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**Innovative approaches to data collection on children**

**Growing Up in Ireland: design principles for a  
child cohort study**

**Note by the Central Statistics Office, Ireland\***

*Abstract*

Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) is the Irish national longitudinal study of children and young people. It has followed the development of two cohorts of children since 2008, and a study of a new birth cohort will commence in 2024. The GUI survey, previously conducted by a research institute, was recently transferred to the National Statistical Institute. A key driver of this change was to enable increased use of administrative data and data linkage within the legal framework of the National Statistical Institute (NSI).

This paper examines the design of data collection for a new birth cohort (Cohort 24) and how an emphasis on use of secondary data sources, data linkage and harmonization with other data collections has informed this design. The legal framework and governance structures of the NSI and how they enable this work is also discussed.

The paper concludes with an outline of the way forward for GUI, exploring how the use of “secondary data first” as a design principle, and alignment with other data collection instruments can contribute to a more in-depth analysis of children’s outcomes.

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## I. Growing Up in Ireland background

1. Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) is the national longitudinal survey of young people and children in Ireland. It represents a very significant investment by the Irish State in high quality research and data on the lives of children, young people and their families.
2. Established in 2006, GUI has collected data from two cohorts of children: from age 9 months for those born in 2008 and from age 9 years for those born in 1998. Planning is now well underway for a new infant cohort and data collection will start in 2024. From its establishment, the aim of GUI was to examine the factors which support or undermine the well-being of children in families, in order to inform effective and responsive policy making and service development. Prior to 2023 the study was carried out by a consortium of researchers under contract to the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY). GUI data is collected under the 1993 Statistics Act, which provides a legislative basis for the compilation of official statistics in Ireland. From 2023 the data collection for GUI has transferred to the Central Statistics Office (CSO), the Irish National Statistical Institute (NSI).
3. The broad aim of GUI is *'to study the factors that contribute to or undermine the well-being of children in contemporary Irish families; and through this, contribute to the setting of effective and responsive policies relating to children and to the design of services for children and families'*.
4. This longitudinal approach enables a better understanding of developmental trajectories and the pathways underlying different outcomes. Understanding pathways is vital to informing the development of effective policies and services which can reduce the short and long term social and economic costs associated with poor outcomes among children.
5. The specific objectives of GUI are:
  - To describe the lives of Irish children, to establish what is typical and normal as well as what is atypical and problematic.
  - To chart the development of Irish children over time, to examine the progress and wellbeing of children at critical periods from birth to adulthood.
  - To identify the key factors that, independently of others, most help or hinder children's development.
  - To establish the effects of early childhood experiences on later life.
  - To map dimensions of variation in children's lives.
  - To identify the persistent adverse effects that lead to social disadvantage and exclusion, educational difficulties, ill health and deprivation.
  - To obtain children's views and opinions on their lives.
  - To provide a bank of data on the whole child.
  - To provide evidence for the creation of effective and responsive policies and services for children and families.
6. GUI consists of 3 cohorts outlined in Table 1. Cohort 98 began when the children were 9 years old, Cohort 08 when the children were 9 months old, and a new Cohort 24 will begin in 2024 when these children are 9 months old.

Table 1  
Cohorts in the Growing Up in Ireland study

Name	Age @ first data collection	Data collection intervals	Current Age
Cohort 98	9 years	9, 13, 17, 20, 25 years	25 years
Cohort 08	9 months	9 months, 3, 5, 7, 9, 13 years	16 years
Cohort 24	9 months	Data collection Oct 2024	

