, safe and effective.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY	Monitor the continuous rollout of improvements to the delivery of services as described in the standards document.	X				<p>In the 19 months since the publication of the White Paper, a significant focus has been placed on delivering these reforms. Much progress was made between September 2021 and March 2022. A priority was placed on progressing elements of Phase Two including the development of the accommodation in the community model, the acquisition of properties, the development of the income support payment policy and mechanism, the development of the local Integration model, all with a view to commencing the movement of IPAS residents into Phase Two accommodation towards the end of 2022.</p> <p>In March 2022 due to the war in Ukraine, staff in DCEDIY were temporarily seconded to help with Ireland's obligation to respond to the impact of the war. The necessity to divert the resources has had an unavoidable impact on the timelines for the implementation of the White Paper. Alongside this, there has been a substantial increase in the number of people seeking International Protection.</p> <p>In this vastly changed context since the publication of the White Paper, an overall review of the projected timelines and deliverables is currently underway.</p> <p>While the review of the White Paper is ongoing, work has and is progressing in certain key areas including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Vulnerability Assessment Programme has been in operation since December 2020 and was extended to all new IP applicants from February 2021. Whilst children are deemed vulnerable by default under the Directive, the Programme helps IPAS to identify children and young people with additional vulnerabilities and to address their reception needs more efficiently.</li> <li>DCEDIY is working with HIQA to put in place an independent monitoring of IPAS accommodation centres against the National Standards, which became effective since 2021. HIQA will monitor standards in IPAS permanent accommodation centres. HIQA will assume an independent monitoring role with regular inspections in 2023 once legislation is in place and following on from a series of pilot inspection.</li> </ul>
			Continuous review of the model to ensure all aspects are embedded in the agreed timeframe.	X				
			Review and report on public procurement process finalised in 2020.	X				

## Goal A

Strong and supportive families and communities

## Objective 3

Families and communities will be supported to provide children with the necessary material and practical resources to encourage positive development in the early years.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
3.2 Support the development of suitable accommodation to meet the needs of babies, young children and their families.	A.3.2.4. Make specific recommendations on access to appropriate accommodation for Traveller families with babies and young children, having regard to the work of the recently established Expert Group who have been tasked with examining and making recommendations on Traveller accommodation policy, strategy and implementation, including reviewing the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998 and all other legislation that impacts on the provision and delivery of accommodation for Travellers.	Lead: DHLGH	Increased delivery of Traveller-specific accommodation.	X				<p><b>Traveller Accommodation Expert Review report Programme</b> - In 2021 a Programme Board was established to oversee the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Traveller Accommodation Expert Review report. The Programme Board selected 24 out of the 32 recommendations for inclusion in the ongoing work programme, grouped into 11 separate projects. To date six of these 24 recommendations have been completed. One of the key recommendations, to introduce an 'ethnic identifier' so that Traveller applicants for mainstream social housing can be identified, progress in meeting their housing needs and have progress monitored effectively, has been completed. Regulation S.I. 73 of 2022, allowing for the inclusion of a Traveller identifier on the statutory Social Housing Support application form, came into operation on 14 March 2022. Updates on progress on the Review recommendations can found here: <a href="https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/37910-traveller-accommodation-expert-review-programme-board-update/">https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/37910-traveller-accommodation-expert-review-programme-board-update/</a></p> <p><b>Capital Funding</b> - In 2021, for the second year in a row, full use was made of the capital budget of €15.5 million to provide additional accommodation and to make improvements to existing Traveller-specific accommodation. The increased capital allocation in 2022 brings the capital budget to €18 million.</p> <p><b>Caravan Loan Scheme</b> - The Department is in the process of providing a preferential Caravan Loan Scheme to enable local authorities to provide loans to Traveller applicants to purchase their own caravans/ mobile homes on halting sites for use as their primary residence.</p> <p><b>Traveller Accommodation Programmes</b> - A midterm review of the Traveller Accommodation Programmes by local authorities is being undertaken in 2022.</p>

## Goal A

### Strong and supportive families and communities

## Objective 3

Families and communities will be supported to provide children with the necessary material and practical resources to encourage positive development in the early years.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<b>3.3</b> Ensure that the design and development of physical and social infrastructure takes account of the needs and rights of young babies, young children and their families so that communities where children are born and grow up support positive early development.	<b>A.3.3.1.</b> Develop guidelines on planning and developing child-friendly communities for local authorities. The guidelines will focus on building sustainable communities that ensure that children have safe environments to play, explore and learn. These will include recommendations on amenity space, appropriate scale, walking and cycling routes, and public spaces including play spaces and natural environments.	<b>Lead:</b> DHLGH	Progress initiatives to support increased emphasis on children in planning including through guidelines.	X				The sustainable urban housing guidelines 2020 have included child-friendly policies.
	<b>A.3.3.2</b> Conduct a mapping exercise of current play policy, practice and provision with a focus on early childhood and on the basis of findings make recommendations for future actions.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY	Finalise mapping exercise.  Initiate process to develop recommendations for future action.				X	Play provision and policy research conducted before Covid-19 is being used to identify areas for action and development. Consultation processes for the new Policy Framework will also inform this process. A process is underway to identify a high level play policy action for the National Children and Young People's Policy Framework 2023-2028.

## Goal A

### Strong and supportive families and communities

## Objective 3

### Families and communities will be supported to provide children with the necessary material and practical resources to encourage positive development in the early years.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<b>3.3</b> Ensure that the design and development of physical and social infrastructure takes account of the needs and rights of young babies, young children and their families so that communities where children are born and grow up support positive early development.	<b>A.3.3.3.</b> Invest in libraries as community hubs, across the country, with a particular focus on young children and their parents (parent and baby groups, materials for parents, development of children's sections), in line with implementation of the new library strategy.	<b>Lead:</b> DRCD  <b>Partners:</b> DCEDIY, Local Authorities, Libraries Development, LGMA	Implement the structured library literacy and reading development support services to babies and young children across all local authorities.	X				A specific focus was placed on the delivery of storytime events online offered to ELC settings for the national Ireland Reads 2022 initiative and this was followed up with a Friendship Storytime Initiative in April/May during the annual public libraries' Spring into Storytime. A friendship package of a book per ELC room and support material was provided to ELC settings and reinforced with storytime events in library branches and online.
			Four new library builds/refurbishments are opened providing suitable and inviting spaces for babies, young children and their families.	X				New libraries opened in Wicklow town, Edgeworthstown, Co. Longford, Bandon, Co. Cork and Castletymon and North Clondalkin in South Dublin, all specifically designed with designated children's libraries and new resources.
			Dependent on 2020 developments, further roll out First 5 in Your Library initiative.  2020 milestone: Building on the success of Healthy Ireland in Your Library, explore the concept of First 5 in Your Library as a valuable source within the community for information on early childhood with support from DCEDIY.  2020 update: The development of First 5 Little Library Initiative will be delivered in 2021.			X		The My Little Library initiative was delivered, with the provision of a library bag containing books supporting the start of school, a library membership card and supplementary materials made available to all four and five-year-olds starting school. To date, over 24,000 children have joined the library, with a further 10,000 renewing library membership. It is planned to embed the libraries' support for babies and young children further with the development of promotional material, including a leaflet and videos aimed at increasing the awareness of the public library services to support ELC settings and the services that libraries provide to support young children and families

# GOAL B

## OPTIMUM PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH



## Goal B

### Optimum physical and mental health

## Objective 4

Parents, families and communities will be supported to engage in and promote positive health behaviours among babies and young children, starting from the pre-conception period.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones	
<b>4.1</b> Promote and support positive health behaviours among pregnant women, babies, young children and their families.	<b>B.4.1.1.</b> Continue progress towards the breastfeeding target rate set out in the National Breastfeeding Action Plan (i.e. annual 2% increase in breastfeeding duration rates over the period 2016-2021). To meet this target:  Continue to support mothers to breastfeed through the PHN service, implement standardised breastfeeding policies and  Provide clinical specialist posts in both primary care and maternity hospitals as per the key actions of the National Breastfeeding Action Plan. Extensions to this target will be considered at the end-of-year-three review of First 5 in 2021.	<b>Lead:</b> HSE  <b>Partner:</b> DoH	a) Blended learning breastfeeding training programme available.			X		Following an extensive review of breastfeeding e-learning training, a new national infant feeding/breastfeeding e-learning unit training package was launched in Q4 2022. This package includes three breastfeeding e-learning units and a formula feeding unit which are required to be completed by the learner. A skills and reflective practice element of the training is at the final stages of development with roll out of this element to commence 2023.	
			Evidence-based information available to mothers through a range of media.	X					The Breastfeeding A Good Start in Life booklet was updated in Q2 and is now available to mothers via Public Health Nursing/midwifery services or via mychild.ie.  Additional support and evidence based information articles are available to mothers on mychild.ie and within the My Pregnancy and mychild 0 to 2 years books which are provided to every expectant mum / parent.  The mychild.ie campaign continues to extensively promote breastfeeding across multiple channels, including digital search and social media advertising, radio adds specific to breastfeeding and digital audio advertising, video on demand and display advertising as well as media partnerships. There were 1,900 queries responded to on the HSE's online breastfeeding support service from Q1-3.  A breastfeeding booklet (Beoir Breastfeeding) for the Traveller and Roma community was published in Q2 2022.
			b) Review of compliance with relevant breastfeeding policies completed.			X			National Standards for infant feeding in Maternity Services published in May. Self-assessment tools were developed Q2 and piloted in 2 services in Q3, commencing roll out to 19 maternity units in Q4. National Infant feeding led forum for maternity services and oversight group commenced in Q4.  The breastfeeding observation and assessment guideline and resource used within primary care services was updated Q2 and is now included in maternal child health record for all newborns.

## Goal B

### Optimum physical and mental health

## Objective 4

Parents, families and communities will be supported to engage in and promote positive health behaviours among babies and young children, starting from the pre-conception period.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<b>4.1</b> Promote and support positive health behaviours among pregnant women, babies, young children and their families.	<b>B.4.1.1.</b> Continue progress towards the breastfeeding target rate set out in the National Breastfeeding Action Plan (i.e. annual 2% increase in breastfeeding duration rates over the period 2016-2021). To meet this target: a) Continue to support mothers to breastfeed through the PHN service, b) implement standardised breastfeeding policies and c) Provide clinical specialist posts in both primary care and maternity hospitals as per the key actions of the National Breastfeeding Action Plan. Extensions to this target will be considered at the end-of-year-three review of First 5 in 2021.	<b>Lead:</b> HSE  <b>Partner:</b> DoH	c) Additional clinical specialist posts provided and funding dependent.			X		In May 2021, Minister Donnelly announced additional annual funding to the HSE of €1.58 million to fund 24 additional lactation consultants thereby providing support to every maternity unit in the country.  By the end of 2022 there was a total of 45.6 WTE lactation consultants in post, comprised of 31.8 in maternity services and 13.8 WTEs in community services. In maternity services, 9.5 WTEs were allocated from the Ministerial announcement of 24 posts of which 8.5 WTEs were filled. In community services 14.5 WTEs were allocated from the Ministerial announcement of 24 posts. 7 WTEs were in post with a further 6 due to take up positions in early 2023.



## Goal B

### Optimum physical and mental health

## Objective 4

Parents, families and communities will be supported to engage in and promote positive health behaviours among babies and young children, starting from the pre-conception period.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<b>4.1</b> Promote and support positive health behaviours among pregnant women, babies, young children and their families.	<b>B.4.1.2.</b> Enhance weaning support to parents through the National Healthy Childhood Programme.	<b>Lead:</b> HSE  <b>Partner:</b> DoH	Enhanced public information available on <a href="http://www.mychild.ie">www.mychild.ie</a>	X				This was completed in 2019. Weaning information is published in the My Child: 0 to 2 years book which is distributed by Public Health Nurses to all parents and a multipage guide on weaning is available on mychild.ie with accompanying video. These information resources continue to be reviewed and updated in line with new emerging evidence and best practice.
			Consistent, standardised information available through the universal child health programme.	X				Weaning is listed as a discussion topic with parents in the National Child Health record at the three-month assessment. This along with the key messages for Public Health Nurses are outlined within the Child health Assessment manual for Public Health Nurses ensure standardised consistent messages are being delivered by Public Health Nurses nationally.  Public Health Nurses also have access to the Nutritional Reference Pack which continues to be reviewed and updated. This is further supported by information provided in the feeding your baby chapter within the My Child 0 to 2 years book provided to parents.
			Community-based weaning workshops provided.				X	Work to agree a standardised approach for delivery of community-based weaning workshops, agree delivery across the country and reporting on same is scheduled to progress in 2023.

## Goal B

### Optimum physical and mental health

## Objective 4

Parents, families and communities will be supported to engage in and promote positive health behaviours among babies and young children, starting from the pre-conception period.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
4.1 Promote and support positive health behaviours among pregnant women, babies, young children and their families.	<b>B.4.1.3.</b> Provide access to comprehensive family planning and reproductive healthcare services, including information and advice for people considering pregnancy (e.g. smoking cessation) and carry out a national information campaign to promote the importance of pre-conception health.	<b>Lead:</b> DoH  <b>Partner:</b> HSE	Implementation of guidelines for the identification, diagnosis and treatment of tobacco addiction.		X			Following a successful pilot, demonstrating the effectiveness of smoking cessation, midwives in two pilot maternity sites, the NWIHP were internal stakeholders in the development of the 'Stop Smoking' National Clinical Guideline published in January 2022, the recommendations of which are currently being implemented across maternity services. The National Maternity Strategy recommends capturing data, at maternity network level, on the number of interventions with women who smoke, and what strategies are most effective, in conjunction with the Health and Wellbeing (health promotion and improvement, public health) Directorate and this work is ongoing on a continuous basis by units locally. In addition, the NWIHP are leading a work programme for the nationally developed and standardised antenatal education. It is envisaged that this programme will incorporate advice for overall well-being, including avoiding/ quitting smoking, avoiding alcohol etc. and remaining healthy during pregnancy. This work is ongoing.

## Goal B

### Optimum physical and mental health

## Objective 4

Parents, families and communities will be supported to engage in and promote positive health behaviours among babies and young children, starting from the pre-conception period.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
4.1 Promote and support positive health behaviours among pregnant women, babies, young children and their families.	<b>B.4.1.3.</b> Provide access to comprehensive family planning and reproductive healthcare services, including information and advice for people considering pregnancy (e.g. smoking cessation) and carry out a national information campaign to promote the importance of pre-conception health.	<b>Lead:</b> DoH  <b>Partner:</b> HSE	Continued implementation of the National Maternity Strategy, as set out in the associated implementation plan.		X			<p>The implementation of the National Maternity Strategy (2016-2026) continues in line with a revised implementation plan for the Strategy, published in Q4 2021, which sets out in detail the roadmap to ensure the Strategy is implemented in full within the timeframe originally intended. Funding of €7.3m provided under Budget 2021 and €8.7m under Budget 2022 ensured that there was significant progress under all four strategic priorities in the Strategy</p> <p>The funding provided in 2021 allowed for further development of community midwifery as well as specialist services. It has enabled the expansion of breastfeeding supports and strengthened training and education supports for staff.</p> <p>The funding allocated in 2022 is providing for the recruitment of an additional 87.8 Whole Time Equivalent staff (WTE) into maternity services across the country, including consultants, midwives/nurses, Allied Health professionals, healthcare assistants and administrative staff. These posts are supporting the realisation of the Strategy's vision of a new model of integrated, team-based care that provides increased choice to women, as well as improving outcomes and experiences for women and babies accessing maternity services.</p>

## Goal B

### Optimum physical and mental health

## Objective 4

Parents, families and communities will be supported to engage in and promote positive health behaviours among babies and young children, starting from the pre-conception period.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
4.1 Promote and support positive health behaviours among pregnant women, babies, young children and their families.	B.4.1.4. Develop mechanisms to improve folic acid intake among all women of reproductive ages.	<b>Lead:</b> DoH  <b>Partners:</b> HSE, Safefood	HSE review of folic acid supplement uptake and NTD surveillance.	X				Folic Acid Supplementation Report has been published.
	B.4.1.5. Develop and maintain comprehensive, accessible information for parents on all aspects of their child's health and wellbeing through a new parenting and child health and wellbeing website supported by social media.	<b>Lead:</b> HSE  <b>Partner:</b> DoH	New content developed for the website.	X				<p>New content continues to be added to mychild.ie website. In 2021, 106 new information guides were published as part of a Sláintecare-funded project. Topics included advice on a wide range of topics, including breastfeeding, premature babies, paediatric physiotherapy, dental, sepsis, among others. Other guides continue to be updated as a result of user feedback or updated guidance. A review process of guides published more than three years ago has commenced, after being delayed due to competing digital demands because of Covid-19. A suite of 10 videos about infant mental health were published and promoted in Q2 2022 as part of Infant Mental Health Week.</p> <p>A new pregnancy support journey funded by Sláintecare was created in 2021 and was being trialled in Q2 2022. A trial group are receiving weekly emails tailored to their stage of pregnancy. It is planned to launch this to the public in 2023 and to expand the journey to include the first few months of a baby's life. The mychild.ie website recorded 5.6 million visits in 2021. Organic search continues to be the main driver of traffic to the website. This is when people click on a link to the site through search engine results. It does not include paid search ads. The website is promoted through social media all year round on the mychild Facebook and Instagram accounts. In 2021, the Facebook community grew year on year by 21% to 51,776 followers. On Instagram, it grew by 42% year on year to 15,100 followers. Overall for 2021 social media engagements were up 40% from 2020 to 734,690.</p> <p>A moderated online support group for breastfeeding mothers led by lactation consultants was trialled between October 2021 and January 2022 as part of a Sláintecare funded project.</p> <p>The website was also promoted in 2 advertising campaigns in 2021 on national and regional radio, audio and podcast platforms, partnerships, digital display ads, pharmacy screens and video on demand (VOD). A similar campaign took place in 2022.</p>

## Goal B

### Optimum physical and mental health

## Objective 4

Parents, families and communities will be supported to engage in and promote positive health behaviours among babies and young children, starting from the pre-conception period.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
4.1 Promote and support positive health behaviours among pregnant women, babies, young children and their families.	B.4.1.5. Develop and maintain comprehensive, accessible information for parents on all aspects of their child's health and wellbeing through a new parenting and child health and wellbeing website supported by social media.	<b>Lead:</b> HSE  <b>Partner:</b> DoH	Digital analytics and user feedback informing development and content.	X				<p>There was a total of 5.6 million visits to mychild.ie in 2021, a 64% increase on 2020.</p> <p>Organic search was the main driver of traffic, accounting for 85% of all sessions, with 4.8 million sessions coming from this channel (71% increase on 2020). This has shown that the content design approach has resulted in a high organic search position for mychild.ie.</p> <p>Data on traffic from organic, social and paid search, most popular pages, most popular keywords and referral traffic is presented quarterly and annually to inform future development. Paid search ads are also reviewed regularly to ensure the website is prominent in searches for priority topics.</p> <p>Users have the opportunity to provide anonymous feedback on every page or individual sections and this data is reviewed periodically to inform edits to information if required and gaps in content. This data and other information such as popular queries to the site's 'ask our breastfeeding expert' service was used to inform a top user tasks survey in 2021. The results have informed our content development in 2021 and 2022 and led to a restructuring of information on the website.</p> <p>Guides with a high amount of user feedback have been prioritised in the ongoing review of content published on the site more than three years ago.</p> <p>Users also get in contact through social media channels. This feedback is shared with the relevant subject matter expert and decision on any action required is made, and a reply sent to the user.</p> <p>Some guides have been updated following feedback from users, for example, clearer language or additional information added.</p>

## Goal B

### Optimum physical and mental health

## Objective 4

Parents, families and communities will be supported to engage in and promote positive health behaviours among babies and young children, starting from the pre-conception period.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<b>4.1</b> Promote and support positive health behaviours among pregnant women, babies, young children and their families.	<b>B.4.1.6.</b> Develop, publish and disseminate guidelines on health behaviours for babies and young children, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Healthy Eating Guidelines for 1-5-year-olds</li> <li>b) Guidelines for Physical Activity for Early Childhood and Guidelines on Sedentary Behaviour, including Guidelines on Screen Time for Early Childhood</li> <li>c) Guidelines on Oral Health, including Dentists' Visits and Toothpaste Use in Early Childhood.</li> </ul>	<b>Joint Leads:</b> DoH  <b>Partner:</b> Safefood	<b>Healthy eating</b> Continue dissemination and promotion of Healthy Eating Guidelines for 1-5 Year Olds.	X				Ongoing.
			Monitor impact of START campaign on 1-5 Year Olds.	X				Ongoing
			Monitor implementation of Guidelines.	X				Ongoing
			Continue to deliver START campaign.	X				Ongoing
			<b>Physical activity</b> Content to communicate Guidelines on Physical Activity for Early Childhood, Sedentary Behaviour, Screen Time in Early Childhood developed and integrated into www.mychild.ie.	X				This action item is being delivered under the START campaign and is ongoing.

