

# INVEST IN SERVICES AND TARGETED INCOME SUPPORTS **BUDGET 2019**



**PRE-BUDGET  
SUBMISSION**  
**#EndChildPoverty**  
**#Budget2019**

# INVEST IN SERVICES AND TARGETED INCOME SUPPORTS

## BUDGET 2019

### Target Child Poverty

In 2016, the *Programme for Partnership Government* committed to developing budgetary policy proofing as a means of advancing equality, reducing poverty and strengthening economic and social rights for those living in Ireland.<sup>1</sup> ‘Poverty-proofing’ policy is a method to consistently identify the impact that policy proposals will have on ‘groups in poverty or at risk of falling into poverty’.<sup>2</sup> Nowhere is this more important than in relation to children in consistent poverty which, in Ireland, currently stands at 11.1 %, while 19.3% remain at risk of poverty.<sup>3</sup>

The *National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020* (BOBF) set a child poverty target to reduce the 2011 child poverty levels by at least two thirds, approximately 102,000 children, by 2020.<sup>4</sup> One-parent families have a consistent poverty rate of 24.6%, while 40.2% are at risk of poverty.<sup>5</sup> Census 2016 shows that there are 356,203 children living in one-parent families.<sup>6</sup>

Current activation measures, which do not attend to the actual financial needs of children or the real childcare, educational and work-family balance issues facing lone parents, will never succeed. They simply increase financial burdens on lone parents and expose their children to further poverty.

This is particularly so in the case of older children, between 12-18/22. Support for all dependent children from 0-18/22 must be of a minimum standard, and reliable, so that vulnerable families are protected.<sup>7</sup>

### Child Poverty - Our Recommendations

- 1 Raise the base rate of the Qualified Child Increase (QCI) from €31.80 to €35.00 per week for one-parent families most at risk of poverty and raise the QCI for children over the age of 12 to €37.80 per week, in recognition of the higher costs faced by families with older children.
- 2 Adjust income thresholds for the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance so that all family types, and those in receipt of the Working Family Payment, are eligible. Restore rates to 2011 levels so those over 12 years would receive €305, while those under 12 years would receive €200.
- 3 Invest €20 million to provide free school books for all primary school pupils.
- 4 Provide another €20 million for the provision of free school books for all secondary school pupils.

1 [https://www.merrionstreet.ie/MerrionStreet/en/ImageLibrary/Programme\\_for\\_Partnership\\_Government.pdf](https://www.merrionstreet.ie/MerrionStreet/en/ImageLibrary/Programme_for_Partnership_Government.pdf) p6

2 <http://www.socialinclusion.ie/documents/ReviewofPovertyProofingbyOSI.pdf>

3 CSO SILC At risk of poverty, Deprivation and Consistent poverty rates by year  
<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/silc/surveyonincomeandlivingconditions2016/>

4 [https://www.welfare.ie/en/downloads/WholeOfGovernmentApproachToTacklingChildPoverty\\_BOBF\\_distilled.pdf](https://www.welfare.ie/en/downloads/WholeOfGovernmentApproachToTacklingChildPoverty_BOBF_distilled.pdf)

5 SILC 2016: <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/silc/surveyonincomeandlivingconditions2016>

6 Census 2016 : <http://www.census.ie/>

7 [St. Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice, Preliminary Pre-Budget 2019 Submission, April 2018. https://www.budgeting.ie/download/pdf/minimum\\_needs\\_of\\_older\\_children\\_vpsj\\_submission.pdf](https://www.budgeting.ie/download/pdf/minimum_needs_of_older_children_vpsj_submission.pdf)

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### In-Work Supports – Make Work Pay

As the 2017 Indecon report found, and the prior 2016 Millar and Crosse evidence-based research had already identified, the reforms of Budget 2012 continue to restrict the economic life and hamper the progression of one-parent families. 53% of lone parents surveyed by Indecon reported being financially worse off since the reforms, while 63% in full-time employment were unable to afford three or more items on the deprivation list, at that time.<sup>8</sup> Consistent poverty rates for lone parent persist at a rate of 24.6%.<sup>9</sup>

As is clear from the outcome of these cuts, no progress will be made for vulnerable one-parent families, unless the realities of their lives are acknowledged and the supports they require are in place such as secure and adequate housing, 0-18/22 childcare and support, flexible all-level educational supports, and secure, flexible working contracts and conditions.

These supports are a pre-requisite to any activation for lone parents, who head 25.4% of all family units with children in Ireland.

More broadly, new and emergent family forms need also to be taken in to account. These include shared, blended and extended families, as well as one parent families. This will require a re-imagining of how we as a society support parents and care for all children.

### In-Work Supports - Our Recommendations

- 1 Increase earnings disregard to €161.40. In 2011, before the 2012 cuts were introduced, the earnings disregard equated to 16.9 hours of National Minimum Wage employment. A disregard of €161.40 would restore these hours and payment levels.
- 2 Lone parents who are in employment, whose children are aged between 7 and 14, should receive both Jobseeker's Transition Payment (JST) and Working Family Payment to make work pay.
- 3 Make 15 hours per week the threshold for the Working Family Payment, in recognition of the difficulties lone parents face in balancing caring and working responsibilities. The current threshold of 19 hours for this payment can be shared between two working adults in two-parent families, while one-parent families must reach this alone. It is obviously inequitable.
- 4 Provide adequate training for Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) Employment Services staff in their work with lone parents and their families. There is a clear need to enhance Employment Services staff's ability to engage effectively in a nuanced way with lone parents who are seeking meaningful pathways out of poverty.
- 5 Increase Community Employment Scheme payments from €22.50 to €50.00 per week, for those in receipt of One-Parent Family Payment (OFP), JST and Jobseeker's Allowance (JA). The Scheme must be a worthwhile option for moving into employment pathways.

<sup>8</sup> INDECON REPORT [https://www.welfare.ie/en/downloads/DEASP\\_OFP\\_Review.pdf](https://www.welfare.ie/en/downloads/DEASP_OFP_Review.pdf)  
Millar and Crosse: <https://aran.library.nuigalway.ie/handle/10379/6044>

<sup>9</sup> Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2016

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### Housing And Homelessness

In the context of an on-going national housing crisis, it is a truism to state that a home is a pre-requisite for secure and stable family life, and by extension, society.

Overall, 45% of one-parent households are paying rent in the private rental market.<sup>10</sup> Reports that simultaneously suggest lone parents are leaving HAP accommodation, and refusing to take up these tenures, ignore the same research which identifies discrimination<sup>11</sup>, insecure tenure, erratic rent adjustments, poor standards and inadequate supports as being determining factors in these situations.<sup>12</sup>

Family homelessness falls disproportionately on lone parents,<sup>13</sup> 60% of whom are lone mother families<sup>14</sup>. In the Dublin region alone, one-parent families make up 65% of this cohort<sup>15</sup>. In April 2018, 3,689 children were homeless.<sup>16</sup>

One Family also knows from our clients that the accommodation needs of non-resident parents are not being met in the allocation of housing. All parents need the opportunity to fully share parenting and have their children in their home. They must not be forced into 'McDonalds' parenting spaces, which amounts to another form of 'environmental deprivation'.<sup>17</sup>

The provision of social housing and the support of non-market driven housing remains the strongest response to this crisis, especially given the part-time, flexi and 'precariat' work<sup>18</sup> (further compromised by a 13.9% gender pay gap) which lone parents must take because of their childcare commitments.

### Housing and Homelessness - Our Recommendations

- 1 Build or buy affordable public housing to meet ongoing housing demand.
- 2 Support transparent and accountable non-market-driven housing schemes and cooperatives.
- 3 Prioritise the allocation of adequate social and non-profit housing for one-parent families who are the most vulnerable families to homelessness.
- 4 Bring housing assistance supports fully into line with market rents. Ensure mechanisms for greater security of tenure, rent certainty and housing standards. Align these with education and employment activation measures to ensure uptake.
- 5 Ensure that both parents in a shared parenting relationship are assessed appropriately for accommodation needs to facilitate overnight visits with their children.

