Report on Childcare Availability in County Kerry

Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School Age Childcare (SAC)

Kerry County Childcare Committee

County-level childcare supply, capacity, and planning evidence report

Prepared for: Kerry County Childcare Committee
Geographic scope: County Kerry electoral areas
Data focus: ELC and SAC services, places, youngest ages catered for, vacancies, population context, and operating patterns.
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Executive Summary

- As of 1 April 2026, Kerry has approximately **175** registered childcare services: **51** community-based services, **115** private services and **9** registered childminders. Provision is concentrated in **Tralee (41** services**)**, while **Castleisland (21** services**)** has the lowest recorded service count.
- The overall service mix is weighted toward combined and school-age provision (notably **Full Day (FDC) with School Aged Childcare (SAC)** and **SAC Only**), while infant and toddler provision is comparatively limited.
- Countywide, services catering for the youngest ages are fewer: **34** services cater for **under 1s** and **18** cater for **children over 1 year**, compared with **24** catering for **children over 2 years**, **51** catering for **ECCE-eligible children**, and **48** catering for **school-age children**.
- The Kerry CCC November 2025 vacancy snapshot shows very limited full day care spare capacity for younger children, with **5** vacant under-1 places and **7** vacant 1–2 places available county wide. Recorded vacancies are higher for children aged 2 years/pre-ECCE (**47**) and ECCE-eligible children (**106**), but these figures should be interpreted alongside service type, location, opening hours, and staffing capacity. A vacant place in one age band or area may not translate into practical availability for a family seeking care in another locality or for a different age cohort.
- Workforce constraints can further tighten **0–2** availability: because infant/toddler rooms require higher staffing ratios, small staffing shocks can reduce **usable** capacity (e.g., reduced hours or temporary room closures) even when registered places are unchanged.
- Many services operate for long weeks and long hours (e.g., Tralee has **23** services open over **46** weeks and **22** services offering **over 40** hours per week), supporting working families—however this does not necessarily translate into infant-place availability.
- Pobal's Annual Early Years Sector Profile (AEYSP) **2024/25** provides additional context on utilisation, vacancies and waiting lists in Kerry and should be read alongside the point-in-time vacancy snapshot and the service-count tables in this report.
- **151** services connect families to the National Childcare Scheme, supporting **6,423** children in Kerry, while **3,158** children participate in the ECCE preschool programme. Equal Start supports **32** services and approximately **253** children receive additional support under AIM (Access and Inclusion Model)
- Service-provider details referenced in the report were cross-checked using the **National Childcare Scheme (NCS) Childcare Search**; listings can change over time as services update their details or the programmes they offer.

Source note: Executive Summary figures are drawn primarily from Kerry CCC tables compiled from Tusla ELC and SAC registration data and the Kerry CCC November 2025 vacancy snapshot. Pobal AEYSP 2024/25 and the NCS Childcare Search are referenced where stated.

Kerry County Childcare Committee

Childcare Availability
in County Kerry: Key Findings

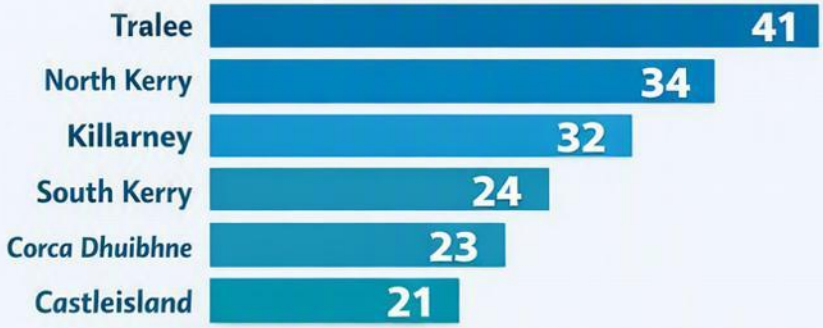
175 Registered Childcare Services

51 Community Providers

115 Private Providers

9 Registered Childminders

Services by Electoral Area



Countywide Indicative Places

9,164 Total Places

3,559 FDC **3,858** SAC **1,075** Sessional **618** Part-Time **54** Childminder Places

Youngest Ages Catered For

- **Under 1:** 34 Services
- **Over 1:** 18 Services
- **Over 2:** 24 Services
- **School Age:** 48 Services
- **Over 1:** 18 Services
- **Over 2:** 24 Services
- **ECCE Eligible:** 51 Services

Vacancy Pressure: November 2025 Snapshot

- Only **5** Vacant **0–1** Places
- **7** Vacant **1–2** Places
- **47** Vacant 2 Years / Pre-ECCE
- **106** ECCE Eligible Vacancies

0–2 Capacity is the Main Pressure Point;
Childcare Should Be Planned as Essential Enabling Infrastructure.