7. Respondents from each cohort are surveyed at regular intervals – the timing of the data collections coincides with periods of change or transition in the children’s lives.
8. Data is collected along the following themes:
  - Background information/socio-demographics, including income family structure, education and housing.
  - Physical health, including health conditions, disability, exercise, sleep, smoking, and drug/alcohol use.
  - Education, including attainment, aspirations, achievements, attitudes to school and transitions.
  - Socio-emotional well-being, including relationships, happiness, anxiety and self-esteem.
  - Economic and civic participation, including work, volunteering, income and discrimination.
9. Information is gathered from the parent(s)/guardian(s) of the children and from age 9 from the child themselves. This information is supplemented by data from the infant’s childcare providers and the child’s teachers and school principal.
10. Outputs from GUI include “Key Findings” and headline reports, microdata for researchers, descriptive reports on detailed findings for each wave and technical reports to help researchers understand and use the data.
11. Since its establishment GUI has provided an important evidence base for policy and services for children across the public sector. The data has been used, for example, in policy decisions relating to preschool education, medical card usage, strategic planning for children’s cultural participation and insights into young people’s health behaviour and mobile phone usage.

## II. The role of the Central Statistical Office

12. The CSO is Ireland's NSI whose purpose is to impartially collect, analyse and make available statistics about Ireland’s people, society and economy. Legislatively under the Statistics Act 1993 the mandate of the CSO is “*the collection, compilation, extraction and dissemination for statistical purposes of information relating to economic, social and general activities and conditions in the State*”.

13. The CSO has had a key role in the management of GUI since its inception. From the beginning GUI has been carried out using the legislative basis of the Statistics Act. Senior statistical and management CSO personnel have been involved with the oversight and governance of GUI throughout its lifetime. Research staff working on GUI were appointed Officers of Statistics under the Act and therefore had the same legal requirement to observe statistical confidentiality as an employee of the CSO. This has enabled the strongest possible assurances of confidentiality to be provided to the respondents.
14. Following a government decision in 2019 - to provide a stable and sustainable future for the study - the transfer of GUI from the original research consortium to the CSO was approved, in order to embed GUI in the official statistics infrastructure.

Similar surveys to GUI operate in other countries – an overview of international cohort studies is shown in Table 2.

Table 2  
International cohort studies

Study	Original Sample Size	Year Commenced
<b>French Longitudinal Study of Children (ELFE)</b>	38,000	2011
<b>Danish National Birth Cohort (DNBR)</b>	100,400	1996
<b>Generation R (Rotterdam)</b>	16,100	2002
<b>Growing Up in New Zealand (GINZ)</b>	10,300	2000
<b>Growing Up in Scotland (GUS)</b>	8,200	2005
<b>Millennium Cohort Study (MCS)</b>	26,400	2000
<b>UK Life Study</b>	100,000	2014
<b>LSAC Australia</b>	9,500	2004

15. These international studies are in general run by research consortiums - it is unusual for an NSI to undertake a cohort study. This transition to the Irish NSI coupled with a structured partnership with the sponsoring policy Department marks a novel and innovative approach for the future of GUI.

## A. Advantages of the transition

16. There are a number of significant advantages associated with transferring GUI to the CSO. The objectives of GUI are consistent with the CSO's mandate under Section 10 of the Statistics Act, 1993 in relation to the compilation of information for statistical purposes on social conditions in the State. GUI will benefit from CSO's longstanding experience in conducting large-scale household surveys. The CSO has the infrastructure required to manage the challenges and risks associated with the collection and management of personal and statistical data.

17. The CSO can leverage the organisation's considerable experience in collecting data to ensure the data collected in GUI is of a high quality and is both longitudinally and internationally comparable.
18. The CSO is ideally positioned and fully committed to linking administrative data to survey data in line with relevant legislation, to enhance the value of GUI and reduce the response burden on participants.
19. The use of administrative data is advantageous for GUI. Given the length of the GUI questionnaires, and the nature of longitudinal surveys, the ability to reduce respondent burden is key. Using administrative data to replace topics on the questionnaire lessens this respondent burden and frees up space within the survey to ask questions that cannot be derived from existing data.
20. The use of administrative data to link area characteristics, environmental data, employment or educational pathways, information on public service settings and quality, and in the creation of sample frames will contribute greatly to providing timely policy relevant data. Administrative data can significantly augment the survey data gathered from the participants providing a greatly enriched dataset to researchers and policy makers.
21. The transition of GUI to the CSO embeds GUI in the official statistical system – guaranteeing a stable and ambitious future for the study.

