Children’s Independent Mobility on the island of Ireland

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Foreword

When we think of times past, we are fond of saying that children then had more freedoms than now. They walked to school and played or spent time with friends until dusk in a carefree manner that we don’t see today. This important study definitively demonstrates that children on the island of Ireland do indeed enjoy considerably less mobility and independence than did children a generation ago.

The work of both the Ombudsman for Children’s Office and the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People’s Office is underpinned by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Committee on the Rights of the Child has recently published a General Comment on Article 31 – The right of the child to rest, leisure, play, recreational activities, cultural life and the arts. In it, they note their concern at the poor recognition afforded by States to Article 31. They link this to, among other things, a lack of awareness of the importance of play and recreation, a lack of access to inclusive spaces free from inappropriate hazards, close to their homes, as well as the commercialisation of public areas. This Article imposes an obligation on States to introduce the necessary infrastructure to ensure all necessary services and opportunities for children. The findings in this report demonstrate that the environmental conditions and infrastructure provision on the island of Ireland require upgrading and restructuring in order to become more child-friendly. We talk a lot about the importance of facilities for children but in reality this is one of the areas of children’s lives in which there has been a particular information deficit. It is always a positive thing to have more data on a topic particularly when such data reveals that public bodies are falling short in ensuring that public spaces are child friendly. Children and young people are in turn disempowered in respect of trying to engage in activities that they have been informed are beneficial for their health and wellbeing.

Both the UN Convention and our Offices emphasise the critical importance of engaging meaningfully with children and young people in an inclusive and respectful way. Both highlight the deficiencies of approaches in which authorities or decision-makers do things to children and young people or for them, rather than with them. Such approaches are characterised by a failure to give young people the opportunity to express their views or a failure to accord them the appropriate weight in the context of decision-making.
From our respective work as Ombudsman and Commissioner, it is clear that hearing what children have to say is an essential part of a wider transformation of the public service vis-à-vis children. Respect for the views of the child is a core element of our work. This conviction is rooted in Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which requires States to assure to children capable of forming their own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting them, with due weight given to those views in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. This principle – a principle that has an elevated status in the framework of the UN Convention because of its cross-cutting nature – underpins all of the work of both the Ombudsman for Children and the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People’s Office. It is therefore welcome that a key feature of this report is that it gives effect to children’s views. It articulates their views on their environment as well as transport and travel.

And while at local level, development agencies have been mobilising community and voluntary groups to come together and improve local amenities for children and young people, as a whole independent mobility continues to decline. The report also illustrates the naturally cautious approach of parents which limits the levels of independent mobility experienced by their children. It is important that we strike a balance between the safety and welfare of children and young people and the importance of allowing them the space and freedoms to explore their surroundings, to participate in unstructured play, to create imagined worlds and enjoy gathering and meeting with friends and peers in public spaces across villages, towns and cities as we once did.

There is no doubt that this report will make a positive contribution to discussions around the progressing of child-friendly development plans. It is important that public bodies and local authorities in particular consider both the views of children – as appropriate - as well as their best interests when making decisions relating to planning and development.

Emily Logan
Ombudsman for Children

Patricia Lewsley-Mooney
Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People
United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Article 12 (Respect for the views of the child):
When adults are making decisions that affect children, children have the right to say what they think should happen and have their opinions taken into account.

Article 15 (Freedom of association):
Children have the right to meet together and to join groups and organisations, as long as it does not stop other people from enjoying their rights. In exercising their rights, children have the responsibility to respect the rights, freedoms and reputations of others.

Article 31 (Leisure, play and culture):
Children have the right to relax and play, and to join a wide range of cultural, artistic and other recreational activities.
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Executive Summary

Children’s Independent Mobility, which may be defined as the level of freedom children have to make journeys on their own, is integral to the exercise of children’s rights. Children’s ability to travel and move about in their communities e.g. to walk or cycle to school, the shops, friends’ houses and recreational facilities, is indicative of the value our society places on children. By studying Children’s Independent Mobility, we gain insights into the lives of children and the health and wellbeing of our communities on several fronts – health, education, sporting, cultural and environmental. This study distinguishes itself from many other reports on children’s lives. While other studies are about children, this study involves children, and it gives effect to their voices. Children and parents from twenty-five schools across the island of Ireland participated and a total of 2,228 children and young people between the ages of seven and fifteen completed a survey that explored their travel patterns and levels of personal autonomy. In addition, 1,695 of their parents completed an accompanying questionnaire about similar issues. The data were gathered in 2011.

The questionnaires examined CIM (Children’s Independent Mobility) by exploring various licences which parents confer on their children at different stages in their development and in a range of contexts. Specifically, our research investigated the permission children have, when unaccompanied by adults, to:

- cross roads,
- travel home from school,
- walk or cycle on main roads,
- use local buses (other than a school bus),
- play outside after dark,
- visit friends’ / relatives’ homes and
- attend sporting, social or recreational events.

The study captured a considerable amount of data on how children make the journey to and from school and it also recorded some of their other travel patterns. The research sought to gauge children’s and parents’ perceptions of safety and mobility in their local area.

This research with children on the island of Ireland represents one of sixteen parallel studies, which were enabled and co-ordinated by the Policy Studies Institute (UK). When collated, the international data show the island of Ireland comes in twelfth place, among the sixteen locations involved in this study. Finland emerges as the country with the highest levels of Children’s Independent Mobility. Other North European countries and Germany also perform strongly, while Ireland (north and south) and countries in Southern Europe tend to be characterised by lower levels of child mobility. This international dimension adds to the value of our study, as it provides channels through which we in Ireland can benefit from experiences and lessons elsewhere, and transnational co-operation will be essential to the implementation of the recommendations arising from our examination and articulation of children’s experiences.

The vast majority of children report that they are allowed to cross roads on their own and this licence was shown to be positively associated with age; 84 per cent of primary school children and 99 per cent of second-level students having been granted this licence. The majority of children also indicate that they received this licence between the ages of seven and nine. Similarly, CIM in relation to bus use is also strongly influenced by age. Two-thirds of second-level students are allowed to use local buses other than the school bus on their own, while fewer than one in ten primary school children state that they are allowed to do so.
Almost all (95%) of second-level students report they are allowed to cycle on main roads without adults. The proportion of second-level students who own a bicycle (88%) is slightly lower than that of primary level pupils (93%). Over 80 per cent of primary school children have cycled on main roads and a majority of these (almost 60%) are allowed to cycle to places on their own. The threshold at which children are allowed to cycle on main roads occurs about ten years of age.

Over a quarter of primary school children indicate that they spend time playing outside after dark with most of these being aged ten or older. However, only a small minority of parents (4%) report that they allow their primary school child to go out after dark. Half of second-level students claim that they are allowed to go out after dark, although this finding is challenged by parents’ responses. While parents’ and children’s views diverge on this matter, they tend to converge in respect of all other indicators of current child mobility. Moreover, their responses are consistent regarding the sequence in which licences are acquired or granted.

Most children complete their school journeys by car: 59 per cent of primary pupils and 49 per cent of second-level students. The school bus is the second most common mode of travel to and from school for second-level students with one third using this service. Walking is the second most common mode of travel to and from school for primary pupils with approximately one quarter completing their school journeys on foot. Less than 3 per cent of primary pupils and less than 2 per cent of second-level students cycle to and from school—a statistic that sets Ireland and Northern Ireland apart from other locations throughout Europe as cycling rates are much higher among young people in most continental countries, especially in Scandinavia, Germany and the Benelux Countries. However, there is some evidence that investment in active travel initiatives are beginning to bear fruit.

Over three-quarters (79%) of primary school children and almost two-thirds (64%) of second-level students are accompanied by an adult while travelling to school. Some 30 per cent of the survey participants attend a school other than the school nearest them, thus increasing the likelihood of car dependency.

With regard to non-school travel, the top six weekend activities in which children participate without adult supervision are, in order of frequency: visiting friends’ homes; going for a walk or cycle; going to the shops; going to a playground; going to a park or sports field; and spending time with friends. The top weekend activities completed in the company of adults are: visiting relatives; going to shops; visiting a place of worship; playing sport or swimming; and going for a walk or cycle.

Almost all children (94%) report feeling (fairly or very) safe in their local neighbourhood. However, nearly one quarter of primary school children (23%) admit to being worried about strangers when they are outside on their own. This decreases to 15 per cent when children are accompanied by their friends. Similarly, 15 per cent of second-level students report fear of strangers when alone, and this drops to 8 per cent when they are with their friends. The single biggest sources of worry to children when they are outside are dogs (for both boys and girls) and kidnapping (among girls). The study reveals that over half the parents felt that most adults in the neighbourhood would look out for other people’s children.

This study of children’s mobility also sheds light on a number of factors that shape and influence where children go, how often they do so and their methods of travel. Age has a strong bearing on the degrees of freedom children experience. Once children make the transition from primary to second-level school,
they find that parents confer on them an extended range of mobility licences. Gender is also significant in determining levels of child mobility. The difference between boys and girls is notable in respect of a number of activities, not least boys’ higher participation rates in sporting activities. Based on the indicators used in this research, boys not only experience greater freedoms, they are also more likely than girls to be physically active.

Geographical factors such as the location of a child’s home and levels of local connectivity have also been shown to have an influence on children’s mobility. Urban children are more likely to walk or cycle to and from school while rural children are more likely to have space and opportunities for spontaneous outdoor play and adventure.

The study reveals many inter-generational changes, and it records a marked decline in Children’s Independent Mobility on several scales. Over 60 per cent of parents report that, as children, they walked to school. Today, only 13 per cent of second-level students and 22 per cent of primary children indicate that they walk to school. The findings from this study suggest that increased reliance on the car is more associated with lifestyle choices and concerns about road safety, rather than with the actual distances children travel. The limited provision of public transport is a further driver of current high levels of car use. A number of parents point to the lack of bus services and the poor scheduling and routing of buses as among the reasons why they feel obliged to drive their children to and from school. The figures generated by this study provide evidence of both the under-supply and under-use of public transport in Ireland, relative to most other European countries. In our major cities (Dublin and Belfast), just over 2 per cent of children use public transport to travel to school, while in all other parts of Ireland the corresponding figures are negligible.

The findings reveal the influence of parental attitudes and opinions on the experiences, behaviour and perceptions of children with regard to travel, transport and independent mobility. The study uncovers a contrast between parents’ and children’s attitudes to traffic, as parents express greater worries about the dangers of traffic. This may be associated with the fact that parents are more conscious of and informed about the risks on the road, and have taken on board to a greater extent the messages of the Road Safety Authority of Ireland and the Road Safety Council of Northern Ireland, both of which have been rigorous in educating drivers on the importance of road safety.

Parents’ responses also reveal concerns about anti-social behaviour and possible intimidation in their locality, which can influence the levels of independent mobility experienced by their children. Geography is a crucial factor in this respect; the more rural the environment, the less likely it is that children’s mobility will be delimited by anti-social behaviour. However, the overall thrust of the responses in both the parents’ and children’s surveys is that infrastructural considerations clearly influence where children go, how they travel and the types of activities in which they engage. The study findings suggest that adequate provision of footpaths and public lighting, as well as access to spaces (other than private gardens) – both formal and informal – are important in determining levels of children’s mobility and their activities. The low level of access to shared communal spaces relative to other European countries is a negative distinguishing feature of the island of Ireland and one that needs to be addressed in the future design and retro-fitting of the built environment. Against this, the range of amenities and outlets provided by civil society bodies, usually in a voluntary capacity, is enabling of children and young people, and Ireland scores well with respect to the positive association between local social capital and CIM.
The research findings point to a need to re-affirm a rights-based approach that puts the child at the centre of decision-making processes, and empowers children to have a meaningful say in shaping the environments in which they live, study, play and move about. Civil society bodies and many schools – north and south – are currently providing our children with spaces in which they can be active and healthy, and further support for voluntary bodies and community initiatives is essential. Local government needs to mainstream the involvement of children in the planning process. School and community-based projects need to be fully gender-proofed, so as to be more inclusive of girls, while it behoves all of our society to make public spaces more child-friendly and welcoming. While national policies have generally become more progressive, most of the government-level strategies currently in place are from the last decade. As these are being revised and updated, it is essential that there be no time-lags between strategies, action plans or budgets, and that children’s voices ring loud and clear in the ears and hearts of those with responsibility for formulating policy, devising strategy, implementing programmes and delivering services at all tiers. All children are different, and while governments must ensure the implementation of, and adherence to, the highest standards at all times, we need to avoid an overly-centralised and ‘one size fits all’ approach, so that local communities, schools and those who work with children and young people are enabled to be creative, innovative, responsive and proactive in fostering a more mobile, active, happy, confident and safe childhood and adolescence.
Children’s Independent Mobility on the island of Ireland

Achoimre Fheidhmeach

Is cuid lárnach í Soghluaisteacht Neamhspleách Páistí, is é sin, an leibhéal saoirse atá ag na páistí turasanna a dhéanamh as a stuaim féin, do chleachtadh ceartanna na bpáistí. Taispeánann cumas páistí taisteal agus dúl timpéall ina bpbobail féin, m.sh. siúl nó rothaoiacht ar scoil, go dtí na siopal, tithe carad agus aiseanna caithheadh a aimsire, an luach a thugann an tscotháil do pháistí. Tri staidéar a dhéanamh ar Shoghluaisteachta Neamhspleách Páistí, is féidir linn léargas a fháil ar shaol páistí agus ar níos mó ná gné amhain de shláinte agus de fholáin a bhfuil an tsairidh ina maraíodh agus timpeallacht. Tá difríocht idir an staidéar seo agus taighde eile ar shaol páistí. Fad is atá staidéir eile faoi pháistí, tá páistí páirtíochta sa staidéar seo agus tugann sé guth do dhóibh. Ghlaic páistí as 25 scoil trasa ina n-áthas na hÉireann páirt ann agus chomhchlión 2,228 páiste agus daoine óga idir 16 agus 18 a sheachadh agus a cugú deag suíomh a rinne iníuchadh ar a bpátrúin taisthaltaí agus a bhfhéinriar pearsanta. Ina theannta sin, chomhchlión 1,695 dá dtuismitheoir agus caomhnóirí ceistneoir a ghaibh leis faoi chúrsaí idirnáisiúnta den saghas céanna. Bailiodh an data i 2011.

Scrúdaigh na ceistneoirí SNP (Soghluaisteachta Neamhspleách Páistí) trí iniúchadh a dhéanamh ar an saghas ceadanada a thugann tuismitheoirí dá bpáistí ag pointí difriúla dá bhforbairt agus i raon comhthéacsanna. D’fhiosraigh an staidéar a dhéanamh gur d’fhéadfadh páistí cineálta a d’fhágann na fáilte is féidir acheapadh i bhfeidhm a bhfuil in Éirinn. Tá cumhacht air iad i dteannta duine fásta chun:

• bóithre a thrasnú,
• taisteal abhaile ón scoil,
• siúl nó rothaoiacht ar phríomhbhóithre,
• busanna a úsáid (seachas bus scoil),
• súgadadh taobh amuigh tar éis titim an dorchadais,
• cuitreacht a thabhairt ar chaire, ar thithe go gcaithfear agus freastal ar imeachtáí spóirt, sóisialta nó caiteamh aimsire.

Cheap an staidéar cuid mhaith data ar conas a dhéanann páistí an turas ar agus ón scoil agus chomh maith leis an sean ról in Éirinn. D’íobair na tuaisceart a bheith in Éirinn de chúrsaí eispéireachta agus ceachtanna in aon duine de na páirteachtaí a thugann an spórt do pháistí. Tá an ghné idirnáisiúnta leagan de shaol páistí a d’fhágann an saghas céanna in Éirinn. Dhírigh a staidéar go bhfuil an sluagh in Éirinn de chúrsaí eispéireachta agus ceachtanna a fhorbairt a chur in iúl d’fhorbairt a bhfuil ina n-aonair, agus leis an ghné idirnáisiúnta a d’fhágann an saghas céanna in Éirinn.

Is cuid i an staidéar seo le páistí ar oileán na hÉireann de shé cinn déag de 25 scoil a dhéanann idirnáisiúnta. Tá an sé are dhuine de na páirteachtaí a bhfuil in Éirinn de chúrsaí eispéireachta agus ceachtanna a thugann an saghas céanna in Éirinn. Dhírigh an staidéar go bhfuil an ghné idirnáisiúnta a d’fhágann an saghas céanna in Éirinn.

Tuairiscíonn formhór mór páistí go bhfuil cáil acu bóithre a thrasnú as a stuaim féin, agus a d’fhágann an sé are dhuine de na páirteachtaí a bhfuil ina n-aonair, agus leis an ghné idirnáisiúnta a d’fhágann an saghas céanna in Éirinn go bhfuil an ghné idirnáisiúnta a d’fhágann an saghas céanna in Éirinn.
Tuairiscionn beagnach gach páiste iar-bhunscoile (95%) go bhuail cead acu rothaíocht ar phiromhbhóithire gan duine fásta leo. Tá an céadadán de scoláirí iar-bhunscoile a bhfuil rothar acu, 88%, beagnán faoi bhun scoláirí bunscoile (93%). Tá rothaíocht déanta ag níos mó ná 80% do pháistí bunscoile ar phiromhbhóithire, agus tá cead ag a bhformhór siúd (beagnach 60%) rothaíocht chuig aitheanna as a stuaím féin. Is ó aós deich mbliana ar aghaidh a cheadaitear do pháistí rothaíocht ar phiromhbhóithire.

Deir níos mó ná an cheathrú cuid de pháistí bunscoile go gcaiteann siad a gcuid ama ag súgradh taobh amuigh tar éis titim an dorchaidh, a bhformhór siúd ag aíos a deich nó níos mó. Ni thuairiscionn ach mionlach beag de thuismitheoirí (4%), afach, go gceadaitheann siad dá bpaiste bunscoile dul amach tar éis titim an dorchaidh. Dearbhaíonn leath na scoláirí iar-bhunscoile go bhfuil cead acu do amach tar éis titim an dorchaidh, cé go mbréagnaíonn freagraí na dtuismitheoirí é seo. Có bhuil contrárthacht idir dearcadh na dtuismitheoirí agus na bpaistí faoin ábhar seo, tagann siad lena chéile maidir le gach gné eile de shoghluais do pháistí faoi láthair. Chomh maith leis sin, tagann a bhfreagraí lena chéile maidir leis an seicheamh ina bhfaightear nó ina dtugtar na ceadaí ann.

Déanann an chuid is mó de pháistí a dturas scoile i gcarr: 59% de scoláirí bunscoile, agus 49% de scoláirí iar-bhunscoile. Is é an bus scoile an córas taistil is gnáthaí ar agus ón scoil do scoláirí iar-bhunscoile, le trian ag baint úsáide as an seirbhís seo. Is i an tsuílóiód an dara sílthaisil is gnátháil maidir le scoláirí bunscoile, le ceithre nó mar sin ag dul de shiúl na gcos. Tá níos mó ná 3% de scoláirí bunscoile agus níos lú ná 2% de scoláirí iar-bhunscoile ag rothaíocht ar agus ón scoil-staíistic a dhealaionn Éire agus Tuaisceart na hÉireann ó na n-áiríteachtaí agus na céadachtaí nó na n-áiríteachtaí agus na ceadaí ar cheann de na n-áiríteachtaí nó na n-áiríteachtaí agus na n-áiríteachtaí.

Tá duine fásta i dteannta níos mó ná trí-cheathrú (79%) de scoláirí bunscoile agus beagnach dhá thrían (64%) de scoláirí iar-bhunscoile agus iad ag taisteal ar scoil. Tá 30% éigin diobh siúd a bhi πáirtíarachta sa tsuirbhé-30% de scoláirí bunscoile agus 32% de scoláirí iar-bhunscoile ag freastal ar scoil eile seachas an scoil is gaire dóibh, agus mar sin is doichí iad ag brath ar charr.

Maidir le taisteal nach mbaineann le scoil, an sé imeacht is mó ina bhfuil páistí πáirtíarachta ag an deireadh seachtaine gan stiúradh daoine fásta nó, in ord miniciohta : ar cuairt ar thithe carad; ag dul ag siúl/rathaíocht; ag dul go dtí na siopaí; ag dul go clóis súgartha; ag dul go páirc nó páiric imertaí agus acraithreamh ama le caidre. Na himeachtaí is mó a dhéantar le daoine fásta ná: ar cuairt ar ghaolta; ag dul go dtí na siopaí; ag dul go teampalll creidimh; ag imirt spóirt/agnaimh, agus ag dul ag siúl/rathaíocht.

Tuairiscionn beagnach gach páiste (94%) go mbraitheann siad (cuíosach nó an-) shábháilte ina gcomharsantacht áitiúil. Adhmhaíonn beagnach an cheathrú cuid de pháistí bunscoile (23%), afach, go mbionn siad imníoch faoi sráinséirí nuair atá siad amuigh ina n-aonair. Laghdaithe sé seo go 15% nuair atá siad i dteannta a gcarad. Mar a gcéanna, tuairiscionn 15% de pháistí iar-bhunscoile go bhfuil ealaí orthu roimh sráinséirí nuair atá siad ina n-aonair, agus titeann sé go 8% nuair atá siad le caidre. Is iad na cúiseanna inmí is mó do fhaighdhisí an chorpaí ina n-áiríteachta (dó bhuaigilis agus chailíní ar an) agus fuadach (i measc cailíní). Léiríonn an stáidéar gur níor eadhadh níos mó ná leath na dtuismitheoirí go mbeadh an chuid is mó de dhaoine fásta sa chomharsanacht ag faire amach do pháistií daoine eile.
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Tugann an staidéar seo ar shoghluaisteacht páisti tosca áirithe chun solais a mhúnlaíonn agus a mbionn tionchar acu ar cá dtéann páisti, cé chomh minic agus a theann siad ann agus a modhanna taistil. Tá baint mhór ag aois leis na leibhéil saoire a bhionn ag páisti. An túsce a aistrosann páisti ón mbunscóil go dtí an iar-bhunscoil, faigheann siad go mbíonn tuaismitheoirí agus caomhnóirí raon níos leithne céadanna soghluaisteacha orthu. Tá inscne tábhachtach, leis, chun leibhéil soghluaisteacht páisti a chinneadh. Tá an difríocht idir buachaillí agus agallínti suntasach maidir le gniomhaíochtaí a dhuachadh, go mór mór an ranphairtiocht nó mo ag buachailli i mtheacht spórtúla. Bunaítear ar na tácaí a uasaideadh sa taighde seo, ní amhain go mbionn saoire níos mó ag buachaillí, ach gur dóichí, chomh maith, iad a bheith níos gníomhaí go fisiciúil.

Taispeántar, leis, go bhfuil tionchar ar shoghluaisteacht páisti ag tosca tíreolaíochta, mar shuíomh tí an pháiste agus na leibhéil comhcheangailteacht aítíuí. Is dóighi go siúfadh nó go rothóidh páistí urbeacha ar agus ón scoil agus is dóighi go mbeidh spás agus deiseanna ag páisti tuaithe le haghaidh súgartha taobh amuigh agus eachtraíocht.

Taispeánann theorainn móran atruithe ó ghlúin go glúin agus cláraíonn sé laghdú suntasach i Soghluaisteacht Neamhspleách Páistí ar níos mó ná scála amháin. Tuairiscionn níos mó ná 60% de thuismiteoirí gur shiúil siad ar scoil mar pháistí. Inniu, ní léirionn ach 13% de scoilí iar-bhunscóil agus 22% de pháisti bunscoile go mbeadh siad ann. Dá fo thorthaí an staidéar seo, go mbeadh níos mó níos go rothóidh páisti urbeacha ar agus ón scoil agus is dóighi go mbeidh spás agus deiseanna ag páisti tuaithe le haghaidh súgartha taobh amuigh agus eachtraíocht.

Taispeánann an staidéar mórán a thuiscint go bhfuil tionchar atá ag dearcadh agus tuairimí tuismitheoirí ar eispéire is, iompar agus dearcadh páistí bheith an-taisceach a leithid baol tréidh leis an-choitíocht. Is féidir go bhfuil níos mó níos dearcadh a bhíonn ag páistí i gcomharsanacht go háirithe níos mó níos go dhá féidir leis an-choitíocht a dhuachadh.

Nochtain an torthaí an tionchar ata ar dearcadh agus tuairimi tuismiteoirí ar eispéire is, iompar agus dearcadh páistí bheith an-taisceach a leithid baol tréidh leis an-choitíocht. Is féidir go bhfuil bheart agus ar an taisceacht a dhuachadh. Nochtain an staidéar contrárthacht idir dearcadh tuismiteoirí agus dearcadh páistí i leith tráchttha, mar go léirionn tuismiteoirí imní níos mó níos go bhfuil níos go dhéanta. Is féidir go bhfuil níos mó níos go dhéanta agus agus eispéire iompair pheiplí in Éirinn, i gcomparáid leis an gcothúil eile in an-Eoraip. Is féidir an-choitíocht a dhéanamh ar shiúl chomh maith le linn an staidéar seo, ach ní bheadh in ann an-choitíocht a dhéanamh sa chuid ar a dtugtar an tAonraí a bhíonn clocha'.

Nochtain an torthaí an tionchar ata ar dearcadh agus tuairimi tuismiteoirí ar eispéire is, iompar agus dearcadh páistí bheith an-taisceach a leithid baol tréidh leis an-choitíocht. Is féidir go bhfuil níos mó níos go dhéanta agus agus eispéire iompair pheiplí in Éirinn, i gcomparáid leis an gcothúil eile in an-Eoraip. Is féidir an-choitíocht a dhéanamh ar shiúl chomh maith le linn an staidéar seo, ach ní bheadh in ann an-choitíocht a dhéanamh sa chuid ar a dtugtar an tAonraí a bhíonn clocha'.

Nochtann freagraí tuismitheoirí, leis, imní faoi iompar frithshóisialta agus b’fhéidir imní faoi eispéire is, iompar agus dearcadh páistí bheith an-taisceach a leithid baol tréidh leis an-choitíocht. Is féidir go bhfuil bheart agus ar an taisceacht a dhuachadh. Nochtain an staidéar contrárthacht idir dearcadh tuismiteoirí agus dearcadh páistí i leith tráchttha, mar go léirionn tuismiteoirí imní níos mó níos go bhfuil níos go dhéanta. Is féidir go bhfuil bheart agus ar an taisceacht a dhuachadh. Nochtain an staidéar contrárthacht idir dearcadh tuismiteoirí agus dearcadh páistí i leith tráchttha, mar go léirionn tuismiteoirí imní níos mó níos go bhfuil níos go dhéanta. Is féidir go bhfuil bheart agus ar an taisceacht a dhuachadh. Nochtain an staidéar contrárthacht idir dearcadh tuismiteoirí agus dearcadh páistí i leith tráchttha, mar go léirionn tuismiteoirí imní níos mó níos go bhfuil níos go dhéanta. Is féidir go bhfuil bheart agus ar an taisceacht a dhuachadh.
gné shuntasach dhiúltach í d’oileán na hÉireann an leibhéal íseal spásanna pobail comhroinnte i gcomparáid le tiortha eile Eorpacha. Is gá aghaidh a thabhairt air seo nuair atá an timpeallacht thógtha á déanamh agus á thach-choiriú sa todhcháí. Ina choineen seo, is rud é an raon áiseanna agus ionad a sholáthraioinn eagrais sa tsochar shibhialta, go deonach de ghnáth, a chumhachaíonn pástí agus daoine óga, agus éirionn go maith le hÉirinn maidir leis an gceangal dearfa atá i gcaipiteal sóisialta áitiúil agus SNP.

Léiríonn torthaí an taighde gur gá cur chuige bunaithe ar chearta a athdheimhniú a chuireann an páiste i gceart-lár próiséas cinnidh, agus a chumhachtaíonn páistí chun ionchur fónta a bheith acu i múnla na dtimpeallachta ina ndéanann siad cónaí, staidéar, súgradh agus gluaiseacht timpéall. Faoi láthair, tá eagrais sa tsochar shibhialta agus mórán scoileanna-thuaidh agus theas-ag cur spásanna ar fáil dár bpáistí inar féidir bheithe gniomhach agus slaintiúil agus tá tacaiocht bhreise riachtanach d’eagrais dheonacha agus thionscnaímh phobail. Caithfidh údarás aithniú priomhshruthu a dhéanamh de rannpháirtíocht páistí sa phróiseas pleanála. Is gá do thionscnaímh scoile agus phobail-bhunaithe aird chearta a thabhairt ar inscne, chun a bheith níos cuimsithe máidir le cailíní, agus tá dualgas ar a rachadh ina iomlán spásanna poiblí a dheanamh níos fáilte agus oiriúnai do pháistí. Cé go bhfuil polasaith naíseanta níos foráis i gceithinne ná mar a bhiodh, is on deich mbliana atá caite an chuid is mó de na straitéiseir ar leibhéal rialtais atá ann faoi láthair. Agus iad sao féin agus á n-usaidithe, is do na riachtanais é nach mbeadh aon aga atá ann faoi láthair. Agus agus sa n-usaidithe, is do na riachtanais é nach mbeadh aon aga atá ann faoi láthair. Agus iad sao féin agus á n-usaidithe, is do na riachtanais é nach mbeadh aon aga atá ann faoi láthair. Agus iad sao féin agus á n-usaidithe, is do na riachtanais é nach mbeadh aon aga atá ann faoi láthair. Agus iad sao féin agus á n-usaidithe, is do na riachtanais é nach mbeadh aon aga atá ann faoi láthair. Agus iad sao féin agus á n-usaidithe, is do na riachtanais é nach mbeadh aon aga atá ann faoi láthair. Agus iad sao féin agus á n-usaidithe, is do na riachtanais é nach mbeadh aon aga atá ann faoi láthair. Agus iad sao féin agus á n-usaidithe, is do na riachtanais é nach mbeadh aon aga atá ann faoi láthair. Agus iad sao féin agus á n-usaidithe, is do na riachtanais é nach mbeadh aon aga atá ann faoi láthair. Agus iad sao féin agus á n-usaidithe, is do na riachtanais é nach mbeadh aon aga atá ann faoi láthair. Agus iad sao féin agus á n-usaidithe, is do na riachtanais é nach mbeadh aon aga atá ann faoi láthair. Agus iad sao féin agus á n-usaidithe, is do na riachtanais é nach mbeadh aon aga atá ann faoi láthair. Agus iad sao féin agus á n-usaidithe, is do na riachtanais é nach mbeadh aon aga atá ann faoi láthair. Agus iad sao féin agus á n-usaidithe, is do na riachtanais é nach mbeadh aon aga atá ann faoi láthair. Agus iad sao féin agus á n-usaidithe, is do na riachtanais é nach mbeadh aon aga atá ann faoi láthair. Agus iad sao féin agus á n-usaidithe, is do na riachtanais é nach mbeadh aon aga atá ann faoi láthair. Agus iad sao féin agus á n-usaidithe, is do na riachtanais é nach mbeadh aon aga atá ann faoi láthair. Agus iad sao féin agus á n-usaidithe, is do na riachtanais é nach mbeadh aon aga atá ann faoi láthair. Agus iad sao féin agus á n-usaidithe, is do na riachtanais é nach mbeadh aon aga atá ann faoi láthair. Agus iad sao féin agus á n-usaidithe, is do na riachtanais é nach mbeadh aon aga atá ann faoi láthair. Agus iad sao féin agus á n-usaidithe, is do na riachtanais é nach mbeadh aon aga atá ann faoi láthair. Agus iad sao féin agus á n-usaidithe, is do na riachtanais é nach mbeadh aon aga atá ann faoi láthair. Agus iad sao féin agus á n-usaidithe, is do na riachtanais é nach mbeadh aon aga atá ann faoi láthair. Agus iad sao féin agus á n-usaidithe, is do na riachtanais é nach mbeadh aon aga atá ann faoi láthair. Agus iad sao féin agus á n-usaidithe, is do na riachtanais é nach mbeadh aon aga atá ann faoi láthair. Agus iad sao féin agus á n-usaidithe, is do na riachtanais é nach mbeadh aon aga atá ann faoi láthair. Agus iad sao féin agus á n-usaidithe, is do na riachtanais é nach mbeadh aon aga atá ann faoi láthair. Agus iad sao féin agus á n-usaidithe, is do na riachtanais é nach mbeadh aon aga atá ann faoi láthair. Agus iad sao féin agus á n-usaidithe, is do na riachtanais é nach mbeadh aon aga atá ann faoi láthair. Agus iad sao féin agus á n-usaidithe, is do na riachtanais é nach mbeadh aon aga atá ann faoi láthair. Agus iad sao féin agus á n-usaidithe, is do na riachtanais é nach mbeadh aon aga atá ann fao
Introduction

Children’s Independent Mobility (CIM) refers to the ability and freedom children have to make journeys on their own. This report explores children’s travel patterns, the journeys they make - where they go and with whom. It also looks at their attitudes to travel and the levels of mobility and freedom they have, and in this respect, our research examines how parental and societal attitudes impact on how our children get about.