## Goal B

### Optimum physical and mental health

## Objective 4

Parents, families and communities will be supported to engage in and promote positive health behaviours among babies and young children, starting from the pre-conception period.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<b>4.1</b> Promote and support positive health behaviours among pregnant women, babies, young children and their families.	<b>B.4.1.6.</b> Develop, publish and disseminate guidelines on health behaviours for babies and young children, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Healthy Eating Guidelines for 1-5-year-olds</li> <li>b) Guidelines for Physical Activity for Early Childhood and Guidelines on Sedentary Behaviour, including Guidelines on Screen Time for Early Childhood</li> <li>c) Guidelines on Oral Health, including Dentists' Visits and Toothpaste Use in Early Childhood.</li> </ul>	<b>Joint Leads:</b> DoH  <b>Partner:</b> Safefood	<b>Oral health</b> Signposting information campaign updated, if required.				X	The development of health promotion campaigns for babies and young children will be progressed as part of the implementation of the National Oral Health Policy, Smile Agus Sláinte. The Policy sets out a body of substantial reform of oral healthcare in Ireland, in line with best international practice. Implementation of these milestones was delayed in 2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Work is now underway on the design of a framework to oversee and facilitate implementation of the Policy, including the development of an information campaign including guidelines on health behaviours in babies and young children.
			Targeted information campaign on early fluoride toothpaste usage rolled out.				X	

## Goal B

### Optimum physical and mental health

## Objective 4

Parents, families and communities will be supported to engage in and promote positive health behaviours among babies and young children, starting from the pre-conception period.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
4.1 Promote and support positive health behaviours among pregnant women, babies, young children and their families.	B.4.1.7. Develop a national skin cancer prevention plan with babies and young children identified as a priority group.	<b>Lead:</b> DoH  <b>Partners:</b> National Cancer Control Programme, Stakeholder Implementation Group	Review progress.	X				<p>Key progress included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SunSmart messaging was included on mychild website, the Parents Centre and in the Nutrition Reference Pack for infants 0-12 months 7th edition.</li> <li>• Guidance was shade was included in the Universal Design Guidelines for ELC Settings.</li> <li>• SunSmart text was submitted for Public Health Nurses Manual developed by mychild.</li> <li>• SunSmart partner packs were disseminated to key children and young people stakeholders.</li> <li>• An FAQ document was developed for Public Health Nurses on sun protection for babies and children.</li> <li>• The provision of UV protective long sleeve shirts and SunSmart games pack to kids summer camps was piloted.</li> <li>• A SunSmart education programme in Primary Schools in was piloted in CHO2 followed by evaluation and consultation with teachers to further inform the lesson plans update and roll out.</li> <li>• SPHE lesson plans for 2nd year students was developed.</li> </ul>



## Goal B

### Optimum physical and mental health

## Objective 4

Parents, families and communities will be supported to engage in and promote positive health behaviours among babies and young children, starting from the pre-conception period.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
4.2 Integrate health behaviour supports and services into child-serving settings and the wider community.	<b>B.4.2.1.</b> Review and enhance the delivery of Healthy Ireland Smart Start (HISS) Programme, working with ELC settings to support the development of child health and wellbeing, through phased expansion of this Programme to all ELC settings and extension of this Programme to children under three.	<b>Lead:</b> HSE  <b>Partners:</b> National Childhood Network, DoH, DCEDIY	Implement recommendations.				X	A review of the Smart Start (HISS) programme took place in 2020- 2021. Following the review, it was decided to cease funding the programme and to work in collaboration with the DCEDIY to develop a more strategic approach to health and wellbeing in ELC settings based on the Smart Start content.
	<b>B.4.2.2.</b> Extend the Community Based Nutrition and Cooking Programmes.	<b>Lead:</b> HSE  <b>Partner:</b> DoH	Increased availability of and participation in Community Based Nutrition and Cooking Programmes.			X		The 2022 KPI target for the Healthy Food Made Easy Programme delivery was 4,384 participants.  As part of Sláintecare Healthy Communities, funding was provided to 19 Community and Voluntary partners to provide Healthy Food Made Easy programme.  Funding was also provided to recruit 19 Community Food and Nutrition Workers to support community nutrition education and initiatives to address food poverty.

## Goal B

### Optimum physical and mental health

## Objective 4

Parents, families and communities will be supported to engage in and promote positive health behaviours among babies and young children, starting from the pre-conception period.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
4.2 Integrate health behaviour supports and services into child-serving settings and the wider community.	<p><b>B.4.2.3.</b> Introduce measures to address food poverty, specifically:</p> <p>Pilot a meals programme in ELC Settings.</p> <p>Pilot a new hot meals programme for DEIS primary schools.</p>	<p><b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY</p> <p><b>Partners:</b> DoH, HSE, Tusla, CCCs</p>	<p><b>Meals in ELC</b></p> <p>Year 1 pilot complete, Evaluation complete; On the basis of findings, budget submission made for wider rollout.</p>				X	<p>The Hot Meals Pilot for ELC settings was allocated €150,000 to test a range of meal options for children in ELC settings operating in areas of concentrated disadvantage. The pilot will be subject to an evaluation that will include consultation with children and their families, early years educators and managers. The results of the pilot will inform decisions about wider roll out as well as work ongoing in to develop a DEIS-type model for ELC.</p>
		<p><b>Lead:</b> DSP</p> <p><b>Partners:</b> DSP and DE</p>	<p><b>Hot meals in schools</b></p> <p>Recommendations from evaluation inform future decisions about initiative.</p>	X				<p>As part of Budget 2019, funding was provided for a pilot scheme from September 2019, providing hot school meals in primary schools at a cost of €1m for 2019 and €2.5m in 2020. The pilot involved 37 schools, benefitting 6,744 children, for the 2019/2020 academic year and was aimed primarily at schools with no onsite cooking facilities.</p> <p>In Budget 2021, an additional €5.5m was provided to extend the provision of hot school meals to an additional 35,000 primary school children, currently receiving the cold lunch option.</p> <p>Budget 2022 provided for the hot school meals to be extended from January 2022 to the 81 DEIS schools that submitted an expression of interest but were not selected in the extension to 35,000 children as referred to earlier.</p> <p>The number of children in receipt of the hot school meal in June 2022 was 54,266.</p> <p>In July 2022, provision of the hot school meal option was extended to the 42,213 children in the 273 new DEIS primary schools and the cold lunch option to the 16,436 children in the new 37 DEIS secondary schools.</p> <p>An evaluation of the school meals programme is currently being undertaken to inform future policy decisions on the scheme.</p>

## Goal B

### Optimum physical and mental health

## Objective 4

Parents, families and communities will be supported to engage in and promote positive health behaviours among babies and young children, starting from the pre-conception period.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<b>4.2</b> Integrate health behaviour supports and services into child-serving settings and the wider community.	<b>B.4.2.4</b> Pilot the extension of the School Milk Scheme strand of the EU School Scheme to early childhood care and education settings, developing a bespoke model for the scheme taking the specific needs of children in such settings into account. Further to the evaluation of the pilot and subject to available resources, consider the scaling up of this scheme to a larger number of settings.	<b>Lead:</b> DAFM  <b>Partners:</b> DCEDIY, DE, DoH  National Dairy Council, Tusla CCCs	Examination of feasibility of model on a national scale.  Programme costings and budget agreed.				X	A second pilot was undertaken in 22 urban early ELC settings in Dublin in March 2022. (1st pilot was undertaken in March 2020 in a Rural setting). DAFM currently awaiting final report from UCD, who were appointed to evaluate the programme. Pending the report, the feasibility of a national roll-out of the model will be examined as part of discussions on the direction of the new School Scheme Strategy which is due to be finalised in March of 2023.
	<b>B.4.2.5.</b> Develop and publish National Food Standards for ELC Settings, including a toolkit for implementation.	<b>Lead:</b> DoH  <b>Partners:</b> HSE, DCEDIY, Tusla	Monitor Nutrition Standards implementation.					See update on B.4.1.6.

## Goal B

### Optimum physical and mental health

## Objective 4

Parents, families and communities will be supported to engage in and promote positive health behaviours among babies and young children, starting from the pre-conception period.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<b>4.3</b> Promote child safety and prevent unintentional injuries to babies and children	<b>B.4.3.1.</b> a) Ensure full implementation of the updated Child Safety Programme, and b) Building on this Programme, ensure child safety messages are integrated into all ELC (and school-age childcare) settings and the wider community.	<b>Lead:</b> HSE  <b>Partners:</b> DoH, DCEDIY, Tusla	a) Best practice changes implemented. Emerging child safety risks identified and evidence-based information provided to parents and professionals.	X				Emerging safety risks are included within the mychild.ie child safety pages and promoted through mychild social media pages in an attempt to make parents informed and aware  The child safety articles on mychild.ie are currently being reviewed and updates will be completed by the end of 2022.  Review of the Child Safety e-learning units is to commence in Q4 2022.
			b) The HSE will work with DCEDIY and Tusla to develop the key messages to promote child safety in all ELC settings.	X				Tusla worked with the HSE in the development of the Quality Regulatory Framework regarding child safety.
	<b>B.4.3.2.</b> Develop and implement a comprehensive child injury prevention plan.	<b>Lead:</b> DoH	Plan finalised.				X	Action delayed, milestone not progressed
	<b>B.4.3.3.</b> In the context of the Road Safety Strategy 2013–2020 and, building on the development of the Cycle Right training standard, pilot the trainer bike programme to introduce cycling skills to pre-school and junior/senior infant age groups.	<b>Lead:</b> Cycling Ireland	Dependent on 2020 developments.  2020 milestone: Evaluation and consideration of the future of the programme.  2020 update: Evaluation and programme review is on-going.			X		Evaluation and programme review ongoing.

## Goal B

### Optimum physical and mental health

## Objective 5

### Babies and young children have access to safe, high-quality, evidence-based integrated primary, preventative and specialist healthcare services.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<b>5.1</b> Resource and support the implementation, expansion and enhancement of the National Healthy Childhood Programme to ensure it better addresses the needs of babies, young children and their families, enabled by the development of a dedicated child health workforce.	<b>B.5.1.1.</b> Review the content and scope of Maternity and Infant Care Scheme, standardise the six-week post-natal check-up for the mother and the six-week check of the baby (as part of the Newborn Clinical Examination) and consider extending coverage of this Scheme to include a pre-conception consultation and beyond six-week post-natal check-up of the mother.	<b>Lead:</b> HSE  <b>Partner:</b> DoH	Implementation of review recommendations commenced in line with available resources.				X	Scoping of the current status and scope of the Maternity and Infant Care Scheme has commenced but is delayed. This will recommence in 2023.
			GPs undertaking the six-week check of the baby as per national agreed standard.				X	Initial work on collation of data on provision of the 6 week check has commenced.
	<b>B.5.1.2.</b> As resources allow, make the antenatal visit by the Public Health Nurse more widely available to expectant mothers in line with need.	<b>Lead:</b> HSE	Work plan agreed based on preferred option.				X	This recommendation has not commenced. Implementation will be resource dependent with particular emphasis on the capacity within the PHN workforce.

## Goal B

### Optimum physical and mental health

## Objective 5

### Babies and young children have access to safe, high-quality, evidence-based integrated primary, preventative and specialist healthcare services.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<b>5.1</b> Resource and support the implementation, expansion and enhancement of the National Healthy Childhood Programme to ensure it better addresses the needs of babies, young children and their families, enabled by the development of a dedicated child health workforce.	<b>B.5.1.3.</b> Increase the use of antenatal care in the first trimester, particularly among vulnerable groups.	<b>Lead:</b> HSE  <b>Partner:</b> DoH	Implementation of plan commenced, subject to resources.		X			This is aligned to the National Maternity Strategy action 7 (7.1 and 7.2). NWIHP plan is to invest in social workers, with the aim that every maternity service will have a social worker in place who will work at local level to review the number of women who are supported through the pathway. NWIHP has funded 21.5 SW WTE's to date (13 of which were funded in 2022). In the 2023 estimates a request for funding for 2 further WTEs was submitted. NWIHP will continue to prioritise this area of investment.
	<b>B.5.1.4.</b> Increase uptake of vaccinations during pregnancy by promoting the influenza vaccine during pregnancy, raising awareness of the importance of the pertussis vaccine during pregnancy and exploring mechanisms to effect administration of the vaccine.	<b>Lead:</b> DoH  <b>Partner:</b> HSE	HSE:  Influenza vaccine – uptake of vaccine recorded so improvements can be documented.			X		Flu vaccines including risk factor (e.g. pregnancy) now recorded into COVAX.

## Goal B

### Optimum physical and mental health

## Objective 5

### Babies and young children have access to safe, high-quality, evidence-based integrated primary, preventative and specialist healthcare services.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<b>5.1</b> Resource and support the implementation, expansion and enhancement of the National Healthy Childhood Programme to ensure it better addresses the needs of babies, young children and their families, enabled by the development of a dedicated child health workforce.	<b>B.5.1.5.</b> Enhance the schedule of immunisations provided under the Primary Childhood Immunisation Programme (PCIP) in accordance with international best practice and recommendations from the National Immunisation Advisory Committee and continue progress towards the national target of 95% uptake in the PCIP, achieving greater consistency in uptake across the country.	<b>Joint Leads:</b> DoH and HSE	<b>HSE:</b> If National Immunisation Information System (NIIS) is implemented, this should improve accuracy and timeliness of uptake information which can be provided back to GPs to target non-attenders. It is hoped this will include the ability to contact parents about immunisations, subject to resources.				X	Due to Covid-19, key stakeholders were redeployed to other work, including Covid-19 ICT systems, and therefore this action could not progress. A market soundings has been refreshed and work to consider options has commenced.

## Goal B

### Optimum physical and mental health

## Objective 5

### Babies and young children have access to safe, high-quality, evidence-based integrated primary, preventative and specialist healthcare services.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<b>5.1</b> Resource and support the implementation, expansion and enhancement of the National Healthy Childhood Programme to ensure it better addresses the needs of babies, young children and their families, enabled by the development of a dedicated child health workforce.	<b>B.5.1.6.</b> Measure the uptake of the Free GP visit card to under 6s including a review of uptake of the Periodic Assessments at two and five and implement actions to increase uptake if required.	<b>Joint Leads:</b> DoH and HSE	Information and analytic systems to respond to GP returns including under 6s in place and reporting available.				X	Implementation is challenged by current child health data and information systems. Engagement continues on review of data on GP provision of child health services
	<b>B.5.1.7.</b> Continue progress to ensure the timing and content of the screening and surveillance programme are consistent with the evidence base and standardised across the country.	<b>Joint Leads:</b> DoH and HSE	Continue progress to ensure the timing and content of the childhood screening and surveillance programme are consistent with the evidence base and standardised across the country.	X				The National Child Health Record for Public Health Nurses and Community Medical Doctors was rolled out nationally throughout 2020/2021. Aligned with the rollout of the National Child Health Record was the delivery of clinical skills training to 1,800 Public Health Nurses nationally.  The National Child Health Record ensures that the timing and content of the childhood surveillance programme are consistent and all content included is based on evidence based information and best practice.  During the Covid-19 pandemic, the timing of the surveillance checks in some areas were affected and local areas are working to address the backlog.
	<b>B.5.1.8.</b> Ensure the full implementation nationally of the revised model of screening for congenital dysplasia of the hip.	<b>Lead:</b> DoH  <b>Partners:</b> HSE	The revised model of screening for DDH is provided to all babies.					X



## Goal B

### Optimum physical and mental health

## Objective 5

### Babies and young children have access to safe, high-quality, evidence-based integrated primary, preventative and specialist healthcare services.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<b>5.1</b> Resource and support the implementation, expansion and enhancement of the National Healthy Childhood Programme to ensure it better addresses the needs of babies, young children and their families, enabled by the development of a dedicated child health workforce.	<b>B.5.1.9.</b> Introduce a universal dental health package for children under six, supported by a screening/surveillance programme to target key ages and vulnerable groups.	<b>Lead:</b> DoH	Implementation of preventive packages for children under six.				X	Funding was awarded in Budget 2023 for the development and rollout of comprehensive oral healthcare packages for children aged from birth to seven years. These packages will include oral health promotion, routine and emergency oral healthcare and oral health evaluation. This evaluation element will support the targeted screening/surveillance programme.
			Oral health evaluation programme put in place.				X	
	<b>B.5.1.10.</b> Ensure the mainstreaming and ongoing evaluation of the quality improvement initiatives commenced under the Nurture Programme – Infant Health and Wellbeing.	<b>Lead:</b> HSE	Mainstreaming of a range of outputs from Nurture commenced, subject to resources.	X				A sustainability plan was developed and agreed.  Based on the agreed sustainability plan, submissions for additional resources have been made through the estimates process.
			Governance structure with mandate for child health service delivery and development in place, subject to resources.	X				A National Child Health Clinical Lead is now in post.