Introduction

This report analyses the availability of Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School Age Childcare (SAC) services across County Kerry, using tables for the six electoral areas: Castleisland, Corca Dhuibhne, Killarney, North Kerry, South Kerry, and Tralee. It summarises service distribution, service-type mix, indicative place capacity, youngest ages catered for, vacancies recorded in November 2025, and operating patterns by weeks open and weekly hours. Because childcare capacity and vacancy data can change due to demographics, service adjustments, staffing conditions and family needs, the figures should be interpreted as a point-in-time evidence base rather than a fixed measure of long-term availability.

For the purposes of this report, full day care refers to childcare services operating for more than five hours per day, typically supporting children across the working day. Part-time care covers provision for more than three and a half hours but less than five hours per day. Sessional care provides early learning and childcare for up to three and a half hours per session, usually once or twice daily, and is commonly associated with preschool-aged children attending ECCE. The Early Childhood Care and Education Programme (ECCE) is a free, universal two-year preschool programme funded by the Department of Children, Disability and Equality, available to children within the eligible age range before starting primary school. School Age Childcare (SAC) caters for children attending school and provides care before and/or after school hours and during school holidays.

Approach and Data Requirements

A robust assessment of childcare provision should triangulate **capacity** (services and places), **demand** (child population), and **availability** (vacancies), alongside the wider planning context that shapes where and how provision can be delivered. The key datasets below summarise what is required and how it is interpreted in this report.

- **Capacity (supply):** number of Tusla-registered services, service types (full day, part time/session, ECCE, SAC, combined models, childminders), and indicative places by age cohort and opening pattern (weeks/hours). This is used to assess whether provision matches working patterns and whether under-3 places are available.
- **Demand:** child population by age cohort (0–3, 4–6, 7–12) and local growth drivers (housing delivery, employment/commuting). This is used to identify where demand is likely highest and to apply planning benchmarks where relevant.
- **Vacancies (availability at a point in time):** vacant places by cohort and place type. Low vacancies—especially for 0–2—often indicate structural constraint rather than short-term fluctuation.
- **Planning and delivery context:** housing, schools, transport/access, workforce sustainability, and the regulatory/funding environment (including Universal Design and capital funding). This is used to translate evidence into deliverable actions.

The tables should be read as planning evidence rather than as a live availability register. Service counts, registered places, and vacancies can change as services adjust rooms, staffing, opening hours, and

age profiles. The figures are therefore most useful for identifying broad patterns, pressure points, and areas for further local verification.

1. Distribution of Services by Electoral Area

Table 1. Provider types in County Kerry.

Provider types	Number of providers
Registered Childminders	9
Community Providers	51
Private Providers	115
Total	**175**



As of 1 April 2026, County Kerry has **175** registered childcare services, comprising **51** community-based services, **115** privately owned and operated services, and **9** registered childminders. This represents a diverse provider mix across the county and reflects a notable increase in registered childminders from **1** in August 2025 to **9** by April 2026. Service availability is concentrated in **Tralee (41)** and **North Kerry (34)**, while **Castleisland (21)** and **Corca Dhuibhne (23)** have the lowest numbers of services. This uneven distribution can indicate potential access pressure in areas with fewer providers, particularly where travel distances are greater and alternative provision is limited.

The expansion of School Age Childcare is also notable. In 2025, **18** new standalone SAC services began operating in Kerry to support families with before- and after-school care, with a further **2** added in 2026 (up to 1st April 2026). In addition, **151** services connect parents to the National Childcare Scheme (NCS). Currently, **6,423** children in Kerry benefit from NCS support, including approximately **3,334** receiving a universal subsidy, approximately **2,844** receiving an income-assessed subsidy and approximately **246** receiving a sponsored subsidy. Kerry also has **3,158** children participating in the free ECCE preschool programme.