This report is based on a research study that involved over 2,200 children and teenagers, most of whom were between the ages of seven and fifteen. It also involved their parents. The study explores children’s and young people’s travel patterns and levels of personal autonomy. It links these aspects of child mobility with parents’ perceptions of the dangers – actual and perceived - to which their children are exposed when travelling without adult supervision. The findings and conclusions are drawn from surveys carried out in 2011 in twenty-five Irish and Northern Irish schools. This research project is based on, and draws inspiration from a landmark study on CIM undertaken in England and Germany in 1971, which was repeated in 1990 (Hillman, et al., 1990).

In 2010, Mary Immaculate College received an invitation from the Policy Studies Institute (PSI) in London to participate in a collaborative research project on Children’s Independent Mobility. While the research topic and the opportunity to work collaboratively provided the initial impetus for the project, its delivery has been largely driven by the need to investigate child mobility issues in the Irish context, the Mission Statement of Mary Immaculate College and the researchers’ own particular areas of interests, all of which ensured the project was brought to fruition.

This research project, which gives voice to children and parents from across the island of Ireland, is part of a wider international study involving sixteen countries. This rich dataset allows us to benchmark the levels of autonomy and independent mobility enjoyed by Irish and Northern Irish children, and to appraise the interventions we make to promote their wellbeing and development in the context of international experiences and best practice. Therefore, just as transnational collaboration was essential in enabling this research to proceed, partnership approaches are essential in acting on its findings and recommendations.

Brendan O’Keeffe is a lecturer in the Department of Geography, Mary Immaculate College. His specialist areas include community development and spatial planning, and he has brought his knowledge of these environmental and contextual issues to bear on the study of child mobility.

Alanna O’Beirne is a Health Promotion Officer for Primary Schools working in partnership with the Curriculum Development Unit of Mary Immaculate College and the Health Service Executive. Her area of expertise relates to social, personal and health education and health promotion, most specifically with school communities.

The researchers would like to publicly acknowledge the generosity of the PSI (Policy Studies Institute) in terms of the cooperation and support that have been extended throughout the research.
The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child recommends that young people and children should be nurtured and facilitated to express their views on matters affecting them (Article 12). It is in the spirit of giving children greater voice that this report captures children’s impressions of, and perspectives on, the places to which they go, and how they feel about going and being there.

In doing so, this report places children’s voices and rights centre stage. This inclusive approach also fits with recent government strategies and policies in that our research gives effect to the National Children’s Strategy (Government of Ireland, 2000: 4), vision of “an Ireland where children are respected as young citizens with a valued contribution to make and a voice of their own.” The three goals of the National Children’s Strategy are that:

1. Children will have a voice in matters which affect them and their views will be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity.
2. Children’s lives will be better understood: their lives will benefit from evaluation, research and information on their needs, rights and the effectiveness of services.
3. Children will receive quality supports and services to promote all aspects of their development.

Similarly, in Northern Ireland, the Strategy for Children and Young People (Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, 2006) advocates a ‘whole child approach,’ with children’s rights at the centre of integrated strategies in the areas of health, welfare, education, community services and environment. Specifically, the Strategy states (2006: 20) that, “in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, we will be proactive in obtaining the views of children on matters of significance to them.”

More recently, the launch of the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014 – 2020, ‘Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures’ has reiterated that the increasing child and youth population is a significant resource for our country, and that “ensuring the best possible outcomes for this group is an important element in future economic planning” (2014: viii). Significantly, ‘Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures’ establishes a set of outcomes for children and youth across sectors, and to which all government departments, agencies, statutory services and the voluntary and community sectors are to subscribe. ‘Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures’ focuses on key outcomes for children and young people:

- Being active and healthy with positive physical and mental wellbeing.
- Achieving full potential in all areas of learning and development.
- Safe and protected from harm.
- Economic security and opportunity.
- Connected, respected and contributing to their world.
It is in this progressive context that our research has involved extensive and in-depth consultations with a wide spectrum of children throughout the island of Ireland, and that our report seeks to make a contribution to children’s wellbeing and development.

1.1: The Significance of Children’s Independent Mobility
Children have been at the centre of much public debate in Ireland over recent years and decades. Society, particularly in the South, is seeking to come to terms with a disturbing legacy arising from the failings of public institutions and personnel to adequately care for and protect our children. The uncovering of the ways in which families, the State, religious bodies and society in general have failed children has undoubtedly influenced the political arena. In 2004, the Irish government established the Office of the Ombudsman for Children, while the Northern Ireland Executive appointed a Commissioner for Children and Young People in 2007. Recognising that children are important social agents in their own right, the Irish government also created the cabinet position of Minister for Children and Youth Affairs in 2011, and citizens voted to strengthen children’s rights in Bunreacht na hÉireann, the constitution of Ireland. Thus, while there are persistent challenges in terms of dealing with historical legacies and institutional intransigence, public policy has generally become more child-centred, and agencies, schools, voluntary bodies and civil society alike are more strongly committed to providing a holistic approach to child development.

Although society on both parts of the island of Ireland has put an increased and welcome value on the rights of children, significant challenges persist and new obstacles have emerged that prevent our children from having the fully affirmative and developmental life experiences that they should have. Child poverty levels across the island are among the highest in Western Europe. Despite the best efforts of frontline personnel, many family support services are over-stretched, and children, particularly in disadvantaged households and neighbourhoods, experience persistent inter-generational social exclusion and deprivation. Household poverty, a lack of local facilities, segregated communities and neglected, fearful neighbourhoods combine to act as barriers to the purposeful mobility of many children, and thereby delimit possibilities for their self-actualisation and growth. Communities and families are challenged by the need to strike a balance between allowing children to walk and cycle from place to place and the need to protect them from potential harm. The disturbing revelations about the treatment and neglect of many children and the reactions of institutions have propelled much public debate in Ireland about the nature and experiences of childhood, society’s responsibilities to children and the place of children in our communities. The increase in people’s consciousness of child-welfare has been accompanied by a zealousness that can result in children’s opportunities for independent learning through life experiences being overly curtailed.

In seeking to further promote a child-centred society, those who work with children and those who advocate on their behalves, point to the importance of evidenced-informed policy and the need to learn from international best practice. This report provides a unique set of evidence, with the potential to inform policy and practice in several areas that impact on the lives of children, not least education, community development, transport and health. It provides insights into how child-centred our society is, and specifically the extent to which children perceive their environment to be child-friendly. It also articulates children’s views on their ability to get about safely and efficiently. This report presents a vital all-island dataset on the extent to which we, as a society, have or have not achieved an appropriate balance between enabling child-freedom and child-protection. The National Children’s Strategy (2000) refers to the need for longitudinal data on children’s lives, and this report makes a significant contribution in that respect.
The issues raised in this report complement and add-value to other research on the lives of children. The ‘Growing Up in Ireland’ study (Williams et al., 2009), which aims to paint a full picture of children in Ireland and how they are developing in the current social, economic and cultural environment has provided valuable insights into children’s life experiences, perceptions and preferences. Among the issues it has highlighted are the rise in childhood obesity associated with sedentary lifestyles (Layte and McCrory, 2011), and children’s frustrations with a lack of play spaces (see also Gleeson and Creamer, 2012). Similarly, the UK Millennium Cohort Study (Centre for Longitudinal Studies, 2008) raised concerns regarding levels of inactivity among children in Northern Ireland, and it found that children in the North are more likely to be overweight than those in Great Britain. Their study also notes that childhood health is associated with social class, and children in the lower social classes are more likely to have problems. Furthermore, the findings point to the significance of parental attitudes and motivation, and the quality of the local environment as factors that impinge on children’s levels of activity – these dimensions are specifically explored in our research. Bauman et al. (2012) argue that there is a need to improve the evidence base in respect of ways of enabling physical activity.

There are many health benefits associated with CIM (Children’s Independent Mobility). For individual children, independent mobility can contribute to their physical, cognitive and social development, in other words, their overall wellbeing. Active travel (e.g. walking or cycling to school) is a very effective way of increasing physical fitness (Heelan et al., 2005). There is increasing evidence that walking and playing outdoors provide children with more physical activity on a regular basis than organised sports in and out of school. In a UK study, Mackett et al. (2004) found that walking to and from school regularly expends more energy than school-organised physical education (PE) per week. Opportunities for free play and participation in recreational activities provide opportunities for the development of bone and muscle strength, regulating body fat levels, controlling weight and maintaining healthy blood pressure levels (Tammelin, 2009; Strong, Malina, Blimkie et al., 2005; see also the Children’s Sport Participation and Physical Activity Study, 2010). Hendry and Kleop (2007: 260), whose research spans several European countries, state that “it will be as important for young people to learn leisure skills as it is to learn work-related, occupational ones.” In addition to developing fitness and coordination, CIM strengthens children’s abilities to reason and solve problems and supports the extension of a complex set of social skills (Cole-Hamilton and Gill, 2002; Hughes, 2010). CIM provides opportunities for children to learn and experience how to share and negotiate, to cooperate and to understand and deal with other peoples’ feelings and needs. Children also learn about the world around them as they engage more directly with their local environment. Lalor et al. (2006) note the importance of children and young people participating in leisure and recreational activities, as participation enables the formation of ‘self-knowledge,’ the development of initiative, strengthening emotional development and resilience, forming new friendships and acquiring social capital. In addition, Humphreys et al. (2011: 14) observe that ‘bonding’ social capital, and specifically “knowing grown-ups and grown-ups being friendly to them” give children a positive sense of their neighbourhoods and increase the likelihood of them spending time outdoors and participating in social and recreational activities. Indeed, the overwhelming evidence from the international literature is that improving levels of CIM can help communities to feel safe, and simultaneously enable children to become more included in society.

Conversely then, it can be argued that reducing levels of CIM and the lack of opportunities for free play and recreation can adversely affect children’s immediate wellbeing and future development. The World Health Organisation recommends that children and young people aged five to seventeen engage in physical activity of moderate to vigorous intensity for at least sixty minutes on a daily basis. This is also the recommendation of the Department of Health and Children here in Ireland through its ‘Physical Activity Guidelines.’ The need to adopt a whole-of-government approach to child development is
evident in ‘Healthy Ireland’ (2013 – 2025) - the new national framework to improve health and wellbeing for everyone in our society. ‘Healthy Ireland’ envisages a future where everyone can enjoy physical and mental health and wellbeing to their full potential, and where the wellbeing of all is valued and supported. The framework views health across the entire life course and is fundamentally committed to reducing health inequalities and creating an environment where every individual and sector of society can play their part in achieving a healthy Ireland.

Among the environmental factors that have gained most popular attention in respect of having an impact on child mobility, and by extension child-health, socialisation and wellbeing, is that of transport, and in particular road safety. Government-led campaigns both north and south have, over the past decade, successfully contributed to a reduction in the number of deaths and injuries on our roads. The European Child Safety Alliance’s (ECSA) most recent report cards (2008 for Ireland and 2007 for Northern Ireland) acknowledge the positive steps that have been taken to make our roads safer for all users. However, they give both Northern Ireland and Ireland a score of two out of five in respect of cycling safety – on a par with Scotland and Wales but considerably below the EU average, and well below a score of four for England. The South scores higher than the North in respect of pedestrian safety, (3.5 and 3 out of 5 respectively). Yet, in overall terms, Ireland’s score for child safety – including on roads and in other spaces – (31 out of 50) is below the European-wide Child Safety Action Plan average (35.5 out of 50). The ECSA recommends integrating “good practice strategies into national public health programmes and ensuring child safety is addressed in all policies” (2008: 2).

The findings in this report resonate with and complement other research such as the aforementioned ‘Growing-Up in Ireland’ Study (Williams et al., 2009: 63) and the Children’s ‘Sport Participation and Physical Activity’ Study (Woods, Tannehill, Quinlan et al., 2010). This report also addresses some of the data deficiencies that other researchers have noted. The Get Ireland Active Research Working Group has specifically highlighted the need for additional data on levels of activity among our children and young people. It has noted that due to renewed interest in “Physical Activity promotion and an impetus to use Physical Activity as a means of preventing disease and improving overall health, monitoring of indicators related to Physical Activity among children and youth are necessary over time” (Harrington et al., 2014: 63). Their work echoes principles in the National Children’s Strategy in recognising the vital roles schools and communities play in keeping our children active and healthy. Indeed, the Research Working Group awarded a higher score to communities than to homes and schools with respect to their promotion of sporting activities among children, and it acknowledged the tremendous work being done by civil society. It reports that in the South, 97 per cent of the junior sport workforce are volunteers with a typical commitment of 1 day/week, while 92 per cent of sports clubs in Northern Ireland could not operate without volunteers.

The findings and recommendations of this report dovetail with, and add value to, several strands of research on the lives and welfare of children, and they provide an additional impetus to the various policy agendas that seek to advance the holistic development of our children. By recording the specific locations to which children go, their methods of travel, the times at which they go and come and the frequency with which they do so, this report provides hard data on the lifestyles of our children, and the degrees of freedom and motivation they experience and with which they are provided. By linking the children’s surveys to those of their parents, this report not only examines longitudinal and inter-generational change on child mobility, it also reveals children’s and adults’ attitudes to mobility, their views, concerns and hopes.
1.2: Literature Review and International Best Practice

Literature references to Children’s Independent Mobility are extensive and growing. CIM is increasingly addressed across several disciplines including health, education, transport, engineering and the social sciences among many others, as researchers acknowledge its importance and its multi-sectoral ramifications. Van Beurden et al. (2003) observe that, there is increasing evidence that physical activity during childhood may “enhance health both in the short term and throughout later life. It improves psychological health... and affects precursors of various lifestyle diseases. It may also be correlated to reducing crime” (2003: 463).

Substantial evidence now exists which shows that the way that children interact with their local environments has changed considerably over the last few decades (Badland et al., 2011; Carver et al., 2008; MacDougall et al., 2009). The literature clearly documents a significant decline in children’s level of freedom and autonomy (Shaw et al., 2013). Fotel and Thomsen (2004) describe modern childhood in terms of a culture of surveillance, where, in order to increase the levels of protection afforded to children, most, if not all, of their activities are now highly structured and monitored. For some time now, many children in developed countries are unlikely to be allowed to travel independently through their local environments without adult accompaniment (Risotto and Tonucci, 2002). However, children interact with each other and their environment very differently when there are adults present than when they are on their own, and research has shown the negative impact of adults on children’s play when children’s recreational activities become ‘adulterated’. Furthermore, Hughes (2010) found that restricting children’s behaviour range led to mental mapping deficits, while Mackett et al. (2003) reported that reduced autonomy lessened children’s environmental knowledge and delayed the development of some spatial, motor and analytical skills. The negative effects of ‘screen time’ – playing on electronic devices - have been well documented (Boone et al., 2007). Meanwhile, the importance of outdoor, creative and spontaneous play to child development and wellbeing is widely acknowledged in international literature (Burdette and Whitaker, 2005; Frost et al., 2008; Michaud et al., 2006) and in public policy (Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, 2008).

In some cases, limitations on children’s autonomy have emerged as a result of understandable parental fears for children’s safety (Whizman and Pike, 2007). One specific area of concern for parents relates to road safety and the risk of children getting injured or being involved in an accident. While car ownership levels have increased during the last two decades, welcome statistics reveal that the number of children injured and killed on the roads (in Ireland and many other countries) has decreased substantially over the same period. Commentators suggest that this is in part due to increased limitations on children’s freedom (Shaw et al., 2013) - by curtailing children’s independent mobility, adults have reduced children’s risk of exposure to potential accidents and injuries. However, Fotel and Thomsen (2004) argue that the ‘automobility’ provided by parents driving children to different destinations in cars allows children increased access to otherwise unreachable amenities, and may help counteract potential risks of isolation for some children. Thus, parents can have both enabling and delimiting influences on CIM.

Strong social messages from their peers and the media can also play a role in parents’ limiting their children’s amount of freedom. Widespread media coverage of relatively rare incidents of child abductions, for example, has resulted in a disconnect emerging between parents’ fears and the actual reduced risk over time of ‘stranger danger’ events occurring (Prezza et al., 2005). It should be noted that perceptions of risk have also undergone significant change in recent times so much so, that the idea of
‘surplus safety’ or excessive fear of risk has emerged as a concept within the CIM literature (Wyver et al., 2010). This is where it is argued that by curtailing children’s independence for safety reasons we not only may expose children to more serious short and longer term health outcomes but also restrict their life opportunities. Parents are pressured by discussions about the dangers of allowing children to engage in unsupervised outdoor play, and this, combined with worries of being perceived as negligent, can lead parents to limit the amount of autonomy they confer on their children (Valentine, 1997). These excessive fears should not be dismissed as they have been shown to result in frightening parents to the extent that they restrict altogether their children’s time outside. Malone (2007) reported on a study which recorded that one in twenty children in Australia indicated that they never left the inside of their homes to play.

In addition to parental concerns, the literature highlights increasing institutional barriers as further contributing to decreasing levels of CIM (Whitzman and Pike, 2007). Children have, to a certain extent, been excluded from some public spaces through formal restrictions being put in place and their preferred activities being curtailed. We see, for example, ‘no cycling,’ and/or ‘no ball playing’ signs being erected, or water features and popular pieces of furniture being planned out of public amenities (Louv, 2006; Gill, 2007). The removal of skateboarding ramps, and planning restrictions on tree houses (which may in part be due to the development of a more liability conscious society) are further instances of the encroachment being made on children’s autonomy and freedom. As Frost et al. (2007: 347) point out, “Children must be exposed to managed levels of hazards, learn to identify hazards, evaluate hazards, and cope with or master hazards.” They contend that children are best raised managing hazards, challenges and risks from an early age, under the watchful eyes and helpful hands of adults.

In order then to enhance CIM, a balance must be struck between supporting children’s mobility in their local communities and the understandable need to protect children in our increasingly complex world. Some examples of good practice include the following:

**Child Friendly Cities (see www.childfriendlycities.org)**
It should be noted that few if any policies explicitly and primarily exist to support CIM. However, UNICEF’s Child Friendly Cities is probably one of the best examples of good practice in terms of promoting children’s right to play and travel about autonomously. This initiative began in 1996 and when fully implemented is the embodiment of the Convention on the Rights of the Child at the local level (Riggio, 2002). Child Friendly Cities view children as active agents and it takes their voices and opinions into account when making decisions. Children’s rights therefore are reflected in policies, laws, programmes and budgets. Child Friendly Cities acknowledge that creating child friendly environments is challenging and requires overcoming both social and design barriers at the neighbourhood level (Corsi, 2002). There is a Child Friendly Cities Framework (which can be adapted for communities and municipalities of different sizes) comprising of a series of component building blocks. Some recurring features of Child Friendly Cities include: involving children in planning; improving streetscapes through provision of appropriate furniture and public art such as children’s mosaics; planting greenery to reduce noise and mitigate against environmental pollution; increasing walkability; and providing a range of surfaces, climbable objects and natural shelters.

**School-based Initiatives**
Motivated by the twin needs to reduce fossil-fuel consumption globally and to promote safe and active travel among their pupils, many school-based initiatives have evolved, some of which show good promise in terms of increasing children’s safety, particularly on the journey to and from school. Safe Routes to School (SRTS) was developed in Denmark during the 1970s and has been widely implemented.
Internationally; for example, the United States, Australia, New Zealand and Canada have each developed their own SRTS programme. Adopting a Triple ‘E’ approach (Educating children and drivers on road safety, Enforcing traffic laws around schools and Engineering street environments near school by controlling traffic speed and enhancing pedestrian and cycle facilities), the Safe Routes to School programmes, which are now in place in several countries, have been successful in reducing the number of children injured or killed while walking and bicycling to school (Boarnet, et al., 2005). More recently, School Travel Plans have had mixed results (Mammen, Stone, Faulkner et al., 2014). These involve schools adopting a series of measures and implementing an action plan to reduce car journeys, and increase active and sustainable transport, aiming at the same time to improve safety for the school journey.

Common actions and measures that feature in School Travel Plans include: encouragement to walk or cycle to school, improving the attractiveness of public transport, the introduction of ‘Park and Stride’ facilities and education programmes such as increasing bicycle training in schools and the use of resources developed by national road safety authorities. Some schools have utilised the concept of the ‘Walking Bus,’ where children walk together as a group along a set route with an adult ‘driver’ at the front of the imaginary bus and an adult ‘conductor’ at the rear (Heelan, Abbey, Donnelly et al., 2009). Overall, School Travel Plans require long-term commitment and voluntary effort on the parts of parents and teachers, which can be a deterrent for some communities. It should also be kept in mind that children’s needs in relation to CIM are much broader than just the school journey. While the ‘Walking Bus’ initiative has been proven to improve children’s fitness and knowledge of the community, and to contribute to the child’s sense of identity, it should be regarded as more of an intermediate step towards CIM particularly as there are adults present with the children throughout the journey. As such, it is an ideal mode of transport for younger children who are not yet skilled enough to travel to school independently. School-based initiatives such as the ‘Walking Bus’ have evolved from their original informal structures to become more formalised, involving, for example, compulsory training and background checks on volunteers (see the Walking School Bus Volunteer Training Manual of Department of Transport, Western Australia). Attracting and retaining volunteers is critical to the success of initiatives such as the Walking Bus, and the literature documents that this is the single biggest challenge for sustaining projects.

The school itself and the P.E. (Physical Education) curriculum are important in transferring cognitive skills to children and in encouraging them to be active and healthy. An increasing number of schools on this island are participating in active travel initiatives, and these parallel the aforementioned practices in Denmark and Australia. Over recent years, there have been improvements in the delivery of P.E. in Irish and Northern Irish schools, but many children still do not get the WHO (World Health Organisation) recommended amount of P.E. instruction (Harrington et al., 2014). An extensive study on the outputs of P.E. delivery in schools in the United States noted a need for “more emphasis on improving physical skill development and on motivating children to be active in their free time” (Van Beurden et al., 2003: 500). These studies, among others, and the reviews of international best practice underscore the importance of the school and the home collaborating in the promotion of active and healthy childhoods.

Home Zones and ‘Woonerfs’
Home Zones is a UK initiative based on the Dutch model of ‘woonerfs’ (Biddulph, 2012). This concept of a ‘living street’ emerged in the 1970s in the Netherlands and is based on the idea that pedestrians and cyclists have legal priority over motorists (Collarte, 2012). Local communities reclaim residential streets by adopting techniques which centre on traffic calming, low speed limits and emphasising communal space. Commonly recurring features of woonerfs and Home Zones include: chicanes or curves in the roadway created by alternate parking bays on opposite sides of street, tree planting, improved lighting,
shared surfaces for cars and pedestrians, use of coloured and textured surface treatments and other design aspects such as a symbolic ‘gateway’ entrance to the street. While lower levels of speed and reduced volume of traffic are significant outcomes, measurable increases in CIM are also achieved by adopting these approaches. Furthermore, these initiatives support the development of stronger and more integrated local communities (Gill, 2007). Again, a number of caveats have to be pointed out in relation to Home Zone type developments: resistance by some members of the community was found in some areas and traffic speeds need to be greatly reduced to encourage greater child use. Areas with strong pre-existing social capital and cohesion were more likely to develop this initiative and consideration needs to be given to vulnerable groupings in relation to sharing spaces and surfaces (Dyer, Grey and Siddall, 2013).

Most of the good practice examples cited in the international literature relate to urban environments, and the experiences of rural children are not as well documented. Thus, it behoves researchers to undertake specific investigations into mobility issues in rural areas, particularly as the current literature highlights the significance of environmental variables, including locational factors.

The data presented in this report, which have been generated by over 2,200 children and almost 1,800 parents in Ireland and Northern Ireland provide clear pointers on the applicability of these international best practices. The following diagram provides a synthesis of key issues and themes that arise from international literature, and which have been explored through the primary research that is presented here. As the diagram shows, the factors that impact on CIM are complex and inter-related. The decline in CIM over recent decades is associated with changes within the home such as busier lifestyles (associated with parents being unavailable to enable or encourage CIM), the pervasiveness of information and communication technology (ICT, associated with sedentary activities), and rising incomes and affluence (which can enable children to access opportunities outside their immediate neighbourhood, but which tend to be associated with travel by car). Changes in the school environment and positive practices promoted by teachers have brought about improvements in child safety, although opportunities for creative and unsupervised play and recreation have diminished. Schools are under pressure to upgrade and maintain sports and recreational facilities, while teachers and parents feel an increased sense of responsibility to keep children safe, and adults’ efforts to structure and organise children’s lives, while usually well-intentioned, can stifle their development. Public policy and the state’s gradual withdrawal from service provision have led to rationalisation and failures to account for place-specific needs, while, as emerges from this report, civil society’s efforts to develop local communities can have empowering effects. School-based interventions can engender attitudinal and behavioural changes, such that children can become promoters of active travel within their families and communities. Thus, as the international literature and review of best practice suggest, a study of CIM has to be scoping and multi-disciplinary.
Fig. 1.1: Factors contributing to decrease in Children's Independent Mobility

- **GROWING CAR DEPENDENCY**
  - Nature of urban areas
  - Decentralisation of urban areas
  - Increasing distances between urban-based activities
  - Sensationalist media reporting
  - Increased perception of risks of being outside

- **SOCIETAL CHANGES**
  - Increasing incomes
  - Increasing car ownership
  - Increasing car use
  - Increasing car use by children
  - Shift from free play to organised activities

- **URBANISATION**
  - Changing employment patterns
  - Reduction in time available for taking children to activities
  - Fewer children at nearest school

- **CONCEPT OF RISK**
  - Policy on school choice
  - School transport policy
  - Fewer local trips
  - Increased availability of personal home entertainment

- **POLICIES**
  - Fewer local trips
  - Decrease in Children's Independent Mobility

Adapted from Mackett (2013).
Unfortunately, children’s voices have not been sufficiently heard in the formulation of policy or in the other processes and mechanisms through which our contemporary western institutions and society make decisions. Children have tended to be almost entirely on the receiving end of adults’ decisions. There is much research ‘about’ children, but research ‘with’ children is far less common, and is almost exclusively confined to the fields of education, psychology and psychiatry. As Scott (2008: 88) observes,

“Survey practice has tended to follow the ‘quarantine’ approach with children being, at best, the subject of proxy information and, at worst, invisible. Moreover, much of the research that does take children into account is concerned with the impact of children on adult lives, rather than focusing on children as social actors in their own right… Yet as any parent will attest, children do have voices, they express opinions, they observe and judge.”

The basic premise that ‘the best people to provide information about children’s attitudes, behaviours, experiences and perspectives are children themselves’ stems from a recognition that children have rights – including the right to be consulted about decisions and processes that affect them and their daily lives.

Research with children obliges one to pursue different approaches to those that pertain when engaging with adults (Lewis et al., 2004). Children require researchers to use particular language and to take account of different stages in cognitive development. Researchers generally find it easier to deal with such factors when undertaking small-scale and in-depth studies that lend themselves to ethnographic and participatory techniques. Large-scale and extensive survey work, such as that presented in this report, requires that methodologies be adapted, so that children have the leeway to ask for due guidance, and have the scope to express themselves with clarity, fluency and accuracy, while being confident that their responses are confidential.
2.1: The Data Collection Instrument and Process

“Children’s daily lives, and thus childhood as an institution, are structured by adult views of how those lives should be lived and of what childhood is” (Mayall, 2008: 109).

Mayall’s thesis is that in order to understand children and childhood, we need to go beyond simply undertaking research ‘about’ and ‘with’ children, and to investigate child-adult relations and the knowledge children have of their social position and the status of being a child. While our research does not pursue the inter-generational conversation methodologies advanced by Mayall, it nevertheless gathers useful data on both children’s and adults’ perceptions of Children’s Independent Mobility, and it deals specifically with the social, institutional and infrastructural resources applied by adults to either enable or delimit children’s ability to move about. Indeed, most of the recommendations arising from this study relate to changes that adults are required to make.

The main methodological tools used in this survey were two questionnaires, which were adapted from those used by the Policy Studies Institute – PSI (UK) in previous studies (1971 and 1990). These were designed specifically to capture data on the licences of CIM, and to enable children and their parents (or guardians) to report their behaviours, experiences and perceptions on other indicators of independent mobility and associated factors.

In line with Scott’s recommendation that “in order to achieve meaningful data, questions have to be pertinent and relevant to the children’s own experience and knowledge” (2008: 96), the children’s questionnaire commences by asking children and teenagers about their journey to and from school (questions 1 to 6). It then asks them about walking, crossing roads, cycling and using buses (questions 7 to 9). Question Ten deals with what they did during the weekend, and this is followed by questions about children’s neighbourhoods and how they perceive their local environment. The questionnaire concludes by asking children where they live, their age and if they are a boy or girl. Thus, the questionnaire begins with their immediate lived experience in order to ease children into responding, and when gauging their perceptions (question 11), the questionnaire includes specific issues to which children can relate. Thus, the sequencing of the questions and the focus and purpose of the questionnaire have contributed to its near universal completion among those who agreed to participate in the study. The adults’ questionnaire follows a similar sequence, and has similar questions, although it also allows for more reflection and requires recall of past experiences.

In order to make the process as user-friendly as possible, and to reduce the challenges for any child with literacy difficulties, most of the questions were closed, and several incorporated images. The parents’ questionnaire also included images, and both survey instruments were clearly laid-out, with ample space between questions, answer spaces and tick-boxes.

Following a pilot with two classes (one in a primary school and one in a second-level school), a number of modifications were made to the PSI questionnaires in order to adapt them for the Irish context. Among the amendments made was the use of Irish terms for public transport providers. The revised survey also provided respondents with an expanded range of options in stating where they go to after school and at weekends. In addition, it re-defined the categories that respondents could use to describe the place in which they live, so as to provide for Ireland’s relatively dispersed settlement pattern. The survey questionnaires can be found in the annex to this report.
Survey Fieldwork

In order to access a large and representative sample of children, the research team decided to administer the survey questionnaires via schools. A school-based approach also enabled the researchers to address particular ethical issues that arise when doing research with children.

In preparation for the fieldwork, the research team members, all of whom had prior clearance from Ireland's police force (An Gárda Síochána), compiled a Schools Information Pack. This was addressed to the school principal and chair of the board of management, and the pack contained information about the study (background, aim, objectives and methodology), letters for parents and copies of the questionnaires. Schools were invited to participate in the study and those that agreed were supplied with parental consent forms, as each participating child was required to have parental consent in advance of the researchers arriving at the school. In line with recommendations put forward by Danby and Farrell (2005: 53-54), each participating child was also given his/her own consent form, and the option to withdraw from the survey, regardless of the consent given by parents and guardians. In addition, the researchers began by ensuring the children had been informed about the project, and they provided a recap on the purpose and format of the research.

The enthusiastic co-operation and support of schools were essential in making this survey possible, and all stakeholders need to acknowledge the roles played by boards of management, principals and class teachers in enabling the generation of such a valuable and rich data source. In all schools, a class teacher or the school secretary took responsibility for ensuring the timely return of parents’ surveys. In some cases, a student on placement from Mary Immaculate College complemented this co-ordinating role. This support was very valuable in ensuring the efficient administration of the survey.

The surveys were administered in the final term of the school year 2010 – 2011 (between March and June 2011). All children’s questionnaires were distributed in school and completed in the classroom or in an assembly area under the joint guidance of the researchers and school staff. A total of 2,228 children and young people in twenty-five schools participated in the survey. Upon receiving his/her survey questionnaire, each young person was also provided with an envelope containing the confidential questionnaire for his/her parent(s). These were completed at home and returned to the school (in provided unmarked envelopes) – usually the following day. A total of 1,695 adults completed survey questionnaires. Thus, 76 per cent of parents whose children had participated in the study also did so, making this one of the largest samples in a survey of this type on the island of Ireland. All survey questionnaires have been treated with complete confidence and are anonymous. Each survey was assigned a unique code so as to enable each adult’s survey to be linked to that of his or her child.

