



A SECTOR IN CRISIS

YOUR VOICE MATTERS

Make sure it's heard at the upcoming local elections

Childcare professionals play a crucial role in shaping the future of our children. The Irish childcare sector is in crisis due to various factors which have led to challenges in providing quality care and education for children and retaining skilled childcare professionals. Some key aspects contributing to this crisis include:

Staff Shortages and Retention Issues: Across our sector, providers are struggling to retain and hire qualified staff. This is mainly due to poor pay and conditions meaning many qualified and passionate staff have no choice but to leave the sector for better-paying jobs with more favourable working conditions. This has led to significant staff shortages, leading to service closures, room closures, reduced hours of operation and parents having an inability to find childcare spaces. It also has an impact on:

- **Stress on existing staff** - staff shortages put additional pressure on existing colleagues, increasing the risk of burnout and further turnover
- **Reduced quality of care** - children need to be able to build strong attachments to the adults in their lives. This is fundamental to their social and emotional development. A high staff turnover impedes this.

Staff shortages are a significant challenge affecting the quality and accessibility of early childhood education. This problem has implications for childcare providers, parents, and broader economic and social outcomes.

Rising Costs and Insufficient Funding: The cost of providing quality childcare continues to rise and government funding, which is historically inadequate, fails to keep up the pace. Many people are not aware that more than 50% of our income comes from government funding. Government has a lack of understanding when it comes to operating a high-quality service. The funding provided is based on the minimum regulatory requirements when it comes to staff:child ratios and therefore does not cover the costs of ensuring we have adequate staffing to cover our colleagues' entitlements to breaks/lunches and holidays while maintaining ratios. The funding does not account for the additional staffing that is required to ensure our youngest children receive adequate care at sleep and nappy changing times. The funding also doesn't cover the costs of employer PRSI and the statutory sick pay entitlements which have recently increased to 5 paid days per year.

Fee Cap: Fees have been capped at 2019 levels. We have been unable to increase fees while dealing with rising inflation and paying 2024 prices for all costs associated with running a business.

Regulatory Challenges: Complex regulations and administrative burdens increase costs for childcare providers. The funding we receive fails to take into consideration the huge administrative burden that comes with managing public funds.

Without an increase in funding it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain financial viability while also providing high-quality childcare services and paying our colleagues what they deserve.

In essence with a huge margin squeeze and a risk of become unsustainable, we are unable to increase wages for our colleagues. The only way we can do so is with further government investment.

These issues contribute to a challenging environment for both families seeking childcare and providers trying to maintain operations.

Engaging with politicians is a crucial way to ensure your voice is heard on issues that matter to you.

Here are some important questions to ask politicians when they canvas in the upcoming local elections.

WHAT TO ASK

- What steps will you take to ensure fair wages for workers in the childcare sector?
- How will you address the staffing crisis in the childcare sector?
- What measures will you implement to retain skilled workers in the childcare sector?
- What is your plan to increase funding for childcare services?
- What will you do to simplify regulations and reduce administrative burdens on childcare providers?

