

INTRODUCTION

This is Ireland's second *State of the Nation's Children* report. The aim of the report is to:

- chart the well-being of children in Ireland;
- track changes over time;
- benchmark progress in Ireland relative to other countries;
- highlight policy issues arising.

OUTLINE OF REPORT

This *State of the Nation's Children* report is presented in four sections, as follows:

- **Part 1: Socio-demographics:** This section provides information on the child population, child mortality, non-Irish national children, family structure, parental educational level and Traveller children. It also includes a new indicator on children's ethnicity. Data are largely drawn from Vital Statistics, the Census of Population and Population Estimates.
- **Part 2: Children's relationships:** This section provides information on children's relationships with their parents and peers, including levels of reported bullying and children's friendships. Data are drawn from the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) surveys and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) surveys.
- **Part 3: Children's outcomes:** This section provides information on children's health outcomes, educational outcomes, and social, emotional and behavioural outcomes, including, for example, use of tobacco, alcohol and drugs, teenage pregnancy, chronic health conditions, educational attainment and reported levels of happiness. Data are drawn from the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) surveys, the National Intellectual Disability Database, the National Physical and Sensory Disability Database and the National Perinatal Reporting System, among others.
- **Part 4: Formal and informal supports:** This section provides information on a range of supports, including school, housing, antenatal care, immunisation and levels of economic security, including consistent poverty and 'at risk of poverty'. Data are drawn from the European Union Survey of Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC), Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) surveys, National Perinatal Reporting System, Vital Statistics and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) surveys, among others.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS

Data developments to support indicators

Since the publication of the last *State of the Nation's Children* report, work has taken place to create data to construct 4 indicators from the National Set of Child Well-Being Indicators (Hanafin and Brooks, 2005) for which there was no available data for the 2006 report. Progress on this work is set out below.

Indicator	Progress to date
Pets and animals	The Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) Survey has piloted, tested and collected information on pets and animals. Data on pets and animal ownership among children are reported on in this <i>State of the Nation's Children</i> report.
Nutritional outcomes	The Department of Health and Children and the Health Service Executive have commissioned the Surveillance of Obesity in Irish School Children. This is a WHO-led project and, as part of a pan-European initiative, will allow for intercountry comparisons within the WHO European Region. Its objective is to measure (i) weight, height, body mass index (BMI), waist and hip circumference; and (ii) prevalence of underweight, healthy weight, overweight and obesity levels, as well as mean BMI of primary school children. Data on nutritional outcomes, specifically BMI, will be available in the next <i>State of the Nation's Children</i> report.
Quality of early childhood care and education	The OMCYA has worked with the Central Statistics Office to identify a question for inclusion in the next Childcare Module of the European Consumer Household Panel Survey. Data on the quality of early childhood care and education will be available in the next <i>State of the Nation's Children</i> report.
Values and respect	The OMCYA is working with the Health Promotion Research Centre, National University of Ireland, Galway, to identify a question for inclusion in the next Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) Survey.

New indicator on ethnicity

This *State of the Nation's Children* report includes a new indicator on ethnicity, which draws on data from the Census of the Population 2006.

Proxy indicators on alcohol and drug use

Since the data from the European Schools Project on Alcohol and Drugs (ESPAD) has not yet been published, proxy indicators on alcohol and drug use have been selected for use in this *State of the Nation's Children* report. These indicators, which are drawn on data from the HBSC Survey, are presented below.

Alcohol use	<p>From: The percentage of children aged 15 who report to have had 5 or more alcoholic drinks in a row at least once in the last 30 days (ESPAD).</p> <p>To: The percentage of children aged 10-17 who report to have been drunk at least once in the last 30 days (HBSC).</p>
Drug use	<p>From: The percentage of children aged 15 who report having used any illicit drugs in their lifetime (ESPAD).</p> <p>To: The percentage of children aged 10-17 who report having taken cannabis at least once in their lifetime (HBSC).</p>

New data on middle childhood

Since the publication of the last *State of the Nation's Children* report, work has taken place to improve data on the middle childhood period.

The Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) Survey is a WHO cross-national study of children's health behaviours, attitudes, perceptions and the contexts of children's health (including family life, school, relationships with peers and the local community). The Irish HBSC Survey has been funded every 4 years by the Department of Health and Children and is led by the Health Promotion Research Centre, National University of Ireland, Galway. In general, data are collected from children aged 11-17. Additional funding, however, was provided in the 2006 Irish survey to collect data from children aged 9 upwards with a view to enhancing the information available about the middle childhood period. These data are presented in this *State of the Nation's Children* report.

Understandings about the middle childhood period will be greatly augmented by the National Longitudinal Study of Children in Ireland currently underway, entitled *Growing Up in Ireland*. This study commenced in May 2007 and will take place over a 7-year period. It will follow the progress and monitor the development of 18,000 children in two groups – a 9-month-old infant cohort of 10,000 and a 9-year-old cohort of 8,000 children – yielding important information about each significant transition throughout their young lives (*for further details, see www.growingup.ie*). Over the course of the 7 years, two data sweeps with each group will be undertaken: the first data sweep of the 9-year-old cohort has been completed and work is about to commence on the collection of data for the 9-month-old infant cohort.

The main aim of the study is to paint a full picture of how children in Ireland are developing in the current social, economic and cultural environment. This information will be used to assist in policy formation and in the provision of services that will ensure all children will have the best possible start in life. The study is funded by the Department of Health and Children through

the OMCYA, in association with the Department of Social and Family Affairs and the Central Statistics Office. The OMCYA is overseeing and managing the study, which is being carried out by a consortium of researchers led by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and Trinity College Dublin.