## Goal B

### Optimum physical and mental health

## Objective 5

Babies and young children have access to safe, high-quality, evidence-based integrated primary, preventative and specialist healthcare services.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<b>5.1</b> Resource and support the implementation, expansion and enhancement of the National Healthy Childhood Programme to ensure it better addresses the needs of babies, young children and their families, enabled by the development of a dedicated child health workforce.	<b>B.5.1.11.</b> Review the school health service/ programme and revise it in line with best evidence and practice.	<b>Lead:</b> HSE  <b>Partner:</b> DoH	Review completed.  Quality improvement project plan developed.  Submissions made for additional funding.				X	An initial evidence review has been completed. Further scoping and development of recommendations will be dependent on resources

## Goal B

### Optimum physical and mental health

## Objective 5

### Babies and young children have access to safe, high-quality, evidence-based integrated primary, preventative and specialist healthcare services.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<b>5.2</b> Make therapeutic and medical provision available to babies, young children on a consistent, equitable and timely basis.	<b>B.5.2.1.</b> Commence the implementation of Model of Care for Paediatric Healthcare Services with initial focus on:  -Expansion in consultant paediatrician numbers, with a definite focus on general paediatrics, emergency paediatrics and community child health.  - Expanded roles for advanced nurse practitioners, clinical nurse specialists and health and social care professionals.  - Developing the regional acute paediatric units to provide an appropriate range of regional services.	<b>Joint Leads:</b> DoH and HSE	Continue the development of acute paediatric units in CUH, UHG and UHL.			X		The focus in 2021 was on ensuring additional staffing was in place to facilitate the safe, timely commissioning and subsequent opening of the new Outpatients and Emergency Care Centre at Tallaght. Funding was provided for additional staffing in paediatric units at CUH, UHG and UHL to deliver services closer to home and reduce demand at CHI hospitals. CHI and the HSE have advised that recruitment is proceeding at pace.
			Continue prioritised implementation of the Paediatric Model of Care.			X		CHI at Tallaght Outpatient and Emergency Care Centre opened in November 2021. The centre accommodates the existing children’s emergency care unit relocated from the adult hospital and will expand outpatient services to children and young people from Dublin South West, South City and the surrounding areas of Kildare and Wicklow.
	<b>B.5.2.2.</b> Continue to support the reconfiguration of services for children with disabilities in line with the Progressing Disability Services for Children and Young People programme.	<b>Joint Leads:</b> DoH and HSE	Dependent on 2020 developments.  2020 milestone: Dependent on 2019 developments  2020 update: The structures are now in place for this reconfiguration to happen in all CHO areas in 2021. The pandemic has caused some delays and it was necessary to complete appointment of Network Managers during 2020 in order to be able to configure teams.	X				All 91 Children’s Disability Network Teams were established by the end of 2021 to provide services for children with complex needs within a defined geographic area.

## Goal B

### Optimum physical and mental health

## Objective 5

### Babies and young children have access to safe, high-quality, evidence-based integrated primary, preventative and specialist healthcare services.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
5.2 Make therapeutic and medical provision available to babies, young children on a consistent, equitable and timely basis.	<b>B.5.2.3.</b> Reduce children’s waiting lists for primary care and early intervention, including waiting times.	<b>Joint Leads:</b> DoH and HSE	Dependent on 2020 developments.  2020 milestone: Dependent on 2019 developments  2020 update: On the Early Intervention side, additional funding was granted in 2020 in order to clear backlog in Assessment of Need. This will be completed at end of Q2 2021. In addition, 100 new therapy posts will be recruited for Children’s disability Services in 2021.				X	In 2021, the HSE was allocated funding to provide for 100 new therapy posts. The most recent figures available from the HSE indicate that approximately 45 of these posts have been filled.  Efforts to fill the balance of the posts, along with other funded positions, are ongoing by the HSE. The recruitment of therapists for the disability sector is proving a challenge for the HSE and more innovative approaches have been commenced to increase the capacity of the CDNT teams who deliver therapy supports.
	<b>B.5.2.4.</b> Continue to develop access to supports for children with a disability/developmental delays through child-serving settings (e.g. AIM, In-Pre-School and School Therapy Demonstration Project, provision of nursing supports in ELC settings and schools for children with complex needs).	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY  <b>Partners:</b> Members of the Cross Sectoral Implementation Group for AIM	Continued implementation of AIM including:  Continue rollout of next phase of training and support for INCOs.	X				This work in ongoing.
			Review Communications Strategy for AIM (taking into account results of end-of-year-three evaluation of AIM).		X			The new AIM website was launched in 2021.
			Extension of AIM training supports for ELC practitioners.			X		Training supports are currently being developed with expected roll out by year end.
			Review implementation of support model and consider if enhancements needed (taking into account results of end-of-year-three evaluation of AIM).			X		The trial model to support children with Complex Healthcare Needs (CHN) was delayed due to Covid-19. The trial was extended for the 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 programme years. A review of CHN trial model was undertaken in October 2022. This will inform the future roll out of the model
<b>B.5.2.5.</b> Improve the Assessment of Need (AON) process in order to ensure timely access to appropriate services.	<b>Joint Leads:</b> DoH and HSE	No Key Milestone for 2021.					N/A	

## Goal B

### Objective 5

Babies and young children have access to safe, high-quality, evidence-based integrated primary, preventative and specialist healthcare services.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
5.2 Make therapeutic and medical provision available to babies, young children on a consistent, equitable and timely basis.	B.5.2.6. Progress the establishment of the new children’s hospital to provide specialist tertiary and quaternary services for children from all over Ireland.	Joint Leads: DoH and HSE	Expansion of a consultant-delivered workforce across the existing hospital sites and increased capacity.			X		The focus in 2021 was on ensuring additional staffing was in place to facilitate the safe, timely commissioning and subsequent opening of the new Outpatients and Emergency Care Centre at Tallaght. Funding was provided for additional staffing in paediatric units at CUH, UHG and UHL to deliver services closer to home and reduce demand at CHI hospitals. CHI and the HSE have advised that recruitment is proceeding at pace.
			Paediatric Outpatient and Urgent Care Centres at Tallaght and Connolly fully operational.			X		CHI at Tallaght Outpatient and Emergency Care Centre opened in November 2021. The centre accommodates the existing children’s emergency care unit relocated from the adult hospital and will expand outpatient services to children and young people from Dublin South West, South City and the surrounding areas of Kildare and Wicklow.

## Goal B

### Optimum physical and mental health

## Objective 6

### Babies and young children and their parents enjoy positive mental health.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<b>6.1</b> Improve the early identification of mental health problems among babies, young children and families.	<b>B.6.1.1.</b> Provide information and guidance on promoting and supporting positive mental health among pregnant women, babies, young children and families and carry out a public information campaign to raise awareness of the importance of promoting social-emotional development, positive mental health and reducing the impact of early childhood trauma in babies and young children.	<b>Lead:</b> HSE  <b>Partner:</b> DoH	Ongoing review and development of infant mental health messages.		X			Infant mental health (MH) ethos is included in all resources developed through the National Healthy Childhood Programme. The following resources developed for professionals incorporate key IMH messages: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Newborn Clinical Examination Handbook</li> <li>• The Child Health Assessment Manual for RPHNs</li> <li>• National Child Health Record</li> </ul> 3 new IMH e-learning units were launched in Q2 2022.  The following parental resources have been developed: 10 videos hosted on the mychild YouTube channel and are linked through to mychild.ie website pages are underpinned by IMH ethos. The mychild Social media pages promote these videos which guide parents.  mychild.ie articles are currently being reviewed in line with emerging evidence/best practice.
	<b>B.6.1.2.</b> Enhance efforts to promote positive mental health among pregnant women, babies, young children and their families in all resources and service contacts by extending the Making Every Contact Count: A Health Behaviour Change Framework and Implementation Plan for Health Professionals in the Irish Health Service to include mental health.	<b>Lead:</b> HSE	Scoping complete to extend the MECC programme in relation to mental health and wellbeing promotion and included in revised implementation plan for the programme from 2021.		X			A new mental health and wellbeing module has been developed and was added to the MECC e-learning programme on HSEland in June 2022.

## Goal B

### Optimum physical and mental health

## Objective 6

### Babies and young children and their parents enjoy positive mental health.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<b>6.1</b> Improve the early identification of mental health problems among babies, young children and families.	<b>B.6.1.3.</b> Improve diagnosis and services for women with pregnancy-related mental health problems.	<b>Lead:</b> HSE  <b>Partners:</b> DoH	Implementation of the HSE's National MOC for SPMHS will improve diagnosis for woman with pregnancy-related MH problems. Specific training for midwives and primary care staff in identifying and being aware of referral pathways for SPMHS.		X			This has been implemented. All 19 maternity services have a CMS in Perinatal Mental Health in place.
	<b>B.6.1.4.</b> Extend post-natal depression screening by PHNs for all mothers, using a standardised evidence-based approach	<b>Lead:</b> HSE	Review current practice completed.		X			Review completed
		<b>Partner:</b> DoH	Evidence review completed.			X		Review completed and screening questions identified. (Perinatal Mental Health Care (Higgins et al. 2021) NICE (2014a) Whooley et al (1997))
			Screening tool recommended.			X		Four mental health screening questions are now recommended for use by all PHNs and are included in the national draft on postnatal care / awaiting approval.
<b>B.6.1.5.</b> Roll out the standardised screening tool for social-emotional development – Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) – to all young children at the two-year developmental check.	<b>Lead:</b> HSE  <b>Partners:</b> DoH	Evaluation of implementation of ASQ-3 completed.  Background work commenced on implementation of ASQ social and emotional screening tool, subject to DoH/HSE agreement on Service Plan.				X	Evaluation of implementation will not be completed pending full implementation  The ASQ-3 continues to be partially implemented pending further consultation with representative organisations in a number of geographical areas.	

## Goal B

### Optimum physical and mental health

## Objective 6

### Babies and young children and their parents enjoy positive mental health.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<b>6.1</b> Improve the early identification of mental health problems among babies, young children and families.	<b>B.6.1.6.</b> Support access to continuous professional development in Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health to those who work with babies, young children and their families in line with the development of the Children’s Workforce Initiative (see action D.3.B.5.).	<b>Lead:</b> HSE	Child health service providers undertaking infant mental health training.		X			The National Healthy Childhood Programme launched three IMH e-learning units in June 2022. These e-learning units are available on HSELand and are available to healthcare practitioners.



## Goal B

### Optimum physical and mental health

## Objective 6

### Babies and young children and their parents enjoy positive mental health.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<b>6.2</b> Improve access to mental health supports and services for babies, young children and families, with a particular focus on initiatives that integrate mental health supports and services into child-serving settings and the wider community.	<b>B.6.2.1.</b> Implement the National Model of Care for Specialist Perinatal mental health with continued resourcing.	<b>Lead:</b> HSE  <b>Partner:</b> DoH	Building of Mother and Baby Unit to begin, subject to DoH/ HSE agreement on Service Plan. Continued development and evaluation of hub and spoke specialist perinatal MHS. Produce Evaluation Report of overall perinatal service in hub and spoke sites.			X		Development of National Clinical Programmes continued in 2021, including those for Specialist Perinatal Services. Perinatal Mental Health Care: Best Practice Principles for Midwives, Public Health Nurses and Practice Nurses was published in 2021 by the HSE in collaboration with the Mind Mothers Project.

## Goal B

### Optimum physical and mental health

## Objective 6

### Babies and young children and their parents enjoy positive mental health.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<b>6.2</b> Improve access to mental health supports and services for babies, young children and families, with a particular focus on initiatives that integrate mental health supports and services into child-serving settings and the wider community.	<b>B.6.2.2.</b> Ensure priority is given to the needs of babies, young children and their families in the Refreshed Vision for Change and the forthcoming national mental health promotion plan.	<b>Lead:</b> DoH	Implement recommendations in Sharing the Vision.			X		Sharing the Vision, published in June 2020, is the successor to Vision for Change. The National Implementation Monitoring Committee (NIMC) oversees the implementation of the recommendations in the policy. Sharing the Vision Implementation Plan 2022-2024 was published in March 2022.

## Goal B

### Optimum physical and mental health

## Objective 6

### Babies and young children and their parents enjoy positive mental health.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<b>6.2</b> Improve access to mental health supports and services for babies, young children and families, with a particular focus on initiatives that integrate mental health supports and services into child-serving settings and the wider community.	<b>B.6.2.2.</b> Ensure priority is given to the needs of babies, young children and their families in the Refreshed Vision for Change and the forthcoming national mental health promotion plan.	<b>Lead:</b> DoH	Implement the mental health promotion plan.			X		In April 2022 “Stronger Together: The HSE Mental Health Promotion Plan 2022-2027” was launched. An Oversight Group for the Mental Health Promotion Plan has been established to oversee the implementation.
	<b>B.6.2.3.</b> Develop and cost proposals to extend National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) to ELC.	<b>Lead:</b> D/Education <b>Partners:</b> NEPS, DCEDIY	Implement as agreed.				X	Development of a fully costed model for NEPS extension is delayed. A Critical Incident Plan Framework was developed by DCEDIY with input from NEPS. Support from NEPS for critical incidents in ELC settings is available on request.
	<b>B.6.2.4.</b> Improve the capacity of community Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and implement the revised operational guidelines.	<b>Lead:</b> HSE <b>Partners:</b> DoH	Progress CAMHS related priorities agreed under the HSE Service Plan 2021.				X	This milestone has been delayed. CAMHS is being audited arising from the Maskey Report. The ongoing audit of medication practice is an independently chaired audit to include random selection of 50 charts or proportionate to the medical caseload at CHO/CAMHS team level from a continuous 6-month predefined period.  An Expert Audit Group has been established. The audit tool and methodology have been finalised and a pilot has now commenced in 4 CHO Areas. The audit will be complete by end 2022. Its purpose is to satisfy that children attending CAMHS services, and who are on medication from the service, are prescribed medication according to the best practice guidelines.

## Goal B

### Optimum physical and mental health

## Objective 6

### Babies and young children and their parents enjoy positive mental health.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<b>6.2</b> Improve access to mental health supports and services for babies, young children and families, with a particular focus on initiatives that integrate mental health supports and services into child-serving settings and the wider community.	<b>B.6.2.5.</b> Improve access to parental mental health services (including counselling and psychological services) that treat maternal depression, anxiety disorders and substance abuse and identify and address any gaps in mental health services for very young children.	<b>Lead:</b> HSE  <b>Partner:</b> DoH	Dependent on evaluation of tele-psychiatry and tele-counselling services.			X		Telehealth services were fully established and provided as part of a blended service delivery, while maintaining client preference was treated as a priority. The majority of these telehealth supports are available seven days per week, with some providing 24-hour support. Seven-day telehealth services include YourMentalHealth.ie, the information line 1800 111 888, the crisis textline 50808 and NGO partners' online supports. Traffic to all of these services increased during Covid-19.
	<b>B.6.2.6.</b> Ensure that access to mental health supports for expectant and new mothers will be improved to ensure appropriate care can be provided in a timely fashion in line with the National Maternity Strategy.	<b>Lead:</b> DoH  <b>Partners:</b> HSE	Further development of links with community services. Group work approach implemented where clinically indicated. Continue to provide education to all staff in maternity services on perinatal MH. Produce report of overall perinatal service in hub and spoke sites.			X		Sharing the Vision recommends that the Model of Care for Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Services should continue to have phased implementation and evaluation. Implementation of this recommendation is underway and is on track.

## Goal B

### Optimum physical and mental health

## Objective 6

### Babies and young children and their parents enjoy positive mental health.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<p><b>6.2</b> Improve access to mental health supports and services for babies, young children and families, with a particular focus on initiatives that integrate mental health supports and services into child-serving settings and the wider community.</p>	<p><b>B.6.2.7.</b> Provide additional support for parents of babies who receive a diagnosis of disability in the perinatal period and those who experience a traumatic birth or bereavement.</p>	<p><b>Lead:</b> HSE <b>Partner:</b> DoH</p>	<p>Additional future funding will be dependent on allocation and the National Service Plan.</p>	X				<p>In all 19 maternity services across the country, women have access to anomaly scanning services and/or late-stage pregnancy scans which enable the detection and subsequent management of specific conditions which can be detected via this diagnostic process. All maternity services are designed around a hub and spoke model regarding tertiary maternal-foetal medical services, thereby ensuring that a full multidisciplinary approach is implemented regarding the care of mother and baby including obstetrics, neonatology, allied health care professional, bereavement, perinatal mental services, and allied healthcare services both hospital and community based.</p> <p>In implementing the National Maternity Strategy, maternity services continue to develop formal de-briefing services for women and their partners following a traumatic birth and work continues in this area as maternity services continue to implement the National Maternity Strategy.</p>

# Goal B

## Optimum physical and mental health

# Objective 6

## Babies and young children and their parents enjoy positive mental health.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones	
<b>6.2</b> Improve access to mental health supports and services for babies, young children and families, with a particular focus on initiatives that integrate mental health supports and services into child-serving settings and the wider community.	<b>B.6.2.8.</b> Continue to roll out and invest in the Clinical Programmes in eating disorders, self-harm and early intervention in psychosis (EIP).	<b>Lead:</b> HSE  <b>Partner:</b> DoH	<b>Eating Disorders National Clinical Programme</b>  a) Remaining ten teams funded and recruitment underway.				X	The capacity of Community Mental Health Teams was increased by 129 new staff, which included staffing on three Eating Disorder Teams. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The NCPED aims to establish an ED network (8 adult teams and 8 CAMHS teams) in accordance with the MOC (2018).</li> <li>There are currently 3 eating disorders (ED) specialist teams in operation. 2 CAMHS teams and 1 Adult team.</li> <li>Ongoing recruitment efforts are underway and all 9 funded teams are expected to be operational in 2023.</li> </ul>	
	a) Eating Disorders National Clinical Programme.		<b>Assessment and management of self-harm presentation to emergency department following self-harm National Clinical Programme</b>  (b) Full implementation of NCP in each ED providing 24/7 care.	X				The National Clinical Programme for Self Harm and Suicide Related Ideation provides a framework to improve services for all who self-harm or present with suicide-related ideation, regardless of where they present. The NCP SHI is now operating in all 26 adult EDs that are open 24/7. The Updated MOC (February 2022) provides for the extension of the NCP SHI service into primary care, for people presenting to their GP who do not require to be seen in an ED setting.  For full implementation of this MOC 78 SCAN nurses are required. Existing SCAN service under NCP SHI auspices with a view to national rollout in coming years.	
	b) Assessment and management of self-harm presentation to emergency department following self-harm National Clinical Programme.		<b>Early Intervention in Psychosis National Clinical Programme</b>  (c) Publish evaluation report on three EIP demonstration sites.	X					A 'Process Evaluation' of the implementation of three EIP teams (RISE, South Lee Cork, CHO 4, Sligo/Leitrim, CHO 1 and Meath, CHO 8) was completed by Trinity College Dublin between 2019-2022. The evaluation report was published in September 2022.
	c) Early Intervention in Psychosis National Clinical Programme.		<b>ADHD in Adults National Clinical Programme.</b>  (d) Establish remaining services – seven sites and service for Dublin prisons (funding €4m).					X	Up until 2022, the Department of Health provided funding to the National Clinical Programme for three of the 11 Adult ADHD NCP sites. The 2022 Estimates process provided funding for a further four Adult ADHD teams. These new teams are in development and will be operational in early 2023.
	d) ADHD in Adults National Clinical Programme.		<b>Dual Diagnosis</b>  (e) Establish remaining services. Further enhance integrated ways of working. Establish remaining teams to complete national service.					X	The Model of Care for Dual Diagnosis has been endorsed by the College of Psychiatrists. Work is underway for the design and publication of the document with a view to launching it in mid-May 2023. Recruitment is underway for the established team sites in CHO 3, 4 and 9. Evaluation frameworks established and the local co researchers identified. Work continues between the NCP and community partners to ensure local responses to dual diagnosis will complement the roll out of the model of care.
	e) Dual Diagnosis								

