



Pre-Budget Submission

2020

#EndChildPoverty

#Budget2020



A chance to put things right for Ireland's poorest children

Budget 2020 is an opportunity to reshape the future for tens of thousands of children who are currently trapped in poverty. These children are restricted in their daily lives and we, as a society, have a unique chance to put things right.

One Family works with one-parent families, people parenting alone, those sharing parenting and those separating; by providing specialist family support services that assist families as they seek to support themselves and their children. Children are at the core of our work and we seek to improve their lives by empowering, supporting and up-skilling parents so that they, and their children, can reach their full potential.

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Since the last Census, Government and independently commissioned research on poverty rates for lone parents has been piling up. Each report paints a similar picture of children's lives being constricted and submerged by poverty.

One-parent families are consistently among the worst off in society and children in these families are particularly vulnerable to poverty and deprivation. These families are five times more likely to live in consistent poverty¹ as two-parent households² and are disproportionately represented in the homeless figures³.

One-parent families have the lowest disposable income and highest deprivation and at-risk of poverty rates of all households with children in the State. The poverty rate among Ireland's working one-parent families more than doubled in the five years from 2012 and their living standards are now among the worst in Europe³. These statistics are out-of-step with an Ireland that prides itself on compassion and justice and it's just not right.

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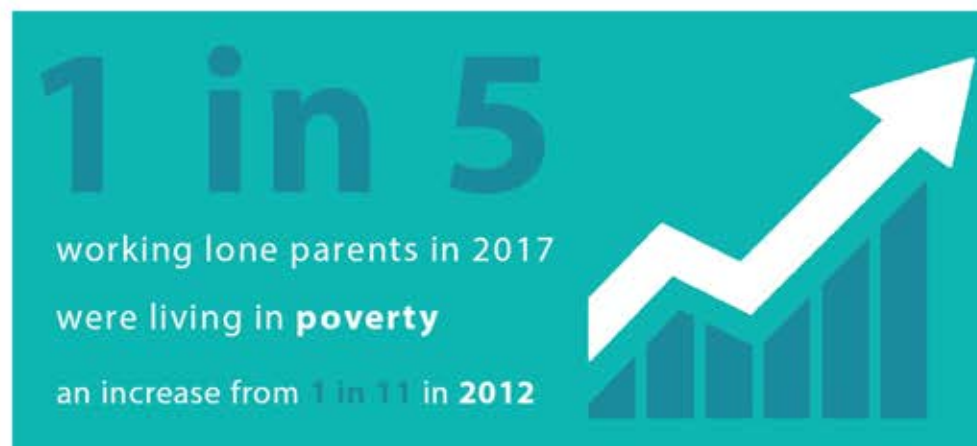
(1) CSO Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC 2017)

(2) Homelessness Report: April 2018. Dublin: Department of Housing Planning and Local Government

(3) Society of St Vincent de Paul (SVP) Working, Parenting and Struggling

Budget 2020 represents a watershed moment when we can stem the rising tide of child poverty for good.

Government is working towards fulfilling its commitment to raise **70,000** children out of poverty before the end of 2020 and there is a clear route forward. All the evidence from this research makes similar recommendations and conclusions: a targeted, rationalised, integrated cross-departmental system of services and income supports is necessary in order to enable movement out of poverty and social exclusion. It is critical that the findings and recommendations from this research are implemented. One Family is calling on Government to base their Budget 2020 on evidence and respond compassionately by prioritising the specific challenges faced by parents and children living in one-parent families.



