

GATEWAY TO
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Gateway Policy Explorer: Retirement Series

Ireland

Spousal Old-Age Benefit Plan Details

1992-2023

Authors

Alejandra Tantamango
Qinyi Ouyang
David Knapp

Contributors

Barra Roantree
Jinkook Lee
Maciej Lis[†]
Rachel Lobo
Drystan Phillips
Kanghong Shao
Michael Upchurch

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Preface

This document is intended for researchers who want to understand the evolution of policy or the policy in place at a particular point in time. This document is not intended for financial advice or to aid in decision-making. The authors have made significant effort to identify and collect historical information pertaining to these policies, to accurately represent these policies, and to communicate how policies may interact to determine legal requirements, eligibility for benefits, and/or benefits levels. The policies presented in this document focus on rules applicable to most individuals aged 50 and older from 1992. Many systems include special policies or alternative eligibility rules for specific groups. We encourage all users to complete their own review of literature in this area depending on the research questions they have in mind.

If you have feedback or questions or identify an error, please contact policy@g2aging.org.

Background — Gateway Policy Explorer: Retirement Series

The *Gateway Policy Explorer* (<http://g2aging.org/policy-explorer>) is part of the Gateway to Global Aging Data (<http://g2aging.org>) project. The *Retirement Series* captures historical policy that affects the birth cohorts of respondents in the surveys covered by the Gateway. It was motivated by the rapid evolution of policies affecting older people across the world. As the Health and Retirement Study (HRS) began in 1992 and many of the international network of studies (HRS-INS) cover more than a decade, understanding the policies in place at the time of the survey has become more demanding for researchers.

Why are we tracking past policy? Individuals make choices based on current policies and the outcomes we see today may reflect responses to past policies. When interpreting the survey responses of individuals, an understanding of the policy environment under which those individuals operate is critical. The collection of contextual information in the *Gateway Policy Explorer* aims to support researchers who want to understand or use policy changes in their research and provide context for longitudinal or cross-country differences. Over the period 2023–2026 the *Gateway Policy Explorer* will be expanded to include information on retirement, long-term care, education, and other policies affecting the life cycle.

The key dimensions to the *Gateway Policy Explorer: Retirement Series* are country and time. We prioritize data collection for each country based on its first interview wave and are continuing to expand our data collection back in time to 1992, the earliest survey date in the HRS-INS.

A separate document, like this one, is developed for each country and each broad category of policies covered in the *Gateway Policy Explorer: Retirement Series*.

Author and Contributor Disclaimers

† The opinions expressed here are those of authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the OECD or of its member countries.

Ireland

Spousal Old-Age Benefits
Plan details 1992-2023 * †

The Irish public pension system provides a benefit payment to the spouse or civil partner of an individual that is receiving State Pension. This benefit is based on the dependent spouse or civil partner's own weekly earnings. From 1992 to 2023, there were no major changes to pension-related policy for dependent spouses or civil partners. Old-age dependent spouse or civil partner pension benefits are administered by the Department of Social Protection.

Key Dates

First law: 1952

Major changes since 1992: None

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* If you have questions or suggestions, please contact policy@g2aging.org.

† Detailed information and definitions are provided in tables, formulas and a glossary at the end of this document. To facilitate switching back and forth, this document is designed with hyperlinks. Most PDF readers have shortcuts that permit a reader to return to the previous location after selecting a hyperlink. In Adobe Acrobat on a PC: "Alt" + "←"; In Adobe Acrobat on a MAC: "command" + "←"; In Preview on a MAC: "command" + "[".

Chapter 1: Policy enacted 1992-2023

Overview

The Irish old-age benefit system provides a weekly payment to the spouse or civil partner of an individual who has claimed State Pension. This benefit is called [Increase for a Qualified Adult](#). It is administered by the Department of Social Protection.

The scope of this document is limited to the Increase for a Qualified Adult benefit that is given to the spouse or civil partner of individuals that receive the [State Pension \(Contributory\)](#). For details about the benefit given to the spouse or civil partner of the [State Pension \(Non-Contributory\)](#) recipients, please refer to the policy document Old-Age Social Assistance Plan Details ([Gateway to Global Aging Data, 2023](#)).