The layout and format of the survey questionnaire were generally conducive to participation and the generation of accurate and reliable data. The research team noted the need to rephrase orally some questions so as to provide the respondents with additional clarity. Where school staff members had advance sight of the questionnaire, they were better positioned to address any queries that arose. In the case of primary school children, (generally aged seven to twelve) most completed the questionnaire in their classrooms. This allowed any individual queries to be addressed when a child raised his/her hand. With younger children (those aged ten and under), the researchers took the class collectively through each question, with all children completing the questionnaire at the same pace. A number of second-level schools (whose pupils generally range in age from twelve to sixteen) arranged for young people to...
complete the survey in assembly halls, thereby ensuring efficiency in the collection of the data. Most primary school classes devoted forty-five to sixty minutes to completing the questionnaire, while second-level students did so in twenty to thirty minutes. Children and young people did not consult with one another when completing the questionnaire.

As part of the process of providing feedback to the research participants, each school was furnished with an individual report on the data gathered from its pupils and parents. The refined survey instrument and methodology are suitable for any school to use, and may enable schools to gather data as they strive to improve local access and safety, promote healthy lifestyles among pupils and complement their participation in the Eco / Green Schools and Active Schools Initiatives among other projects.

2.2: The Areas Surveyed
A total of twenty-five schools – fifteen primary and ten second-level – from across the island of Ireland were invited to participate in this study. All responded positively.

The sample of schools was selected to provide a cross section of participants from a range of geographical and socio-economic contexts in the South (S) and the North (N). In geographical terms, the participating schools included those in city and suburban locations in the island of Ireland’s two largest urban centres – Dublin (S) and Belfast (N). One school in each of the provincial major urban centres of Cork (S), Limerick (S) and Galway (S) also participated. The medium to large towns which provided participating schools included Navan, Co. Meath (S) and Tralee, Co. Kerry (S), while smaller towns were identified in Counties Clare (S), Derry (N), Offaly (S) and Roscommon (S). Participating schools in villages and more remote rural areas were located in counties Carlow (S), Kerry (S), Tipperary (S), Mayo (S), Monaghan (S), Tyrone (N) and Wexford (S). The sample also included one school on an offshore island in County Galway (S). Thus, the sample represents a broad geographical spectrum on the rural to urban continuum. Over 98 per cent of the children in the selected schools received parental permission, and they participated fully in the study.
Over twelve hundred (n=1,283) primary school pupils between the ages of seven and twelve approximately participated in the study. Slightly under half (46%) of primary school respondents are female and approximately 54 per cent are male. Over one thousand (n=1,081) parents of primary pupils completed the questionnaire.

Just under a thousand (n=945) second-level school pupils participated in the study comprising 51 per cent female and 49 per cent male respondents. Approximately two-thirds of parents (n=614) of second-level students participated.

2.3: Data Analysis

The survey fieldwork generated a considerable volume of data. The completed questionnaires were coded, and the data inputted into SPSS. This enabled us to quantify the responses to each question (both by children and parents) and to examine how children’s and parents’ behaviours, experiences and perceptions might be affected by factors that had been identified in the literature. Therefore, answers (dependent variables) were analysed on the basis of independent variables including school type (primary or post primary), age, gender, location/geography and social factors (car ownership, type of house, parents’ occupations) through a series of cross-tabulation tables and correlation tests. The questionnaires were stored in a secure location in line with Mary Immaculate College research and ethics guidelines, and the SPSS file was only accessible to the research team.
The nature of the fieldwork also brought a qualitative dimension to the research, as school principals and teachers openly shared with us their experiences and schools’ endeavours with respect to CIM. These valuable insights have enhanced our understanding of the data and provide a grounding for some of the emerging recommendations.

The completed dataset was shared with the PSI, so as to contribute to the international dimension of the research, and the researchers participated in a workshop convened by the PSI in September 2013. The workshop brought together most of the researchers from the sixteen countries involved in parallel studies, and it provided a forum through which we could better understand the research findings, and work together to advance appropriate policies and best practice in the promotion of Children’s Independent Mobility.

Over the course of processing and analysing the data, the researchers participated in workshops and discussion fora that were organised by the Mary Immaculate College Research Office. These provided outlets for the dissemination of findings and enabled the researchers to benefit from, and take on board feedback, suggestions and advice from colleagues with experience in the fields of child development, physical education and public policy among others.

The data generated by this study are largely quantitative, and as such they provide a very solid baseline and snapshot in terms of measuring and monitoring Children’s Independent Mobility. This research report can be complemented using qualitative data and by applying methodologies that allow for children to express themselves more spontaneously through interviews, workshops, conversations, drawings, diaries and the creative arts among other modes of expression (see for example O’Kane, 2008). There is also scope for more micro-level geographical analysis, whereby the particular locational factors of the participating schools and the range of local sporting and recreational facilities can be mapped and further analysed so as to investigate how they impact on mobility. While there is a good fit between the issues covered in the children’s and parents’ questionnaires and a number of questions overlap, there is potential to expand the parents’ questions somewhat, and to replicate more directly questions that were asked of children.

This research marks a significant contribution to our understanding of childhood and children’s worlds. Repeating this study in 2016 or 2021 and at subsequent intervals of five or ten years will allow for longitudinal analysis, and will enable us to undertake a definitive and reliable monitoring of progress in the achievement of CIM.

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1 According to *The Dictionary of Human Geography* (Castree, et al., 2013) Correlation refers to “a statistical calculation which measures the probability that there is a potential dependence between two or more variables. That is, there appears to be a potential causal relationship between the variables, be it direct or indirect…The correlation determines the extent to which such a dependency varies from randomness. While there might be a statistically significant correlation between variables, it does not necessarily mean that a causal relationship exists, but rather that the two sets of data have an alignment which has a non-random pattern [and] A statistical test used to determine whether a null hypothesis is rejected or not. The test establishes whether there is a relationship between variables and the extent to which such a relationship might have occurred by chance. In effect, the test provides a level of confidence in the null hypothesis.”

Throughout this Report, we present P values in respect of several tables and diagrams. The P value refers to the probability that observed differences are merely due to chance and do not reflect real differences in the population as a whole. A difference is said to be statistically significant if it is highly unlikely to have arisen by chance. Therefore, a P value of 0.001 < P < 0.01 provides strong evidence against the null hypothesis in favour of the alternative, while a P value < 0.001 provides very strong evidence against the null hypothesis in favour of the alternative. Having established that a difference is statistically significant, we can use Measures of Association (usually Cramer's V given the variables in this Report) to test the strength of the relationship (association) between variables. In this respect, the closer the value is to 1.0 or -1.0, the stronger the relationship.
The findings from this extensive data collection exercise are organised into four main sections in this report. Given the nature of the data, the report is largely quantitative, and the data are analysed with respect to gender, age-cohort, geography and some socio-economic variables. Having presented and analysed the all-island findings (in Chapter Three), the report then (in Chapter Four) assesses these in the context of the findings from the other countries that participated in this research.

**Section 3.1** presents the findings on children’s independent mobility under the following four headings:

i) the six licences of independent mobility;
ii) the journey to and from school;
iii) non-school travel and activities;
iv) perceptions of safety and local areas.

This section concludes by looking at the linkages between licences granted and mobility exercised. The results presented here are classified by age, with the data for primary and second-level pupils being extracted separately.

**Section 3.2** examines factors that can influence levels of independent mobility. The following variables are specifically considered: age, gender and geography. The geographical analysis also considers social factors including car availability and social class.

**Section 3.3** focuses on family and household characteristics that impact on children’s independent mobility. This section also looks at how local household contexts and micro-geographies shape and influence children’s mobility.

**Section 3.4** deals with changes in children’s mobility over time. Using data provided by parents, it considers the methods of travel used by children today and how these compare and contrast with those used a generation ago. This section also considers parents’ and children’s perceptions of place, and it looks at the societal and environmental factors that ought to be addressed in order to promote child-friendly communities.
3.1: Mobility Licences and Experiences
This section presents an overview of the independent mobility licences conferred on, and exercised by children and young people. It looks at where they travel to and how they get there. Most of the results are presented separately for primary and second-level school pupils so as to provide for comparative analysis of the experiences of younger and older children.

3.1.1: The Six Licences of Independent Mobility
The Policy Studies Institute has identified six principal licences of independent mobility. These licences, which children are granted by their parents or guardians were envisaged as similar to adults being granted driving licences, which recognise that they are experienced and competent enough to drive on main roads. The principal indicative licences of Children’s Independent Mobility (as expressed by the PSI) are:

- Licence to cross main roads alone;
- Licence to travel to places other than school within walking distance alone;
- Licence to travel home from school alone;
- Licence to go out alone after dark;
- Licence to cycle on main roads alone (parents’ response);
- Licence to use local buses alone (children’s response).

The research findings in respect of these licences provide insights into both actions and attitudes. They also generate valuable data on habitual behaviour and the lifestyles our children lead. Furthermore, the research reveals how the granting of mobility licences can be influenced by several environmental factors including perceptions of safety, distance and transport services.

The results garnered through the responses provided by children (aged seven to fifteen), with respect to these licences and associated behaviours, reveal that on the island of Ireland:

- 90 per cent of children have permission to cross the road alone.
- 11 per cent of children travel to school unaccompanied by an adult.
- 11 per cent of children travel home from school unaccompanied by an adult.
- 73 per cent of children are allowed to be outdoors in their neighbourhood without an adult, but just 36 per cent may do so after dark.
- 33 per cent of children are allowed to travel unaccompanied on local public buses.

Of those children not yet allowed to cross roads on their own, 37 per cent indicated that they did not feel ready to have the licence to do so. This appears to indicate that children understand that there are dangers for which they are not yet prepared. The majority of children indicated that they received the licence to cross the road between the ages of seven and nine. Almost one quarter (24%) of children reported they first were allowed to cross the road at age seven, and 20 per cent reported that such a licence was granted at age eight, while a further 13 per cent were first allowed to cross the road alone at age nine.

When asked about the licence to cycle on roads without adult supervision,

- 97 per cent of children claimed to have parental permission to do so, while
- 41 per cent of parents reported having conferred this licence on their child/ren.

Children are generally older when they acquire the licence to cycle on a main road. According to themselves, the median age at which they are permitted to cross the road alone is seven, while the
median age at which they are permitted to cycle (in addition to walking) on the road is eight. According to the data generated from the surveys among their parents, the median values for both these licences are ten and eleven, respectively. Thus, while children are generally more positive and optimistic, and parents are more cautious in projecting the licences experienced and granted, the research reveals general agreement among children and parents with respect to the sequencing of licence-acquisition. The sequence in which children acquire the six indicative mobility licences is as follows:

1. Licence to cross main roads alone;
2. Licence to travel home from school alone;
3. Licence to travel to places other than school within walking distance alone;
4. Licence to cycle on main roads alone;
5. Licence to use local buses alone; and
6. Licence to go out alone after dark;

Crossing the road alone emerges as the first of the six licences to be conferred on children. The second set of licences children are most likely to gain is that of travelling to and from school unaccompanied by an adult. Parents are more reluctant to permit their children to cycle on roads than to allow them to walk to local amenities and events, while the licence to travel on non-school buses is generally the fifth of the six licences to be acquired by children. The sixth (and final) licence children acquire is that of ‘being outdoors after dark.’ Although a clear majority of children claim to have permission to be outdoors in their neighbourhood, without adult supervision, only a minority claim that they can do so after dark. When parents were asked about their children’s permission to travel to places locally other than school, almost half (47%) reported they allow their children to do so unaccompanied, although only 9 per cent stated that they would allow their child to be outside after dark.

Analysis of these headline figures reveals that Children’s Independent Mobility on all six indicators progressively increases with age, and that the transition from primary to second-level is the most significant period in a child’s life in terms of gaining increased autonomy. The following table presents the summary findings with respect to the main mobility licences among primary school pupils and those who attend second-level schools. It demonstrates that with respect to all the leading indicators of mobility, second-level pupils enjoy greater autonomy than do those who attend primary school.

### Table 3.1.1: Percentage of Children who experience Licences of Independent Mobility, grouped by Primary and Second-level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary School Pupils</th>
<th>Mobility Licence</th>
<th>Second-level Pupils</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>83.8</td>
<td>To cross a main road alone</td>
<td>98.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81.4</td>
<td>To cycle on local roads (children’s response)</td>
<td>94.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>To cycle on local roads (adults’ response)</td>
<td>72.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>To travel unaccompanied on local public buses</td>
<td>66.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68.1</td>
<td>To be outdoors in their neighbourhood without an adult or to travel to places locally within walking distance (children’s response)</td>
<td>72.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>To be outdoors in their neighbourhood without an adult or to travel to places locally within walking distance (adults’ response)</td>
<td>68.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>To be outdoors after dark (children’s response)</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>To be outdoors after dark (adults’ response)</td>
<td>18.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although children’s autonomy increases with the progression from primary to second-level education, increased mobility is more evident in respect of non-school related journeys and activities. As the following table shows, second-level students are only marginally more likely than their primary school siblings and neighbours to make the journey to and from school independently. This is due to the organisation of school transport services and the timing of other family journeys to coincide with school opening and closing times.

Table 3.1.2: Percentage of Primary and Second-level School Pupils Exercising Autonomy in Travelling to and from School.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary School Pupils</th>
<th>Mobility Licence in Practice</th>
<th>Second-level Pupils</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>Travel to school unaccompanied by an adult.</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>Travel home from school unaccompanied by an adult.</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On both sides of the Border, children progress from primary to second-level school aged twelve or thirteen and, as several of the findings presented in this study demonstrate, this progression has a significant bearing on CIM. The following statistics refer to twelve-year-olds, who participated in this study. The research found that relative to those who attend primary school, those twelve-year-olds who are in second-level education are:

- 9 per cent more likely to travel to school unaccompanied by an adult;
- 5 per cent more likely to have permission to cross the road alone;
- 1 per cent more likely to have permission to cycle on local roads alone;
- 20 per cent more likely to be allowed to travel unaccompanied on local public buses; and, are
- 21 per cent more likely to be permitted to be outdoors alone after dark (according to parents).

However, twelve-year-olds who attend second-level schools are less likely than are those still in primary education to travel home from school unaccompanied by an older person. This is due to the more extensive provision and use of organised school bus transport for second-level (relative to primary school) students, particularly in rural areas, where distances between homes and schools are greater than in urban Ireland. Moreover, in rural Ireland walking and cycling are less feasible than in an urban context.

As the data above (and in Table 3.1.1) demonstrate, the contrast between the life experience of primary and second-level pupils is most significant with respect to travelling on local buses (other than the school bus) and being outdoors alone after dark.

Although teenagers have greater parental permission to cycle on roads, they are less likely to be bicycle-owners. The proportion of second-level students who own a bicycle (88%) is lower than among primary school children (93%).

Perceptions of Mobility
There are some differences between parental and children’s responses to questions on the various licences. Less than six in ten (57%) parents of primary school pupils indicated that they allow their children to cross main roads on their own, whereas more than eight in ten or 84 per cent of the pupils themselves reported they were allowed to cross roads on their own.

There are some further divergences in perception between children and their parents. Almost one third of parents (29%) of primary school pupils indicated that their children travel home from school alone.

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1 Most children view bus drivers and passenger assistants as ‘accompanying adults.’
while 11 per cent of children at primary level reported they would go home alone. This difference can partly be explained by the children's perceptions of a school bus driver as an accompanying adult, while parents were inclined to define a child travelling alone as one who is not collected by a parent, guardian, family member or friend. Parents’ responses indicate that the conferring of the licence to travel home from schools alone usually occurred at about age nine or ten. Parents also report ten years of age as the median threshold for granting the licence to cross main roads alone.

Similar trends in terms of the significance of age and divergences in the perspectives and reported behaviours of children and parents can also be observed in respect of other licences:

- One quarter (25%) of parents of primary-school pupils report that they allow their children to cycle on main roads alone, which is less than half of the rate reported by children (60%). Parents and guardians tended to confer this licence from age ten upwards.
- A small number (5%) of parents allow primary school pupils to travel on local buses, although 9 per cent of primary school children said they were allowed to do so. The early to middle teens (thirteen to fifteen years of age) was identified as the age range the licence to travel on buses alone is usually granted.
- A small minority of parents (4%) allow their primary school children to go outside after dark, while over one quarter (26%) of primary school pupils reported that they can do so. While 50 per cent of second-level students report that they are allowed to go out after dark, only 18 per cent of parents say they have granted this licence.
- Similarly, 43 per cent of parents allow their children to travel alone on buses (reported as 66% by students themselves). Over half (52%) of parents of second-level students reported that their children are allowed to travel home from school alone.

These divergences in perception between children and their parents are not exclusive to the research on the island of Ireland; they feature in the parallel research across many of the countries that participated in this international study. Moreover, they are not problematic in terms of measuring and analysing independent mobility. In fact, they reveal how children view one-off experiences of independent mobility as steps on the road to gaining increased personal autonomy, while parents are more inclined to view and measure expressions of mobility with reference to more general and preferred practices and standards. In any event, children and parents are consistent in identifying the sequence in which mobility licences are conferred and, as later sections in this report reveal, they have interesting views on the factors that can both promote and impinge on mobility.

3.1.2: The Journey to and from School
Our survey began by asking children and parents about the journey to and from school. By doing so, we were able to establish the extent to which children exercise the mobility licences that have been conferred on them (as presented in Section 3.1.1). Examining the journey to and from school also enables us to gain insights into local environmental and infrastructural factors, including the availability and feasibility of active and sustainable travel options and the perspectives of schools and parents with regard to active travel. This section looks specifically at how children and young people travel to and from school: the modes of transport they use, who accompanies them or not, the time they leave home and the duration of the journey. Subsequent sections of this report examine the correlates with their reported behaviours. Children were asked to respond to a series of questions with reference to the day on which they completed the questionnaire, while parents were asked to base their answers on the general practices in their household.
The following tables outline the various transport methods by which children travel to and from school.

### Table 3.1.3: Methods of Travel to School (expressed as %) grouped by Primary and Second-level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary School Pupils</th>
<th>Method of Travel</th>
<th>Second-level Pupils</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>Walked Most or All of the Way</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>Cycled</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>School Bus</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Local Bus / Train</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59.1</td>
<td>Car</td>
<td>48.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3.1.4: Methods of Travel home from School (expressed as %) grouped by Primary and Second-level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary School Pupils</th>
<th>Method of Travel</th>
<th>Second-level Pupils</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>Walked Most or All of the Way</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Cycled</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>School Bus</td>
<td>40.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Local Bus / Train</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50.9</td>
<td>Car</td>
<td>35.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the tables clearly show, the car is the most frequently-used method of transport for school-related journeys. The ‘Growing Up in Ireland’ study (Williams et al., 2009) reported that 60 per cent of nine-year-olds travelled to school by car while one quarter (25%) walked. Their findings are similar to ours, which found that over half of all children were taken to school by car, while over 40 per cent are collected from school by car. The greater use of the car in the morning rather than in the evening can be associated with parents taking in the school journey on the way to work. In the evening, however, schools finish earlier (primary at 15h and second-level at 16h) than most workplaces (outside the home), with the result that almost one in seven primary-school children who travel to school by car, walk home (either accompanied or unaccompanied). A similar proportion of second-level pupils who are driven to school, make the homeward journey using the designated school bus service, while others who are driven in the morning, walk home in the afternoon.

The figures presented here show that the proportion of children walking either to or from school is less than half the proportion of pupils who make the journey by car. Cycling – the other active (and healthy) mode of travel – accounts for a very small proportion of journeys, and despite their having greater autonomy, older children are less likely to cycle to or from school. The limited use of the bicycle and the small proportion of children and young people using local buses and other forms of public transport represent points of contrast between the island of Ireland and other countries in Northern Europe – including those with low population densities and dispersed rural communities.

In addition to reporting on how they travel to and from school, children were asked to identify their preferred mode of transport to school. The following table presents the findings.
The figures presented in this table stand in significant contrast to the two previous tables. They show that children, particularly those attending primary school, have a keen interest in cycling and walking to school. While less than 3 per cent of primary school pupils actually cycle to school, a substantial proportion (38%) indicated that this is their preferred mode of travel. Less than 1.5 per cent of second-level students cycle to school, but almost eight times as many would like to.

For second-level students, the school bus (which is the most frequently-used mode of transport home from school – 41 per cent travel home this way) is only the preferred mode of transport for just over one in five students. A small but not insignificant number (almost 8%) of second-level students would like to be able to use public transport to get to and from school.

Attitudes to the car vary, with only a minority of primary school pupils (15%) and over one in three second-level students identifying it as their preferred mode of transport. Consultations with pupils indicate that the weight of school bags¹ and the requirement to carry equipment (e.g. for science, woodwork and technical graphics) combine to make the car a more attractive option than the school bus, while in some areas the circuitous routes taken by some school transport providers make the school bus less popular than the car. The following graph presents the actual and preferred modes of travel to school across all children. It reveals how their preference for active travel (walking and cycling) over the car, challenges the notion put forward by Fotel and Thomsen (2004) that children like being chauffeured by their parents (i.e. ‘automobility’).

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¹These observations are substantiated by research undertaken by the National Parents’ Council and by a Working Group that reported to the Minister for Education in June 1998. In 1997, the then Minister for Education and Science, Micheál Martin T.D. established a Working Group on the Weight of Schoolbags. The Working Group identified the extent of the problem and put forward a series of recommendations to alleviate it. These recommendations remain relevant.
It is beyond the scope of this study, and it would indeed be premature given that they have only been operating for a short number of years, to evaluate active travel programmes definitively. Nevertheless, it is plausible that school-based initiatives such as the Green Schools (South) and Eco-Schools (North)\textsuperscript{5} are having a positive impact in making children more favourably disposed towards active travel. These initiatives involve the awarding of Green Flags to schools that demonstrate compliance with stringent environmental criteria, which include inter alia reducing the school’s carbon footprint by encouraging children to travel actively. In Northern Ireland, 96 per cent of schools (as of June 2014) have at least one eco-schools flag. South of the border, 556 schools (18% of all schools) participated in the Green Schools Travel Theme during the academic year 2013 – 2014. Since 2008, 774 (19% of all schools) have been awarded the green flag for travel.

The possible positive influence of these active travel and ecological initiatives is also suggested by the data (tables 3.1.3 and 3.1.4) on the methods by which children travel to and from school. Inter-censal data for Ireland (Central Statistics Office, 2007) had shown a continuous drop over time in the proportion of children walking and/or cycling to school (i.e. using active travel modes); from 50 per cent in 1986 to 25 per cent in 2006). While direct comparisons with the CSO dataset are inhibited by the use of different age cohorts (the CSO cohorts are of five to twelve-year-olds and thirteen to eighteen-year-olds and our survey refers to seven to fifteen-year-olds), there is evidence that the downward trend in respect of use of active travel has been arrested, or at least that it has bottomed-out. Our survey shows that among seven to twelve year-olds, 23 per cent travel actively to school, while 30 per cent either walk or cycle on their homeward journey. The corresponding figures obtained for those aged 13 and over were 15 per cent for the journey to school, and 21 per cent for travelling home from school\textsuperscript{6}.

Accompaniment to school
The journey to and from school provides an opportunity for children to interact and socialise with parents, siblings, friends and neighbours. It sometimes includes diversions to collect neighbours or a childminder, and approximately 90 per cent of journeys to and from school are made in the company of others.

As the following tables show, over half of all children are accompanied to school by a parent, and parents are present to accompany 37 per cent of children home from school. Among the other prominent adults who fulfil this role are childminders and grandparents. Indeed, as the tables\textsuperscript{7} below show, grandparents, childminders and neighbours play a significant role in accompanying children, particularly on homebound journeys, while parents are at work.

\begin{table}
\begin{tabular}{|l|l|l|}
\hline
Primary School Pupils & Accompaniment to School & Second-level Pupils \\
\hline
60.6 & Parent & 42.6 \\
18.4 & Another Adult & 21.5 \\
23.7 & Older Child or Teenager & 36.9 \\
47.0 & Child of the Same Age or Younger & 39.5 \\
9.8 & Travelled Unaccompanied & 12.7 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{1} For details see: Department of Regional Development (2012) and An Taisce \textit{et al}. (2011).
\textsuperscript{6} Our data show that among 7 – 12-year-olds, 20.7% walk to school and 2.36% cycle. The corresponding figures for those aged 13 to 15 are 13.45% and 1.25% respectively. The figures for the homeward journey (from school) are: among 7 -12-year-olds, 27.95% walk and 2.08% cycle and among 13 to 15-year-olds, 19.83% walk and 1.37% cycle.
\textsuperscript{7} The figures presented in Tables 3.1.6 and 3.1.7 do not total 100%, as respondents could tick more than one of the options provided, depending on who accompanied them to/from school.
Table 3.1.7: Accompaniment (expressed as %) from School grouped by Primary and Second-level, as reported by Children and Young People.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary School Pupils</th>
<th>Accompaniment to School</th>
<th>Second-level Pupils</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>49.7</td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>32.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>Another Adult</td>
<td>20.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>Older Child or Teenager</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50.5</td>
<td>Child of the Same Age or Younger</td>
<td>43.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>Travelled Unaccompanied</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Length of the Journey to School

For the purposes of this survey, the length of the journey to school was measured in terms of the time it took to complete the trip. The following tables present the children’s responses.

Table 3.1.8: Length of Journey to School (% in different time bands) grouped by Primary and Second-level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary School Pupils</th>
<th>Length of time taken to travel to school</th>
<th>Second-level Pupils</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>Less than 5 minutes</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>5 to 15 minutes</td>
<td>46.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>16 to 30 minutes</td>
<td>25.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>31 to 45 minutes</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>46 minutes or more</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The figures show that journeys to second-level schools are longer. This is consistent with their catchment areas being larger than those of primary schools, but the longer journey times are also associated with indirect bus routes and parents’ decisions to send their child(ren) to a second-level school other than their local one. Over 30 per cent of children (30% of primary school aged children and 32% of second-level students) attend a school other than their nearest school. Pupils in the South were more likely than their counterparts in the North to opt to travel to a school other than the one nearest their home, and this difference between north and south is more pronounced at primary school level. As the following graph shows, the earlier starting times and longer journeys combine to oblige second-level students to commence their journey to school earlier than do those attending primary school.

Fig. 3.1.2: Times (in bands) at which Pupils depart Home to make the Journey to School
The data garnered with respect to the journey to and from school reveal:

- High levels of car dependence,
- Parents’ structuring role and influence with regard to how children travel, and
- The prevalence of adult accompaniment, especially in the mornings.

The findings suggest some levelling-off in the longitudinal trend towards reliance on the car. This prospect, together with the influence of parents on CIM, is explored in Section 3.3.

### 3.1.3: Non-School Travel and Activities

Having established how and when children travel to and from school, how they would like to do so, and the licences they experience and exercise with respect to school travel, our survey then turned to dealing with other journeys children are likely to make. Maintaining our focus on children’s lived realities, we asked them about the activities they had undertaken over the course of the previous weekend. Children were presented with a list of possible activities, and were requested to indicate whether or not they had undertaken them and, if so, if they had done so unaccompanied or with an adult. The following table provides a summary of the key findings in this respect. It shows the percentage of children (by school type) who engaged in the defined activities. The data confirm the significance of age, as those who attend second-level schools have much higher levels of mobility and activity outside the home than do primary school children.

**Table 3.1.9: Weekend Activities Undertaken by Children without Adult Accompaniment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator of Mobility</th>
<th>% of Primary School Pupils</th>
<th>% of Second-level Pupils</th>
<th>% of all Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visited a Friend’s Home</td>
<td>40.5</td>
<td>65.8</td>
<td>51.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went for a Walk or Cycled</td>
<td>33.7</td>
<td>63.0</td>
<td>47.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went to the Shops</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>54.3</td>
<td>46.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went to a Playground, Park or Playing Fields</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>47.7</td>
<td>36.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spent Time with Friends Outside After Dark</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>36.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Played Sport or Went Swimming</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>45.4</td>
<td>33.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visited Relatives or Grown-Ups</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>19.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went to the Cinema</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went to a Youth Club</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went to a Concert or Nightclub</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visited a Place of Worship</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went to the Library</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the table shows, the most popular activities in which primary school children independently engage at weekends are visiting friends, walking or cycling, shopping and going to the playgrounds, parks and playing fields. While over one third report that they spend time playing outside after dark, most of those who do so are aged over ten years of age. With the exception of going shopping, the most frequently-identified activities do not require children (or their parents) to spend money, while less popular (in terms of frequency) activities including going to the cinema, concert or nightclub incur an entrance fee. As subsequent sections in this report also note, accessibility to amenities (e.g. parks, playgrounds, cinemas, and youth clubs) is not spread evenly across the geography of Ireland, and many
children, particularly those who live in rural areas, have fewer options in terms of weekend activities. Thus, a lack of supply of amenities can reduce the options available to children in terms of their physical activity and associated cognitive development.

The data presented in this table also show that while older children engage in more weekend activities, the sequencing, in terms of popularity of the activities children undertake is almost universal across primary and second-level pupils. The most popular activities involve interactions with friends and neighbours including visiting one another, shopping and playing together. Most (especially teenagers) use social media and mobile phones to make arrangements to meet, and these new technologies are also used to record and document weekend activities. Such self-directed encounters occur much more frequently than do formally-organised activities such as those at youth clubs. Interestingly, the HSBC ‘Trends Report’ (1998-2010) has reported there has been a statistically significant increase between 1998 and 2010 in the percentage of young people who report spending four or more evenings after school out with friends. In general, a higher proportion of boys, younger children and those from lower social economic groupings reported they spend four or more evenings a week with friends.

The top five activities in which children participated without adult supervision involve relatively high levels of sociability. Many of these activities also required active participation and therefore demanded higher levels of physical exertion than for example, more passive activities such as going to the café or visiting an art exhibition. The following table lists the activities in which children engaged over the previous weekend. Activities are listed in order of frequency. The most popular activity (without adult accompaniment) was visiting friends, while children were also likely to walk or cycle around and go to shops. When with adults, they are more likely to go visiting relatives or grown-ups, and to be taken to church.

Table 3.1.10: Activities, in which Children and Young People Engaged at the Weekend, Expressed as a Percentage of all Children Surveyed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weekend Activities in Order of Frequency</th>
<th>Without an Adult</th>
<th>With an Adult</th>
<th>Weekend Activities in Order of Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visited a Friend’s Home</td>
<td>51.2</td>
<td>45.0</td>
<td>Visited Relatives or Grown-Ups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went for a Walk or Cycled</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>Went to the Shops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went to the Shops</td>
<td>46.2</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>Visited a Place of Worship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went to a Playground, Park or Playing Fields</td>
<td>36.3</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>Played Sport or Went Swimming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spent Time with Friends Outside After Dark</td>
<td>36.1</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>Went for a Walk or Cycled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Played Sport or Went Swimming</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>Went to a Playground, Park or Playing Fields</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visited Relatives or Grown-Ups</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went to the Cinema</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>Visited a Friend’s Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went to a Youth Club</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>Went to the Cinema</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went to a Concert or Nightclub</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>Went to the Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>Went to a Youth Club</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visited a Place of Worship</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>Went to a Concert or Nightclub</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went to the Library</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>Spent Time with Friends Outside After Dark</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The only indicators for which the sequence differs between primary and second-level pupils are ‘went for a walk or cycled,’ and ‘went to the shops.’

Gavin et al. (2013: 30-31)
As the table shows, the presence or absence of an adult influences the types of weekend activities in which children engage. While on their own or with siblings or friends of the same or a similar age, children are more likely to engage in outdoor activities. Independence from adults is most strongly associated with spending time with friends outside after dark – an activity also more associated with the teenage years. Children are three times more likely to play sport or go swimming with other children than with an adult. They are also more likely to go for a walk or cycle or go to the cinema unaccompanied by an adult. On the other hand, 80 per cent of children who attend a place of worship at weekends do so accompanied by an adult.

A variety of alternative activities were recorded in the category ‘Other’ (See children’s questionnaire, question 11c). Responses here demonstrate a wide range and breadth of children’s involvement in educational, social and recreational pursuits over the weekend, with the most popular being Irish dancing, music classes and horse riding. A notable number of teenage children also reported that they devote time at the weekend to farming.

As the following graph shows, second-level pupils engage independently in significantly more activities at weekends than do their primary school siblings and neighbours.

