

**Estimates  
for Numbers of  
Family Carers  
in Ireland**

## Background

Since 2002, thanks to extensive lobbying and representation by the family carers movement, there has been a formal state-endorsed approach to quantifying the number of individuals in the Republic of Ireland who are providing unpaid care to a relative or friend. Initially, the Census of Population provided this data every five years. More recently a number of other large-scale surveys have been undertaken in an attempt to capture the prevalence of family caring in Ireland. This document seeks to summarise this new data and draws on the population data published by the Central Statistics Office in August 2019.

For a wider discussion of the quantitative reporting of carer prevalence, the definition of family caring, types of caring, preferences for the language of caring, and the wider societal context, see the 2015 Discussion Document 'Defining Carers' and the 2017 Overview Report *Trends in Family Caring in Ireland*, available on our website <https://www.carealliance.ie/discussionpapers> and <https://www.carealliance.ie/Briefing-Position-Papers>

## Population of Census Data

Since 2002, four Censuses of Population have been published that included a specific question relating to family/unpaid caring. Some modifications have been made to the Census question, most recently with the inclusion in 2011 and 2016 of a question on the number of hours of care provided per week.

**22 Do you provide regular unpaid personal help for a friend or family member with a long-term illness, health problem or disability?**

*Include problems which are due to old age*  
*Personal help includes help with basic tasks such as feeding or dressing*

1  Yes

2  No

**If 'Yes', for how many hours per week?**

Write in hours

Figure 1:  
Census 2016  
question on  
caring



In the 2016 Census, **195,263** individuals indicated that they provided such care.<sup>1</sup> This represented 4.1% of the population, an increase in absolute numbers by 31% from the 148,754 reported in the 2002 Census.<sup>2</sup> The gender breakdown was reported as 61% female and 39% male, showing no change in the relative number of males providing care since the 2002 Census. The Census estimates that carers provided 6,608,515 hours of care per week, an average of 38.7 hours per carer per week. Allowing for population increases over this period, the census data reports only a small increase in the percentage of the population indicating that they provided such care, from 3.8% in 2002 to 4.1% in 2011 and 2016.

## 2009 Quarterly National Household Survey

The Q3 2009 Quarterly National Household Survey<sup>3</sup> (QNHS) asked the following question of 21,500 people:

*“Some people have extra responsibilities because they look after someone who has long-term physical or mental ill-health or disability, or problems related to old age. May I just check, is there anyone living with you/not living with you who is sick, disabled or elderly whom you look after or give special help to, other than in a paid or professional capacity (for example, a sick or disabled (or elderly) relative/husband/wife/child/friend/parent etc.)?”*

The survey found that 8% of respondents aged 15 and over provided some level of unpaid care. Based on population data available at the time this suggested that there were approximately **274,000** people aged 15 and over providing unpaid informal/family care in the state.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Central Statistics Office. ‘Census 2016 Profile 9 – Health, Disability and Carers’ 2017. <https://www.cso.ie/en/csolatestnews/presspages/2017/census2016profile9-healthdisabilityandcarers/> Website accessed September 11th 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Central Statistics Office. ‘Census 2002 Volume 10 – Disability and Carers’ 2004. <https://www.cso.ie/en/census/2002censusreports/census2002volume10-disabilityandcarers/> Website accessed September 11th 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Central Statistics Office. ‘Quarterly National Household Survey Quarter 3 2009’. Website accessed September 11th 2019. <https://www.cso.ie/en/csolatestnews/pressreleases/2009pressreleases/quarterlynationalhouseholdsurveyquarter32009/> Carers report published July 29th 2010. [PDF] Carers 2009 Q3.vp – CSO.

<sup>4</sup> Central Statistics Office. ‘Quarterly National Household Survey Quarter 3 2009’. Website accessed September 11th 2019. <https://www.cso.ie/en/csolatestnews/pressreleases/2009pressreleases/quarterlynationalhouseholdsurveyquarter32009/> Carers report published July 29th 2010. [PDF] Carers 2009 Q3.vp – CSO; 8.

## 2015 Irish Health Survey

The 2015 CSO/Irish Health Survey, published in 2016,<sup>5</sup> estimated that 10% of the population aged 15 and over provide care. Based on the population data available at the time, Care Alliance has extrapolated a figure of approximately 361,854 family carers.<sup>6</sup>

The gender breakdown was the same as that reported in the census data (61% female/39% male, rounding), with an average of 44.7 hours of care provided weekly. The report also provides other details relating to economic status, age group, disability, nationality, geographical location and level of deprivation.

