



Strategy for Strengthening Families Submission to Department of Social and Family Affairs September 2004

Background

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.

Introduction

One Family welcomes the opportunity to make a submission in the process of development of a strategy for strengthening families in this 10th anniversary year of the UN International Year of the Family. On this occasion One Family will focus the submission on the issues to be considered and recommendations regarding provision within the strategy for one-parent families. However, the submission is drafted within the overall context of respecting the realities of family life and supporting steps to embrace diversity in family life in Ireland.

This submission will focus firstly on the demographic and socio-economic profile of one-parent families in Ireland. An analysis will then be made of the progress of implementation of recommendations within the final report of the Commission on the Family “Strengthening Families for Life” (1998). Finally the submission will propose objectives and specific actions for inclusion in the strategy based on progressing the implementation of the Commission’s recommendations and framed within One Family’s policy areas of concern in the period 2004-2006:

1. Working for a constitution which affords equal rights to all families
2. Recognising the realities of the diversity of family life in Ireland
3. Ensuring equality of access and opportunity in education for one-parent families



4. Working for a positive work life balance for one-parent families
5. Striving for equality for one-parent families in all housing tenures
6. Championing quality childcare for children in one-parent families
7. Campaigning for access to an adequate income for all one-parent families
8. Working for equitable services in all pregnancies

1. Shaping the strategy – one-parent families in Ireland

1.1 Census 2002 – one-parent families on the increase

In total in 2002 there were close to 153,900 one-parent families in Ireland. Between 1996 and 2002 the number of households containing a solo parent with children increased from 105,400 to 131,200, an increase of 25,800 households (24.5%). 85% of those families were headed by females, 15% by males. Regarding the route into forming a one-parent family, 40% were headed by widowed persons, 32% by separated or divorced persons and 23.9% were headed by a single (never married) parent.

Of a total of 3,917,203 people in the state on census day 2002, 363,814 lived in households with a solo mother/father and children of any age and 80,624 lived in households with a solo mother/father and children of any age and other persons (eg; family of origin of parent) totalling 444,438 persons in the state in total living in one parent families, over 11% of the total population.

There were a total of 1,287,958 private households enumerated in the census, 153,900 of which included a lone parent with children of any age and a lone parent with children of any age and other persons. This represents almost 12% of all households in the state.

In relation to the extra-marital birth rate, the 2002 figure of 18,815 births represents an increase of 9,604 in the 10-year period since 1992 and a 104% increase on the 1992 figure. In 1992 the average age of mothers giving birth outside marriage was 23.9, whereas in 2002 the average age was 26.1, indicating an increasing age profile of mothers giving birth outside marriage and following an increasing age patterns since 1980 when the average age was 22.2.

Thus, families are changing in Ireland, particularly in relation to structure and size. In particular the number of one-parent families has increased significantly on the previous census and one-parent families now account for 12% of households in the state and are the family type within which over 11% of the population live. However, One Family is concerned that due to a non-inclusive data collection structure such as that used in the census enumeration, the numbers of one-parent families captured significantly under represents the reality. As a consequence, the data presented to Government agencies, departments, policy makers and service providers often falls significantly short and results in provision for one-parent families which falls



short of the scale of provision needed. As a result, One Family recommends that the Strategy for Strengthening Families propose revisions to the data collection methodologies used to estimate population trends and needs which is cognisant of the realities of family life. For example, much effort needs to be made to ensure that multiple family households are captured in surveys such as the census and that the interrelationships of household members are explored and enumerated in shaping provision for families.

1.2 Social welfare payments to one-parent families

In 2002, there were 79,195 recipients of one-parent family payment, an increase of 2.7% on 2001. 97.5% of recipients were female and 2.55% were male.

