



Achieving Equality and Social Inclusion for All One Parent Families in Ireland

Pre-Budget Submission to Government

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Achieving Equality and Social Inclusion for All in Ireland

Background– Mission Statement of One Family

Progressing the work of Cherish, established in 1972, **One Family** provides voice, support and action for one-parent families through membership, professional services and campaigning. Our aim is to affect positive change and achieve equality and social inclusion for all one-parent families in Ireland.

We work to achieve our aims through

Voice we are the national membership organisation of one-parent families, supporting organisations and others concerned with the issues facing one-parent families.

Support we offer a comprehensive range of professional services to one-parent families, to those experiencing a crisis pregnancy and to those working with one-parent families.

Action we campaign with and on behalf of our members to affect positive change for one-parent families.

One Family works with all types and all members of one-parent families, respecting the realities of family life in Ireland.

An integral part of our mission is to transfer learning gained from working with one-parent families to real policy change and to affect positive changes in social and family policy for one-parent families in Ireland. In doing so, One Family is uniquely placed as a service provider and a voice for one-parent families for over 30 years.

One Family welcomes the opportunity to make this submission in advance of Budget 2006. One Family has designed its pre-budget submission in the knowledge that the Government is considering significant developments in the area of support for solo parents and for childcare in Ireland. The submission is also made in the context that solo parents are increasingly

disadvantaged as a group in Ireland in terms of poverty levels, social welfare dependency and access to services that help address these issues.

Our submission begins by spelling out the key policy areas that will be addressed. It then highlights the *key* issues that One Family believes should influence the prioritisation of Government policies and related funding. The key facts in relation to one-parent families in Ireland today are outlined and proposals for addressing these issues are presented. One Family calls on the Government to take concerted action to address the needs of this group, many of whom have not been able to benefit from in the boom created by the Celtic Tiger, due to the lack of necessary supports, and many of whose children are at risk of continuing poverty and social exclusion unless strong and coordinated action is taken to address their needs.

Key Policy Areas Addressed in this Submission

1. Reduction in income poverty among one-parent families dependant on social welfare.
2. Support for solo parents to access education, training and employment as a way out of poverty and social exclusion.
3. Ensuring that children in one-parent families and in all low income families are removed from poverty and can access both quality early childhood development and education and ongoing education.
4. Support for one-parent families and other low income families to access health services.
5. Support for one-parent families and other low-income families in meeting their accommodation needs.
6. Support for quality care in pregnancy, maternity and family health services.
7. Coordination of service provision and comprehensive availability of information to ensure that one-parent families are aware of the financial and other supports available to them and can the access advice and support they require.

Prioritising Public Policy Developments and Related Funding Arrangements

One Family believes that policy developments in this area should take into account the following issues:

- The needs of children must be at the centre of all relevant policy developments.
- The need to ensure real choice for solo parents in terms of participation in the paid labour market and in terms of childcare arrangements.
- Many solo parents are involved in a range of caring roles, including childcare, eldercare and care of family members with disabilities.
- The fact that solo parents have different needs and requirements at different stages of their children's lives with many requiring support to manage transitions in and out of the labour market, as well as access to wide ranging options to pursue viable part-time work.
- The importance of focusing planned policy changes and related funding on low income and other disadvantaged groups, including families and children living in poverty.
- The importance of ensuring that developments in childcare and in early childhood education and development take into account the particular needs and position of one-parent families and actively support access by one-parent families and other low-income families to such services.

- The challenge of exploring ways of separating supports directly aimed at reducing child poverty from means tested payments for low-income families.

Overall, One Family believes that there is an urgent need to develop and implement a coherent policy framework for one-parent families that reflects the realities of their lives and those of their children.

The key elements of this framework are:

- reductions in child and family poverty;
- reduced dependence on social welfare;
- child development and education;
- access to services: education and training, childcare, health and accommodation; and
- the coordination of services and supports, including information.

This requires the coordination of policy development across Departments as well as cooperation in implementation across Departments and agencies.