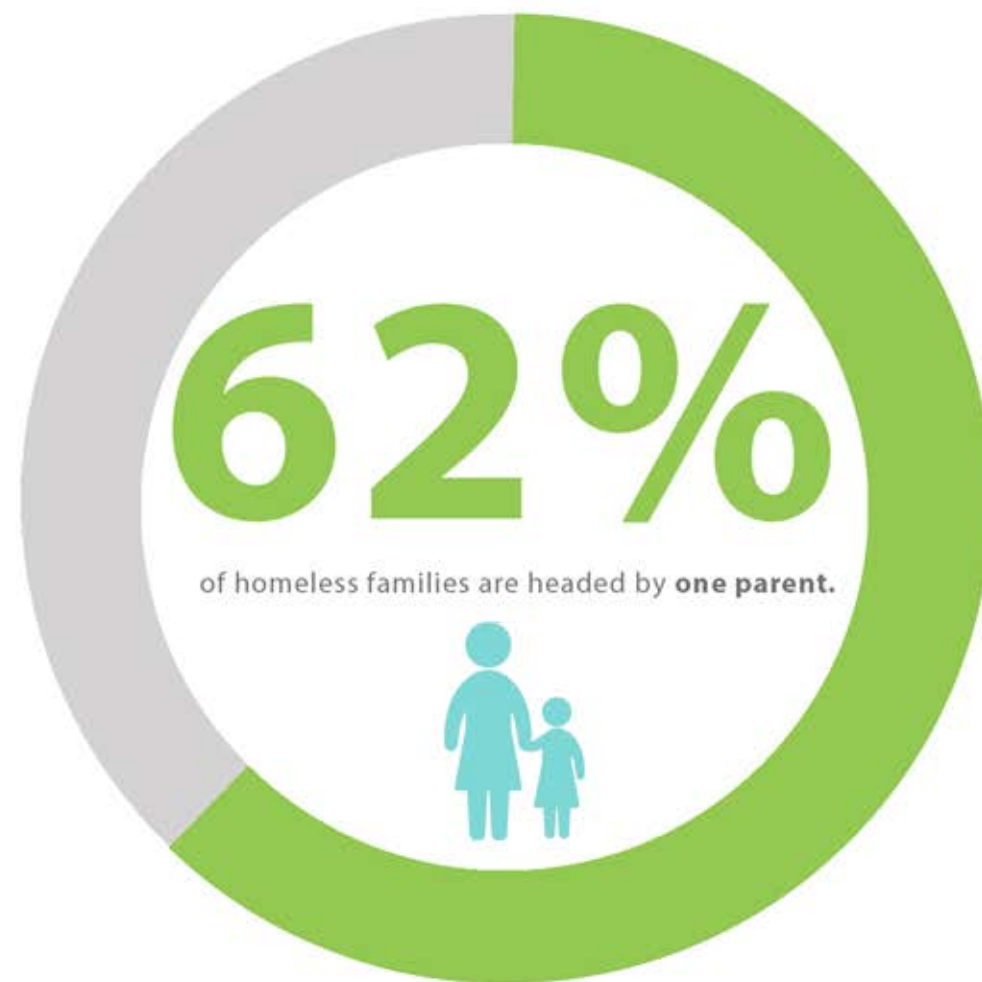
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In practical terms, we need to provide focussed support services, payments and human resources specifically on one-parent families as a matter of urgency.

An integrated and targeted approach across the DEASP (Department of Employment and Social Protection), DCYA (Department of Children and Youth Affairs), DES (Department of Education and Skills), HSE (Health Service Executive), DHPLG (Department of Housing, Planning & Local Government), DJE (Department of Justice & Equality), SOLAS and Revenue is required if the unequal treatment of one-parent families is to be addressed. These anomalies create poverty traps for one-parent families. If this problem is tackled now, we will avoid another generation of children and their parents being drowned in poverty, stress and social isolation.

One Family supports recent calls for independent poverty-proofed benchmarking of social welfare rates, directly indexed to Minimum Essential Standard of Living rates (MESL). Benchmarking, if linked to MESL, would ensure that payment increases are related to the real costs of an adequate standard of living⁴.

One-in-five children in Ireland live in a one-parent family, while one-in-four families are headed by a lone parent⁵. Let's stop seeing people who parent alone, or share parenting, as a social anomaly and design social policies and services that support all children, all parents and their families equally. If this problem is tackled now, we will avoid another generation of children and their parents being drowned in poverty, stress and social isolation.



(4) Benchmarking Social Welfare Rates: SVP Submission to DEASP: April. 2019.

(5) Census 2016. CSO.

Evidence Exists – let's face the facts in Budget 2020

There has been extensive independent and Government commissioned research on the problems facing people living in one-parent families and hundreds of recommendations on how to support lone parents to lift themselves and their children out of poverty.

Budget 2020 needs to be based on the evidence and respond to this evidence with compassion and justice. Only then will the barriers facing people parenting alone in accessing education, employment, housing and an adequate income be overcome.



- 2019** *Working, Parenting and Struggling? An analysis of the employment and living conditions of one parent families in Ireland.* A Report by the Society of St Vincent de Paul. Dublin, Ireland.
- 2018** (July) *Lone-Parent Incomes and Work Incentives. Budget Perspectives 2019. Paper 1, July 2018.* Regan, M., Keane, C., and Walsh, J.R. ESRI.
- 2018** (June) *Understanding, negotiating and navigating the politicisation of evidence-based policy research: the case of Irish research on lone parent labour market activation policy.* Millar, M., Crosse, R., Canavan, J. University of Bristol, UK.
- 2018** (October) *In-Work Benefits: The (in)adequacy of in-work benefits in Irish lone parent labour market activation policy.* Millar, M., Gray, J., et al., Journal of Poverty and Social Justice. Policy Press, University of Bristol, UK.
- 2017** *An Independent Review to Identify the Supports and Barriers for Lone Parents in Accessing Higher Education and to Examine Measures to Increase Participation.* Delma Byrne and Cliona Murray. Maynooth University (Commissioned by DES, DEASP and DCYA).
- 2017** *Houses of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Social Protection Report on the Position of Lone Parents in Ireland.*
- 2017** *Indecon Independent Review of the Amendments to the One-Parent Family Payment since January 2012.* Presented to Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. Prepared by Indecon Research Economists www.indecon.ie
- 2016** *Lone Parents and Activation, What Works and Why: A Review of the International Evidence in the Irish Context.* Millar, M and Crosse, R. The UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, National University of Ireland, Galway.