# GOAL C

## POSITIVE PLAY-BASED EARLY LEARNING



## Goal C

### Positive play-based early learning

## Objective 7

Parents, families and communities are supported to provide a nurturing and stimulating environment for children’s early learning, starting from birth.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones	
7.1 Support parents and families to provide a stimulating home learning environment for babies and young children, with a particular focus on promoting play.	<b>C.7.1.1.</b> Carry out a national information campaign to build awareness of the important role that parents and families can play in supporting children’s early learning with advice and information to empower parents and families in creating playful learning environments. Under this campaign, a bedtime reading campaign will be carried out. This will be supported by child- friendly events at local libraries to encourage an interest in learning from an early age, and to provide inspiration and access to age-appropriate reading material.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY	Information campaign strategy completed.	X				The Let’s Play Ireland Annual Campaign took place in 2021 and 2022. This is a gov.ie resource designed to remind everyone, young and old, of the fundamental importance of play.  The Let’s Get Ready Annual Campaign took place in 2021 and 2022. This is a gov.ie resource to support young children and their parents plan for the transition to pre-school or primary school.  A Bed Time Reading Campaign will take place in 2023.	
			Network of Department, Agency and NGO staff involved with supporting early learning established to share, disseminate and promote best practice.	X					
			Public information campaign commenced.	X					
	<b>C.7.1.2.</b> Provide parents and families with resources to support children’s playful early learning commencing with a Baby Box and Book Bag Pilot Initiative through the First 5 Trials Programme.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY  <b>Partners:</b> To be determined on establishment of oversight group	Pilot underway.		X				The First 5 Little Baby Bundle Pilot Initiative commenced in 2022 in collaboration with the Rotunda Hospital, Dublin and University Hospital, Waterford. 500 expectant parents are participating in the pilot.  Under the First 5 Little Library Initiative 2021, 4,500 ELC settings, including childminders, were offered an opportunity to connect with their local library and receive a series of book bags. Under the Little Library Initiative 2022 - My Little Library - a free book bag with storybooks and resources was offered to every 4 and 5 year old who started school in September 2022. An evaluation of the First 5 Little Baby Bundle and the Little Library Initiative is underway.
			Concurrent evaluation of pilot underway.		X				
			Undertake review to identify additional resources to support parents of young children.		X				



## Goal C

### Positive play-based early learning

## Objective 7

Parents, families and communities are supported to provide a nurturing and stimulating environment for children’s early learning, starting from birth.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
7.1 Support parents and families to provide a stimulating home learning environment for babies and young children, with a particular focus on promoting play.	<b>C.7.1.3.</b> Building on existing initiatives, including the Parent and Toddler Grant Initiative, develop further supports to family, including grandparents, friends and neighbours who provide informal care.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY	On the basis of the review, make changes to the Parent and Toddler Initiative and develop proposals for further supports.		X			Although the review of the Parent and Toddler Grant Initiative was delayed, an enhancement to the Initiative - funding to support Buggy Walking Groups – was introduced in 2022. These Buggy Walking Groups are organised social walks for parents/ guardians and young children. The grant is open to any existing or new organisations or groups who wish to offer a minimum of six organised walks within their community

## Goal C

### Positive play-based early learning

## Objective 7

Parents, families and communities are supported to provide a nurturing and stimulating environment for children’s early learning, starting from birth.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
7.2 Facilitate and encourage greater parental involvement and engagement in early learning in ELC settings and primary schools.	<b>C.7.2.1.</b> Develop guidance and information for parents and families on ELC (and school-age childcare), including information on ELC (and school-age childcare) options and entitlements and guidance on key indicators of high-quality provision. Over time, explore the potential to develop a real-time finder of regulated ELC (and school-age childcare places) with links to inspection reports and other relevant information.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY	Scoping work undertaken on development of real-time place finder.				X	Action delayed, milestone not met.
	<b>C.7.2.2.</b> Support greater parental involvement and engagement in children’s early learning in ELC settings and primary schools.  – Develop advice, guidance and training for ELC settings and primary schools to build effective working relationships with all parents, families and communities.  – Support ELC settings or primary schools to create opportunities to encourage and strengthen involvement of parents such as parent–practitioner meetings, parental advisory boards, home–ELC liaison officers, designated staff with responsibility for supporting parents, including initiatives in collaboration with the National Parents Council (Pre-Primary and Primary).	<b>Joint Leads:</b> DCEDIY and DE  <b>Partners:</b> To be identified	Work with partners to design and deliver guidance and training, complementing existing initiatives.					See update on Objective 9

## Goal C

### Positive play-based early learning

## Objective 7

Parents, families and communities are supported to provide a nurturing and stimulating environment for children’s early learning, starting from birth.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
7.3 Take steps to ensure positive enrolment and participation patterns in ELC settings and primary schools at the earliest opportunity.	<b>C.7.3.1.</b> Carry out a detailed assessment of the universal pre-school programme to identify groups of children with lower-than-average enrolment and participation rates and take steps to raise enrolment and participation among these groups.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY	Evaluation complete.				X	DCEDIY appointed Stranmillis University College to undertake a 12-month review of the ECCE programme. The report is due for completion in Q4 2023.  Work has commenced on the Tackling Disadvantage strand under Together for Better, the new funding model for ELC and SAC. Planning enhancements to, and/or extensions of AIM is also underway.
			Consider evaluation findings and develop policy responses, with reference to developments on AIM and DEIS model for ELC.				X	
	<b>C.7.3.2.</b> Extend the statutory powers of the Educational Welfare Service to all children under six years of age enrolled in a recognised school in line with legislative developments.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY  <b>Partner:</b> Tusla	Subject to legislative process.				X	The Education Welfare (Amendment) Bill lapsed with the dissolution of the 32nd Dáil.  Responsibility for the Tusla Education Welfare Service transferred to the Department of Education in 2020.

## Goal C

### Positive play-based early learning

## Objective 8

Babies and young children have access to safe, high-quality, developmentally-appropriate, integrated ELC (and school-age childcare), which reflects diversity of need.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
8.1 Make high-quality ELC (and school-age childcare) for babies and young children more affordable.	<b>C.8.1.1.</b> Provide continued funding and support for two full years of the universal pre-school programme. Undertake a review of the programme and, subject to findings, consider the need to make changes. Over the lifetime of the strategy, introduce a universal legal entitlement to pre-school.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY  <b>Partner:</b> Pobal	Publish and support the passage of a Bill providing for a universal legal entitlement to preschool.					See update on D.4.B.4
	<b>C.8.1.2.</b> Introduce the National Childcare Scheme to publicly subsidise the cost of high-quality regulated ELC (and school-age childcare) to families and, over time, and as resources allow, progressively increase the number of families eligible for targeted subsidies and ensure subsidy rates are grounded in a robust funding formula that is based on the cost of delivering high-quality ELC (and school-age childcare). Undertake an end-of-year-three evaluation of National Childcare Scheme and, subject to evaluation findings, consider the need to make changes to the Scheme utilising and expanding the quality levers within the Scheme in order to drive continuous quality improvement.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY  <b>Partners:</b> Pobal, DSP, Office of the Revenue Commissioners	Complete one-year review of scheme.	X				<p>The 12-month review of the National Childcare Scheme was published in December 2021.</p> <p>Budget 2022 introduced two enhancements to the NCS from April and August 2022 respectively:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The practice of deducting hours in pre-school and school from NCS subsidised hours was discontinued</li> <li>The universal subsidy was extended to all children under 15</li> </ul> <p>Budget 2023 introduced further enhancements to the NCS. An increase to the minimum subsidy from 50c to €1.40 took effect from 2 January 2023.</p>

## Goal C

### Positive play-based early learning

## Objective 8

Babies and young children have access to safe, high-quality, developmentally-appropriate, integrated ELC (and school-age childcare), which reflects diversity of need.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
8.1 Make high-quality ELC (and school-age childcare) for babies and young children more affordable.	<b>C.8.1.3.</b> As part of the reform of the funding model, develop an appropriate mechanism to control fees charged to parents in return for increased State investment in affordability and quality.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY  <b>Partner:</b> To be determined on establishment of Expert Group	See milestones under New Funding Model (action D.5.B.3).	X				The introduction of fee management measures is one of the recommendations of the Expert Group, as approved by Government. Fee management starts with a requirement for providers to maintain fees at or below September 2021 levels to access the new Core Funding scheme and a once-off Transition Fund. This feature of these schemes will ensure that parents feel the full affordability benefits of the NCS and the ECCE programme. This approach to fee management will be developed over time.
	<b>C.8.1.4.</b> Promote and support the registration of paid, non-relative childminders currently eligible to register with Tusla in preparation for the introduction of the National Childcare Scheme.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY  <b>Partners:</b> CCCs	Through the National Childminding Coordinator and the team of regional Childminding Development Officers, continue to provide a range of supports for childminders to register with Tusla.	X				During 2021 and 2022, the team of regional Childminding Development Officers continued to work closely with the CCCs to provide advice and guidance to new and existing childminders, including in relation to current registration requirements.

## Goal C

### Positive play-based early learning

## Objective 8

Babies and young children have access to safe, high-quality, developmentally-appropriate, integrated ELC (and school-age childcare), which reflects diversity of need.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<b>8.2</b> Maintain and extend the supply of high-quality publicly subsidised ELC (and school-age childcare) to best serve the developmental needs of babies and young children, ensuring that it also reflects the needs and preferences of parents and families.	<b>C.8.2.1.</b> Extend regulation to all other paid, non-relative childminders (and to school-age childcare) on a phased basis. This will make National Childcare Scheme subsidies available to more parents who use childminding services.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY  <b>Partners:</b> To be specified in the Childminding Action Plan	Continuing implementation of Phase 1 of the Childminding Action Plan.	X				The National Action Plan for Childminding was published in April 2021 and implementation of Phase 1 commenced. A Steering Group has been established, along with four Advisory Groups.
			Development of comprehensive regulations for school-age childcare.					See update on D.2.B.2.
	<b>C.8.2.2.</b> Undertake research on the ELC (and school-age childcare) needs of parents who work atypical hours or live in rural communities and develop recommendations for future action.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY	Report complete. Recommendations for future action identified.			X		Research on the ELC and SAC needs of parents who work atypical hours and live in rural communities was completed in 2022.
<b>C.8.2.3.</b> Strengthen capacity to accurately forecast supply and demand for ELC (and school-age childcare) by undertaking a regular national need assessment.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY  <b>Partners:</b> DE, Pobal, CSO, ESRI	Having regard to existing and new data, make recommendations for future data needs.		X			A nationally representative parents survey on ELC and SAC was undertaken in July 2022 by Ipsos on behalf of the DCEDIY and results were published in October 2022.	

## Goal C

### Positive play-based early learning

## Objective 8

Babies and young children have access to safe, high-quality, developmentally-appropriate, integrated ELC (and school-age childcare), which reflects diversity of need.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<b>8.2</b> Maintain and extend the supply of high-quality publicly subsidised ELC (and school-age childcare) to best serve the developmental needs of babies and young children, ensuring that it also reflects the needs and preferences of parents and families.	<b>C.8.2.4.</b> Continue to administer a sustainability fund that ensures provision in the most deprived areas does not fail as a result of higher levels of need and/or temporary fluctuations in occupancy and consider longer-term mechanisms as part of the new funding model.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY  <b>Partner:</b> Pobal	Review the effectiveness of available sustainability supports.		X			A review of current Sustainability Funding Strands (incl. purpose; end-to-end process; supporting documentation) was completed in Q2 of 2022.
			Continue to develop Pobal Case Management offering and capacity.		X			Pobal and DCEDIY have collaborated in the creation of additional funding strands which are available to services through Case Management. Strand 11 of Sustainability Funding was developed in Q3 of 2021 while an additional funding strand was developed in Q4 of 2022, which is available to private and community services which are beneficiaries of Core Funding.
			Further considerations of longer-term mechanisms as part of the new funding model.			X		The Specials have been brought into Case Management and a review of the 20K and CCSP Specials programmes, which are in place to support a number of services which by their nature experience fluctuations in attendance, needs to occur.
	<b>C.8.2.5.</b> Update the National Planning Guidelines for the development of ELC (and school-age childcare) settings.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY  <b>Partners:</b> DHLGH	Implement guidelines.				X	This work is ongoing

## Goal C

### Positive play-based early learning

## Objective 8

Babies and young children have access to safe, high-quality, developmentally-appropriate, integrated ELC (and school-age childcare), which reflects diversity of need.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<b>8.2</b> Maintain and extend the supply of high-quality publicly subsidised ELC (and school-age childcare) to best serve the developmental needs of babies and young children, ensuring that it also reflects the needs and preferences of parents and families.	<b>C.8.2.6.</b> Develop and publish a strategic capital investment plan to deliver the large-scale capital investment under Project 2040 with the aim of ensuring that the demand for high-quality ELC (and school-age childcare) places meets supply. This plan will include pilot projects under the First 5 Trials Programme that focus on innovative practice (e.g. outdoor ELC provision).	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY  <b>Partner:</b> Pobal	Publish strategic capital investment plan.	X				As part of the review of the National Development Plan, the DCEDIY developed a plan to deliver large scale capital investment over the period 2023-2025. Arising from this, €70 million was secured for the Building Blocks Capital Programme. This Programme includes three Pillars: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A €10 million Modernisation Grant to improve energy efficiency standards, while also supporting the continuous improvement of the physical environment of services.</li> <li>• A €45 million Capacity Grant to address capacity gaps, to fund an expansion in existing services and investing in the development of new services where needed</li> <li>• A €15 million Innovation Grant to pilot a range of innovative initiatives such as outdoor ELC/SAC settings.</li> </ul>
	<b>C.8.2.7.</b> Use of schools and existing community facilities that have suitable environments for high-quality child-centred school-age childcare should be maximised where demand exists and where it can be facilitated by the school patron/trustees. Consider how increased use of school buildings could be facilitated, taking into account the issues raised to date, and continue to engage with property owners and school authorities to facilitate increased use of school buildings where feasible.	<b>Lead:</b> D/ Education	No Key Milestone for 2021.					Preparatory work for the review of 'Guidelines on the Use of School Buildings Outside of School Hours' commenced in late 2022. The Department is to conduct a survey of a sample of schools regarding their experience in engaging with community and recreational groups seeking to use school property. This survey will issue in Q2 2023.



## Goal C

### Positive play-based early learning

## Objective 8

Babies and young children have access to safe, high-quality, developmentally-appropriate, integrated ELC (and school-age childcare), which reflects diversity of need.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<b>8.2</b> Maintain and extend the supply of high-quality publicly subsidised ELC (and school-age childcare) to best serve the developmental needs of babies and young children, ensuring that it also reflects the needs and preferences of parents and families.	<b>C.8.2.8.</b> Introduce measures to ensure that children in Gaeltacht areas have access to Irish-medium ELC provision.	<b>Lead:</b> DTCAGSM Partners: Údarás na Gaeltachta, Acadamh na hOllsco-laíochta Gaeilge (NUIG), Muintereas Teo	Allocation of €470,000 provided in 2020/2021 to CNNG for the provision of additional services in the Gaeltacht under the Language Planning Process.	X				Funding of €414,488 from that €470,000 was provided in that time period. The remaining funds were not provided as this funding was not drawn down.
			Accept six additional services under the auspices of CNNG.	X				Comhar Naíonraí na Gaeltachta has accepted and is managing an additional 21 services as per the agreement.
			Provide support/advice to ten additional services (40 in total) operating through English regarding using Irish in their services.	X				Comhar Naíonraí na Gaeltachta provides supports to 32 services operating through English regarding the use of the Irish language in their services, including advice relating to the importance of the Irish language for Gaeltacht children aiming to attend Irish language national schools, sessions focusing on Irish language songs and stories, the provision of resources and advice to staff in the services and other supports for the Irish language.
			Communicate and raise awareness with 3,000 parents regarding the services that are available through Irish.	X				Comhar Naíonraí na Gaeltachta communicates and raises awareness with approximately 3,000 parents regarding the services that are available through Irish. The organisation maintains contact with their early years services and the parents who make use of them to provide information on classes and other activities of interest.
			Develop a connection between 90 pre-school services and 120 primary schools while also highlighting best practice.	X				Comhar Naíonraí na Gaeltachta operates Mo Scéal (formerly Nasc leis an mbunscoil), which provides information on the developmental level of children entering national school to parents and school principals, in all of their services to assist the transition of children from early years services. This information has proven to be of great value to the schoolteachers in the National schools.

## Goal C

### Positive play-based early learning

## Objective 8

Babies and young children have access to safe, high-quality, developmentally-appropriate, integrated ELC (and school-age childcare), which reflects diversity of need.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
8.2 Maintain and extend the supply of high-quality publicly subsidised ELC (and school-age childcare) to best serve the developmental needs of babies and young children, ensuring that it also reflects the needs and preferences of parents and families.	<b>C.8.2.8.</b> Introduce measures to ensure that children in Gaeltacht areas have access to Irish-medium ELC provision.	<b>Lead:</b> DTGASM  <b>Partners:</b> Údarás na Gaeltachta, Acadamh na hOllscolaíochta Gaeilge (NUIG), Muintereas Teo	Skills and capacity training; target 20 employees.	X				Údarás na Gaeltachta provides funding to Comhar Naíonraí na Gaeltachta and other relevant ELC services to assist in the upskilling and capacity training of employees in the Gaeltacht- based ELC services. To date, 27 individuals have or are being supported to undertake third level qualification courses from Level 6 to Level 9 on the National Framework of Qualifications. The milestone to target 20 employees, was also reported as completed in 2020. It currently stands at 48 individuals who have been or are being supported to undertake third level qualification courses.

## Goal C

### Positive play-based early learning

## Objective 8

Babies and young children have access to safe, high-quality, developmentally-appropriate, integrated ELC (and school-age childcare), which reflects diversity of need.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<b>8.3</b> Ensure that ELC provision promotes participation, strengthens social inclusion and embraces diversity through the integration of additional supports and services for children and families with additional needs.	<b>C.8.3.1.</b> Ensure that future capital investment facilitates the participation of all children in ELC and promotes settings that are inclusive and accessible to all children, families and practitioners, informed by Universal Design Guidelines.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY  <b>Partners:</b> DHLGH, National Disability Authority, Early Childhood Ireland, Trinity Haus	Introduce mechanisms to ensure Universal Design Guidelines are used by settings when applying for capital funding.			X		Under the Building Blocks - Improvement Grant, all ELC and SAC settings are required to consider the Universal Design Guidelines in the refurbishment, renovation and building of facilities. Applicants are required to confirm that they have read the guidelines and will commit to take account of these in their projects.  In addition, Dormant Account Funding has been awarded for a three-year project to support the use of the Guidelines.

## Goal C

### Positive play-based early learning

## Objective 8

Babies and young children have access to safe, high-quality, developmentally-appropriate, integrated ELC (and school-age childcare), which reflects diversity of need.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<b>8.3</b> Ensure that ELC provision promotes participation, strengthens social inclusion and embraces diversity through the integration of additional supports and services for children and families with additional needs.	<b>C.8.3.2.</b> Continue to roll out AIM to ensure the full inclusion of children with a disability in settings delivering the universal pre-school programme. Undertake an end-of-year-three evaluation of AIM and, subject to evaluation findings and other relevant developments, consider enhancements to, and/or extension of, AIM to, for example, all ELC services, all school-age childcare services and/or to children with additional needs other than a disability. As part of this evaluation, consideration will be given to other supports that exist for children with a disability in ELC and the scope to consolidate and streamline these under AIM, or to align eligibility and access routes as well as practice and training.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY  <b>Partners:</b> DoH, DE, HSE, and other partners to be determined following the AIM Evaluation	Depending on results of the year-three evaluation of AIM, consider enhancements to, and/or extension of, AIM to, for example, all ELC settings (including children aged 0-3), all school-age childcare services and/or to children with additional needs other than a disability.			X		The end of year three evaluation has been completed, is undergoing its final review and is due to be published in 2023.  Planning enhancements to, and/or extensions of AIM is underway.
			Review eligibility rules and consider future of HSE specialist pre-schools in context of results of the year-three evaluation of AIM and developments in education sector e.g. NCSE policy advice regarding special schools and special classes.			X		

## Goal C

### Positive play-based early learning

## Objective 8

Babies and young children have access to safe, high-quality, developmentally-appropriate, integrated ELC (and school-age childcare), which reflects diversity of need.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
8.3 Ensure that ELC provision promotes participation, strengthens social inclusion and embraces diversity through the integration of additional supports and services for children and families with additional needs.	<b>C.8.3.3.</b> Oversee and evaluate the In-School and ELC Therapy Support Demonstration Project, and, subject to the findings of the evaluation and any other relevant developments, consider the model for national rollout (as resources allow).	<b>Lead:</b> D/Education  <b>Partners:</b> DoH, NCSE, HSE and other partners to be determined	Potential further rollout to other areas and regions, depending on evaluation findings.					See update on C.9.3.2
	<b>C.8.3.4.</b> Introduce mechanisms through the National Childcare Scheme (with periodic reviews, including a review of relevant Scheme data, and withy periodic stakeholder consultation), to ensure that children with specific vulnerabilities – including children in homeless families and children in direct provision – have access to high-quality ELC (and school-age childcare).	<b>Lead:</b> CEDIY  <b>Partners:</b> Pobal, DE, HSE, Tusla, Local Authorities	Consider further National Childcare Scheme-related mechanisms to support children and families with specific vulnerabilities.			X		This work is ongoing.