Provision of informal care or assistance			
50	Are you providing care or assistance at least once a week to one or more people suffering from any chronic condition or infirmity due to old age (exclude professional activities)?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
If yes:		Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
51	Are the person or persons concerned family members?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
52	How many hours a week do you give the care or assistance?	<input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> Hours	*Care provided on a 24 hour basis, 7 days a week equates to 168 hours.

Figure 2: Irish Health Survey – question on caring



Figure 3: Irish Health Survey – infographic

<sup>5</sup> Central Statistics Office. 'Irish Health Survey' 2016.

<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-ihs/irishhealthsurvey2015/>  
<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-ihs/irishhealthsurvey2015/ct/>  
<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-ihs/irishhealthsurvey2015/bgn/>  
 Website accessed September 11th 2019.

<sup>6</sup> This figure was based on the estimated population of 3,618,544 aged 15 and over at the time, using, we assume, April 2016 migration and population data, with a small reduction to the April 2016 data as the sample was surveyed between Q4 2014 and Q4 2015, not April 2016.

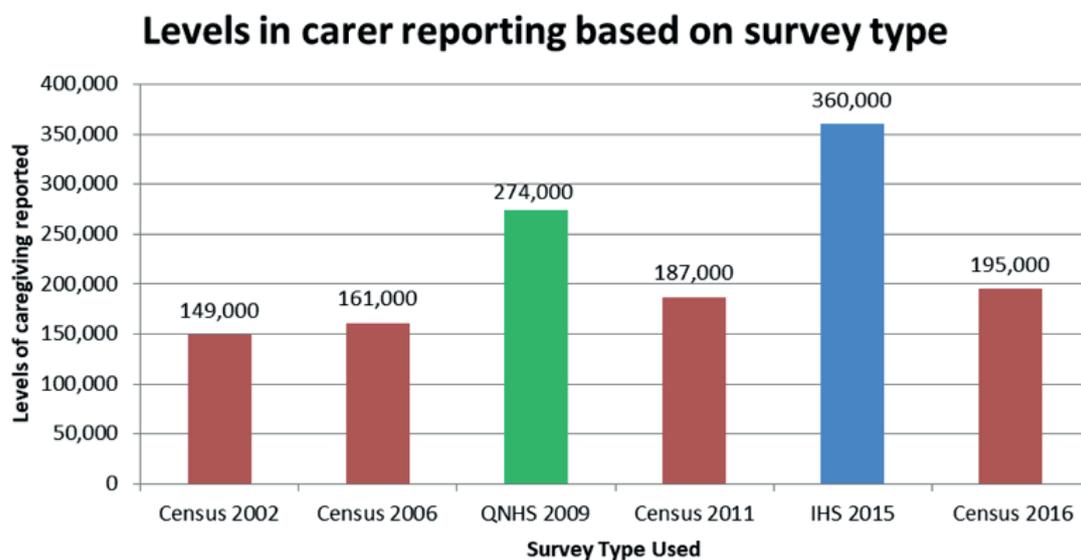
<https://www.cso.ie/en/methods/surveybackgroundnotes/irishhealthsurveyihs/> and  
<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/pme/populationandmigrationestimatesapril2016/>  
 Websites accessed September 11th 2019.



	Providing care at the moment	Providing care to a family member	Average hours per week spent providing care
	%	%	Number of hours
<b>State</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>44.7</b>
<b>Sex</b>			
Male	8	87	37.7
Female	13	85	48.7
<b>Age Group</b>			
15-24	4	88	23.2
25-34	6	83	46.7
35-44	9	88	42.8
45-54	18	90	36.3
55-64	15	84	43.1
65-74	10	72	62.3
75+	8	84	87.7

**Table 1:** Percentage of all persons aged 15 years and over providing care and average number of hours per week spent caring, by gender and age group, 2015

The variations between the various surveys, in absolute figures, over the period 2002–2015 are shown in Figure 4 below.



**Figure 4:** Reported carer numbers from various surveys 2002–2015

## 2019 Estimates of Carer Population in Three Age Groups

The 2015 estimate is based on data secured over four years ago. For this reason we have updated the estimate for the carer population using more recent population data. This does not take account of any possible structural changes in carer prevalence over the intervening period.

The original Irish Health Survey data was based on population data available in 2015. The updated August 2019 Population and Migration estimates suggest a significantly larger population of 4,921,500.<sup>7</sup> In particular the '15 and over' population has increased by 9% over that three-year period, whereas the 0–14 population has actually decreased by 3%. Using the same 10% carer prevalence estimate as was used in the Irish Health Survey report, this would equate to a current carer population (aged 15 and over) of **391,260**. (Calculations provided.)

