

# Growing Up in Ireland In Context

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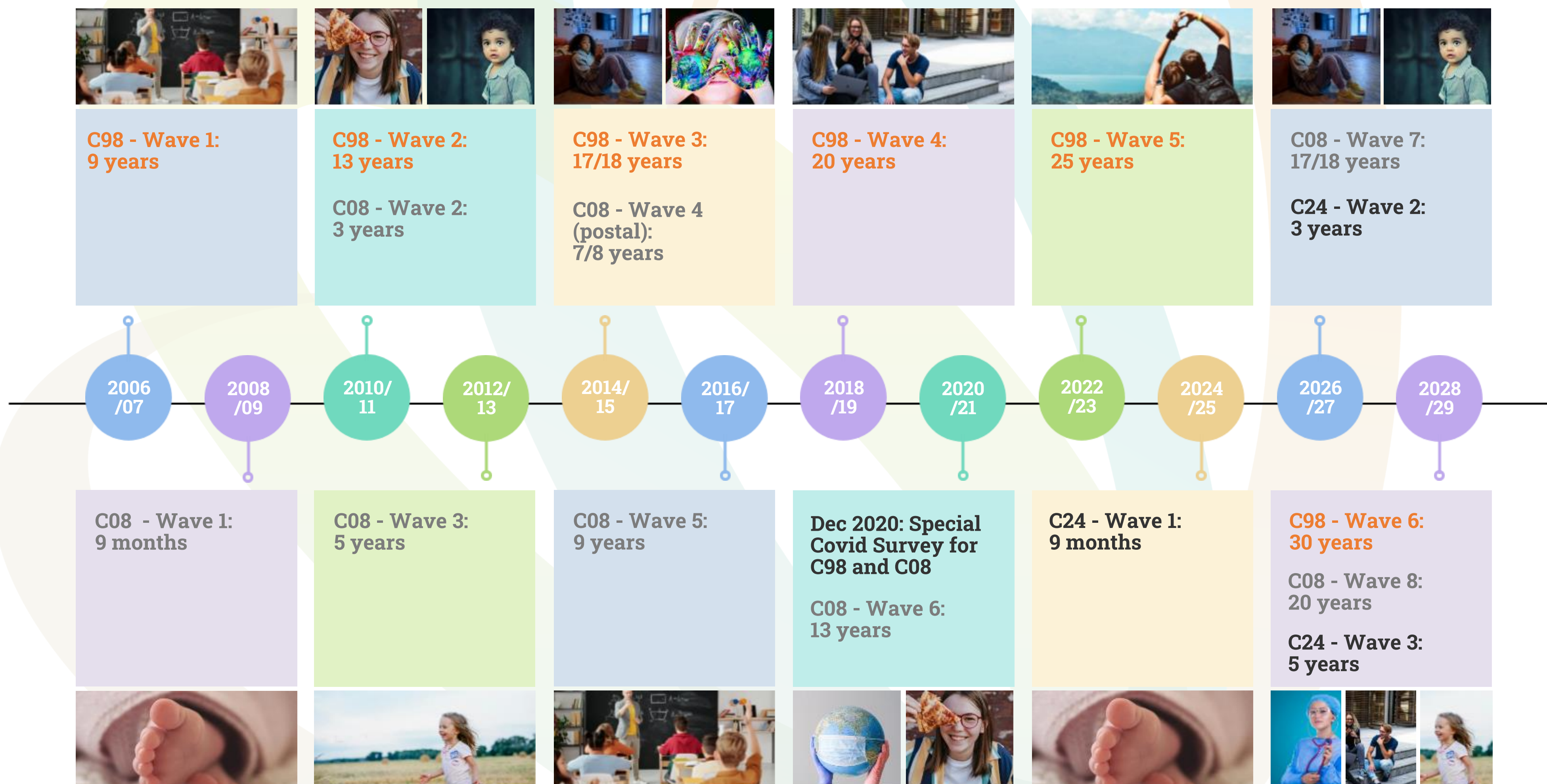
## About this report

*Growing Up in Ireland* has followed thousands of children throughout their childhood and has provided rich information on how they have developed and changed over time. At the same time, the country in which they live has undergone significant changes. This report provides an overview of the main economic and social changes since the beginning of the study. It highlights the external factors which have influenced the lives of participants of the *Growing Up in Ireland* study and their counterparts.

This report draws attention to population growth, changes in the birth rate, the composition of the population, periods of economic growth and decline, changes in health behaviours and technological change. *Growing Up in Ireland* is a valuable resource for exploring and understanding the impact of these wider changes on the lives of children and young people in Ireland. As the 1998 and 2008 cohorts enter new stages in life, we can now explore the longer-term impacts of these economic, societal and technological changes.