## Goal C

### Positive play-based early learning

## Objective 8

Babies and young children have access to safe, high-quality, developmentally-appropriate, integrated ELC (and school-age childcare), which reflects diversity of need.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
8.3 Ensure that ELC provision promotes participation, strengthens social inclusion and embraces diversity through the integration of additional supports and services for children and families with additional needs.	<b>C.8.3.5.</b> Develop mechanisms to provide additional supports to ELC services where there are high proportions of children who are at risk of poverty to mitigate the impacts of early disadvantage. Specifically, informed by the DEIS model, develop a programme for the delivery of ELC in the context of concentrated disadvantage.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY  <b>Partners:</b> Pobal, DE, and others to be determined on establishment of working group	Pilot initiated and accompanying evaluation underway.				X	Work has commenced on the Tackling Disadvantage strand under Together for Better, the new funding model for ELC and SAC.
	<b>C.8.3.6.</b> Develop mechanisms to provide Irish-language supports to ELC provision where there are high proportions of children who are learning through the medium of Irish.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY  <b>Partners:</b> Monitoring Group for the ELC Actions under the five-year Action Plan for the Irish Language	Build on 2020 developments.  2020 milestone: Build on the groundwork undertaken in 2019 to progress the actions in the Irish Language Plan.  2020 update: Expressions of Interest for the Irish Medium Support Coordinator (IMSC) post were sought in 2021. This IMSC will guide recruitment for the Early Years Specialist post.			X		An Irish Medium Supports Coordinator was appointed in Q1 2022, and work on mapping Irish-language provision and support needs commenced, with a view to developing a Comprehensive Plan for the sector in line with the 5-Year Action Plan.

## Goal C

### Positive play-based early learning

## Objective 9

Children will be supported in their transitions to (and through) ELC settings and onwards to primary school.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<p><b>9.1</b> Introduce measures to exchange information, involve children and parents and develop strong partnerships between ELC settings and primary schools to support transitions.</p> <p><b>9.2</b> Increase continuity in curriculum and pedagogy across ELC settings and the early years of primary school.</p>	<p><b>C.9.1.1.</b> Provide information and guidance to parents, families, childminders and communities on the role they can play in supporting transitions (with tailored advice and information for vulnerable groups), including guidance for parents making decisions around school starting age.</p> <p><b>C.9.1.2.</b> Roll out transition activities (including joint CPD) between ELC settings and primary schools, and introduce NCCA's reporting templates and associated support material. Building on that work, develop a national approach to support the transitions experienced by children as they move into and through ELC settings.</p> <p><b>C.9.2.1.</b> Provide clarification for ELC settings and primary schools on the appropriate dispositions, skills and knowledge for children as they make the transition into primary school.</p>	<p><b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY</p> <p><b>Partners:</b> NCCA and others to be determined on establishment of working group</p>	Implement strands of new model as agreed.				X	Action delayed, milestones not met.

## Goal C

### Positive play-based early learning

## Objective 9

Children will be supported in their transitions to (and through) ELC settings and onwards to primary school.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<b>9.2</b> Increase continuity in curriculum and pedagogy across ELC settings and the early years of primary school.	<b>C.9.2.2.</b> Align the redeveloped Primary School Curriculum for the early years of primary school with Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework, to facilitate progression in children’s early learning as they move from ELC settings to primary school.	<b>Lead:</b> D/Education	Specifications for curriculum areas and subjects in development and informed by the Primary Curriculum Framework.				X	Consultation on the Primary Curriculum Framework, which was delayed due to Covid-19, was completed at the end of February 2022. The Primary Curriculum Framework was launched by the Minister on 9 March 2023. This framework will guide the NCCA’s work in developing a specification for each curriculum area.
			Primary Mathematics Curriculum informed by the principles and pedagogies of Aistear, published.				X	Consultation on the Primary Mathematics Curriculum (PMC) from junior infants to sixth class commenced in April 2022 and ran to end June 2022. The new Primary Mathematics Curriculum will be introduced to schools in 2023.
	Complete trial of “transitions” model of inspection and finalise for use.					X	This action is connected to the timeline for the Update of Aistear and the Primary Curriculum Framework and will be progressed in line with these developments.	
	Trial of adjusted/ revised inspection models as curriculum changes are implemented.					X		



## Goal C

### Positive play-based early learning

## Objective 9

### Children will be supported in their transitions to (and through) ELC settings and onwards to primary school.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
9.2 Increase continuity in curriculum and pedagogy across ELC settings and the early years of primary school.	<b>C.9.2.4.</b> Having regard to resource implications, explore over time appropriate class sizes in the early years of primary school as a redeveloped Primary School Curriculum is aligned with Aistear.	<b>Lead:</b> D/Education	Keep under review.	X				Budgets 2021 and 2022 have collectively improved the staffing schedule by two points and schools will be provided with class teachers on the basis of one teacher for every 24 pupils which means that primary schools will be staffed at the most favourable level ever seen in September 2022. Budget 2021 also introduced a new three point retention level on the staffing schedule for schools who might otherwise be at risk of losing a teacher. There has been an increase of 7,754 teachers employed in primary schools over the 10 year period (2011/12 - 2021/22). Primary teacher numbers have increased from 31,928 to 39,682.

# Goal C

## Positive play-based early learning

# Objective 9

## Children will be supported in their transitions to (and through) ELC settings and onwards to primary school.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
9.3 Ensure the necessary supports are in place to sustain learning for all children as they transition from ELC settings to primary school	C.9.3.1. Provide continued funding and support to implement and enhance DEIS.	Lead: D/ Education	Continued implementation of various actions contained in DEIS supporting transitions, parental and community involvement and school climate.		X			The majority of the 108 actions in the DEIS plan are either complete or ongoing. In the 2021/22 school year there are 884 schools participating in the DEIS Programme - 687 Primary and 197 Post Primary, serving over 180,000 students. In March 2022 an extension of the DEIS programme was announced. From September 2022 an additional 322 schools (284 primary and 38 post-primary) will be included in the DEIS programme for the first time, bringing the total number of schools to 1,206, serving over 240,000 students. The Department of Education will spend approximately €170 million in 2022 on providing supports to schools with the highest levels of educational disadvantage. This will increase to over €180 million from 2023.
	C.9.3.2. Develop proposals to implement the recommendations of the Comprehensive Review of the SNA Scheme.		Dependent on 2020 developments.  2020 milestone: Continued piloting of School Inclusion Model and accompanying evaluation; Evaluation of the pilot complete; Depending on the outcome of the evaluation, return to Government with proposals for extending the new Model.  2020 milestone: School Inclusion Model Pilot in 2019/20 and 2020/21 was disrupted by school closure and redeployment of therapists to Covid-19 related work. It is planned to resume the pilot in 2021/22.				X	The School Inclusion Model (SIM) has a number of strands, including additional NEPS services and in-school support from therapists. Initially designed as a one-year pilot involving up to 75 participating schools in the CHO 7 region, it was interrupted by Covid-19 with the closure of schools and the diversion of HSE therapists from the project to Covid-19 related work. It was then extended to the 2020/21 school year which was also interrupted by Covid-19. Progress has been made on aspects of the Model but much remains to be done in terms of in-school implementation and evaluation. The Pilot recommenced in November 2021 in CHO7.  There are a number of challenges and barriers to continuing the roll-out of SIM in CHO7 and expanding SIM to other areas at this time. The single biggest challenge is the availability of therapists and psychologists. While the Department's initial intention was to expand SIM to other areas, pressures relating to workforce supply (therapists and psychologists) have resulted in SIM being limited to one CHO area. This will remain in 2023.  The Health Service Executive (HSE) are engaging with CORU (regulatory body over therapists) to determine how the current registration process can be expedited. The HSE are engaging with the Department of Health, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) and Department of Further and Higher Education, Research and Innovation to explore how the Higher Education Institutes can increase third level capacity, with a focus on an initiative to commence in September 2023.

## Goal C

### Positive play-based early learning

## Objective 9

### Children will be supported in their transitions to (and through) ELC settings and onwards to primary school.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
9.3 Ensure the necessary supports are in place to sustain learning for all children as they transition from ELC settings to primary school	<b>C.9.3.3.</b> Ensure AIM and the In-School and ELC Therapy Support Demonstration Model bring a focus to positive transitions from ELC to primary school. This will require early and strong collaboration between ELC and primary school support services (e.g. Better Start Quality Development Services, National Council for Special Education).	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY  <b>Partners:</b> DE, National Council for Special Education (NCSE), National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), Parents Council (NPC)	Implement strands of new model as agreed.					See update on C.9.1.1, C.9.1.2 and C.9.1.3
	<b>C.9.3.4.</b> Increased investment in children's education will be supported by the Programme for Government and Action Plan for Education commitment to raise capitation rates at primary and post-primary level as resources allow.	<b>Lead:</b> D/Education	Investment in education supported as part of annual estimates process.	X				This is an ongoing action as part of the annual estimates process. Capitation rates increased by 5% on 1st September 2019 and by 2.5% from 1st September 2020. Funding for a further increase was sought as part of the estimates process in 2021 and it is intended to continue to seek funding for increases in capitation rates in future estimates. Enhanced investment in education, including capitation rates, will continue to be kept under review as First 5 implementation progresses.

# GOAL D

## AN EFFECTIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEM



## Goal D

### An effective early childhood system

## Building Block 1

Committed leadership, strong governance and positive collaboration and engagement aligned around a shared vision for babies, young children and their families.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<b>1.A</b> Put in place effective implementation and governance structures and public engagement mechanisms for First 5.	<b>D.1.A.1.</b> As a constituent strategy of BOBF, the implementation of First 5 will be overseen by BOBF Implementation Structures to allow for a comprehensive and connected approach to addressing key issues which impact on the lives of babies, young children and their families. The Cabinet Committee on Social Policy and Public Services, chaired by An Taoiseach, will oversee the implementation of First 5. New nominations to BOBF Implementation Structures (i.e. Children and Young People's Policy Consortium, Sponsors Group, Advisory Council) will be sought to ensure the necessary focus on babies, young children and their families. These Implementation Structures involve widespread multilateral engagement from across Government Departments, State Agencies and others. The Implementation Structures are described in further detail in the section on Implementation and Oversight. A First 5 Implementation Team will be established in the Department of Children and Youth Affairs to spearhead the coordination and monitoring of implementation of First 5, liaising with the BOBF Implementation Team.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY  <b>Partners:</b> BOBF Implementation Structures and all key Government Departments and Agencies	Continued effective engagement between First 5 Implementation Team and BOBF Implementation Structures.	X				Presentations on First 5 were made to the National Advisory Council in 2021 and 2022.
			BOBF Advisory Council Work Plan agreed, including in respect of role in overseeing First 5 and promoting related thematic areas of focus.			X		The BOBF Advisory Council was invited to publish a commentary on implementation in 2020, 2021/22 and over the period 2019-2022. The Advisory Group was also invited to make a submission on the Phase 2 Implementation Plan.
			BOBF Advisory Council invited to publish a commentary on Year 2 of implementation.		X			The BOBF Advisory Council was invited to publish a commentary 2020 implementation.

## Goal D

### An effective early childhood system

## Building Block 1

Committed leadership, strong governance and positive collaboration and engagement aligned around a shared vision for babies, young children and their families.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
1.A Put in place effective implementation and governance structures and public engagement mechanisms for First 5.	<b>D.1.A.1.</b> As a constituent strategy of BOBF, the implementation of First 5 will be overseen by BOBF Implementation Structures to allow for a comprehensive and connected approach to addressing key issues which impact on the lives of babies, young children and their families. The Cabinet Committee on Social Policy and Public Services, chaired by An Taoiseach, will oversee the implementation of First 5. New nominations to BOBF Implementation Structures (i.e. Children and Young People’s Policy Consortium, Sponsors Group, Advisory Council) will be sought to ensure the necessary focus on babies, young children and their families. These Implementation Structures involve widespread multilateral engagement from across Government Departments, State Agencies and others. The Implementation Structures are described in further detail in the section on Implementation and Oversight. A First 5 Implementation Team will be established in the Department of Children and Youth Affairs to spearhead the coordination and monitoring of implementation of First 5, liaising with the BOBF Implementation Team.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY  <b>Partners:</b> BOBF Implementation Structures and all key Government Departments and Agencies	BOBF Implementation Structures used to tackle implementation challenges that may arise.	X				Presentations on First 5 were made to the National Advisory Council in 2021 and 2022.
			BOBF Implementation Structures invited to contribute to review of First 5 and development of Phase 2 Implementation Plan (2022–2024).		X			The BOBF Advisory Council was invited to publish a commentary on the first phase of First 5 implementation and a submission on the Phase 2 Implementation Plan.

## Goal D

### An effective early childhood system

## Building Block 1

Committed leadership, strong governance and positive collaboration and engagement aligned around a shared vision for babies, young children and their families.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
1.A Put in place effective implementation and governance structures and public engagement mechanisms for First 5.	<b>D.1.A.2.</b> The First 5 Implementation Team will ensure that within six months of the date of publication of this Strategy, a detailed three-year implementation plan is developed with a timetable for delivery, including the assignment of responsibility for actions.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY	No Key Milestone for 2021.					N/A
	<b>D.1.A.3.</b> The First 5 Implementation Team will prepare an annual report on the implementation of the Strategy.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY	Annual Report 2020 prepared and published.			X		The Annual Implementation Report 2020 has been prepared and will be published in 2023.
	<b>D.1.A.4.</b> The First 5 Implementation Team will carry out a three-year review of the Strategy with a view to developing a further implementation plan for the following three years.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY	IDG established.	X				The First 5 IDG will provide guidance and input for the development of the Implementation Plan 2023-2025.
			Terms of review agreed.	X				The approach to the three-year review has been agreed.
			Three-year review undertaken.				X	The three-year review is underway

## Goal D

### An effective early childhood system

## Building Block 1

Committed leadership, strong governance and positive collaboration and engagement aligned around a shared vision for babies, young children and their families.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
1.A Put in place effective implementation and governance structures and public engagement mechanisms for First 5.	D.1.A.5. Support the meaningful participation of young children and parents of young children in the development of policy, programmes and practice that concern them, including seldom heard groups. This will involve the development and use of appropriate methodologies and mechanisms for consulting and engaging with young children and parents of young children, the development and delivery of child participation training programmes for those working with children and the publication of guidance on children's participation.	Lead: DCEDIY  Partners: Hub na nÓg and Relevant early years sectoral partners	A training programme to support implementation of the national framework and its related methodologies will be developed and implemented.			X		A pilot of the training programme on the Everyday Checklist of the National Participation Framework commenced in 2022 with ELC providers. This pilot will inform a train the trainer programme that will rollout via the CCCs in 2023.
			Parent consultation panel established.			X		A working group has met twice in 2022 to document and pilot participation methodologies appropriate for ELC settings. Work in this group will include parent's representatives and will continue into 2023.



## Goal D

### An effective early childhood system

## Building Block 1

Committed leadership, strong governance and positive collaboration and engagement aligned around a shared vision for babies, young children and their families.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
1.A Put in place effective implementation and governance structures and public engagement mechanisms for First 5.	D.1.A.7. Implement a communications plan that will ensure the importance of early childhood development and learning is well understood and how actions and projects in First 5 can contribute to improving babies' and young children's experiences.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY  <b>Partners:</b> Government Departments and Agencies involved in First 5	Actions in communications plans implemented.	X				The First 5 twitter account and website continued to be very effective communications' tools for raising awareness and engaging with stakeholders on the deliverables of the First 5 Strategy. The website also continued in use throughout 2021 and 2022 as a resource for early years educators and school-age childcare practitioners and parents, providing information on outdoor learning and play; providing public health guidance; as well as hosting the Pre-school at Home hub. In addition, in response to the war in Ukraine and the arrival of Ukrainian refugees in Ireland, the First 5 website was extended to offer a range of supports and resources for early years' educators, school-age practitioners, children and families.

## Goal D

### An effective early childhood system

## Building Block 1

Committed leadership, strong governance and positive collaboration and engagement aligned around a shared vision for babies, young children and their families.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<b>1.B</b> Strengthen leadership and governance across the early childhood system at a national and local level.	<b>D.1.B.1.</b> Strengthen leadership and cross-sectoral action for parenting supports by establishing a dedicated Parenting Support Policy Unit in the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY	No Key Milestone for 2021.					N/A
	<b>D.1.B.2.</b> Building on the development of the 2017 Whole-of- Government Approach to Tackling Child Poverty, monitor and track progress on the achievement of the child poverty target through BOBF Implementation Structures under the joint leadership of the Departments of Employment and Social Protection, and Children and Youth Affairs.	<b>Lead:</b> DSP  <b>Partners:</b> DCEDIY	Monitoring and reporting on Social Inclusion Strategy.	X				Progress on the implementation of the Roadmap commitments is monitored by the Social Inclusion Roadmap Steering Group, which is chaired by Joe O'Brien, T.D., Minister of State with responsibility for social inclusion in the Department of Social Protection. Membership of the Steering Group is comprised of senior representatives of all Government Departments responsible for the delivery of Roadmap commitments, as well as three external members from the Community and Voluntary Sector.

## Goal D

### An effective early childhood system

## Building Block 1

Committed leadership, strong governance and positive collaboration and engagement aligned around a shared vision for babies, young children and their families.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<b>1.B</b> Strengthen leadership and governance across the early childhood system at a national and local level.	<b>D.1.B.3.</b> Build on work of established working group led by the Department of Justice and Equality, with representatives from the Departments of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, Employment Affairs and Social Protection, and Children and Youth Affairs to progress proposals on family leave and family-friendly working.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY  <b>Partners:</b> DSP and DETE	Annual programme of work agreed and implemented.	X				Equality functions were transferred to DCEDIY in September 2020.  The Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Bill 2022 was published on 5 October 2022.  The Right to Request Remote Working Bill has been integrated into the Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Bill following recommendations of the Pre-Legislative Scrutiny Reports of both Bills. As a result, the Bill will deliver an integrated approach that gives a right to request remote working to all workers, while the right to request other forms of flexible working will remain limited to parents and carers as defined in the Bill.
	<b>D.1.B.4.</b> Strengthen leadership and cross-sectoral action for child health through the new Healthy Ireland Office to be established in the Department of Health, and through expanding and enhancing the HSE National Healthy Childhood Programme as a policy priority programme.	<b>Lead:</b> DoH  <b>Partners:</b> HSE	Dependent on 2020 developments.  2020 milestone: Dependent on 2019 developments.  2020 update: Next steps on this will be considered in the context of the new Healthy Ireland Strategic Action Plan, scheduled for publication in 2021.	X				The Healthy Ireland Strategic Action Plan published in May 2021.
	<b>D.1.B.5.</b> Identify and scope the issue of food poverty as a cross-sectoral priority under BOBF, and in alignment with overall Healthy Ireland implementation, led by the Department of Health.	<b>Lead:</b> DoH  <b>Partners:</b> DCEDIY, BOBF Advisory Council	Implement work programme Year 2.	X				DSP has established an Inter-Departmental Group on Food Poverty in which the DoH participates.