The main pensioner can claim this benefit for their spouse or civil partner if the dependent individual passes the means test which requires them to have weekly income below a maximum level. In 2023, the maximum income level is 310€. Total weekly income includes earnings from employment and self-employment as well as notional income from capital. The dependent spouse or civil partner's total weekly income determines the benefit they receive.

Other changes during this period include:

- The Civil Partnership and Certain Rights and Obligations of Cohabitants Act ([Irish Statute Book, 2010](#)), enacted July 19, 2010 and effective from January 1, 2011, extended eligibility for this benefit to civil partners.
- From May 2022, a 14,000€ rental income disregard was introduced when determining weekly income as part of the means test for IQA benefit level and eligibility.

Eligibility

Are divorced spouses entitled to benefits based on their ex-spouses contribution or earnings history? Answer: Yes

Age requirements to start benefits without penalty

- **Full eligibility age (FEA)**
Any age if eligibility conditions are satisfied.
- **Does FEA vary by sex?** Answer: No
- **Does FEA vary by birth year?** Answer: No
- **Details by birth year:** Not applicable

Requirements to be eligible to receive benefit

- **Currently married spouses**
A dependent spouse or civil partner could qualify for the [Increase for a Qualified Adult](#) benefit if they meet the following requirements:
 - Age requirement: None. An individual can qualify at any age if eligibility conditions are satisfied.
 - Means-test requirement: The dependent spouse or civil partner must pass a means test. The dependent spouse or civil partner must have weekly income of less than the maximum level of weekly income. In 2023, the maximum level of weekly income is 310€. The maximum level of weekly income changes by year —see [Formula 1](#) for details of the calculation of total weekly income and [Table 1](#) for details of weekly income floor and ceiling (i.e., maximum) by year.
 - Other requirements:
 - * The independent spouse or civil partner claiming this benefit must be receiving a [State Pension](#).
 - * The dependent spouse or civil partner must not be receiving a social welfare payment except for the following:
 - [Child Benefit](#)
 - [Disablement Benefit](#)
 - [Domiciliary Care Allowance](#)
 - [Foster Care Allowance](#)
 - [Guardian's Payment](#)
 - [Half-rate Carer's Allowance](#)
 - [Occupational Injuries Death Benefit in respect of an orphan](#)
 - [Supplementary Welfare Allowance](#)

- **Divorced spouses**

If an individual has separated or divorced, they could qualify for the [Increase for a Qualified Adult](#) benefit if they meet the following requirements:

- Age requirements: None. An individual can qualify at any age if eligibility conditions are satisfied.
- Means-test requirements: An individual must not receive weekly income above the maximum level of weekly income. In 2023, the maximum level of weekly income was 310€ per week —see [Table 1](#) for changes in the maximum level of weekly income by year.
- Other requirements:
 - * An individual must be receiving a weekly maintenance payment from their ex spouse or civil partner of at least the same amount as the current rate of the Increase for a Qualified Adult payment for [Jobseeker's Allowance](#) —see [Table 2](#) for changes in weekly maintenance payments by year.
 - * An individual must not be cohabiting with someone else as a couple.

Alternative eligibility requirements that permit starting benefits early, but with a penalty

- **Can an individual start benefits before FEA?** Answer: No

Benefits

- **To receive a benefit, does an individual have to claim it?** Answer: Yes
- **To continue to receive a benefit, does an individual have to remain qualified?** Answer: Yes

Payment type

- **Payment options (i.e., Annuity, cash balance, or lump sum):** Annuitable

Factors effecting computation of benefit entitlement

- **Does the formula for computing benefit entitlement differ by birth year?** Answer: Yes, the benefit flat-rate is different for individuals under age 66 and for individuals age 66 and over.
- **Is the formula for computing benefit entitlement progressive?** Answer: Yes
- **Does the benefit entitlement depend on the surviving spouse's own contribution/work history?** Answer: Yes
- **Does the benefit entitlement depend on the contribution/work history of the deceased spouse?** Answer: No
- **Are future benefit entitlements adjusted for cost of living?** Answer: Yes
- **If so, what measure is used for adjustment?**

Ad hoc: Government adjusts the pension benefit rates as part of the annual budget process. There is no formal measure for adjustment.