## **B. The new partnership model**

22. The transfer of GUI to the CSO prompted the development of a new model for phase 3 of GUI. This model defines GUI as having two distinct elements, the GUI Survey and GUI Study.
23. The “GUI Survey” refers to the elements of GUI being undertaken by the CSO under the authority of the Statistics Act, 1993. This encompasses all stages of the survey life cycle as defined by the Generic Statistical Business Process Model (GSBPM), namely: Identify Needs, Design, Build, Collect, Process, Analyse and Disseminate. The CSO will ensure that the survey process is informed by the fullest possible engagement with key stakeholders.
24. The “GUI Study” refers to those elements of GUI being undertaken by DCEDIY. These encompass: engaging with policy and scientific stakeholders; consulting with children/young people; identification of research needs, data priorities and policy objectives; consulting on instrumentation development and design; enhancing awareness of GUI; building capacity in GUI data use; promoting the use of GUI data for research and policy development; and generating research analyses of the data in the GUI study. The DCEDIY will engage with the CSO throughout these processes.
25. Further to the transition on 1 January 2023, GUI has three distinct but interdependent phases for each wave of data collection (Figure 1). Phase A (DCEDIY-led) refers to the identification of research needs, which will inform Phase B (CSO-led) which encompasses the collection and publication of the GUI data. Phase C (DCEDIY-led) includes a programme of research and outreach to maximise the use and awareness of GUI.

Figure 1  
GUI Phases



26. These separate, but closely related activities will ensure continued policy relevance and user engagement in the development of draft questionnaire content, while respecting the independence of the CSO in statistical matters.

### C. The new birth cohort

27. In 2022 the Irish Government approved the establishment of a new birth cohort for GUI. This new birth cohort involves the recruitment of a new sample of 9-month-old babies in 2024. The new birth cohort, Cohort 24, will be comparable in scale to the existing (Cohort 08) infant cohort, relative to the number of nine-month-olds in the population at the time of recruitment.
28. The addition of a new birth cohort to GUI is timely - international literature suggests that the optimum interval between birth cohort studies is 12 to 15 years.
29. The aim of the new GUI birth cohort is to provide ongoing policy relevant data about multiple dimensions of the lives of babies, young children and families. Findings will help policy makers and researchers to understand the range of factors that impact either positively or negatively on children's lives, how policy interventions have changed the lives of children, and about new and emerging challenges which are specific to this next generation of children growing up in Ireland.

### III. Administrative data for official statistics

30. As NSI for Ireland, the CSO has a legal mandate to assess the statistical potential of the records maintained by other public authorities and to ensure that this potential is realised. This mandate was a key driver in the government decision to secure the future of GUI by embedding it in the official statistical system. Under its governing legislation, the Statistics Act 1993, the CSO has a statutory basis to access data on individuals and businesses

collected for administrative purposes which can then be re-used for statistical and analytical functions. In recent years, in recognition of the burden placed by statistical surveys on households and businesses alike, and in addressing falling response rates, the work programme of the CSO has increasingly focussed on the use of administrative data.

31. To enable this agenda a strong governance framework is in place. Key elements of this framework include:
- Corporate structures, including a dedicated Administrative Data Centre
  - A process-based approach to data collection and analysis which enables clarity of roles and functions
  - Inter-agency agreements which specify the type of data being transferred to the CSO by other public authorities and the legal basis on which this is done
  - Internal policies and procedures to ensure secure handling of the data and compliance with data protection and statistical confidentiality legislation.

