

# Irish mummies : reconciling work and family lives

Evelyn Mahon  
Fellow Emerita  
Trinity College Dublin  
[emahon@tcd.ie](mailto:emahon@tcd.ie)

# References

- The Incomplete Revolution: Development of Childcare Policy in Ireland. Evelyn Mahon and Jemimah Bailey
- In M.Kutsar and M.Kuronen (eds.) in *Local Welfare Policy Making in European Cities Springer 2015*.  
“ It is an individual choice”: experiences of highly qualified stay -at -home mothers in Dublin”,  
Simone Tappert S. and E. Mahon (2015)  
*Special Edition of Swiss Journal of Social Work Revue Suisse de travail social.pp106-126. ean Cities,(pp.149-160),Springer International Publishing Switzerland 2015*

# Dublin : FLOWS-eu project

- Objective : to see the impact of local welfare systems on women's participation in the labour force – presentation on childcare
- Dublin /Ireland in a comparative context
- Has Irish social family policy promoted
- Women's equality agenda in terms of advancing childcare provision?

# History of childcare policy

- Persistent reluctance to advance a dual – earner or a working mother model
- (i) political difficulties with *care-giver parity* model versus *adult worker* model
- (2) financial costs all seen in restricted context
- (3) tax credits constantly vetoed
- Recent focus now on child investment



*Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions*

# Barcelona objectives

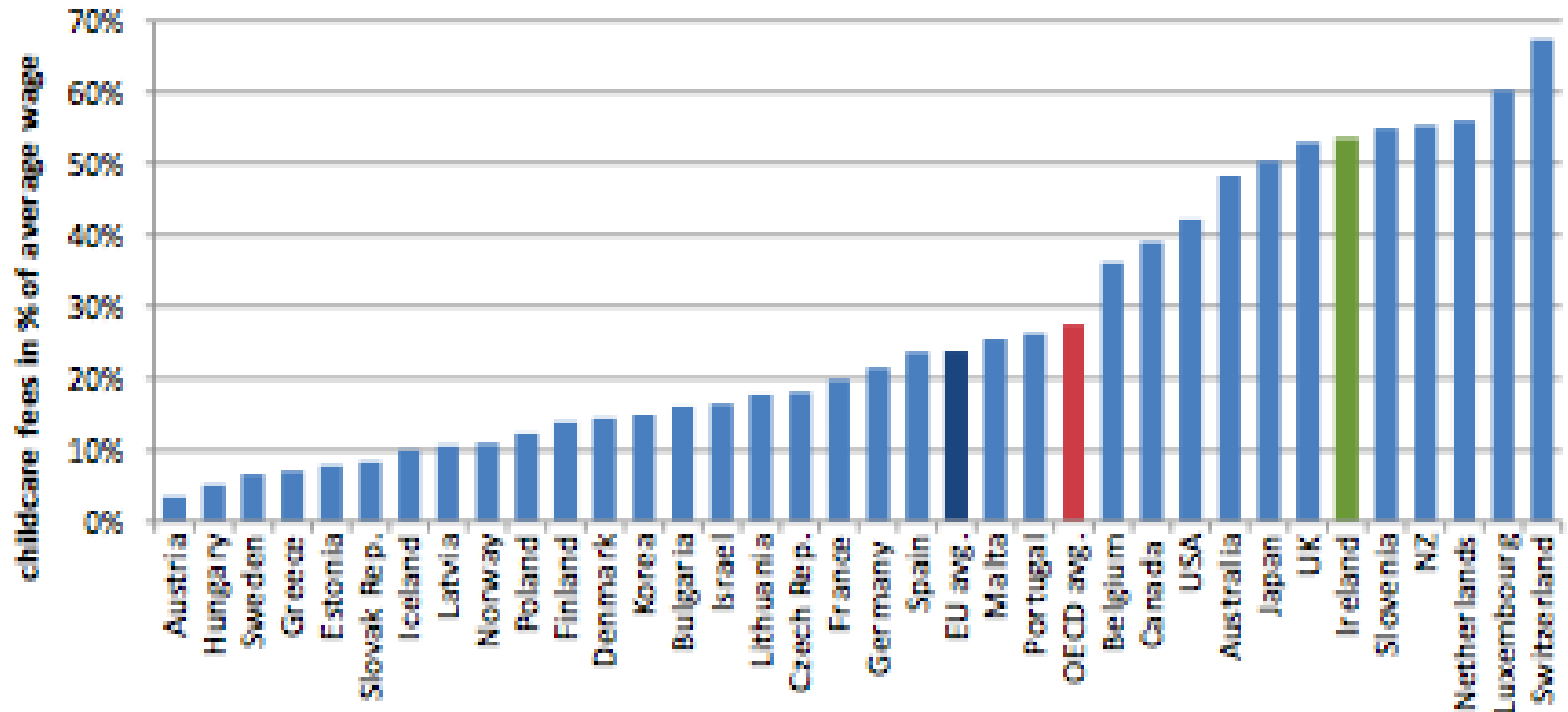
**The development of childcare facilities for young children in Europe with a view to sustainable and inclusive growth**