Population aged 15 and over is calculated as 4,921,500 (all ages)  
less 1,008,900 (aged 0–14) = 3,912,600

Carer population aged 15 and over is calculated as  
3,912,600 x 10% = **391,260**

See Appendix 1 for confidence intervals, and high/low range estimates.

Table 7 Estimated Population classified by Sex and Age Group, 2013 - 2019							
Sex and Age Group	Persons in April of each year						
	2013	2014	2015	2016 <sup>1</sup>	2017 <sup>2</sup>	2018 <sup>2</sup>	2019 <sup>2</sup>
	'000						
<b>Persons</b>							
0 - 4 years	353.0	345.4	337.9	331.4	324.6	319.3	315.2
5 - 9 "	333.0	342.1	349.3	355.3	359.1	356.9	352.3
10 - 14 "	307.9	310.1	314.4	318.9	323.3	332.6	341.4
15 - 19 "	284.4	290.6	296.1	301.2	308.5	316.2	319.9
20 - 24 "	278.9	276.6	275.5	273.5	276.3	289.3	298.1
25 - 29 "	321.8	305.9	298.7	296.7	292.4	291.1	289.2
30 - 34 "	391.4	382.5	369.2	360.3	347.9	335.8	330.8
35 - 39 "	366.8	371.6	379.8	388.1	394.6	398.3	397.0
40 - 44 "	341.0	347.4	353.0	356.5	363.1	369.9	379.9
45 - 49 "	310.1	312.6	317.0	324.9	333.1	341.2	351.1
50 - 54 "	282.8	289.2	295.2	298.4	303.3	306.7	310.5
55 - 59 "	251.1	255.7	260.6	268.2	274.0	279.9	285.9
60 - 64 "	223.2	226.4	230.8	236.5	242.3	246.5	253.8
65 - 69 "	190.0	197.2	203.6	208.0	211.3	215.8	219.3
70 - 74 "	138.7	144.4	150.8	159.9	169.2	177.7	184.8
75 - 79 "	106.4	109.1	112.2	114.2	116.8	121.9	127.5
80 - 84 "	73.4	76.1	78.8	80.5	82.9	85.1	87.4
85 years and over	60.7	62.7	64.9	67.3	69.7	73.0	77.3
<b>Total persons</b>	<b>4,614.7</b>	<b>4,645.4</b>	<b>4,687.8</b>	<b>4,739.6</b>	<b>4,792.5</b>	<b>4,857.0</b>	<b>4,921.5</b>

Figure 5: Population estimates – April 2019

<sup>7</sup> Central Statistics Office 'Migration and Population Estimates April 2019' (2019)  
<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/pme/populationandmigrationestimatesapril2019/>  
Website accessed September 4th 2019.



## Carers Aged Under 18

The greatest variation between surveys of carer prevalence is in the area of young carers. A school-administered survey indicated that 11.5% of 10- to 17-year-olds identify as carers,<sup>8</sup> which would equate to approximately 60,000 young carers nationally. The wording of the survey question was as follows:

“Do you provide regular unpaid personal help for a family member with a long-term illness, health problem or disability? (Includes problems which are due to old age. Personal help includes help with basic tasks such as feeding or dressing) with response options ‘Yes’ and ‘No’.”

However, according to the most recent census figures (2016) there are only 3,800 children aged less than 15 years reported as providing care. The census is completed by an adult member of the household, and for this reason there may be some reluctance to report on caregiving among those under the age of 18. This may be due to concerns about privacy or perceived stigma. Further analysis of this is provided in our 2017 Overview Report *Trends in Family Caring in Ireland* [www.carealliance.ie/Briefing-Position-Papers](http://www.carealliance.ie/Briefing-Position-Papers).

## Carers Aged 15–17

Using the April 2019 population estimates and the IHS 2015 data:

Population aged 15–19                      319.9k (ref Figure 5 above)

Assuming an equal distribution of population across each age (15–19), each age cohort between 15 and 19 years (age 15, 16, 17, etc.) would equate to 63,980. The 15–17 population would then equate to 191,940 (63,980 x 3).

Assuming a carer prevalence rate of 4% in the 15–19 age cohort (based on the stated 4% carer prevalence rate in the age cohort 15–24, per Table 1 above), this would equate to **7,678 carers aged 15–17**.