Policy background

This submission is again structured to concentrate on strategies to operationalise the aims of the *National Action Plan Against Poverty and Social Inclusion 2003-2005 (NAP/Incl)* in 2006, with regards to equality of access, opportunity and outcome for one- parent families.

Taking the key objective of NAP/Incl, the aim of this submission is to present recommendations... *‘to build a fair and inclusive society and ensure that people have the resources and opportunities to live a life with dignity and have access to the quality public services that underpin life chances and experience’*, regardless of their family structure and experience.

1. Reducing Income Poverty among those Dependent on Social Welfare

Current policy

‘To increase social welfare payments in real terms, ensure that they are properly structured to reflect household needs and that they contribute to making work pay and to reconciling work and family life’. (NAP/Incl)

‘To reduce the number of those who are consistently poor to 2 per cent (NAP/Incl)

‘To reduce the number of women who are consistently poor to 2 per cent.’ (NAP/Incl)

‘To achieve a rate of €150 per week in 2002 terms for the lowest rates of social welfare payment by 2007. During the period of the plan (2003–2005) increases in the rates will be made in order to achieve this target.’

(NAP/Incl)

Supporting data

According to the 2002 Census of Population (CP) there are 153,863 one-parent households in Ireland, of whom 128,771 are aged 15–65. This represents a 25 per cent increase on the 1996 figures. The Department of Social and Family Affairs (DSFA) figures indicate that over 92,000 parents are in receipt of a One Parent Family Payment (OPFP) – equivalent to 60 per cent of all solo parents. Recent NESC figures also show that 206,241 people are dependant on OPFP, accounting for over one-quarter of all those in receipt of social welfare assistance.

Further data shows that households headed by a solo parent are disproportionately more likely to be living in consistent poverty and at risk of poverty in comparison with the overall rates. (EU SILC, 2005)

For instance, in 2003, those households headed by a solo parent had the highest levels of consistent poverty, at 33 per cent compared with an overall average of 9 per cent. In 2003, 42 per cent of solo-parent headed households

Achieving Equality and Social Inclusion for All in Ireland were at risk of living in poverty, compared with 23 per cent of the total population.

Over 70 per cent of solo-parent headed households were at risk of poverty-related deprivation. This compares with 27 per cent of persons living on their own.

Over 30 per cent of solo parents reported experiencing debt problems arising from ordinary expenses, a similar percentage is unable to afford new clothes (EU-SILC, 2005).

Current situation

The basic payment for a solo parent in receipt of the OPFP is €148.00 per week, with Child Dependant Allowances of €19.30 per week for each dependent child. Despite increases in this payment in line with overall general increases in personal social welfare payments, households headed by a solo parent are at a disproportionately higher risk of living in poverty than the overall population.

In addition to below recommended payment levels, one-parent families face an increased risk of poverty due to the impact of other income and resources on their basic weekly payment. This is particularly relevant in relation to the lack of increases in the earning disregard for OPFP recipients, and the treatment of additional income against rent supplement.

Since the introduction of the OPFP, despite increases in wages and the cost of living, there has been no subsequent rise in the level of disregarded income for assessment of eligibility for OPFP, which remains frozen at €146.50 per week. This has resulted in a change in the situation whereby solo parents were actively facilitated to take up employment to one whereby work for many does not pay, particularly if the parent has to pay for childcare. This situation is particularly inequitable given the uniform application of the disregard and the rules of assessment regardless of the number of children in the one-parent family.

One Family concludes therefore that despite increases in amounts and levels of child benefit and social welfare payments, the costs of living for one-parent families are exceeding the incomes provided and in many cases one-parent families are trapped in income poverty.

Recommendations¹:

- Increase the One Parent Family Payment by €18.50 per week (Department of Social and Family Affairs – DSFA).
- Significantly increase the earnings disregard to reflect increases in wage rates and costs that have occurred since 1997, and to a level that does not discourage solo parents from participating in the labour market or progressing to better paid and more skilled employment. This disregard should also take into account family size (DSFA).
- Review and take action to remove continuing poverty traps experienced by solo parents in making the transition from social welfare dependency to the labour market, particularly in relation to the income disregard, rent supplement and childcare costs (DSFA/Department of Enterprise and Employment – DETE).
- Reform means test to ensure uniformity of treatment of income and other assets (DSFA/DETE/Department of Health and Children – DH&C).
- Ensure that information for one-parent families on eligibility for FIS is widely available and automatically provided (DSFA/DETE).