Targeted inclusion and disadvantage supports are also part of the countywide provision landscape. Equal Start, launched in 2024, is a funding model with universal and targeted measures designed to enhance access and participation in ELC and SAC for children and families experiencing disadvantage. In Kerry, **32** services currently receive additional support through Equal Start. Approximately **253** children in Kerry are also receiving additional support under the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM),

which supports inclusive preschool participation based on individual need and does not require a diagnosis of disability.

2. Service Type Mix (ELC & SAC)

Distribution of the 175 registered childcare services across County Kerry's six electoral areas, showing the geographic concentration of provision and the relative number of services available in each area.

Table 2. Distribution of childcare services across the six electoral areas in County Kerry.

Locations by electoral area	Number of services
Castleisland	21
Corca Dhuibhne	23
Killarney	32
North Kerry	34
South Kerry	24
Tralee	41
Kerry Total	**175**

Table 3 below shows service-type activity across each electoral area. These categories are not mutually exclusive: a single service may offer more than one form of provision, such as full day care and SAC. For this reason, the category counts should be read as indicators of provision types available in each area, rather than as totals that add to the number of registered services. Registered childminders appear in small numbers in this dataset and are concentrated in South Kerry, Tralee, and North Kerry. They often support younger age cohorts, although capacity for the youngest children is constrained by the **Childminding Services Regulations 2024**, which allow a childminder in Ireland to care for **up to six children at any one time**, **including their own children up to the end of primary school age**. No more than **two children may be under 15 months of age** at the same time in a childminding service.

Table 3. Service-type activity by electoral area. Categories are not mutually exclusive and may sum to more than the number of services.

Electoral area	Registered childminders	FDC services	Part-time services	Sessional ECCE services	SAC services	Total service-type services	Total registered services
Castleisland	0	9	3	5	13	30	21
Corca Dhuibhne	0	10	1	6	13	30	23
Killarney	0	6	11	8	22	47	32
North Kerry	1	6	2	12	21	41	34
South Kerry	6	9	1	5	12	27	24
Tralee	2	18	3	11	22	54	41
Grand Total	**9**	**58**	**21**	**47**	**103**	**238**	**175**

Data note: The service-type categories are not mutually exclusive: a single registered service may appear in more than one column where it offers more than one form of provision. The services data records **238 service-type entries** across **175 registered services**. The final column therefore retains the registered service total by electoral area, while the other columns show the number of service-type entries recorded in each area.

3. Youngest Age Catered For (Infants, Toddlers and Preschool)

The 'youngest age catered for' data indicates how much of Kerry's childcare supply is accessible to infants and toddlers. The available data show fewer services catering for **under** 1s (**34**), children over 1 year (**18**), and **children over 2 years** (**24**) than for **ECCE-eligible children** (**51**) and **school-age children** (**48**). There are also notable area differences: **South Kerry** has the highest number of services catering for under-1s (**10**), while **Killarney** has a low under-1 count (**2**) despite having one of the highest total service numbers. Overall, the profile suggests stronger availability for preschool and school-age children than for babies and young toddlers.

This pattern should be read alongside the regulatory staffing requirements for younger children. In full day and part-time early years provision, the required adult-to-child ratios are higher for babies and toddlers—1:3 for children under 1 year, 1:5 for children aged 1–2 years, and 1:6 for children aged 2–3 years—compared with 1:8 for preschool children aged 3–6 years. As a result, services that cater for the youngest children often provide smaller numbers of places, because each infant or toddler place requires proportionately more staff time and can be more difficult to sustain where staffing is constrained.

3.1 Services by Youngest Age Catered For

Table 4. Services by youngest age catered for by electoral area.

Electoral area	Under 1	Over 1	Over 2	ECCE eligible	School age	Total services
Castleisland	4	1	3	7	6	21
Corca Dhuibhne	5	2	3	7	6	23
Killarney	2	4	7	10	9	32
North Kerry	6	1	1	12	14	34
South Kerry	10	3	4	4	3	24
Tralee	7	7	6	11	10	41
Grand Total	**34**	**18**	**24**	**51**	**48**	**175**

Data note: The youngest-age categories identify the youngest age group a service is recorded as catering for and should not be interpreted as exclusive age-band capacity. A service may cater for several older age groups once it caters for a younger age group.