Budget 2020 Recommendations

Reaching child poverty targets

o Help children stay in school

Keep children in school by restoring Child Benefit to those aged 18 and over and in full time second-level education. If this is not possible on a universal basis, consider an alternative targeted approach to reach children living in one-parent families. (DEASP)

o Older children cost more

Increase the Qualified Child Increase rate for older children by €5 to €42 per week to meet the costs of older children. (DEASP)

o Make Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance fair for lone parents

Equalise income thresholds for all families and treat one-parent families the same as two-parent families, who are allowed earn more per child for the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance. (DEASP)

o Help the working poor stay healthy

Automatically link eligibility for the Working Family Payment to Medical Card eligibility. Increase the dependent's allowance for children under 16 years old to €80 in line with other social welfare payments. (DEASP | HSE)

o Ensure the new National Childcare Scheme works for all families

Make sure that the families whose subsidies will be cut are protected when transferring from the Community Childcare Subvention Scheme and Education and Training Childcare Schemes, to the National Childcare Scheme.⁶ Promote prevention and early intervention by ensuring there are additional ways in which vulnerable children can receive up to 40 hours/week in a quality Early Childhood Care and Education service without having to be clients of the relevant sponsor agencies. Provide 25 hours/week in school-age childcare for lone parents to ensure their participation in employment and education. (DCYA)

Make work pay

o Give working parents back their tax credits

Introduce refundable tax credits for families in low income work, ensuring that work pays.⁷ (Revenue)

o Restore Budget 2012 cuts to income disregard

Building on Budget 2019, restore the value of the weekly income disregard to €165.62 (equivalent to 2011 levels) for all lone parents receiving the One-Parent Family Payment, Jobseekers Transitional Payment and Jobseekers Allowance to help make work affordable. (DEASP)

o Make the Working Family Payment fair for lone parents

Currently one-parent families need to work the same number of hours per week as two-parent families to benefit from the Working Family Payment. Reduce the weekly threshold to 12 hours per week for one-parent families to reduce the disproportionate pressure they are under and to help them increase their earning capacity. (DEASP)

(6) Oireachtas Debate: <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/2019-05-28/17/>

(7) Social Justice Ireland 'Refundable Tax Credits needed to help the working poor' (SJI 2019) <<https://bit.ly/2MasYi4>> accessed 27 May 2019.

Budget 2020 Recommendations

Education and training

o Prioritise housing for one-parent families

One-parent families are disproportionately affected by homelessness with a significant amount of lone parents and their young children in emergency accommodation. Show compassion for these vulnerable families by prioritising housing for lone parents. (DHPLG)

o Make the private rental sector accessible and accountable

Given our reliance on the private rental sector, provide housing for vulnerable families and make sure that parents and children reliant on payments are not 'HAP-disadvantaged'. Put in place mechanisms for greater security of tenure, rent certainty and housing standards. (HPLG)

o Allow separated parents to parent their children

Make sure children are able to live with both their parents following separation. Allow both parents in a shared parenting relationship to be assessed for accommodation for their family whether they are parenting full or part-time. (HPLG)

Family law services

o Child Maintenance should support children out of poverty

Child Maintenance should be a direct untaxed and non-means-tested payment for children, as with Child Benefit, to support children out of poverty. Establish an independent Child Maintenance Service in order to reduce child poverty, reduce conflict and abuse within families, and to support shared parenting. (DJE | Court Welfare Service)

o Make court proceedings safe for families

Work towards the provision of a comprehensive statutory Court Welfare Service to support vulnerable children and parents using the family and child law courts. This needs to include Child Contact Centres, parenting and counselling support services as well as court reports. (DJE | Court Welfare Service)

Housing and homelessness

o Don't let housing tenure stop education

Integrate the Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) grant and the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) with the various housing supports to ensure continuous access to education for parents irrespective of where they live. (DEASP | DES)

o Support lone parents to be part-time students

Let lone parents access SUSI as part-time students given their specific parenting, childcare and accommodation challenges. (DES)

o Support lone parents to enter or return to education and employment

Focus on JST recipients to ensure they will successfully move to employment. Fund specialist bridging programmes such as *New Futures* and *New Steps* that support lone parents to enter education, training and employment. Incorporate wrap-around parenting and family support services. Provide adequate training for (DEASP) Employment Services staff in their work with lone parents and their families. (DEASP | DES | Solas)

o Make primary education really free

Invest €103.2 million annually to establish a national free primary education system. Begin by investing €20 million to provide free school books for all primary school pupils. (DES)



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