¹ Departmental abbreviations used in the recommendations are as follows: DSFA– Department of Social and Family Affairs; DETE – Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment; DH&C – Department of Health and Children; DE&S – Department of Education and Science; DJELR – Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform; DELG – Department of Environment and Local Government.

2. Support for Solo Parents to Access Education, Training and Employment as a way out of Poverty and Social Exclusion

Current policy

NAP/Incl. objective:

‘To increase labour market participation levels and job progression rates among women and marginalised and excluded group.’

NAP/Incl Policy Task:

‘Continue to improve educational retention rates and attainment levels, especially for those who are less well off; to continue to address the issue of early school leaving and to further expand opportunities for lifelong learning.’

The strategic approach to facilitating participation in employment is...

‘eliminating any remaining gaps or disincentives to employment/training in the application of the secondary benefit systems so that, at a minimum, nobody is materially worse off as a result of taking up employment, training or educational opportunities.’

Supporting data

According to OECD data, the employment rate for women with children in Ireland in 2000 was 66 per cent, declining to 41 per cent for women with two or more children. This latter figure is the lowest in the OECD. This compares with an OECD average of 74 per cent and 62 per cent respectively.

According to the Census 2002, 45 per cent of solo parents are in the labour force, 43 per cent for women and 57 per cent for men, compared to 61 per cent overall. This compares with 76 per cent in France. The average duration on the one-parent family payment is eight years.

The 2001 Review of the OPFP by the Department of Social and Family Affairs referred to the increasing number of solo parents working and concluded that:

‘The increasing number in employment is reflected in an assessment of earnings on the Department’s Central Records System which shows that 61 per cent of OFP recipients had earnings in the year 98/99. Of those with earnings 72 percent had less than £6,000 which suggests a high level of part-time working, which probably suits lone parents, or low paid employment which could reflect the poor educational attainment of many lone parents. Despite the increasing numbers who are working, it is considered by representative groups that there are still significant barriers to lone parents participating in the paid workforce. Two of the principal barriers cited are the lack of affordable childcare and the operation of the means test for Rent Supplement.’

A more recent ESRI report on ‘Trends in Welfare for Vulnerable Groups, Ireland 1994–2001’ (ESRI, 2005) found that 80 per cent of solo parent headed households were in receipt of some form of social welfare payment. However they also found that only 28 per cent obtained three-quarters or more of their income from that source. This report also showed the difference between poverty levels among those in solo parent households where the solo parent is not working. In 2001, 37 per cent of such households where the solo parent was not working were living in consistent poverty, compared with 11 per cent where the solo parent was working. Sixty-four per cent of households where the solo parent wasn’t working were at risk of poverty, compared with 18.5 per cent where they were working.

Fahey and Russell (ESRI, 2001) pointed out that one way of removing disincentives is to assist solo parents to earn a living wage. They suggested that in order to achieve this it would be necessary to improve the skills and

educational deficits of solo parents and to provide affordable childcare, which they saw as ‘crucial to increasing working lone parents’ chances of becoming fully independent of social welfare.’

As outlined in the NESF report on solo parents (NESF, 2001), in 1996 the percentage of married mother with no qualifications was 9 per cent compared with 23 per cent for solo mothers.

Current situation

The figures show that solo parents are increasingly working outside the home and that such employment reduces poverty rates. However, many solo parents are limited in their opportunities to access education, training and employment due to a range of poverty traps, poor educational attainment and lack of access to affordable, quality childcare.

Solo parents therefore continue to experience social exclusion due to below average levels of educational attainment and above average experiences of early school leaving. In order to break the proven link between social exclusion and poor educational attainment the barriers preventing solo parents from continuing or returning to education need to be recognised and addressed. Although there remain structural barriers as to the types of education and types of provision suitable to the needs of solo parents, the overwhelming majority of barriers preventing take up of educational opportunities by solo parents remain related to cash and non-cash benefits. These are primarily related to primary and secondary benefits and the lack of provision of affordable, quality childcare.

