



One Family's Pre-Budget Submission 2009 to the Department of Social and Family Affairs September 2008

Background

One Family is working to ensure a positive and equal future for all members of all one-parent families in Ireland – changing attitudes, services, policies and lives. Together with one-parent families and those working with them, we are committed to achieving equality and respect for all families.

In addition to striving for fundamental structural change, we support individual one-parent families as they parent through times of family, work and life change, and those experiencing a crisis pregnancy. We know that every family is unique, and so we work in a family centred way to bring about better lives for parents and children.

One Family welcomes this opportunity to submit our pre-budget submission to the Department of Social and Family Affairs.

Reality of Life for One-Parent Families

The latest Census of Population (Census of Population, CSO, 2006) confirmed the growth of non-traditional family forms in Ireland. The Census revealed that:

- The number of lone-parent families in Ireland increased from 153,900 in 2002 to 189,200 in 2006. This represents a 23 per cent increase and means that one-parent families now represent 18 per cent of all families living in the state.
- The number of lone parent families with children under 20 years of age increased by 70.4 per cent between 1997 and 2006.¹ In 2006, one-parent families with at least one child under 20 years old represented 22 per cent of all families with children, an increase of 36 per cent since Census 2002.

The latest EU SILC results for 2006 show that 33 per cent of lone parent households live in consistent poverty, compared to 7.5 per cent of the population overall and 27 per cent in 2005 (EU SILC, 2007). This represents a

¹ According to the CSO “it must be kept in mind that the more precise family coding allowed by the revised relationship question used in the 2006 census has contributed to this increase.” Census of Population, 2006



very significant increase in consistent poverty rates among this group in the last year and indicates that one-parent families are 4.5 times more likely to live in consistent poverty than the general population.

One-parent families are now the group experiencing the highest level of consistent poverty in Ireland. These figures should be seen in a context where government policy is aimed at reducing the number of those experiencing consistent poverty to between 2 per cent and 4 per cent by 2012, with the aim of eliminating consistent poverty by 2016.²

One Family's Submission

This year One Family is framing its submission in a way that takes account of the serious economic downturn currently being experienced in the economy and of the expectation, as forecast by the ESRI³ in its latest Medium Term Review, that the economy will soon return to a long-term growth path.

In this context One Family calls on the government to ensure that:

- those already experiencing high levels of poverty and social exclusion do not bear the brunt of the planned cutbacks;
- Budget 2009 is seen as an opportunity to prioritise areas where interventions can have strong immediate effects as well as laying the basis for a more long-term strategy and related actions in the more prosperous years expected ahead; and that
- a longer-term strategy is agreed aimed at reducing consistent poverty rates among one-parent families to 2 per cent by 2012.

2009 Budget Priorities

One Family is therefore proposing the following priorities in Budget 2009 for one-parent families:

1. Increase social welfare payments targeted at one-parent and other low income families

1.1 Increase One Parent Family Payment

Begin a process of increasing the One-Parent Family Payment to the level proposed by the ESRI of €230 in 2007 terms.⁴ We understand that such a strategy would be part of a wider programme of reforms but also that it would

² 'The National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (NAPinclusion) 2007 – 2016', launched on 21 February 2007

³ The ESRI in its latest Medium term review states that 'the economy has the potential to grow at around 3.75 per cent a year over the coming decade, despite significant short-term problems.' Medium Term Review: 2008-2015

⁴ 'Tackling Low Income and Deprivation: Developing Effective Policies' T. Callan, B. Nolan J.R. Walsh, C.T. Whelan B. Maitre, Research Series Number 1 June 2008



recognise the success the government has had in reducing poverty rates for the over 65s following the adoption of the strategy of substantially increasing social welfare rates for this target group .

We believe that in light of the current government finances this should begin with an increase of €16 per week in Budget 2009 with higher level increases in future years as the economy recovers.

1.2 Increase payments to children dependent on social welfare and other low income families

Begin a process of addressing child poverty with the clear aim of eliminating such poverty by 2016 - now only eight years away. Given the inability so far of the social partners to agree on the specific actions required to achieve this aim we propose that in Budget 2009 the focus should be to:

- Increase the Qualified Child Allowance to €32, an increase of €8 per week.
- Raise significantly the Back to School Clothing and Footwear allowance as this payment goes to low income families on social welfare and in low paid employment, and integrate this payment with these other payments. We recommend an annual payment of €360 a year for primary school children and €650 a year for secondary school children paid twice yearly with the second payment in January, commencing in January 2009. (The Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice estimates direct education-related costs of secondary school children at €1400 per annum and €370 per annum for a primary school child.)
- Apply the same means test for Back to School Clothing and Footwear allowances to one-parent and two parent families, as is currently the case in relation to other social welfare payments, and increase the income limit for eligibility to the same level as that proposed for Family Income Supplement ie €540 per week.

2. Remove Poverty Traps for Lone Parents

Action is required in a number of areas if lone parents are to be able to return to work, or to increase their involvement in work if they are already working (60 per cent of those on the OPFP are estimated by the DSFA to have an income from employment.) The Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice estimates that a one-parent family working full-time with no car have a discretionary income after all costs of only €16.49 compared to €7.47 if they are fully dependent on social welfare.⁵

⁵ The poverty trap is clearly illustrated by the fact that using the same calculations the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice estimates such discretionary income increases to €133.92 if a lone parent with 2 children works part-time and has no car.