Benefit formula for claiming at FEA

From 1992 to 1999, all individuals that qualify for this benefit receive a fixed amount —see [Table 3](#) for changes in benefit rates by year.

From 2000, benefits are calculated based on the dependent spouse or partner's weekly income —see [Formula 2](#) for details on how benefits are calculated and [Table 4](#) for details on the reduction rate and earnings bracket length.

The benefit payment a dependent spouse or partner could receive is adjusted based on their weekly income. If the dependent spouse or civil partner receives less than 100€ in weekly income in 2023, they will be eligible to receive a payment in the highest benefit tier. If the dependent spouse or civil partner receives more than 310€ per week, they will not be eligible for this benefit.

Benefits change depending on the dependent spouse or civil partner's age. An individual age 66 and over would receive a higher benefit payment than an individual under age 66. In 2023, an individual age 66 and over would receive a weekly benefit rate 237.80€ if they qualify for a payment in the highest benefit tier. In 2023, an individual under age 66 would receive a weekly benefit rate of 176.70€ if they qualify for a payment in the highest benefit tier. The benefit rates change by year —see [Table 5](#) for changes in benefit rates by year.

Adjustments for starting benefits before FEA (Early claiming or retirement)

- **Are benefits reduced for starting benefits before FEA?** Answer: No

Adjustments for starting benefits after FEA (Delayed claiming or retirement)

- **Are benefits increased for starting benefits after FEA?** Answer: No

Adjustments for starting benefits and continuing to work (Earnings Test)

- **Are benefits reduced or eliminated while working?** Answer: Yes
- **Adjustment formula**
Not applicable
- **Details by birth year:** Not applicable
- **If benefits are reduced while working, does it effect future benefits?** Answer: Not applicable

Tables and Formulas

Formula 1: Calculation of Total Weekly Income for the Increase for a Qualified Adult

$$\text{Total Weekly Income}_{i,t} = \text{CashInc}_{i,t} + \text{Countable Capital Income}_{i,t} + \text{Other Income}_{i,t}$$

- Total Weekly Income_{*i,t*} = Individual *i*'s total weekly income at time *t*
- CashInc_{*i,t*} = Individual *i*'s cash income at time *t*, including income from work and self-employment as follows:
 - Gross weekly earnings from employment: If paid monthly, the average weekly earnings are calculated over the last 2 months. If paid weekly, the average weekly earnings are calculated over the last 6 weeks.
 - Gross weekly earnings from self-employment: Earnings received from self-employment in the last tax year are divided by 52 to obtain the average weekly earnings.
- Countable Capital Income_{*i,t*} = Individual *i*'s assessed means from capital at time *t*:

$$\text{Countable Capital Income}_{i,t} = \begin{cases} 0 & \text{if } \text{CapInc}_{i,t} \leq 20,000 \\ \frac{\text{CapInc}_{i,t} - 20,000}{1,000} & \text{if } 20,000 < \text{CapInc}_{i,t} < 30,000 \\ \left(\frac{\text{CapInc}_{i,t} - 30,000}{1,000} \times 2 \right) + 10 & \text{if } 30,000 < \text{CapInc}_{i,t} < 40,000 \\ \left(\frac{\text{CapInc}_{i,t} - 40,000}{1,000} \times 4 \right) + 30 & \text{if } 40,000 \leq \text{CapInc}_{i,t} \end{cases}$$

where CapInc_{*i,t*} is individual *i*'s income from capital at time *t*, including earnings from property, investments, and savings. If these assets are owned jointly with their spouse or civil partner, half of the value of these assets is considered to belong to the dependant spouse or civil partner.

- Other Income_{*i,t*} = Individual *i*'s other income at time *t*, including income from a trust fund, rental income (From May 2022, disregarding up to 14,000€ per year for those that rent a room in their home), occupational pension, etc. are calculated on a weekly basis to obtain the average weekly income.

Source: [Citizens Information \(2022a\)](#) - Capital and Social Welfare Payments

Table 1: Weekly Income Floor and Ceiling for a Qualified Adult (1992-2023)

Period	Weekly Income Floor	Weekly Income Ceiling
2009-2023	100.00 €	310.00 €
2008	100.00	300.00
2007	100.00	280.00
2006	88.88	240.00
2005	88.88	220.00
2004	88.88	210.00
2003	88.88	203.16
2002	88.88	196.81
2001	70.00 £	145.00 £
2000	70.00	135.00
1997-1999	60.00	90.00
1996	60.00	Missing ¹
1995	60.00	Missing ¹
1994	60.00	Missing ¹
1993	55.00	Missing ¹
1992	55.00	Missing ¹

Source: [Department of Social Protection \(1992-2023\)](#) - Rates of Social Welfare Payments

Note:

1. Information about the weekly income ceiling is unavailable for the years before 1997
2. Gross weekly income includes earnings from employment and self-employment as well as notional income from capital

Table 2: Minimum Weekly Maintenance Payment for Ex Spouses (1992-2023)

Period	Personal Rates
2023	146.00€
2022	138.00
2019-2021	134.70
2018	131.40
2017	128.10
2011-2016	124.80
2010	130.10
2009	135.60
2008	131.30
2007	123.30
2006	110.00
2005	98.70
2004	89.40
2003	82.80
2002	78.80
2001	54.00 £
2000	47.00
1999	43.20
1998	41.20
1997	40.00
1996	38.50
1995	37.50
1994	36.60
1993	35.50
1992	34.30

Source: [Department of Social Protection \(1992-2023\)](#) - Rates of Social Welfare Payments

Note: The minimum weekly maintenance payment is the same as the rate of the Increase for a Qualified Adult payment for Jobseeker's Allowance.

Table 3: Increase for a Qualified Adult Fixed Benefit Rates (1992-1999)

Year	Under Age 66	Aged 66 and Over
1999	55.50 £	59.90 £
1998	52.50	56.90
1997	51.00	55.40
1996	49.50	53.90
1995	48.10	52.30
1994	45.20	51.00
1993	43.90	49.50
1992	42.40	47.80

Source: [Department of Social Protection \(1992-2023\)](#) - Rates of Social Welfare Payments

Formula 2: Increase for a Qualified Adult

$$B_{SP,i,t} = \begin{cases} B_t^{\text{MAX}} & \text{if Total Weekly Income}_{i,t} < \text{Income Floor}_{i,t} \\ B_t^{\text{MAX}} - \left(\text{Reduction Rate}_{i,t} \times \text{Floor} \left(\frac{\text{Total Weekly Income}_{i,t} - \text{Income Floor}_{i,t}}{\text{Earnings Bracket Length}_t} \right) \right) & \text{if Income Floor}_{i,t} \leq \text{Total Weekly Income}_{i,t} < \text{Income Ceiling}_{i,t} \\ 0 & \text{if Income Ceiling}_{i,t} \leq \text{Total Weekly Income}_{i,t} \end{cases}$$

- $B_{SP,i,t}$ = Individual i 's weekly Increase for a Qualified Adult benefits from the [State Pension \(Contributory\)](#) in year t
- B_t^{MAX} = The benefit rate in the highest benefit tier in period t —see [Table 5](#)
- $\text{Income Ceiling}_{i,t}$ = Maximum amount per week individual i could receive in period t to receive any benefits —see [Table 1](#)
- $\text{Total Weekly Income}_{i,t}$ = Individual i 's total weekly income in period t —see [Formula 1](#)
- $\text{Income Floor}_{i,t}$ = Maximum amount per week individual i could receive in period t to receive a benefit rate in the highest benefit tier —see [Table 1](#)
- $\text{Reduction Rate}_{i,t}$ = Rate at which the benefit amount gets reduced in period t based on number of contributions, time of claiming and time when reaching age 66 —see [Table 4](#)
- $\text{Earnings Bracket Length}_t$ = Length of earnings bracket in period t —see [Table 4](#)

Source: [Department of Social Protection \(1992-2023\)](#) - Rates of Social Welfare Payments