# Report of Inter-Departmental Working Group: Future Investment in Childcare in Ireland

*To identify and assess policies  
and future options for  
increasing the quality,  
accessibility (including supply)  
& affordability of early years  
and school-age care and  
education services in Ireland  
(22nd July 2015)*

**Figure 5: Gross childcare fees as a percentage of the average wage per two-year old attending accredited early-years care and education services (2012)**



Source: OECD Family Database, PF3.4 Childcare support

**Table 2: Mean fees by childcare service type (2014)**

	Community			Private			All		
	Avg.	Min.	Max.	Avg.	Min.	Max.	Avg.	Min.	Max.
Age <1, full-time	€165	€50	€257	€180	€115	€285	€175	€50	€285
Age 1+, full-time	€159	€40	€257	€172	€100	€267	€167	€40	€267
Part-time	€81	€25	€158	€106	€40	€183	€95	€25	€183
Sessional	€60	€20	€125	€68	€40	€150	€66	€20	€150
Breakfast Club	€25	€10	€65	€28	€10	€100	€27	€10	€100
After-school	€64	€12	€128	€85	€20	€153	€77	€12	€153

*Source: Pobal Annual Early Years Sector Survey, 2014*

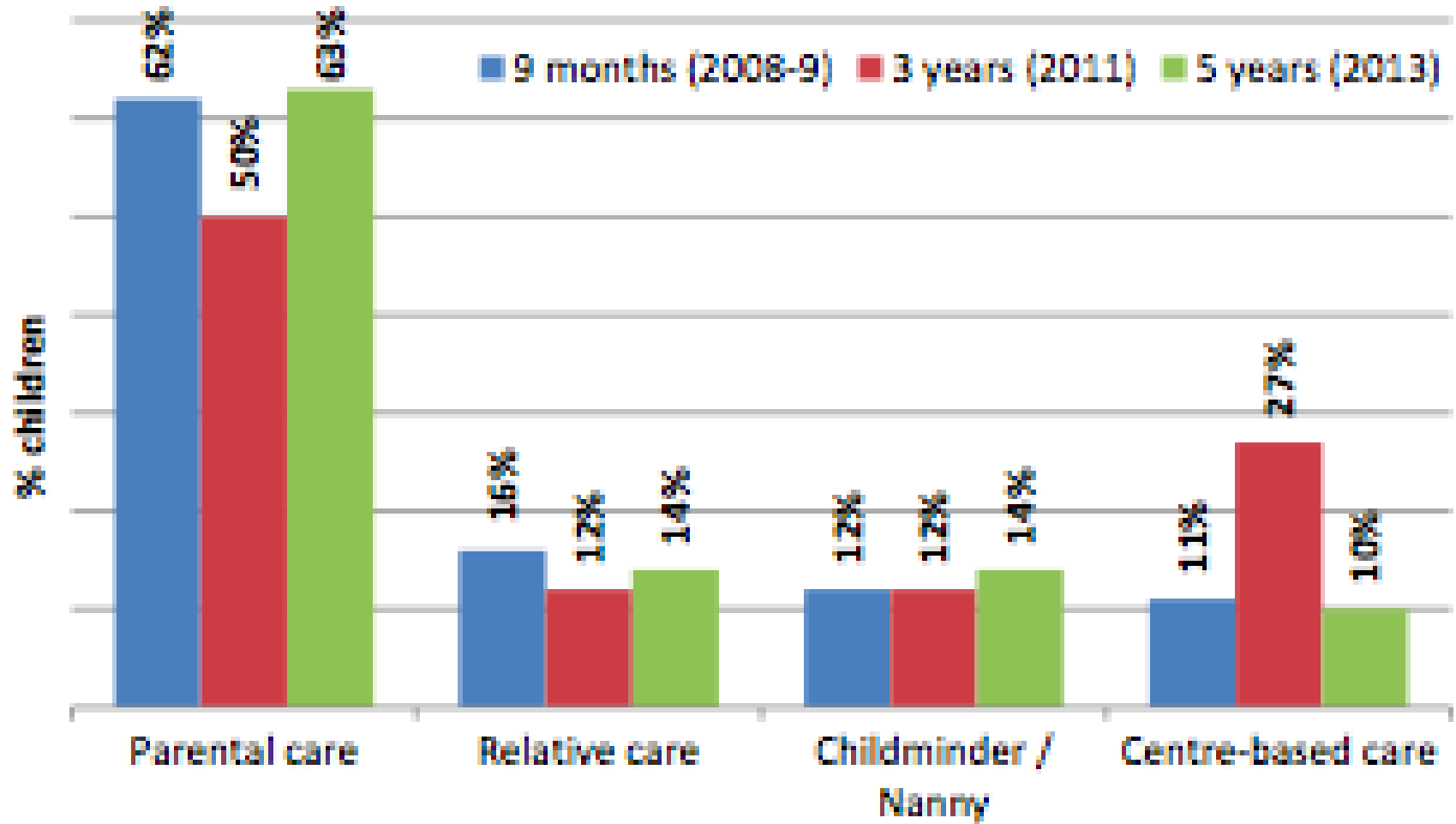


Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) data indicates that in Quarter 1 of 2015 there were 38,900 persons wanting to work but not seeking employment because *“suitable care services for children are not available or affordable”*. This suggests there is a considerable cohort of potential parents that could be potentially attracted back in to the labour force if quality and affordable childcare provisions were improved.