Number of recipients of One Parent Family Payment by status of parent and number of qualified children, 2002 (Source: DSFA)

Type of recipient	Unmarried parent, separated parent, prisoners spouse	Widowed person	Total
With 1 child	47,801	603	48,404
With 2 children	19,000	293	19,293
With 3 children	7,202	145	7,347
With 4 children	2,673	67	2,740
With 5 children	846	34	880
With 6 or more children	388	20	408
Total recipients	78,030	1,165	79,195
Total number of children	124,857	2,176	127,033

From the table above, OPFP was claimed in respect of 127,033 qualified children (under 18/22 if in full-time education) by 79,195 parents, 78,030 of whom were unmarried, separated or the spouse of a prisoners while 1,165 were a widowed person.

As a crude figure of the actual number of one-parent families, using the census figure and the figure from DSFA indicating receipt levels of One-Parent Family Payment in 2002, the 79,195 recipients represent over 50% of all solo parents enumerated in the census. As the OPFP is a means tested payment this leads us to note that over 50% of one-parent families live on low incomes and as such are in receipt of state income support.

1.3 Experience and risk of poverty among solo parent headed households *Consistent poverty rates (% of persons experiencing consistent poverty by age, household type or by labour force status) (Source: ESRI: Monitoring Poverty Trends)*

Category	1998 %	2000 %	2001 %
Overall	8.2	6.2	5.2
Solo parents	30.9	23.0	23.7



At risk of poverty rates (% of persons below 60% of median income by age, household type or by labour force status)

Category	1998 %	2000 %	2001%
Overall	19.8	20.9	21.9
Solo parents	44.9	46.5	42.9

As seen from the tables above, almost 24% of one-parent families in the state experience consistent poverty in comparison with 5% of the overall population. This disproportionate experience of poverty among solo parent headed households indicates the higher incidence of poverty among one-parent families than the general or overall population and points to the need for targeted initiatives to both identify and ameliorate the barriers to full social inclusion and equal opportunities for participation for one-parent families.

2. Strengthening families for life – progress to date

In this section One Family will concentrate on the recommendations of the commission in relation to the four core themes discussed:

1. “Building strengths in families”
2. “Supporting families in carrying out their functions – the caring and nurturing of children”
3. “Promoting continuity and stability in family life”
4. “Protecting and enhancing the position of children and vulnerable dependent family members”

In commenting on the recommendations of the Commission, One Family will focus on the ethos of the report, that it “concentrated on the welfare of children and vulnerable families and how public policy can best strengthen and support families in carrying out their important functions”. Given the context presented in the preceding section of this submission it is clear that one-parent families are disproportionately represented within those families considered as vulnerable. One Family would consider family policy in the main to be framed around a definition or vision of the family as based in marriage and structured around a two-parent relationship. This is particularly shaped by the constitutional protection afforded only to those families based on marriage. Without legislative and constitutional change which embraces the widest spectrum of family types and structures, provision for families will often under serve the needs of all families as it will have been shaped without reference to all types of families and their situations and needs.

2.1 “Building strengths in families”

This section of the report had as its stated desired outcome – “the well-being of children and families who are managing in difficult circumstances”, making specific reference to those families headed by someone parenting alone.



Within the recommendations, One Family particularly welcomes those focusing on practical and supportive services for families to allow for familial autonomy; including the provision of one-stop shops and customised local services to families. In this regard One Family particularly recommends the full implementation of the recommendations to transform the social welfare local office structure to provide for a one-stop shop, which would increase information services covering all relevant services, including community services in the local area. This would allow for the provision of a customised approach to people's needs for information and support. On this note One Family particularly welcomes the establishment of the Family Support Agency providing a framework for the delivering of supportive services for families locally through the family resource centres and the commissioning of research into the realities and needs of families.

Although the work of the Agency will (from reference to its Strategic Plan) improve the provision and standardisation of services supporting families in local areas and the information available to develop family policy and services, it is imperative that an approach to providing increased provision on all family services be taken. This approach should also be coordinated and multi-disciplinary and reflect the multiplicity of the aspects of family life. In particular One Family would call for the full implementation of recommendations regarding provision of information on local services through the health services, regarding provision of public health nursing and GP services and the recommended review of Community Welfare Services informed by the need for integrated delivery of services for families.