# Three Cohorts of GUI: Timeline



C98 = Cohort 98 C08 = Cohort 08 C24 = Cohort 24

Further information: [growingup.gov.ie](https://growingup.gov.ie)



## Life in Ireland

Although the study was commissioned in 2006, the elder cohort (Cohort 98) was born in 1998. In 1998, there were 54,000 babies born in the Republic of Ireland, an increase of slightly over 1,000 from the previous year. ([CSO](#)). In Ireland, the unemployment rate was 7.6% in 1998 ([OECD](#)) and the Irish Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at constant prices was nearly 9% higher than the same figure in 1997, while consumer spending increased by 11.4% ([CSO](#)).

This year would see the Irish economy boom, initiating a period of economic growth and prosperity known as the Celtic Tiger, which would last for nearly ten years. In February, Ireland qualified for entry into the Economic and Monetary Union of the European Union and on December 31<sup>st</sup> the value of the punt (Irish pound) was fixed to the European Currency Unit, with the punt continuing to be used until January 2002 when Ireland fully transitioned to the Euro.

## In The News at Home and Abroad

The year of 1998 was of great political significance in Ireland. In April, political parties from both the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom signed the Good Friday Agreement, a peace agreement aiming to end the Troubles in Northern Ireland via power-sharing. The agreement would be ratified by public referenda in both the north and south in May. However, just months later in August, 29 people would die following a car bomb attack carried out by the Real IRA in Omagh, County Tyrone.

Galway won the All-Ireland Senior Football Championship for the first time in 32 years, while Offaly won their 2<sup>nd</sup> hurling title in 5 years. Swimmer Michelle Smith, who won 3 gold medals at the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta, was banned from competition for four years for tampering with a drug test.

Globally, 1998 was the year of Operation “Desert Fox”, a bombing campaign on Iraq launched by the United States and the United Kingdom, as well as the year that saw the establishment of the International Criminal Court (ICC). Additionally, Google, Inc., which would go on to become the most popular web search engine, was founded in September of that year.

In relevant policy matters, the Parental Leave Act, 1998 established the entitlement to 14 weeks of unpaid leave from work to spend time looking after their children before the child’s 5<sup>th</sup> birthday ([ISB](#)).

**GDP**

Up 9% on previous year

**Unemployment**

7.6%

**Good Friday Agreement**



## Life in Ireland

The Growing Up in Ireland study was commissioned in 2006. At that time, population estimates from the previous year indicated that there were 1,027,880 children under the age of 18 living in the Republic of Ireland, with that number being evenly split between boys and girls (OMC 2006, p. 11). In 2006, there were 64,237 babies born in the Republic of Ireland, an increase of over 3,000 from the previous year ([CSO](#)).

As a percentage of the population, the child population represented 24.9% of the overall population of the state, which was substantially higher than the EU average at the time of 19.8% (OMC 2006, p.11-13). Census records indicate that just 4% of the children under 18 years of age were non-Irish nationals, with over half of that percentage answering that they were “British” or “Northern Irish” (OMC 2006, p. 19-20).

In terms of the economic landscape in 2006, the Irish economy was still in the midst of the Celtic Tiger. The unemployment rate was 4.8%, indicating that the economy was operating at near-full employment ([OECD](#)).

The Irish Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at constant prices was 6% higher than the same figure in 2005 ([CSO](#)). Consumer spending was 6.2% higher compared with the previous year ([CSO](#)). At the time, the latest statistics showed that over 13% of children aged 10-17 smoked cigarettes every week, with the vast majority of that number smoking cigarettes every day (OMC 2006, p. 152-155).

Over half of children aged 15 reported having engaged in binge drinking at least once in the last month and 40% of children aged 15 reported having used an illicit drug at least once in their life (OMC 2006, p. 162 & 167). An estimated 59% of households had a home computer ([CSO](#)).

## In The News at Home and Abroad

In Irish events, 2006 was the year of the St. Andrew’s Agreement, which resulted in the restoration of the Northern Ireland Assembly, the formation of a new Northern Ireland Executive and Sinn Féin’s support of the Police Service Northern Ireland.

In golf team Europe won their third consecutive Ryder Cup, hosted at the K Club, and in rugby Munster defeated Biarritz to win the Heineken Cup. In athletics, sprinter Derval O’Rourke won the women’s 60m hurdles at the 2006 IAAF World Indoor Championships, setting a new national record in the event.