In order to support solo parents to access education and training as well as to enter and progress in the labour market, One Family makes the following recommendations.

Recommendations:

- Provide a comprehensive and integrated range of supports to encourage solo parents to combine caring, enhancement of educational qualifications and skills, as well as access to part-time or full-time employment as part of a coordinated strategy to raise one parent and other low-income families out of poverty (DSFA/DETE).
- Set such supports at a level that makes it attractive and viable for those involved to return to work and/or progress to full-time employment (DSFA/DETE).
- Ensure that a comprehensive range of part-time and full-time education and training and related options are in place for solo parents wishing to return to the labour market and or progress, including support for childcare costs based on local need (DETE).
- Review eligibility criteria and benefits effects of participation in all education and training programmes, with regard to financial compensation, secondary benefit retention, and childcare provision in order to remove any particular barriers experienced by one-parent families in progressing on to more skill based education and training programmes (DETE).
- Provide targeted, subsidised places for day-care for children of one-parent families and other low-income families wishing to participate/progress onto full-time employment (DH&C, DETE, DJELR, Department of Education and Science D E&S).

- Extend higher and further education grants to provide access to students on part-time courses, subject to satisfying other conditions of eligibility (DE&S).
- Ensure adequate provision of information to solo parents on their options (All departments).
- Ensure that all available income supports recognise that part-time working is the only viable option for many solo parents due to childcare and other family responsibilities (for example, requirement to work 19 hours to be eligible for FIS) (DSFA/DETE).

3. Ensure that Children in one parent families and in low-income families are removed from poverty and can access quality early childhood development and education and ongoing education

Current policy

NAP/Incl target re income support for those in employment:

‘Child Benefit and Child Dependent Allowances to be set at 33–35 per cent of the minimum adult Social Welfare Payment rate by 2007.’

‘To reduce the number of children who are consistently poor to 2 per cent.’

Supporting data

Available evidence indicates that 14 per cent of children under 16 years of age were living in consistent poverty in 2003 and that 25 per cent of children under 16 years of age were at risk of poverty. (EU-SILC, 2005)

The Combat Poverty Agency’s work on child poverty (*Ending Child Poverty*, CPA, 2005) refers to the link between child poverty and child development

and calls for a multifaceted approach to reduce poverty among one-parent families, reduce the proportion of children in workless households and to reduce severe wage inequalities, and in addition to such income supports, to provide measures to ensure the provision of affordable, accessible, good quality services for children.

One Family supports moves to both raise the income level of low-income families and to actively support the provision of early childhood development and education places to support child development among such families. In addition, One Family recognises that the provision of quality early childhood education and training and childcare support for solo parents can be linked in a positive way that addresses poverty issues and supports increasing opportunities for solo parents to access education, training and employment.

Available research supports the case that quality early childhood development is a strongly positive support for future life, including future earnings, especially for disadvantaged children.

Current situation

One Family has welcomed successive increases in Child Benefit rates. However, One Family recognises the successive lack of increases in Child Dependent Allowances since 1993, or of any other targeted income support for children on low-income households. One Family also notes the lack of age indexing of social welfare payments despite evidence to show that the costs of child rearing increases in line with the age of the child.

Welfare-dependent families are also currently the hardest hit by additional costs related to return to education by their children. Successive failures to meet rising costs have led to an unprecedented rise in applications for and receipt of the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance in recent years.

In 2004, 1433 children were born to mothers aged 19 or under. While this is a very small proportion of the total – 61,684 – it does indicate that there continue to be a small number of young women becoming mothers during their school going years. Such young parents require concentrated supports if they are not to drop out of education and significantly increase their risk of living in poverty and remaining dependant on social welfare. Again given the small numbers involved state support to encourage such parents to remain in education and go on to further education, training and development should be relatively inexpensive to introduce.

