

END CHILD POVERTY MAKE WORK PAY



**BUDGET 2018
PRE-BUDGET
SUBMISSION**
#EndChildPoverty
#Budget2018

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ONE FAMILY'S KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BUDGET 2018

Target Child Poverty

Child poverty rates have continued to increase since 2008¹ and the Taoiseach has now committed to lifting over 100,000 children out of consistent poverty by 2020 as part of the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* framework. The focus of these targets must be on children living in one-parent families, as outlined in our recent joint NGO submission on *Actions to Achieve the Child Poverty Reduction Target*.²

Children in one-parent families are living in households that are almost four times as likely to live in consistent poverty³ than two-parent households and they live in the most socially excluded families in Ireland.⁴

There is a commitment in the *Programme for Partnership Government*⁵ to reform the budgetary process and develop the process of budget and poverty proofing as a means of advancing equality, reducing poverty and strengthening economic and social rights. Government have begun the process of implementation and the focus should be on ensuring budgetary policies are effectively tackling the disproportionate poverty rates in one-parent families.

1 SILC, 2008-2015

2 <https://onefamily.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/NGO-Submission-on-Actions-to-Achieve-Child-Poverty-Target.pdf>

3 SILC, 2015

4 Eurostat, 2016

5 http://www.merrionstreet.ie/MerrionStreet/en/ImageLibrary/Programme_for_Partnership_Government.pdf

Our Recommendations

- 1 The Qualified Child Increase should be increased for one-parent families most at risk of poverty, to the same weekly amount as Child Benefit (i.e. €32.30 per week, up from €29.80) with a corresponding higher increase in the QCI payment for older children. **(DSP)**
- 2 Alleviate back to school costs for parents by allocating €40 million to provide for free school books at primary and post-primary level to families in receipt of social welfare. Continue to increase the rates of Back to School Clothing & Footwear Allowance until they are reinstated to €200 for 4-12 year olds and €305 for children over 12 years. **(DSP, DES)**
- 3 Increase the income limit for one-parent families to qualify for the Back to School Clothing & Footwear Allowance to the same limit as a couple household. **(DSP)**

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In-Work Supports - Make Work Pay

The Joint Oireachtas Committee on Social Protection recently published a report on the *Position of Lone Parents in Ireland*. It includes a series of proposals to help alleviate the difficulties often faced by those parenting alone or sharing parenting, most of which refer to One Family's research, presentations to the Committee, and Pre-Budget Submissions over the past decade.⁶ The report also supports all our recommendations below.

Reforms of the One-Parent Family Payment⁷ (OFP) have resulted in only marginal increases in employment rates for some one-parent families, a reduction in employment for those with children over 12⁸, and higher rates of child poverty and deprivation in these families.⁹ Targeted interventions and an investment in services are required to improve access to education and employment and reverse these unacceptable levels of poverty.

Some of the specific challenges for one-parent families in balancing parenting and work include lack of affordable childcare, low pay and precarious work such as zero-hour contracts. Policies are needed which promote access to employment, support the work of parenting and offer more flexible work contracts. This requires a whole of government approach and input from several departments¹⁰ to have any meaningful impact.

Community Employment (CE) can serve as an effective bridging programme to support those distant from the labour market in transitioning back into employment. Increasing financial supports to lone parents engaging in CE makes returning to work more affordable and accessible.

In Budget 2014, the One Parent Family Tax Credit was replaced with the Single Person Child Carer Credit (SPCCC). The key difference between them is that only one parent can now claim the credit and that is generally the person with whom the child lives for the whole or greater part of the year. One Family's *National Shared Parenting Survey Results & Recommendations*¹¹ highlighted that administration of the SPCCC does not take into consideration the complexities of shared parenting arrangements.

6 http://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/32/joint_committee_on_social_protection/reports/2017/2017-06-15_report-on-the-position-of-lone-parents-in-ireland_en.pdf

7 See One Family's analysis here: <https://onefamily.ie/policy-campaigns/one-family-campaigns/one-parent-family-payment-reform-child-poverty/>

8 CSO QNHS, Q2 2016

Our Recommendations

- 1 Increase the earnings disregard for One-Parent Family Payment (OFP) and Jobseeker's Transition (JST) recipients and lone parents in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance to €146.50 per week to support lone parents to take up employment. **(DSP)**
- 2 As part of DSP's plans to improve staff training; caseworkers and other relevant staff assigned to support lone parents should be given specific training to ensure that they fully understand the challenges and needs of one-parent families, and to enhance their ability to intervene as effectively and beneficially as possible. **(DSP)**
- 3 Enable lone parents in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), JST and OFP to participate in Community Employment by providing an additional €50 per week instead of just €22.50. **(DSP)**
- 4 Lone parents who are in employment, whose children are aged between 7 and 14, should receive both Jobseeker's Transition payment and Family Income Supplement (FIS) to make work pay. **(DSP)**
- 5 Introduce the planned Working Family Payment, replacing FIS, where families only need to work a minimum of 15 hours per week, in recognition of the difficulties lone parents can face in balancing caring responsibilities and increasing their hours to 19 per week under the current FIS rules.¹² **(DSP)**
- 6 Amend the administration of the Single Person Child Carer Credit (SPCCC) to reflect the realities of sharing parenting. **(Revenue)**

9 SILC, 2015

10 DJEI, DCYA, DSP, DES, DHPCLG, DPER

11 https://onefamily.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/One-Family-Shared-Parenting-Results-and-Recommendations_FINAL-REPORT_Online.pdf

12 https://onefamily.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/OneFamily_WorkingFamilyPaymentSubmission_Mar17.pdf

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Housing & Homelessness

The most recent homelessness figures show that 65% of homeless families are one-parent families¹³ and 45% of one-parent households are paying rent in the private rental market.¹⁴ There are commitments to increase the supply of social housing, to address the needs of children who are homeless and to protect private tenants contained in *Rebuilding Ireland*¹⁵ and the *Strategy for the Rental Sector*¹⁶ which need to be implemented and targeted at one-parent families in the first instance.