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10 Census 2016.

11 <https://www.esri.ie/publications/discrimination-and-inequality-in-housing-in-ireland/> (p.13)

12 [http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/report\\_of\\_drhe\\_to\\_department\\_of\\_housing\\_planning\\_local\\_government.pdf](http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/report_of_drhe_to_department_of_housing_planning_local_government.pdf)

13 <https://www.focusireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Submission-to-the-Oireachtas-Committee-on-Social-Protection-final.pdf> (p1ff)

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14 Op.Cit

15 DRHE Report (p.9ff)

16 <https://www.focusireland.ie/resource-hub/latest-figures-homelessness-ireland/>

17 ESRI Op.Cit.

18 [https://www.tasc.ie/download/pdf/living\\_with\\_uncertainty\\_final.pdf](https://www.tasc.ie/download/pdf/living_with_uncertainty_final.pdf)

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### Access To Education And Training

When assessing the position of lone parents in Ireland, the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Social Protection positively supported research which suggests an ‘education first’, rather than a ‘work first’, approach to interventions which, in the longer term, will lift families out of poverty and into employment.<sup>19</sup>

As a group, lone parents need targeted support - in the first place - to remove the systemic blocks which arise when they pursue education and – secondly - for the specific needs of lone parent students while they study.

Bridging programmes to support re-entry into both education and employment, mentoring support in ‘learning to learn’ in formal educational contexts, and the explicit recognition of the services lone parent students need in all institutes of education are required. There is a need to strategically invest in JST recipients and provide a suite of educational opportunities to ensure people can have careers that lift their families out of poverty.

### Education and Training - Our Recommendations

- 1 Review and rationalise interactions between the SUSI grant, Back to Education Allowance (BTEA), Housing Tenure and Income Support systems for lone parents and remove all active block to their educational progression:
  - Enable lone parents in receipt of OFP and JST to retain their SUSI maintenance grant throughout their course of study, regardless of the age of their child, without any requirement to switch to Back to Education Allowance.
  - Review SUSI and housing tenure anomalies for lone parents. Allow Rent Supplement, SUSI, and Income Supports, to be paid concurrently. Make the ‘Dependent/Independent’ housing category switch easier.
- 2 Expand eligibility of SUSI to part-time students to provide financial support to flexible, mature and part-time learners.
- 3 Extend the Cost of Education Allowance to all recipients of the Back to Education Allowance.
- 4 Provide specialist bridging programmes such as New Futures and New Steps for lone parents which supports their progression and job-readiness. Incorporate wrap-around parenting and family support services. These programmes are particularly designed for those in receipt of JST payments and provide both professional and personal support.

<sup>19</sup> <https://webarchive.oireachtas.ie/parliament/media/committees/socialprotection/reports/joint-committee-on-social-protection-report-on-the-position-of-lone-parents-in-ireland-june-2017.pdf> (p.22)

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### Early Years, Out-Of School And After-school Childcare

The provision of affordable, accessible, and quality childcare, including early years and out-of-school care is essential if lone parents are to enter work or educational progression. The current development and structuring of a childcare system in Ireland will, we hope, enable many lone parents to gain more time to pursue education, employment, personal development and community engagement, should they wish to do so.

However, again, attention must be paid to out-of-school care and the needs of older children, when parents are in shift or short-term work. The inflexibility of mainstream working conditions, and a persistent lack of work-family balance arrangements, mean that many lone parents are unable to take up full-time or highly structured work. While at the same time, the ever-changing and daily demands of raising children exposes them to exploitation in precarious working conditions. A high quality childcare system of supports meets some of these dilemmas.

Overall, the paramount and overriding rationale for this scheme must be children's wellbeing. All children in vulnerable families, including many one-parent families, will continue to need targeted supports.

It is well established that access to quality and affordable childcare enhances children's development and socialisation in various ways<sup>20</sup> and eases parental stressors.<sup>21</sup> The transparency and regulation of this sector, therefore, is extremely important.