Across member states of the European Union, women who have pre-school children under the mandatory school age and state that they do not work or work only part-time for reasons linked to childcare, do so because childcare is either too expensive (53%), not available (25%), of insufficient quality (4%) or for other reasons (18%). Comparable figures in Ireland reveal that mothers of pre- school children do not work or work only part-time do so because childcare is either too expensive (85%) not available (8%) and, or is of insufficient quality (3% ).

IDG report on Childcare 2015

**Figure 3: Main childcare arrangements for pre-school children**



*Source: Growing Up in Ireland*

Female employment Rates in Dublin by educational level	%		
LOWEST PRIMARY	32%		
COMPLETED SECOND LEVEL	55%		
COMPLETED PLC	60%		
DEGREE	72%	78% (PG)	

INACTIVE (15-64 age) 2012		
Lowest educational level	67%	
Second level	36%	
Third level	18%	

No of children	Educational level	Employment Rate
One child	Up to Junior cert	34%
	Secondary	60
	Third level	78
Two children	Up to Junior cert	31
	Secondary	51
	Third level	72
Three Children	Up to Junior Cert	20
	Secondary	39
	Third level	61

# Current provision of public childcare

- Pre-school for 68,000 children
- CCS 25,000 in 90 centres (45m)
- CENTS 8,000 children (17ml)
- ASCC 300-500 children (1.3ml)
- CEC program ,2,000 (7.5m)
- Childcare budget 70.8 m