## A. Administrative Data Centre

32. Over the past 20 years the CSO has developed rigorous procedures and structures to safeguard the security and integrity of administrative data entrusted to us by other public authorities. These ensure that access to identifiable data is strictly limited to a small number of essential personnel only, and data linkage for analytical purposes is carried out on pseudonymised datasets.
33. The Administrative Data Centre (ADC) is the central repository of unit-level administrative data in the CSO. This data is sourced from a wide range of public bodies. The ADC manages the secure transfer of administrative data into the CSO and ensures that administrative data access procedures comply with the requirements of confidentiality and data protection. One of the main sources of protection of individual data is the organisation of ADC data into “tiers” which ensures a high level of control of access to identifiable data. In particular:
- Source Tier data contains all details of the original raw data received from the sending public body, including identifiers. Access to this tier is restricted to a small number of essential personnel.
  - Analysis Tier data comprises pseudonymised data sets from which person/business names and addresses and other identifiers have been removed. Individual records in this tier contain a Protected Identifier Key (PIK) which enables linkage of datasets without use of personally identifiable information.
34. Survey data, including GUI datasets, can also be assigned a PIK on each record. This facilitates linkage of administrative and survey data without the use of direct identifiers. The assignment of PIKs to both administrative and survey data is carried out within the ADC under strictly controlled conditions and by a limited number of personnel.

## B. CSO data protocol

35. The CSO Data Protocol<sup>1</sup> provides a governance framework for the linkage of both survey and administrative data sets for statistical purposes provided that:
- All data matching activity complies in full with data protection legislation;
  - The data matching is undertaken solely for statistical purposes;
  - The implementation of any proposal for matching has received the prior written approval of the Director General of the CSO before it is implemented; and
  - The provisions of the Statistics Act, 1993 regarding the protection of individual information are strictly adhered to at all stages of the data matching process and are applied in particular to protecting the individual data contained in the linked databases.
36. All data linkage projects are subject to a four-stage approval process, culminating with the approval of the Director General.
37. A publicly available register of data matching activities is maintained and updated quarterly. This ensures the transparency of the CSO's data matching activity and contributes towards social acceptance of this work.

## IV. Creating a sampling frame from administrative records

### A. Previous approach and limitations

38. Administrative data use is key to the design of a new birth cohort for Ireland. Nearly 20 years ago a single administrative data source the Child Benefit Register (CBR) was identified as the only viable sampling frame for the first infant cohort – Cohort 08<sup>2</sup>. The register comprises the details of every child for whom a Child Benefit (CB) payment is made in Ireland and of the parent who receives the payment. CB is a universal social protection payment to the parents or guardians of children under age 16 (or 18 if in full time education) who satisfy a habitual residence condition<sup>3</sup>. The payment is generally made to the child's mother. (In 2023, just 1.5% of the 648,000 recipients of this payment were male<sup>4</sup>.)
39. While the CBR was seen at the time as the optimal sampling frame for Cohort 08, it had some limitations, including the voluntary nature of registration – although the financial incentive was regarded a strong mitigating factor – and limited classification variables for stratification purposes. Also, children born to parents who do not meet the habitual residence

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cso.ie/en/aboutus/lgdp/csodatapolices/csodataprotocol/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.growingup.gov.ie/pubs/BKMNEXT252.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/social-welfare/irish-social-welfare-system/social-assistance-payments/habitual-residence-condition/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/262944/3bdd325b-db94-4daf-90c3-b6c00682a7d9.pdf#page=null>



criterion, such as International Protection applicants, do not qualify for this payment and would, therefore, not appear on the sampling frame.