2.2 "Supporting families in carrying out their functions – the caring and nurturing of children"

The Commission states as its desired outcome in this section that "children receive the best care possible. Parents are affirmed by the state and wider community as the primary carers and educators of their children".

One Family is supportive of this desire to allow for family autonomy and would recommend this regardless of family structure or circumstance. A Strategy for Strengthening Families which would achieve this outcome would aim to provide services which while correcting or removing difficulties for families would do so in the spirit of fostering and enabling family autonomy. This Strategy would support the view that all family types are valid and that one-parent families are positive structures in which children's development can be facilitated.

One Family is concerned that particular strategies and actions be implemented to focus on the areas identified in the report, of:

- Parental support & enablement
- Income adequacy
- Recognising the value of care work and the cost of childcare



Using the three focus areas above in the context of proofing provision in respect of one-parent families will go some way in furthering equality for one-parent families in access to services and participation in the fields of family and work.

2.2.1 Parental support and enablement

One Family is particularly concerned with the lack of progress in implementation of recommendations in relation to solo parents in chapter 7 of the report. Although One Family appreciates that restricted or limited resources may have been of issue in implementing some of the proposed changes, others require a shift in the ideology of provision for one-parent families which has not occurred. A case in point is the lack of change in relation to the practice of registration of births outside marriage from registry offices only to hospital or registry office, wherever parents choose. This small change would be of massive benefit to parents of children born within an extra-marital relationship, over 30% of current births (CSO) and as the report states “could facilitate the promotion of joint parenting and joint responsibility for the care and nurturing of children”. One Family recommends that this issue be addressed as a top priority in equalising the administrative burden for all parents.

One Family also strongly encourages the recommendation for research into solo parenthood as recommended in the report. Although we warmly welcome the work of the NESF in 2001, while this report focussed primarily on the social inclusion needs for one-parents families at greatest risk of social exclusion there is a pressing need for solo parenthood and one-parent families to remain on the agenda.

One Family calls for the full implementation of the recommendation by the Commission for comprehensive services on entitlements and supports in the event of widowhood, although One Family would like to extend this to all one-parent families. This could easily be integrated into the previous work of organisations such as One Family working with Comhairle and should be produced and reviewed regularly.

One Family also agrees with the Commission that voluntary and community sector organisations are an important component of family support and would call for one-parent family interest groups to be funded to provide mainstream supports to family support services nationwide.

One Family agrees with the Commission that a national coordinating group on parenting skills programmes be established and that all parents have access to parenting supports. One Family increasingly receives requests from parents instructed to undertake parenting programmes by the courts in family and child welfare cases. However, there is a lack of free and nationwide provision of such programmes to parents. The model of parenting skills programmes



should be based on the premise of positive parenting recognising the need for additional supports and tailored programme elements for solo parents.

One Family also welcomes the expansion of the Family Mediation Service and would welcome the implementation of the Commission's recommendation to provide specialised parenting education programmes for separating families.

One Family welcomes the expansion of the Teen Parents Support Initiative to cover a wider geographical area. However, as noted by the Commission, there is a remaining need for a comprehensive policy for teenage parents, particularly those in one-parent families. Given recent changes to the availability of Crèche Supplement and childcare allowances for those participating in VEC funded education programmes there is a particular need to proof proposed scheme alterations in light of their potential effects on one-parent families. The Strategy should also focus on preventative measures in relation to teenage pregnancy and this would include continued funding for and cooperation with the Crisis Pregnancy Agency strategy.

2.2.2 Income Adequacy

As noted earlier, a significant proportion of one-parent families live on low incomes either through state income support or maintenance arrangements. Any strategy which will seek to strengthen families must seek to provide for a level of income adequacy which will provide for family autonomy. Section three of this submission will include specific recommendations in relation to income adequacy which One Family are proposing in advance of Budget 2005 while this section will focus on commentary surrounding the recommendations of the Commission.