<p>| Fig. 3.1.3: Number of Weekend Activities Undertaken by Children, unaccompanied by an adult – grouped by Primary and Second-level School. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All Children &amp; Youths</th>
<th>Post-Primary</th>
<th>Primary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Activity</td>
<td>1 to 3 Activities</td>
<td>4 to 7 Activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

P <.0001, Cramer’s V=.264

The mean number of weekend activities to which children travel without adult accompaniment is 3.35: 2.5 for primary school pupils and 4.5 for second-level students.

As the following graph shows, children and young people in Northern Ireland are slightly more active at weekends than are their counterparts south of the border. While visiting friends and going for walks and cycles are almost universally popular in the North, ‘going to the shops’ is the most-frequently undertaken weekend activity. In addition, children and youths in Northern Ireland are more than twice as likely to attend a youth club, and are over 30 per cent more likely to go to the cinema or library than are their counterparts south of the border10.

10There are fewer rural sites among the study locations north of the border. Therefore, as geography (including proximity and access to amenities) is a determinant of CIM, there is a need for more extensive research in order to test the full representativeness of the data presented here.
The findings presented in this section show that adults play influential roles in shaping and scheduling children’s lives and the activities they undertake. Yet, the weekend provides an opportunity for children to make some decisions, either independently of their parents or in consultation with them, regarding the places they frequent and how they travel there. As the figures presented here demonstrate, children, particularly as they get older, make an increasing number of journeys independently, with the most popular destinations being places where they can meet their friends and socialise with them. Most journeys are made within children’s immediate localities, and as the next section in this report testifies, their experiences and perceptions of their neighbourhoods are important in influencing the decisions they make.

3.1.4: Children’s Perceptions of Safety and their Local Area
International research has shown that perceptions of their local environment impact on the extent to which children move about. Therefore, our research asked both children and adults to indicate how safe they felt in their local neighbourhood. The children’s responses are grouped by primary and second-level in the following table.
Table 3.1.11: Children’s Perceptions on the Degree of Safety of their Local Neighbourhood grouped by Primary and Second-level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary School Pupils</th>
<th>Perceived Degree of Safety</th>
<th>Second-level Pupils</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>52.4</td>
<td>Very Safe</td>
<td>54.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42.0</td>
<td>Fairly Safe</td>
<td>39.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>Not Very Safe</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>Not At All Safe</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the data show, the vast majority children believe their neighbourhood to be safe or very safe (94%). This positive perception largely mirrors the findings from other research; 95% of participants in the ‘Growing Up in Ireland’ study (Williams et al., 2009) felt safe playing in their neighbourhood and overall the percentage of respondents in the HSBC ‘SLÁN’ surveys who reported ‘always’ feeling safe in their local area remained stable between 2002 and 2010. In general, a higher percentage of boys and younger children reported always feeling safe. However, the HSBC survey also found that among boys, feeling safe in their local area was lowest among those in lower socio-economic groups. This finding echoes that of Humphreys et al. (2011), whose research in several neighbourhoods in Limerick City revealed how children in more deprived areas were more fearful of going outside to play.

Our survey also asked parents about their perceptions of their neighbourhood, and how these might influence their willingness to confer mobility licences on children. Well over half the parents felt that most adults who live in their area would look out for other people’s children in the neighbourhood. In addition, almost 40 per cent (38%) disagreed, many strongly (16%), with the statement that some young people and adults in the area would make them afraid to let their children play outdoors. These findings are similar to those reported in the ‘Growing Up in Ireland’ (GUI) study where most parents agreed that it was safe for children to play outside during the day (91%). It is notable that while children from different socio-economic groups reported reasonably large differences in perceptions of their local neighbourhoods ‘being dirty,’ there was little or no difference in their opinions about traffic levels. The main difference, as noted in the ‘GUI’ Report (Williams et al., 2009), was in relation to the rural–urban continuum: urban children were about twice as likely as their rural counterparts to report that there was too much traffic (31% compared to 15%).

In order to further probe this aspect of CIM, our survey asked children to consider what they might be worried about when they are outside without adult supervision from two perspectives. Firstly, children were asked to consider what worried them when they were outside on their own, and secondly they were asked to identify what worried them when they were outside with friends. In both cases, they were given a list of options, and their responses are set out in the following table.
Table 3.1.12: Issues and Factors that Worry Children when they are Outside

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential Sources of Worry</th>
<th>% of Primary School Pupils who reported being worried when outside</th>
<th>% of Second-level Students who reported being worried when outside</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>On Their Own</td>
<td>With Friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strangers</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Knowing what to do if Someone Speaks to Me</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting Lost</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Feel Old Enough</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traffic</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of These</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>49.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the table shows, older children have fewer worries, and all children are less likely to be worried when they are in the company of their friends. Despite the decline in worry as children get older, the sequencing of the sources of anxiety remains constant regardless of age (as of the variables specified here); children are most likely to be worried by strangers, and are least concerned about traffic.

In addition to responding to the potential causes of worry listed in the table above, children were provided with a space in which to identify “anything else” about which they might be worried when they are outside on their own or with friends without adult supervision. The following ‘Wordcloud’ illustrates the children’s responses. The sizes of the words are in proportion to the frequency with which worries were cited. The most prevalent source of worry is ‘Kidnapping’—although if one combines ‘Dogs’ with ‘Animals’ the level of anxiety is greater than for ‘Kidnapping.’ The next level of worry focuses on ‘Strangers and Stalkers,’ which are both similar type of fears and concepts, and which may even overlap in some children’s minds. Other sources of anxiety relate to ‘Criminals’ and ‘Assault’ followed by fears for ‘Safety,’ ‘Drunk People’ and ‘Car Accidents.’ It is interesting to note that Kidnapping and Strangers and Stalkers are so highlighted, as these are relatively unlikely experiences for children. Media reporting and over-hyping of significant exceptional events perhaps have a role to play here. Thankfully, for most children, threats from criminals and the likelihood of assault are relatively rare.

Fig. 3.1.5: A. Wordcloud depicting Children’s Greatest Fears when Outdoors (all children)

For a discussion on perceptions of fear and risk, please see Pain (2006).
As the following Wordclouds illustrate, children’s perceptions change with age. Among primary school pupils, ‘dogs’ represent the dominant source of worry, while among second-level students, worry about criminality is more pronounced. Worry over kidnapping is prevalent across all age cohorts.

### B. Wordclouds depicting Children’s Greatest Fears when Outdoors (by school level)

#### Primary School Pupils

![Primary School Pupils Wordcloud](image1)

#### Second-level School Students

![Second-level School Students Wordcloud](image2)

As the questions (both closed and open-ended) on children’s worries reveal, they have little consciousness of the potential dangers associated with traffic. On the other hand, their parents tend to exhibit a considerable level of anxiety over the potential harm arising from traffic, as the following Wordcloud shows. The words presented below were generated based on the frequency with which parents specified particular reasons as to why they did not permit their children to be outdoors after dark. The Wordcloud stands in contrast to those generated by children, particularly primary school children.
Fig. 3.1.6: Wordcloud depicting Main Reasons put forward by Parents as to why they do not permit their Children to be Outdoors After Dark.12

The findings presented in this section show that while most children are not fearful in their own localities, there are some obstacles to their independent mobility of which adults are not always conscious. Indeed, our research provides tangible evidence that their fears can inhibit children’s participation in weekend activities. Among those who described their neighbourhood as ‘very safe,’ the mean number of weekend activities undertaken was 3.51, while among those who described their neighbourhood as ‘not very safe,’ the mean number of activities was 3.05. The findings in respect of undertaking weekend activities also show that children who express lower levels of fear are more likely to go for a walk or cycle, go to a playground, park or playing field, attend a concert or nightclub and play sport or go swimming13.

In addition to answering an open-ended question on their concerns, parents were asked to consider the risk of their child being injured in a traffic accident when crossing the road, and as the following table shows, this is a notable cause of concern for them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of Parent of Primary School Pupils</th>
<th>Level of Worry</th>
<th>% of Parents of Second-level Pupils</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>38.2</td>
<td>Very Worried</td>
<td>22.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>Quite Worried</td>
<td>34.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>Not Very Worried</td>
<td>35.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Not at All Worried</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12 ‘Unnecessary’ refers to parents’ perception that children do not need to be out after dark. ‘Rural area’ – parents are referring to the fact that they live in remote/isolated areas. ‘Supervision’ – this can mean that parents perceive there is no supervision at night or it could refer to parents having to supervise activities after dark.
13Among those who described their neighbourhood as ‘very safe,’ 36.6% reported having gone to a playground, park or playing field the previous weekend, while among those who described their neighbourhood as ‘not very safe,’ the corresponding figure was 27.2%. The figures in respect of having played sport the previous weekend are 34.5% (of those who described their neighbourhood as ‘very safe’) and 24.7% (among those who described the neighbourhood as ‘not very safe’). Similar gaps pertain in respect of most other measures of weekend activities.
Over 57 per cent of parents of second-level students and 70 per cent of those who have primary school children are quite worried or very worried about the threats posed to their children when crossing the road. These findings are further explored in Section 3.3 in the context of addressing the household and societal impediments to CIM.

3.1.5: Licences and Levels of Mobility

International literature on children’s mobility (as referred to in Section 1.2 of this report) suggests that acquisition of mobility licences is a prerequisite in enabling children to get about independently and to participate in social and recreational activities. The data presented in this report generally corroborate this hypothesis, as they show that once children accede to second-level education, they are likely to have acquired all six licences and are more inclined to make journeys independently and to travel to friends’ homes, local amenities, and public places generally.

The higher levels of activity among second-level school students are not just associated with the acquisition of mobility licences, but are indicative of a widening horizon of interests as children get older, and are essential in the formation of any young person. Independent mobility is however a key driver in enabling young people to realise their self-actualisation goals, as the data generated by this study show little difference between primary school pupils (mean=4.6) and second-level students (mean=4.5) in the number of weekly trips (round trips) which parents make with a child outside of the journey to or from school. This implies that the higher levels of activity exhibited by second-level students relative to primary school pupils are associated with the ability to make journeys independently.

While our study found that on a range of indicators, CIM increases with age, it should be noted that other research has recorded that levels of participation in physical activity, and achievement of the Department of Health and Children’s physical activity recommendations (at least sixty minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity), actually decrease with age in many instances (CSPPA, 2010). Their research reveals that only 19 per cent of primary and 12 per cent of second-level school children met physical activity recommendations, and, furthermore, these percentages had not improved since 2004. In addition, the HSBC ‘Trends Report’ (2010) confirmed that there was a statistically significant decrease between 1998 and 2010 in the percentage of children who reported that they exercise four or more times a week, with boys and younger children more likely to be active.

Thus, international literature, other similar studies and stated public policy objectives underscore the need for an in-depth analysis of the findings garnered through our research. Specifically, they point to a need for an examination of possible associations between CIM and variables including age, gender, geography, household factors and the disposition of schools, communities and public bodies. The remaining sections of this chapter seek to provide such an analysis.
3.2: Influences on Children's Independent Mobility.
Considering the observations made in the international literature regarding influences on children's independent mobility, this section examines the possible impacts of variables such as age, gender, geography and environmental considerations. It looks at the factors that shape and influence where children go, how often they do so, and their habitual modes of travel. The results presented here provide insights into how children and their parents and guardians make decisions about mobility. This section also reveals how environmental factors, such as actual and perceived road safety, impact on the mobility licences children have, and thereby contribute to an enhanced understanding of how communities and institutions shape the spaces in which children endeavour to move about.

As the results detailed over the following pages show, age has a strong bearing on the degrees of mobility children experience; as they get older, particularly from ten years of age upwards, children find that their parents confer on them an extended and new range of freedoms. There are clear gender differences with respect to the activities children pursue and the autonomy they enjoy. Boys are generally more mobile and active than girls, and are more likely to make journeys independently. Indeed, the difference between boys and girls is notable and statistically significant in respect of a number of activities, especially sporting endeavours.

Geographical factors, such as the location of the child's home and local area connectivity, have an influence on child mobility, with urban children being more likely to walk or cycle to and from school and rural children more likely to have space and opportunities for spontaneous outdoor activities. However, as the details presented here illustrate, the relationship between geography and mobility is a complex one, and the specific features and facilities in a child's community frequently transcend the urban–rural continuum in influencing levels of mobility.

The previous section has shown that a parent's role in conferring licences on a child is integral to the exercise of independent mobility. The additional analysis presented in the following pages demonstrates that independent mobility is also a social construct, and that the decisions taken by parents (on whether to grant or withhold licences or enable/inhibit mobility) and the choices made by children (to make a journey or stay at home) are influenced by social and environmental factors. Therefore, it behoves schools, communities, civil society and local development bodies, local authorities and service providers to create the conditions that enable children and their parents to make and effect decisions with regard to independent mobility.

Each of the following sections – dealing with age, gender and geography – follow the same format as Section 3.1, in that they examine:
   a. The Mobility Licences Conferred on Children (by parents);
   b. The Journey to and from School;
   c. Weekend Activities; and
   d. Children's Perceptions of Place.
3.2.1: The Influence of Age on Independent Mobility

Age emerges as a significant correlate with the degrees of mobility which children and young people experience, and those which they are permitted by parents. Indeed, as the previous section (3.1) has demonstrated, there are clear and statistically significant differences between the levels of independent mobility exercised by primary and second-level school children. In addition to having more licences conferred on them, older children are more likely to travel to and from school on their own. However, the significance of age is more pronounced in respect of non-school activities and specific licences, including travelling on local buses and playing outdoors after dark.

Age and the Mobility Licences Conferred on Children

Age correlates with all the six licences of independent mobility i.e. the older children become, the more likely their parents are to confer licences on them. The following graph clearly illustrates the association between age and two of the fundamental mobility licences. It shows that by age twelve, almost 100 per cent of children claim to have acquired parental permission to cross main roads. Indeed, by age ten, over 70 per cent report having acquired this licence. As already noted, parents are generally more cautious when it comes to conferring mobility licences with respect to cycling – nevertheless, as this graph shows, the association with age is clearly evident.

**Fig. 3.2.1: Percentages of Children permitted to Cross Roads and Cycle on Main Roads by Age**

![Graph showing percentages of children permitted to cross roads and cycle on main roads by age.]

- **Permitted to Cross Main Roads (Children’s Responses)**
- **Permitted to Cross Main Roads (Parent’s Responses)**
- **Permitted to Cycle on Main Roads (Children’s Responses)**
- **Permitted to Cycle on Main Roads (Parent’s Responses)**

$P < .01$. Age * Permitted to Cross Main Roads (Parents’ Responses) Cramer’s V = .558

Age * Permitted to Cycle on Main Roads (Parents’ Responses) Cramer’s V = .532

The figures presented in this graph appear to show an anomaly between the degrees of freedom that children perceive they have and that which their parents confer on them (as shown by the blue and...
Children of all ages tend to overstate the level of freedom they enjoy. Among twelve-year-olds, for example, 97 per cent claimed to have parental permission to cross main roads, while 87 per cent of parents said they permit, or would permit a twelve-year-old to cross a main road. The difference between children’s perceptions and those of their parents may be accounted for in part by the fact that this survey was undertaken while children were in school and the questionnaire asked children ‘Are you allowed to cross main roads on your own?’ While a child may have parental permission to cross a main road, teachers and school managers are less likely to allow children the same degree of freedom, particularly, because due to the high proportion of pupils travelling to and from school by car, the neighbourhoods of schools are more susceptible to accidents than are other locations14. By the same token, just under 40 per cent of parents who collect their child/ren from school cited ‘concern about traffic danger’ as a reason for doing so. Thus, the micro-geography of the school or home location and environment can have a bearing on a child’s licence to cross a road.

As the following graph illustrates, age is also positively associated with having permission to cycle on main roads and with using a bicycle to travel to friends’ homes and local amenities. This increase in the use of the bicycle occurs despite a slight decline in bicycle ownership with age indicating that teenagers who do not own a bicycle themselves use parents’, friends’ and siblings’ bicycles to get about.

A similar positive association between age and child mobility can be observed in respect of children having permission to use buses other than the school bus; just over one third (36%) of parents report that they give or would give a ten-year-old permission to use a public bus, while this figure increases to 76 per cent in respect of twelve-year-olds.

14 This observation was made by teachers during the data collection phase of the research. It does not imply that any teacher or other school staff member assumed the place of a parent or guardian in completing a questionnaire.
The following graph clearly shows the association between age and two other indicative mobility licences, namely permission to travel unaccompanied on local buses (other than the school bus) and having parental permission to be outdoors after dark.

Fig. 3.2.3: Percentages of Children and Young People permitted to travel on Local Buses and be Outdoors After Dark by Age

The graph shows that among eight-year-olds, almost 6 per cent claim to have their parents’ permission to travel on a bus other than the school bus. This figure rises to 46 per cent for twelve-year-olds, while 89 per cent of fifteen-year-olds state that they have permission to travel on local buses. As with previous indicators of independent mobility, the most notable period at which the level of freedom increases occurs between eleven and thirteen years of age. Indeed, as the graph above shows, there is a gap of almost thirty percentage points between the number of twelve- and thirteen-year-olds who are permitted to travel on local buses.

This graph (above) presents a similar pattern to that shown in Fig. 3.2.1. Both reveal a gap between children’s and parents’ responses with respect to the relationship between age and the acquisition of mobility licences. Whether or not children are overstating, or parents are understating, the levels of mobility licences enjoyed by, or conferred on, children the significance of age as a correlate of independent mobility is abundantly clear and is statistically significant across all six indicators.
**Age and the Journey to and from School**

While the relationship between age and independence in travel to and from school is statistically significant, it is, in practice, a weak one, mainly due to the organised nature of school transport and high levels of car dependency. Measures of association (Cramer’s V) stand at .127 in respect of travelling to school alone, and at .118 as regards travelling home alone.

The following graph shows that among those attending primary school, about half of older children state that they travel to and from school unaccompanied by an adult. The graph manifests a clear upward trend in respect of the association between age and independent travel among those aged seven to twelve. There is little age-related change however in the levels of independence experienced by teenagers in respect of school travel. This is most likely due to the more extensive provision of organised school bus travel among second-level students than is the case at primary level. Among those who attend second-level schools, i.e. those aged thirteen and over, age is not significant as a determinant of how young people travel; about half of young people aged thirteen to fifteen claim to travel unaccompanied by an adult (i.e. alone or with other children of the same age or older).

![Fig. 3.2.4: Percentages of Children and Young People travelling to and from School without Adult Accompaniment by Age](image)

The graph above clearly shows the significance of the phase between ten and twelve years of age in increasing the likelihood of a child travelling to and from school unaccompanied; less than 40 per cent of ten-year-olds claim to travel to school unaccompanied, while almost 60 per cent of twelve to fourteen-year-olds report that they do so. There is a slight spike in the graph in respect of the proportion of eleven-year-olds who state that they travel home from school alone. While this may be attributed in part to a desire on the part of children to project themselves as enjoying a higher degree of freedom than they actually experience, it is more directly attributable to the primary school timetable. As the previous section (section 3.1) has demonstrated, more primary school children travel home alone than travel to school alone.

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*Figures are based on children’s journey to school on the morning on which they participated in the survey and on their intentions / expectations for the homeward journey on the same day.*
This is due to the fact that in the mornings parents can drop children to school while on their way to work. However, as the primary school day ends at 15h, parents who work outside the home are generally unable to collect their children in person.

As the following graph shows, a similar trend can be observed in respect of the proportion of children travelling to school with a child of the same age or younger. Younger children are more likely to be accompanied by an adult as they walk to and from school, and there is some evidence of older children assuming responsibility for younger siblings with whom they walk to school.

**Fig. 3.2.5: Percentages of Children and Young People travelling to and from School with a Child of the Same Age or Younger (Children’s Responses)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>% of Children/Youths</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In respect of children aged seven to eleven, there is a general upward trend in respect of the proportion who travel to and from school with children of the same age or younger. The downward trend from aged twelve to fifteen is associated with the transition to second-level school, as children assume a different schedule to their younger siblings and neighbours, and as previously-presented data have shown, they are more likely to use the school bus.

Children aged ten and eleven are more likely to walk to school with siblings, friends and neighbours, than are older children who are more likely to have travelled on a bus (either a school bus or public transport), as the following diagram shows.
The figures presented here also show the dominance of travel by car among both primary and second-level pupils. Strikingly in the ‘Growing Up in Ireland’ study (Williams et al., 2009), 70 per cent of nine-year-olds who lived within 1-1.5 miles (i.e. 1.5 to 2km) of their school reported travelling there by car. The most worrying trend in respect of trying to promote healthy lifestyles among children is that as they progress to second-level school, children become less likely to walk or cycle to school. These findings point to the need to extend initiatives such as ‘park and stride’ to second-level schools, which have proven successful at primary level.

**Age and the Weekend Activities Undertaken by Children**

Age is positively associated with children’s levels of activity and their participation in sporting, recreational and social activities. Our survey presented children with a menu of twelve activities and asked them to indicate which of those they had undertaken (both accompanied and unaccompanied) over the course of the previous weekend (Question 10). As the following table shows, the number of activities they undertook increases with age, with older children more likely to be independently active and mobile than their younger siblings and neighbours.
Table 3.2.1: Percentage of Children of Each Age by the Number of Weekend Activities in which They Engage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Weekend Activities</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>14</th>
<th>15</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>45.9</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 or more</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>25.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Highest percentages for each age are in bold font. P<.01. Spearman Correlation = .378.

The data presented in the table demonstrate that the percentage of children who do not engage in any weekend activity declines with age – from 46 per cent among seven-years-olds to 6 per cent among fourteen-year-olds. At the other end of the activity spectrum, over a quarter (26%) of fifteen-year-olds report having undertaken seven or more activities during the weekend prior to the survey fieldwork, while only 2 per cent of eight-year-olds report such active lifestyles.

The data presented in this table provide grounds for optimism, particularly in respect of older children, and are consistent with data published by Lalor et al. (2007) that show Irish children as having high levels of motivation regarding their leisure activities. However, Lalor et al. note that as children get older, they tend to ‘drop-out’ from some of the sporting and recreational clubs with which they had been involved, and they contend that “the public health implications of this decline in adolescent physical activity will be enormous” (2007: 230). They attribute ‘drop out’ to adolescents ‘losing interest,’ and outgrowing particular activities. Drop-out is also associated with peer influences, increased competitiveness in some sporting endeavours and with teenagers having less free time due to academic pressures. Research (Jackson and Goossens, 2006; Lalor et al., 2007; Hughes, 2010) also notes the important roles played by families, schools and local communities in either enabling or constraining access to leisure activities, and these issues are explored later in this report.

Age and Children’s Perceptions of Place
As the international literature (cited in Section 2.1 of this report) has noted, and as the data presented already (in Section 3.1) demonstrate, children’s perceptions and experiences of their neighbourhoods and localities can affect their independent mobility. When children are fearful of factors in their localities, they are less likely to want to leave the security of home. Similarly, parents’ fears regarding traffic and anti-social behaviour can make them more likely to withhold mobility licences, and to transport their children by car, rather than allowing them to walk or cycle on their own.

As the following graph shows, over 90 per cent of children describe their neighbourhoods as being ‘very safe’ or ‘fairly safe,’ and this generally positive perception of place dominates across all ages.
However, the research findings also reveal some age-related differences in perceptions. Seven-year-old children are more likely than are older children to describe their neighbourhoods as being ‘very safe,’ while eleven and twelve-year-olds are less likely to apply this description to their immediate local environment. The trend presented in this graph echoes the findings of Humphreys et al. (2011), in respect of a cross-section of Limerick City communities, and suggests that, as they get older, children become more aware of real and potential fears in their neighbourhoods. From twelve years onwards, they become less fearful as they gain more of the life skills necessary to enable them to deal with possible threats or fears. However, the research undertaken by Humphreys et al. (2011: 13) also recorded that “only 13 per cent of parents / carers across all areas report that there are safe places for teenagers to meet in their neighbourhood.”

Our research also presented children with a list of potential sources of fear (as outlined previously in Table 3.1.12), and we asked children to indicate if they would be worried about these (namely fear of strangers, bullying, getting lost, traffic, not knowing what to say if somebody speaks to me) if they were outside - either accompanied by an adult or with friends. With respect to each of the options presented, the proportion of children reporting that they would be fearful declines with age; in all cases, seven-year-olds were the most likely to be fearful, and fifteen-year-olds were the least likely to have fears. In all cases, the relationships were linear negative (as age increases, fear declines).

**Age and CIM**

It is evident from the various measures presented here that age is a correlate with parental conferring of licences and the actual exercise of mobility. The years between eleven and thirteen are the most significant in a child’s life in respect of gaining greater permission and opportunities to exercise his/her independence. This period is associated with the transition from primary to second-level school, and brings with it increased freedoms as well as responsibilities and challenges for children and young people. It is not surprising that of all the independent variables presented in this report, age has the strongest correlations with indicators of independent mobility. However, as the following sections show,
boys and girls experience mobility differently, and micro-geographies, and in particular the provision of child-friendly infrastructure, and the supply of facilities and amenities are important influences on mobility.

3.2.2: The Influence of Gender on Independent Mobility
Gender is notable, albeit less so than age, in influencing the licences conferred, and freedom exercised with respect to most indicators of independent mobility. It correlates in particular with the activities in which children engage during out-of-school hours. As the data presented in this section show, boys acquire mobility licences at a younger age than girls, and they experience greater levels of independent mobility.

Gender and the Mobility Licences Conferred on Children
Our survey found that boys are more likely than girls to have secured five of the six licences that are indicative of independent mobility. In addition, they acquire parental permission to be independently mobile earlier than girls. As the following graph shows, boys report being more likely than girls to have parental permission to cross main roads and/or to cycle on them.

Boys are also more likely than girls to have acquired the licence to be outdoors after dark; in their responses, parents indicated that 11 per cent of boys and 7 per cent of girls have their permission to be outdoors after dark. The only licence which is conferred on a higher percentage of girls than boys is that of ‘travelling unaccompanied on local buses.’ Our study also found that the overall higher levels of mobility among boys are associated with parents’ generally conferring mobility licences on them at a younger age, as the following table shows.
Table 3.2.2: Mean Age at Which Parents State they Have Conferred or are Likely to Confer Mobility Licences on Children by Gender of Child (parents’ responses).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Indicator of Mobility</th>
<th>Boys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.67</td>
<td>Age at which the child was permitted to cross the road</td>
<td>9.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.47</td>
<td>Age at which the child was permitted to cycle on main roads alone</td>
<td>10.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.79</td>
<td>Age at which the child was permitted to travel on local buses alone&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>7.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.50</td>
<td>Age at which parents expect to confer on their child the licence to cycle on main roads alone</td>
<td>13.27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the previous section of this report has noted, acquisition of mobility licences is the precursor to the exercise of independent mobility. Thus, in line with their advanced acquisition of mobility licences relative to girls, boys are more likely to be mobile. The following pie charts illustrate the gender differences with respect to cycling.

**Fig. 3.2.9: Frequency with which Girls and Boys Cycle during a Typical Week**

The pie charts show that boys cycle more frequently than girls do; 40 per cent of boys cycle on three or more days a week, while only 28 per cent of girls do so. Levels of bicycle ownership are equal across both genders, but, as the following section of this report (Section 3.3) reveals, boys’ higher levels of mobility, and their greater levels of physical activity generally, are associated with a willingness on the part of parents to confer mobility licences on boys at an earlier age and in a greater range of circumstances.

**Gender and the Journey to and from School**

As noted earlier in this report, the structured nature of the journey to and from school and the high level of adult involvement in managing how children travel between home and school result in little difference between boys’ and girls’ experiences in this respect. The vast majority of both genders are taken to school by car, or in the case of second-level students using the designated school bus. The only notable difference between boys and girls can be observed in respect of cycling. Boys are twice as likely as girls to cycle to school. It must be emphasised, however, that the figures in question are very small (1.3% of girls and 2.6% of boys).

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<sup>a</sup>Based on parents’ responses, this licence has only been conferred on 17.2% of 7 to 15-year-olds. Thus, the sample for the figures presented in the table in respect of this licence represents a minority of the survey participants.
When asked about their preferred mode of travel to and from school, both boys and girls favour active travel (i.e. walking and cycling combined) over travel by car, with cycling being the singular most popular option. As the following table shows, girls are more amenable to walking, while cycling is the preferred option among boys.

**Table 3.2.3: Children’s Preferred Modes of Travel to School.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Walk most or all the way</th>
<th>Cycle</th>
<th>School Bus</th>
<th>Car</th>
<th>Other Modes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Girls</strong></td>
<td>21.7%</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
<td>24.1%</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Boys</strong></td>
<td>16.4%</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
<td>24.9%</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gender and the Weekend Activities Undertaken by Children

The findings in respect of the acquisition of mobility licences, together with a gender analysis of weekend activities of children and young people, demonstrate that boys not only experience greater freedoms, they are also more likely than girls to be physically active. The following table presents the levels of boys’ and girls’ engagement in weekend activities.

**Table 3.2.4: Weekend Activities Undertaken by Children and Young People either Alone or With Another Child/Youth by Gender.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>% Girls</th>
<th>% Boys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visited a Friend’s House</td>
<td>47.83</td>
<td>54.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went to the Shops</td>
<td>45.10</td>
<td>46.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went for a Walk or Cycled</td>
<td>44.44</td>
<td>50.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went to a Playground, Park or Playing Fields</td>
<td>35.50</td>
<td>36.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Played Sport or Went Swimming</td>
<td>26.93</td>
<td>40.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visited Relatives or Grown-Ups</td>
<td>17.89</td>
<td>19.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went to the Cinema</td>
<td>16.01</td>
<td>18.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went to a Youth Club</td>
<td>11.39</td>
<td>12.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went to a Concert or Nightclub</td>
<td>9.70</td>
<td>9.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visited a Place of Worship</td>
<td>8.29</td>
<td>9.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went to the Library</td>
<td>8.29</td>
<td>7.94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A higher percentage of boys than girls claim to have engaged in all but one of the eleven activities (i.e. going to the library), which were presented in a menu format to survey participants. The difference between genders is statistically significant (P<.05) in respect of the following activities:

- Visited a Friend’s House
- Went to the Cinema
- Played Sport or Went Swimming
- Went for a Walk or Cycled Around
- Visited a Place of Worship
The difference between boys and girls is greatest in respect of their participation in sporting activities; there is a difference of thirteen percentage points between boys and girls on this indicator of mobility. The boys’ level of engagement in sport is a testament to the efforts of voluntary sporting organisations such as the GAA (Gaelic Athletic Association) and various other community-based sports clubs. Lalor et al. (2007: 240) identify the “widespread prevalence of GAA sports” and the shorter travel distances associated with accessing GAA grounds relative to other sporting venues such as swimming pools, as facilitating young people’s participation in particular sports. Although the GAA caters for both boys and girls, and the popularity and profile of camogie and ladies’ Gaelic football have grown in recent years, uptake of Gaelic games remains lower among females and media coverage remains weighted in favour of male sports. Indeed, the need for all sporting organisations to be more positive and proactive in promoting girls’ participation is essential.

Our study also shows that among younger children (those aged 10 and younger), boys and girls are almost equally likely to go to a playground, park or playing fields. As children get older, however, boys are more likely than girls to do so, and are even more likely to engage in spontaneous activities such as ‘going for a walk or cycle.’ These findings mirror those of other studies such as the ‘Growing Up in Ireland’ research (Williams et al., 2009), which found that 29 per cent of Irish boys met the World Health Organisation’s (WHO) recommendations for physical activity levels, while only 21 per cent of Irish girls did so. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the “Growing Up in Ireland” study recorded more frequent exercise participation among boys overall. What is striking, however, is that 24 per cent of girls who did not participate in sports indicated that ‘having no opportunities to play’ was the primary reason for their non-participation, compared to only 3 per cent of boys, who cited the same reason. The ‘Children’s Sport Participation and Physical Activity’ study highlighted that involvement in extra-curricular sport, active commuting to school and minutes of Physical Education provided were significant determinants of the minutes of moderate to vigorous activity engaged in by Irish girls. Currently, however, boys are more likely than girls to engage in extra-curricular activities and girls receive less Physical Education in school than do boys (Woods et al., 2010).

These gender differences with respect to formal and informal sports and leisure activities outside of school mirror what tends to happen within the school environment. According to the Children’s Sport Participation and Physical Activity Study (Woods et al., 2010), girls are less likely than boys to meet the minimum recommendations for Physical Education (PE) at school. Indeed, their study also found that the likelihood of meeting the WHO recommendations decreases as children grow into adolescence; 35 per cent of primary and 10 per cent of second-level pupils receive the minimum recommended minutes of P.E. at school each week. The findings presented and referred to here are not unique to Ireland and a number of studies (cited in Michaud et al.) contend that the correlates of physical and sports activity are high family income, high maternal education and children having a better relationship with parents.

As Hendry and Kloep (2006) outline, young people’s participation in sporting and recreational activities can make a positive contribution to their intellectual and emotional wellbeing. Clubs and structured activities provide them with opportunities to experience and exercise “a wide range of social roles and perhaps to develop a greater versatility in their social relationships by mixing with both adults and peers” (2006: 250). While also acknowledging the positive associations between physical activity and cognitive development, Frost et al. (2008) and Hughes (2010) argue that participation should be voluntary, and they countenance against adults forcing children into activities or specialisms in the hope of producing elite athletes. Indeed, Hughes emphasises children’s enjoyment, and he notes that an ego-orientation within some sporting contexts can lead to young people abandoning sport.

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17 A traditional Irish stick-and-ball outdoor team sport played by females.
18 The data sourced from Williams et al. (2009), relate to Ireland (South / Republic of) only.
While sporting clubs provide spaces in which children and young people can gain physical exercise and develop their social skills, other locations and venues can also be important in enabling them to socialise with their peers. Indeed, Hughes (2010) contends that by the age of twelve and into the adolescent years, the most popular recreational activities include many that reflect a need for self-awareness, heterosexual socialisation and intimate communication. Thus, adolescents like to spend time watching television, reading, listening to music, going to discos and parties and “they also like just hanging around with friends, and much adolescent play is of this unstructured variety” (2010: 149). An age-based analysis of our findings (presented in table 3.2.4) provides evidence of this, and concurs specifically with those of Lalor et al. (2007) in respect of the association between gender and shopping. Their research found that teenage girls were more likely than boys to go shopping (32% of girls and 24% of boys shop on a weekly basis). Indeed, our dataset provides concrete evidence of this age-related gender differentiation; among fourteen and fifteen-year-olds, 73 per cent of girls and 64 per cent of boys had been to the shops on their own or with other children / young people during the weekend prior to participating in this survey. Aside from shopping, our survey found that girls aged fourteen and fifteen were also more likely than boys of the same age to have gone ‘to a concert or nightclub’ and ‘to the cinema.’

In their analysis of why (in several European counties) girls are less likely than boys to participate in leisure, recreational and social activities, but spend more time reading and talking with friends, Hendry and Kleop (2007: 258) suggest that girls “are expected to spend more of their free time helping out in the house; and are often required to return home earlier in the evening.” They also note that girls tend to receive less pocket money (or wages) and have higher ‘self-maintenance costs.’ …and thus less disposable income to spend on activities with a cost.

Gender and Children’s Perceptions of Place

In addition to the factors mentioned above, boys’ higher levels of mobility may be associated with their having lower levels of fear. As the following graph reveals, the proportion of boys who describe their neighbourhood as ‘very safe’ is almost ten percentage points higher than the proportion of girls who do so.

Fig. 3.2.10: Children’s Perceptions of the Levels of Safety in their Neighbourhood, by Gender.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of Children</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Boys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all safe</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very safe</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly safe</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very safe</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

P<.001. Cramer’s V=.078

The data presented in Table 3.2.4 relate to all children aged 7 to 15 years.
When asked to identify any causes of worry that they may have when they are outdoors alone or with friends, boys are less likely than girls to identify anything. Indeed, the two leading worries among children i.e. kidnapping and dogs or animals (fig. 3.1.5) are significantly less manifest among boys than among girls. Girls are four times more likely to fear kidnapping, and are 50 per cent more likely to be afraid of dogs. Dogs represent boys’ main worry, while kidnapping is the primary source of worry among girls.

Gender and CIM
Despite boys being more mobile and active than girls, their levels of mobility and activity are considerably lower than those their parents experienced as children and, on several indicators, Irish boys are less active and less mobile than are children in other counties (see section 4 of this report). Indeed, the findings presented here show much scope for facilitating greater child mobility and physical activity, most especially among girls. Thus, greater efforts are required in order to make all children more active, and such interventions need to focus on, and empower schools and communities.

3.2.3: The Influence of Geographical Factors on Independent Mobility
Geographical, social and cultural factors are significant correlates of independent mobility as several studies have shown (Jackson and Goossens, 2006; Frost et al., 2008). In terms of micro-geographies, area characteristics such as the degrees of urbanisation or rurality of a child’s environment, the accessibility of schools and amenities, and perceptions of place can have notable bearings on how, where and when children travel. As the data presented in this section reveal, independent mobility is not just determined by physical distance from services or amenities, but is also influenced by social geographies, such as the quality of the local environment and family circumstances and attitudes.

Children in urban and rural areas experience mobility differently. When it comes to accessing services and organised activities in public spaces, the mobility of children in urban areas is enabled by better infrastructure (e.g. proper footpaths, cycle lanes and public transport provision) and, as a consequence, they have higher levels of participation in organised sporting and recreational activities than do children who live in rural communities. Children in rural areas, and particularly those who live in the open countryside, exhibit higher levels of car dependency, most notably in respect of travel to and from school, but they tend to enjoy higher degrees of independent mobility in respect of spontaneous activities such as walking and cycling in their locality.

Geography and the Mobility Licences Conferred on Children
As the following table shows, there is a clear rural to urban continuum in respect of the mobility licences conferred on children and, in all cases, the more urban the environment in which the child lives, the more likely it is that he/she will have acquired parental permission to travel independently.
Table 3.2.5: Percentage of Children from across the Spectrum of Study Locations\(^{20}\) who have had Mobility Licences Conferred on Them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mobility Licences</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Large</th>
<th>Medium Town</th>
<th>Village Town</th>
<th>Rural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To Cross the Road Alone</td>
<td>Children</td>
<td>96.4</td>
<td>94.4</td>
<td>92.1</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>71.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adults</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>72.0</td>
<td>74.3</td>
<td>76.9</td>
<td>47.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Cycle on Main Roads Alone</td>
<td>Children</td>
<td>92.9</td>
<td>92.8</td>
<td>86.9</td>
<td>88.4</td>
<td>63.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adults</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>45.0</td>
<td>57.6</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Travel Unaccompanied on Local Buses</td>
<td>Children</td>
<td>58.3</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adults</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be Outdoors After Dark</td>
<td>Adults</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean (based on an equal weighting of the above mobility licences)</td>
<td></td>
<td>59.5</td>
<td>48.7</td>
<td>49.2</td>
<td>52.5</td>
<td>30.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table shows that children who live in cities are the most likely to be allowed to cross roads alone (\(P<.01\) and Cramer’s \(V=.273\)), and they are also more likely than all other children to have permission to cycle on main roads (\(P<.01\) and Cramer’s \(V=.290\)). Conversely, children who live in the open countryside have the lowest degrees of freedom on these indicators, and as the parents’ responses to other questions in our survey reveal, there is considerable concern over the increased volumes of cars on Irish roads, and the shortcomings of the road network to cater for the needs and safety of road users other than motorists. As Census of Population data (Central Statistics Office, 2009) for Ireland reveal, the number of persons walking or cycling to work, particularly in rural areas, has declined over the past twenty years (since 1990) as roads have become more congested, and these trends are also reflected in children’s journeys to and from school.

Geography and the Journey to and from School
The rural - urban continuum presented in the previous table also pertains in respect of journeys to school with active travel (walking/cycling) being more prominent in the urban environment, and car and school bus transport being more prevalent in rural locations. As the following table shows, children who live in urban locations are more likely to walk to school, while rural children are the least likely to do so. While travel by car is the modal method of transport in all locations, car use is lowest in the cities.

Table 3.2.6: Method of Travel to School (% of Children) by Locations of Homes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method of Travel</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Large Town</th>
<th>Medium Town</th>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Rural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Walking</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cycling</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Bus</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>36.9</td>
<td>31.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Transport</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Car</td>
<td>49.7</td>
<td>65.5</td>
<td>61.4</td>
<td>50.3</td>
<td>62.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{20}\)For the purposes of this study, the following definitions were applied so as to secure a geographically representative sample: The Cities are Dublin, Belfast, Cork, Limerick and Galway. Large Towns are those (excluding cities) with over 20,000 inhabitants. Medium Towns refer to all other towns on the CSO (Central Statistics Office and NIRSA (Northern Ireland Research and Statistics Agency) databases. Villages are population centres with less than 1,500 inhabitants. Rural refers to the open countryside.
The data reveal a clear negative trend from the most urban to the most rural in respect of the number of children walking to school, but the pattern in respect of car dependence is less clear cut in spatial terms. Levels of car dependency are lowest in cities, which is not surprising given that children are more likely to have a school within walking distance of their homes. A similar situation pertains in villages, where geographical proximity is also a factor in facilitating access to and from school. At some variance from the anticipated spatial pattern, levels of car dependence are highest in large towns. This is partly associated with fewer public transport options relative to cities, the locations of newer (amalgamated) schools on town peripheries rather than in central locations, and a growing tendency among second-level students to travel considerable distances to access schools that provide subject options to best suit their aptitudes. Thus, except in our cities, the feasibility of taking public transport options to get to and from school is limited. Indeed, the only location in which any more than 5 per cent of school students do so is in Belfast, where the second-level school in this study is centrally located.

The fact that so few rural children cycle or walk to or from school represents a very significant inter-generational change. The ‘Growing Up in Ireland’ survey (Williams et al., 2009) has also highlighted that children’s opportunities to get physical exercise have seriously diminished over time because of increasing reliance on motorised transport. While reliance on the car is a feature of all geographical contexts, the significance of the school bus system in rural areas is clearly evident. Opinions expressed by some public figures over recent months regarding the rationalisation of school bus services, increases in passenger fees and additional amalgamations of rural schools represent a cause for concern as, if pursued, they would further reduce children’s independent mobility, and probably increase levels of car dependency.

**Geography and the Weekend Activities Undertaken by Children**

Although rural children have the least access to safe roadways and formal public spaces, they benefit from having more open space around the family home. Almost all live in detached houses with gardens, while those on farms have access to yards and farm roads, where they can play with siblings and friends and can engage in activities such as cycling and playing ball. The following graph shows that children who live in the open countryside are more likely to cycle, while, in contrast, those in cities are least likely to do so. Thus, while figures presented previously have shown that rural children are the least likely to have parental permission to cycle on main roads, they cycle with greater frequency than do children in villages, towns or cities, as the following graph shows.

---

21 This is substantiated by the parents’ survey.
22 Among the entire sample, almost half of parents reported that they used to walk or cycle to school (46.2% walked and 2.9% cycled.)
Access to private or family-owned and communal space (e.g. beaches and woodland) also results in rural children being most likely to go for a walk. However, as the following table shows, they are the least likely to engage in all of the weekend activities covered by this survey – the only activity they were more likely to undertake relative to other children, was visiting relatives or grown-ups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Large Town</th>
<th>Medium Town</th>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Rural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Went to a Friend’s House</td>
<td>65.79</td>
<td>56.63</td>
<td>35.96</td>
<td>53.07</td>
<td>25.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went to the Shops</td>
<td>60.41</td>
<td>47.96</td>
<td>37.92</td>
<td>45.29</td>
<td>22.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spent Time with Friends Outside After Dark</td>
<td>46.14</td>
<td>36.22</td>
<td>27.81</td>
<td>37.30</td>
<td>20.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went for a Walk or Cycled</td>
<td>45.41</td>
<td>45.92</td>
<td>49.16</td>
<td>55.53</td>
<td>39.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went to a Playground, Park or Playing Fields</td>
<td>43.38</td>
<td>33.93</td>
<td>32.58</td>
<td>43.24</td>
<td>15.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Played Sport or Went Swimming</td>
<td>35.52</td>
<td>35.20</td>
<td>29.49</td>
<td>42.62</td>
<td>19.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went to the Cinema</td>
<td>27.22</td>
<td>19.39</td>
<td>14.33</td>
<td>12.50</td>
<td>5.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went to a Youth Club</td>
<td>18.20</td>
<td>9.95</td>
<td>14.04</td>
<td>7.58</td>
<td>3.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visited Relatives or Grown-Ups</td>
<td>15.72</td>
<td>16.84</td>
<td>21.35</td>
<td>20.29</td>
<td>25.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went to the Library</td>
<td>10.77</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>11.24</td>
<td>8.81</td>
<td>2.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went to a Concert or Nightclub</td>
<td>10.19</td>
<td>8.42</td>
<td>9.27</td>
<td>15.78</td>
<td>2.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visited a Place of Worship</td>
<td>8.15</td>
<td>8.93</td>
<td>10.39</td>
<td>10.25</td>
<td>7.36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data presented in this table show that, in general, the more urbanised the environment, the more likely children are to engage in weekend activities outside the home. The main variation on this trend emerges in respect of village children, who tend to have greater mobility and more licences than children in both medium and large towns.
As the data reveal, children in cities are:

- six times more likely than rural children to go to a youth club;
- four times more likely to go to the cinema, a concert, nightclub or library;
- almost three times more likely to go to a playground, park or playing fields;
- 2.5 times more likely to visit a friend’s house or go to the shops; and
- more than twice as likely to spend time playing outside after dark.

City children are also more likely than town children to engage in eight of the twelve weekend activities covered in this survey, particularly visiting friends, going to shops and going to the cinema. While city children have the mean highest levels of activity with respect to engaging in the listed weekend activities, and rural children have the lowest, children who live in villages emerge as having the highest levels of mobility on three of the indicators, namely: ‘going for a walk or cycle,’ ‘playing sport or swimming,’ and ‘going to a concert or nightclub.’ In addition, the proportion of village children going to a playground, park or playing fields (43%) is on a par with the figure for city children (43%). These findings dovetail with those of Humphreys et al. (2011: 19) on the link between supply of facilities and the level of exercise in which children engage. Our findings also suggest that the provision of local facilities, amenities and infrastructure can be as significant as the urban-rural continuum in determining children’s mobility in respect of weekend activities. Across the island of Ireland, community and voluntary groups have become increasingly active over recent decades in improving their local built environment. The benefits that have been derived from their efforts and their working in partnership with local authorities and LEADER Partnerships / Local Development Companies in particular, are evident (National Rural Network, 2013; RSM McClure Watters, 2013), but such initiatives require further investment if the particular obstacles, most notably the infrastructural deficits faced by rural children, as evidenced in this report (e.g. the following table), are to be addressed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.2.8: Percentage of Children with Access to Playspaces by Location.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access to a Park (without crossing a main road)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to a Quiet Residential Road</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to Shared Communal Space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

P<.001, Cramer’s V values: .220, .229 and .216.

Geography and Children’s Perceptions of Place

Our research found no significant geographical differences when children were asked to describe how safe they felt in their own neighbourhoods, with the vast majority in all locations describing their localities as ‘very safe’ or ‘safe.’

When asked about potential sources of worry when being outdoors alone or with friends, children who live in cities were least likely to report being worried about strangers or traffic. Conversely, those who reside in medium-sized towns were more likely to be worried about traffic, while there were no discernible geographical differences with respect to the fear of strangers. The fear of dogs and other animals is least evident in cities, and is most pronounced in towns and in rural areas, but not in villages. Children’s worry about kidnapping is found in almost equal levels across all geographies.

23 For an example of a young people’s account of the impact of local development on the provision of local facilities and amenities, please see: YOLODUHALLOW http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Alq9gdmRpiE (accessed March 2014).
Geography and CIM
The results presented in this section show that there are notable geographical differences in the ways in which children experience independent mobility. Those who live in cities and large urban areas have the broadest range of opportunities available to them to entice and enable them to engage in sporting and recreational activities. Children who live in villages have the advantage of access to facilities and amenities in proximity to their homes, and this contributes to them having more freedom than those who live in the open countryside. On many of the indicators studied here, villages tend to offer the most suitable environment in which children can be independently mobile, and the efforts of civil society over recent decades in providing amenities for children and young people are important in contributing to their self-actualisation. Indeed, as later sections of this report show, local infrastructural provision is integral to empowering children and young people to be active, and in re-assuring parents with respect to child safety.

Correlates with Mobility
As indicated in the international literature, age emerges in our dataset as the variable that correlates most strongly with Children’s Independent Mobility – the older a child is, the more freedom he/she has to travel and engage in social and recreational activities without adult supervision. What is most striking in terms of the significance of age as a determinant of mobility is the considerable gap between the mobility of eleven-year-olds and that of thirteen-year-olds. This two-year period, which is associated with the transition from primary to second-level education, is when children experience the greatest increase in the levels of independent mobility they enjoy. Children attending second-level schools also perceive themselves as having considerable independent mobility, and are keen to emphasise the extent to which they go places on their own.

With respect to gender and geography, boys experience greater mobility than girls, and urban males have the highest degrees of mobility. Gender-related differences are most pronounced in respect of engagement in sporting and recreational activities, and the relatively low levels of participation by girls in organised sporting and leisure activities has to be a cause for concern, particularly in the context of increasing levels of childhood obesity and long-term health and wellbeing. The lack of community-based outlets for girls, and parental concerns over road and environmental safety underscore the importance of the Physical Education curriculum in our schools. The findings also suggest the need for specific support mechanisms for sports and other physical activities that encourage female participation in community settings.

While rural children’s mobility is somewhat hampered by poor infrastructure (lack of footpaths and cycle lanes outside villages) and fewer facilities (in the form of parks, swimming pools, bowling alleys and other formal spaces dedicated for recreation) relative to most urban communities, they endeavour to compensate for this through spontaneous play – specifically walking and cycling around their yard and/or garden. However, the increased mechanisation of agriculture and changing land-use patterns in rural areas that involve fencing of lands as well as intensive agricultural practices are making the countryside a less welcoming place for children. In some areas, ribbon development along country roads and increased traffic volumes and speeds have heightened parents’ concerns over road safety. Children who live in villages enjoy relatively high degrees of mobility, and are benefiting from the efforts of community and voluntary groups in organising activities and improving the quality of the local environment and infrastructure. Therefore, on-going EU and government support for the voluntary sector and for village and streetscape design initiatives as well as for sporting, recreational and youth development clubs and organisations are essential. Indeed, as the next section demonstrates, investment in local facilities, particularly in the promotion of road safety measures, is essential in allowing parents to play a more enabling and empowering role with respect to their children’s independent mobility.
3.3: Parents, Communities and Children’s Independent Mobility
This section outlines the findings of the parents’ survey, which was conducted in conjunction with the children’s study. The results presented here are based on a sample of 1,695 parents, or 76 per cent of those whose children completed a survey questionnaire. The findings reveal the influence of parental attitudes and opinions on the experiences, behaviour and perceptions of children with regard to travel, transport and independent mobility. Parental influence is most evident in respect of children’s high levels of car dependency and use, which is associated with parents’ worry about traffic accidents and their views on the ages at which mobility licences ought to be conferred on children and young people. Considerable differences emerge however in respect of inter-generational lived experiences, with parents – regardless of geography or socio-economic background – having enjoyed considerably greater independent mobility and freedom as children than is the case among their own children today.

3.3.1: Parents’ Influences on How Children travel to and from School
This survey asked parents whether or not their children are permitted to travel to and from school alone. In response, almost 40 per cent of parents reported that their children are permitted to do so, while just over 60 per cent stated that they do not allow their children to travel to school unaccompanied. These figures are broadly in line with those reported by children. Among the parents who allow their children to travel independently, the modal age at which children were conferred with this licence is eleven years. However, among parents who do not currently permit their children to travel to and from school unaccompanied, the modal age at which they would grant such permission to a child is thirteen years.

Over half of parents (55%) reported that their child is typically collected from school five days a week. Just over one in five (21%) of parents stated that their child is not usually collected from school by an adult. As the following graph shows, there are differences between primary and second-level schools in respect of the frequency with which children are collected. Second-level students are twice as likely as primary school children to travel home from school without parental accompaniment five days a week. Yet, as the following graph illustrates, almost 45 per cent of second-level students are collected by an adult every day and a further 20 per cent are collected at least one day per week. Indeed, statistical analysis reveals that while it is significant (P<.001), the relationship between the school level attended and the frequency with which parents collect their children is weak (Cramer’s V = .19) – thereby indicating the strong ‘structuring’ influence parents bring to bear on children’s lives.
The behaviour represented in the graph above is reflective of the high (and increased) level of car dependence in society (as documented by the Central Statistics Office, 2009: 2011); among the parents who collect their child from school five days a week, 86 per cent do so by car.

As the following graph shows, almost 40 per cent of parents state that the distance between home and school is the primary motivating factor for them to collect their child.

---

**Fig. 3.3.2: Main Reasons cited by Parents as to why they Collect Children from School.**

- School too far away
- Concern about Traffic Danger
- Danger from Adults
- On the Way to an Activity
- Opportunity to Spend Time with my Child
- Other
- Child Unreliable or Too Young
- Opportunity to Meet People
- Fear of Bullying by Other Children
- Opportunity for Exercise or to Get Out of the House

---

24 Respondent could tick more than one option; hence, the figures do not total 100%.
The findings in response to this question reveal a degree of irony in the views expressed by many parents, in that 39 per cent stated that they collect their children due to ‘concern about traffic danger.’ Yet, of those who expressed this view, 60 per cent transport their child from school by car. The other main reason parents cited for collecting their child from school was ‘distance.’ Nevertheless, the survey findings also reveal that 60 per cent of children live a similar or shorter distance from school than did their parents – the majority of whom walked to school.

The following table presents the distances (in minutes) between home and the child’s school. It shows that travel by car is faster, and this contributes to its popularity as a method of travel.

| Table 3.3.1: Distance (in minutes) between the Children’s Home and School. |
|-----------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
|                                              | On Foot | By Car |
| Mean                                          | 22.8    | 8.9   |
| Median                                        | 15.0    | 7.0   |
| Mode                                          | 10.0    | 5.0   |

In addition to actual and perceived distance, the absence of public transport is a contributor to car use. A number of parents pointed to the lack of bus services and the poor scheduling and routing of buses as among the reasons why they feel obliged to collect their children. Among survey participants, less than 20 per cent of all parents, and fewer than 5 per cent of those in rural areas, responded to the question that asked them how long it would take to travel to their child’s school using public transport. This indicates that parents do not perceive public transport as a feasible or practical option. These figures are consistent with those presented in the CSO’s (2011: 19) National Travel Survey, which showed that in Ireland:

- Journeys by public transport (bus, rail, LUAS and DART) account for 5 per cent of all journeys;
- Journeys by car account for 73 per cent of all journeys.

Parents’ fears are also determining factors as to why they collect children from school. As the graph (fig. 3.3.2) illustrates, over 20 per cent of parents are concerned that other adults could pose a danger to their children, while 8 per cent expressed the concern that other children might bully their children.

There are some positive motivations as to why parents like to collect their children from school, such as meeting other parents and neighbours and taking exercise. These are cited by 10 per cent and 7 per cent of parents, respectively, and are associated with walking rather than driving to and from school. As the graph (fig. 3.3.2) also shows, 16 per cent of parents cited factors other than those listed (in the options provided) as among the reasons why they collect their child from school. The most frequently cited reasons were the weight of the child’s schoolbag, the child’s participation in extra-curricular activities and the weather.

Parents who are more likely to collect their child from school are also more likely than other parents to send the child to a school other than the one nearest to them. Just over 30 per cent of parents reported that they do not send their child to the local school – 30 per cent for primary school pupils and 31 per cent for second-level students. Of those who do not send their child to their nearest school, 42 per cent of parents reported that they preferred another school, 30 per cent stated that they wanted to send the child to a better school, while 11.5 per cent cited faith reasons or a child’s particular aptitude, and just under 8 per cent stated that transport considerations caused them to go to a school other than the local one.
3.3.2 Accompanying Children to Places other than School

Although parents cited distance as the main reason for collecting children from school, the survey findings also show parents’ preference for the car when it comes to making short journeys with their children. As the following pie chart shows, when asked if their child is usually taken to places other than school that are within walking distance, over half of parents replied that the child is usually taken, while less than one in five children travels independently.

Fig. 3.3.3: Parents’ Responses to taking Children to Places other than School that are within Walking Distance.

The following graph provides details on the modes of transport used by children to make non-school journeys, as identified by their parents. The figures reveal the dominance of the car – used by 91.5 per cent of respondents, as opposed to 15 per cent for walking and 4 per cent for cycling.

Fig. 3.3.4: Modes of Transport used by Children to make non-school Journeys.

Note: The cumulative of the figures presented here exceeds 100%, as some respondents opted to tick more than one option to indicate the main method of transport travel used.

While this study focuses on the behaviour and perceptions of children and their parents, it is necessary to acknowledge the role of other individuals such as older siblings, relatives, child-minders and neighbours in accompanying children. One-fifth of children who participated in this study reported that an adult other than their parent accompanies them to school.
The aforementioned CSO Transport Survey (2011: 18) reveals that ‘companion journeys to and from education’ account for 9 per cent of all journeys made by adults. A further 4 per cent of adults’ journeys are classified as ‘other companion journeys’ and prominent among these are taking children to social and leisure activities. The CSO findings suggest that grandparents are important travel companions for children on such journeys. Table 3.3.2 presents a breakdown by age cohort of those who make companion journeys. The figures reveal that persons aged over 55 are responsible for 20 per cent of all non-education companion journeys.

### Table 3.3.2: Percentage Distribution of Companion Journeys by Age Cohort.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Cohort</th>
<th>Companion Journey to and from Education</th>
<th>Other Companion Journey</th>
<th>All Purposes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18 – 34</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 – 44</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 – 54</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 - 64</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 and over</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CSO, 2011

The CSO findings also reveal that women are 2.5 times more likely than men to make a companion journey to / from education, while non-education companion journeys are made equally among males and females. While our study did not ask about the gender of the adult who accompanies the child to / from school, the fact that over 80 per cent of adult respondents were mothers is not insignificant.

Our study provides insights into the influence on child mobility of selected socio-economic factors such as Parents’ Age, Home Ownership and Employment Status. These show that younger parents are more likely to collect children from school; 62 per cent of parents aged thirty and younger collect their child from school five days a week, while 55 per cent of older parents do so. Home Ownership also emerges as being statistically associated with parental accompaniment of children; people who own their homes are the most likely to accompany their child to and from school (59.5% collect their child five days per week), while those who live in local authority housing are less likely to do so (44% collect their child five days per week). Home Ownership is associated with the higher social classes, as is car ownership. These socio-economic variables impact on child mobility as the findings from our survey among children demonstrate that those who live in local authority housing are twice as likely to walk to school than are children who live in owner-occupied dwellings, regardless of the distances involved.

The number of cars owned by a household has no notable statistical relationship with the granting or withholding of mobility licences, but car ownership directly impacts on mode of travel children use. As the following table shows, the only households from which a majority of children walk to school are those that do not have a car. In contrast, where households have two or more cars, a majority of children are driven to school. A similar association can be observed in respect of how children travel home from school.

25 Collecting children from school is associated with the child’s age.
Table 3.3.3: Percentage of Children who travel to School by Various Modes by Number of Cars owned by the Child’s Household.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode of travel to School</th>
<th>Number of Cars Available to the Household</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No Car</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walked</td>
<td>60.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cycled</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Bus</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Bus or Train</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Car</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

P<.01, Cramer’s V = .290

Other household characteristics such as parents’ employment status and the number of persons in the household were found to have had very limited impacts on children’s independent mobility. The mean number of weekend activities in which children participate is not statistically associated with parents’ employment status, suggesting that economic barriers to CIM are not as significant as the institutional, infrastructural and social ones identified elsewhere in this report. As noted previously, the activities in which children engage most frequently involve visiting and socialising together, playing spontaneously and attending clubs that charge only nominal fees (e.g. GAA). Parental employment and category of work status did not register any significant association with modes of travel, the frequency of companion journeys or the types of activities undertaken by children. Some associations were found, however, between the number of persons in a household and the granting of mobility licences, as children with two or more siblings tended to be more likely to acquire mobility licenses earlier than those in smaller households.

3.3.3: Parental Attitudes to Children’s Independent Mobility

Parents were asked a series of questions to establish the ages at which they consider it appropriate to confer independent mobility licences on children. These questions paralleled those put to children, and they included indicators of CIM such as crossing main roads, travelling on buses and playing outside after dark among others.

When asked if their child has permission to cross main roads alone, over 70 per cent of parents replied in the affirmative, and among these, eleven is the modal age at which their children were granted permission. Almost all (99%) of parents in this cohort stated that by age thirteen their child was permitted to cross main roads alone. Among those parents who do not currently permit their children to cross main roads alone, there is slightly more reticence in respect of the age at which such permission should be granted, with twelve (rather than eleven) being the modal age for which they opted.

As noted in Section 3.1, parents are less likely to allow children to cycle on main roads than to cross them. Just over 40 per cent of parents whose child owns a bike permit him / her to cycle it on main roads. As the following figure shows, parents are more cautious in granting children permission to cycle rather than to walk on main roads.
In figure 3.3.5, the two box plots on the left present the responses from parents who currently permit their children to cross main roads and cycle on them. They show that the median age at which children are first permitted to cross main roads alone is ten, while the corresponding value for permission to cycle on main roads is eleven years of age. The box plots also show a noticeably older age range in respect of children acquiring parental permission to cycle on main roads.

The two box plots on the right present the responses from parents who currently do not permit their children either to cross main roads or to cycle on them. They show a similar pattern in respect of the conferring of licences, as both sets of parents are more reticent about allowing their children to cycle on main roads than to cross them. Among parents who do not permit their children to cycle on main roads, the median age at which they consider such a licence should be granted is thirteen. This is one-year-older than their preferred age for allowing children to cross roads unaccompanied.
Parents are more cautious again in respect of permitting their children to travel on local buses other than the school bus. Less than one in five parents (19%) report that they allow their child to travel on buses. Among such parents, the modal age at which they first permitted their child to travel unaccompanied on a public bus was twelve, with the mean value being 11.7 years. Among parents who do not currently permit their children to travel on public buses, the modal age at which they state they would be likely to allow their child to do so is fifteen, while the mean value is 11(10.92) years of age.

Relative to the licence to cross roads and cycle on main roads, a much smaller proportion of children (9%) usually have, according to their parents, permission to go outside after dark. Age is the main correlate (relative to other independent variables addressed in this survey), with children under fourteen much less likely to have such permission. The following pie chart (fig. 3.3.6) presents the main reasons cited by parents as to why their children are not permitted outside after dark.

When considered in the light of the findings on children’s perceptions of their neighbourhoods as presented in Section 3.1.4, the pie chart demonstrates that parents’ concerns differ from those of their children. The single largest category of parental concerns relates to traffic and infrastructure, and includes factors such as the volume of vehicles on the roads, lack of proper footpaths, inadequate lighting and dangerous roads. Almost one in five of the fears reported by parents can be classified as a general fear or distrust of other adults, particularly strangers, while 15 per cent simply stated that it would be ‘too dangerous’ or ‘inappropriate’ to permit children to be outside after dark. Among the place-specific characteristics identified by parents were rurality and distance from facilities. Criminality features less prominently among the fears expressed by parents relative to children. The main divergence in the perceptions of children and adults is in respect of dogs and other animals. While dogs were among the prominent causes of fear expressed by primary school children, only one parent mentioned them.

![Fig. 3.3.6: Reasons cited by Parents as to why Children are not Usually Permitted to go Outside After Dark](image-url)
The survey findings also show parents are more aware of, and more concerned about, social ills that inhibit Children’s Independent Mobility. While children are more likely to express concerns over sensationalist and (thankfully) unlikely experiences such as kidnapping, parents are more likely to be concerned about anti-social behaviour, and in particular local traffic flows. The following diagram (fig. 3.3.7) shows that a sizeable majority (64%) are worried about the risk of their child being injured in a traffic accident when crossing a road.

**Fig. 3.3.7: Extent to Which Parents are Worried about their Child being injured in a Traffic Accident when Crossing a Road.**

Increased car ownership in Ireland – North and South - over recent decades parallels an under-investment in public transport relative to roads, and as our road network improved, and public transport lost competitiveness, parents were incentivised to use, and obliged to rely on, cars. Car dependency is also driven by parental anxiety over child safety on the road, and although agencies such as the RSA (Road Safety Authority), Department of Environment (NI), local authorities, schools, the PSNI (Police Service of Northern Ireland) and An Garda Síochána (the South’s police force) among others have done much to make travel safer for children, and rates of fatalities and injuries have fallen, there is a strong sense among parents that the momentum of road safety campaigns and actions needs to be maintained, and indeed that further steps may be needed.
The following bar graph reveals parents’ perceptions on two societal indicators that influence the mobility licences they confer on children.

**Fig. 3.3.8: Parents’ Levels of Agreement and Disagreement with Statements about their Neighbourhoods as they relate to Child Mobility**

Parents’ responses reveal a degree of concern with anti-social behaviour and possible fears of intimidation in their locality, with over one in four (27%) either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement that ‘Some young people and adults in this area make you afraid to let your children play outside.’ As the term “young people” in this question was not defined as a particular age cohort, it is plausible that parents are concerned with what are perceived as groups of teenagers, ‘hanging about.’ As Lalor *et al.* note, such behaviour “has long been associated with gangs and delinquency… school drop-out and deviance” (2007: 220). However, ‘hanging about’ parks, shopping centres, village squares and street corners is also a normal activity for teenagers, and it fulfils useful developmental functions, including contact with peers, group membership and role negotiation. As various studies (Jackson and Goossens, 2006; Hughes, 2009) have observed, ‘hanging around’ is more likely to be perceived as problematic in areas that experience higher concentrations of social exclusion and deprivation. Indeed, in our study, parents who live in town centres and villages are more likely to agree with this statement, while people who live in the open countryside are more likely to disagree, as table 3.3.4 shows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Street/Ave./Lane</th>
<th>Housing estate in town</th>
<th>Suburban housing estate</th>
<th>Other suburban</th>
<th>Approach road to town</th>
<th>Open country</th>
<th>Village</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strongly Agree</strong></td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agree</strong></td>
<td>25.2%</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Neither/No Opinion</strong></td>
<td>25.2%</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
<td>21.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Disagree</strong></td>
<td>33.9%</td>
<td>33.2%</td>
<td>37.3%</td>
<td>52.5%</td>
<td>32.6%</td>
<td>38.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strongly Disagree</strong></td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

P<.001. Cramer’s V=.117
‘Growing Up in Ireland’ (Williams et al., 2009) similarly reported that families from urban areas were more likely than their rural counterparts to report that problems were ‘fairly common’ or ‘very common’ in their neighbourhoods.

When asked to give their view on the willingness or reliability of neighbours to watch out for their children, the majority of parents responded positively. As table 3.3.5 shows, over 60 per cent of parents in all locations agree with this affirmative assessment of their local community, with no major variations by location, albeit with the highest level of trust and confidence being in suburban and rural areas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Street/ Ave. Lane</th>
<th>Housing estate in town</th>
<th>Suburban housing estate</th>
<th>Other suburban</th>
<th>Approach road to town</th>
<th>Open country</th>
<th>Village</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>21.9%</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>46.9%</td>
<td>44.6%</td>
<td>44.2%</td>
<td>61.4%</td>
<td>48.9%</td>
<td>47.8%</td>
<td>44.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither / No Opinion</td>
<td>18.0%</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>191%</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Trust and confidence in neighbours are associated with social capital (Putnam, 2000; Humphreys & Dineen, 2007; Humphreys et al., 2011) and social capital, in the form of volunteerism and active civil society organisations, is essential in the development and provision of community-level sporting and recreational facilities among other social and economic goods (Taskforce on Active Citizenship, 2007). Indeed, most sporting organisations in Ireland are run on a voluntary basis. Fostering social capital requires on-going investment in community development and higher levels of social capital are attained when public policy and the practices of agencies are supportive of community-led local development (European Commission, 2011). The generation of social capital also places responsibilities on local authorities and the observation by the Taskforce on Active Citizenship (2007: 20) in respect of local amenities is directly relevant to the promotion of Children’s Independent Mobility. It states that the planning system in Ireland fails to take “sufficient account of the needs of people and communities, especially in relation to community facilities and local services... [and] this can have a significant negative impact on people's sense of community and create practical barriers to participation.” The Taskforce goes on to recommend that local authorities prioritise the provision of community and recreational facilities as part of Development Plans and subsequent planning decisions, and it specifies the need for new housing development to take greater account of the needs of people, and communities for transport, common areas, open spaces and community facilities.

As the following table demonstrates, there are statistical correlations between parents’ sentiments towards their local environment and their willingness to confer mobility licences on children.
Table 3.3.6: The Impacts of Parents’ Perceptions of their Neighbourhood and the Ages at which they grant particular Mobility Licences to their Children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parents’ Perceptions</th>
<th>Granting of Mobility Licences</th>
<th>At what age was your child first allowed to cross main roads alone?</th>
<th>At what age do you think you will allow your child to cross main roads alone?</th>
<th>At what age was your child first allowed to cycle on main roads alone?</th>
<th>At what age do you think you will allow your child to cycle on main roads alone?</th>
<th>At what age was your child first allowed to travel on buses alone?</th>
<th>At what age do you think you will allow your child to travel on buses alone?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree or Agree Strongly</td>
<td>Mean Age 9.47</td>
<td>11.93</td>
<td>10.59</td>
<td>13.16</td>
<td>8.42</td>
<td>10.91</td>
<td>14.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Age 10.00</td>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>11.00</td>
<td>13.00</td>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>14.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither Agree nor Disagree</td>
<td>Mean Age 9.72</td>
<td>12.22</td>
<td>10.69</td>
<td>13.61</td>
<td>9.31</td>
<td>10.64</td>
<td>14.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Age 10.00</td>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>11.00</td>
<td>13.00</td>
<td>11.00</td>
<td>14.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree or Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Mean Age 9.74</td>
<td>12.21</td>
<td>10.43</td>
<td>14.18</td>
<td>10.64</td>
<td>12.15</td>
<td>14.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Age 10.00</td>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>11.00</td>
<td>14.00</td>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>15.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Mean Age 9.54</td>
<td>12.03</td>
<td>10.59</td>
<td>13.38</td>
<td>8.80</td>
<td>11.00</td>
<td>14.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Age 10.00</td>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>11.00</td>
<td>13.00</td>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>14.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree or Agree Strongly</td>
<td>Mean Age 9.63</td>
<td>12.37</td>
<td>10.62</td>
<td>13.87</td>
<td>9.85</td>
<td>11.55</td>
<td>14.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Age 10.00</td>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>11.00</td>
<td>14.00</td>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>14.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither Agree nor Disagree</td>
<td>Mean Age 9.58</td>
<td>11.98</td>
<td>10.54</td>
<td>13.10</td>
<td>9.67</td>
<td>10.78</td>
<td>13.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Age 10.00</td>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>11.00</td>
<td>13.00</td>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>13.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree or Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Mean Age 9.51</td>
<td>11.87</td>
<td>10.61</td>
<td>13.27</td>
<td>18.28</td>
<td>10.88</td>
<td>14.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Age 10.00</td>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>11.00</td>
<td>13.00</td>
<td>11.00</td>
<td>14.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Mean Age 9.56</td>
<td>12.04</td>
<td>10.60</td>
<td>13.40</td>
<td>8.94</td>
<td>11.04</td>
<td>14.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Age 10.00</td>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>11.00</td>
<td>13.00</td>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>14.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

= younger than average

= older than average

The table shows that where parents have a more negative perception\(^{26}\) of their neighbourhood, they are inclined to delay the granting of certain mobility licences to their children (as indicated by the orange shading). Conversely, those who have a more positive view of their neighbourhood are more likely to advance the granting of mobility licences (as indicated by the green shading). Of the main indicative licences which the PSI has selected as integral to the measurement of children’s independent mobility, that of ‘having permission to be outside after dark’ does not correlate statistically with the parental attitudes presented in the table above. This is most likely because most parents, regardless of their perceptions of their neighbourhood, do not favour granting this licence until their children are in their early to middle teens.

\(^{26}\) They disagree or strongly disagree with the statement that ‘Adults who live in the neighbourhood look out for other people’s children,’ and they are more likely to agree with the statement that ‘Some young people and adults in the area make you afraid to let your children play outdoors.’
Much literature and media comment has focused on the use of mobile phones to bully and/or intimidate children and teenagers (Srivastava, 2005; Lalor et al., 2007). Our survey found that 73 per cent of children (aged 7 to 15) have a mobile phone (76% of girls and 70% of boys), with this figure rising to over 90 per cent for those aged twelve and older.

![Fig. 3.3.9: Level of Mobile Phone Ownership among Children](image)

When parents were asked if their child’s possession of a mobile phone gave them more confidence about letting their children out alone, 90 per cent who responded stated that it does.

While parents’ attitudes are a determinant of the mobility licences enjoyed by children, and consequently of the mobility and autonomy they exercise, there is no definitive statistical evidence arising from this study to demonstrate that parents’ fears or apprehensions transfer to their children or that children necessarily share their parent’s views on the levels of safety locally. The data garnered suggest that children’s perceptions of place and space tend to be influenced and shaped by a diverse range of social and environmental factors - at home, at school, in their communities and through the media and ICT. These aspects are explored further in Section 3.3.4.

3.3.4: The Influence of Household and Neighbourhood Characteristics
The international literature presented in section 1.2 of this report notes that access to public or communal spaces – both formal and informal – is important in determining levels of children’s mobility and activity. The overall thrust of the responses to both the parents’ and children’s surveys is that infrastructural considerations and the levels of facilities available for young people are more likely than are degrees of rurality or urbanisation, to influence where children go, how they travel and the types of activities in which they engage. Therefore, it is important to look at the quality of the environment and infrastructure in the immediate vicinity of children’s homes and at how local facilities can be enablers of child mobility. As noted by Kerrins et al. (2011: 31),
“Limiting outdoor play opportunities to equipped playground provision is critiqued for the way in which it mainly affords children the opportunity to engage in gross motor activities – walking, climbing, sitting upright – rather than a wider range of activities and experiences. Outdoor play affords children opportunities to engage in imaginative, physical, creative, social, solitary, and intellectual activities (Wheway and Millward, 1997), and decision making and problem solving, in ways that they do not experience when playing indoors (Burdette and Whitaker, 2005). Sights and sounds are different and activities that are prohibited indoors can happen outdoors – The outdoors offers children material for exploration, contact with living things, raw materials for creative and constructive play, and greater opportunities for meeting children and adults.”

Over the past decade, local authorities and community groups have made considerable advances in providing new and improved play and recreational spaces for children and young people. While we have progressed from a situation in the year 2000 when Ireland had five times more golf courses than playgrounds, our study finds that more work needs to be done in expanding the level and variety of communal play and recreational spaces. As figure 3.3.9 shows, over 90 per cent of children on the island of Ireland have access to a garden in which to play. This figure compares very favourably with the situation internationally. While the highest values are to be found in rural areas, the mean figure for children who live in cities and large towns is 88.5 per cent. However, as the diagram also shows, the majority of children are limited in their access to other play spaces, and this can have a delimiting effect on older children as their favoured recreation and leisure pursuits require communal and larger spaces (Jackson and Goossens, 2006).

Fig. 3.3.10: Access to Spaces in which Children Can Play."
The high level of access to a garden is a product of Ireland's dispersed rural settlement pattern, and a societal preference for low-density development in the urban context. Among survey participants, over 95 per cent of those who live in detached and semi-detached houses have access to a garden in which children can play. For those who live in terraced housing, the figure stands at 86 per cent, but it drops to 49 per cent for those who live in flats and apartments, and is lower again for children who live in temporary accommodation. While privately-owned gardens and green spaces can be conducive to child development, the benefits are most likely to accrue to younger children, and there is no statistical evidence in our research to suggest that children aged seven to fifteen years who have access to a garden are any more or less likely to be independently mobile or to engage in the physical activities addressed in our questionnaires. As the figures presented in Section 3.2.1 of this report reveal, children's need for, and use of facilities and amenities increases with age, with the result that children who reside in villages and those in communities that have playing fields, parks and other recreation facilities live in an environment that is more conducive to independent mobility. Indeed, as table 3.3.7 shows, ease of access to communal playspaces is positively associated with children undertaking activities independently.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Playspaces to which Children have Access</th>
<th>Mean Number of Activities Undertaken Unaccompanied</th>
<th>Mean Number of Activities Undertaken Accompanied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Park (without crossing a main road)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>2.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>2.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Park (across a main road)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>2.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>2.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Communal Space</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>2.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>2.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quiet Residential Road</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>2.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>2.41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Our findings on the importance of investment in community and communal sports and recreational facilities, among other amenities, in enabling older children to be physically active and independently mobile is also reflected by figures provided by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2012: 184), which showed that while 71 per cent of nine-year-olds and 65 per cent of ten and eleven-year-olds reported that “there are good places in their area to spend their free time,” the corresponding figure for twelve to fourteen-year-olds was 56 per cent, and for fifteen to seventeen year-olds it dropped to 40 per cent. Among all children aged ten years and older, boys were more likely than girls to agree with this statement, which is also consistent with several findings in this report that show that boys have higher levels of independent mobility and are more likely to participate in selected sporting and recreational activities.

This report has already demonstrated a positive association between Children's Independent Mobility and favourable perceptions of place (among both parents and children), with perceptions being influenced by the characteristics of neighbourhoods, including the provision of infrastructure and amenities. As the following figures show, there are variations in the levels of access to recreational facilities enjoyed by children based on where they live. These reveal that as regards playspaces, children are more likely to have access to a quiet residential road than to other spaces. The low level of access to shared communal spaces relative to other European countries is a negative distinguishing feature of the island of Ireland, and one that needs to be addressed in the future design and retro-fitting of our communities.
One of the most striking revelations of the previous figure is the limited access to outdoor spaces enjoyed by children who live in the open countryside – only 16 per cent of parents claim that their children have access to ‘other’ outdoor spaces (i.e. other than gardens, parks, roads and designated communal areas). While some have access to unrivalled spaces such as beaches and hillsides, the increased mechanisation of agriculture over recent decades has meant that fields and farmyards – once the domain of many young people – are no longer considered safe for children. The figure of 16 per cent is also associated with the changing economic profile of those who live in the countryside. Two generations ago, a majority of those living in the countryside were involved in farming and had access to their own land. Today, less than one third of households in the countryside are engaged in agriculture.

There are clear spatial patterns with respect to children’s access to parklands (figure 3.3.11). Over 50% of children who live in cities and towns have access to a park, although the majority are obliged to cross a main road to access it, thereby limiting its usefulness for children aged under ten (as according to our survey a majority of those aged ten and younger do not have parental permission to cross main roads). Almost half of children who live in villages have access to a park, although, as in the towns and cities, most have to cross a main road to access it. These figures provide statistical evidence that demonstrate the merits of expanding the recommendations of An Taisce\textsuperscript{28}, The National Transport Authority and Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (2011) in respect of active travel to and from school, and they underscore the importance of providing cycle lanes, covered bicycle parks, footpaths and pedestrian crossings in order to enable children to develop and maintain healthy lifestyles and enjoy ease of access to communal play spaces and recreational facilities.

\textsuperscript{28} The National Trust for Ireland – works to protect Ireland’s natural and built heritage. See http://www.antaisce.ie
The micro-geographical complexities and variations elucidated in this report point to a need for comprehensive mapping of school and community-based sporting and recreational facilities so that we acquire more robust data on the linkages between the provision of amenities and levels of activity and mobility among children.

The provision and maintenance of parks as spaces for play and recreation requires investment and commitment on the parts of communities and local authorities. In Northern Ireland, Local District Councils are to the fore in developing and looking after public spaces, including playgrounds, parks and public gardens. District Councils also assume responsibility for leisure centres and swimming pools. South of the border, leisure centres and swimming pools are more likely to be in private ownership and attached to hotels. There are also fewer parks and publicly-owned green spaces per capita in the South. Consequently, as the following graphs show, there are differences in children’s experiences on the island. Indeed, as previously noted, (fig. 3.1.5), children in Northern Ireland are more active at weekends.
In addition to differences with respect to accessing formalised places of recreation (fig. 3.3.12 and fig. 3.3.13), there is also a notable North–South difference with respect to going to a place of worship – 54 per cent of children in Northern Ireland attend a religious service at the weekend (12% alone and 42% in the company of an adult), as opposed to 41.5 per cent in the South (8% unaccompanied and 33% with an adult).

The deficits that exist south of the border in terms of local authority provision of sporting and recreational facilities are, in many cases, being compensated for by the efforts of civil society, but this leads to considerable geographical variations as communities are obliged to fundraise locally to provide and maintain amenities. Indeed, across the island of Ireland, civil society and voluntary sporting and recreational associations - and not local authorities - are the main providers of recreational outlets and sporting facilities for children. As Cronin and Higgins (2011: 255) note, “much of Ireland’s sporting environment has been the product of people’s voluntary efforts, their hard work and desire to provide their community with a place to play”. While most schools, particularly second-level ones, have recreational spaces that are frequently complementary to those available to community groups, many schools do not tend to make these available outside of school hours. In this respect, Irish schools tend to lag behind schools on mainland Europe, which are generally open for community use, although moves towards making schools more accessible to communities need to be accompanied by appropriate health and safety measures.
Adults and CIM

It is clear from the survey findings that adults – directly and indirectly – govern and influence the mobility experienced by our children. Parents have the most direct influence of all (actors / agents) on the mobility of their children. Parents can give or withhold permission to allow a child to travel to a particular location and they can decide the child’s means of travel. The survey findings show that parents are becoming more cautious in this regard, and are increasingly reluctant to grant children mobility licences. Parents are also responsible for organising and structuring children’s times and activities. They generally decide what time children leave for school in the morning, and a significant proportion of parents personally take their children to and from school. As parents seek to keep their children off what they perceive to be dangerous roads, they tend to want to drive them to sporting, recreational and social activities. Parents’ desire to manage their children’s mobility generally transcends geographical and social factors. The values communicated by parents appear to be motivated by concern for the personal safety of their children, and parents seem to want to transmit to them the importance of proceeding with caution.

The mobility behaviour reported by children reflects the structuring influence of parents. Their days are organised and governed by schedules, and, on most of their journeys, they are accompanied by an adult. While the responses provided by most children indicate that they comply with the mobility licences and restrictions imposed on them by adults, they tend to have a much more benign view of their environment than do their parents. Fear of traffic, which very much preoccupies parents, does not register to any significant degree among children. Indeed, most of their worries and concerns can appear to adults to be sensationalist or driven by the media and hearsay.

Adults shape the environment in which children move about. Adults make the decisions regarding where infrastructure, services, amenities and facilities are provided (or not provided – as is increasingly the case in rural Ireland). Adults design children’s environments – their schools, playgrounds, gardens and neighbourhoods. The engineering of roads and paths and the provision of lighting and traffic-calming measures all impact on Children’s Independent Mobility. Health and safety legislation and insurance concerns often shape adults’ discourse and concerns when they are constructing and governing spaces that are used by children. More often than not, in designing public and communal spaces, the primary motivation is influenced by the ‘bottom line,’ that is, financial gain or profit, rather than any specific regard for children – hence one of the reasons for the ‘many poorly designed and badly-built housing complexes and estates that litter the landscape on the peripheries of towns and villages throughout much of our island’ (Kitchin et al., 2010).

In contrast, altruism, volunteerism and neighbourliness on the parts of adults provide favourable contexts and conditions in which children exercise their mobility and partake in activities that develop their skills and attributes, and benefit them physically and socially. There are examples of projects and initiatives promoted by planners, community groups, local development agencies, schools and public bodies that make our communities child-friendly based on inter-generational dialogue and collaboration. There is a need to constantly highlight, celebrate, replicate, resource and reward such innovations and good practices, and to promote a society in which children move from the margins to the mainstream. Achieving this goal implies that we learn from past experiences and from communities and societies that have enjoyed particular successes. Therefore, the next sections of this report look at changes in child mobility over time and at lessons from international best practice.
3.4: Changes in Child Mobility – Temporal and Social Factors

This section provides an analysis of changes and evolutions in patterns of child mobility. It compares and contrasts the perceptions, experiences and opinions of children and adults, and it looks specifically at how the mobility of today’s children compares with that of children a generation ago. Changes in child mobility are discussed in respect of the licences children have or perceive they have, and those that parents confer on them. This discussion is followed by some analysis of the methods of travel and transport used by children today and in the past. As noted in previous sections of this report, place is an important factor in influencing child mobility. Therefore, this section assesses children’s and adults’ perceptions of place, and in particular their fears and apprehensions regarding independent mobility. The following pages also make reference to international experiences and draw on studies undertaken in other countries. These references allow us to learn from the positive and negative experiences of children elsewhere, and to consider what good practices and approaches might be transferred to the island of Ireland.

3.4.1: Intergenerational Experiences of Mobility Licences

“The day in school was just an unwelcome interlude then between the morning trek and the return home, and if the journey to school took about thirty minutes, the coming home could take anything up to two hours. On leaving school, we ran down the land and over a wooden fence into a large hilly field. We ran around in circles flinging our sacks ahead of us and running after them, like young calves kicking up their heels at the first taste of freedom in an open field... We ran to the bottom of the hill and in under the overhanging trees where our first glaise (stream) tumbled over mossy green stones. Here, if the humour was on us, we might block up a large pool and paddle in and out of it... Then, as we sauntered on through the remaining fields, we checked our birds’ nests to see how things might be progressing. An odd time we met one of the neighbours, and if we were lucky got invited in for a cup of milk and currant cake” (Taylor, 1988: 95 -97).

This account in Alice Taylor’s iconic work ‘To School Through the Fields’ conveys an image of rural Ireland in the 1940s and 1950s that seems like a romantic pipe dream when compared with the lived experiences of children today. Taylor’s narrative reveals an era in which children enjoyed similar levels of independent mobility to adults, and in which life was structured more by the seasons than by the clock. Cronin and Higgins’ (2011) profile of Ireland’s sporting heritage eloquently describes how in previous generations, open public spaces including roads and streets served as venues for spontaneous play and even for semi-competitive sporting endeavours. While the attainment of such levels of freedom among children is no longer realistic, and indeed carried with it, risks that are no longer socially acceptable or desirable, there is no doubt but that much has been lost over the years as our households and institutions have increasingly made decisions on behalf of children and sought to structure and organise their lives. The data garnered through our research quantifies much of the change in children’s mobility that has taken place over the past thirty years.

This report has already noted the significance of the age range eleven to twelve years, and the transition from primary to secondary school in respect of the increasing mobility licences conferred on children today. The findings from the parents’ survey presented here suggest that a generation ago, comparable licences were conferred on children somewhat earlier than is the case today. When today’s parents were asked at what age they had the freedom to travel about on their own, the median age they reported was ten (mean = 10.2 years of age). As the following table shows, the ages at which today’s parents are willing to confer mobility licences on their children is, in most cases, older than ten years of age.
Table 3.4.1: Ages at which Today’s Parents confer, or are willing to confer Mobility Licences on their Children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Licence</th>
<th>Among Parents who Give Permission</th>
<th>Among Parents who do Not Yet Give Permission</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% Parents who give permission</td>
<td>Median Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Cross Main Roads Alone</td>
<td>71.6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Cycle on Main Roads Alone</td>
<td>40.8</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Travel Home from School Alone</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Travel on Public Buses Alone</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table shows that a majority of parents surveyed do not give their children permission to cycle on main roads, travel home from school alone or travel on local buses unaccompanied, and that most are unwilling to do so until their child is in a second-level school. A majority (72%) of today’s parents permit their children to cross main roads alone once the child reaches the age of ten, which is the median (and mean) age at which they themselves had permission to travel about independently. However, as the table shows, a sizeable cohort of parents (28%) is unwilling to confer such a licence on children today until they are aged older (median age = twelve).

The increase over time in the median ages at which parents are willing to confer mobility licences affects the behaviour and attitudes of their children. The following bar-chart illustrates differences in inter-generational experiences. It presents the percentage of children at each age, who have permission to cross the road (based on children’s responses) stacked beside the percentage of those, who a generation ago, claim to have had permission to travel about independently (based on parents’ responses). The graph shows, for example, that among ten-year-olds of the previous generation, 96 per cent had permission to travel independently, while just 60 per cent of ten-year-old children today claim to have permission to cross main roads alone.
Inter-generational differences, such as those shown above, may be attributable in part to parental nostalgia and cultural representations of childhood (as described in the works of West, 2000 and Honeyman, 2005), which suggest that parents might be inclined to over-estimate the level of independent mobility they enjoyed as children. Such perspectives must however be viewed in light of children’s tendency to exaggerate the freedoms they have (Cleary et al., 2001). Therefore, accepting that both children and adults are prone to liberalisms in interpreting and representing lived experiences in childhood, the ages at which children actually gain and have gained definitive mobility licences may be slightly older than those reported by both cohorts of survey participants. However, such tendencies do not dilute the findings of this survey in respect of the relative reduction in children’s independent mobility over the past thirty or so years. It is evident from the responses of both children and their parents that young people today have much more restricted mobility – formally and informally than had their parents, and international research suggests this is not a uniquely Irish or Northern Irish phenomenon. Citing data from studies in Amsterdam, Hörschelmann and Van Blerk (2012: 99-100) report that “as recently as one or two generations ago it was part of the fabric of urban neighbourhoods to be playing in the streets... [but] dangers have increased, at least in terms of the volume of traffic present.” Indeed, this longitudinal decline in Children’s Independent Mobility was flagged in the ‘One False Move’ study and the trend identified in 1990 of “increasing restrictions on their independent travel” (Hillman et al., 1990: 79) has persisted and been consolidated.
While there are divergences in perceptions between children and adults, there was almost universal convergence in their responses to the various questions on the methods of travel they use during school days and at weekends. These are outlined below, and they confirm the high and increasing levels of car dependency and a consequent decrease in CIM.

3.4.2: Methods of Travel and Transport
The following graph is indicative of the changes that have occurred in the space of one generation in respect of how children travel to and from school.

![Fig. 3.4.2: Methods of Travel to School used by Children today and Children a Generation Ago](image)

As the graph clearly illustrates there has been an inter-generational decline of 46 percentage points in the proportion of children walking to school (from 64% to 18%) and a corresponding increase by 38.5 percentage points (from 16% to 54.5%) in the proportion of children travelling to school by car. There has also been a decline, albeit to a very small extent in the proportion of children cycling to school or taking public transport. There has been an increase (by almost 10 percentage points) in the number of children who avail of dedicated school buses, and this increase has been more pronounced in Northern Ireland than south of the border. International research indicates that “the greater the distance between home and school, the more likely it is that children will travel by motorised means” (Ross, 2007: 385). However, the mean distance children travel to/from school on the island of Ireland has not changed significantly over the past thirty years29. Therefore, the increase in car dependency manifested here is associated with a range of structural factors, and as articulated by Ross (2007), Gleeson and Creamer (2012) and Schmeinck (2012), these include:

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29 The number of schools south of the border that closed over the past two decades is negligible. During the 1960s with the expansion of motorised transport, schools were amalgamated in a number of rural areas, but there have been few amalginations since then except where adjoining single-sex schools amalgamated to form co-educational schools. The (2009) Report of the ‘Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure Programmes’ advocated reducing pupil teacher ratios in smaller schools, which if pursued would lead to school closures and amalgamations. In Northern Ireland, amalgamations have been more prevalent, particularly in rural areas in the west of the province.
• Educational policy supporting (or not) small village and rural schools (a high proportion of children attending their local schools travel relatively short distances),
• Parental attitudes and value systems,
• Community responsibility for children’s welfare,
• Children’s independent negotiation of methods of travel and schedules,
• The responsiveness of planning systems to inputs by children and on their behalves,
• Ownership of spaces and the capacity of public bodies to determine the uses of space and provision of infrastructure,
• Schools’ approaches to transport and travel.

Thus, while distance has remained a constant, the infrastructure and societal contexts in which children move about have changed over time, and independent mobility has declined.

The popularity of walking to school a generation ago transcended all geographies, and walking to and from school was positively correlated with having mobility licences. Parents report that the median age at which they were permitted to ‘go about on their own’ was ten. By age eight 32 per cent had parental permission to travel independently, and this figure rose to 80 per cent by age twelve.

The profile of children’s mobility that emerges from this study provides confirmation that trends identified in the United States in the middle of the twentieth century and in the early 1990s in the UK are now clearly manifest on the island of Ireland, and that there has been a notable decline in children’s freedom and independence. The observations from the landmark ‘One False Move’ study in respect of the UK in 1990 definitely apply on this island today: “Children’s play territory has also been reduced as roads and pavements have become progressively more dangerous... the geographical scope of their play territory has been much reduced, along with the amount of unsupervised time they spend outside the home” (Hillman et al., 1990: 79).

The travel experience of Irish children today contrasts not just with that of their parents (and grandparents), it contrasts with that of children in many parts of mainland Europe. In Southern Europe a Mediterranean climate is conducive to children spending time outdoors and not having to rely on a car to protect them from the elements as they travel to and from school. The topography of The Netherlands and Belgium, and their ‘bicycling culture’ encourage people to cycle to school and work. In other countries, such as Germany where climate and topography are not dissimilar to Irish conditions, local authorities have generally been proactive in providing citizens with an infrastructure that incentivises people to leave the car at home. Public transport provision, and the installation of cycle lanes, solid footpaths, pedestrian crossings, car-free zones and parking restrictions all contribute to enabling children and their parents to exercise real choices in respect of how they travel. Figures reported by Krause (2012) show the merits of this enabling approach; as the following pie charts illustrate, the methods of transport used by German children today are similar to those used by Irish and Northern Irish children a generation ago. German children are less car dependent (37.5% travel to school by car) than are children in Ireland today (55% of whom travel to school by car).

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30 When asked ‘How did the distance you had to travel to primary school compare with the distance your child has to travel to primary school?’ (Question 9b) parents responded as follows: Much less, 17.1%; Less, 10.9%; About the Same, 34.9%; Further, 19.0% and Much further, 18.0%.
Relative to children on the island of Ireland, children in Germany are:
- 30% more likely to walk to school
- Seven times more likely to cycle to school and
- Ten times more likely to use public transport.

On the island of Ireland and in Germany, primary school children are more likely to walk to school than are second level students – the proportion of children walking to school declines with age. In Ireland and Northern Ireland as children get older, half of those who walked to school transfer to travelling by school bus as they progress to second level school. In Germany, the proportion of children travelling by bus also increases, but so too do the numbers cycling to school; among six to nine-year-olds 10 per cent cycle to school and this figure increases to 19.5 per cent among fourteen to seventeen-year-olds (Krause, 2012). The contrasts between this island and Germany in respect of methods of travel are not confined to children. Adults in Germany are much more likely to make journeys on foot and by bicycle than are adults here, as the following table shows.

**Table 3.4.2: Distribution of Journeys by Method of Travel to Work in Ireland and Germany**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Ireland % Commuters</th>
<th>Germany % Commuters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private Car – driver</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Car – passenger</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Van / Lorry / Other Vehicle</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walking</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Transport</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bicycle</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Hillman et al. (1990) note how Germany’s urban structure is more conducive than that of the UK to the provision of public transport and to the organisation of connectivity corridors and networks that provide travellers with realistic alternatives to the car. Experiences in Germany and in Scandinavian countries as well as in Australia and New Zealand (Gleeson and Creamer, 2012) underscore the
importance of the planning system in organising settlements and transport systems in ways that support mobility by means other than the private car. This does not necessarily imply that Ireland needs to promote a more urbanised settlement pattern, as indeed, the urbanisation trajectory in Ireland has been characterised by suburbanisation, leading to growing car dependency and environmental degradation (McDonald and Nix, 2005). Instead, the international experience points to the need for all infrastructural projects including housing developments and the building and refurbishment of schools and places of work to cater for active travel, and to be promotive of those that are carbon neutral and benefit public health. As recommended by Gleeson and Creamer (2012: 59), “Sustainability goals and children’s rights must be coupled together... if sustainability goals are not achieved, children will be the most profoundly affected. Therefore, the wellbeing of children can be used as an indicator of sustainability.”

The dependence on the car among children in Ireland and Northern Ireland is not just associated with travel between home and school. It is also pervasive in respect of the other destinations to which children travel. The following graph presents the results obtained when parents were asked how their children travel to social and recreational venues. It shows that children are four times more likely to be transported by car than by all other means combined.

Children’s heavy reliance on the car as their method of travel is indicative of a wider societal dependence on cars, as the following graph shows.

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*Fig. 3.4.4: Distribution of Children’s Non-School Journeys by Method of Travel*

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Children’s Independent Mobility on the island of Ireland

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*Fig. 3.4.5: Distribution of Adults’ Journeys by Method of Travel to Work in Ireland and Northern Ireland*

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* Northern Ireland data refer to ‘all usual residents aged 16 to 74 (excluding students) in employment and currently working’ and exclude persons who work in the home. Republic of Ireland data include travel to school or college.
The data published by the statistics agencies in Dublin and Belfast reveal that private cars are the most frequently used mode of transport. High levels of car use in both Ireland and Northern Ireland are associated with increased economic prosperity, societal values and public policy orientation. Unlike in other European jurisdictions, particularly those in Northern Europe, where there has been consistent government-led emphasis on promoting equity and public service provision, Ireland and the UK have tended to promote privatisation and neo-liberalism (Kitchin et al. 2010; Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010), and our economic and social model has been described as being closer to that of Boston than Berlin. Consequently, during the period 1990 to 2008, we experienced exponential growth in private car registrations and new road construction, but relatively little expansion of our public transport networks.32

While car dependency among children is common and dominant across all geographies on this island, there are some spatial variations in respect of levels of car ownership, which in turn impact on child mobility. Single car households are more likely to be found in cities, and to a lesser extent in large towns. Households with three or more cars are predominantly in rural areas.33 Such patterns are associated with dispersed settlement and limited public transport options, as have been documented in several other studies (McDonagh, 2008). While there is much commentary that associates increased car ownership with declining child mobility, and correlations in that respect are clearly confirmed by the findings presented in this report, car ownership is also positively associated with increasing affluence, which can, in turn, open up possibilities for children to participate in extra-curricular activities, sporting and recreational clubs and in general travel to more places (Hillman et al., 1990: 80 and Cleary et al., 2001). Indeed, as the following graph shows, the more cars a household has, the more bicycles – a potential, albeit latent tool of child mobility – it is also likely to have.

![Fig. 3.4.6: Level of Bicycle Ownership among Children by Number of Cars in the Child’s Household.](image)

P<.001, Cramer’s V= .17 (controlling for household size)

Central Statistics Office data (for Ireland) and the results of our survey suggest that rather than being a mode of transport, as was the case in the past, the bicycle is increasingly perceived as a child’s toy or something a child ought to master and know how to ride, but not actually use for any specific travel purpose. The vast majority of children today possess a bicycle, but hardly any of them use it to cycle to school or to any of their weekend or leisure destinations. This attitudinal shift regarding the purpose of a bicycle – from a method of transport to a play-thing - was articulated in the ‘One False Move’ Study.

33 Our study found that among city households, 35% had one car, 49% had two cars and 11% had three or more cars. Among rural households, 19% had three or more cars, with 21% having one car.
34 Among those who participated in this study, car ownership was positively correlated with full-time employment (P<.001 and Cramer’s V=.113).
Our results have also shown that as children get older and enter their teenage years, they tend to abandon their bicycles - as age increases, ownership and use levels decrease. The following table produced by the CSO suggests that the negative association between using a bicycle and growing-up is not reversed in adulthood.

**Table 3.4.3: Frequency of Bicycle Use Among Irish Adults**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Three or more times per week</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once or twice a week</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than weekly but more than twice a month</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once or twice a month</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than monthly but more than twice a year</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once or twice a year</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than yearly or never</td>
<td>51.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The tendency among teenagers to abandon their bicycles in favour of other methods of transport is not unique to the island of Ireland. Motorised scooters are particularly popular in Southern Europe, especially in Greece, Turkey and Italy. Figures from Germany reveal that 98 per cent of six to ten-year-olds own a bicycle, but among those aged fourteen to seventeen, the ownership level is 89 per cent, and among eighteen to twenty-four-year-olds the corresponding figure drops to 77 per cent. The difference between Ireland and Germany however is that in Germany, bicycle use recovers again as people get older, with over 80 per cent of persons aged twenty-four to sixty five reporting that they own a bicycle (Krause, 2012), as opposed to 29 per cent of adults in Ireland and 38 per cent of those aged over 16 in Northern Ireland.

### 3.4.3: Societal Factors and Independent Mobility

Both adults and children tend to have a generally positive perception of their local environment. However, as outlined in Sections 3.1.4 and 3.3.3, our survey respondents highlight a number of issues that they think should be addressed so as to make communities more child-friendly. Parents are particularly concerned with the need to improve road safety, while children are more likely to be anxious about the behaviour of adults and the potential danger from dogs.

The contrast between parents’ and children’s attitudes to traffic may be associated with the fact that parents are more conscious of, and informed about the risks on the road, and have taken on board to a greater extent the messages of the Road Safety Authority of Ireland and the Road Safety Council of Northern Ireland, both of which have been systematic in educating the public on the importance of road safety. Indeed, their efforts, coupled with legislative changes and greater PSNI and Garda enforcement have contributed to a significant reduction in traffic-related fatalities and injuries over the last decade. Statistics on road collisions indicate an overall downward trend (see the following tables) in terms of those injured or killed on Irish and Northern Irish roads.

---

Note: The question only referred to individuals with one or more bicycles in their household. Almost 71% of households reported that they have no bicycle that is used by adults or children aged over six.
Table 3.4.4: Numbers killed and injured\(^{36}\) in Road Traffic Accidents (2000 – 2012)

<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Killed</td>
<td>415</td>
<td>411</td>
<td>376</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>374</td>
<td>396</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>338</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injured</td>
<td>12,340</td>
<td>12,043</td>
<td>10,222</td>
<td>9,206</td>
<td>8,262</td>
<td>7,867</td>
<td>9,318</td>
<td>8,575</td>
<td>9,758</td>
<td>9,742</td>
<td>8,270</td>
<td>7,235</td>
<td>7,942</td>
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<tr>
<td>Northern Ireland</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Killed</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injured</td>
<td>1,786</td>
<td>1,682</td>
<td>1,526</td>
<td>1,288</td>
<td>1,183</td>
<td>1,073</td>
<td>1,211</td>
<td>1,097</td>
<td>990</td>
<td>1,035</td>
<td>892</td>
<td>825</td>
<td>795</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Garda and PSNI Road Collision Statistics

In its recent ‘Child Casualties Report’ (2011) the Road Safety Authority (South) recorded that the reduction in child fatalities from 1997 to 2009 was over 45 per cent (children are defined here as being up to fourteen years of age). In the same period child passenger fatalities decreased by 73 per cent, child pedestrian fatalities by 36 per cent and child cyclist fatalities reduced by 60 per cent. The majority of child fatalities occurred between 16h and 18h.

Table 3.4.5; Child\(^{37}\) Fatalities and Serious Injuries in Road Traffic Accidents (1997-2012)

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
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<tr>
<td>Killed</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injured (serious)</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injured (minor)</td>
<td>1,047</td>
<td>922</td>
<td>912</td>
<td>823</td>
<td>659</td>
<td>553</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>531</td>
<td>519</td>
<td>576</td>
<td>766</td>
<td>803</td>
<td>691</td>
<td>611</td>
<td>678</td>
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<tr>
<td>Northern Ireland</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Killed</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injured</td>
<td>1,693</td>
<td>1,881</td>
<td>1,728</td>
<td>1,823</td>
<td>1,569</td>
<td>1,480</td>
<td>1,124</td>
<td>1,091</td>
<td>902</td>
<td>969</td>
<td>995</td>
<td>945</td>
<td>976</td>
<td>842</td>
<td>928</td>
<td>1,043</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Children have been exposed to a renewed campaign to promote their safety on the road. The flagship ‘Safe Cross Code’ campaign has been recently updated and is presented using contemporary images and technology. Road safety awareness campaigns targeted at children are having the desired effect in that the number of traffic-related childhood deaths and injuries has declined over recent years. Safer and better roads and vehicles, more conscious road users and a more informed public all contribute to Ireland and Northern Ireland having among the lowest rates of childhood death and injuries due to traffic accidents in Europe. Collectively we need to continue to advance these progressive trends, but need to do so, not by removing children from public spaces, but by making our communities and environment safer and more child-friendly.

While children may not overtly express worry about traffic, the sentiments expressed by parents clearly show that adults do not perceive our roads and streets as child-friendly spaces. This anxiety among parents exists regardless of the age and gender of the child and is evident across all geographies, although as the following graph illustrates, those who live in the countryside have the highest levels of

\(^{36}\) Data for Northern Ireland refer to those classified as ‘seriously injured.’

\(^{37}\) The Garda and Road Safety Authority define a child as a person aged 14 years or younger. The PSNI classification refers to persons aged under 16.
worry, and those who live in villages are least likely to be worried about their child’s safety as a pedestrian or cyclist. It is noteworthy that previous sections of this report have demonstrated that children who live in villages experience the highest levels of independent mobility.

Fig. 3.4.7: Parents’ Levels of Concern regarding their Child being Injured in a Traffic Accident when Crossing the Road distributed by Location

P<.001 and Cramer’s V = .112.
*Those who live on the offshore island have been excluded from this computation, as traffic circulation there follows a distinctive pattern, and is not subject to same norms as on the mainland.

The following graph, which deals with children’s concern regarding traffic, further underscores the contrasting perceptions of children and adults. It shows that children report much lower levels of concern regarding traffic. The graph also reveals a spatial pattern that is different to that which pertains among their parents, as town, rather than country children express the greatest concern.

Fig. 3.4.8: Proportion of Children who expressed Worry or Concern regarding Traffic if they are on their own or with Friends

P<.005. Cramer’s V=.10
Research by Ross (2007: 383) suggests some differences between adults’ attitudes on this island and those of adults in Scotland. Ross notes that in Scotland “parents viewed school journey routines as a means thorough which children acquired responsibility, developed time and risk management skills and independent decision-making.” Meanwhile in Ireland, many parents’ concerns over road safety prevent them from giving children the licence to travel to school independently. In both contexts however, adults seek to structure and organise children’s journeys and schedules and to impose a degree of formality on how they exercise their mobility. Ross’ findings reveal that children attempt to reduce and circumvent adults’ formal and informal surveillance of their travel by taking short-cuts and deviating from the routes assigned to them. Children in Rural Scotland report detouring into woodlands, pitches and parks *en route* to and from school, and Ross observes that this spontaneity on the parts of children represents their attempts to integrate play into travel and to make it a social experience. Thus, parents and children in Scotland come across as being less worried about the danger of traffic accidents than are Irish and Northern Irish adults.

While children and adults here may have varying perspectives on road safety, their attitudes converge in respect of some of the societal barriers to child-friendly communities. Among children, their greatest fear is of strangers (reported by 38% if they are on their own and by 21% when they are with friends), followed by bullying (reported by 18% of children when they are alone and by 8% when they are with friends). These sentiments among children resonate with the concerns expressed by parents – across all geographies – regarding the behaviour of some young people and adults, which can intimidate children. Associated with this fear, the survey findings also show that the vast majority of parents (91%) claim not to allow their children to be outside after dark, and among those who do, their children tend to be aged twelve and older. The removal of children from streets and the increasing reluctance of older people to venture out after dark are, according to Hörschelmann and Van Blerk (2012) making public spaces more exclusive and dangerous. Their research also highlights the social consequences of the exclusion of children from our streets. They note that street spaces are important venues in which to meet friends and socialise, and as a space in which teenage boys and girls can meet and interact. They argue that the marginalisation of children and young people and “the creation of ‘youth only’ spaces ensures that identity formation can take place away from adults, but at the same time make adults fearful of youth on the streets and their potential to engage in criminal behaviour” (2012: 109).

These observations are particularly relevant in the UK and Irish contexts given the particular problems we have with under-age alcohol abuse and a culture of binge drinking.

**Mobility Consequences of Children’s Perceptions of Society**

Previous sections of this report have shown that levels of independent mobility are associated with age and gender. The higher levels of mobility enjoyed by older children and boys are associated with parents’ attitudes and their consequent willingness to confer licences. Experiences of mobility and the levels of freedom exercised by children are also associated with their own attitudes to, and perceptions of the environment and society in which they move about. Older children and boys are less likely to be fearful and are less likely to perceive barriers to their independent mobility. As the following series of bar-graphs shows, boys express lower levels of fear than girls do, but both genders exhibit higher levels of fear of strangers than of traffic. All fears decline with age.

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38 The figures presented here refer to a list of potential fears presented to children. For details, please see Question 11 in the Children’s Questionnaire (annex i).
Fig. 3.4.9: Boys’ and Girls’ Stated Fears of Selected Variables in Circumstances in which they are with Friends.

The bar-graph presented below shows that across all ages, less than 6 per cent of children expressed a fear of traffic. The mean levels of concern regarding bullying and strangers are much higher, but such fears decline as children get older and mature.

Fig. 3.4.10: Children’s Fears of Selected Variables distributed by Age

The relatively low proportion of children who reported to be concerned about bullying does not take away from the seriousness of this issue. The opinions expressed by children in our survey may well be a testimony to the success of anti-bullying initiatives that schools and health authorities have been promoting over recent years, and thereby underscore the importance of continuing and mainstreaming such interventions.
Children’s optimism and their positive attitudes are synthesised by the graph below. The challenge to, and responsibility for, channelling optimism into reality rests with all of us, and especially with agencies and personnel involved in education, planning, local government, community and local development, transport and health.

**Fig. 3.4.11: Children’s Perceptions of their Local Environments – distributed by Location**

The results presented here highlight some of the significant roles parents, institutions and places play in shaping the ways in which children and young people are enabled and constrained as they travel and move about. The task of making our communities more conducive to safe and independent mobility on the parts of our children requires collaborative and partnership approaches involving multiple stakeholders, and which have the child at the centre.

**Enabling Children’s Independent Mobility**

The findings presented in this chapter demonstrate that CIM is complex, and its attainment and promotion are influenced by several inter-related variables. Age, gender and disposition are factors, and this chapter has explored reasons why older children, boys and those who live in villages tend to have higher levels of independent mobility. The data and analysis point to some positive steps that can be taken in order to empower more children to be active and mobile, and these need to be taken at multiple tiers – government, local authority, school, community and household. Educating children about road safety, and the benefits of physical activity and social recreation are essential, and in parallel, schools need to be properly supported and resourced in promoting healthy living, including active travel. Safe active travel and progress on alleviating parents’ and children’s fears are contingent on local authorities paying due attention to the needs and rights of children. International evidence demonstrates that even when begun at neighbourhood level, favourable street-scale urban design and family-friendly land-use can support physical activity and active travel, and in this respect, such practices can include “improved street lighting or infrastructure projects that increase the ease and safety of street crossing… pavement continuity…[and] traffic calming such as centre islands or raised crosswalks, or improve the aesthetics of the street area such as landscaping” (Heath, 2012: 276). Thus, partnership between government, schools and communities is fundamental to enabling CIM. Moreover, as the data presented here reveal, there are social and cultural barriers to CIM, and in order to remove these, awareness-raising, training and capacity-building need to target personnel – professional and voluntary,
while Community-Led Local Development (European Commission, 2011) can better enable associations and communities to be more inclusive, and to provide fora though which all citizens – including children – actively participate in decision-making and policy-formulation and review processes. As noted by Lalor et al. (2007) the provision of recreational outlets and dedicated spaces for children and teenagers is conducive to their being active. This observation also emerges from the research undertaken by Humphreys et al. (2011), which also points to the positive impacts on children’s lives of bonding social capital, including supportive communities and the friendliness of adults towards children. Thus, our research dovetails with international literature and with empirical data from several Irish studies to demonstrate that CIM (Children’s Independent Mobility) is an indicator of societal health and wellbeing, and is best promoted through a multi-pronged approach that puts the child at the centre of physical planning, infrastructure provision, community development, health promotion and good governance.
This chapter draws on comparative international research and analysis, specifically provided by the Policy Studies Institute. This allows us to benchmark child mobility on the island of Ireland against mobility in a number of other countries, and to identify ways in which mobility and child development can be better enabled and facilitated.

The following table (4.1) shows that of the sixteen countries that took part in this research on Children's Independent Mobility, Ireland is in twelfth place. The Scandinavian Countries, together with Germany and Japan emerge as those in which children have the highest levels of mobility. Finland stands out as the country in which children have the highest levels of mobility across all six indicator licences.

Relative to Irish children, Finnish children are:
- 2.41 times more likely to travel home from school alone;
- 1.99 times more likely to be allowed to go to places within walking distance alone;
- 1.25 times more likely to be allowed to cross main roads alone;
- 1.88 times more likely to be allowed to cycle on main roads alone;
- 8.18 times more likely to be usually allowed to go out alone after dark;
- 3.53 times more likely to be usually allowed to travel on local buses alone.

Mobility levels in Ireland are below average across four of the six indicators thereof. Irish children are the second least likely (after Italians) to be permitted to go places that are within walking distance of their homes. Our children are the third least likely to travel home from school alone — behind children from Sri Lanka and Italy. The only two variables on which Irish children record levels of mobility that are above average are ‘being allowed to cross main roads’ and ‘being allowed to cycle on main roads.’

Those countries that score better than Ireland does with respect to permitting and enabling Children’s Independent Mobility also have better safety records (as recorded by the European Child Safety Alliance, 2012). This indicates that rather than remove children from roads and other public spaces, households, schools, communities, institutions and policy-makers in Finland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Germany have made greater progress in creating public spaces that are safer and more child-friendly (Björklid and Gummesson, 2013; Krause, 2012). In her analysis of the relatively high levels of independent mobility

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39This ranking methodology treats the licences with equal importance; licences are weighted equally. In the ranking, for example, a child’s ability to cycle on main roads alone is treated with equal impact on their level of independent mobility as being able to go out alone after dark.
experienced by Finish children, the chief researcher on the parallel study (to this one) there, Professor Kyttä (2013) observes that “It doesn’t harm if the child is ...independent, fit & healthy and trusted!” Her research identifies trust in children as a significant driver of safe and responsible independent mobility. Transnational and international initiatives such as the Network of Child-Friendly Cities and the other ecological and community-based endeavours referred to in Chapter One of this report provide blueprints and examples of tangible steps that can be taken to ensure that children’s views, needs and desires are factored properly into the design and management of public spaces (OECD, 2004; Gleeson, 2008). These initiatives in other countries and the positive data from North Europe (see the following table) demonstrate that the decline in Children’s Independent Mobility on the island of Ireland must not be seen as an unintended or unfortunate consequence of modernisation. Indeed, the positive and healthy experiences of children in Finland and elsewhere, proves that CIM is not just desirable, but is a realistic and attainable goal for society.
### Table 4.1: Country Rankings by Licences of Children’s Independent Mobility.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Travels home from school alone</th>
<th>Allowed to go to places within walking distance alone</th>
<th>Allowed to cross main roads alone</th>
<th>Allowed to cycle on main roads alone</th>
<th>Usually allowed to go out alone after dark</th>
<th>Usually allowed to travel on local buses alone</th>
<th>Overall rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>89.80%</td>
<td>91.10%</td>
<td>88.10%</td>
<td>69.90%</td>
<td>74.40%</td>
<td>65.30%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>88.40%</td>
<td>85.20%</td>
<td>77.50%</td>
<td>61.30%</td>
<td>26.90%</td>
<td>49.70%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>87.60%</td>
<td>87.90%</td>
<td>80.30%</td>
<td>40.80%</td>
<td>15.50%</td>
<td>59.40%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>89.20%</td>
<td>79.40%</td>
<td>74.00%</td>
<td>50.90%</td>
<td>50.40%</td>
<td>47.80%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>85.10%</td>
<td>81.20%</td>
<td>73.10%</td>
<td>34.70%</td>
<td>56.80%</td>
<td>62.20%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>70.80%</td>
<td>67.80%</td>
<td>58.70%</td>
<td>48.40%</td>
<td>30.50%</td>
<td>38.30%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>85.90%</td>
<td>67.80%</td>
<td>75.60%</td>
<td>18.10%</td>
<td>23.30%</td>
<td>25.70%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>54.90%</td>
<td>56.70%</td>
<td>70.50%</td>
<td>32.70%</td>
<td>5.70%</td>
<td>28.30%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>60.40%</td>
<td>64.30%</td>
<td>50.50%</td>
<td>29.70%</td>
<td>13.70%</td>
<td>24.50%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>47.20%</td>
<td>46.10%</td>
<td>62.10%</td>
<td>23.50%</td>
<td>12.30%</td>
<td>35.40%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>47.70%</td>
<td>50.60%</td>
<td>57.00%</td>
<td>20.50%</td>
<td>10.30%</td>
<td>24.10%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>37.20%</td>
<td>45.70%</td>
<td>70.50%</td>
<td>37.10%</td>
<td>9.10%</td>
<td>18.50%</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>46.10%</td>
<td>47.50%</td>
<td>57.90%</td>
<td>18.50%</td>
<td>3.10%</td>
<td>24.00%</td>
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<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>57.70%</td>
<td>48.90%</td>
<td>49.30%</td>
<td>8.30%</td>
<td>49.90%</td>
<td>17.10%</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>33.60%</td>
<td>36.50%</td>
<td>44.80%</td>
<td>21.30%</td>
<td>8.00%</td>
<td>9.70%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>34.50%</td>
<td>45.90%</td>
<td>30.40%</td>
<td>12.80%</td>
<td>4.10%</td>
<td>18.20%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean %</td>
<td>63.51%</td>
<td>62.66%</td>
<td>63.77%</td>
<td>33.03%</td>
<td>21.81%</td>
<td>34.26%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Communication from Policy Studies Institute, 2013. The rankings are based on the entire samples and are not age-weighted. They are based on preliminary findings presented at the PSI Conference in September 2013. The forthcoming PSI International Report on CIM will provide an age-based ranking. Details on the Irish and Northern Irish data in respect of each variable have been presented in Tables 3.1.1 and Tables 3.1.2*
The international literature suggests (see section 1.2 of this report), CIM is not just a desirable goal in its own right, but is a social good that is associated with other dimensions of children's wellbeing and development. Similarly, as the following table shows, positive scores (indicated by top rankings) on children’s mobility are associated with better performances in the areas of education and health.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Children’s Independent Mobility</th>
<th>PISA Scores (combined maths, reading and science)</th>
<th>UNICEF Assessment of Overall Wellbeing</th>
<th>Lowest Proportion of Health Complaints (13-year-olds)</th>
<th>13-year-olds who report MVPA45 Daily</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>England</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The rankings presented in columns 3 to 6 exclude countries that did not participate in the study on Children’s Independent Mobility. The UNICEF data and the World Health Organisation study (Currie et al., 2012) are limited to European countries.

Since the level of independent mobility enjoyed by a child is strongly associated with how old they are, ages have been weighted evenly in the analysis to avoid bias such as one country outperforming another simply because it has a larger proportion of older (and therefore more independent) children. The rank scores for each country and question are weighted accordingly and then brought together into an aggregate rank score per country, producing the final overall ranking.

PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) data sourced from OECD (2012).

Data sourced from UNICEF (2007) based on a composite index of child welfare in wealthy countries.

Data extracted from Currie et al. (2012: 77) based-on an assessment by 13-year-olds of their personal health.

MVPA: Moderate and / or Vigorous Physical Activity. Data extracted from Currie et al. (2012: 131).
Ireland’s rankings on this table appear to suggest a degree of inconsistency. In line with our relatively poor performance on CIM, our PISA ranking is below average, as is our overall ranking on the UNICEF assessment of child wellbeing. However, Irish children fare better than average (based on the participating countries) with respect to the proportion of thirteen-year-olds who report at least one hour of moderate to vigorous physical activity daily. Indeed, of the thirty-seven countries surveyed by the WHO, Ireland comes in first place on this indicator for both eleven and thirteen-year-olds, but we drop to fifth place when measuring the proportion of fifteen-year-olds who engage in MVPA each day.

These positive statistics on levels of physical activity on the parts of Irish children are however called into question by more-recently published cross-country study (Tremblay et al., 2014), in which Ireland was placed below both Finland and England on almost all benchmarks thereof, as summarised in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Overall Physical Activity</th>
<th>Organised Sport Participation</th>
<th>Active Play</th>
<th>Active Transportation</th>
<th>Sedentary Behaviours</th>
<th>Family and Peers</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Community &amp; Built Environment</th>
<th>Government Strategies &amp; Investments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fin.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fin.</td>
<td>Eng.</td>
<td>Fin.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Eng.</td>
<td>Irl.</td>
<td>Irl.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Eng.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fin.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Aus.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Eng.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


46 The Active Healthy Kids Canada (AHKC) Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth, which is based on nine indicators, was applied by Tremblay et al. in fifteen countries globally. Of those countries, Australia, England, Finland and Ireland also participated in our study on CIM. The other countries to participate in the Tremblay et al. study were Canada, Colombia, Ghana, Kenya, Mexico, Mozambique, New Zealand, Nigeria, Scotland, South Africa and the USA.
Notwithstanding Ireland’s unfavourable performance, the most striking feature of the table is the absence of all four countries surveyed (for CIM) from the higher grades, indicating as the authors note, that “overall, the grades for indicators of physical activity (PA) around the world are low/poor. Many countries have insufficient information to assign a grade, particularly for the Active Play and Family and Peers indicators” (2014: 113). The report recommends further research on the correlates and drivers of physical activity and / or sedentary behaviours in children and youth, using more robust and standardized measures. It also calls for more investigation into sedentary behaviours among children and youth.

In its assessment of children’s levels of activity, the WHO identifies schools has having a key role in promoting a positive perception of health and wellbeing and in acting as buffers against negative health behaviours and outcomes. Furthermore, the WHO notes that “neighbourhoods that engender high levels of social capital create better mental health, more health-promoting behaviours, fewer risk-taking behaviours, better overall perceptions of health and greater likelihood of physical activity” (Currie et al., 2012: 7). These observations are consistent with those of teachers and other professionals that emerged over the course of our research, and they underscore the need for greater institutional support for schools and civil society bodies in the work they do in enabling children and young people to be active and healthy. As is the case with the data presented in this report, the WHO research identifies families / household members as having considerable influence on children’s behaviours, and it recommends that professionals working in the area of young people’s health should consider the family’s influence in supporting the development of health-promoting behaviours. Similarly, Lalor et al. (2007: 241) identify the common constraints on Irish children’s engagement in physical activity as, inadequate provision, not knowing other participants, transport difficulties, and a perceived lack of skill integral to the activity. Conversely, they identify the main facilitators of participation on the parts of children and youth in leisure activities as, family & peer support and encouragement, enjoyment of competition and finance.

The figures presented in this chapter are not meant to castigate Ireland or Northern Ireland, but to demonstrate to us that, as is the case in other European countries, it is possible to provide for the safety of our children while also promoting their independent mobility. Thus, rather than seeing independent mobility and child safety as competing objectives, we need to view them as complementary and mutually re-enforcing. The data presented in this chapter demonstrate that a more holistic approach to child welfare and development is both desirable and possible.
There are many global initiatives aimed at producing more child-friendly environments. The United Nations’ Child Friendly Cities Project and UNESCO’s Growing Up in Cities Project focus on giving effect to the objectives set out in the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Both projects support city and regional authorities to take initiatives to involve children in designing their own environment, and they encourage planners and infrastructure providers to be more conscious of the needs, mobility and safety of children. At EU level, we have the European Network of Child Friendly Cities (ENCFC), which facilitates inter-city knowledge transfers and the promotion of good practices in making our urban environment more conducive to child mobility and development.

Initiatives at national and regional level include the sterling work done by the offices of the Ombudsman for Children and the Commissioner for Children and Young People, who advocate for, and with children to advance the rights of the child. Other agencies have successfully promoted increased emphasis on road safety. At a local level, most city and county councils are committed to the implementation of Local Agenda 21, which promotes sustainable development through improved local governance, and in theory at least, offers a mechanism through which children’s voices can be expressed, listened to and acted upon. Local development and LEADER partnerships and other development agencies throughout the island of Ireland have successfully animated community and voluntary groups and facilitated them in improving local environments and infrastructure and in expanding the range of amenities and facilities available to children. These bodies are well-positioned to ensure that all members of the community, including children participate fully in the planning process. Communities and schools are leading grassroots and agency-supported initiatives such as ‘park ’n stride’ and the ‘walking bus.’ Projects such as the Eco / Green Schools and Active Schools Initiatives support and acknowledge the work schools do on promoting safe and sustainable transport. Thus, at various levels there are several positive and progressive initiatives underway that promote child-friendly places. The most widely-publicised good practice examples are generally based in urban locations. As noted in Chapter One, children who live in rural communities require and merit specific rurally-oriented strategies and interventions, with a greater rural-proofing of all transport and travel policies.
The insights into the lives of children and their perspectives as unearthed and articulated in this report provide benchmarks against which we can monitor progress or lack thereof, on the various children’s and child development strategies that pertain in Ireland – north and south. Mobility is absolutely integral to the holistic development of our children, and it dovetails with several policy and practice areas, and in this context, the following four objectives in Ireland’s National Children’s Strategy set out very clear deliverables with respect to children’s activity and mobility. The Strategy envisaged that:

- Children will be supported to enjoy the optimum physical, mental and emotional wellbeing.
- Children will have access to play, sport, recreation and cultural activities to enrich their experience of childhood.
- Children will benefit from and contribute to vibrant local communities.
- Children will benefit from a built and natural environment which supports their physical and emotional wellbeing.

The parallel Northern Ireland Strategy for Children and Young People pledges authorities to “continued promotion of the travelwise safer routes to school initiative to achieve the dual aim of improved road traffic conditions and individual levels of health and fitness” (2006: 42).

However, as several of the findings in this report reveal, the global and governmental aspirations for children do not always translate into lived realities. Independent mobility has declined, and families’ concerns over traffic dangers and social ills are driving an increased reliance on transport by private car. Thus, children struggle to gain contact with their surroundings, and are more frequently chauffeured as they live increasingly structured lives, often with negative consequences for their health and wellbeing, and for our natural environment. Thus, while they have been formulated a number of years ago (2000 and 2006), the aforementioned provisions in the respective Children’s Strategies remain relevant today, and our research recommends that efforts in these areas be reinvigorated. Children’s independent mobility merits specific mention, provision and resourcing in the successors to both strategies.

Among the most striking findings in this report is the retrograde decline in children’s independent mobility over the course of recent decades and the apparently growing divergence between the island of Ireland and other parts of the EU. Several of the observations made over twenty years ago in respect of the divergences between the UK and Germany can be applied to the island of Ireland today; as the ‘One False Move’ study noted, “aspects of the German environment such as shorter journeys to school and superior public transport and recreational facilities encourage more independent mobility at a young age” (Hillman et al., 1990: 85). The data presented in our report reveal that environmental conditions and infrastructure provision on the island of Ireland require upgrading and restructuring in order to become more child-friendly. The spatial variations in children’s experiences within this island and between Ireland and other countries suggest that there are many examples and models of good practices in enabling child-friendly communities that can be replicated, transferred, adapted and mainstreamed. Therefore, it behoves this research team and other stakeholders with a role in child development to participate fully and actively in international networks and collaborations, and especially on a north–south basis, so as to promote transfers of best practices and steps to improve the quality of life, and enhance the mobility of our children and young people. Learning from international experiences and inviting international experts to review policies and practices in Ireland, coupled with the inculcation of an evaluation culture and reflective best practice will serve to ensure greater innovation in the formulation of policy and in the design and implementation of actions.
Children on the island of Ireland enjoy considerably less mobility and independence than did children a generation ago. While thankfully deaths and injuries due to traffic accidents have declined, children’s health, welfare and development have been compromised. Our survey findings confirm that those observed and predicted by Hillman *et al.* (1990) on the decreasing mobility and increased surveillance of children, are now manifest on the island of Ireland. However, their contention that “children enjoy the comfort and convenience of being chauffeured to and from school” (op. cit.: 82) does not appear to be entirely true in the Irish or Northern Irish context. When asked if they could choose how to travel to and from school, over 45 per cent stated that they would like to walk or cycle. Children also responded positively to the option of travelling on public transport. Their preferences in respect of modes of travel, their opinions of the freedoms they hold and their generally positive perceptions of place contrast with the more anxious attitudes and protective behaviour of their parents. Children’s views reveal some disquiet with the notion of travelling into some public spaces due to fears of dogs, strangers and crime. Addressing these fears requires that communities and public bodies recolonize spaces that have been abandoned or neglected by private interests. The onus on them to do so has been made particularly urgent by the collapse of the construction sector, which has led to a number of abandoned sites and ‘ghost estates’ on the Irish landscape. A more coherent approach to child development is also required within and among agencies. Currently health authorities and several schools are active in promoting healthy living options, as they encourage children to eat well and exercise regularly. However, local authorities do not child-proof their development plans, such that children and young people are disempowered in trying to put into practice what teachers and health professionals recommend to them in terms of using active transport and in engaging in outdoor play.

Our research sought to garner data from a large representative spectrum of children rather than to examine the mobility experiences of any particular population cohort. Sections 3.2 and 3.4 reveal that certain children experience lower levels of mobility than others due to their gender and social circumstances. Girls have fewer mobility licences and are less mobile and less active than boys, particularly up their middle teens, thus pointing to a need for interventions to be gender-proofed, so that they are more inclusive of girls and responsive to their needs. Our findings in this regard suggest that the World Health Organisation’s recommendations (*Currie et al.*, 2012: 137) in respect of increasing the possibilities for all children, but especially girls, to access sporting facilities, apply very definitely to the island of Ireland.

While their numbers were too small within the overall sample here to enable us to make definitive statements about statistical significances, the data reveal particular experiences in respect of children with disabilities and Traveller children. The former tend to have lower than average levels of mobility across all age cohorts and social settings. While Traveller children tend to acquire mobility licences younger than do other children, both they and their parents are more likely than are others to be fearful of factors in their neighbourhood – a finding that is consistent with research published by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2012: 180). In order to explore these issues further, it is necessary to undertake more in-depth consultation with Travellers and with children with disabilities and their parents. Similar observations may be made with respect to children of asylum seekers, as the current model of direct provision is the antithesis of what children require to grow-up in a healthy environment, which is necessary for physical activity and independent mobility.
The following chart (Fig. 5.1) seeks to provide an overview of the main conclusions and recommendations emanating from this study. Our findings add value to other studies and much of the international literature (see Chapter One) in recognising that Children’s Independent Mobility is a multi-faceted phenomenon, the promotion of which needs to view and empower children as social actors. The research findings point-up six inter-related pillars on which strategies to promote CIM ought to be based. They are:

1. Applying a **Child-Centred & Rights-Based Approach** to the formulation, implementation and review of Public Policy and to the practices and governance of agencies;
2. Requiring and **Incentivising Institutions to be Inclusive of Children and Responsive** to their needs, views and visions;
3. Promoting a **Child-Friendly Environment** in which children and families feel comfortable, and in which their parents and guardians feel confident about child safety and wellbeing;
4. **Encouraging and Educating Homes** to be more supportive of children, through positive example, affirmation and the living of healthy lifestyles;
5. **Enabling Schools** to promote physical activity through the curriculum, and in partnership with homes and communities; and
6. Promoting **Vibrant and Empowering Communities** that offer children outlets for physical activity, self-actualisation and positive socialisation.

**Fig.5.1: The Virtuous Cycle of Children's Independent Mobility**
All of the six pillars we have identified are mutually re-enforcing and require inter-agency collaborations and active and on-going public participation, particularly by children and youths. Moreover, as the international best practice examples elucidated in Section 1.2 demonstrate, interventions need to be adapted to local circumstances and delivered in ways that promote inclusion and enhance social capital.

Child-centred public policy and a rights-based approach to policy formulation and service delivery are fundamental to ensuring that State and public bodies adhere to the highest standards in their dealings with children, and in shaping the milieu in which all of society contributes to the maximisation of Children’s Independent Mobility. Since the two governments (north and south) published their respective children’s strategies, there has undoubtedly been a greater sensitisation of policy-makers and agency personnel to the needs and rights of children. Play policies are in place in both parts of the island (National Children’s Office, 2004; Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, 2008), and like in other jurisdictions, these provide an impetus towards enabling more active and fulfilling childhoods.

A 2011 report by the Children’s Rights Alliance documents the areas in which children have come to experience improvements in their interfaces with institutions and with the state. The report also notes however a lack of progress in some fields, and it highlights the pressures on many services and initiatives due to the current recession and austerity policies. The assessment by the Children’s Rights Alliance notes the progress made in formulating play and recreational policies and in delivering financial supports to local and voluntary bodies to provide sport and recreational facilities. It recommends that all local authorities incorporate play and recreation into their development strategies and appoint play officers. Moreover, it highlights the lack of progress in designing open and accessible public spaces for children, and it emphasises the need to give greater “consideration to children’s safety while walking or cycling when planning traffic management policies” (2011: 38). These observations and recommendations on expanding play and recreational facilities and on improving road safety are supported by our research on CIM, and responses from the children and parents who participated in this study testify to the merits and values of State and public bodies enabling communities to put in place the infrastructure and facilities children require and deserve.

Since the publication of the Children’s Rights Alliance report, the goal of ensuring children’s on-going participation in decision-making has faced a number of challenges. Cutbacks to the Rural Transport Programme* and its re-organisation into county consortia (it had been generally delivered by Local Development Companies) is likely to make it more difficult for young people, especially in rural areas to move about, and to access amenities and services, and this retrograde step should be reversed. Current and envisaged local government reforms and the proposed channelling of local and community development funding via Local and Community Development Committees, which have been established as sub-committees of local authorities, and whose membership is limited to fifteen to seventeen persons, and does not specifically include representatives from children’s or young people’s organisations, mean that children are being excluded from a key decision-making forum at local level. In addition, a number of the local authority initiatives such as RAPID, which were identified in the (Kerrins et al., 2011) review of Irish local government policy on the built environment for children and young people in social housing have been abandoned, rather than expanded. Moreover, at national level, NGOs and civil society bodies are challenged to continue to make the machinery of social partnership inclusive of children and young people.

* The Children’s Rights Alliance (2011: 38) identified the Rural Transport Programme as an empowering factor in enabling children to benefit from a built and natural environment which supports their physical and emotional wellbeing.
In Northern Ireland, the current ten year Strategy for Children and Young People runs to 2016. In the South, the equivalent strategy officially operated between 2000 and 2010, and while its core values and main provisions remain valid, and some of its stated actions remain to be achieved, there is a need to produce a revised multi-annual strategy that takes into account the contemporary experiences, environments and views of children and young people in 2014, and which takes on board the recommendations advanced through our study.

**Inclusive and Responsive Institutions** (at EU, national, regional, local and community level) are the conduits through which government can enable Children’s Independent Mobility, and through which children’s voices are given effect. EU and government policy initiatives such as ‘Smarter Travel,’ road safety campaigns, play policies and health promotion are having positive impacts on CIM at community-level and their mainstreaming and expansion will benefit children and the wider society.

As children do not currently have the right to vote, and the concept of citizenship is not always viewed as being inclusive of children, there is a greater onus on all public bodies and community organisations to ensure on-going and direct consultation with them. At present, the only governance indicator on which the Department of Children and Youth Affairs measures children’s participation in decision-making relates to the making of school rules (2012: 114). Given the importance of CIM, and its resonances with key areas of public policy, there is a need for mobility indicators, such as those presented in this report, to be included in assessments of children’s wellbeing.

In order to promote the transfer of good practice models and to ensure communities and agencies work collaboratively in the interest of CIM, it is necessary to strengthen planning and governance systems on the island of Ireland. ‘One False Move’ had identified the importance of the planning system in increasing cycle networks and enabling the distribution of schools and essential services within walking distance of the user. The study referred to the concept of ‘local catchment areas’ (1990: 86) – a district within which people access a range of services. This concept has been advanced by Ireland’s National Spatial Strategy (2002 – 2020) and Northern Ireland’s Regional Development Strategy, 2035 (2012). The objectives set out in the NSS with respect to local service provision (2002: 113) need to be given effect in the policies and practices of all local authorities, with the state sector ensuring it provides the levels of services at the spatial tiers specified in the NSS. Therefore, the recent trend of state sector withdrawal from rural areas and some disadvantaged communities needs to be halted and reversed, and local authorities need to be placed in co-ordinating roles with respect to ensuring universal access to public services, which statutory bodies are charged with delivering to all.

Child-proofing of development strategies and plans at all tiers of government, and children’s involvement in decision-making through mechanisms of participative governance will ensure shared visions, greater innovations and the tailoring of interventions in line with local needs and circumstances.

**Child-Friendly Environments** on the island of Ireland and elsewhere (e.g. Child Friendly Cities) have been proven to emerge through collaboration and partnership involving government, public bodies, NGOs, the private sector, schools and communities. Although they are relatively new, evidence is emerging, including from this study, that the ‘Smarter Travel’ policy and ‘National Cycle Policy Framework’ (Department of Transport, 2009 and 2009b), are contributing to increased levels of mobility and activity among children and adults. Smarter Travel Initiatives in Dungarvan, Limerick and Westport and projects in Active Travel Towns such as Cavan, have brought about substantial public investment in an improved infrastructure that encourages the use of public transport, cycling and walking. Moreover, the high local visibility of bus corridors, cycle lanes, ramps, extended footpaths and traffic calming...
measures among other developments is beginning to affect attitudinal changes, such that people of all ages are more likely to spend time outdoors and to avail of spaces in which they feel secure and at ease. These initiatives, together with the development of Greenways (e.g. from Westport to Achill Sound) represent positive progress in promoting CIM while simultaneously enabling a more healthy population and enhanced sustainability, and we recommend further investment on these fronts, and that ‘National Bike Week’ become an all-year-round reality. In addition, the findings from our study point to the need for a Department of Transport-funded and community-led ‘smarter villages and townlands’ scheme, so that the benefits of Smarter Travel extend to a larger population, and dovetail more effectively with road safety measures. These concrete steps would provide opportunities for increased activity and mobility locally, while Ireland’s participation in the International Child Cities Network is also recommended, so that children across this island benefit from new and pilot initiatives and that the learnings from international best practice are applied here with expediency and efficiency.

Over the past two generations our society has successfully reduced the number of children killed and injured on our roads and farms, and we need to ensure that this downward trend continues apace, and that the agencies involved in promoting health and safety have the proper resources, to enable them to deliver effectively. While governments, agencies, schools, communities and households are to be commended for their respective and collective contributions to reducing the number of childhood deaths and injuries, we need to acknowledge that some of our achievements have been made, not by making our environment safer or more child-friendly, but by removing children from public spaces. Such approaches are not socially desirable, and are not commensurate with the goals of child development. Instead, of sheltering children from the world, we need to make public spaces safer and more people-oriented, and in this respect, planners, engineers, architects and other executives need to be trained and enabled to design, deliver and maintain public spaces and places in which children can travel, socialise and play with ease and comfort. Our research supports the recommendations advanced by the OECD (2004: 10) and Kerrins et al. (2011: 37 - 39) with respect to increasing street permeability, reducing speed limits, giving pedestrians priority and reducing the car’s domination of public spaces. In addition to the definite need to continue to reduce road accidents, and to address parents’ concerns regarding traffic and ‘stranger danger,’ there is also a need to remove causes of children’s fears, including making dog owners more responsible, and avoiding sensationalism in the reporting of cases of child abduction and other forms of criminality.

The Irish government recently announced that it will be supporting the construction of new housing units, particularly social and affordable housing. The delivery of this policy objective and the retrofitting of existing communities must be underpinned by the creation of Child-Friendly Environments, and the promotion of social capital as already recommended by the Taskforce on Active Citizenship (2007). The expertise of civil society and housing associations must be allowed to come to the fore, and children need to be allowed and facilitated to play an active part in designing and developing communities.

Supportive Homes. in which parents and guardians act as role models and positive educators, are key to enabling children to face the dangers and challenges associated with independent mobility (OECD, 2004) and encouraging children to be active, fit and healthy (Frost et al., 2008). The findings from our research demonstrate that parents organise and structure children’s schedules, and while they are well-motivated to ensure children are safe, parents tend to insist on chauffeuring their children, even when the children might prefer to travel independently and actively. The data presented here also show higher levels of
car dependency in Ireland relative to most of the other European countries that participated in this study. While, this behaviour can be accounted for, in part, by poorer public transport provision here, the research findings also suggest a need for an attitudinal change on the part of adults, and they point to an obligation on local authorities and housing developers to ensure that parents and children, who wish to travel actively, can do so without compromising their safety.

Parents’ and siblings’ lifestyles and their relationships with their neighbours and members of the local community impact on Children’s Independent Mobility. As this study has shown, levels of trust in local people influence parents’ decisions on the licences they confer on their children, and as the findings from Finland among other countries suggest, parents’ trust of children is positively associated with independent mobility.

Enabling Schools that view children as important social actors with their own rights, and which foster in them a sense of responsibility, contribute to greater independent mobility. Through their delivery of the curriculum (particularly Physical Education and Health Promotion), their focus on the holistic development of the child and through working in partnership with families and communities, schools are well positioned, but need to be better supported, in playing a fuller role in enabling children to be active and independently mobile.

While several schools have invested in sports facilities and have come to place increased emphasis on enabling children to be physically active, the data presented in this report underscore the need for greater attention in this area, and our findings lead us to concur with the recommendations already advanced by the Get Ireland Active Research Working Group (Harrington et al., 2014) that the development, launch and implementation of an all-island Physical Activity Plan is an urgent necessity, and that all children should have the opportunity for a ‘quality’ experience of school-based physical activity and sport that includes P.E., break time and extra-curricular sport.

An inter-agency group established in 2009 by the Department of Health and Children and the Health Service Executive has developed Ireland’s first ever National Physical Activity Guidelines. This Group continues to call for a National Physical Activity Action Plan to be incorporated into any future programme for government. A national plan supported by the principal stakeholders would provide a strong focus of efforts to increase physical activity across the whole of the population. Physical inactivity has been identified as the fourth leading risk factor in global mortality. Consequently, further investment in this area, by providing resources to schools and communities, and by training personnel (professional and voluntary) would bring about improved standards in the delivery of physical education and would save significantly on public expenditure48.

In the light of the overwhelming international evidence that demonstrates the linkages between active and healthy childhoods and the avoidance of ill-health, including heart disease and cancers in later life, our research strongly endorses the recommendations specified in the Seanad Éireann ‘Public Consultation Committee Report’ (2013: 3) on the need for “a national physical activity plan for all age groups, including the extension of bike/walking schemes and to ensure that this plan is central to urban and rural planning.” Moreover, our research tallies with the Seanad Committee’s assertion that, interventions to promote healthy lifestyles be made at the level of the local community. Thus, while a national framework provides a useful reference and set of indicators, we need to avoid a centralised approach, and must empower and resource schools and civil society to design and implement strategies and projects that are accessible and are appropriate to local circumstances, needs and potential.

In addition to their work in the areas of physical education, health promotion and social / civil studies, schools play an important role in filtering and interpreting the information children receive from third parties and that which they transmit to one another. Programmes such as ‘Stay Safe’ are designed to give children the skills to be able to distinguish between real or potential danger on the one hand and hearsay or scaremongering on the other hand. The on-going development of such classroom-based instruction, complemented and re-enforced in the home and community, is essential in enabling children to have the ability and confidence to move about more freely in public places.

Schools across this island have been particularly active and successful in the promotion of active travel. Their participation in the Eco-Schools, An Taisce Green Schools and Active Schools Initiatives, put active travel and child mobility firmly on the agendas of families and communities, and the formulation of national guidelines and the setting of national-level targets (An Taisce, 2011) represent clear and welcome government commitments and support. The on-going promotion and extension of these initiatives, coupled with local authority investment in infrastructural improvements and the creation of child-friendly public spaces, are integral to the promotion of CIM, and will simultaneously improve the quality of life for all.

Thanks to the dedication of countless volunteers, Vibrant and Empowering Communities are contributing to CIM by re-enforcing, supplementing and adding value to good practices that pertain in many schools and homes. Indeed, in many cases, civil society bodies are making-up some of the shortfalls in schools and households that can be caused by a scarcity of resources and social problems. The 40,000+ volunteers who run the clubs and associations affiliated to the National Youth Council of Ireland and the many more who devote their time to coaching, training, fund-raising, facilitation, mediation, instruction, community and local development – volunteers and professionals alike, all facilitate CIM, and by extension, the positive development of our children and society.

Our findings in respect of the importance of micro geographies bear out the observations of Humphreys et al. (2011) and Hendry and Kleop (2007: 251) that the “supply of facilities for outdoor sports plays a decisive role in the choice of leisure facilities.” Our study also provides evidence to support the WHO’s contention (Currie et al., 2012) that local social capital is an enabler of child development. Across the island of Ireland landscape changes, over the past decade including the expanded provision and development of playgrounds, walkways, greenways, skate parks, bowling alleys, astro-turf pitches and indoor & outdoor gymnasia among other facilities, provide visual testament to the efforts of largely voluntary groups and associations to provide outlets where children and families can be active, healthy and mobile. Local communities have enabled such positive developments through fundraising, and civil society organisations have ably assumed promotive roles, and have developed the capacity to provide infrastructure and deliver services that come within the domain of municipal authorities and communes in most European democracies. In addition, civil society bodies have demonstrated that they can manage public monies effectively, and routing funding (e.g. national lottery and Sports’ Council) through them has helped to improve opportunities for CIM, and we recommend a renewed focus on this bottom-up approach. As well as creating the spaces and places in which children can be mobile, community and voluntary bodies offer vehicles through which children can be enabled to participate more fully in shaping and taking the decisions that affect them.
The increased capacity of civil society in Ireland, particularly in rural communities, is attributable, to a considerable extent, to their linkages to local development companies, whose expertise in community development (O’Keeffe and Douglas, 2013) ensures that they are well-positioned to work with communities in ensuring children’s inputs into the formulation of municipal and county and city development plans. Working in partnership at the local level can, as has been shown elsewhere (Heath et al., 2012), address the genuine fears and concerns of school principals, boards of management, civil society leaders, parents and children themselves, and thereby ensure that those who take initiatives to promote children’s independent mobility, do so, confident that they operate within a supporting institutional and infrastructural context.

This research report originally emerged though an initiative taken by Mary Immaculate College to participate in an international study. While this collaborative transnational approach restricted, to some extent, the scope for Irish children’s inputs into the design of the survey instrument, it has provided a useful set of benchmarks and reference points against which we can monitor the advancement of CIM on this island, and on-going transnational collaboration will be essential in enabling policy-makers, institutions and communities to learn from one another’s experiences, and to promote best practice. As Tremblay et al. (2014: 122) noted in the conclusion of a comprehensive assessment of children’s levels of activity, “international cooperation and cross-fertilization is encouraged to conquer existing challenges, understand underlying mechanisms, derive innovative solutions and overcome the expanding childhood physical inactivity crisis.” Such partnerships also enable a more evidence-based approach to policy, planning and practice, and ensure that on-going evaluation is fully incorporated into strategic planning.

Both parts of the island of Ireland have experienced considerable trauma in recent years, as our societies have had to face up to some unpleasant truths about how we have treated past generations of children and their families. It is essential that we establish the full facts of what happened, understand why children were so ill-treated, acknowledge the wrongs that were done and ensure that our children are never again viewed or treated as second-class citizens. We need to put the rights and wellbeing of all children at the core of our value systems. Moreover, we must not be tempted to assume that the neglect of children or the denial of their rights were in some way historical phenomena, but we need to recognise and dismantle the barriers to self-actualisation that members of the current generation of children face, and we need to be ever-vigilant in enabling and empowering children, so that we ensure that children’s rights are not just an add-on to policy and practice, but are the bedrock on which we base all our interactions with children. The advancement of CIM is both consistent with, and integral to the progression of children’s rights, and mobility issues need to feature much more strongly in public discourse about and with children. Indeed, such discourse needs to be more inclusive of children. By giving voice to children, this report clearly demonstrates that the promotion of CIM is not, and cannot be, the sole responsibility of any agency or set of institutions, but requires a ‘whole of community’ approach, that is rights-based, child-driven and child-oriented, and focuses on modernising spaces and places so that they become more child-friendly and family-friendly.
i. Children’s Questionnaire

ii. Parents’ Questionnaire
HOW YOU GET ABOUT
A questionnaire for children and young people 7 to 15 years old

- Please answer the questions as best you can – there are no right or wrong answers.
- We will not know who filled in this questionnaire, only the class it was completed in.
- Please ask if you have any questions.

TRAVELLING TO AND FROM SCHOOL

1) How did you get to school this morning?
(Only tick one box, to show the main method you used)

- ☐ Walked most or all the way
- ☐ Cycled
- ☐ School bus / minibus / coach
- ☐ Train (including DART or LUAS)
- ☐ Car
- ☐ Other please write in: ....................................................

2) Who did you travel to school with this morning?
(Tick as many boxes as you need)

- ☐ Travelled on my own
- ☐ Parent
- ☐ Another adult
- ☐ Older child / teenager
- ☐ Child of same age or younger

3a) How long did it take you to travel to school this morning?
(Only tick one box)

- ☐ Less than 5 minutes
- ☐ 5 to 15 minutes
- ☐ 16 to 30 minutes
- ☐ 31 to 45 minutes
- ☐ 46 minutes or more

3b) At what time do you usually leave home to go to school? ____________
4) How will you go home *today*? 
(Only tick one box)

- [ ] Walk most or all the way
- [ ] Cycle
- [ ] Bus
- [ ] Train
- [ ] Car
- [ ] Other please write in: .................................................................

5a) Who will you travel home with *today*? 
(Tick as many boxes as you need)

- [ ] Travelling home alone
- [ ] Parent
- [ ] Another adult
- [ ] Older child / teenager
- [ ] Child of same age or younger

5b) After school where do you usually go? 
(Only tick one box)

- [ ] Go straight home
- [ ] Go to a friend’s house
- [ ] Go to a childminder’s house
- [ ] Go to a school based childcare facility
- [ ] Go to a non-school based childcare facility
- [ ] Go to a recreational or sport activity
- [ ] Other (please explain) .................................................................
6a) How would you like to be able to travel to and from school? (Only tick one box)
- [ ] Walk most or all the way
- [ ] Cycle
- [ ] School bus
- [ ] Local bus or train
- [ ] Car
- [ ] Other please write in: .........................................................

6b) How many cars or vans are owned or available for use by those in your home? (Only tick one box)
- [ ] One 🚗
- [ ] Two 🚗 🚗
- [ ] Three 🚗 🚗 🚗
- [ ] Four or more 🚗 🚗 🚗 +
- [ ] None

WALKING

7a) Are you allowed to cross roads in your neighbourhood on your own?
- [ ] YES ☑️ (Please go to Question 7c)
- [ ] NO

7b) If you don’t cross roads on your own, would you like to be allowed to do so?
- [ ] YES
- [ ] NO

7c) How old were you when you first crossed roads on your own? (Please estimate if you are not sure)
- [ ] Age
- [ ] Not allowed to cross roads on my own
CYCLING

8a) Do you have a bicycle?
- YES
- NO (Please go to Question 9)

8b) Are you allowed to cycle on roads in your neighbourhood by your parents?
- YES
  - At what age were you first allowed?
    - Age
- NO

8c) If you have a bicycle, are you allowed to ride it to go to places (like the park or friend’s houses) without any grown ups?
- YES
- NO
- Don’t have a bicycle

8d) How many times do you cycle in a typical week (both with and without parents) including the weekend?
- Once a week or less
- One or two days a week
- Three or more days a week
- Don’t have a bicycle

BUSES

9) Are you allowed to go on local buses on your own (other than a school bus)?
- YES
- NO
### AT THE WEEKEND

10) Which of these activities did you do this weekend (last Saturday or Sunday):
(tick the first column if you did these things on your own or with another young person)
(tick in the second column if you did them with a parent or other adult)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>On your own or with another young person</th>
<th>With a parent or other adult</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visited a friend’s home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visited relatives or grown-ups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went to a youth club (including Scouts, Guides, Cadets, Sunday school etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went to the shops</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went to a library</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went to a cinema</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spent time with friends outside after dark</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went to a playground, park or playing fields</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Played sport or went swimming (individual or team sports or lessons)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went for a walk or cycled around</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went to a concert or nightclub</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visited a place of worship</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please write in):</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please write in):</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please write in):</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**WHERE YOU LIVE**

11a) How safe do you feel on your own in your local neighbourhood?
(Only tick one box)
- [ ] Not allowed out on my own
- [ ] Very safe
- [ ] Fairly safe
- [ ] Not very safe
- [ ] Not at all safe

11bi) When you are outside on your own are you worried by any of the following?
(Tick as many boxes as you need)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traffic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting lost</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strangers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not feel that I am old enough to go about on my own</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not knowing what to do if someone speaks to me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11bii) When you are outside with friends are you worried by any of the following?
(Tick as many boxes as you need)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traffic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting lost</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strangers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Do not feel that I am old enough to go about on my own</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not knowing what to do if someone speaks to me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11c) Is there anything else you are worried about when you are outside on your own or with friends?

Please write in: ..............................................................................................................
11d) Which of the following best describes your neighbourhood?

- Street/Avenue/Lane
- Housing Estate (within 2 km of centre)
- Suburban Housing Estate (more than 2 km from centre)
- Other suburban
- On approach road to town
- Open countryside

11e) Do you live in......
(Only tick one box)

- A whole house or bungalow that is
  - Detached
  - Semi-detached
  - Terraced

- A flat or apartment that is self contained

- A bedsit

- A caravan or other mobile or temporary structure

ABOUT YOU

12) How old are you?

☐ Age

13) Are you...?

☐ a Girl    ☐ or    ☐ a Boy

Thank you very much for your help 😊
**Children's Independent Mobility on the island of Ireland**

**HOW YOUR CHILD GETS ABOUT**
Questions for the father, mother or carer of a child 7 to 15 years old

**THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE ABOUT YOUR CHILD**
- This form should take about ten minutes to complete.
- Please only answer in relation to the child who gave you this form – do not answer about any other children in your household.
- Please answer the questions honestly and as best you can.
- Your answers will be made anonymous and will be kept confidential.

**Coming home from school**

1a) Does your child travel home from school alone?
   - [ ] YES - When did you first let them travel home from school alone?
     - Age
   - [ ] NO - At what age will you be likely to let your child travel home from school alone?
     - Age

1b) How many days a week is your child typically collected from school by an adult?
   *(Please insert number)*
   - [ ] times each week

1c) What are your main reasons for picking your child up from school (even if you no longer do)?
   *(Please tick no more than three boxes)*

   - [ ] 1. Opportunity to spend time with my child
   - [ ] 2. Opportunity for exercise or to get out of house
   - [ ] 3. Concern about traffic danger
   - [ ] 4. Child unreliable or too young
   - [ ] 5. Danger from adults
   - [ ] 6. Fear of bullying by other children
   - [ ] 7. Opportunity to meet people (teachers, other parents etc)
   - [ ] 8. On the way to an activity for you or the child (e.g. shopping, visiting a relative, after school club etc)
   - [ ] 9. School too far away
   - [ ] 10. Other, please write in:
1d) How long would it typically take you to get to your child’s school? (Insert a time however large or small, or tick ‘Don’t know / Not applicable’)

- On foot: _______ minutes
- By car: _______ minutes
- Public transport: _______ minutes

1e) Is the school the nearest one your child can attend?
- □ YES (Please go to Question 1g)
- □ NO

1f) If NO, what is the main reason for your child attending this school? (Tick as many as you need)
- □ 1. No places available at nearest school
- □ 2. Did not want to send child to local school or preferred a specific school elsewhere
- □ 3. Wanted a specific type of school (faith school, performing arts, etc)
- □ 4. Moved home after child started at school
- □ 5. Travel easier
- □ 6. Other, please write in:

1g) Does your child have a long-standing illness, disability or infirmity?
- □ YES - Please give brief details (optional)
- □ NO

Other journeys

2a) When going to places other than school that are within walking distance, is your child taken there or allowed to go alone?
- □ Usually goes alone (Please go to Question 3)
- □ Usually taken
- □ Varies

2b) What is the approximate number of round trips made each week to accompany your child, excluding the journey to school? (For example, travelling to the swimming pool and then home again would count as one round trip)
- □ Round trips each week
2c) What is the method of travel most frequently used on these trips?  
(Tick as many as you need)
- [ ] Walk most or all the way
- [ ] Cycle
- [ ] Local bus or train (including DART or LUAS)
- [ ] Car
- [ ] Other method, please write in: ..............................................................

Crossing roads
3) Is your child allowed to cross roads in your neighbourhood alone?  
*Please note: this question is included for all parents of children aged between 7 and 15 years old. Please answer even if the answer seems obvious.*
- [ ] YES  What age was your child first allowed to do so?  
  [ ] Age
- [ ] NO  What age do you think you will allow your child to do so?  
  [ ] Age

Going out after dark
4a) Is your child usually allowed to go out alone after dark?  
(Please go to \( \rightarrow \) Question 5)
- [ ] YES
- [ ] NO

4b) If NO, what is the main reason your child is not allowed to go out alone after dark?  
*Please write in:* ........................................................................................................

Cycling
5) Is your child allowed to cycle on roads alone?  
- [ ] Does not own a bicycle
- [ ] YES - At what age was your child first allowed to cycle on roads alone?  
  [ ] Age
- [ ] NO - At what age do you think you will allow your child to cycle on roads alone?  
  [ ] Age
### Buses

6) **Is your child usually allowed to travel on local buses alone (other than a school bus)?**
   - **YES**
   - **NO**
   
   **At what age was your child first allowed to travel on buses alone?**
   - Age
   
   **At what age do you think you will allow your child to travel on buses alone?**
   - Age

### Mobile Phones

7a) **Does your child have a mobile phone?**
   - **YES**
   - **NO** (Please go to Question 8)

7b) **If YES, does this give you more confidence about letting your child go out alone?**
   - **YES**
   - **NO**
   - Child does not go out alone

### Traffic

8) **How worried are you about the risk of your child being injured in a traffic accident when crossing a road?**
   - Very
   - Quite
   - Not very
   - Not at all
   - Don’t know / not sure
The following questions are about you

9a) When you were a child aged 8 or 9, how did you usually travel to school?
(Only tick one box)

☐ Walked most or all the way
☐ Cycled
☐ School bus
☐ Local bus or train
☐ Car
☐ Other. Please write in: ________________________________

9b) How did the distance you had to travel to primary school compare with the distance your child has to travel to primary school?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Much less</th>
<th>Less</th>
<th>About the same</th>
<th>Further</th>
<th>Much further</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9c) At about what age were you allowed to get about on your own?

☐ Age

10) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following two statements? Put a cross in the box which best matches your opinion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agree strongly</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree strongly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10a) Most adults who live in the neighbourhood look out for other people’s children in the area

10b) Some young people and adults in the area make you afraid to let your children play outdoors

Your household

11a) Does your household have regular use of a car (including car share)?

☐ No  ☐ Yes, 1 car  ☐ Yes, 2 or more cars
11b) How many adults in your household, **including yourself**, have a full driving licence?

| Number |

12) How many people live in your home, **including yourself**?

| Children aged 10 years or less |
| Children aged 11 to 15 years |
| Everyone else aged 16 or more |
| TOTAL |

13) Does your family own your home or is it rented?

| Own home (with or without mortgage) |
| Rented home from Council or Housing Association |
| Private rented |
| Live in a relative’s home |
| Temporary accommodation |
| Other ................................. |

14) Do you have access to outside space(s) where your children can play? (Please tick all the relevant boxes)

| 1. Garden |
| 2. Park which you can reach without crossing a road |
| 3. Park you reach by crossing a road |
| 4. Quiet residential road |
| 6. Shared communal space |
| 7. Other please write in |
| 8. No suitable outside space available |

15) Please write in the county you live in

|  |

16a) How old are you?

**Please tick the boxes for you and (if applicable) your partner**

- You
- Your husband, wife or partner (if applicable)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Under 30</th>
<th>30 to 44</th>
<th>45 or over</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
16b) What gender are you?
Please tick the boxes for you and (if applicable) your partner

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>You</th>
<th>Your husband, wife or partner (If applicable)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

17a) Are you in paid work?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>You</th>
<th>Your husband, wife or partner (If applicable)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes, full-time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes, part-time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

17b) If you are in paid work, do you work at home or elsewhere?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>You</th>
<th>Your husband, wife or partner (If applicable)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Elsewhere</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

17c) What is your current or most recent job title?

You ........................................................................................................................................

Your husband / wife / partner ................................................................................................

17d) If you are an employee, what is made or done at your place of work?

You ........................................................................................................................................

Your husband / wife / partner ................................................................................................

Please seal this completed questionnaire in the accompanying envelope and give it to your child to take back to school tomorrow, the following day or as soon as possible after that.

If you would like to be entered into a prize draw for a £75 voucher of your choice, please fill in the attached form which follows the end of this survey.

Thank you very much for your help 😊
References


Cavan County Council (2012) *Active Travel Towns – Stream 2 Funding Application - Submitted to the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport*, May 2012.


For the purposes of this report where parents are mentioned this term includes legal guardians and carers in the home context.
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