## Goal D

### An effective early childhood system

## Building Block 1

Committed leadership, strong governance and positive collaboration and engagement aligned around a shared vision for babies, young children and their families.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
1.B Strengthen leadership and governance across the early childhood system at a national and local level.	<b>D.1.B.6.</b> Establish formal mechanisms to align and coordinate the policy, practice and implementation work of the Departments of Children and Youth Affairs, and Education and Skills, in respect of ELC, commencing with a joint Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY  <b>Partners:</b> DE	Implement MOU – hold high-level meetings as provided for in MOU to discuss and progress critical areas of cooperation and other arising issues.			X		DCEDIY and DoE continue to work closely on a range of aspects of ELC, facilitated by the ongoing co-location arrangement. Work on revising the current MOU between the two Departments in relation to ELC has commenced.
	<b>D.1.B.7.</b> Strengthen existing relationships between the Departments of Children and Youth Affairs, and Education and Skills, through the establishment of a high-level Inter-Departmental Group to develop policy proposals and to commission research in relation to key cross-cutting issues affecting early learning of babies and young children (e.g. school starting age; transitions; impact of pre-school on primary school provision).	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY  <b>Partners:</b> DE	Proposals to be developed and implemented as agreed through high-level engagement set out in MOU.			X		DCEDIY and DoE continue to work closely on a range of aspects of ELC, facilitated by the ongoing co-location arrangement.
	<b>D.1.B.8.</b> Support an increased role for the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in ELC curriculum development through changes to the NCCA governance structures.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY  <b>Partners:</b> DE, NCCA	Full participation of nominees and official in governance structures.	X				NCCA governance structures have been adjusted to give an increased role for DCEDIY.

## Goal D

### An effective early childhood system

## Building Block 1

Committed leadership, strong governance and positive collaboration and engagement aligned around a shared vision for babies, young children and their families.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
1.B Strengthen leadership and governance across the early childhood system at a national and local level.	<b>D.1.B.9.</b> Review the operating system for ELC (and school-age childcare), at national and local level, to develop more consolidated and streamlined planning, funding, administration and quality support. As part of this review, consider a range of possible options including a dedicated Statutory Agency, the use of existing State Agencies or the establishment of an executive arm of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY	Consideration of the review and moving towards implementation phase.		X			The independent Review of the Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School-Age Childcare (SAC) Operating Model has been completed and its findings approved by Government. The review, published on 30th March 2022, concluded that a new dedicated State agency under the remit of the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth is the optimal operating model for the ELC and SAC sector for the years ahead. This agency would undertake the functions currently carried out by Pobal Early Years (including Better Start), the 30 CCCs, as well as operational functions undertaken by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY). Following publication of the review, DCEDIY commenced a design and implementation planning phase of this reform project. A significant element of this phase will involve engagement with the sector, and a period of ongoing and extensive consultation with stakeholders has commenced. The DCEDIY has committed to working collaboratively with a wide range of stakeholders to design an alternative operating model for the benefit of children, their families, and the ELC and SAC sector. Following this design and implementation planning phase, DCEDIY will revert to Government to seek further approval to proceed to full implementation of the recommendations arising out of this review, and formally commence the establishment of a dedicated State agency for the ELC and SAC sector.

## Goal D

### An effective early childhood system

## Building Block 1

Committed leadership, strong governance and positive collaboration and engagement aligned around a shared vision for babies, young children and their families.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<b>1.C</b> Progress collaborative initiatives and integrated service development and delivery to support babies, young children and their families.	<b>D.1.C.1.</b> Explore the potential for joined-up and integrated service development and delivery for babies, young children and their families, through ELC settings as a natural hub for collaborative work with families.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY	Develop policy proposals.				X	This will be considered under the Tackling Disadvantage strand under Together for Better, the new funding model for ELC and SAC and in the context of planning enhancements to, and/or extensions of AIM.
	<b>D.1.C.2.</b> Pilot the development of Family and Early Childhood Centres that bring together a range of services to support parents and children in the early stages of development.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY	Develop policy proposals.  Explore options in the context of NDP funding.				X	This will be considered under Pillar 3 of the Building Blocks Capital Programme under the NDP
	<b>D.1.C.3.</b> Pilot the development of models of local collaboratives to better address governance and sustainability in ELC, in partnership with community and private ELC (and school-age childcare) providers.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY	Pilot ongoing.  Research underway.				X	This will be considered in design and implementation planning phase for a new operating model for ELC and SAC.

## Goal D

### An effective early childhood system

## Building Block 2

### A robust regulation, inspection and quality assurance regime to enforce and raise standards.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
2.A Develop, enhance and implement national standards for early childhood supports and services.	<b>D.2.A.1.</b> Develop and publish a set of quality standards for publicly funded parenting supports and services.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY  <b>Partners:</b> Tusla, HSE and voluntary sector	Project plan developed and commenced.  Working group established.  Stakeholder engagement commenced.  Quality standards agreed by Departments and Agencies and published.				X	Quality standards are being considered as part of the national study of home visiting services for families with babies and young children, which will inform the development of an agreed national approach to home visiting services. This study will be completed in Q4 2023. Quality standards/guidelines for other parenting support services will be considered at a later date.
	<b>D.2.A.2.</b> Develop guidance and support for Family Resource Centres (FRCs) to enhance and consolidate the delivery of the FRC programme	<b>Lead:</b> Tusla  <b>Partner:</b> DCEDIY	Continue to build on the development of local PPFS Tusla oversight and support function.	X				Progress is ongoing and will be continued to ensure development of local PPFS oversight and support function
			Review services of procured support Agency for efficacy.				X	This will be reviewed in 2023 in line with the key priority for the agency to integrate national services into revised regional governance services in the completion of structure Part 2 of the Practice Reform programme.
	<b>D.2.A.3.</b> Review current assessment and screening tools for babies, young children and families, particularly those with additional support needs, to facilitate collaborative working across health and social care professionals and effective referral pathways. Ensure that these are consistently implemented nationally.	<b>Lead:</b>	Finalise mapping exercise including identification of recommendations for how tools might be used more across disciplines and sectors with greater co-ordination to facilitate collaborative working.					See update on D.3.B.5

## Goal D

### An effective early childhood system

## Building Block 2

### A robust regulation, inspection and quality assurance regime to enforce and raise standards.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
2.A Develop, enhance and implement national standards for early childhood supports and services.	D.2.A.4. Develop a standardised, accredited curriculum framework for antenatal education for parents.	Lead: HSE	Local implementation of standards continued via maternity and community services. Rollout of Antenatal Educators Training Programme continued.				X	<p>Three elements of work have been progressing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assessment on readiness for local implementation has been ongoing, including onsite visits using an assessment tool which was developed in line with HIQA and National Antenatal Education standards.</li> <li>Work stream 1 group of the National Implementation group are working on the curriculum. Content of the Programme has been agreed.</li> <li>Curriculum for educators which can also be shared with women and their birth partners is in progress.</li> </ul> <p>Additional resources and packages for educators and parents are being scoped out for inclusion at a later stage.</p> <p>Anticipate implementation by April 2023</p> <p>The development of a curriculum for antenatal educators is at an advanced stage of development.</p> <p>Commencement of the rollout of this programme will be in 2023.</p>



## Goal D

### An effective early childhood system

## Building Block 2

### A robust regulation, inspection and quality assurance regime to enforce and raise standards.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
2.A Develop, enhance and implement national standards for early childhood supports and services.	D.2.A.5. Develop and implement quality standards for school-age childcare.	Lead: DCEDIY  Partners: Tusla	Commencement of comprehensive regulations for school-age childcare.					See update on D.2.B.2
			Publication of quality and regulatory framework to underpin regulations.					
			Publication of quality standards.	X				National Quality Guidelines for School-Age Childcare Services were published in September 2020.
			Development of implementation plan, including training supports for the sector.				X	Training supports for the National Quality Guidelines for SAC were delayed as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Work on developing training supports is underway.
			Coordinated delivery of implementation to commence with a pilot alongside existing quality frameworks for ELC.				X	

## Goal D

### An effective early childhood system

## Building Block 2

### A robust regulation, inspection and quality assurance regime to enforce and raise standards.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
2.A Develop, enhance and implement national standards for early childhood supports and services.	D.2.A.6. Through the National Síolta Aistear Initiative (NSAI), develop and implement a national plan for the phased, supported and simultaneous implementation of Síolta, the National Quality Framework, and Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework, in all ELC settings for babies and young children, including making the application of these frameworks a contractual requirement of DCYA funding schemes and give consideration to, over time, making adherence to the frameworks a statutory requirement. Over the lifetime of First 5, review Aistear and Síolta.	Lead: D/Education  Partners: DCEDIY, Better Start, NCCA	Implement work programme for 2021 as approved by National Steering Group.	X				2021 actions were carried out, though implementation was impacted by Covid-19.
			Review new model for delivery.		X			In line with the commitment in Nurturing Skills, CPD resources for NSAI are to be redeveloped into a new, blended format, combining online and face-to-face delivery.
			Complete consultation and publish updated Aistear curriculum framework.				X	The NCCA has commenced the updating of Aistear, with a public consultation completed. Work on updating Aistear will continue into 2023.

## Goal D

### An effective early childhood system

## Building Block 2

### A robust regulation, inspection and quality assurance regime to enforce and raise standards.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
2.A Develop, enhance and implement national standards for early childhood supports and services.	D.2.A.7. Through Children and Young People’s Services Committees (CYPSCs) and Child and Family Services Networks (CFSNs), and linked to the development of the Children’s Workforce Initiative, pilot the development of “No Wrong Door” policy in services for babies, young children and their families to ensure that anyone seeking assistance and services is appropriately supported by the relevant professionals in their community. The development of a revised blueprint for CYPSC and Child and Family Support Networks will support the development of this initiative.	Lead: DCEDIY  Partner: Tusla	Continued implementation of Blueprint.			X		Implementation of Shared Vision, Next Steps 2019 - 2024 is ongoing.
			Continued implementation and incremental scaling.			X		CYPSC are now in a position to scale initiatives and share best practice. One example is My Place to Play Baby Mat initiative which is currently being rolled out to Ukrainian Refugees in accommodation settings around the country.

## Goal D

### An effective early childhood system

## Building Block 2

### A robust regulation, inspection and quality assurance regime to enforce and raise standards.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
2.B Progressively reform the ELC (and school-age childcare) regulatory and inspection systems and strengthen quality assurance, with a renewed emphasis on self-evaluation.	<b>D.2.B.1.</b> Over the lifetime of First 5, conduct a review of the Early Years Services Regulations 2016 and accompanying Quality and Regulatory Framework based on evidence of what best contributes to the quality of children's experience. Particular areas for consideration will include minimum regulatory qualification levels, indoor and outdoor space requirements, adult-child ratios and group size. Incremental changes to qualification requirements will also be examined as part of the Workforce Developmental Plan (see Building Block 3). The scope of the Regulations will also be considered for different settings, in particular, home-based settings, to ensure proportionate regulation.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY  <b>Partner:</b> Tusla	Commence review of Early Years Services Regulations 2016.	X				<p>A review of the Early Years Services Regulations 2016 recommenced in Q4 2021. A comprehensive public consultation was launched in Q1 2022 and concluded in Q4 2022. The report on the public consultation is being finalised for publication in Q2 2023.</p> <p>The Government has given approval to draft Heads of Bill to amend the primary legislation. Drafting of Heads is under way and publication of the Bill is expected to take place in Q3 2023 with enactment by Q2 2024.</p>

## Goal D

### An effective early childhood system

## Building Block 2

### A robust regulation, inspection and quality assurance regime to enforce and raise standards.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<b>2.B</b> Progressively reform the ELC (and school-age childcare) regulatory and inspection systems and strengthen quality assurance, with a renewed emphasis on self-evaluation.	<b>D.2.B.2.</b> Introduce regulations for School-Age Childcare and extend regulation to all paid, non-relative childminders. An Action Plan for Childminding will set out a plan for moving progressively towards wider regulation and support for childminders over the lifetime of the Strategy building on the 2018 Working Group report.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY  <b>Partner:</b> Tusla	Commencement of comprehensive regulations for school-age childcare.				X	Work on development of comprehensive regulations was delayed due to a re-prioritisation of work during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, National Quality Guidelines for School-Age Childcare Services were published in September 2020 alongside the publication of a report on the public consultation that took place to inform the development of comprehensive regulations and quality standards for school-age childcare.
			Establishment of full inspectorate for school-age childcare services within the Tusla Children’s Services Regulation.				X	Preparatory work for establishment of a full inspectorate for school-age childcare services is underway but is dependent on development of comprehensive school-age childcare regulations. Work on this area is due to progress over the course of 2022 and 2023 alongside the development of the regulations. In the interim, Tusla continue to register School Age Childcare services in line with the initial regulations and will inspect services where concerns are raised in relation to service provision.

## Goal D

### An effective early childhood system

## Building Block 2

### A robust regulation, inspection and quality assurance regime to enforce and raise standards.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<b>2.B</b> Progressively reform the ELC (and school-age childcare) regulatory and inspection systems and strengthen quality assurance, with a renewed emphasis on self-evaluation.	<b>D.2.B.3.</b> Consider options for reforms to the registration and inspection of ELC, including childminders (and school-age childcare), to ensure a proportionate inspection regime and a more integrated approach to ELC. First steps include widening the qualification requirements for Tusla early years inspectors and piloting the extension of education-focused inspections to children under three.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY  <b>Partners:</b> DE Inspectorate, Tusla	Rollout of education inspections of ELC for children aged 0–6.			X		The public consultation on the development of EYEI Birth to Six was completed in 2022. The Minister approved the revised framework in July 2022. ‘The Guide to Early Years Education Inspection: Birth to Six’ was published on 2 September 2022. This document provides details of how the Department of Education Inspectorate carries out Early Years Education Inspection in early learning and care settings. It replaces the previous Guide to EYEI (2018). Pilots have been successfully concluded and the first inspections are due to take place in Q2 of 2023. gov.ie -
			Ongoing review of profile of qualifications of Tusla early years and school-age inspectors.	X				The criteria for the recruitment of Inspectors has been widened to include other relevant qualifications. The profile of qualifications of Tusla Early Years and School-Age inspectors is reviewed periodically through relevant governance structures.
	<b>D.2.B.4.</b> Develop and use appropriate methods to take account of the views of children and parents in the inspection of ELC and school-age childcare.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY  <b>Partners:</b> DE, Tusla	Tusla to implement a model to gain views of children in the inspection of ELC settings.			X		Tusla and the DE EYEI are working collaboratively to explore how to give space to the voice of the child in inspections and reporting.
			Implementation of agreed models for collection of parent views.		X			Tusla published the details of its consultation with parents of children attending services in early 2021. Actions arising from the consultation have been implemented, including improvements to information sharing with parents and establishment of a feedback and concerns office through which parents, and others, can submit feedback on services. In addition, Tusla Inspectors now display posters in services when an inspection is underway inviting parents to submit feedback to the Inspectorate. Tusla and the DE EYEI are working collaboratively on future phases of this action.

## Goal D

### An effective early childhood system

## Building Block 2

### A robust regulation, inspection and quality assurance regime to enforce and raise standards.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<b>2.B</b> Progressively reform the ELC (and school-age childcare) regulatory and inspection systems and strengthen quality assurance, with a renewed emphasis on self-evaluation.	<b>D.2.B.5.</b> Develop a revised self-evaluation framework for ELC to replace the existing Siolta Quality Assurance Programme (QAP) so that providers can assess their own performance along the quality spectrum, from compliance to excellence.	<b>Lead:</b> D/Education  <b>Partners:</b> DCEDIY, Better Start, Tusla	Initial CPD developed to support use of self-evaluation framework by NSAI Resource Development Group.				X	Planning commenced in late 2022 for development of a single integrated quality framework to be used as the common reference point for all inspection activities and for self-evaluation by settings, reflecting the recommendations of the OECD Country Policy Review of ELC quality in Ireland published in December 2021.
	<b>D.2.B.6.</b> Align the national quality improvement infrastructure around the Better Start Quality Development Service which operates nationally. Include a regional structure and increase support to the sector through an enhanced specialist service that provides intensive coaching, training and advice to improve professional practice.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY  <b>Partners:</b> DE, Better Start, NCCA, CCCs, national voluntary childcare organisations	Commence implementation of recommendations supporting alignment of national quality improvement infrastructure around the Better Start Quality Development Service.				X	Strengthening of the national quality improvement infrastructure will take into account the OECD Country Policy Review of ELC quality in Ireland (published December 2021) and Nurturing Skills, the Workforce Plan for ELC/SAC (also published in December 2021), as well as the findings of the Review of the Operating Model for ELC and SAC (published in 2022).

## Goal D

### An effective early childhood system

## Building Block 3

### An appropriately skilled and sustainable professional workforce that is supported and valued and reflects the diversity of babies, young children and their families.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
3.A Identify and put in place the staff requirements to deliver early childhood supports and services.	<b>D.3.A.1.</b> In line with the principles set out in Sláintecare, develop a dedicated child health workforce adopting a population-based approach focussed initially in areas of high population density and disadvantage, recognising that this will require additional resources.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY  <b>Partners:</b> DCEDIY and other Departments and Agencies to be determined on establishment of steering group.	Commence testing in pilot sites and collect data to inform subsequent evaluation (subject to resources being made available through Estimates process).				X	A Steering Group was formed in the Department and work commenced in early 2020 to progress and test a model of practice to underpin dedicated child health workforce subject to resources being made available. This work has not progressed due to the competing priorities with the pandemic response.  The model of practice will be revisited and further developed by the re-establishment of the Steering Group in 2023.
	<b>D.3.A.2.</b> Develop the Tusla multi-annual strategic workforce plan, focussing on innovative approaches to recruiting and retaining social workers and family support practitioners. Include a pilot scheme of funded bursaries for Traveller and Roma students to become Tusla social workers or social care workers.	<b>Lead:</b> Tusla	Placements for Traveller and Roma children to become social workers and social care workers.			X		The Employment Support Scheme was developed by Tusla to assist Traveller students in education programmes (social work and social care) through to completion of degrees and then on to employment. There are currently 11 students being supported with bursaries and placements through the scheme at various stages in their courses. Tusla plans to support additional students in 2023.