4. Indicative Childcare Places (Capacity)

Indicative place numbers vary significantly by area. Tralee records the largest number of places across the displayed categories, including higher FDC and SAC place totals, while Killarney also shows substantial capacity. Castleisland has among the lowest overall recorded place totals. These patterns broadly mirror the distribution of services, suggesting that families may experience stronger choice and flexibility in higher-capacity areas. However, ELC capacity is difficult to measure precisely because Tusla-registered places may be used flexibly across different sessions and age groups depending on demand, staffing, and service model. The Tusla Register identifies the total number of children who may be cared for at any one time, but it does not specify dedicated capacity for particular age cohorts.

Places-total clarification: The place-category table records **54 childminder places**, **3,559 FDC places**, **618 part-time places**, **1,075 sessional places** and **3,858 SAC places**, which sum to **9,164** places.

4.1 Places by Type

Table 5. Indicative childcare places by service type and electoral area.

Electoral area	Childminder places	FDC places	Part-time places	Sessional places	SAC places
Castleisland	0	413	69	69	387
Corca Dhuibhne	0	482	22	113	470
Killarney	0	581	362	278	772
North Kerry	6	503	58	241	570
South Kerry	36	520	30	152	459
Tralee	12	1,060	77	222	1,200
Grand Total	**54**	**3,559**	**618**	**1,075**	**3,858**

5. Vacant Spaces Snapshot (November 2025)

Kerry CCC vacancy data (collected at a point in time, November 2025) highlights where immediate capacity constraints are most visible. The data totals show **very limited vacancies for FDC younger ages** (**5** vacant under-1 places; **7** vacant 1–2 places), with **47** vacant places for children aged 2 years/pre-ECCE and **106** vacant ECCE-eligible full-time places. This pattern is consistent with the broader supply profile: infant and toddler places are both fewer in number and show little spare capacity, suggesting stronger demand pressure and/or more constrained provision for these ages. Because under-2 provision is highly workforce-sensitive (higher ratios and specialist room requirements), small staffing shocks can quickly reduce usable capacity and push vacancies toward zero.

Source note (Pobal AEYSP/EYP): Complementing this point-in-time snapshot, Pobal's Annual Early Years Sector Profile (AEYSP) **2024/25** provides annual, survey-based indicators of enrolment, vacancies, and waiting lists for services with DCDE contracts. These measures are not directly comparable with Tusla-registered place totals, but they help distinguish between (a) immediate availability at a given date and (b) wider demand pressure and service-level utilisation across the programme year (typically Sept to August).

Table 6. Vacant full-time childcare places by age group and electoral area (November 2025 snapshot).

Electoral area	Vacant 0–1 places	Vacant 1–2 places	Vacant 2 years/pre-ECCE places	Vacant ECCE-eligible places
Castleisland	2	1	5	21
Corca Dhuibhne	0	2	2	23
Killarney	0	0	0	9
North Kerry	0	1	15	21
South Kerry	3	3	4	7
Tralee	0	0	21	25
Grand Total	**5**	**7**	**47**	**106**

6. Population and Planning Context

Table 7 (using Census 2022 information) provides planning-demand context by age cohort and includes an indicative benchmark showing the number of ELC places required to cover **35%** of children aged **0–3**. These benchmark figures vary by area (e.g., higher in Tralee and Killarney), reinforcing that demand is likely strongest in larger population centres. When combined with the vacancy snapshot and youngest-age profile, the data suggests that meeting demand for under-3 places—particularly full-day, year-round provision—remains a key pressure point.

This benchmark also aligns with the revised EU Barcelona targets for 2030, as referenced in *Shaping the Future: Early Years Action Plan Phase 1 Report*. The revised targets set a country-specific target for Ireland of **35% participation of children under three in ELC**, alongside a wider target of at least **96% participation** for children from age three to compulsory school age. They also emphasise

availability of ELC for at least **25 hours per week**, closing participation gaps for children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, ensuring high-quality provision, and keeping fees proportionate to household income.