## **B. Enhanced approach for Cohort 24**

40. For Cohort 24, therefore, while the CBR is again being used to form the central spine of the sampling frame, further improvements to the previous approach were required. In particular there was a stakeholder requirement to disproportionately sample harder to reach groups in the population due to the need to maintain a representative sample over time. This meant that additional stratification variables that were not available in the CBR were needed, as was coverage of children not eligible for CB.
41. Thanks to the developments in the use of administrative data since the design of Cohort 08, and the transfer of GUI functions to the CSO such improvements have been made possible. In particular the CSO Data Protocol enables the linkage of CB data with other sources to give a more comprehensive sampling frame with increased options for stratification.
42. Coverage issues associated with the CBR have been addressed under the new approach by supplementing the CBR with birth registrations data. This allows for the inclusion of births registered in Ireland in respect of whom no child benefit claim has been made or no eligibility for child benefit exists as well as providing additional attributes for stratification. This data linkage was carried out successfully for a pilot survey conducted in October-December 2023.
43. Stratification options are being improved through the assignment of both area-level information such as area-based deprivation measures and person-based characteristics (of the parents) from other administrative and survey sources. This will enable disproportionate sampling of certain hard to reach groups. The data linkage required for this work was partially achieved for the pilot survey and further work focussing, in particular, on area-based characteristics will be completed for the full survey in 2024.

## **C. Administrative data for analysis**

44. Use of administrative data to replace primary data collection is also a central focus of the new GUI work programme. There are many advantages to such an approach including:
  - Reduction of response burden by confining primary data collection only to those topics/data items which are not available in administrative data. This is particularly important for a broad based cohort study which requires data collection across a wide range of domains.
  - Non-reliance on respondent recall, e.g. for examination results, reducing the risk of error in the data.
  - Ability to calculate certain measures for the entire population of interest.
45. The role of the CSO and its position in the national data infrastructure enables this approach, utilising strategic relationships across the public service to facilitate the use of publicly held data sources in a way that is consistent with our legal mandate as NSI and is compliant with data protection and data governance requirements.

46. The education domain currently provides one of the best examples of the existing and planned use of administrative data from across a range of public bodies to give a comprehensive profile of education pathways. Administrative data sources can provide us with an almost “cradle to grave” view of education trajectories beginning at early childhood care and education. Starting with the very first wave of data collection when the children are aged just 9 months, the National Childcare Information System of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth gives detailed information on formal childcare settings including facilities available in the setting, quality markers, staffing levels and programmes offered as well as information on the population served and levels of diversity. At later waves similar data can be accessed for school settings, using the Primary and Post-Primary Pupil Databases of the Department of Education as well as data from the State Examinations Commission. Later in life, administrative data sources from other education agencies can be used to identify further and higher education activity and attainment.
47. By embedding a “secondary data first” principle in the questionnaire design process and ensuring that appropriate identifiers are recorded. GUI has the capacity not only to trace educational pathways taken and education levels attained, but also to link these pathways and outcomes to other factors. This type of analysis has already been successfully tested for older cohorts and with an increased understanding of the role of a national data infrastructure including the use of person and address identifiers developing across the public service in Ireland the future outlook of this work remains bright.

## V. Cohort ‘24 questionnaire

48. The new birth cohort, Cohort 24, aims to build on previous GUI cohorts and international experience, to ensure the availability to the state of robust national data on children and families in contemporary, post-pandemic Ireland.
49. An intensive program of data collection is planned – starting when the babies are 9 months old. In line with social changes over the last fifteen years, Cohort 24 will specifically seek to capture in more detail than previously, the diverse experiences of families and children in Ireland – particularly among smaller subgroups in the population, such as diverse ethnic groups, children in migrant families or those with disabilities.

### A. Survey design

50. A core priority for the new birth cohort is to measure the baby’s developmental outcomes directly, and to engage directly with parents (and children as they grow older) about their own lived experiences. Cohort 24 has been designed to gather information on the family context, household environment, baby’s development, family relationships, neighbourhood, housing, childcare and socioeconomic context. To this end the respondents to be interviewed for the study are:

#### *Household Informants*

- Primary informant (self-selected) – the parent/guardian who provides the most care for the baby in the household.

- Other parent in household – the second parent/guardian resident in the household.

*Other informants (pilot)*

- Parent in own household – parents or legal guardians who do not live full time with the baby and so are resident in their own household.
- Childcare provider – childminder/childcare provider of regular childcare to the baby.