Table 4: Reduction Rates and Earnings Bracket Length (2000-2023)

Period	Reduction Rate for Under Age 66	Reduction Rate for Age 66 and Over	Earnings Bracket Length
2009-2023	7.00	9.40	10.00 €
2008	7.00	9.50	10.00
2007	7.30	9.10	10.00
2004-2006	5.40	6.20	6.34
2003	5.30	6.20	6.34
2002	4.80	5.80	6.34
2001	4.20	4.90	5.00 £
2000	4.20	4.50	5.00

Source: [Department of Social Protection \(1992-2023\)](#) - Rates of Social Welfare Payments

Table 5: Increase for a Qualified Adult Maximum Benefit Rates (2000-2023)

Period	Under Age 66	Aged 66 and Over
2023	176.70 €	237.80 €
2022	168.70	227.00
2019-2021	165.40	222.50
2018	162.10	218.00
2017	158.80	213.50
2016	155.50	209.00
2009-2015	153.50	206.30
2008	148.80	200.00
2007	139.50	173.00
2006	128.80	149.30
2005	119.50	138.50
2004	111.50	129.20
2003	104.80	121.50
2002	98.10	113.80
2001	68.20 £	79.60 £
2000	60.20	64.60

Source: [Department of Social Protection \(1992-2023\)](#) - Rates of Social Welfare Payments

Sources

This section records key sources consulted when we collected the institutional details reported in this document. Archived versions of these sources are available at the Gateway Policy Explorer website (<http://g2aging.org/policy-explorer>).

Citizens Information (2022a). Capital and Social Welfare Payments. As of November 28, 2022. [\[Link\]](#)

Citizens Information (2022b). Claiming for an Adult Dependant. As of November 28, 2022. [\[Link\]](#)

Citizens Information (2022c). Disablement Benefit. As of November 28, 2022. [\[Link\]](#)

Citizens Information (2022d). Domiciliary Care Allowance. As of November 28, 2022. [\[Link\]](#)

Citizens Information (2022e). Fostering. As of November 28, 2022. [\[Link\]](#)

Citizens Information (2022f). Guardian's and Orphan's Payments. As of November 28, 2022. [\[Link\]](#)

Citizens Information (2022g). Half-rate Carer's Allowance. As of November 28, 2022. [\[Link\]](#)

Citizens Information (2022h). Supplementary Welfare Allowance. As of November 28, 2022. [\[Link\]](#)

Department of Social Protection (1992-2022). Rates of Social Welfare Payments. As of November 28, 2022. [\[Link\]](#)

Department of Social Protection (2019). Operational Guidelines: Increase for a Qualified Adult. As of November 28, 2022. [\[Link\]](#)

Gateway to Global Aging Data (2023). Old-Age Social Assistance Plan Details [\[Link\]](#)

Irish Statute Book (1990). Social Welfare (Adult Dependant) (Amendment) Regulations. As of July 12, 2023. [\[Link\]](#)

Irish Statute Book (1993). Social Welfare (Adult Dependant) (Amendment) Regulations. As of July 12, 2023. [\[Link\]](#)

Irish Statute Book (2005). Social Welfare Consolidation Act. As of July 13, 2023. [\[Link\]](#)

Irish Statute Book (2010). Civil Partnership and Certain Rights and Obligations of Cohabitants Act. As of November 16, 2022. [\[Link\]](#)

Irish Statute Book (2022). Social Welfare Act. As of July 13, 2023. [\[Link\]](#)

Glossary of terms

This section summarizes key definitions from the main text. To facilitate switching back and forth, this document is designed with hyperlinks. Most PDF readers have shortcuts that permit a reader to return to the previous location after selecting a hyperlink. In Adobe Acrobat on a PC: "Alt" + "←"; In Adobe Acrobat on a MAC: "command" + "←"; In Preview on a MAC: "command" + "[".

Annuitable System: A pension system that provides a periodic payment for life after the benefit begins.

Cash Balance System: A pension system that provides each individual an account that is drawn down over time.