Table 7. Child population by age cohort and indicative 35% benchmark, Census 2022.

Electoral area	Children aged 0–3	Children aged 4–6	Children aged 7–12	Indicative 35% 0–3 benchmark
Castleisland	784	510	1,352	274
Corca Dhuibhne	607	624	1,388	212
South Kerry	1,128	1,054	2,421	395
Killarney	1,327	1,152	2,546	464
North Kerry	1,155	1,052	2,381	404
Tralee	1,579	1,049	2,253	553
Grand Total	**6,580**	**5,441**	**12,341**	**2,303**

Data note: The population table uses Census/CSO Electoral Division groupings from census 2022 data. These labels should be interpreted as planning-context indicators rather than direct service-area totals.

Benchmark note: The indicative **35%** benchmark is calculated from the 0–3 population figures in Table 7. For example, **Tralee** has **1,579** children aged 0–3, and **35%** of this is approximately **553** places. **Killarney** has **1,327** children aged 0–3, and **35%** of this is approximately **464** places.

7. Operating Patterns: Weeks Open and Hours Offered

The tables 8 and 9 below summarise how many weeks services operate across the year and the weekly hours they offer. These measures are important for working families who need full-day childcare across most of the year, and they help distinguish between term-time or part-time models and longer-hour provision.

Table 8. Services by weeks open across the year by electoral area.

Electoral area	Open 38 weeks or less	Less than 46 weeks	Open over 46 weeks	Total services
Castleisland	6	4	11	21
Corca Dhuibhne	13	1	9	23
Killarney	21	3	8	32
North Kerry	22	4	8	34
South Kerry	5	8	11	24
Tralee	14	4	23	41
Grand Total	**81**	**24**	**70**	**175**

Table 9. Services by weekly hours offered by electoral area.

Electoral area	Less than 25 hours	25–40 hours	More than 40 hours	Total services
Castleisland	5	4	12	21
Corca Dhuibhne	11	3	9	23
Killarney	12	12	8	32
North Kerry	12	14	8	34
South Kerry	2	9	13	24
Tralee	11	8	22	41
Grand Total	**53**	**50**	**72**	**175**

Data note: The data records **175** services overall. The operating-pattern pivots also total **175** services across the six electoral areas: **Castleisland (21)**, **Corca Dhuibhne (23)**, **Killarney (32)**, **North Kerry (34)**, **South Kerry (24),** and **Tralee (41)**. These totals are retained as the controlling figures for the number of services by electoral area in this report.

8. Planning Considerations and Implications

8.1 Other Factors

8.1.1 Planning and Building Regulations

Planning policy requires the provision of childcare facilities in new residential developments, typically at a rate of one childcare facility for every 75 dwellings. This requirement is set out in the Childcare Guidelines for Planning Authorities and is reinforced by the Childcare Act 1991 and related regulations. Together with the Universal Design Guidelines (see below), this policy framework is important for the long-term provision of high-quality, accessible childcare facilities that support families and communities.

8.1.2 Universal Design Guidelines (UDG)

The UDG set out the key Universal Design (UD) considerations and guidance for Early Learning and Care settings in Ireland. The guidelines apply to both new and retrofit projects and provide a flexible UD framework to ensure settings are accessible for all children, staff, families, and visitors. Developers, both private and public, need to be aware of these when planning and designing new developments that require childcare facilities.

8.1.3 Capital Grants

Capital grant availability has been intermittent in recent years. In addition to earlier Building Blocks rounds (including Strand 1 expansion and Strand 2 extension grants, under which **2 Kerry services** were successful), the Department of Children, Disability and Equality launched the **Building Blocks Extension Scheme – Phase 2** in April 2026. The scheme is intended to increase capacity through extensions to existing premises and targets net increases in **full-time places for children aged 1–3**

(pre-ECCE). It is open to **Core Funding** **Partner Services** that commit to operating for at least **46 weeks** per year, **five days** per week and **8 hours** per day, and to incorporating the **Universal Design Guidelines**. Under Phase 2, community providers can apply for capital grants of **€100,000–€530,000** and private providers can apply for **€50,000–€265,000**. The development of new facilities and the upgrading of existing services—particularly in the community sector—remain heavily dependent on the availability, scale, and continuity of such capital funding streams.

Taken together, the preceding tables show that Kerry's childcare challenge is not only about the total number of registered services, but about the match between local demand, age-cohort needs, opening patterns, staffing capacity and the practical availability of places. The planning implications below therefore focus on actions that can increase usable capacity, especially for infants and toddlers, while supporting sustainable provision across both urban and rural areas.

8.2 Planning Implications and Recommended Actions

The data presented in this report indicates that the gap between childcare demand and available supply in Kerry is structural rather than short term. Very low vacancy levels, particularly for younger ages, alongside wider available evidence of unmet demand, point to a system operating at or near capacity. Childcare should therefore be treated as essential enabling infrastructure within spatial planning and housing delivery, with targeted actions required to address age-cohort shortages, geographic pressure points, and service sustainability.

8.2.1 Prioritise 0–2 capacity

- Require new/expanded ELC developments to include fit-for-purpose infant and toddler rooms (sleep/rest, nappy-change, storage, outdoor access), recognising that 0–2 places are the most constrained and most vulnerable to closure due to staffing pressures.
- Where childcare provision is conditioned as part of development, seek an age-cohort mix that includes demonstrable under-2 capacity (not only ECCE or SAC).
- When capital/retrofit supports are available, prioritise projects that measurably increase 0–2 places in pressure areas.

8.2.2 Target interventions to identified pressure points.

- Use place-based analysis (ED/settlement level) to target shortages; this report highlights particular pressure in Tralee, Killarney, and South Kerry, with differing local drivers.
- In growth areas, plan childcare as enabling infrastructure alongside housing, transport, and school capacity; prioritise wraparound/full-day models while safeguarding under-2 provision.
- Where under-2 provision is absent or minimal, consider targeted site identification and early engagement with potential providers to address feasibility barriers (site suitability, costs, fit-out).

8.2.3 Strengthen development management and enforcement.

- Apply childcare requirements consistently through enforceable planning conditions (including the one facility per 75 dwellings standard, where applicable) and align delivery with development scale and phasing.
- Use triggers to prevent late delivery (e.g., link opening/fitted shell to a defined level of residential occupation) and require clarity on handover, utilities, and fit-out specifications.

- Ensure proposed sites are viable for childcare use in practice (safe pedestrian access, set-down/collection, outdoor space, proximity to services/transport where available).

8.2.4 Embed quality, inclusion, and futureproofing in design.

- Design new builds and significant retrofits in line with the Universal Design Guidelines so settings are accessible for children and families, including those with additional needs.
- Specify operationally workable layouts (age separation, sleep/rest areas, storage, staff facilities, safe indoor/outdoor circulation) so under-2 rooms are viable over time.
- Build in flexibility so rooms can be reconfigured as demographics change without major structural works; consider appropriate co-location to improve accessibility.

8.2.5 Plan for workforce and service sustainability (Pobal workforce trends)

Workforce availability is a key determinant of realised capacity, particularly for infant and toddler rooms where staffing ratios are highest. Pobal's workforce dashboards (filterable by county and programme year) provide Kerry-specific indicators on staff totals, staff roles, qualifications, wages, and workforce mobility/turnover. These indicators should be reviewed alongside the low vacancy signals for 0–2 provision, as staffing constraints can lead to reduced opening hours, reliance on relief cover, or closure of baby rooms even where premises capacity exists.

Under-2 capacity is more workforce-sensitive than other age groups because regulatory ratios are higher and rooms require more staff per child-hour. This means that even small changes in staffing (vacancies, sick leave, turnover, or reduced availability of qualified staff) can force providers to cap enrolments, reduce opening hours, or temporarily close infant/toddler rooms—reducing **usable** capacity without any change to the service's registered places.