One Family agrees strongly with the Commission that "income support for lone parent families is and must continue to be an essential priority for state policy in relation to families". However, since the publication of the report, there have been no significant improvements in income support levels and schemes for one-parent families and Budget 2004 even saw the "rolling back" of previously progressive measures to provide for income adequacy through the removal of half-rate OPFP for those transitioning into work among other changes.

Although One Family welcomes the range of initiatives to "make work pay" for one-parent families and the supports to improve income adequacy, such as continued investment in child benefit; specific increases to payment levels and payment reduction thresholds need to be introduced as a priority if further poverty for one-parent families is to be avoided. Specific recommendations are made in section three.

Supports within the strategy should incorporate increased payment levels and recognise the complexity of the relationship between earned and payment



income for those looking to transition from welfare to work. The strategy should also integrate information, guidance and support needs for parents.

2.2.3 Recognising the value of care work and the cost of childcare

Again, specific recommendations are made in section three. One Family welcomes the expansion of family focussed policies such as the parental leave provisions but calls for improvements to the scheme and the introduction of a parental leave benefit to allow access to paid periods of family leave for low income and solo income families. One Family also calls for the implementation of the Commission's recommendation that mortgage holidays and extended repayment periods be negotiated for those wishing to take leave periods to care for family.

One Family also recommends the implementation of the Commission's recommendation to provide employee assistance programmes to provide information, advice and support to working parents to assist with achieving work life balance.

The gap in policy in support for the care of pre-school age children must be addressed within the context of the Strategy, along the recommendations of the Partnership 2000 Expert Working Group on Childcare and the further development and implementation of the National Childcare Strategy.

One Family would welcome further exploration of the implications of the suggested Early Years Opportunities Subsidy for three year olds to facilitate participate in early childhood services.

One Family agrees with the recommendation to review tax arrangements to provide most for families when caring responsibilities are most demanding.

2.3 "Promoting continuity and stability in family life"

This section of the Report states as its desired outcome: "continuity and stability in family relationships are recognised as having a major value for individual well-being and social stability as far as children are concerned".

However, One Family does not agree that marriage should be supported in public policy although understands that this may be necessitated by the parameters of the Constitution. One Family would consider one-parent families a valid family form and would see the support of one family type over another contrary to the pursuit of equality of experience for children in their development.

One Family agrees that greater information to unmarried parents and those not engaged in joint parenting should be available in relation to relationships, parenting rights and responsibilities.



One Family would not consider the existence of the Constitutional preference for marriage as a barrier to provide for equality of policy and service for families of diverse types and welcomes any initiatives which would broaden the delivery of support services to non-marital families. This would include the embracing of family diversity in the strategic plan of the Family Support Agency.

One Family would encourage the implementation of all recommendations in relation to the provision of counselling and support services to families and relationships under stress, such as the expansion of the Family Mediation Service and would encourage that this be done with reference to the realities of family life and not focus solely on provision to families based on marriage.

2.4 “Protecting and enhancing the position of children and vulnerable family members”

The desired outcome of this section of the report is that “children are recognised as individuals within a family and in the wider community with rights to adequate support, care and promotion of their well-being”.

As such the development of the strategy should be cognisant of the rights of children and consider provisions in relation to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as good practice. The strategy would strive to provide for children’s needs to have an optimal experience of childhood and include investment in services for children in need.

In this regard One Family welcomes the ongoing review of Family Support Services and encourages the development of the strategy in conjunction with the proposed changes in family support for children and vulnerable family members.

One Family also recommends that greater interdepartmental cooperation be fostered to develop and implement services to allow for a comprehensive system of provision for families.

