

**BETTER  
OUTCOMES  
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FUTURES**

# **National Advisory Council for Children and Young People Paper on Addressing Child Poverty**

**28 July 2021**

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## 1. Introduction

Growing up in poverty has a devastating and lasting impact on children's lives. It negatively impacts on their well-being<sup>1</sup> and increases their risk of socio-emotional developmental problems;<sup>2</sup> it leads to educational inequalities, with poor children being disproportionately more affected by learning disabilities and speech and language difficulties;<sup>3</sup> they experience greater school absenteeism and lower expectations for their lives and for achieving third level education.<sup>4</sup> It also leads to health inequalities, with children experiencing poverty having poorer health and being less likely to get medical treatment as they are on a waiting list and must wait longer for a service.<sup>5</sup> Childhood poverty is associated with reduced life chances and a greater risk of experiencing poverty during adulthood.<sup>6</sup> These issues are structural and require reform at a national policy and service delivery level.

In addition to devastating loss of life, health and well-being, the Covid-19 pandemic has caused widespread unemployment, loss of income, loss of family supports and has impacted on every aspect of children's lives. The Economic, Social and Research Institute (ESRI) has projected that, in the absence of economic growth and employment recovery, child poverty could increase to 22.6 per cent due to the pandemic.<sup>7</sup> The response to the Covid-19 crisis, including widespread lockdowns, has generated significant challenges for children and families and has increased already existing inequalities.<sup>8</sup> The negative impact on well-being and mental health has been most apparent among those from disadvantaged backgrounds; job losses have been concentrated among low earners and younger adults, and the greater financial strain in households is likely to negatively affect the well-being of children and young people.<sup>9</sup> These impacts have been compounded by the closure of schools and move to remote learning, with negative consequences for the most marginalised and vulnerable children and families.<sup>10</sup>

Added to the impact of the pandemic on children's everyday lives, the UK withdrew from the European Union (EU) on 1 January 2021. A key concern about the impact of Brexit is the potential increased cost of living for all households in Ireland, with the greatest impact on low income households.<sup>11</sup> Prior to Brexit becoming a reality, it was estimated that low-income households could face an increase in their annual costs of more than €600 due to Brexit alone.<sup>12</sup> Further research is needed to determine what impact Brexit is having in relation to low-income households and child poverty particularly in relation to consumer food prices and additional costs for those working in the agri-food sector. Budget 2021 made provision for additional government supports related to both Covid-19 and Brexit but there was no additional Brexit-related expenditure allocated to the

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<sup>1</sup>Richard Wilkinson, and Kate Pickett, *The Spirit Level: Why more equal societies almost always do better* (Allen Lane 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Emer Smyth, *Wellbeing and School Experiences among 9 and 13 year olds: Insights from the Growing Up In Ireland study* (ESRI 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Rory Hearne, and Cian McMahon, *Cherishing all equally 2016 economic inequality in Ireland* (TASC 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Delma Byrne, and Emer Smyth, *No way back? The dynamics of early school leaving* (The Liffey Press and ESRI 2010).

<sup>5</sup> Richard Wilkinson, and Kate Pickett, *The Spirit Level: Why more equal societies almost always do better* (Allen Lane 2009).

<sup>6</sup> Dorothy Watson, Bertrand Maitre, Christopher T Whelan and James Williams 'Child poverty in a period of austerity' <<https://bit.ly/2RbvoN6>> accessed 9 September 2020.

<sup>7</sup> Mark Regan, and Bertrand Maitre 'Child poverty in Ireland and the pandemic recession' (ESRI 2020) <<https://bit.ly/3hjhAdQ>> accessed 10 September 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Ombudsman for Children's Office *Annual Report 2019* (Ombudsman for Children 2020).

<sup>9</sup> Merike Darmody, Emer Smyth and Helen Russell *The implications of the Covid-19 pandemic for policy in relation to children and young people: A research review* (ESRI 2020) <https://bit.ly/33kVJ0J> accessed 12 September 2020.

<sup>10</sup> Jennifer Symonds, Dymna Devine, Seaneen Sloan, Gabriela Martinez Sainz, Margaret Crean, Barbara Moore, Emma Farrell, *Experiences of Remote Teaching and Learning In Ireland during the Covid 19 Pandemic, Report No 2*, Children's School Lives (UCD 2020).

<sup>11</sup> Martina Lawless, and Edgar Morgenroth *ESRI Special Article: Brexit and Irish Consumers* (ESRI 2018).