## Goal D

### An effective early childhood system

## Building Block 3

### An appropriately skilled and sustainable professional workforce that is supported and valued and reflects the diversity of babies, young children and their families.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<p><b>3.A</b> Identify and put in place the staff requirements to deliver early childhood supports and services.</p>	<p><b>D.3.A.3.</b> Introduce a range of measures so that, by 2028:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– all regulated childminders will hold a minimum qualification (level to be determined by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs by end 2019 in follow-up to the Expert Group Report). An appropriate period of time will be provided to meet this requirement;</li> <li>– all regulated school-age childcare staff will hold a minimum qualification (level to be determined by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs by end 2019). An appropriate period of time will be provided to meet this requirement; and</li> <li>– a graduate-led ELC workforce, with at least 50% of staff (i.e. all room leaders, assistant manager and managers) working directly with children in centre-based ELC settings and coordinators supporting the work of childminders, will hold an appropriate degree-level qualification (with an initial target of 30% reached by 2021).</li> </ul>	<p><b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY</p> <p><b>Partners:</b> DE</p>	<p>See overarching milestones for the Workforce Plan (action D.3.A.4).</p>					<p>See overarching milestones for the Workforce Plan (action D.3.A.4).</p>

## Goal D

### An effective early childhood system

## Building Block 3

### An appropriately skilled and sustainable professional workforce that is supported and valued and reflects the diversity of babies, young children and their families.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<b>3.A</b> Identify and put in place the staff requirements to deliver early childhood supports and services.	<b>D.3.A.4.</b> Informed by the predictive model developed by the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs for the ELC workforce, develop a Workforce Development Plan to ensure the appropriate number of ELC and school-age childcare staff at all levels in the sector. The Workforce Development Plan will support the achievement of the above targets. The Workforce Development Plan will also set out plans to raise the profile of careers in ELC (and school-age childcare), establish a career framework and leadership development opportunities and will work towards building a more gender-balanced and diverse workforce. Consideration will also be given to broader ELC and school-age childcare workforce, including those in inspection, mentoring and training roles and support for those who facilitate practice placements.).	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY  <b>Partners:</b> To be determined in preparation of the Workforce Development Plan	Implementation of actions agreed in Phase 1 and Phase 2.	X				Nurturing Skills: The Workforce Plan for Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare, 2022-2028 was published in December 2021. Nurturing Skills aims to strengthen the ongoing process of professionalisation for those working in ELC and SAC. This Plan includes specific actions for moving to a graduate-led workforce by 2028, establishing a career framework for staff working in the ELC and SAC sector, including role profiles, qualifications requirements and the strengthening of career pathways. Nurturing skills also includes actions to support the recruitment and retention of staff with the necessary qualifications, and to support ongoing staff training and development; to create a workforce which feels valued and is motivated to deliver the best possible service to children.

## Goal D

### An effective early childhood system

## Building Block 3

### An appropriately skilled and sustainable professional workforce that is supported and valued and reflects the diversity of babies, young children and their families.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<b>3.B</b> Improve access to high-quality initial training and Continuous Professional Development opportunities to ensure the staff involved in delivering early childhood supports and services are fully prepared for the demands of their professional roles.	<b>D.3.B.1.</b> Publish agreed criteria and guidelines for further and higher education ELC (and school-age childcare) qualifications including access and entry requirements; knowledge and content of programmes and the incorporation of supervised professional practice. These standards and guidelines will support the implementation of the Workforce Development Plan by helping to create a shared agenda, common practice and understandings of quality (ensuring that practice frameworks are reflected in training), clarifying the roles and responsibilities of training institutions.	<b>Lead:</b> D/Education  <b>Partners:</b> DCEDIY, QQI, further and higher education institutions	Phased implementation of new professional awards by HEIs.	X				The Qualifications Advisory Board continues to review Level 7 and 8 ELC programmes. A list of approved programmes continues to be updated on <a href="https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation-information/c2e6b-qualifications-advisory-board-qab-for-the-early-learning-and-care-elc-sector/">https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation-information/c2e6b-qualifications-advisory-board-qab-for-the-early-learning-and-care-elc-sector/</a>
			New FET programmes for ELC to commence.	X				New Level 5 and 6 major awards in ELC in line with the Professional Award Type Descriptors for ELC awards commenced in September 2021.
	<b>D.3.B.2.</b> Introduce a redeveloped national subsidised fund for further and higher ELC (and school-age childcare) education to support the implementation of the Workforce Development Plan.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY  <b>Partners:</b> DE	See overarching milestones for the Workforce Plan.					See update on D.3.A.4

## Goal D

An effective early childhood system

## Building Block 3

An appropriately skilled and sustainable professional workforce that is supported and valued and reflects the diversity of babies, young children and their families.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<p><b>3.B</b> Improve access to high-quality initial training and Continuous Professional Development opportunities to ensure the staff involved in delivering early childhood supports and services are fully prepared for the demands of their professional roles.</p>	<p><b>D.3.B.3.</b> Develop a national programme of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) opportunities for the ELC (and school-age childcare) workforce to be delivered through Better Start Quality Development Service. Over time, this will develop links with the national structure for CPD of primary school teachers. Opportunities for joint delivery of CPD programmes where appropriate will be considered.</p>	<p><b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY</p> <p><b>Partners:</b> DE, Better Start, other partners to be determined during development of a national plan for CPD</p>	<p>Finalise and commence implementation of a national plan for CPD for the ELC and SAC workforce, as part of Phase 2 of the Workforce Development Plan.</p>			X		<p>Nurturing Skills (published in December 2021) sets out plans for the further development of CPD through a 'whole system' approach, coordinated by one agency, to integrate and align current structures and any newly developed structures. Implementation of CPD actions within Nurturing Skills commenced in 2022.</p>

## Goal D

### An effective early childhood system

## Building Block 3

### An appropriately skilled and sustainable professional workforce that is supported and valued and reflects the diversity of babies, young children and their families.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<p><b>3.B</b> Improve access to high-quality initial training and Continuous Professional Development opportunities to ensure the staff involved in delivering early childhood supports and services are fully prepared for the demands of their professional roles.</p>	<p><b>D.3.B.4.</b> Review graduate training options and requirements for all professionals working with babies, young children and their families to ensure that appropriate specialist training is available, including training that is specific to early childhood and to ensure all those working with babies and young children are supported to undertake regular CPD.</p>	<p><b>Lead:</b> All Government Departments</p> <p><b>Partners:</b> All relevant Government Departments and Agencies</p>	<p>See action D.3.B.5.</p>					<p>See update on D.3.B.5</p>

## Goal D

### An effective early childhood system

## Building Block 3

### An appropriately skilled and sustainable professional workforce that is supported and valued and reflects the diversity of babies, young children and their families.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<p><b>3.B</b> Improve access to high-quality initial training and Continuous Professional Development opportunities to ensure the staff involved in delivering early childhood supports and services are fully prepared for the demands of their professional roles.</p>	<p><b>D.3.B.5.</b> Develop and Early Childhood Workforce Initiative. This Initiative will include health and social care workforce, including ELC staff and primary school teachers, among others. Aligning with developments in the Quality and Capacity Building Initiative and the Nurture/National Healthy Childhood Programme, the Early Childhood Workforce Initiative will develop opportunities for all professionals working with babies, young children and their families to learn together and develop working collaborative approaches. The initiative will progress joint pre-service training and in-service learning modules on key issues of relevance across the early childhood workforce including child development, bonding and attachment, play, working with parents, working collaboratively, family violence and addressing disadvantage. The Early Childhood Workforce Initiative will also develop control f to acknowledge and recognise effective collaborative learning and working (e.g. Team Around the Child initiatives such as Meitheal and AIM).</p>	<p><b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY</p> <p><b>Partners:</b> All relevant Government Departments and Agencies</p>	<p>Finalise mapping process and prepare a report with recommendations on how to make training more widely available across sectors and disciplines in such a way as to facilitate joint learning between professionals at local level.</p>				X	Action delayed, milestone not met.

## Goal D

### An effective early childhood system

## Building Block 3

### An appropriately skilled and sustainable professional workforce that is supported and valued and reflects the diversity of babies, young children and their families.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<b>3.C</b> Develop mechanisms to raise the professional status of the ELC and SAC workforce and support employers to offer more favourable working conditions to attract and retain staff.	<b>D.3.C.1.</b> Develop proposals for a structure to review and oversee compliance with new standards and guidelines for further and higher ELC and SAC education programmes and create a register of the ELC (and school-age childcare) workforce. This structure would, over time, move towards a professional standards body to promote and regulate the ELC (and school-age childcare) profession.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY  <b>Partners:</b> DE	Appropriate actions implemented as agreed in the Workforce Plan.			X		Nurturing Skills, the Workforce Plan for ELC and SAC, commits to the incremental movement towards regulation of the ELC and SAC profession. The Implementation of Nurturing Skills actions commenced in 2022.
	<b>D.C.3.2.</b> Having regard to the Workforce Development Plan and alongside the introduction of a new funding model for ELC (and school-age childcare), examine the possibility of introducing further quality levers (e.g. extending the use of higher capitation payments) within the framework provided by the ACS so that appropriate incentives can be made available to attract and retain staff, in particular graduates, working with children of all ages.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY  <b>Partners:</b> DE	Appropriate actions implemented as agreed in Phase 2 of the Workforce Plan and in line with development of a new funding model.			X		Nurturing Skills contains a commitment to provide a graduate premium to lead educators in all ELC rooms, extending the higher capitation payments previously available only in the ECCE programme to lead educators working with children aged under three years old. The new graduate premium is being delivered through Core Funding, commenced in September 2022.

## Goal D

An effective early childhood system

## Building Block 4

A strong national infrastructure for research and data that is used to inform policy and practice alongside an ongoing programme of monitoring and evaluation.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
3.C Develop mechanisms to raise the professional status of the ELC and SAC workforce and support employers to offer more favourable working conditions to attract and retain staff.	<b>D.3.C.3.</b> Undertake a review of the types of favourable working conditions that could be supported to attract and retain staff working in ELC (and school-age childcare) settings as a key input to the development of a new funding model (described later). As part of this review, the optimal time for observation, reflection, planning, teamwork and cooperation with parents will be explored.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY	No Key Milestones for 2021.W					N/A



## Goal D

### An effective early childhood system

## Building Block 4

### A strong national infrastructure for research and data that is used to inform policy and practice alongside an ongoing programme of monitoring and evaluation.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<b>4.A</b> Continue to fund and support the use of research on the lives of babies and young children.	<b>D.4.A.1.</b> Support the continuation and use of Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) and, in consultation with key stakeholders, explore the potential value of establishing a new birth cohort.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY  <b>Partners:</b> CSO, ESRI	Completion of main phase data collection from Cohort '08 with associated outputs.		X			Data collection from cohort '08 at age 13 was completed in 2022 and key findings will be published early in 2023. Another wave of data collection from Cohort '98 at the age of 25 will take place in 2023. A plan for GUI data collection by the Central Statistics Office up to 2030 has been agreed.
			Longer-term planning for GUI progressed.		X			DCEDIY consulted with stakeholders on the value of a new birth cohort in May 2022. Stakeholders highlighted support for its establishment in the light of significant policy and social change since Cohort '08 was recruited in 2008/9. The outcome of the consultations combined with further desk research and a scoping review of the international literature informed the development of a Memorandum to Government, and in June, Government approved its establishment. Draft questionnaire content for the first survey of parents of 9 month olds was developed by the Central Statistics Office in collaboration with the Department in 2022. A series of consultations with a wide range of stakeholders on this draft content took place September 2022, aimed at identifying priority data needs and any significant gaps. The questionnaires will be piloted in advance of main data collection planned for 2024.
			Continuation of GUI Pathfinder Project including publication of findings.		X			Data collection for GUI is transitioning to the CSO from 1 January 2023. Under this new model of delivery, the CSO will implement a programme of administrative data linkage for each wave of data collection. This will enhance the value and breadth of the study data, and replaces the need for a pathfinder project.

## Goal D

### An effective early childhood system

## Building Block 4

### A strong national infrastructure for research and data that is used to inform policy and practice alongside an ongoing programme of monitoring and evaluation.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<b>4.A</b> Continue to fund and support the use of research on the lives of babies and young children.	<b>D.4.A.2.</b> Implement the What Works Initiative to support the mainstreaming of prevention and early intervention approaches across services to children.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY	Dependent on 2020 developments  2020 milestone: Continued rollout of Learning Framework projects and activities focussing on use of data and evidence to inform shift towards prevention and early intervention services for children, young people and their families; Continued development of online platforms and hubs.  2020 update: The What Works Learning Strategy is now published on the What Works website. What Works commenced the roll out of Action Learning sets and Executive Leadership programmes to service providers and practitioners in 2020, but these were disrupted due to Covid-19, and will continue throughout 2021. In 2021 What Works has also awarded grant funding of €200,000 to community and voluntary organisations providing prevention and early intervention services for children, young people and families. Strengthening of evidence informed practice continues through a number of pilot projects focused on parenting and fostering, and What Works has supported Tusla to roll out learning events for Parent Support Champions, and the delivery of a Level 8 Certificate in Prevention, Partnership and Family Support. In October 2020, the What Works 'Festival of Learning' brought together keynote speakers and panellists with expertise prevention and early intervention as it relates to policymakers, providers and practitioners.  The What Works website has been developed and content continues to be managed and updated. The Outcomes for Children Data and Information Hub is an online interactive area based geo mapping system developed in collaboration with Tusla and with input from stakeholders across the sector. Outcomes for Children provides an intuitive web platform to visualise published data sets as they relate to children and young people. Enhancements will continue to be developed on an ongoing basis..		X			The What Works Initiative, with Dormant Accounts Funding, provides funding to 3 programmes under Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. These include scaling proven models from Area Based Childhood Interventions, expanding Early Talk Boost, and extending the Traveller Parenting Pilot Project. In 2022, the Sharing Knowledge fund provided Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) programmes with once-off grants to encourage shared learnings and best practice in PEI,
	<b>D.4.A.3.</b> Establish a First 5 research observatory to collect, organise, manage and make accessible research on babies, young children and their families across all domains of their lives.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY	Observatory is operational and periodically updated.				X	Action delayed, milestone not met.
	<b>D.4.A.4.</b> Develop a First 5 research and evaluation programme to support strategy implementation and build evidence around innovative and integrated service delivery.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY	Research Plan implemented.		X			An extensive programme of research and evaluation was undertaken throughout 2021 and 2022.
			Framework utilised to support research capacity.	X				Framework in place.

## Goal D

### An effective early childhood system

## Building Block 4

### A strong national infrastructure for research and data that is used to inform policy and practice alongside an ongoing programme of monitoring and evaluation.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
4.B Develop and enhance administrative data systems on babies, young children and their families to assess quality and support the delivery of integrated supports and services.	<b>D.4.B.1.</b> Develop and roll out administrative data systems across child health, welfare and protection, and ELC services, including the Maternal and Newborn Clinical Management System (MN-CMS) across all maternity hospital/units on a phased basis. Over time and as resources allow, extend MN-CMS to community services. This will contribute to the delivery of optimal services to mothers and babies post-natally.	<b>Lead:</b> HSE  <b>Partners:</b> DoH	Complete the rollout of Phase 2 and progress towards the rollout of Phase 3 of the implementation of the MN-CMS across additional maternity hospitals/units.				X	Phase 1 implementation of the MN-CMS was successful across four hospitals from 2016-2018, and review of same led to the Gynaecology Electronic Record was implemented at all four phase 1 sites in 2019. Plans for Phase 2 implementation are underway, with contract negotiations with vendors regarding deployment of MN-CMS to Phase 2 sites ongoing.
	<b>D.4.B.2.</b> National Immunisation Information System (NIIS) (Phase 1) and a National Child Health Information System (Phase 2) to support the delivery and integration of child health services across community, primary care and hospital services. Over time, these systems should be accessible by parents. These information systems will also facilitate documentation and analysis of outcomes data.	<b>Lead:</b> HSE  <b>Partners:</b> DoH	Phase 1 – Implementation of joint childhood immunisation records in NIIS, dependent on funding.				X	Work ongoing to assess COVAX system against NIIS requirements and decision due before end of 2022 on direction of procurement decision.

## Goal D

### An effective early childhood system

## Building Block 4

### A strong national infrastructure for research and data that is used to inform policy and practice alongside an ongoing programme of monitoring and evaluation.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<b>4.B</b> Develop and enhance administrative data systems on babies, young children and their families to assess quality and support the delivery of integrated supports and services.	<b>D.4.B.3.</b> National Childcare Information System (NCCIS) in Tusla child welfare and protection services. Over time and as resources allow, enhance NCCIS to capture data on the full breadth of Tusla's work.	<b>Lead:</b> Tusla  <b>Partner:</b> DCEDIY	The NCCIS programme further extended to improve the current system and to deliver case management solutions for PPFs and After Care services.				X	A project to replace the NCCIS system with the new Tusla Case Management System (TCM) system was successfully completed in Q1 2023. TCM provides a single integrated case management system for all Tusla Services. As of Q1 2023 TCM now supports six Tusla Services (Tusla Education Support Service (TESS), Fostering enquires, Barnahus, Child Abuse Substantiation Procedure (CASP), Birth Information and Tracing and Adoption, Child Protection & Welfare and Alternative Care). The further extension of the system for PPFs and After Care services will be completed by Q4 2023.
			Completing a digital integration with An Garda Síochána to support a secure and efficient digital notification process.			X		The Tusla Portal App is now used by An Garda Síochána and Tusla Social Work teams to electronically exchange notifications thereby replacing the previous manual paper processes.
			Enhance the Mobile Apps available to social workers to support them in all aspects of their work.			X		All Social Work staff have mobile phones with applications such as Email and Microsoft Teams for conferences, and other office applications. Further applications will be rolled out on the new phones in 2023.

## Goal D

### An effective early childhood system

## Building Block 4

### A strong national infrastructure for research and data that is used to inform policy and practice alongside an ongoing programme of monitoring and evaluation.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
4.B Develop and enhance administrative data systems on babies, young children and their families to assess quality and support the delivery of integrated supports and services.	<b>D.4.B.4.</b> An ELC Online Database to facilitate planning and development of ELC services, building on experience in developing the Primary Pupil Online Database (POD). Having regard to appropriate data protection and data sharing arrangements, this will facilitate the monitoring of children's progress as they transition from ELC through to the primary education system and onwards to post primary and beyond.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY  <b>Partner:</b> Pobal	Dependent on 2020 developments  2020 milestone: Consider the potential for an ELC database when preparing the policy paper and Heads of Bill for establishing a legal entitlement to preschool.  2020 update: This action was delayed in 2020 owing to the Covid-19 pandemic.				X	As a precursor to preparing a policy paper and Heads of Bill, a review of the ECCE programme was commissioned in 2022.
	<b>D.4.B.5.</b> Further develop the Outcomes for Children National Data Hub to ensure inclusion of relevant outcome indicators and its use in the design and delivery of services for children, young people and their families.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY  <b>Partners:</b> Tusla	Continually build data/indicators, support Tusla and users and support the publication of reports and analysis.	X				The Outcome for Children Data Hub is fully functional. Indicators are reviewed periodically and data is updated regularly.
	<b>D.4.B.6.</b> Consider, in conjunction with the relevant Government Departments, options to develop and publish more detailed current data about nature and uptake of paid and unpaid maternity, paternity and parental leave and flexible working arrangements including through analysis of Eurostat Labour Force Survey data, CSO general household surveys and other approaches.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY	Dependent on 2020 developments  2020 milestone: Agreement by CSO to include questions in one of their household surveys.  2020 update: Personal and Work-Life Balance Survey undertaken and results published. The DCEDIY liaised with the DETE and the CSO to develop a specific General Household Survey – to collect data on employees' access to and experiences of leave and flexible working arrangements in 2021.		X			Personal and Work-Life Balance 2021 was published in 2022.

## Goal D

### An effective early childhood system

## Building Block 4

### A strong national infrastructure for research and data that is used to inform policy and practice alongside an ongoing programme of monitoring and evaluation.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
4.B Develop and enhance administrative data systems on babies, young children and their families to assess quality and support the delivery of integrated supports and services.	<p><b>D.4.B.7.</b> Work with key Government Departments to assess what data relating to babies and young children is collected and in what format. Depending on the outcome, consideration will be given to the establishment of a technical group, under the BOBF Implementation Structures, tasked with making recommendations for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– the harmonisation and alignment of data collected (for example, recording children’s date of birth rather than age or age band) to allow for more effective analysis and comparison;</li> <li>– the use of appropriate markers, including disability and ethnicity markers, where relevant, and</li> <li>– the promotion of data sharing in line with the Civil Service Renewal Plan, which seeks improvements in how data is collected, managed and shared.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY</p>	<p>Dependent on 2020 developments</p> <p>2020 milestone: Key Departments contracted and data catalogue created.</p> <p>2020 update: This action was delayed in 2020 owing to the Covid-19 pandemic.</p>				X	Action delayed, milestone not met.