One Family welcomes continued work on the development and implementation of the National Childcare Strategy and the preparatory work on the Longitudinal Study of Children and welcomes the opportunity to link with both. One Family recommends that the development of the Strategy integrate with both processes as the lives of children are catered for by a multiplicity of structures and processes.

3. Achieving equality and social inclusion for all one-parent families in Ireland – One Family’s recommendations

This section of the submission mirrors One Family’s recommendations in advance of Budget 2005 and is structured to concentrate on strategies to operationalise the aims of the *National Action Plan Against Poverty and*



Social Inclusion 2003-2005 (NAP/Incl) in 2005 with regards to equality of access, opportunity and outcome for one-parent families.

Taking the key objective of NAP/Incl, the aim of these recommendations is “...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.

3.1 Campaigning for access to an adequate income for all one-parent families

Summary of recommendations:

Heading/policy aim	Recommendations and lead Department
Child Income Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increase Child Benefit and Child Dependent Allowances by 1/3 amount needed to meet the NAP/Incl. target in 2007 (DSFA) ▪ Revise Child Benefit payment system to introduce weekly payments to facilitate budgeting on a weekly basis by welfare dependent families. (DSFA) ▪ Review provision of social protection to non-Irish families (DSFA)
Income Adequacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Disregarding position of maintenance to solo parents in calculation of Rent Supplement (DSFA) ▪ Review and increase earnings disregard for OPFP recipients in employment (DSFA) ▪ Introduce a tapered system of income disregards for OPFP recipients in employment by family size (DSFA) ▪ Rescind decision to remove half-rate OPFP (Budget 2004) in context of a review of access to paid employment and independent means for solo parents (DSFA)

3.1.1 Income adequacy

One Family policy objective: *Campaigning for access to an adequate income for all one-parent families*

NAP/Incl policy task:

“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”.

Context

Current data shows that households headed by a solo parent are disproportionately living in consistent poverty and at risk of poverty in comparison with the overall rates¹. In 2002, although consistent poverty fell

¹ ESRI (2003) Monitoring Poverty Trends



for households of all compositions those households headed by a solo parent had the highest levels, at 24%. In 2001 43% of solo parent headed households were at risk of living in poverty.

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.

3.1.2 Child income support:

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

“Child Benefit and Child Dependent Allowances to be set at 33%-35% of the minimum adult Social Welfare Payment rate by 2007.”

One Family has welcomed successive increases in Child Benefit rates and the commitment to increasing Child Benefit as a means to reduce child poverty rates. However, One Family notes the successive lack of increases in Child Dependent Allowances as inequitable to families dependent on social welfare payments for income, such as many one-parent families. Failure to increase Child Dependent Allowances again in Budget 2004 has represented a decrease in the income received for children of welfare dependent families, compacted by a lack of comparable increases in supplementary allowances and schemes. One Family also notes the lack of age-indexing of social welfare payments despite evidence to show increasing costs of child rearing with increases in age of the child.

3.1.3 Income Adequacy

NAP/Incl target re income adequacy and security:

“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”.

The basic payment for a solo parent in receipt of One Parent Family Payment is €134.80 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 to the disregard for OPFP recipients from earned income and the treatment of additional income against rent supplement.

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.

Since the introduction of the One Parent Family Payment, 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 One Parent Family Payment (OPFP). This has led from a situation whereby solo parents were actively facilitated to take up employment to one whereby work may 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.

Welfare dependent families are 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.