We recommend therefore:

- An increase in the earnings disregards for the one-parent family payment to €250 with a €500 ceiling to bring such disregards more in line with the historical percentage of Gross Average Industrial Earnings (GAIE) that these disregards represent.
- An increase in the income limit for Family Income Supplement (FIS) to €540 and an increase in the percentage of income covered to 70 per cent from its current level of 60 per cent.
- Childcare costs should be disregarded when calculating eligibility for rent supplement.
- Remove the requirement for lone parents to be on benefit for considerable periods of time before they can access supports to return to education or the requirement that they reach a certain age before they can return to education.⁶
- Undertake a widespread programme of information specifically targeted at lone parents about FIS and any other new payments and consider facilitating automatic payment of FIS to those who are eligible.

This package of measures will help to reduce poverty levels in one-parent families, will improve incentives to earn additional income and will increase take up of available supports.

Development of a Longer Term Strategy to Reduce Poverty and Social Exclusion among One-Parent families

If one-parent families are to move out of poverty and to experience full equality in Ireland today they must have access to the type and quality of services that will support them to access education, training and employment, and that will also assist them to positively manage their work and caring responsibilities.

We therefore call on the government to develop a strategy that will aim to reduce one-parent family poverty to 2 per cent by 2012 and which will be ready to commence implementation when the economy begins to pick up. This will require co-ordinated action across a number of government departments and related agencies. We believe that the key elements of that strategy should be:

⁶ For example if you are aged between 18 and 20 to qualify for BTEA you must be out of formal education for two years, and be getting the OPFP for 6 months (156 days) for the Second Level Option and 12 months (312 days) for the Third Level Option.



Education

- Provide early childhood education and development for the children of one-parent families and of other low income families to assist in breaking the cycle of long-term poverty, starting with a guarantee of one years provision for such children as promised in the current Programme for Government, 2007.
- Provide supports such as the Teen Parent Support Programme on a nationwide basis to encourage young parents to stay in school, including a stay in school payment where required.
- Implement the commitment in the current Programme for Government to grant-aid part-time education courses leading to recognised qualifications in 2008.⁷

Employment

- Progress the proposed reform of lone parent state supports in a way that supports choice, positive engagement, the introduction of incentives and the removal of barriers to progression within the labour market by lone parents, building on the findings of One Family's research on the real barriers facing lone parents in accessing and progressing in the labour market, (to be published in November 2008).
- Introduce a guarantee that lone parents moving from social welfare to paid employment can access suitable and accessible childcare, including after school care as promised in the current Programme for Government.
- Introduce a 'Cost of Returning to Work' allowance to lone parents and other parents on low income moving from social welfare to work to reflect the significant costs involved in these transition periods.
- Introduce an initiative to support lone parents on Community Employment (CE) to move onto skills based education and training and into meaningful employment.

Housing

- Ensure greater access by one-parent families to social housing and to the Rental Accommodation Scheme, including suitable provision for non-residential parents with child access.⁸

⁷ The current Programme for Government promises to: *'Introduce a new system of means-tested free fees for approved part-time courses. Together with incentives for colleges to offer more flexible and diverse course structures, this will enable more people with work or family commitments to avail of opportunities at third level'* (2007).

⁸ According to the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government one-parent families make up 38 per cent of households on the waiting list for social housing. (Assessment of Housing Needs, Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government 2005 (awaiting 2007 report))



Health

- Provide a medical card for all children, commencing with those children whose families are on social welfare or are eligible for FIS.

Supporting Families

Over 200,000 families in Ireland today are headed up by divorced, separated or remarried parents. Such families need information and support in dealing with related family law issues and in addressing the financial, child access and emotional and practical difficulties involved in such situations.

We therefore call on the government to:

- Allocate funds for the provision of Child and Family Contact Centres, building on the findings of research on child contact centres currently being carried out by One Family, supported by the Family Support Agency.

Supporting Parenting

The Programme for Government 2007 commits the government to support groups providing parenting support. One Family believes that the state can play a particularly important role in helping parents in one-parent and shared parenting situations to achieve a desirable balance between work, caring and recreation. By assisting parents to parent well, such supports can result in positive outcomes for both children and parents in the families involved.

We therefore recommend:

- The extension of available work life balance options that do not result in a loss of income. In particular, the provision of a combination of paid maternal, paternal and parental leave to cover the period until a child reaches one year of age.
- The introduction of a 'parenting' fund to facilitate those parenting alone or in co-parenting situations to attend parenting courses and to network with others involved in parenting in this way.
- Provision of trained facilitators/mediators to work with new parents that are parenting alone and to support them to maintain links with the labour market as well as to access family and parenting services during the early years of their children's lives.

Remove Inequalities faced by Migrant One-Parent Families

Increasing numbers of one-parent families in Ireland today are from new communities. One Family's growing involvement with such families has highlighted to us how many such families are extremely isolated and face additional pressures in coping with family life and in surviving financially. Families from new communities include parents with humanitarian leave to remain, foreign workers on visas who become pregnant, spouses/partners of workers from new EU member states who are now parenting alone and asylum-seekers. Increasing numbers of such families are coming to One Family for support, advice counselling and training. While the needs of such



families are multifaceted and wide-ranging, we would focus on the following recommendations aimed at addressing some of their most urgent needs:

- The reinstatement of Child Benefit as a universal payment.
- Provision of specialist accommodation for asylum seeker families living in direct provision.
- Provision of culturally sensitive medical and pregnancy related services.
- Availability of relevant information in key languages.
- Removal of the requirement for those parenting alone with humanitarian leave to remain to demonstrate their contribution to Irish society in terms of paid employment, at least when their children are younger or when they have large families.
- Greater support for migrant women experiencing crisis pregnancies including real access to all options.

Ends

This submission is made on behalf of One Family. Queries should be directed to Candy Murphy or Louise Caffrey, Policy & Research Section Tel: 01 662 9212 Fax: 01 662 9096 Email: policy@onefamily.ie