Recommendations:

- Increase Child Benefit in line with the Government’s commitment in Sustaining Progress. This should also provide for weekly Child Benefit payments. Child Benefit should also be available to all children regardless of nationality or residency status (DSFA).
- Target additional increases in child income supports to those living in poverty with graduated withdrawal as income increases, using Child Dependent Allowances (CDAs) and Family Income Supplement (FIS) in an integrated and employment-neutral manner. Such targeted payments should be increased significantly to reflect the low base that they have been at for many years (DSFA/DETE).
- Provide subsidised early childhood development and education places, over time to all pre-school children. In implementing these provisions initially target one-parent families and other low-income families in disadvantaged areas (DE&S, DETE, DJELR - Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform).

- Expand provision of after school supports particularly for one-parent families and for other low-income families (DE&S, DJELR).
- Increase the Back to School clothing and footwear allowance to more accurately reflect the costs of school attendance by low-income families. Amounts of €150 for primary school pupils and €230 for secondary school pupils (DSFA).
- Introduce a once off grant for one- parent families for children transferring from primary to secondary school at €400 per child (DSFA).
- Provide supports for young parents to remain in education through the provision of a stay in school payment and other supports for those in school, not subject to any delay in qualifying for the payment (DE&S).

4. Support for children in One Parent Families and in other low income families to access health services

Current policy

Key objectives under the Health Strategy include:

- placing the health of the population at the centre of public policy; and
- reducing health inequalities.

Supporting data

In 1994, the proportion of the population on medical cards was just over 36 per cent. Since then, both the numbers and the proportion of the population

Achieving Equality and Social Inclusion for All in Ireland covered have decreased steadily to 26 per cent in 2004 (excluding the over 70s).

A recent report (Public Health Alliance Ireland, 2004) highlighted a number of significant health inequalities, as follows:

- Low-income groups who do not have access to a medical card are more likely not to use services due to an inability to pay.
- People who are poor and excluded get sick more often and die younger than people who are better off.
- Nearly one in ten Irish children live in consistent poverty, while one in four live in relative poverty. Poverty damages children's health and can have detrimental, lifelong effects.
- Travellers live, on average, 11 years less than settled people. The number of Traveller families living on the road is the same as it was in the 1960s.
- Children born in less well off areas are more likely to die before the age of one year than those born in more advantaged areas.

Current situation

A recent Comhairle report states that:

'While the precise value of a medical card depends on the circumstances of the holder, it is clearly the case that it is of particular importance to families with small children.... It has been clear for some time that the loss of a medical card is a significant factor in the choices people make about moving from social welfare to employment or to back to education and employment schemes.'

They go on to say that:

'New income limits, particularly for those living with their families, mean that people whose only income is a social welfare payment may not qualify for a medical card. This was not the case in the past and social welfare payments were never designed to cover medical costs. People on low incomes, including people entirely dependent on social welfare, may now experience problems getting or retaining a medical card. As well as causing financial problems for these families, the absence of a medical card causes anxiety and may result in mothers in particular neglecting their own health problems in order to ensure that their children get any necessary medical care.'

The relationship between low income and ill-health is outlined in detail in *Health in Ireland: An Unequal State 2004*. It shows that people on low incomes are much more likely to become ill and to die younger than people on higher incomes.

One Family calls for a policy which ensures that all children regardless of income can access medical care and for traps that encourage solo parents to remain on social welfare in order to ensure retention of the medical card be removed. One Family believes that these two aims are best supported by giving all children up to the age of 18, access to a medical card.

Recommendations:

- Provide medical card to all children up to age 18, initially targeting one-parent families and other low-income families (DH&C).
- Ensure that medical cards are provided to solo parents on low incomes, up to the level of the minimum wage, to all those on social welfare and those returning to education, training and employment (DH&C).

6. Support for quality care in pregnancy, maternity and family health services

Current policy

The Government has established the Crisis Pregnancy Agency (CPA) as a coordinating body to implement a strategy to address the issue of crisis pregnancy in Ireland through:

- a) a reduction in the number of crisis pregnancies by the provision of education, advice and contraceptive services;
- b) a reduction in the number of women with crisis pregnancies who opt for abortion by offering services and supports which make other options more attractive; and
- c) the provision of counselling and medical services after crisis pregnancy.