## Adult Carers (18 and Over)

Total adult (18 and over) population = 4,921,500 (total) less 1,200,840 (aged 0–17) = 3,720,660

Carer population aged 18 and over = 391,260 less 7,678 (aged 15–17) = **383,584**

<sup>8</sup> Callaghan, M., Keane, E. & Molcho, M. (2016, February). ‘Short Report – HBSC Ireland: Young Carers in the 2014 HBSC study’.

## Upcoming Data Sources/Publications

We understand that at the time of the publication of this document (October 2019) a new Irish Health Survey is being undertaken. The new survey will include a carer module, using the same question as was used in the 2015 survey. It is expected that this will be published in July 2020.

## Discussion

Clearly the variation in reported prevalence rates between the various surveys and censuses is at a level that warrants analysis. Some attempt at understanding such variations has been made in our 2017 Overview Report *Trends in Family Caring in Ireland* <https://www.carealliance.ie/Briefing-Position-Papers>. Survey methodology, response rates, the identity of the primary responder, and wording appear to be factors in the variation. The 2017 report also looks at international prevalence rates.

Recent reporting on the piloting of the 2021 Census by the CSO has shed some further light on this issue. Piloting for Census 2021 has been completed, with some further modifications to the question on caring likely. The experience from the pilot is that the proposed revisions to the question appear to cause significant increases in the reported level of caring. The questions in both versions of the pilot form were significantly reworded, with the addition of explicit reference to provision of 'support', 'caring for a neighbour' and 'caring for persons with issues related to old age'. Both versions of the question tested in the pilot caused increases in the number of persons reporting as carers. In 2016, 4.1% of the population in the areas of Ireland used in piloting reported as carers; this increased to 5.6% in testing of Form A and 5.7% in testing of Form B.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Central Statistics Office. 'Report on the public consultation on content of Census 2021 and the Census Pilot Survey 2018' (2019), 21. <https://www.cso.ie/en/census/census2021consultation/>  
Website accessed September 11th 2019.



**23** **Do you provide regular unpaid personal help or support to a family member, neighbour or friend with a long-term illness, health issue, an issue related to old age or disability?**

1  Yes      2  No

**If 'Yes', for how many hours per week?**

*Write in hours*

*Care provided on a 24 hour basis, 7 days a week equates to 168 hours*

**Figure 6:**  
Proposed Census  
2021 caring  
question

The census figures appear to be the data used most frequently, and they are invariably referred to in government documents, whereas the NGO/advocacy sector tends to use the figure of circa 360,000, although this usage is not completely consistent. This large gap between the 195k census figure and the c. 360k IHS 2015 figure represents a difference of up to 85% (c. 165k). While the gap is understandable it creates the potential for confusion, ambiguity and incredulity about the real prevalence of family caring. We believe that coming to agreement on one figure and being consistent in its use has the potential to support a clearer message and associated policy actions in support of the carers movement.

Notwithstanding the changes to the question in the 2021 Census, which will likely increase reported carer prevalence, possibly by up to 40%, a large gap will remain between the existing published surveys.

We believe that until publication of the IHS 2019 carer module report and corresponding population estimates, the figure of '391,260 family carers in Ireland' is a robust figure that can be used with confidence and credibility.

## Appendix I

### Confidence Interval Data re 2015 Irish Health Survey

Courtesy of Prof. Chris Brunsdon, National Centre for Geocomputation (NCG), Social Sciences Institute (MUSSI), Geography, Hamilton Institute, Maynooth University.

Total respondents to survey: 10,323<sup>10</sup>

Carer respondents (10%) – 1,032

Calculation of 95% confidence intervals:

The formula is that the upper and lower limits are  $p - se(p) * 1.96$  and  $p + se(p) * 1.96$

where  $n$  is the number in the survey (10,323)

$p$  is the proportion of carers (here 10% or 0.1) and  $se(p)$  is the standard error of  $p$  - given by the formula  $se(p) = \sqrt{p * (1-p) / n}$

Thus  $se(p)$  is  $\sqrt{0.1 * 0.9 / 10,323} = 0.00295$  (or 0.295%)

Thus the 95% CI upper and lower limits are: lower =  $10 - 1.96 * 0.295\% = 9.42\%$  and upper =  $10 + 1.96 * 0.295\% = 10.58\%$

<sup>10</sup> Central Statistics Office. 'Irish Health Survey 2015 Background Notes' 2016.  
<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-ihs/irishhealthsurvey2015/bgn/>  
Website accessed September 11th 2019.



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