# FLAWS Survey of working mothers

- **68%** Mothers with children **worked full time** in both private and public sectors
- **78%** returned to **previous job after** maternity leave
- Care for children under 2 as GUI :
- fathers 42%' public creche,17% private 18% other relatives 22%)
- (Random sample but small sample size)

# Childcare for 3 year olds

- 50% looked after by father
- 16% private nursery
- 15% in public funded nursery
- 21 % others-
- by childminder
- 5% looked after by mother and father
- 1% looked after by a nanny



# Childcare by educational level

- Fathers were more likely to look after children
- in families where mother had lower levels of education
- But were relied upon by mothers from all educational backgrounds
- Half of the sample said that childcare was too expensive while 39 % did not like formal childcare for very young children.

# Working mothers –low educational level FLOWS *-focus group findings*

- Key findings
- Almost all working mothers liked their jobs
- Money was important
- Social aspects of work -friends
- Gave their children positive role models
- Only one worked full time

# Childcare

- 4 Mothers were able to avail of subsidized childcare –only one worked was full time
- One paid 980 a month for childcare
- Booked childcare places when pregnant
- Heard about supported creche from friend
- Pleased with educational quality of creches

# Constraints of current childcare

- Mothers with limited access – one session am or pm
- Mothers were restricted/ had to refuse extra work ;
- Creches did not offer additional hours if needed
- Free **ECCE scheme** is reducing net costs but
- hours are limited paying 'extra hours of care' not an option
- informal support from family members often required in addition ie. collection from creche

# Cost and access to care

- Even part time childcare was expensive
- 110 a week – for three mornings one week and two the second week – “this option only suited civil servants who job-shared” – she could not find a private creche who did mornings only
- Those who *worked nights or irregular* hours have no access to childcare facilities – suggested that hospitals and workplaces should provide childcare

# Mothers in higher educational group

- Mothers valued work : financial, social, a break from home, a different identity , an opportunity to use their professional skills ; loved the work they did and wanted to continue it,

# Childcare arrangements

- 4 of the five in this group relied on a grandparent for childminding.
- Even in the case of 2 migrant workers – their mothers had come to mind their children as creches were not affordable
- This was the case for a single mother who worked in a creche herself .(1,176 creche fees)
- Child minder was 500- 600 a week

# Costs of creche

- 950 a month for child aged 20 months
- State funded creche offered parents 3.5 hours half day for 62.50 a week ; one mother availed of it for 2 children ( she lived in a disadvantaged area.).
- Mothers helped out each other a lot with collection in community creches



# Disadvantages of creches

- What happens if child is too ill to go to creche?
- 24 hour after starting antibiotic rule
- Informal care easier when children are babies as flexibility in hours of care = mothers not under pressure to pick up etc at exact time.

# Fathers non-involvement in childcare

- Attitudes to fathers' involvement in childcare differed among this group
- Fathers were seen as the main breadwinners and mothers excused them from tasks ..
- “he works very long hours and is unpredictable”
- “I call myself a single mum as my husband works mad hours – up to 80 a week”
- “he has no parenting skills”
- “Men never see what is needed to be done ..i was frustrated and the relationship dramatically changed since we had a baby”

# Breastfeeding

- Breastfeeding was seen as letting men off the hook..
- “ I have to tell him what to do ..he is getting better at it”
- “He does not look after my child as I would ..i have to let him do it his way”
- However men did “Help”with domestic chores when they were at home ..laundry, cooking cleaning..

# Recommendations

- Extension to length of unpaid leave during which they could retain their jobs.. Some referred to leave of up to two or three years
- More government run, high quality and affordable creche provision for working mothers
- Tax allowances for mothers who employ childminders

# Reconciliation models varied

- Some mothers want to take leave while children were very young'
- Others wanted to have a *shorter working day* ;
- Or work *part time*;or work a three day week
  
- Many in the group had very young babies at time of focus group

# Any improvements?

- Childcare a private matter for most parents
- Class differences emerge between mothers
- Affordability a big issue
- Increase in access to subvented places needed
- Women's participation in the labour force is not a political issue
- Single mothers were the exception in activation policy

- Thank you ..