Supporting data

The Crisis Pregnancy Agency Statistical Report 2005 concluded that:

'Statistics on abortion indicate that there has been a substantial increase in the number of women with addresses in the Republic of Ireland having abortions in UK clinics over the last three decades. The greatest number of abortions occurs to those in the 20 to 24 year-old age group. Abortion is more likely to be an outcome of pregnancy for those under twenty years of age, for those within the 20-24 year-old age range and for over 40s than for women between the ages of 25 and 39. However, Ireland's abortion rate is low by international standards.'

Current situation

There is evidence to indicate that there is a general dearth in public maternity and pregnancy services. Given the increase in birth rates and the continued prevalence of crisis pregnancy, there is a continued need for additional supports for pregnant women and expectant parents.

As a service working with solo parents for over thirty years at all stages in the life cycle of the family, One Family is acutely aware of the barriers and poverty risk created by the rising costs of healthcare and social services. There is a wealth of information and empirical evidence to show that parents on low incomes experience a range of health problems associated with low income. In prioritising their children's healthcare needs on low income, solo parents can often neglect their own health as shown in the experience of the delivery of our women's health programme to female solo parents.

Recommendations:

We reiterate the recommendations made in our 2005 Budget submission to Government in this area:

- Ensure access to free, confidential non-directive counselling services for all women experiencing crisis pregnancy (DH&C).
- Provide specialist accommodation for pregnant women and women experiencing crisis pregnancies at risk of homelessness due to pregnancy in conjunction with supportive specialist agencies (DH&C, DELG).
- Compile a comprehensive inter-departmental information pack for expectant parents on the full range of benefits, services and legislative provision regarding pregnancy, maternity and family services (DSFA, DETE, DH&C).

- Provide culturally appropriate and needs-based pregnancy services for ethnic minority women (DH&C).
- Carry out an increased information campaign on the guidelines regarding the retention of medical cards in employment (DH&C).
- Carry out research on the impact of such services (DH&C).

7. Support one-parent families and other low-income families in meeting their accommodation needs.

Current policy

The NAPS Action Plan 2003–2005 set the following target in relation to housing – *to deliver an appropriate mix of social and affordable housing measures which meets the needs of different types of households.*

Supporting data

The EU-SILC survey 2003 shows that at-risk-of poverty increases for those in rent or rent-free accommodation, at 42 per cent, compared with 18 per cent of those living in their own home. The ESRI report on ‘*Trends in Welfare for Vulnerable Groups, Ireland 1994-2001*’, found that 65 per cent of solo parent headed households are tenants/subtenants. Policies aimed at improving tenant housing arrangements and at supporting house purchase and alternative housing arrangements are therefore likely to have a particularly positive impact on solo parents.

It has been estimated by the Combat Poverty Agency (CPA, 2005) that 75 per cent of housing lists nationally are made up of solo parents. This arises because of the way that points are allocated (two-thirds of solo parents have only one child) and the preponderance of three-bedroom houses where two-parent families receive greater priority in the allocation of such houses. The

National Economic and Social Forum (NESF 2001) has examined this issue and recommended that solo parents' particular accommodation needs should be considered in the design, development and allocation of a range of housing types.

Current situation

One-parent families experience a higher risk of insecurity of housing tenure due to a general lack of protection for tenants in the private rented sector, lack of affordable longer-term housing options and lack of availability of Local Authority housing as well as a legacy of inappropriate local authority housing build for smaller families.

For solo parents living in private rented accommodation with their children, reliant on Rent Supplement, the entire amount of any maintenance paid by the other parent is assessed against the Rent Supplement. This means that the payment of maintenance does not help alleviate the poverty of the family. This situation is particularly inequitable given the predominance of one-parent families on Local Authority waiting lists, living in the precarious private rented sector.

Measures to address these issues in the past have failed to provide equality of access to the full range of housing tenures and mobility among tenures for one-parent families.

To address this situation, One Family believes that investment and commitment needs to be given to equalising the experience of family types across the housing tenures and to improving mobility between tenures for families of all sizes and income levels.

Recommendations:

- Ensure that the needs of one-parent families are taken into account in planning, designing and allocating housing support (DELG).
- Increase reasonable rent limits for rent supplement recipients (DELG).
- Disregard childcare costs against the assessment for rent supplement for solo parents in receipt of the one-parent family payment for 12 months or more accessing employment/training who are not in receipt of childcare allowances) (DSFA).
- All childcare allowances provided on participation in employment and training programmes to be disregarded against the assessment for Rent Supplement (DETE).

8. Coordination of service provision and comprehensive availability of information to ensure that one-parent families are aware of the financial and other supports available to them and can access the advice and support they require.

Current policy

The NAPS Action Plan 2003–2005 has as a key target in urban areas to:

‘Ensure that the basic needs of all families, especially young parents, lone parents, older people, and ethnic minorities are met through enhanced and better co-ordinated State support services.’

Current situation

A number of reports have indicated that lack of information is a key barrier to those in poverty, including one-parent families, in accessing available financial and other supports, including FIS. Such reports have also recommended that significant improvements in service provision are only possible if the provision of such services is co-ordinated across all the state service providers.

Recommendations:

- Review the provision of information on the full range of income and service supports provided to welfare dependent families and social welfare recipients (DSFA).
- Compile a comprehensive inter-departmental information pack for expectant parents on the full range of benefits, services and legislative provision regarding pregnancy, maternity and family services (DSFA/DETE/DH&C).
- All information for one-parent families to be equality and literacy-proofed regarding accessibility of the content and format (All Departments).
- Carry out an inter-departmental review of the information and access barriers to the full range of education, training and active labour



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market programmes including the calculation of cash and non-cash
benefit effects for all families (DSFA/DETE/DES).

- Carry out an information campaign on the guidelines regarding the retention of medical cards in employment (DH&C/DSFA).
 - Ensure that information for one-parent families on eligibility for FIS is widely available and automatically provided (DSFA/DETE).
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Summary of Recommendations in the Pre-Budget Submission

<p>1. Reduce Income poverty</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the One Parent Family Payment by €18.50 per week (DSFA). • Significantly increase the earnings disregard to reflect increases in wage rates and costs that have occurred since 1997, and to a level that does not discourage solo parents from participating in the labour market or progressing to better paid and more skilled employment. This disregard should also take into account family size (DSFA). • Review and take action to remove continuing poverty traps experienced by solo parents in making the transition from social welfare dependency to the labour market, particularly in relation to the income disregard, rent supplement and childcare costs (DSFA/DETE). • Reform means test to ensure uniformity of treatment of income and other assets (DSFA/DETE/DH&C). • Ensure that information for one-parent families on eligibility for FIS is widely available and automatically provided (DSFA/DETE).
<p>2. Support for Solo Parents to Access Education, Training and Employment as a way out of Poverty and Social Exclusion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a comprehensive and integrated range of supports to encourage solo parents to combine caring, enhancement of educational qualifications and skills, as well as access to part-time or full-time employment as part of a coordinated strategy to raise one parent and other low-income families out of poverty (DSFA/DETE). • Set such supports at a level that makes it attractive and viable for those involved to return to work and/or progress to full-time employment (DSFA/DETE). • Ensure that a comprehensive range of part and full-time education and training and related options are in place for solo parents wishing to return to, or progress

in, the labour market, including support for childcare costs based on local need (DETE).

- Review eligibility requirements, financial compensation, secondary benefit retention, and childcare provision in order to remove any particular barriers experienced by one-parent families in progressing on to more skills-based education and training programmes (DETE).
- Provide targeted, subsidised places for day-care for children of one-parent families and other low-income families wishing to participate/progress onto full-time employment (DH&C/DETE/DJELR/DE&S).
- Extend higher and further education grants to provide access to students on part-time courses, subject to satisfying other conditions of eligibility (DE&S).
- Ensure adequate provision of information to solo parents on their options (All departments).
- Ensure that all available income supports recognise that part-time working is the only viable option for many solo parents due to childcare and other family responsibilities (for example, requirement to work 19 hours to be eligible for FIS) (DSFA/DETE).