- **Higher staffing ratios:** infants and toddlers require more staff per place, so recruitment/retention issues translate quickly into fewer available 0–2 places.
- **Qualification and role mix:** shortages in key roles (managerial cover, lead educators, suitably qualified staff) can constrain room operation even when overall headcount appears stable.
- **Rostering and relief cover:** limited relief staff increases the likelihood of short-notice closures or reduced hours, disproportionately affecting baby rooms.
- **Viability impacts:** higher staffing costs for 0–2 places can reduce financial viability, leading services to prioritise older-age provision unless supported through sustainable funding and fit-for-purpose design.
- **Pobal workforce data:** track Kerry's staff totals, turnover/mobility, qualifications profile and pay indicators over time and relate these to changes in under-2 vacancies, waiting lists and reported closures. https://www.pobal.ie/data-library/early-learning-and-childcare-data/

8.2.6 Support diversified delivery models (including childminders and rural solutions)

- Support diversified models (including childminders and small-scale/rural solutions) where a large standalone facility may not be viable, while maintaining regulatory and quality requirements.
- Use land-use and transport planning to reduce access barriers in rural areas (safe roads/footpaths where feasible, service clustering), recognising travel distance can limit take-up.

8.2.7 Monitoring, governance, and a pipeline of deliverable projects

- Update demand/capacity indicators regularly (at least annually) at local level and maintain a pipeline of priority projects (new build, expansion, retrofit) with emphasis on increasing 0–2 places in pressure areas.
- Strengthen cross-agency coordination (Local Authority planning/housing, CCC supports, Tusla requirements and funders) to reduce delays between site delivery, fit-out, registration and opening.
- Where possible, integrate childcare needs assessment into Local Area Plans/settlement plans so zoning and infrastructure sequencing reflect childcare alongside schools, health, and community needs.

9. Conclusions

The evidence in this report indicates that childcare demand in Kerry often exceeds available supply, particularly for the 0–2 age cohort. The vacancy snapshot shows very limited spare capacity for babies and toddlers, while the wider supply profile points to constrained infant and toddler provision across several areas. The most immediate pressure points are Tralee, Killarney, and South Kerry, each of which should be prioritised for further local analysis and targeted action.

The development of new services and the expansion of existing services—particularly in the community sector—will require significant capital investment in the coming years if the needs of a growing population are to be met. In addition, community providers delivering essential services in rural parts of the county need support through population fluctuations that can affect their sustainability.

Development and expansion in the sector will also require significant capital investment. Future matched-funding grant schemes should take account of the stated government position on increasing public provision of ELC services while still supporting viable private-sector and community sector growth where needed.

The requirement to provide childcare facilities in new residential developments—specifically one childcare facility for every 75 dwellings, where applicable—needs to be applied consistently across both public and private developments. Providing services that support families in new communities is essential to ensuring that growth and expansion are matched by high-quality childcare provision.

Importantly, all new developments and all expansions of existing services should adhere to the Universal Design Guidelines to ensure settings are accessible for all children, staff, families, and visitors.

Despite the pressures in the system and the scarcity of places in some areas, the overall quality of childcare provision in Kerry remains high. Kerry CCC is committed to working cooperatively and proactively with service providers, parents/guardians, and other key stakeholders to continue improving and developing high-quality early childhood care and education across the county.

10. References

The following sources informed this report:

- Kerry County Childcare Committee (Kerry CCC) service tables and vacancy snapshot (an internal Kerry CCC report).
- Tusla - Child and Family Agency, *Early Years Services - March 2026 Kerry* PDF, used as the source of ELC registration data. Kerry_May26.pdf
- Tusla - Child and Family Agency, *External Register School Age* PDF, used as the source of SAC registration data. External_Register_School_Age.pdf
- National Childcare Scheme (NCS) Childcare Search, used as a source for service provider details. Childcare Service Search · Applicant Portal
- Census 2022 child population figures, as presented in the report tables.
- Pobal Early Learning and Childcare Data dashboards (including EYP administrative extracts and AEYSP indicators for **2024/25**). Early Learning and Childcare Data - Pobal
- Pobal Workforce dashboards (overview, mobility, qualifications, and wages).
- Childcare Guidelines for Planning Authorities. Childcare Facilities Guidelines
- Childcare Act 1991 and related regulations. Child Care Act, 1991
- Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) (Childminding Services) Regulations 2024. S.I. No. 494/2024 - Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) (Childminding Services) Regulations 2024
- Universal Design Guidelines for Early Learning and Care Settings. Universal Design Guidelines - Access and Inclusion Model
- Department of Children, Disability and Equality, *Building Blocks Extension Scheme – Phase 2* (gov.ie, 24 April 2026). Building Blocks Extension Scheme – Phase 2
- Houses of the Oireachtas, *Childcare Services – Parliamentary Question 1486* (4 November 2025), setting out the minimum adult-to-child ratios for full-day and part-time early years provision: 1:3 for children under 1, 1:5 for children aged 1–2, 1:6 for 2-year-olds, and 1:8 for children aged 3–6.
- Department of Children, Disability and Equality, *Shaping the Future: Early Years Action Plan Phase 1 Report*, including reference to the revised EU Barcelona targets for 2030. Available at: Shaping the Future: Early Years Action Plan

