

Pre-Budget Submission 2021

#Budget2021

#EndChildPoverty



Background

One Family welcome the opportunity to submit our recommendations to Government for Budget 2021. One Family is Ireland's national organisation for one-parent families. We work with 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. Budget 2021 represents a watershed moment when we can stem the rising tide of child poverty for good.

Budget 2021 represents 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 represent issues affecting one-parent families on a range of committees including the National Advisory Council on *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*⁽¹⁾ where our CEO chairs the child poverty sub committee which is focused on measures to free children from the binds of poverty. We have worked extensively and constructively with representatives of this department over recent years on policy opportunities working towards the Government target to lift 100,000 children out of poverty by 2020⁽²⁾.

Every night thousands of children and families go without basic needs such as a warm meal and adequate accommodation, caught in a broken system that pulls them under. This shouldn't happen in Ireland. It's not who we are. It doesn't have to be this way.

We have significant concerns about the ongoing negative impacts on one-parent families of the COVID19 pandemic both in terms of family conflicts in relation to access, child maintenance and domestic abuse; as well as income insecurity due to job losses or the inability to work due to a lack of childcare. We expect that research on the impacts of the pandemic will show that lone parents and their children are again disproportionately negatively affected.

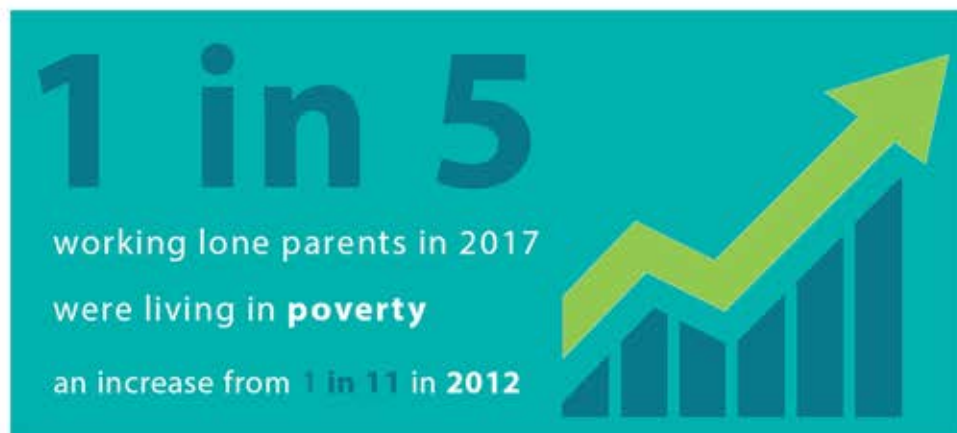
Coronavirus
COVID-19



(1) Better Outcomes Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, 2014-2020 <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/775847-better-outcomes-brighter-futures/>

(2) ibid

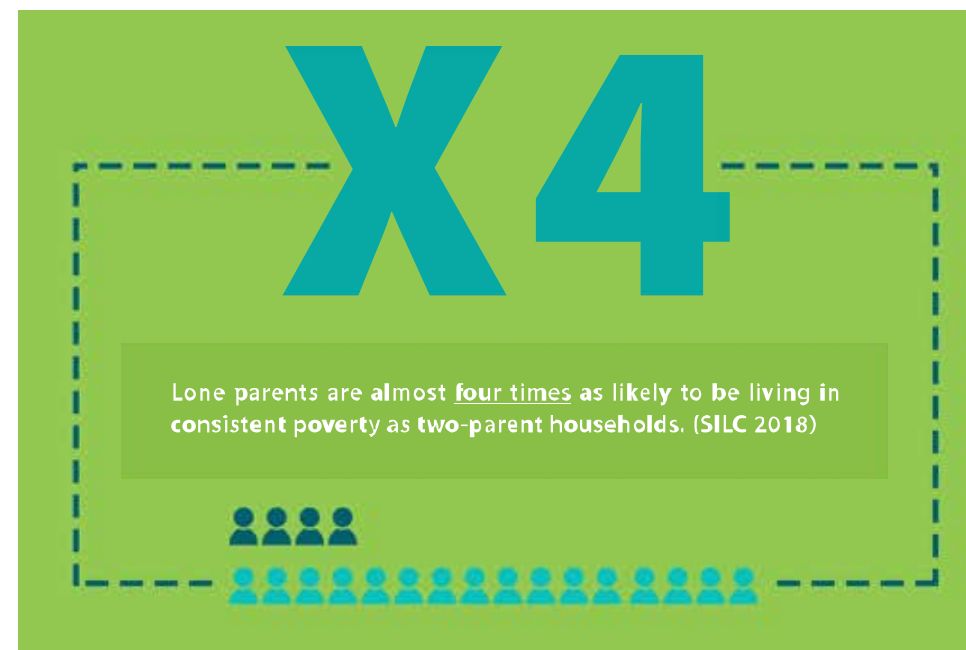
Statistics



One-in-five children in Ireland live in a one-parent family, while one-in-four families are headed by a lone parent³. Let's stop seeing people who parent alone, or share parenting, as a social anomaly and design social policies and services that supports 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.

National statistics consistently highlight one-parent families as being more disadvantaged than other families and individuals. One-parent families are consistently among the worst off in society and children in these families are particularly vulnerable to poverty and deprivation. They are four times more likely to live in consistent poverty as two-parent households and have the lowest disposable income and highest deprivation and at-risk of poverty rates of all households with children in the State⁴.

They are also disproportionately represented in the homelessness figures⁵. 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 Europe⁶. These statistics are out-of-step with an Ireland that prides itself on compassion and justice and it's just not right.



(3) Census 2016, CSO

(4) CSO Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC 2018). Accessible at: <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-silc/surveyonincomeandlivingconditionssilc2018/>

(5) Homelessness Report: April 2020. Dublin: Department of Housing Planning and Local Government. Accessible at: <https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/homelessness-report-april-2020>

(6) Society of St Vincent de Paul (SVP) Working, Parenting and Struggling, 2019. Accessible at: <https://www.svp.ie/news-media/publications/social-justice-publications/working,-parenting-and-struggling-full-report.aspx>

Programme for Government

We particularly welcome the inclusion in the Programme for Government of the following:



- Act to reform our child maintenance system and address key issues such as calculation, facilitation, and enforcement, guided by international best practice and in light of the findings of the Murphy Review.
- Continue to prioritise and protect supports for lone parents, having regard to the recommendations of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Social Protection's Report on the Position of Lone Parents in Ireland (2017).
- Work across government to address food poverty in children and ensure no child goes hungry.
- Request the Low Pay Commission to examine Universal Basic Income, informed by a review of previous Programme for Government – international pilots, and resulting in a universal basic income pilot in the lifetime of the Government.
- Continue to support the annual Social Inclusion Forum as an important means of promoting engagement between people experiencing poverty and exclusion, the community and voluntary sector and Government.
- Introduce returnships in partnership with employers, to support women who have taken time out of work to raise their families or care for loved ones, to re-enter the labour market through new education, training, and personal development programmes.

Research

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. 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 to enable movement out of poverty and social exclusion. It is critical that recommendations from this research are implemented.

List of Research

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| <p>2020 <i>The Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice - Minimum Essential Standard of Living 2020 update report.</i> https://www.budgeting.ie/publications/mesl-2020/</p> <p>2020 <i>Income, Poverty and Deprivation among Children: A Statistical Baseline Analysis.</i> Byrne, D.&Treanor, M. Presented by Dept. of Children & Youth Affairs.</p> <p>2020 <i>Child poverty in Ireland and the pandemic recession.</i> Regan, M & Maître, B. ESRI.</p> <p>2019 <i>Working, Parenting and Struggling? An analysis of the employment and living conditions of one parent families in Ireland.</i> A Report by the Society of St Vincent de Paul. Dublin, Ireland.</p> <p>2018 <i>Lone-Parent Incomes and Work Incentives. Budget Perspectives 2019. Paper 1, July 2018.</i> Regan, M., Keane, C., and Walsh, J.R. ESRI.</p> <p>2018 <i>Understanding, negotiating and navigating the politicisation of evidence-based policy research: the case of Irish research on lone parent labour market activation policy.</i> Millar, M., Crosse, R., Canavan, J. University of Bristol, UK.</p> | <p>2018 <i>In-Work Benefits: The (in)adequacy of in-work benefits in Irish lone parent labour market activation policy.</i> Millar, M., Gray, J., et al., Journal of Poverty and Social Justice. Policy Press, University of Bristol, UK.</p> <p>2017 <i>An Independent Review to Identify the Supports and Barriers for Lone Parents in Accessing Higher Education and to Examine Measures to Increase Participation.</i> Delma Byrne and Cliona Murray, Maynooth University (Commissioned by DES, DEASP and DCYA).</p> <p>2017 <i>Houses of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Social Protection Report on the Position of Lone Parents in Ireland.</i></p> <p>2017 <i>Indecon Independent Review of the Amendments to the One-Parent Family Payment since January 2012.</i> Presented to Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. Prepared by Indecon Research Economists www.indecon.ie</p> <p>2016 <i>Lone-Parent Incomes and Work Incentives. Budget Perspectives 2019. Paper 1, July 2016.</i> Regan, M., Keane, C., and Walsh, J.R. ESRI.</p> <p>2016 <i>Lone Parents and Activation, What Works and Why: A Review of the International Evidence in the Irish Context.</i> Millar, M and Crosse, R. The UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, National University of Ireland, Galway.</p> |
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Key Asks for Budget 2021

There are many challenges facing parents and children in one-parent families both longer and shorter term that require a strategic cross-governmental response. We have prioritised our asks to be as effective, evidence-based and targeted on the most vulnerable children and families. An integrated and targeted approach across the DSPCRD (Department of Social Protection, Community & Rural Development), DCYA (Department of Children and Youth Affairs), DES (Department of Education and Skills), DFHE (Department of Further & Higher Education), HSE (Health Service Executive), DHPLG (Department of Housing, Planning & Local Government), DJE (Department of Justice & Equality), SOLAS and Revenue is required if the existing conflicting and often unequal treatment of one-parent families is to be addressed. These anomalies create poverty traps for one-parent families.

Fairness for all working families

In some cases, DSPCRD treats one-parent families unfairly in comparison to two-parent families when in fact they face much more significant challenges and require additional supports. Over the last recession (2008-2013), research has highlighted that discretionary policy changes particularly affected the incomes of lone parents.⁷

- **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 (BSCFA). Currently a couple with one child can earn up to €603.70 per week and qualify for the BSCFA but a one-parent family with one child will not qualify if they earn more than €438.30 per week⁸. Given that school costs per child are the same for all families, regardless of how many adults are in the household, the current system unfairly penalises lone parents. (DSPCRD)**

(7) Doorley, K., Bercholz, M., Keane, C., Callan, T., and Walsh, J.R. (2018). The gender impact of Irish budgetary policy. Dublin: Economic and Social Research Institute and Parliamentary Budget Office. Regan, M., Keane, C., and Walsh, J.R. (2018). Budget Perspectives 2019, Paper 1. LoneParent Incomes and Work Incentives. July 2018.

(8) Citizens Information, <https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/social_welfare/social_welfare_payments/social_welfare_payments_to_families_and_children/back_to_school_clothing_and_footwear_allowance.html> accessed 13 July 2020. Perspectives 2019, Paper 1. LoneParent

- **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 (WFP). Reduce the weekly threshold to 15 hours per week for one-parent families to reduce the disproportionate pressure they are under and to help them increase their earning capacity. (DSPCRD)**

Fuel Allowance and Energy Poverty

Children are a group most exposed to the risk of energy poverty and growing up in an energy poor household has a distinct negative impact on children's health outcomes⁹. However, despite this greater risk for children, particularly those living in one-parent families, current policies and schemes are failing to effectively target children and families experiencing energy poverty.

- **Increase fuel allowance payments to 2010 levels of €25.30 for 32 weeks, to ensure that when people are required to stay at home to self-isolate or because they are sick or because schools are closed the additional fuel requirements to keep themselves warm are met. (DSPCRD)**
- **Expand eligibility to the Fuel Allowance (FA) to households in receipt of the WFP and remove the wait period for FA for those in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance. (DSPCRD)**
- **In the immediate term relax conditionality around Exceptional Needs Payment for those impacted by higher energy bills as a result of Covid19. (DSPCRD)**

(9) SVP (2019) Growing up in the cold: a policy briefing on the nature and extent of energy poverty in households with children. <<https://www.svp.ie/getattachment/2cb10388-e3ca-41ef-9911-a17f252ce09c/Growing-up-in-the-Cold.aspx>> accessed 13 July 2020.

Key asks for Budget 2021

Access to Education

The Joint Oireachtas Committee on Social Protection¹⁰ positively supported research which suggests an ‘education first’, rather than a ‘work first’, approach to interventions will lift families out of poverty and into employment in the longer term. As a group, lone parents and their children need targeted supports to remove the systemic blocks which arise when they pursue education. A cross departmental approach between DSPCRD, DES and newly formed DFHE is vital to resolve this issue. This is what is required to ensure fairness for lone parent families as there are several anomalies in the current provision of supports. Adequate social welfare & resources ensure children’s basic needs are met, they are better prepared for school and allows parents to reconnect with the world of work and access educational opportunities.

- **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 what housing supports they receive. (DSPCRD, DHPLG, DES & DFHE)**
- **Ensure that SUSI maintenance grants are payable to lone parents in receipt of BTEA so the additional costs associated with accessing education can be met. (DSPCRD, DES & DFHE)**
- **DSPCRD, DES and DFHE need to work together to make SUSI available to those studying part-time, so that lone parents can avail of part-time education. (DSPCRD, DES & DFHE)**
- **Establish a properly resourced taskforce to identify and implement measures that will support children and young people in DEIS and non-DEIS schools to prevent further educational disadvantage as a result of Covid-19. (DES)**
- **Extend the free school-books pilot scheme to all non-fee paying primary and secondary schools. (DES)**

- **Expand on existing governmental measures to address digital poverty, ensuring all low-income households have access to online teaching and pre-printed resources, if required during the academic year as a result of Covid-19 safety measures.**

Child Maintenance

Child Maintenance presents a significant problem for separated and one-parent families and frequently does not increase income for lone parents as it is means tested by the DSPCRD, may require conflictual court appearances and is frequently unpaid by the liable relative. 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 families¹¹. A cohesive family Court Welfare System and Statutory Child Maintenance service would integrate all these elements and position Child Maintenance as simply one element in this entire process. Where Child Maintenance is accurately assessed and collected it makes a positive contribution to the elimination of child poverty.