3.2. Equalising access to education and training for all families

Summary of recommendations

Heading/policy aim	Recommendations and lead Department
Meeting the costs of education for parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Introduce stay in school payment (DSFA) ▪ Inter-departmental review of the treatment of income and interaction of income and allowances on the incomes of families of participants in ALMPs and training and education/programmes towards universal and standardised treatment of cash and non-cash benefits.(DSFA, DETE, DES) ▪ Rescind decision (Budget 2004) to increase qualifying period for BTEA (DSFA)
Equalising access to programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Any time delay in processing a claim for OPFP be credited to the recipient in qualifying for eligibility of access to the full range of employment, educational and training programmes (DSFA, DES and DETE) ▪ Identification of custodial lone parents within the family home as independent households for grant applications, regardless of age (DES/DELG) ▪ Expansion of Higher Education Grant scheme to part-time education (DES/DELG)
Removing barriers to participation for parents of younger children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Introduction of standard training childcare allowance to replace Youthreach and VTOS/FAS allowances subject to localised budgets (DSFA/DES/DETE) ▪ Disregard of childcare allowances on education and training programmes in respect of rent supplement and DSFA payments (DSFA,DETE and DES)

One Family Policy position: Ensuring equality of access and opportunity in education for one-parent families

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”.

Context:

Solo parents 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 there needs to be a recognition of the barriers preventing solo parents from continuing or returning to education. Although there remain structural barriers as to types of education and types of provision suitable to the needs of single 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 or provisions for access to affordable quality childcare.

3.3. Towards equality of participation in employment

Summary of recommendations

Heading/policy aim	Recommendations and lead Department
Equalising access to labour market programmes and participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Standardisation of access and financial reward of participating in full range of programmes to equalise access and opportunity (DSFA in conjunction with DES and DETE) ▪ Any time delay in processing a claim for OPFP be credited to the recipient in qualifying for eligibility of access to the full range of employment, educational and training programmes (DSFA and DETE) ▪ Inter-departmental review of the treatment of income and interaction of income and allowances on the incomes of families of participants in ALMPs and training and education/programmes towards universal and standardised treatment of cash and non-cash benefits. (DSFA, DETE, DES)
Making work pay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review and increase of OPFP earnings disregard (DSFA) ▪ Introduce a tapered system of income disregards for OPFP recipients in employment by family size (DSFA)
Towards family friendly work practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Introduction of specific incentives to employers to recruit part-time employees to redress lack of equality of access to employment for parents (DETE, DSFA) ▪ Increased information campaign on family friendly work practices (DETE and DSFA)
Removing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Disregard childcare costs against the assessment for rent supplement

barriers to labour market participation for parents of young children and expectant parents	<p>for solo parents in receipt of OPFP for 12 months or more accessing employment/training who are not in receipt of childcare allowances. (DSFA)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All childcare allowances provided on participation in employment and training programmes be disregarded against the assessment for rent supplement. (DSFA) ▪ Compilation 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, DoHC)
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One Family policy objective: Working for a positive work life balance for one-parent families

NAP/Incl. objective:

“To increase labour market participation levels and job progression rates among women and marginalised and excluded groups”.

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.”

NAP/Incl Actions:

- “Making work pay”
- “Fostering family-friendly employment practices and supporting women returners”.

Context:

Solo parents continue to experience exclusion from full participation in the labour market and access to opportunities to improve and enhance employability and progression due to a number of factors. These are principally related to negative cash and non-cash benefit effects associated with the replacement rate of earned income to social welfare income, the lack of availability of affordable childcare and childcare allowances and the lack of availability of family friendly work arrangements suited to the needs of one-parent families.

3. 4. Towards quality care in pregnancy, maternity and family health care services

Summary of recommendations

Heading/policy aim	Recommendations and lead Department
Providing access to support and information in crisis pregnancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensuring access to free, confidential non-directive counselling services for all women, men and couples experiencing crisis pregnancy.(DoHC) ▪ Provision of specialist accommodation for pregnant women

	and women experiencing crisis pregnancies at risk of homelessness due to pregnancy in conjunction with supportive specialist agencies. (DoHC, DELG)
Providing access to information and support for expectant parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Compilation 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, DoHC) ▪ Provision of culturally appropriate and needs-based pregnancy services for ethnic minority women (DoHC)
Access to healthcare for all	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Commitment to the introduction of a medical card for all children on a phased basis (DoH) ▪ Review and increase medical card income guidelines (DoH) ▪ An increased information campaign on the guidelines regarding the retention of medical cards in employment (DoH, DSFA)

One Family policy objective: *Working for equitable services in all pregnancies*

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, we are 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 single parent women.