## Goal D

An effective early childhood system

## Building Block 4

A strong national infrastructure for research and data that is used to inform policy and practice alongside an ongoing programme of monitoring and evaluation.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<p><b>4.B</b> Develop and enhance administrative data systems on babies, young children and their families to assess quality and support the delivery of integrated supports and services.</p>	<p><b>D.4.B.8.</b> Develop rigorous approaches to capturing outcomes data of babies and young children at key development stages across child health and early learning systems. In particular, explore the potential for anonymised data from existing standardised tools to be used for analysis, e.g. Ages and Stages Questionnaire administered by Public Health Nurses at two-year check.</p>	<p><b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY</p> <p><b>Partners:</b> All relevant Government Departments</p>	<p>Explore mechanisms for data sharing.</p>					<p>See update on D.3.B.5</p>

## Goal D

### An effective early childhood system

## Building Block 4

### A strong national infrastructure for research and data that is used to inform policy and practice alongside an ongoing programme of monitoring and evaluation.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
4.C Put in place robust systems of monitoring and evaluation across Government.	<b>D.4.C.1.</b> With reference to the existing age-relevant indicators in the BOBF indicator set and the associated development of a regular reporting framework, a set of indicators for early childhood will be compiled and reported on. The possible addition of supplementary indicators relevant to First 5 will be considered.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY	Publication of updated values for the BOBF indicator set, including the publication of disaggregated values for the indicators.		X			The updated BOBF indicator set was published in early 2022, presenting the most recent data available for each of the BOBF indicators as of 2021. The Statistical Spotlight on First 5, which aims to collate available data that helps to illustrate key trends in relation to the goals and objectives of the First 5 Strategy, was published in Q4 2022.
			Reporting of data on supplementary indicators.			X		
	<b>D.4.C.2.</b> Building on and updating previous work, progress and development of a methodological approach to support and inform any wider Government response to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child concluding observations recommending that the Irish state "...include children's rights impact assessments in the framework for integrated social impact assessments to ensure that fiscal and budgetary decisions are compliant with obligations under the Convention."	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY  <b>Partner:</b> DPER	Finalise methodological approach.  Make preparations to pilot test with policy units.				X	DCEDIY is participating in a two-year project, led by the Children's Rights Alliance. The project has received funding under the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme (CERV). One aspect of the project is to explore how Child Rights Impact Assessments (CRIAs) can embed a children's rights approach, including during times of emergency. A prototype CRIA will be developed and training supports aimed at embedding children's rights. The project started in September 2022.



## Goal D

### An effective early childhood system

## Building Block 4

### A strong national infrastructure for research and data that is used to inform policy and practice alongside an ongoing programme of monitoring and evaluation.

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
4.C Put in place robust systems of monitoring and evaluation across Government.	<b>D.4.C.3.</b> Building on the EU Quality Framework for ECEC, develop a national monitoring and evaluation framework for ELC, including identification of a set of agreed indicators on the quantity, quality and targeting of provision, and regular publication of a national monitoring report.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY  <b>Partners:</b> DE	Publication of national monitoring report.			X		A national monitoring and evaluation framework for Nurturing Skills, including agreed indicators, has been developed and the first report published.
	<b>D.4.C.4.</b> Develop measurement tools to assess quality of early childhood services commencing with a tool to measure and monitor the quality of practice in ELC settings. A national baseline study using the tool will be carried out, with a view to repeat quality reviews at regular intervals to assess progress in raising quality standards.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY  <b>Partners:</b> DE	Implement baseline study.				X	Planning commenced in late 2022 for development of a single integrated quality framework to be used as the common reference point for all inspection activities and for self-evaluation by settings, reflecting the recommendations of the OECD Country Policy Review of ELC quality in Ireland published in December 2021.
			OECD Starting Strong VI and accompanying country reports published.	X				

## Goal D

An effective early childhood system

## Building Block 5

Additional public funding that is strategically invested to achieve the best outcomes for babies, young children and their families

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
5.A Increase public funding in services and supports for babies, young children and their families.	<b>D.5.A.1.</b> Increase public investment in high-quality ELC (and school-age childcare) for all babies and young children to raise the quality and address the affordability of provision for families, particularly families on low income. By 2028 the level of public investment in ELC (and school-age childcare) will be at least doubled.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY	Successful estimates campaign based on high-quality data and evidence on the need for additional investment in ELC.	X				<p>Over the course of the pandemic 2020-2022, approximately €1 billion in State supports was allocated to the ELC and SAC sector.</p> <p>Separately, Budget 2022 secured an additional €78 million for ELC and SAC (including once off funding for ELC and SAC of €37 million to bridge the gap between the end of Covid-19 supports and the introduction of a new funding scheme – Core Funding) and Budget 2023 secured €1.025 billion for ELC and SAC – achieving the First 5 investment target five years ahead of time.</p>

## Goal D

### An effective early childhood system

## Building Block 5

### Additional public funding that is strategically invested to achieve the best outcomes for babies, young children and their families

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<b>5.A</b> Increase public funding in services and supports for babies, young children and their families.	<b>D.5.A.2.</b> Deliver capital investment through the National Development Plan to develop the early childhood systems infrastructure, including ELC and school-age childcare provision, the new Children's Hospital and Urgent Care/ OPD Units, the National Maternity Hospital and the Primary Care Centre Construction Programme.	<b>Lead:</b> DoH	New Children's Hospital Phase B works (7-storey above ground works) advanced.	X				<p>Despite the obvious challenges the Covid-19 pandemic imposed, significant progress was made on the New Children's Hospital project. A significant milestone was reached in March 2021 with the 'Topping out' of the building, at St James's, with the distinctive shape of the building becoming clear. The fit out of the internal areas comprising Critical Care areas and theatres commenced in 2021, with rooms and clinical areas now discernible. 150,000 cubic metres of concrete has been poured in three years (weighing over 360,000 tonnes), 2,300 tonnes of steel structure have been erected. Over 800 windows have been installed, in addition to 17,000 square metres of glazing and 5,800 square metres of stone façade. 86,000 square metres of internal partitions have been installed to date. 2021 saw significant progress on the exterior and the major focus in 2022 is continuing the internal fit-out. This ranges from first fix in some areas, whereas others are much further progressed, with ceilings and joinery being fitted. Medical equipment and nursing stations also being installed. The demonstration spaces were completed in November 2021, giving a sense of the child and family centric facilities and services that will be available. The paediatric Outpatient and Emergency Care Centre, at Tallaght was opened in November 2021 and will accommodate up to 17,000 outpatient and 25,000 emergency care attendances per year.</p> <p>Sustainability including setting high-energy efficiency targets was a key objective in the design and planning of the new children's hospital. The hospital has secured a sustainability rating in 2021 when awarded the BREEAM Excellent design stage certification. The New Children's Hospital is one of the few Hospitals in the world to have this sustainability rating. The focus throughout 2022 and 2023 at the St James's site is the internal fit-out. The most advanced areas have finished floors, walls, ceilings and joinery, such as nursing stations, installed. Equipment is also in place. The Emergency Department, Imaging, Critical Care and Therapy areas are progressing at pace. The first clinical rooms were completed in late 2022, ready for commissioning, and the rest will follow in a scheduled manner throughout 2023.</p>

## Goal D

### An effective early childhood system

## Building Block 5

### Additional public funding that is strategically invested to achieve the best outcomes for babies, young children and their families

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
5.A Increase public funding in services and supports for babies, young children and their families.	D.5.A.2. Deliver capital investment through the National Development Plan to develop the early childhood systems infrastructure, including ELC and school-age childcare provision, the new Children's Hospital and Urgent Care/OPD Units, the National Maternity Hospital and the Primary Care Centre Construction Programme.	Lead: DoH	The National Maternity Hospital. Construction to continue.	X				<p>The capital project for the relocation of the National Maternity Hospital (NMH) to the St Vincent's University Hospital (SVUH) Campus is progressing.</p> <p>Enabling works were undertaken to prepare the site of the new NMH and de-risk the campus in advance of the construction works for the new hospital.</p> <p>These works comprised of the carpark extension and relocating some SVUH departments that were located on the proposed site of the new NMH, such as the pharmacy, and diverting utility services to other locations on the SVUH campus.</p> <p>The pharmacy and multi-storey car park extension were completed in 2021 and both are fully operational.</p> <p>A final business case for relocation of NMH has been submitted to the Department, which is now subject to technical review including the External Assurance Process for major capital projects as recently introduced by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.</p>
			Primary Care Centre Construction Programme. Construction and leasing of additional Primary Care Centres.			X		<p>At year end 2021, there were 147 Primary Care Centres in operation across the country.</p> <p>As of Q3 2022, there were 160 Primary Care Centres in operation across the country. A further 19 Primary Care Centres are currently in construction, five of which are due to become operational in Q4 2022, 12 due to become operational in 2023 and currently two are scheduled to become operational in 2024.</p>

## Goal D

### An effective early childhood system

## Building Block 5

### Additional public funding that is strategically invested to achieve the best outcomes for babies, young children and their families

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
5.B Develop more strategic approaches to funding supports for babies, young children and their families to deliver improved services.	<b>D.5.B.1.</b> In the context of a new model of parenting supports, adopt quality standards to underpin public funding of parenting supports in order to put in place a more strategic, consistent and sustainable basis for this work with a transparent framework for allocating resources.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY  <b>Partners:</b> Tusla, HSE and voluntary sector	Agreed quality standards adopted by Departments and Agencies.					See update on D.2.A.1
			Quality standards linked to funding of model of parenting supports.					
			Guidance to Departments and Agencies developed and disseminated.					
	<b>D.5.B.2.</b> In the context of the Whole-of-Government Approach to Tackling Child Poverty, continue to work to determine the optimal design of child and family income supports to maximise their effectiveness and efficiency in reducing child poverty, while improving employment incentives. Continue also to develop multi-dimensional approaches to tackling child poverty, to complement child and family income support policies.	<b>Lead:</b> DSP	Post-Budget analysis should reflect the continued strong performance of child and family income supports.	X				Recent Budgets have included measures specifically aimed at supporting families on low incomes through increases in qualified child (IQC) rates, including the introduction of separate rates for children aged under and over 12, increases in earnings disregards for One Parent Family and Jobseeker Transition payments, increases in the income thresholds for Working Family Payments, as well as an increase in the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance.

## Goal D

### An effective early childhood system

## Building Block 5

### Additional public funding that is strategically invested to achieve the best outcomes for babies, young children and their families

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<b>5.B</b> Develop more strategic approaches to funding supports for babies, young children and their families to deliver improved services.	<b>D.5.B.3.</b> Develop and introduce a new funding model for ELC (and school-age childcare) that will support improved quality of provision without compromising sustainability for providers or affordability for parents.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY	Pilot model agreed.		X			<p>On 7 December 2021, the Minister launched a report on a new funding model for Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare, entitled Partnership for the Public Good. This report was delivered by an Expert Group which was independently chaired and comprised national and international experts. The emerging recommendations of the Expert Group informed the developments introduced in Budget 2022 and Budget 2023, including the Core Funding scheme and fee freeze.</p> <p>On 15 September 2022, the Minister launched Together for Better, the new funding model for early learning and childcare. This new funding model will support delivery of ELC and SAC for the public good, for quality and affordability for children, parents and families.</p> <p>Together for Better brings together three major elements, the Early Childhood Care and Education programme, including the Access and Inclusion Model, the National Childcare Scheme and Core Funding, in line with the Employment Regulation Orders coming into effect.</p> <p>Core Funding is the new funding stream worth €259 million in full year costs for year 1 of the programme (September 2022-August 2023) to start this partnership for the public good between the State and providers. Its primary objectives are to improve quality for children, including through better pay and conditions for staff in the sector, and to improve affordability for parents as well as ensuring a stable income to providers.</p>
			IT scoping initiated.		X			
			Costed proposal developed for estimates process.		X			
			Pilot services selected and preparations to pilot underway.		X			

## Goal D

### An effective early childhood system

## Building Block 5

### Additional public funding that is strategically invested to achieve the best outcomes for babies, young children and their families

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
<b>5.B</b> Develop more strategic approaches to funding supports for babies, young children and their families to deliver improved services.	<b>D.5.B.4.</b> Further develop the compliance framework and financial guidelines to underpin public funding in ELC and SAC, with an agreed mechanism to withdraw funding from settings that do not meet contractual requirements (quality or otherwise).	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY	Implementation and review of framework.	X				The Compliance Framework has been effective in encouraging compliance with the positive sign that the vast majority of services placed on the Framework to date having rectified issues without the implementation of sanctions. Across the first 3-year cycle (2017-2020) all services were successfully removed from the Framework, mainly for improved practices with regard to attendance records and facilitation of compliance visits. For the 2021/22 programme cycle, a new iteration of the Compliance Framework was made operational. During the 2021/22 cycle, and going into the 2022/23 cycle, 10 services have been sanctioned and placed on Level 1 of the Compliance Framework due to non-rectification of NCS non-compliant outcomes. The new Compliance Framework has been strengthened by determining actions that will provide greater assurance that services placed on the Framework will receive the appropriate supports from their local CCC.

## Goal D

### An effective early childhood system

## Building Block 5

### Additional public funding that is strategically invested to achieve the best outcomes for babies, young children and their families

Strategic Action	Action	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Milestone 2021/22	Completed 2021	Completed Q2 2022	Completed Q4 2022	Delayed	Narrative on progress for 2021/22 Milestones
5.C Develop appropriate mechanisms to accurately track progress in public investment in early childhood	<b>D.5.C.1.</b> Building on previous work in this area, develop indicators to accurately identify public investment in early childhood across key spending areas and to establish the baseline against which progress can be tracked. In addition to tracking total amount of public spending in early childhood, develop and monitor additional financial and non-financial indicators (with appropriate international comparators) to track progress in the development of effective early childhood systems, e.g. proportion of (average) household income spent on ELC (and school-age childcare), child poverty targets, take-up rates of entitlements such as parental leave, rates of pay in ELC.	<b>Lead:</b> DCEDIY	Agree and publish indicator set to measure and monitor investment in early childhood.			X		On foot of a UNCRC request to implement “a tracking system for the allocation and use of resources for children throughout the budget at all levels of government”, the DCEDIY developed a pilot methodology, which is both transparent and reproducible, and applied this to one government department (DCEDIY spending in 2019). This pilot was published as an IGESS spending review in 2022. This pilot report addresses expenditure on all children from 0-18 and does not specifically address spending for 0-5 years olds. However, this is a project which could be pursued in the future drawing on the methodology developed in the pilot report.
	<b>D.5.C.2.</b> Continue to undertake Social Impact Assessments of investment in early childhood, commencing with a review of the social impact of recent changes to funding for ELC and school-age childcare.	<b>Lead:</b> All Government Departments	Papers published periodically as part of the Social Impact Assessment Series. Ongoing analysis of data available from the National Childcare Scheme including impacts of any changes to eligibility, thresholds, subsidy rates etc.	X				The 12-month review of the National Childcare Scheme was published in December 2021.



## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> *The First 5* Vision of an effective early childhood system is underpinned by theory and evidence of what works. The systemic approach is informed by the work of ZERO TO THREE, a global organisation focused on child development. ZERO TO THREE brings together researchers and clinicians from diverse disciplines, providing resources for parents, professionals and policy-makers. The body of work emphasises the need for a comprehensive and coordinated approach, with policies and programmes promoting good health, strong families and positive early learning experiences. Resources and information are available at: <https://www.zerotothree.org/>
- <sup>2</sup> Allen, G. (2011) *Early Intervention: The Next Steps*. London: HM Government.
- <sup>3</sup> Phillips, D.A., & Shonkoff, J.P. (Eds.) (2000) *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*. Washington: National Academies Press.
- <sup>4</sup> World Health Organization (WHO) (2003) *Pregnancy, Childbirth, Postpartum, and Newborn Care: A Guide for Essential Practice*. Geneva: WHO
- <sup>5</sup> National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2007) *The Science of Early Childhood Development*. Available at: <http://www.developingchild.net>
- <sup>6</sup> Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2013) *Right from the Start: Report of the Expert Advisory Group on the Early Years Strategy*. Dublin: Government Publications.
- <sup>7</sup> Hall, D.M.B. & Elliman, D. (2006) *Health for all Children (revised 4th edition)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- <sup>8</sup> Denyer, S. (2005) *Best Health for Children Revisited – Report from the National Core Child Health Programme Review Group to the Health Service Executive*. Dublin: Health Service Executive (HSE).
- <sup>9</sup> Epsing-Andersen, G. (1998) *Equal Opportunities in an Increasingly Hostile World*. Trois Lectures II. Lecture Series. Available at: [http://dcpis.upf.edu/~gosta-epsing-andersen/materials/equal\\_oportunities.pdf](http://dcpis.upf.edu/~gosta-epsing-andersen/materials/equal_oportunities.pdf).
- <sup>10</sup> Davies, C. & Ward, H. (2012) *Safeguarding Children Across Services: Message from Research*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- <sup>11</sup> Jackson, K.M. & Nazar, A.M. (2006) Breastfeeding, the Immune Response, and Long-Term Health, *Journal of the American Osteopathic Association*, Vol. 106, pp. 203-207.
- <sup>12</sup> Munro, E. (2011) *The Munro Review of Child Protection: Final Report. A Child-Centred System*. London: Department for Education.
- <sup>13</sup> Allen, G. (2011) *Early Intervention: The Next Steps*. London: HM Government.
- <sup>14</sup> Frost, J.L., Wortham, S.C., & Reifel, R.S. (2001) *Play and Child Development*. Prentice Hall: Merrill.

- <sup>15</sup> Ruhm, C.J. (2004). Parental Employment and Child Cognitive Development. *Journal of Human Resources*, 39(1), pp.155–192.
- <sup>16</sup> Merriman, B., Greene, S., Doyle, E. & McDaid, R. (2013) *Report on the Qualitative Study of Infants and Their Parents at Wave 1 (Nine Months)*. *Growing Up in Ireland: National Longitudinal Study of Children*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.
- <sup>17</sup> Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2013) *Right from the Start: Report of the Expert Advisory Group on the Early Years Strategy*. Dublin: Government Publications.
- <sup>18</sup> Russell, H., McGinnity, F., Fahey, É. & Kenny, O. (2018) *Maternal Employment and the Cost of Childcare in Ireland*. Dublin: The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI).
- <sup>19</sup> Urban, M., Vandenbroeck, M., Lazzari, A., Peeters, J., & van Laere, K. (2011) *Competence Requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care (CoRe)*. A Study for the European Commission Directorate-General for Education and Culture. London & Ghent: University of East London, University of Ghent.
- <sup>20</sup> O’Kane, M. (2016) *Transition from Pre-School to Primary School. Research Report No. 19*. Dublin: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>22</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2006) *Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care*. Paris: OECD.
- <sup>23</sup> French, G. (2007) *Children’s Early Learning and Development: A Background Paper*. Dublin: National Council for Curriculum Assessment (NCCA).
- <sup>24</sup> Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2013) *Right from the Start: Report of the Expert Advisory Group on the Early Years Strategy*. Dublin: Government Publications.



Rialtas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland