

About One Family

One Family was founded in 1972 as Cherish and is Ireland's leading organisation for one-parent families and people sharing parenting or separating, offering support, information and services to all members of all one-parent families, to those sharing parenting, to those experiencing an unplanned pregnancy and to professionals working with one-parent families. Children are at the centre of One Family's work and the organisation helps all the adults in their lives, including mums, dads, grandparents, step-parents, new partners and other siblings, offering a holistic model of specialist family support services. We also provide policy analysis on relevant issues in order to deliver systemic and positive change.

One Family welcome the opportunity to make a brief submission to the Central Statistics Office on the content of the questionnaire for the 2021 Census. We would like the following questions to be considered for inclusion:

1. Questions regarding shared parenting after separation

With almost 45 years experience of working with and representing one-parent families, our evidence shows us that many lone parents share parenting to some extent with their child's other parent, even though they live separately and are not in a relationship with each other. However, the current Census does not capture this reality for many thousands of children and parents in Ireland, and services, policies and laws which could support them are severely lacking, as is understanding of their family form.

We want to change this. We want to finally give a voice to these parents and their children, so that policies and services in the future can be better designed to meet their needs.

In January 2017, we launched the results of Ireland's first survey for people who are sharing parenting. Over 1,000 women and men who share parenting, or have tried to, responded to our survey and we received over three thousand in-depth comments that expanded on their survey responses. The results and recommendations arising from *Ireland's First National Shared Parenting Survey* can be found [here](#).

The only empirical data available on shared parenting was derived from the *Growing Up in Ireland* data on the child cohort (nine year-olds)¹. As defined by the resident parents in that study, it is most common in cases of divorced or separated lone parents (39%), is slightly less common in step- families (30%), and is least common in never married lone parent families (26%). The data also showed that non-resident parents in divorced or separated lone parent families have the most frequent contact

¹ Fahey et al. (2012) *Family Relationships and Family Well Being*

with their children, followed by those in step-families, and is lowest with those in never-married lone parent families.

Currently if a lone parent is filling in the Census form- it doesn't allow them to say that they have children, unless their children live with them. In question 16 they are asked- *How many children have you given birth to? This question is for women only.*

This means that fathers who don't live with their children are not afforded the opportunity to state that they are parents on the Census form. It would be extremely helpful if the Census captured the actual number of parents in Ireland- both those who don't live with their children and those that do. This would allow both local and national Government to appropriately plan services and supports for all family types in Ireland.

Proposed Census Questions:

Do you share parenting of your child(ren) with their other (non resident) parent?

Are you a parent to children who do not live with you? (If yes, allow the details to be completed for each child)

2. Question regarding payment of child maintenance

Non-existent or insufficient maintenance payments was the most common financial problem discussed by respondents to *Ireland's First National Shared Parenting Survey*². One Family are seeking the establishment of a state Child Maintenance Service, which would provide the best legal mechanism for families to safely and consistently access child maintenance payments, while reducing the burden currently placed on resident parents. Currently there is no accurate or reliable data regarding payments made by non resident parents towards their children.

Proposed Census Questions:

Do you currently provide financial assistance towards your children in the form of child maintenance?

Please indicate the amount and frequency of these payments (categories/ranges should be provided)

² https://onefamily.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/One-Family_Shared-Parenting_Results-and-Recommendations_FINAL-REPORT_Online.pdf

Do you receive financial assistance towards your children in the form of child maintenance from their other parent?

We would suggest that these questions be linked to, and could follow, the questions pertaining to marital status (i.e. single, married, separated divorced etc.)

ENDS