It also saw the release of the film *The Wind That Shakes the Barley*, set in Ireland during the early 1920s.

Internationally, 2006 saw the establishment of the United Nations Human Rights Council and the celestial body Pluto stripped of its planetary status and demoted to a “dwarf planet”.

The social media platform Twitter was founded, the search engine Google purchased the video sharing platform YouTube and Japanese video game company Nintendo launched their newest console, the Nintendo Wii, which was the first console to capture users’ movement as part of the interactive gaming experience.

In relevant policy changes, the Public Health (Tobacco) Act 2002 raised the legal age for purchasing tobacco products from 16 to 18 ([ISB](#)). In 2004, the Public Health (Tobacco) Act 2004 was passed, which banned smoking in all workplaces, bars and restaurants ([HSE](#)). The Equality Act was also passed in 2004, expanding on previous legislation to set out nine characteristics that are illegal to use as grounds for discrimination ([ISB](#)). The Maternity Protection (Amendment) Act 2004 expanded maternity leave entitlement to 18 weeks from the 14 weeks set out in the original 1994 Act ([ISB](#)). A 2004 constitutional referendum passed the 27th Amendment, which removed the birthright entitlement to citizenship for anyone born in Ireland after 1 January 2005 ([Citizens Information](#)). In 2005, the government introduced the GP visit card as a means tested graduated benefit to cover the cost of visits to a general practitioner ([Oireachtas](#)).



**GDP**

Up 9% from 2005



**Unemployment**

7.6%

**Words of the year**



*‘Truthiness’ & ‘carbon neutral’*



## Life in Ireland

In 2008, fieldwork began for Wave 1 for both cohorts; the age 9 interview for Cohort '98 and the age 9 months survey for Cohort '08. Population estimates from the previous year indicated that there were 1,056,947 children under the age of 18 living in the Republic of Ireland (OMCYA 2008, p. 10). In 2008, there were 75,173 babies born in the Republic of Ireland, an increase of nearly 4,000 from the previous year. ([CSO](#)). As a percentage of the population, the child population represented 24.4% of the overall population of the state, which was again substantially higher than the EU average at the time of 19.4% (OMCYA 2008, p. 11-13). Census records indicate that 6.1% of the children under 18 years of age were non-Irish nationals, with "United Kingdom" (32%) and "Other" (23%) accounting for over half of that group (OMCYA 2008, p. 21-24).

In terms of the economic landscape in 2008, the Irish economy was being hit hard by the collapse of the Celtic Tiger. The unemployment rate was 6.8%, the highest in Ireland since 1999, having been just under 5% in 2007 ([OECD](#)). The Irish Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at constant prices was 3.0% lower than the same figure in 2007 ([CSO](#)). Consumer spending was 2.1% higher compared with the previous year, although when adjusted for price rises, consumer spending was actually 1.0% lower than 2007 ([CSO](#)). At the time, the latest statistics showed that nearly 12% of children aged 9-17 smoked cigarettes every week, with the vast majority of that number smoking cigarettes every day (OMCYA 2008, p. 128-131). Nearly 40% of children aged 15-17 reported having been drunk at least once in the last month and 29% of children aged 15-17 reported having used cannabis at least once in their life (OMCYA 2008, p. 135 & 137).

## In The News at Home and Abroad

In Irish events, the collapse of the Celtic Tiger led to the Taoiseach Bertie Ahern resigning from his role as Taoiseach, with Brian Cowen stepping into the role. The Lisbon Treaty was defeated in Ireland by a "No" vote in the Irish referendum, while an un-forecasted blizzard hit the country, leading to the heaviest snowfall in Ireland since December 2000. The Irish men's national soccer team hired Italian Giovanni Trapattoni as its new manager, while the Kilkenny men's hurling team won its third consecutive All-Ireland Senior Hurling Championship and boxer Kenny Egan won a silver in boxing at the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics.

Internationally, 2008 saw the Global Financial Crisis take hold in economies across the globe, CERN'S Large Hadron Collider opened in Switzerland and Barack Obama elected president of the United States of America, the first black individual to hold that position.

