

# Adding up childcare costs [IE] <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

See text below.

## EXCERPTS

With full-time teaching jobs, Gareth and Moira Allen have no choice but to send their two young sons, aged one and three, to a creche near their home. The couple are luckier than most, however, and their comparatively family-friendly working hours give them a significant degree of flexibility when it comes to drop-offs and pick-ups.

Their good fortune doesn't end there, not by a long shot. While most working parents of pre-school children in this country are spending upwards of 800 a month for every child they have in daycare, the Allens are paying less than a quarter of that amount.

And what's the secret to their low-cost childcare? Emigration.

Five years ago they moved from Dublin to Seville, where both their children were born. While virtually everything is markedly cheaper in their adopted country, even when considerably lower wages are factored in, it is the savings they have made in childcare that really stand out. Their monthly creche bill per child is 265, to which the Andalucian government contributes 100, reducing their total childcare outlay to just 330 every month. Had they stayed in Dublin, they would be paying nearly 2,000 a month.

Parents in Ireland with similarly aged children in private childcare will spend at least 60,000 over the next four years on creche fees alone. And with costs only going in one direction and the Government preparing to reveal its meanest budget for 20 years this week, things are likely to get worse for Irish parents.

A recent survey carried out by the National Children's Nurseries Association (NCNA) on childcare costs showed that the cost of childcare has increased steadily over the last two years. The price increases - in the region of 15 per cent since 2006 - are hardly surprising in the current economic climate, and creches can be forgiven for covering the cost of rising salaries and increases in food and energy costs.

The average cost of sending a toddler to a creche is 715 a month, up from 626 in 2005. Babies, meanwhile cost 802 a month. Prices vary from county to county, with the highest prices found in Dublin where it costs an average of 828 per month for a baby and 802 for toddlers, although many city centre creches charge closer to 1,000 per child.

The weekly cost of community childcare - which is subsidised by the State - is lower, but still not cheap, with places costing around 117 for toddlers and 127 for babies.

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It is not only the cost of creche care that needs to be factored in by parents of young children. Average after-school care has a price tag of around 120 per week per child. Over the eight years of primary school, parents will fork out 42,000 per child, taking the total spend for parents of two young children to 150,000 on childcare before their offspring hit secondary school.

Such sums put the early childcare supplement of 1,100 given to parents of children under six into perspective - it barely covers a single month's fees for most parents.

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For people who are spending nearly a third of their net income on childcare costs, it won't come as any surprise to learn that the Government is ranked bottom of the EU league table for spending on childcare and early education, according to a report published by the European Commission earlier this month.

The government was found to be investing just 0.2 per cent of national income (GDP) on the services. Denmark, Sweden, Finland and France spend at least 1 per cent of GDP.

And the extra money spent in these countries really makes a difference. In Denmark, parents pay a maximum of 30 per cent of their childcare cost with the State subsidising the rest. In France, parents who send their children to creches can get a subsidy of 600 per month while the École Maternelle opens its doors to children aged between two and five between the hours of 8.30am and 4.30pm, and is funded entirely by the state. Some 99 per cent of children attend these schools. A similar system is in place in Italy for children aged three to six.

In Sweden, parents pay no more than 3 per cent of their household income in creche fees for their first child, 2 per cent for their second and 1 per cent for their third. In Norway the parents have to pay between 28 and 45 per cent of the cost of their children's creche fees depending on their income.

In Ireland, parents pay 90 per cent of the cost themselves.

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- reprinted from the Irish Times

**Region:** Europe <sup>[2]</sup>

**Tags:** affordability <sup>[3]</sup>

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