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

Departments of Social Protection or Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. Furthermore, the recently published Economic Recovery Plan has a limited focus on children and young people and the few direct references are limited to childcare in the context of labour market participation and gender equality.<sup>13</sup>

This Paper sets out the perspective of the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* National Advisory Council for Children and Young People, our analysis of causes and trends of child poverty and our proposals for a whole-of-government approach to planning its elimination.

Given the impact of the pandemic, the implications of Brexit and the shortcomings in responses to date, this Paper aims to inform the development of a new child poverty action plan. Although more limited in scope, the development of a specific action plan is also required to fulfil the State's obligations under the EU Child Guarantee and could be used as a foundation for the more ambitious Child Poverty Action Plan (CPAP) we have in mind. The EU Child Guarantee is a welcome significant initiative in that regard but to truly tackle child poverty in a meaningful way this should be seen as one element of a more holistic and ambitious plan and government commitments must go further than the minimum standards set out in the Guarantee. This Paper provides an overview of *how* a Child Poverty Action Plan could be developed and identifies the key overarching components that are needed to ensure that the goal of eliminating child poverty is achieved within its lifetime. Based on the experience of international efforts to tackle and eliminate child poverty, accountability through the Houses of the Oireachtas will ensure the goal of eliminating child poverty is met. The second section describes *what* targeted measures are needed across key policy areas in order to progress work on eradicating child poverty.

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<sup>13</sup> Government of Ireland *Economic Recovery Plan 2021* <https://bit.ly/3zBQBoz> accessed 15 June 2021.

## Section A: Development of a National Child Poverty Action Plan

### 2. Context

#### 2.1 Rationale for a Focus on Child Poverty

Every child has the right to an adequate standard of living for his or her physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.<sup>14</sup> Parents and guardians have the primary responsibility to provide for the child's material needs but the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child requires the State to assist parents and guardians who are in need by providing 'material assistance and support programmes particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing'.<sup>15</sup>

In 2016, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed its deep concern at the 'significant increase in the number of children living in consistent poverty' in Ireland and referred in particular to single-parent households.<sup>16</sup>

Addressing poverty and social exclusion, in particular among children and young people, must become a core political obligation and not just a possible policy choice. It is a central tenet of creating a more equal, prosperous and just Ireland. In the last recession, children were most negatively impacted.<sup>17</sup> A previous commitment by the Irish Government to address pensioner poverty demonstrates that addressing poverty amongst a specific cohort of the population can be done. In the late 1990s there were high levels of poverty amongst the older population but this fell to less than 10 per cent by 2010 through sustained investment in the maximum rate of the state pension in the first decade of this century.<sup>18</sup> The protection of the state pension during the last recession also 'helped to mitigate the significant increase in material deprivation seen for other age groups'.<sup>19</sup>

While the costs of poverty fall primarily on the individuals and households who are experiencing it, there is also a hidden cost of poverty to the State and our public services.<sup>20</sup> It is estimated that the public service cost of mitigating the effects of poverty in Ireland is almost €4.5 billion per annum.<sup>21</sup> Poverty impacts on everyone in society, not just those living below the poverty line.<sup>22</sup> In a context where the pressure on public finances has never been greater, and when the Covid and Brexit crises have highlighted the inequalities facing children and families in Ireland, investing now to end poverty is vital.

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<sup>14</sup> UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (20 November 1980) 1577 UNTS 3 (UNCRC) Art 27.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> UNCRC, 'Concluding Observations: Ireland' (2016) UN Doc CRC/C/IRL/CO/3-4 para 59.

<sup>17</sup> Bea Cantillon, Yekaterina Chzhen, Handa Sudhanshu, et al. *Children of Austerity: Impact of the Great Recession on Child Poverty in Rich Countries* (Oxford University Press 2017).

<sup>18</sup> Barra Roantree, Bernard Maitre, Alyvia McTague, and Ivan Privalko *Poverty, income inequality and living standards in Ireland*, (ESRI and The Community Foundation for Ireland 2021) 40-41.