Our Recommendations

- 1 Prevent the crisis of one-parent families entering homelessness. Increasing the supply of social housing is the only sustainable solution to the housing and homelessness crisis and to tackle housing insecurity and lack of affordability. **(DHPCLG, DSP)**
- 2 Ensure that homeless families due to be moved from hotels and B&Bs into “family hubs” are there for no longer than six months and provide intensive assistance during this time to support them into longer term housing. **(DHPCLG)**
- 3 Increase Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) and Rent Supplement limits in line with market rent and ensure that new HAP tenants are provided with a deposit and rent in advance; sourcing this money places huge pressure on their household budgets and the viability of their tenancy as a result. **(DHPCLG, DSP)**
- 4 Government must ensure that both parents in a shared parenting relationship are assessed appropriately for accommodation needs to facilitate overnight visits with their children. **(DHPCLG, DSP)**

¹³ DHPCLG, April 2017

¹⁴ Census, 2016

¹⁵ http://rebuildingireland.ie/Rebuilding%20Ireland_Action%20Plan.pdf

¹⁶ https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/strategy_for_the_rental_sector_final.pdf

Access to Education & Training

Taking an education first approach will improve employment rates for one-parent families in the longer term. Jobseeker's Transition (JST) payment recipients are a distinct group with a specific set of needs. The time spent on JST is a unique opportunity to invest in a package of supports and services to ensure that these parents can access education or employment.

Broadening access to JST will also allow parents with older children to enhance their employability through further education and training. These recommendations would remove a number of structural barriers which currently prevent lone parents from accessing education.

Our Recommendations

- 1 Provide specialist bridging programmes such as New Futures and New Steps¹⁷ for lone parents which support progression, job-readiness and incorporate wrap around parenting and family support services. **(DSP, DES)**
- 2 Provide that once a lone parent in receipt of One-Parent Family Payment/ Jobseeker's Transition and the SUSI maintenance grant begins full time study, prior to their youngest child reaching 14 years, they may remain on that payment until their course is completed. There should be no obligation to switch to Back to Education Allowance. **(DSP, DES)**
- 3 Address the anomaly by which lone parents in receipt of Rent Supplement cannot receive their One-Parent Family Payment or Jobseeker's Transition Payment and the SUSI maintenance grant on taking up an education or training course. **(DSP, DES)**
- 4 Ensure all lone parents in receipt of Back to Education Allowance can receive the SUSI maintenance grant to help meet the costs of accessing education. **(DSP, DES)**

¹⁷ <https://onefamily.ie/education-training/for-parents/back-to-work-education/>

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Early Years, Out-of-School and Afterschool Childcare

The provision of affordable, accessible and quality childcare, including early years and out-of-school care is essential if we want lone parents to enter work or education. The proposed Affordable Childcare Scheme (ACS) is a very welcome development, however, it currently excludes afterschool providers and childminders who are not required or permitted to register with Tusla, which limits accessibility for many lone parents with older children who are subject to activation measures.

Childcare costs in Ireland are the highest in the OECD for lone parents and the second highest for couples.¹⁸ Both the Joint Oireachtas report¹⁹ and the joint NGO submission on child poverty²⁰ highlight the need for affordable and accessible childcare to support lone parents.

Our Recommendations

- 1 Continue to develop and resource an Affordable Childcare Scheme which recognises shared parenting and meets the needs of lone parents in education and work. **(DCYA)**
- 2 Increase accessibility so that families in every county can access subsidised and affordable childcare, with particular emphasis on access to out-of-school care. This requires further State investment and improved quality standards to increase quality, uptake, and availability of places. **(DCYA, DPER)**

¹⁸ OECD, 'Ireland Economic Survey of Ireland', September 2015

¹⁹ Ibid. 6

²⁰ Ibid. 2

Family Law Courts Reform

There is a chasm in the provision of legal family law services in Ireland due to the lack of a CAFCASS²¹ type system, which exist in other jurisdictions such as the UK. This is the type of investment that is required to keep children safe, to decrease familial conflict and to strengthen family relationships post-separation in Ireland.²²

One Family are aware through our work with parents that payment of child maintenance and domestic violence are significant issues for separated families. These issues were also highlighted by a number of parents in our *National Shared Parenting Survey Results & Recommendations*.²³

Our Recommendations

- 1 Serious consideration needs to be given to the longer term development of a court welfare system in Ireland that would provide the necessary services for families attending family law courts. **(DJE)**
- 2 The payment of maintenance is a perennial problem for parents, children and the courts, particularly where domestic violence and financial abuse is a factor. Research is required into the best systems internationally, where State intervention is often the most effective way to ensure consistent payment. **(DJE, DSP)**

²¹ CAFCASS: Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service. <https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/>

²² https://onefamily.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/One-Family_Shared-Parenting_Results-and-Recommendations_FINAL-REPORT_Online.pdf

²³ Ibid.

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Valerie Maher
Policy & Programmes Manager
One Family

T 01 662 9212

CHARITY No 6525

askonefamily Lo-call Helpline

1890 66 22 12

E vmaher@onefamily.ie

W www.onefamily.ie