**GDP**

Down 3% from 2007

**Unemployment**

6.8%

**Words of the  
year***'bailout' &  
'credit crunch'*



## Life in Ireland

In 2011, Growing Up in Ireland completed the second wave for both birth cohorts; Cohort '98 were surveyed for their age 13 interview while Cohort '08 completed their age 3 interview. At the time, there were 1,148,687 children under the age of 18 living in the Republic of Ireland (DCYA 2012, p. 10). In 2011, there were 74,033 babies born in the Republic of Ireland, a decrease of nearly 1,000 from the previous year ([CSO](#)). As a percentage of the population, the child population represented 25% of the overall population of the state, which was again substantially higher than the EU average at the time of 19% (DCYA 2012, p. 10-13). Census records indicate that 8.3% of the children under 18 years of age were non-Irish nationals, with over one in four of those children being Polish nationals (DCYA 2012, p. 29-32). Between 2006 and 2011, the number of foreign national children in the Republic of Ireland increased by almost 50% (DCYA 2012, p. 29). These increases may coincide with the 2004 and 2007 enlargements of the European Union, which included Eastern European countries like Poland, Romania and the Baltic states.

In terms of the economic landscape in 2011, the Irish economy was still reeling from the end of the Celtic Tiger boom. The unemployment rate was 15.4% ([OECD](#)). The Irish Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at constant prices was just 1.4% higher than the same figure in 2010 ([CSO](#)). Consumer spending decreased by 0.9% compared with the previous year, although when adjusted for price rises, this number rises to a 2.4% decrease ([CSO](#)). At the time, the latest statistics showed that nearly 8% of children aged 10-17 smoked cigarettes every week, while 73.5% of children aged 10-17 had never smoked a cigarette (DCYA 2012, p. 120-124). Nearly 37% of children aged 15-17 reported having been drunk at least once in the last month and 21% of children aged 15-17 reported having used cannabis at least once in their life (DCYA 2012, p. 128 & 136).

## In The News at Home and Abroad

In Irish events, incumbent Taoiseach Brian Cowen resigned his position as leader of the Fianna Fáil party, leading to a general election following which Fine Gael's Enda Kenny was elected Taoiseach by the 31<sup>st</sup> Dáil. Michael D. Higgins was elected president while U.S. President Barack Obama visited Ireland and his ancestral home of Moneygall. In sport, the duo of Aoife Hoey and Claire Bergin became the first ever Irish bobsleigh team at the Olympics in the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver the previous year, the Irish men's national soccer team qualified for UEFA Euro 2012 in Poland and Ukraine, while Leinster won the European Rugby Heineken Cup.

Internationally, 2011 saw the global population reach 7 billion people and the Arab Spring protests, a host of anti-government protests in Tunisia that spread across the Arab world, while South Sudan seceded from Sudan following an independence referendum. A 9.1-magnitude earthquake and subsequent tsunami in Japan led to an emergency at a nuclear power plant in Fukushima, while the eruption of the Icelandic volcano Grímsvötn released a cloud of volcanic ash into the air that disrupted European air travel. The Occupy Wall Street protests were held in the U.S., developing into the Occupy movement that would spread to 82 countries, and the European Union announced an agreement to combat the European sovereign debt crisis following an emergency meeting in Brussels.

In relevant policy changes since the previous wave, the Tobacco Products (Control of Advertising, Sponsorship and Sales Promotion) (Amendment) Regulations 2009 made advertising and display of cigarettes in shops illegal, except for those that deal solely in tobacco products ([ISB](#)). In 2010, the Early Childhood Care and Education programme was introduced, a universal scheme providing one year of childcare/early education paid for by the State ([European Commission](#)). Also in 2010, the Adoption Act 2010 was passed, setting out new legislation for adoption in Ireland ([TUSLA](#)).



**GDP**

Up 1.4% from 2010



**Unemployment**

15.4%

**Words of the  
year**



*'Pragmatic' &  
'squeezed middle'*



## Life in Ireland

In 2013, Growing Up in Ireland completed the third wave for Cohort '08, the interview at age 5. The following year, there were 1,194,462 children under the age of 18 living in the Republic of Ireland. (DCYA 2014, p. 10). In 2013, there were 68,954 babies born in the Republic of Ireland, a decrease of over 2,500 from the previous year ([CSO](#)). As a percentage of the population, the child population represented 25.6% of the overall population of the state, which was again substantially higher than the EU average at the time of 18.8% (DCYA 2014, p. 11). Statistics on foreign national children had not been updated since the previous collection.

In terms of the economic landscape in 2013, the Irish economy was still in recession. The unemployment rate was 13.8% ([OECD](#)). The Irish Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at constant prices was just 0.2% higher than the same figure in 2012 ([CSO](#)). Consumer spending decreased by 1.1% compared with the previous year, although when adjusted for price rises, this number falls to a 0.8% decrease ([CSO](#)). At the time, the latest statistics showed that nearly 8% of children aged 10-17 smoked cigarettes every week, while 73.5% of children aged 10-17 had never smoked a cigarette (DCYA 2014, p. 120-124). Nearly 37% of children aged 15-17 reported having been drunk at least once in the last month and 21% of children aged 15-17 reported having used cannabis at least once in their life (DCYA 2014, p. 129 & 137).