## B. Questionnaire design inputs

51. The questionnaire design process began in early 2023. An iterative process of stakeholder engagement and requirements analysis was undertaken. This was followed by an intensive review and refinement of the questionnaires in consultation with DCEDIY. The questionnaire content was agreed using the process and phases outlined below:

i. Stakeholder engagement

An intensive period of stakeholder engagement was undertaken – this included consultations with policy makers across a range of government departments and public bodies, researchers and non-governmental organisations. These requirements were reviewed and prioritised based on specific criteria chief amongst which were policy data need, research data need, longitudinal consistency, availability in administrative data and length of questionnaire.

ii. Longitudinal consistency

The questionnaire from the previous birth cohort was reviewed to facilitate cross cohort longitudinal consistency and comparability with the new requirements for Cohort 24.

iii. International Longitudinal studies

Research was carried out on data points, scales and topics included in other international longitudinal cohort studies to enable cross-country comparability.

iv. Meta data reviews

Meta data repositories such as the CSO's own Colectica database and the Centre for Longitudinal Studies were mined for standardised questions on a range of topics. Emphasis was placed on the use of questions already in the public domain and used in other surveys. Questions from the Survey on Income and Living Conditions on deprivation and cost of living, from the Labour Force Survey on the Labour Market and questions on housing quality, ethnicity and economic status from the Irish Census were included to facilitate both national and international comparability of data points.

v. Administrative data

Data requirements were reviewed against the meta data available in the CSO ADC. Data points that can be derived using administrative data include: income, social welfare payments, medical cards, birth information, housing/rent supplement and educational pathways. Data needs that can be met by the administrative data already availability within the CSO were removed from the questionnaire.

52. At the conclusion of the above process the content for the questionnaires was defined and agreed paving the way for the design and build phases of the GSBPM to proceed. The Parent and Primary Informant questionnaire topics and rationale for inclusion are outlined in Table 3 Parent and Table 4 Primary Informant.

Table 3  
Parent questionnaire topics

Topics	Rationale
<b>Socio demographics &amp; Education/Parental Health</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parental citizenship/residency</li> <li>• Parental education</li> <li>• Parental educational expectations for baby</li> <li>• Household Language</li> <li>• Parent's health</li> </ul>	Context of the household & baby's environment Longitudinal information: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language in households</li> <li>• Health conditions impacting parents/guardians of baby.</li> </ul>
<b>Employment</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-perceived employment status/ILO Status</li> <li>• Occupation in current or last job (unemployed/retired)</li> <li>• Occupation of spouse/partner in current or last job (unemployed/retired)</li> <li>• Flexible working</li> </ul>	Context on the socioeconomic environment of the family Maintain longitudinal consistency with the other cohorts Access to/availability of flexible working Returning to work from maternity leave
<b>Leave &amp; Work Life Balance</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maternity Leave</li> <li>• Paternity Leave</li> <li>• Parents Leave</li> <li>• Parental leave</li> <li>• Work life balance</li> </ul>	Policy requirements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Usage of new/extended leave by parents &amp; guardians</li> <li>• Identify barriers to taking leave</li> <li>• Primary objectives - helping parents balance work and care</li> </ul>
<b>Prenatal care &amp; Baby birth and health</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Antenatal care</li> <li>• Birth experience</li> <li>• Breastfeeding</li> </ul>	Policy requirements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing high-quality health services</li> <li>• Health related decisions women make during pregnancy.</li> <li>• Data on breastfeeding               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low breast-feeding rates in Ireland</li> <li>• Supports/barriers for breastfeeding</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Parenting Supports</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access/use of services &amp; supports</li> <li>• Barriers to accessing services &amp; supports</li> <li>• Support from family, friends and grandparents</li> </ul>	Policy requirements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclusive accessible supports for parents</li> <li>• Providing information, services and supports to parents</li> <li>• Providing practical and material resources to parents</li> </ul>
<b>Self-Complete Sensitive Questionnaire</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ethnicity &amp; religion</li> <li>• Marital &amp; relationship status</li> <li>• Pregnancy</li> <li>• Smoking, alcohol &amp; drug use</li> <li>• Depression &amp; anxiety</li> <li>• Relationship with partner/spouse</li> <li>• Shared parenting</li> </ul>	Societal change: data on diversity/religious beliefs Focus on mental health Relationships & family dynamics Bridge significant data gaps on shared parenting