Updates not available

In this *State of the Nation's Children* report, it has been possible to provide updated data for the majority of indicators. However, in some cases, no updates were available (*see below*). Instead, the latest data for these indicators, previously published, are included in this report:

- **Availability of housing for families with children:** The number of children in families on a local authority housing waiting list.
- **Enrolment in early childhood care and education:** The percentage of children under 13 in various early childhood care and education arrangements.
- **Attendance at school:** The percentage of children who are absent from school for 20 days or more in the school year.
- **Screening for growth and development:** The percentage uptake of developmental screening at 7-9 months.

IMPROVING INFORMATION

National Data Strategy on Children's Lives

There is recognition that additional development of information, knowledge and understanding of children's lives is required, particularly for setting out a strategic approach. Within the recent social partnership agreement *Towards 2016* (Department of the Taoiseach, 2006), there is an explicit commitment to the development of a National Data Strategy on Children's Lives and this is being led by the OMCYA. Other Government departments are also in the process of developing data strategies for their own departments, many of which will include information on children. Some have already done so, for example, the Department of Education and Science published its *Data Strategy 2008-2010* earlier this year.

The aim of the National Data Strategy on Children's Lives will be to set out an overarching strategic roadmap for the identification, collection, compilation and dissemination of data, which will facilitate the utilisation of good quality, easily accessible, internationally comparable information about children in Ireland and ultimately improve the lives of all children in Ireland. A multi-phase approach is being adopted to the development of the National Data Strategy on Children's Lives and includes the following components:

- background review of the literature on key issues (in association with the Health Promotion Research Centre, NUIG);
- description and analysis of current data available on children's lives in Ireland;
- identification of data gaps to meet current and future data needs;

- in-depth examination of data usage in practice (in association with the Health Promotion Research Centre, NUIG);
- consultation with key stakeholders, including children and young people.

The National Data Strategy will also incorporate elements of the OMCYA-led knowledge management strategy, which will identify practical actions for HSE front-line practitioners and managers to take in order to better access and use information and knowledge around the area of child welfare and protection.

Research and information database

The website www.childrensdatabase.ie was created by the OMCYA to provide access to research and information on children for policy-makers, Government departments, academics, voluntary organisations and the general public. The website comprises:

- Irish Government policy documents;
- annotated websites, including a collection of databases, specialist libraries, Irish, European and international resources, including, for example, e-journals, data sources, libraries and information gateways, Policy Documents Database and National, European and International Children's Observatories, Documentation Centres and Research Dissemination Units.

This *State of the Nation's Children* report will be made available in an accessible format on the website www.childrensdatabase.ie.

HealthStat and HealthAtlas

Other recent and ongoing developments within the Health Service Executive (HSE) will also make a substantial contribution to improving information about children's lives. Two of the most significant developments are HealthStat and HealthAtlas. HealthStat is an integrated statistical system that draws from a comprehensive pool of internal and external data within the HSE. Although its overall purpose is to support continuous improvements in the HSE services, so that the right care is delivered by the right people at the right time and in the right place, undoubtedly information arising from it will assist in deepening our understanding of children's lives.

This is also the case with HealthAtlas, which exploits the potential of integrating geographical information system technologies, health datasets (e.g. Vital Statistics, Hospital In-Patient Enquiry, National Perinatal Reporting System) and statistical computations in a web-enabled and open source environment. This will provide role-based access to 'health mapping' across the sector in support of service planning, epidemiology, emergency responding and research. Seed funding for this development was provided by the Health Research Board and the Health Protection Surveillance Centre of the HSE.

CONCLUSIONS

This *State of the Nation's Children* report presents an update on the well-being of children in Ireland since 2006 and is based on the National Set of Child Well-Being Indicators. Some limitations set out in the 2006 report have been addressed and progress has been made on, for example, reporting on the indicators drawn from the HBSC Survey to provide a better understanding of the middle childhood period. Similarly, it has been possible to present data here on one previously unavailable indicator, i.e. pets and animals. A small number of other indicators (nutritional outcomes; quality of early childhood care and education; and values and respect) are being developed for the next *State of the Nation's Children* report.

A number of important developments on improving data on children's lives have taken place over the last few years, including the National Longitudinal Study of Children, *Growing Up in Ireland*; the research and information database, www.childrensdatabase.ie; HealthStat and HealthAtlas. It is accepted, however, that a more strategic approach to the development of good information on children's lives is necessary. A commitment to developing a National Data Strategy on Children's Lives was given in *Towards 2016* and this is now underway, being led by the OMCYA.

References

- Department of Education and Science (2008) *Data Strategy 2008-2010*. Dublin: Department of Education and Science.
- Department of the Taoiseach (2006) *Towards 2016: Ten-year Framework Social Partnership Agreement 2006-2015*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.
- Growing up in Ireland: National Longitudinal Study of Children*. Available at: www.growingup.ie
- Hanafin, S. and Brooks, A.M. (2005) *Report on the development of a National Set of Child Well-being Indicators*, National Children's Office. Dublin: The Stationery Office.
- OMC (2006) *State of the Nation's Children: Ireland 2006*, Office of the Minister for Children. Dublin: The Stationery Office. Available at: www.childrensdatabase.ie OR www.omc.gov.ie