3. 5. *Towards access to quality accommodation for all families*

Summary of recommendations

Heading/policy aim	Recommendations and lead Department
Improving equality of access and opportunity in all housing tenures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Local authority waiting lists to be used to determine build types in output, standardised across regions (DELG) ▪ Increased investment in social housing and collaborations between providers of housing and supportive services (DELG) ▪ Protection of tenants' rights in private rented sector. Protection under law for rent allowance recipients from discrimination on basis of SWA receipt. (DSFA, DoF) ▪ Introduction of initiatives to provide equal access to affordable housing for low and single income families. (DELG, DoF)
Providing access to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provision of specialist accommodation for pregnant women and

support for single parents at risk of/experiencing homelessness	<p>women experiencing crisis pregnancies at risk of homelessness due to pregnancy in conjunction with supportive specialist agencies. (DoHC, DELG)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provision of support services in collaboration with specialist agencies/services working with specific vulnerable and socially excluded groups to provide additional supports to those transitioning from/at risk of homelessness. (DELG, DoH) ▪ Rescind decision to disallow access to Rent supplement to those not renting for six months (Budget 2004) (DSFA)
Equalising access and opportunities for private rented tenants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increase reasonable rent limits for rent supplement recipients (DSFA) ▪ Disregard childcare costs against the assessment for rent supplement for solo parents in receipt of OPFP 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 be disregarded against the assessment for rent supplement. (DSFA, DETE, DES)

One Family policy objective: *Striving for equality for one-parent families in all housing tenures*

One-parent families experience a higher risk of insecurity of housing tenure due to 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 and a legacy of inappropriate local authority housing build for smaller families.

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 investment and commitment needs to be given to equalising the experience of family types across the housing tenures and improving mobility between tenures for families of all sizes and income levels.

3. 6. Providing quality childcare for children in one-parent families

Summary of recommendations

Heading/policy aim	Recommendations and lead Department
Providing for the childcare costs of families on low incomes	Rescind decision (Budget 2004) to cease operation of the Crèche Supplement payment (DSFA)

One Family policy objective: *Championing quality childcare for children in one-parent families*

Context from Estimates for 2004:

“As a result of state expenditure on crèche care and increased Child Benefit payments, the crèche supplement will be discontinued” (DSFA)

Crèche supplement was a Supplementary Welfare Allowance payment providing financial assistance for payment towards the cost of childcare. It was a discretionary payment and was intended to be paid in relation to emergency access to childcare only. It was not a standard/general payment for childcare.

Given the continued lack of availability of affordable childcare and cuts in 2003 to other childcare allowances for those in education, this change further compounds the difficulties faced by parents in accessing childcare. Rather than provide further financial allowances, these are effectively being eradicated without any replacement provision for access to childcare for low-income parents.

3.6. Improving equality of access and opportunity for all

Summary of recommendations

Heading/policy aim	Recommendations and lead Department
Improving the availability and accessibility of information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review of the provision of information on the full range of income and service supports provided to welfare dependent families and social welfare recipients. (DSFA) ▪ Compilation 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, DoHC) ▪ All information for families to be equality and literacy-proofed regarding accessibility of the content and format (All Departments)
Improving welfare to work information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 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 and DES) ▪ An increased information campaign on the guidelines regarding the retention of medical cards in employment (DoH, DSFA)

One Family notes and recommends the removal of information gaps in existence that prevent many solo parents from accessing the full range of opportunities and services developed to facilitate their full social inclusion.

ENDS



This submission is made on behalf of One Family – voice, support and action for one-parent families. Queries should be directed to Anne Bowen, Social Policy & Communications Officer, T: 01 662 9212 F: 01 662 9096 E: policy@onefamily.ie