Table 4:  
Primary informant questionnaire topics

Topic	Rationale
<b>Baby</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ethnicity/citizenship/religion</li> <li>• Sleep/play/screentime</li> <li>• Transport</li> <li>• Feeding</li> <li>• Ages &amp; Stages Development questionnaire</li> </ul>	Societal change – longitudinal comparison with previous cohort Home play environment/ exposure to screens Accessibility/use/barriers to use of transport Key information on feeding/weaning/nutrition Age-appropriate developmental scale
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General health</li> <li>• Vaccinations</li> <li>• Developmental checks</li> <li>• Health care</li> </ul>	Policy requirements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uptake of vaccinations for baby</li> <li>• Access to development checks &amp; public health nurses</li> <li>• Access to primary health care</li> <li>• Use of healthcare &amp; unmet medical needs</li> </ul>
<b>Household</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing</li> <li>• Neighbourhood</li> <li>• Income</li> <li>• Deprivation</li> </ul>	Policy requirements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing tenure, quality, Cost</li> <li>• Neighbourhood – safety, amenities, transport</li> <li>• Baby's home environment</li> <li>• Socioeconomic conditions</li> <li>• Deprivation – food or fuel poverty, financial strain</li> </ul>

53. The fieldwork for the main data collection of Cohort 24 will begin in October 2024 and continue for 1 year. The data collections for future waves of Cohort 24 are planned to coincide with key transitions in the child's life and to maintain cross comparability with previous GUI Cohorts. Future data collections are therefore planned, in the medium term for when the baby is 3 years, 5 years and 7 years old. Planning is already underway for the data collection for Cohort 24 at 3 years. The design phase for this questionnaire will begin in September 2024. This is an ambitious and intensive period of data collection and analysis for GUI in the CSO, cementing GUI as a key source of data on children and their families in Ireland.

## VI. Conclusion

54. While the incorporation of the GUI survey to the NSI is still in its early stages there are some useful lessons for future design work from our experience to date:

- i. The strong legal basis which the involvement of the NSI has provided for GUI has underpinned its successful operation from the outset. The legal guarantee of confidentiality has been, and continues to be, central to the assurance that can be provided to respondents. The legal mandate of the NSI is now fundamental to the successful integration of secondary data into GUI data holdings. It provides an institutional and governance framework for the acquisition of relevant data sets and linkage of survey and administrative data in a manner that is compliant with data protection and statistical legislation.
- ii. The partnership between the NSI and the sponsoring policy Department ensures that there is direct user input into the final survey design, increasing relevance and utility of the final dataset. The formal structures that have been put in place to support this partnership are key to ensuring a useful engagement while ensuring the independence of the NSI is maintained.
- iii. Linkage of administrative data sources to create a sampling frame have addressed issues of coverage and stratification in a way that was not possible for earlier cohorts in the GUI project. This will improve coverage and retention across waves of data collection thus enabling increased policy relevant analysis.
- iv. The process approach taken in the survey design, structured around the GSBPM and underpinned by a metadata management system across multiple household surveys, enables efficiencies and standardization.
- v. The questionnaire design process – capturing user requirements, maintaining longitudinal consistency, utilising administrative data and standardising question blocks for national and international compatibility enables the development of questionnaire content best placed to meet the data needs of both policy experts and researchers.
- vi. Future work planning for an intensive period of data collection for GUI together with the transition to the CSO will ensure GUI continues to be a relevant and robust source of data on children and their families in Ireland