## In The News at Home and Abroad

In Irish events, the Government announced that a constitutional referendum on same-sex marriage would be held in 2015. A Forbes magazine ranking for the best place in the world for business had Ireland in the No. 1 spot, saying it was an "extremely pro-business environment", while a United States Senate hearing declared that Ireland was a tax haven. In sport, Dublin repeated as All-Ireland Senior Football champions, while golfer Paul McGinley was named as the first Irish Ryder Cup captain and the Football Association of Ireland announced Martin O'Neill as manager of the Irish football team, with former team captain Roy Keane as his assistant. The previous year, Katie Taylor served as Irish flagbearer and won the boxing gold medal for the lightweight class at the 2012 London Summer Olympics, the first Olympics with women's boxing.

Internationally, Croatia joined the European Union, three people were killed and over 200 injured by two bombs set off at the Boston Marathon, and former CIA employee Edward Snowden leaked classified government information to news publications and fled the United States. Pope Benedict XVI became the first pope to voluntarily resign since the 13th century, with Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio of Argentina elected as his replacement, taking the name Francis and becoming the first pope from the Americas and the Southern Hemisphere.

In relevant policy changes since the previous wave, the Children's Referendum was held on a proposal to amend the constitution in 2012. The proposal passed, leading to the Constitution explicitly recognising that children have rights and committing to protecting those rights and looking after the well-being of children across a wide range of scenarios ([gov.ie](#)).

**GDP**

Up 0.2% from 2012

**Unemployment**

13.8%

**Words of the  
year***'Science' &  
'selfie'*



## Life in Ireland

In 2015, Growing Up in Ireland completed the third and fourth waves, respectively, for each birth cohort; Cohort '98 were surveyed for their age 17/18 interview while Cohort '08 completed their age 7 interview, which was a postal survey. The following year, there were 1,220,907 children under the age of 18 living in the Republic of Ireland (DCYA 2016, p. 10). In 2015, there were 65,536 babies born in the Republic of Ireland, a decrease of nearly 2,000 from the previous year ([CSO](#)). As a percentage of the population, the child population represented 26% of the overall population of the state, which was again substantially higher than the EU average at the time of 18.8% (DCYA 2016, p. 11-12). Statistics on foreign national children had not been updated since the previous collection.

In terms of the economic landscape in 2015, the Irish economy was beginning to see some recovery from the economic recession. The unemployment rate was 9.9% ([OECD](#)). The Irish Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at constant prices was 26.3% higher than the same figure in 2014 ([CSO](#)). Consumer spending increased by 5.3% compared with the previous year, and even when adjusted for price rises, this number stays at a healthy increase of 4.5% ([CSO](#)). At the time, the latest statistics showed that over 5% of children aged 10-17 smoked cigarettes every week, while over 84% of children aged 10-17 had never smoked a cigarette (DCYA 2016, p. 122-126). Nearly 21% of children aged 15-17 reported having been drunk at least once in the last month and 17% of children aged 15-17 reported having used cannabis at least once in their life (DCYA 2016, p. 131 & 139).

## In The News at Home and Abroad

In Irish events, the constitutional referendum on the 34<sup>th</sup> Amendment led to the enactment of the Marriage Act 2015. This act legalised same-sex marriage in the Republic of Ireland and was the first time that a state legalised same-sex marriage through a popular vote. The 'reasonable chastisement' excuse for smacking children was removed from legislation, effectively banning child slapping in Ireland ([Guardian](#)). The GP visit card for Under 6s was rolled out, providing free GP visits for children under the age of 6 ([HSE](#)). The rollout of Eircodes, the national postcode system, began and Bolivia's Evo Morales became the first South American head of state to visit Ireland. In sport, the Irish men's national soccer team defeated Bosnia-Herzegovina in a playoff to reach UEFA Euro 2016 in France, while the Ireland men's national field hockey team qualified for the 2016 Summer Olympics, their first Olympic Games since 1908.

Internationally, Greece became the first advanced economy to miss a payment to the International Monetary Fund in its history and the 2015 UK General Election saw the Conservative party form a majority government for the first time in 18 years. The world of science saw two significant discoveries, with gravitational waves being observed for the first time, while NASA announced that liquid water had been found on Mars. At the COP 21 summit, all countries agreed to the first global climate change pact, committing to reduce carbon emissions. OpenAI, a non-profit artificial intelligence research company, was founded.