3. Ensure that Children in one parent families and in low-income families are removed from poverty and can access quality early childhood development and education and ongoing education

- Increase child benefit in line with the government's commitment in Sustaining Progress. This should also provide for weekly Child Benefit payments. Child Benefit should also be available to all children regardless of nationality or residency status (DSFA).
- Target additional increases in child income supports to those living in poverty with graduated withdrawal as income increases, using Child Dependent Allowances (CDAs) and Family Income Supplement (FIS) in an integrated and employment-neutral manner. Such targeted payments should be increased significantly to reflect the low base that they have been at for many years (DSFA/DETE).

- Provide subsidised early childhood development and education places, over time to all pre-school children. In implementing these provisions initially target one-parent families and other low-income families in disadvantaged areas (DE&S).
- Expand provision of after school supports particularly for one- parent families and for other low-income families (DE&S/DJELR).
- Increase the Back to School clothing and footwear allowance to more accurately reflect the costs of school attendance by low-income families. Amounts of €150 for primary school pupils and €230 for secondary school pupils (DSFA).
- Introduce a once off grant for one- parent families for children transferring from primary to secondary school at€400 per child (DSFA).
- Provide supports for young parents remain in education through the provision of a stay in school payment and other supports for those in school, not subject to any delay in qualifying for the payment (DE&S).

4. Support for children in One Parent Families and in other low income families to access health services

- Provide medical card to all children up to age 18, initially targeting one- parent families and other low-income families (DH&C).
- Ensure that medical cards are provided to solo parents on low incomes, up to the level of the minimum wage, to all those social welfare and those returning to education, training and employment (DH&C).

5. Support for quality care in pregnancy, maternity and family health services

- Ensure access to free, confidential non-directive counselling services for all women experiencing crisis pregnancy (DH&C).
- Provide specialist accommodation for pregnant women and women experiencing crisis pregnancies at risk of homelessness due to pregnancy in conjunction with supportive specialist agencies (DH&C/DELG).
- Compile of a comprehensive inter-departmental information pack for expectant parents on the full range of benefits, services and legislative provision regarding pregnancy, maternity and family services (DSFA/DETE/DH&C).

- Provide culturally appropriate and needs-based pregnancy services for ethnic minority women (DH&C).
- Carry out an increased information campaign on the guidelines regarding the retention of medical cards in employment (DH&C).
- Carry out research on the impact of such services (DH&C).

6. Support One-Parent Families and other low-income families in meeting their accommodation needs.

- Ensure that the needs of one-parent families are taken into account in planning, designing and allocating housing support (DELG).
- Increase reasonable rent limits for rent supplement recipients (DELG).
- Disregard childcare costs against the assessment for rent supplement for solo parents in receipt of the one-parent family payment for 12 months or more accessing employment/training who are not in receipt of childcare allowances) (DSFA).
- All childcare allowances provided on participation in employment and training programmes to be disregarded against the assessment for Rent Supplement (DETE).

7. Coordination of service provision and comprehensive availability of information to ensure that one-parent families are aware of the financial and other supports available to them and can access the advice and support they require.

- Review the provision of information on the full range of income and service supports provided to welfare dependent families and social welfare recipients (DSFA).
- Compile a comprehensive inter-departmental information pack for expectant parents on the full range of benefits, services and legislative provision regarding pregnancy, maternity and family services (DSFA/DETE/DH&C).

- All information for one-parent families to be equality and literacy-proofed regarding accessibility of the content and format (All Departments).
- Carry out an Inter-departmental review of the information and access barriers to the full range of education, training and active labour market programmes including the calculation of cash and non-cash benefit effects for all families (DSFA/DETE/DE&S).
- Carry out an information campaign on the guidelines regarding the retention of medical cards in employment (DH&C/DSFA).
- Ensure that information for one-parent families on eligibility for FIS is widely available and automatically provided (DSFA/DETE).

ENDS

**This submission is made on behalf of One Family –
Voice/Support/Action for One Parent Families**

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