## Employment rate by educational level by sex

(aged 15- 64) 2015

Eurostat

	males	Female	
Low 0-2	48%	32%	
3-4	65	59	
5-8	81	78	

### Overall employment rate in Ireland 2015

Aged 20-64

Is 68.8

European average is 70.0%

Men 75.0%

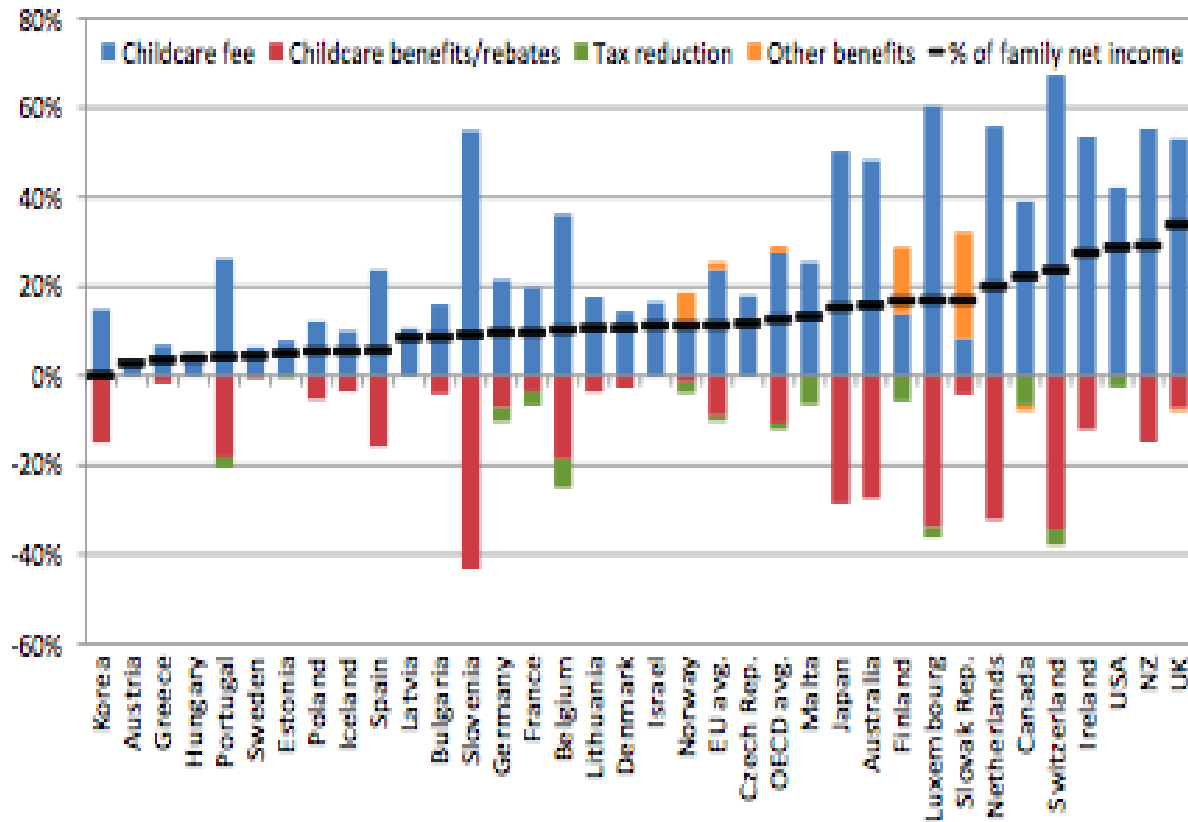
Women 63.0%

EUROSTAT

Need to investigate the impact of childcare on male employment as well as on female employment



**Figure 6: Net cost of childcare as a proportion of dual-earner family income**



Source: OECD Family Database, PF3.4 Childcare support