**GDP**

Up 26.3% from 2010



**Unemployment**

9.9%

**Words of the year**



'-ism' & '😂'



## Life in Ireland

In 2017, Growing Up in Ireland completed the fifth wave for Cohort '08, completing their age 9 interview. At the time, there were 1,192,909 children under the age of 18 living in the Republic of Ireland (DCEDIY 2022, p. 7). In 2017, there were 61,824 babies born in the Republic of Ireland, a decrease of nearly 2,000 from the previous year ([CSO](#)). As a percentage of the population, the child population represented 25% of the overall population of the state, which was again substantially higher than the EU average at the time of 18% (DCEDIY 2022, p. 7). The previous year, census records indicate that 6.6% of the children under 18 years of age were non-Irish nationals, with almost 30% of those children being Polish nationals (DCEDIY 2022, p. 21-22). Between 2011 and 2016, the number of foreign national children in the Republic of Ireland decreased by 15.1% (DCEDIY 2022, p. 20).

In terms of the economic landscape in 2017, the Irish economy seemed to have emerged from the shadow of the recession. The unemployment rate was 6.8% ([OECD](#)). The Irish Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at constant prices was 7.2% higher than the same figure in 2016 ([CSO](#)). Consumer spending increased by 3.1% compared with the previous year, although when adjusted for price rises, this number falls to a 1.6% increase ([CSO](#)). Statistics on substance use for children had not been updated since the previous collection.

## In The News at Home and Abroad

In Irish events, incumbent Taoiseach Enda Kenny announced that he would step down as leader of Fine Gael, with Leo Varadkar replacing him as both party leader and Taoiseach. Sinn Féin politician Martin McGuinness announced his retirement due to health reasons, Citizens' Assembly<sup>1</sup> voted to recommend that terminations of pregnancy should be available in Ireland with "no restriction as to reasons" and the Irish state formally recognised Irish Travellers as an indigenous ethnic minority. In Dublin, the Luas began operating its Cross City tram service and the men's senior football team won its third consecutive All-Ireland Championship, while the Galway men lifted the Liam McCarthy for the first time since 1988. At the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio the previous year, sailor Annalise Murphy ended Ireland's 36-year-drought in sailing by winning the silver medal in the Laser Radial class.

Internationally, 2017 saw Donald Trump inaugurated as the 45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States, as well as the beginning of Brexit negotiations between the United Kingdom and the European Union. The U.S. government announced it would be withdrawing from the Paris Climate Agreement, while Spain and the international community refused to recognise Catalonia's declaration of independence. Disney announced that it would acquire the majority of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Fox and Nintendo launched worldwide its latest gaming device, the Nintendo Switch.

In relevant policy changes since the previous wave, the Paternity Leave and Benefit Act 2016 established the legal entitlement to 2 weeks off work for qualifying new parents ([ISB](#)).



**GDP**

Up 7.2% from 2016



**Unemployment**

6.8%

**Words of the year**



*'Feminism' & 'youthquake'*

<sup>1</sup> A Citizens' Assembly brings citizens together to discuss and consider important legal and policy issues in Ireland. The Assembly then makes recommendations and reports back to the Oireachtas (the Irish parliament). For more information visit <https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/government-in-ireland/irish-constitution-1/citizens-assembly/>



## Life in Ireland

In 2018, Growing Up in Ireland completed the fourth wave for Cohort '98, surveyed for their age 20 interview. At the time, there were 1,199,926 children under the age of 18 living in the Republic of Ireland (DCEDIY 2022, p. 7). In 2018, there were 61,022 babies born in the Republic of Ireland, a decrease of nearly 1,000 from the previous year and the tenth consecutive year that the birth rate per 1,000 people had decreased ([CSO](#)). As a percentage of the population, the child population represented just under 25% of the overall population of the state, which was again substantially higher than the EU average at the time of around 18% (DCEDIY 2022, p. 7). Statistics on foreign national children had not been updated since the previous collection.

In terms of the economic landscape in 2018, the Irish economy was thriving. The unemployment rate was 5.8% ([OECD](#)). The Irish Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at constant prices was 8.2% higher than the same figure in 2017 ([CSO](#)). Consumer spending increased by 5.3% compared with the previous year, although when adjusted for price rises, this number falls to a 3.4% increase ([CSO](#)). At the time, the latest statistics showed that under 2.5% of children aged 10-17 smoked cigarettes every week, while 89.4% of children aged 10-17 had never smoked a cigarette (DCEDIY 2022, p. 87 & 90). The percentage of children aged 15-17 that reported having been drunk at least once in the last month was 10%, 19% and 31%, respectively, and the percentage of children aged 15-17 that reported having used cannabis at least once in their life was 13%, 22% and 28%, respectively (DCEDIY 2022, p. 94 & 100).

