



# Early Years

Affordable Quality Accessible

*Early Years – paid parental leave and childcare – is one of the big themes of the 2016 General Election, and all political parties have made commitments in the area. Here's a summary of what we believe the next government should do, and how the political parties' manifestos<sup>2</sup> measure up.*



## Early Years #GE16

*All parties have included Early Years in their election manifesto. Some have put children at the centre of their policy, others haven't.*

*Worth bearing in mind, when we get the chance to vote on Friday.*

Party	26 weeks extra paid family leave	Subsidised childcare places (not tax credits)	Link funding to quality	Cap prices	Invest in quality	Regulate and include childminders
Fianna Fáil	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗
Fine Gael	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗
Labour	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Renua	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Sinn Féin	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
Social Democrats	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗

# Affordable, Quality, Accessible Childcare

*Irish parents pay some of the highest childcare costs in the world, without any guarantee of quality for their children.*

*The vast majority of childminders are not subject to any regulation.*

## What should the next Government do?

1. Develop subsidised quality childcare places
2. Link funding to quality
3. Cap prices
4. Invest in quality
5. Regulate childminders and include them within subsidised childcare plans

## What do the politicians say?

All parties have plans to make childcare more affordable. Approaches differ, however. Fianna Fáil and Renua have called for tax relief for childcare costs, despite the international evidence that tax relief doesn't work. Other parties have focused on subsidised childcare (Fine Gael, Social Democrats, Labour, Sinn Féin) with most of those also proposing to cap fees for parents (Labour, Sinn Féin, Social Democrats).

Most parties have promised to support the professionalisation of the early years workforce, with several committing to introduce salary scales (Fianna Fáil, Labour, Sinn Féin). Most parties have also made commitments to invest in quality and some have committed to the regulation of childminders (Labour).

Parties have tried to ensure accessibility, through a range of proposals, investing in infrastructure (Renua), forward planning for early years services (Labour) and to open public funding to childminders (Labour).

Some parties have further commitments in their childcare policies – here, we only look at the manifestos.

<sup>1</sup> We include any political party that had 3 or more seats at the dissolution of the 31st Dáil, or has more than 5% in opinion polls. As the AAA-PBP didn't issue a manifesto (they did issue a 'Common Principles' document) we've not included them in our analysis.

<sup>2</sup> We have only detailed what are included in the manifestos. Some parties (Labour and Sinn Féin) published more detailed plans during the election campaign. Others (Fianna Fáil and ReNua) had previously published policy documents.





## Affordable



## Quality



## Accessible

<b>Fianna Fáil</b>	Tax credit worth up to €2,000 on average income and €5,000 on low income. Extend ECCE from 38 to 42 weeks.	Professional Development Fund, agreed salary scale, roll out Síolta & Aistear.	
<b>Fine Gael</b>	€2,000 subsidy, for 9-36 month olds. Continue to expand targeted supports to low-income families.	Continue to strengthen regulations, further develop Better Start, supporting services to enhance quality. Expand inspectorates. Phased programme of reforms for childminders.	
<b>Labour</b>	Fees capped at €170 per week, reducing to €80 per week with lower fees for low-income families.	Funding conditional on basic quality, increased funding for higher qualifications. Paid non-contact time. Sector-wide agreement on pay and conditions – funded graduate salaries (33% in 5 years). Regulate childminders. Unified early years inspectorate. Expansion of Better Start.	Open funding schemes to registered childminders. Forward planning for publicly funded provision. School meals programme to include pre-school settings
<b>Renua</b>	Tax relief (parents & crèche operators to share). Use CE workers to keep costs low.	Minimum standards for instructors. Stronger oversight.	Network of community crèches to provide affordable childcare
<b>Sinn Féin</b>	Fees capped at €180 per week reducing to €150 per week. Open CCS to all services.	Professionalisation - review and increase capitation linked to salary scales. 60% graduates by 2025. Paid non-contact time. Roll-out Síolta and Aistear. Extend the Learner Fund. Increase inspectorate.	1,000 additional SNA's
<b>Social Democrats</b>	Cap fees for parents. Extend subsidised places for low-income families in all areas	Higher capitation, link funding to higher quality. Full economic review of the cost of quality childcare. Introduce proper career structure.	



# Family leave

*Children do better when cared for at home until at least their 1st birthday, Irish family leave policies don't support this.*

## What should the next Government do?

1. Introduce 26 weeks' paid parental leave – open to either parent – at the end of the paid maternity leave.
2. Support the sharing of care through reserving at least 1 month of paid parental leave as a 'father's quota'.

## What do the politicians say?

Most parties are calling for an extension to paid leave. Both Sinn Féin and the Social Democrats have committed to 26 weeks' paid parental leave. Others to shorter leave: Labour 13 weeks, Fine Gael 8 weeks, and Fianna Fáil 4 weeks.

The Social Democrats have proposed legislation to guarantee flexible work options for parents. Labour has promised an additional 2 weeks' paternity leave. Renua has only committed to allowing the existing leave entitlement to be shared between parents.

Party	Additional Paid Leave (Wks)	Shareable?	Father's Quota?
Fianna Fáil	4	✓	
Fine Gael	8	✓	
Labour	15 (13+2)	✓	✓
Renua	0	N/A	N/A
Sinn Féin	26	✓	
Social Democrats	26	✓	

## Spending plans

*Ireland currently invests less than 0.2% GDP in early years services each year. We are calling on parties to raise investment to the OECD average (0.8% GDP) by 2021, and to achieve the UNICEF benchmark of 1% GDP within 10 years*

Fianna Fáil	€314m
Fine Gael	€144m
Labour	€867m
Renua	€500m €1bn capital
Sinn Féin	€858m
Social Democrats	?