- **Ensure that the Murphy Review in consultations with all stakeholders is completed and recommendations implemented. (DSPCRD, DCYA & DJE)**
- **Child Maintenance should be a direct and non-means-tested income for children, as with Child Benefit, to support children out of poverty. The department should stop means-testing it and ensure multiple means tests are eliminated. (DSPCRD, DCYA & DJE)**

⁽¹⁰⁾<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>

⁽¹¹⁾ One Family Child Maintenance Position Paper, 2019
<https://onefamily.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Child-Maintenance-Position-Paper-7.19-2.pdf>

Key Asks for Budget 2021

Make Work Pay

The Recommendation on Investing in Children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage¹² stresses the importance of supporting parents' access to the labour market, making sure that work pays and to provide adequate income support such as child and family benefits. Current legislation underpinning the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) means it is not available to those who cannot work due to a lack of childcare, despite recent assurances from the Minister. This disproportionately impacts people parenting alone who are the sole carers for their children. The provision of affordable, accessible, and quality childcare, including early years and school age childcare is essential if lone parents are to return to work or continue their educational progression both during and post Covid19 restrictions. Current provision of these childcare and out of school services are extremely far away from what is required.

A cross-departmental, collaborative approach must be taken between DSPCRD, DCYA and DHLGH to prevent an increase in lone parents leaving employment in the coming weeks and months due to a lack of childcare and possibly entering homelessness as a result. To tackle the fallout from Covid19, it is vital that measures are taken to increase income for lone parents through employment supports.

- **Amend legislation to extend the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme and PUP to parents unable to return to work due to childcare obligations. (DSPCRD & DYCA)**
- **Ensure ongoing state funding to the childcare sector so that private providers are not forced to increase parents' fees to recoup inevitable losses due to Covid 19. (DCYA & DES)**

- **Provide top-up payments to make sure no parents are worse off when transferring from existing childcare subsidies to the National Childcare Scheme. Publish the Action Plan on Childminding while providing a dedicated and accessible budget line to support childminders in improving their facilities and practices to meet appropriate minimum regulatory and quality standards. (DSPCRD & DCYA)**
- **Focus on Jobseeker's Transition recipients to ensure they will successfully move to employment. Fund specialist bridging programmes such as our New Futures Employability Programme¹³ that support lone parents to enter education, training and employment and incorporate wrap-around parenting and family support services. Provide adequate training for DSPCRD Employment Services staff in their work with lone parents and their families. (DSPCRD & DES)**
- **Introduce refundable tax credits for families in low income work, ensuring that work pays¹⁴. (Revenue)**

(12) Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32013H0112>

(13) <https://onefamily.ie/education-development/employability-programmes/>

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

Key Asks for Budget 2021

Minimum Essential Standard of Living

Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) Research has consistently identified older children as having additional and distinct needs in comparison to younger children. Additional costs relating to food, clothing, personal care, social inclusion and second level education account for much of the difference. However, there must also be proportionate increases for children under 12 to allow for inflation and the increase in the cost of living¹⁵.

Despite the recent budget increases, the latest assessment by the VPSJ still places all social welfare dependent households with children below the level of income adequacy¹⁶. Households headed by just one parent and those with older children currently experience the deepest level of inadequacy¹⁷.

- Increase the Qualified Child Increase (QCI) rate for older children by €10 from €40 to €50 per week for children over 12 and from €36 to €39 per week for children under 12. (DSPCRD & DCYA)
- There is a need for an independent poverty-proofed benchmarking of social welfare rates, directly indexed to MESL. Begin with an €8 increase in primary payments for this year, setting a target of reaching an adequate level for all primary payments by 2025. (DSPCRD)
- Make Child Benefit payable to families with children over the age of 18 enrolled in secondary school in recognition of the higher cost of education in the senior cycle. If this is not possible on a universal basis, consider an alternative targeted approach to reach children living in one-parent families. (DSPCRD)

(15) VPSJ (2020) Minimum Essential Standard of Living 2020 update report <https://www.budgeting.ie/publications/mesl-2020/>
(16) *ibid.*
(17) *ibid.*

Housing

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





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