## In The News at Home and Abroad

In Irish events, a constitutional referendum saw the ban on abortion repealed and Mary Lou McDonald was elected leader of Sinn Féin. The Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018 was passed, aiming to make the rules around admissions to schools more structured, fair and transparent ([Citizens Information](#)). The country saw heavy snowfall as it experienced a winter storm dubbed "the Beast from the East" and pubs opened on Good Friday for the first time since 1927. In August, Pope Francis visited Ireland, becoming only the second pope to visit Ireland after Pope John Paul II in 1979. In sport, the Irish women's hockey team reached the World Cup final against the Netherlands, the Irish men's rugby union team completed the Six Nations Grand Slam on Saint Patrick's Day and the Dublin men's football team lifted the Sam Maguire for the fourth consecutive year. The following year, Offaly golfer Shane Lowry won the 148th Open Championship at Royal Portrush Golf Club in County Antrim.

Internationally, 2018 saw commemorations marking the centenary of the end of the First World War. The European Union saw its General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) go into effect and Apple became the first publicly held company to reach a market capitalisation of \$1 trillion. A group of Thai boys were successfully rescued following 17 days trapped in a flooded cave, the 2018 Winter Olympics were held in Pyeongchang, South Korea and the 2018 FIFA World Cup took place in Russia.



**GDP**

Up 8.2% from 2017



**Unemployment**

5.8%

**Words of the year**



'Justice' & 'toxic'



## Life in Ireland

In 2021, Growing Up in Ireland completed the sixth wave for Cohort '08, surveyed for their age 13 interview. At the time, there were 1,191,125 children under the age of 18 living in the Republic of Ireland (DCEDIY 2022, p. 7). In 2021, there were 60,575 babies born in the Republic of Ireland, an increase of nearly 4,000 from the previous year, leading to an increase of nearly one percentage point for the birth rate per 1,000 people, which had been decreasing for over a decade. ([CSO](#)). As a percentage of the population, the child population represented just under 23.8% of the overall population of the state, which was again substantially higher than the EU average at the time of around 18% (DCEDIY 2022, p. 7). Census records indicate that in 2022, 7.3% of the children under 18 years of age were non-Irish nationals, with over one in eight of those children being Polish nationals, with the next highest percentage being Indian at 9% (DCEDIY 2024a, p. 20-23). Between 2016 and 2022, the number of foreign national children in the Republic of Ireland increased by 11.4% (DCEDIY 2024a, p. 20).

In terms of the economic landscape in 2021, the Irish economy was weathering the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic quite well. The unemployment rate was 6.3% ([OECD](#)). The Irish Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at constant prices was 13.6% higher than the same figure in 2020 ([CSO](#)). Consumer spending increased by 8.6% compared with the previous year, although when adjusted for price rises, this number falls to a 4.6% increase ([CSO](#)). Statistics on substance use for children had not been updated since the previous collection.

## In The News at Home and Abroad

In Irish events, 2021 saw the rollout of COVID-19 vaccination programmes, which helped lead to the easing of Level 5 restrictions, while fully vaccinated people began to receive their EU Digital COVID-19 Certificates. Ulster Bank announced that it would be slowly withdrawing from the Republic of Ireland in the following years and the Climate Change Advisory Council realised carbon budgets in efforts to reduce Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions by 51% by 2030. In sport, Limerick defeated Cork in the All-Ireland Senior Hurling Championship Final to repeat as champions while Tyrone won their first All-Ireland Senior Football Championship Final since 2008.