Appendix 1: Data Notes and Limitations

Sources used in this report: Kerry CCC service tables and vacancy snapshot; Tusla *Early Years Services - March 2026 Kerry* register PDF (source of ELC registration data); Tusla *External Register School Age* PDF (source of SAC registration data); Census 2022 child population figures (as presented in the tables); Pobal Early Learning and Childcare Data dashboards (EYP administrative extracts and AEYSP survey indicators for 2024/25); Pobal Workforce dashboards (overview, mobility, qualifications and wages); and the Department of Children, Disability and Equality publication **Building Blocks Extension Scheme – Phase 2** (gov.ie, 24 April 2026).

- **Service-type activity:** Service-type categories are not mutually exclusive. Services offering more than one model of care may appear in more than one service-type category. Service-type counts should therefore be interpreted as provision-type activity rather than as mutually exclusive service totals.
- **Point-in-time vacancies:** Vacancy figures reflect availability at the time of data collection (November 2025) and may change quickly due to enrolments, staffing changes, or seasonal patterns.
- **Service categorisation:** "Service type" groupings (e.g., Full Day & SAC, SAC Only) summarise primary models but may not capture all flexibility within services (for example, mixed-age or mixed-session offerings).
- **Pobal ELC Data (AEYSP/EYP):** Selected contextual indicators are drawn from Pobal's Early Learning and Childcare Data dashboards, which compile administrative data from the Early Years Platform (EYP) and annual survey data from the Annual Early Years Sector Profile (AEYSP). AEYSP figures referenced here relate to the **2024/25** programme year and reflect participating services with DCDE funding contracts.
- **NCS Childcare Search:** Service-provider details were cross-checked using the National Childcare Scheme (NCS) Childcare Search. Listings may change over time as services open, close, update their details, or amend the programmes they offer.
- **Pobal workforce indicators (county-filterable):** Workforce data are available via Pobal's Workforce dashboards (overview, mobility, qualifications, and wages) and can be filtered to Kerry by programme year. Pobal notes methodological changes across recent years (breaks in series), so trend comparisons should be interpreted within the context of the relevant year and data source.
- **Capacity and vacancy data:** Capacity and vacancy data can change frequently due to demographic shifts, enrolment changes, service adjustments, staffing availability, and population trends. As a result, all capacity and vacancy figures should be treated as a point-in-time evidence base and reviewed regularly.
- **Childminding Regulations 2024:** Registered childminders are regulated under the *Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) (Childminding Services) Regulations 2024*. These regulations, including the limit of no more than two children under 15 months at any one time, should be considered when interpreting childminder capacity for the youngest age cohorts.
- **Tusla registered places and age-cohort capacity:** The Tusla Register records the total number of children that may be cared for at any one time, but registered places can be deployed across different sessions and age groups. As a result, registered capacity may not

translate directly into dedicated places for specific age cohorts (particularly 0–2), and should be interpreted alongside service models, operating hours, and vacancy patterns.

- **Youngest age catered for:** The "youngest age" indicator shows the youngest child a service is registered to cater for; services catering for school-age children may or may not cater for younger children depending on Tusla registration and operational decisions.
- **Places are indicative:** Place totals are presented as recorded in the tables and should be treated as indicative capacity. They do not account for part-time patterns, split sessions, or utilisation rates.
- **Demand proxies:** Census 2022 population figures provide planning context, but actual childcare demand depends on factors such as parental employment, preferences, affordability, and availability of informal care.