Child Benefit: Benefit payment paid monthly to parents and guardians of a child under age 16, or under age 18 if in full-education, full-time training or disabled.

Claimable Benefit: A pension where the beneficiary must actively file a claim for benefits with the government's pension authority.

Cost-of-Living Adjustments (COLA): Adjustments after an individual begins receiving benefits that increase benefit payments, typically in line with consumer prices or average earnings.

Disablement Benefit: Benefit payment given to individuals who have suffered a loss of physical or mental faculty due to an accident at work.

Domiciliary Care Allowance: Benefit payment given monthly to a child under age 16 that has a severe disability.

Earliest eligibility: Earliest age and/or years of contributions required to be eligible to start receipt of a particular type of benefit. Earliest eligibility is the same as statutory eligibility in countries where there is no benefit penalty for claiming before the statutory retirement age.

Foster Care Allowance: Benefit payment given weekly to individuals who are fostering children.

Full Eligibility Age: The age at which individuals are eligible to receive their full benefit. For dependent benefits or social assistance, the full eligibility age may differ from the statutory retirement age for own old-age pension benefits.

Guardian's Payment: Payment given to the guardian of a child under age 18 (or 22 if in full-time education) who is an orphan.

Half-rate Carer's Allowance: Benefit payment given to individuals who are providing full-time care to another person, and are receiving certain social welfare payments.

Increase for a Qualified Adult: Benefit payment given to the dependent spouse or civil partner of a pensioner who is receiving State Pension. The dependent individual must satisfy the eligibility requirements.

Jobseeker's Allowance: Benefit payment given to people that are unemployed, are genuinely looking for a job, pass a means test and satisfy the habitual residence condition.

Latest claiming age: Latest age where a benefit may be claimed such that benefit payments are increased as an incentive for delaying the start of benefits past the statutory retirement age. Latest claiming age is the same as statutory retirement age in countries where there is no benefit to delayed claiming. Not applicable for non-claimable benefits.

Lump Sum Benefit: A pension system that provides an individual with a one-time or limited number of payments. Lump sum benefits are distinct from annuitable or cash balance benefits because they do not continue past a specified time frame. Lump sum benefits use varies by country, but they are sometimes used as death benefits, incentives to delay claiming, or payments to individuals with an insufficient contribution history to be eligible for annuitable benefits.

National Income Measure: In some pension systems, the benefit is dependent on a national income measure, such as average wages. We indicate a pension system depends on the national income measure if the benefit paid is determined by a national income measure (as opposed to an individual's earnings history). For example, the benefit level for the United Kingdom Basic State Pension depends on a level set by the government and does not depend on an individual's earnings. This distinction does not include systems that adjust annual benefits based on a national income measure or index past earnings using a national income measure.

Occupational Injuries Death Benefit in respect of an Orphan: Additional benefit payment given to a guardian of an orphan whose parent died as a result of an accident at work.

Pay Related Social Insurance (PRSI): Compulsory contributions to social insurance made by employees. Contribution rates change by year and benefit class.

Progressive Benefit: A benefit is progressive if people with lower earnings have a greater replacement rate for their contributions.

Qualified Benefit: A benefit is qualified if an individual must continue to meet certain standards, such as a means test, to continue receipt of benefits.

State Pension (Contributory): Benefit payment given to individuals age 66 and over based on their Pay-Related Social Insurance (PRSI) contributions.

State Pension (Non-Contributory): Means-tested payment given to individuals age 66 and over that do not meet the contributions requirement to receive the State Pension (Contributory)

Statutory Retirement Age (SRA): The age at which individuals are eligible to receive their full own old-age benefit. In the United States, this is known as the normal retirement age. In the United Kingdom, this is known as the state pension age.

Supplementary Welfare Allowance: Benefit payment paid weekly to individuals that do not earn enough income to meet their own needs

Version information

Current Version: 1.0 (August 2023)

Version History

- 1.0 (August 2023): First version.

Additional resources

The following resources provide additional details for the interested reader:

European Commission Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion —Your social security rights in Ireland. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=13764&langId=en>

Features: It provides a general overview on the different social welfare benefits in Ireland including the Increase for a Qualified Adult.