

HIQA investigation into how Tusla manages child sexual abuse referrals against adults of concern

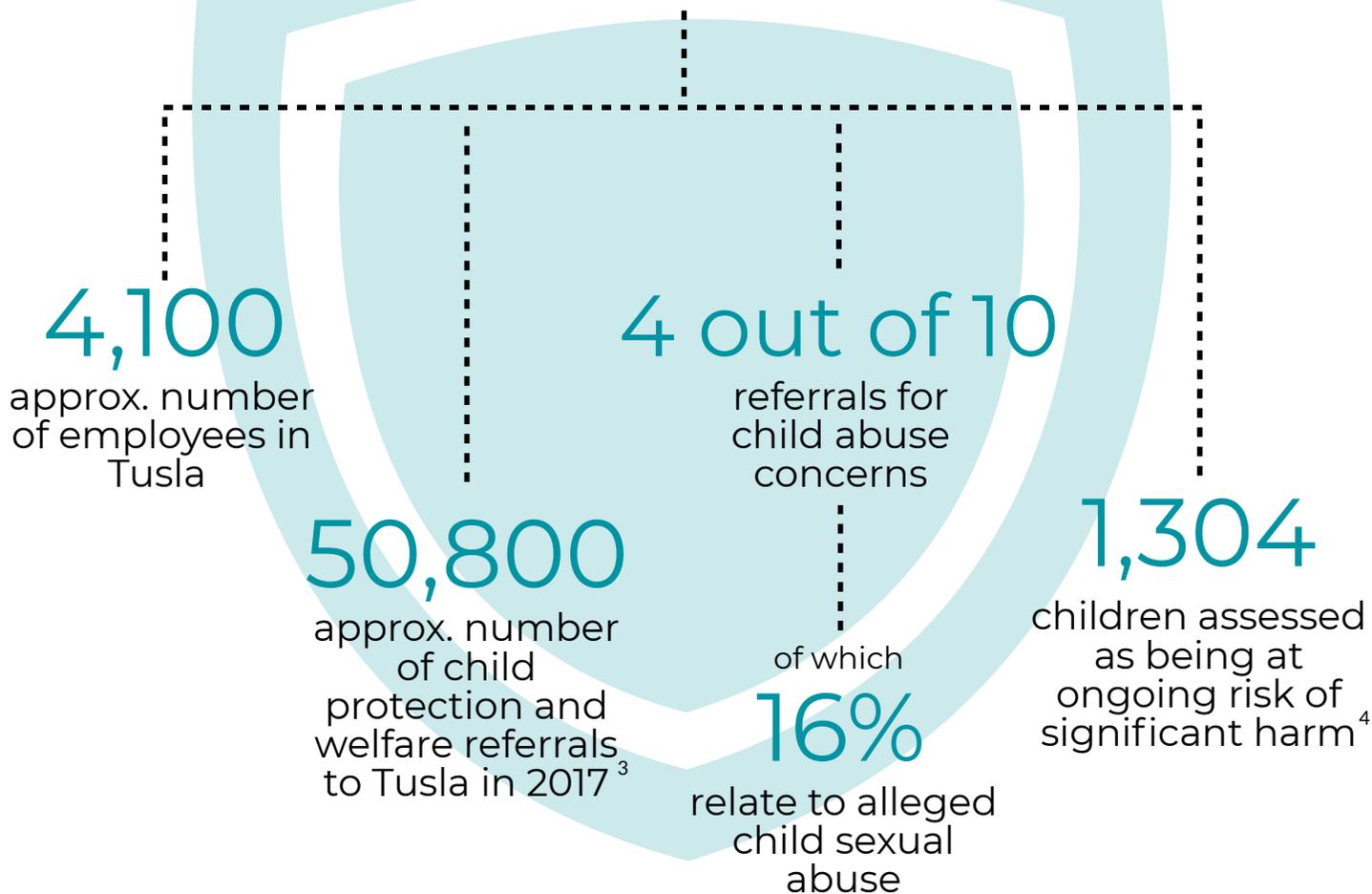


**Health
Information
and Quality
Authority**

An tÚdarás Um Fhaisnéis
agus Cáilíocht Sláinte

This investigation followed public concerns over the handling by the Child and Family Agency (**Tusla**) — the State's child protection and welfare agency — of a false allegation about a garda¹ whistle-blower contained in a Tusla notification sent to An Garda Síochána.²

The child protection and welfare landscape



HIQA Investigation Team:



spent 1 year carrying out its work



visited 6 Tusla service areas and 1 sexual abuse regional team



reviewed over 500 documents and pieces of data received from Tusla



examined 1 in 3 case records in the areas reviewed



conducted formal interviews with 39 Tusla staff and a board member



carried out 29 focus-group meetings

These consisted of:



14

meetings with Tusla social workers and social work team leaders

7

meetings with external agencies

1

meeting with the sexual abuse regional team of a Tusla assessment service

7

meetings with members of An Garda Síochána

Key findings of the HIQA investigation



Tusla must take urgent action to address serious shortcomings in how it manages allegations of child sexual abuse.

HIQA identified 3 main defective points in Tusla's response to managing allegations of child abuse, including allegations made by adults about alleged abuse in childhood.



In some cases, this is leaving children at potential risk.

The defective points in Tusla's response to managing allegations of child sexual abuse are:

A Screening and preliminary enquiry

Inconsistencies in practice around the screening of allegations of child sexual abuse and making preliminary enquiries into these allegations, which meant that not all children at actual or potential risk were being assessed and where necessary, protected by Tusla, in a timely and effective manner.

B Safety planning

Inconsistencies in safety-planning practice by Tusla for children meant that while some children were adequately safeguarded, others at potential risk were not. Even for children who had a safety plan, these plans were not always reviewed to ensure the continued safety and wellbeing of the child.

C Management of retrospective cases

While there was a policy on managing allegations made by adults of abuse during their childhood, no standardised approach to direct and guide staff in case management was in place. Some people were not told that an allegation of abuse had been made against them and others were given only limited information.

Other findings

Some children are being left at potential risk because of a gap between national Tusla policy and what is actually happening on the ground, including:

- failures to consistently implement Tusla's national policies locally
- poor record-keeping

12

— despite intensive efforts, the increase in Tusla social workers in 1 year

- ineffective monitoring of effectiveness of the steps taken to protect children
- staff members' personal development not being fully supported

5
years

— minimum projected Tusla time frame for Tusla's 'Signs of Safety' initiative

- HIQA believes current findings require immediate attention as not all challenges and risk will be addressed by Signs of Safety alone.

What happens now?

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs must set up an expert quality assurance and oversight group to support and advise on implementing the HIQA recommendations and regularly update the public on progress being made.

4 main recommendations for Department of Children and Youth Affairs and Tusla

7 other actions which Tusla must urgently take

Tusla has to publish an action plan with clear timelines on how it proposes to implement the actions identified in the recommendations.

Tusla must continually review and update its action plan and report annually on how it is implementing the recommendations of the HIQA investigation report.

¹ The term for a police officer in Ireland.

² Ireland's national police service.

³ Provisional figure.

⁴ At the end of 2017, 1,304 children were listed as being 'active' on the Child Protection Notification System.