### Childcare (Early Years, Out-of-, and After-School) - Our Recommendations

- 1 When in place, child poverty-proofing must be a key element of the 12 month review of the Affordable Childcare Scheme (ACS) in order to ensure the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children have appropriate and ongoing levels of access to quality childcare.
- 2 Increase the maximum childcare allowance from 15 hours per week to 20 hours per week. This is equivalent to part-time weekly childcare on the 40-hours weekly limit per child, for enhanced hours subsidies, set out in the ACS Policy Paper.
- 3 Continue to develop the range of accredited childcare providers available to parents.
- 4 Recognise the importance of unpaid work and activities, which also require childcare support in parents' transitions into employment.
- 5 Cost and match state subsidies for the provision of quality childcare in order to ensure professional care and equitable pay and conditions for staff.

<sup>20</sup> [https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/sites/default/files/assets/document/Byrne%20and%200%27Toole\\_0.pdf](https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/sites/default/files/assets/document/Byrne%20and%200%27Toole_0.pdf) (p.v)

<sup>21</sup> Parental satisfaction with daycare is a significant predictor of parental stress : <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877042812040402>



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### Family Law Courts Reform

One Family are aware through our work, that payment of child maintenance presents a significant ‘front-line’ problem for separated and one-parent families. Child maintenance regulations and processes affect lone parents in particular when they are accessing One-Parent Family Payment.

In its current form, ‘Liable Relative’ legislation<sup>22</sup> about child maintenance is cumbersome and appears to be relatively unproductive for both lone parents and the DEASP. It places the burden of locating an absent or refusing parent on the parent who has care responsibilities alone; often requiring them to go to court to prove they have made efforts to seek maintenance. It frequently does not, increase income for lone parents since it is means tested. Additionally, levels of return for the pursuit of child maintenance by the Maintenance Recovery Unit are very low at 35%.<sup>23</sup>

Another difficulty is the transition from OFP to JST which happens when the child of a lone parent reaches 7 years. At this stage, a liable relative is no longer legally required to pay maintenance within DEASP structures.

The pursuit of child maintenance needs to be integrated into a wider service which provides concurrent supports for the range of issues facing separating and one-parent families.

One Family focuses on the rights of children and their wellbeing in this complex web of transition and vulnerability, which helps re-position acrimonious interactions in favour of children’s overall wellbeing.<sup>24</sup>

A cohesive family court welfare system would integrate all these elements and position child maintenance as simply one element in this entire process.

Such integrated services would support all parents and their children through the common and traumatic experience of separation and family dissolution.

### Family Law Courts Reform - Our Recommendations

- 1 Serious consideration needs to be given to the longer term development of integrated family court welfare services.
- 2 Standardise the child maintenance process and provide support for those parenting alone who are pursuing child maintenance. Do not leave this process solely to the parent with care responsibilities.
- 3 Use available DEASP discretionary powers to believe lone parents when they have provided the liable relative information available to them and declared they have made efforts to seek maintenance, as is the case with domestic violence and abuse. Believe lone parents.
- 4 Adjust DEASP OFP-JST-JA categorisations to acknowledge that children are legal dependents until age 18/22. They require child maintenance throughout this dependent life stage regardless of the ‘activation’ category their parent may be in.
- 5 Fully recognise child maintenance as a separate and independent income for children. As with Child Benefit, which is neither taxed nor means-tested, remove means-testing for child maintenance payments when assessing one-parent family income supports.
- 6 Create flexible calculation and assignment for the Single Person Child Carer Credit (SPCCC) to recognise and reflect increasing levels of shared parenting.

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Who-is-a-liable-relative.aspx>

<sup>23</sup> Joint Committee on Social Protection Report on the Position of Lone Parents in Ireland found that only 35% of parents in receipt of OPFP received child maintenance: (2016, p.27.)

<sup>24</sup> Forthcoming: One Family Child Maintenance Position Paper and proposals to establish a legal and welfare family agency.

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We provide free, professional and confidential HSE approved Crisis Pregnancy and Post-Abortion counselling.

If you, or someone you know, need to talk please click **here** or lo-call our helpline on **1890 662 212** or e-mail: **info@onefamily.ie**

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