

## 1. One Family

1.1 One Family, founded in 1972 as Cherish, provides support, information and a range of services to people parenting alone, those sharing parenting, those going through separation; and to those experiencing an unplanned or crisis pregnancy. One Family works for an Ireland where every family form is cherished equally and can enjoy economic, social, political and legal equality with their peers in order to create their own positive future.

1.2 Full information on One Family can be found at [www.onefamily.ie](http://www.onefamily.ie).

## 2. Introduction

2.1 One Family works towards the inclusion of one-parent families into the fabric of Irish society. Parenting alone and sharing parenting in new, complex and blended family forms is an increasing and emergent social reality. Recent census data<sup>1</sup> shows there is a steady increase in diverse families in Ireland, a pattern replicated throughout Europe.<sup>2</sup>

2.2 Many parents will parent alone through the course of their lives, either temporarily or permanently. However, the traditional 'breadwinner' model of family life which has given rise to most of our familiar social, economic and educational infrastructures tends to ignore or evade the multiple and on-going demands of lone parenting.

2.3 Lone parents are a group who experience multiple disadvantages in Irish society.<sup>3</sup> Ensuring adequate education for their children is a crucial part of this disadvantage and a serious source of stress for one-parent families who face cyclical rising costs when returning their children to school each year.

2.4 One Family welcomes the opportunity to submit to the Joint Committee on Education & Skills and appreciates your interest in this important issue.

## 3. One-Parent Families: Demographics

3.1 One-in-five children in Ireland live in a one-parent family, while one-in-four families are headed by a lone parent. There were approximately 218,817 lone parents in Ireland in 2016<sup>4</sup>. Almost 90,000 were single; a further 50,496 were widowed, while the remaining 68,378 were separated or divorced. The vast majority (86.4%) of

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.cso.ie/en/csolatestnews/pressreleases/2017pressreleases/pressstatementcensus2016resultsprofile4-householdsandfamilies/>

<sup>2</sup>[http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=People\\_in\\_the\\_EU\\_-\\_statistics\\_on\\_household\\_and\\_family\\_structures](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=People_in_the_EU_-_statistics_on_household_and_family_structures)

<sup>3</sup><https://www.esri.ie/publications/poverty-dynamics-of-social-risk-groups-in-the-eu-an-analysis-of-the-eu-statistics-on-income-and-living-conditions-2005-to-2014/>

<sup>4</sup><http://www.cso.ie/en/csolatestnews/presspages/2017/census2016summaryresults-part1/>

one-parent families are headed by mothers, but many families also share parenting of their children.<sup>5</sup>

#### 4. Child Poverty and Lone Parent's Access to Wealth

4.1 The most recent Irish Survey on Income and Living Conditions showed that individuals living in households where there was one adult and one or more children aged under 18 had the highest consistent poverty rate at 24.6%. This is compared to a consistent poverty rate of 6.4% for two-parent households. This means that lone parents are four times as likely to be living in consistent poverty compared to two-parent households. Consistent poverty means that children are living in households with incomes below 60% of the national median income of €237.45 per week and experiencing deprivation based on the agreed 11 deprivation indicators.<sup>6</sup> 11.1% of children live in consistent poverty in Ireland<sup>7</sup>. Older school-going children between the ages of 12-18/22 are particularly vulnerable to poverty.<sup>8</sup>

4.3 Additionally, family homelessness falls disproportionately on lone parents, 60% of whom are lone mother families.<sup>9</sup> In the Dublin region alone, one-parent families make up 65% of this cohort.<sup>10</sup> In April 2018, 3,689 children were homeless.<sup>11</sup> The educational needs of these children are especially important and recent research shows the devastating impact homelessness has on their capacity to learn.<sup>12</sup>

#### 5. Child Poverty and Educational Disadvantage

*“The incidence, depth, duration and timing of poverty all influence a child’s educational attainment, along with community characteristics and social networks.”<sup>13</sup>*

5.2 Growing up in poverty has a devastating developmental impact on children’s lives.<sup>14</sup> Childhood poverty increases the risk of health inequalities<sup>15</sup>, socio-emotional developmental problems<sup>16</sup>, and leads to serious educational disadvantage. Children who live in poverty are disproportionately affected by learning disabilities, speech,

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/silc/surveyonincomeandlivingconditions2016/>

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.eapn.ie/documents/15\\_EAPN%20PAPER%201.pdf](http://www.eapn.ie/documents/15_EAPN%20PAPER%201.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> [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)

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.focusireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Submission-to-the-Oireachtas-Committee-on-Social-Protection-final.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> [https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/report\\_of\\_drhe\\_to\\_department\\_of\\_housing\\_planning\\_local\\_government.pdf](https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/report_of_drhe_to_department_of_housing_planning_local_government.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.focusireland.ie/resource-hub/latest-figures-homelessness-ireland/>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.childrensrights.ie/resources/home-works-study-educational-needs>

<sup>13</sup> Ferguson HP, et al. *The impact of poverty on educational outcomes for children*. p. 701ff

<sup>14</sup> Wilkinson, Richard and Kate Pickett, *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better* (Allen Lane 2009).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Smyth, Emer, *Wellbeing and School Experiences among 9- and 13-Year-Olds: Insights from the Growing Up in Ireland study* (ESRI 2015) <<https://www.esri.ie/pubs/BKMNEXT291.pdf>>.

and language difficulties.<sup>17</sup> Poverty increases rates of school absenteeism and lowers expectations of going on to third level education.<sup>18</sup>

5.3 Equal access to affordable, accessible and high-quality education is a core issue for one-parent families. A range of obstacles affect the work of one-parent families in developing and maintaining their children's capacities and attachment to school life, so that they can join society as equals and create the habits and skills for life-long learning. The cost of maintaining children in school in a way which enhances their success and self-confidence is considerable. For one-parent families these costs can create insurmountable barriers and present at multiples levels, given the ongoing and ever-increasing costs of simply going to school every day.

In this submission to the Committee, One Family propose the following income supports and schools infrastructural development in order to fully acknowledge one-parent families and to directly reduce child educational disadvantage.

## **6. Schools Costs and Related Matters: Our Recommendations**

- 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.
- Make child benefit payable to families with children over the age of 18 enrolled in secondary school, reflecting the higher educational costs for families with adolescents.
- Extend the medical card waiver to all students eligible for concessionary school transport.
- Address food poverty by increasing School Meals Programmes by 10% to improve access to adequate nutrition for low-income students.
- Invest €40 million to provide free school books for all primary and secondary school pupils.
- Restore Capitation Rates to 2010 levels. End the 'voluntary' contribution systems in non-fee paying primary and secondary schools.

**Ends**

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<sup>17</sup> Hearne, Rory and Cian McMahon, *Cherishing All Equally 2016 Economic Inequality in Ireland* (TASC 2016).

<sup>18</sup> Byrne, Delma and Smyth, Emer, *No Way Back? The Dynamics of Early School Leaving* (The Liffey Press & ESRI 2010).

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