Internationally, 2021 began with supporters of outgoing U.S. President Donald Trump storming the U.S. Capitol on January 6<sup>th</sup> in an unsuccessful attempt to overturn the result of the 2020 Presidential Election. Joe Biden would be inaugurated as the 46<sup>th</sup> U.S. President later that month. In March, the container ship the Ever Given became stuck in the Suez Canal and disrupts global trade. A global minimum corporate tax rate of 15% was agreed by the G7 countries, the Taliban returned to power in Afghanistan and Einstein's theory of general relativity was confirmed after light was observed from behind a black hole. The 2020 Summer Olympics were held in Tokyo after being postponed by one year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In relevant policy changes since the previous wave, the National Childcare Scheme began in 2019 ([gov.ie](#)). The scheme provides financial support to help families with their early learning and childcare costs through both a universal subsidy that provides €2.14 per hour for a maximum of 45 hours per week as well as a means-tested subsidy for qualifying families ([NCS](#)). That same year, the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme was expanded to cover a second year of free pre-school ([gov.ie](#)). Also in 2019, the Parent's Leave and Benefit Act 2019 established the entitlement to 2 weeks parent's leave in the first two years of a child's life for qualifying parents ([ISB](#)). The Parental Leave (Amendment) Act 2019 expanded parental leave entitlements to 26 weeks of unpaid leave taken prior to the child's 12<sup>th</sup> birthday, taking effect in 2020 ([ISB](#)). In 2021, it was announced that the Junior Certificate would be fully replaced in 2022 by the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA), which added classroom-based assessments to the Junior Cycle and introduced a new grading system ([Citizens Information](#)).



**GDP**

Up 13.6% from 2020



**Unemployment**

6.3%

**Words of the year**



'Vaccine' &  
'vax'



## Life in Ireland

In 2024, Growing Up in Ireland launched the new birth cohort, Cohort '24, being surveyed at age 9 months. At the time, there were 1,232,714 children under the age of 18 living in the Republic of Ireland (DCEDIY 2024b, p. 17). In 2024, there were 54,062 babies born in the Republic of Ireland ([CSO](#)). As a percentage of the population, the child population represented just under 23% of the overall population of the state, which was again substantially higher than the EU average at the time of around 18% (DCEDIY 2024b, p. 20). Between 2006 and 2023, the average age of mothers increased from 31.0 years in 2006 ([CSO](#)) to 33.3 years in 2024 ([CSO](#)). The number of annual births fell from 64,237 in 2006 ([CSO](#)) to 54,062 in 2024 ([CSO](#)). The number of teen parents decreased from 2,362 in 2006 ([CSO](#)) to 634 in 2023 ([CSO](#)). In 2024, the unemployment rate was 4.3% ([OECD](#)); in 2023, Irish Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at constant prices was 5.5% lower than the same figure in 2022 ([CSO](#)) while consumer spending at constant prices increased by 4.8% compared to the previous year ([CSO](#)).

## In The News at Home and Abroad

In Irish events, Leo Varadkar resigned as Taoiseach and Leader of Fine Gael in March, being replaced by Simon Harris, who became the youngest ever Taoiseach. A general election was held on 29<sup>th</sup> November, seeing the lowest voter turnout in the history of the state, with the 34<sup>th</sup> Dáil meeting for the first time in December. Corkman Cillian Murphy won the Oscar for Best Actor for portraying the titular nuclear physicist in *Oppenheimer*. In sport, Ireland had its most successful Olympics medal haul at the 2024 Summer Olympics in Paris: boxer Kellie Harrington and rowing pair Fintan McCarthy and Paul O'Donovan repeated as gold medal champions in their respective events.

Internationally, the war in Ukraine continued into its 3<sup>rd</sup> year in February 2024 and Israel continued its military offensive in Gaza after the October 7<sup>th</sup> 2023 terror attack by Hamas. In July, Keir Starmer oversaw a landslide victory as the Labour party returned to power after 14 years following the 2024 UK General Election. In November, Donald Trump, just months after surviving an assassination attempt, defeated incumbent-Vice President Kamala Harris in the 2024 US Presidential Election to return to the White House after four years.

Between 2006 and 2024, Ireland has had two presidents, Mary McAleese, who began in 1997, and Michael D. Higgins, who replaced President McAleese in 2011. There were five general elections (2007, 2011, 2016, 2020 and 2024) and six Taoiseachs: Bertie Ahern, Brian Cowen, Enda Kenny, Leo Varadkar, Micheál Martin and Simon Harris.

In relevant policy changes in 2024, the parent's leave entitlement increased from 7 weeks to 9 weeks beginning in August 2024 ([Citizens Information](#)). The Gambling Regulatory Authority of Ireland was established under the Gambling Regulation Act 2024, with the body responsible for the licensing and regulation of gambling services in Ireland ([Citizens Information](#)). In relevant policy changes since the previous wave, in 2023 the government committed to provide a publicly-funded model of care for fertility treatment by offering one full cycle of IVF or ICSI treatment to eligible patients ([gov.ie](#)). Also in 2023, the government expanded the free GP visit card to include 6- and 7-year-olds ([Citizens Information](#)).

**GDP**

Down 5.5% from 2022\*

**Unemployment**

4.3%

**Words of the  
year**'polarisation' &  
'brain rot'



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