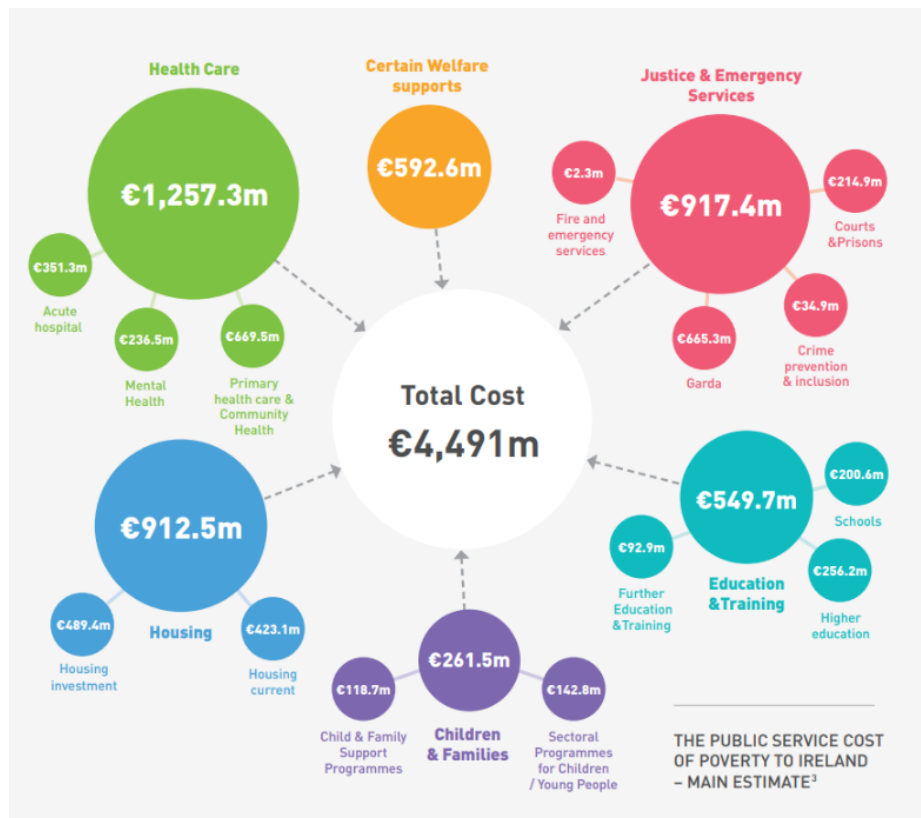
<sup>19</sup> Barra Roantree, Bernard Maitre, Alyvia McTague, and Ivan Privalko *Poverty, income inequality and living standards in Ireland* (ESRI and The Community Foundation for Ireland 2021) 41.

<sup>20</sup> Micheal Collins, *The Hidden Cost of Poverty* (Society of St Vincent de Paul 2020) <<https://bit.ly/3mzuusn>> accessed 16 September 2020.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*

Figure 1: The Public Service Cost of Poverty to Ireland



Source: Collins, M. (2020) The Hidden Cost of Poverty <https://bit.ly/3mzuusn> p. 7.

## 2.2 Drivers of Child Poverty in Ireland

Households with children experience higher rates of enforced deprivation, and experience higher rates of consistent poverty than other households.<sup>23</sup> The 2019 Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) demonstrates that children are most vulnerable to poverty, with 8.1 per cent of children living in consistent poverty, while 15.3 per cent of children were at risk of poverty.<sup>24</sup> It is estimated that in 2019 just over 96,000 children were living in consistent poverty, equating to 34 per cent of those living in consistent poverty.<sup>25</sup> Among the children living in consistent poverty 43 per cent are in deep poverty, where household income is 50 per cent or less of median income.<sup>26</sup>

Recent analysis of the Growing up in Ireland survey data, commissioned by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY), identifies a number of drivers of child poverty. Characteristics such as lone parenthood, ethnicity, disability and family size are identified as being associated with persistent poverty.<sup>27</sup> The authors developed a multi-dimensional measure of poverty, known as ‘economic vulnerability’, based on three indicators – low household income (bottom 20 per cent), difficulty making ends meet and material deprivation. Drivers of entry into economic vulnerability include household transitions, such as relationship breakdown or parental

<sup>23</sup> Department of Children and Youth Affairs, *Income, poverty and deprivation among children: A statistical baseline analysis* (DCYA 2020).

<sup>24</sup> Central Statistics Office, *Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2019*. (CSO 2020).

<sup>25</sup> Department of Children and Youth Affairs, *Income, poverty and deprivation among children: A statistical baseline analysis* (DCYA 2020).

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Bertrand Maitre, Helen Russell, and Emer Smyth *The Dynamics of Child Poverty Evidence from the Growing Up in Ireland Survey* (ESRI 2021) <<https://bit.ly/3iiUtEG>> accessed 4 June 2021

job loss.<sup>28</sup> The inability of the mother to work due to disability or illness is also a strong predictor of economic vulnerability.<sup>29</sup> In addition, parental employment is a key factor both in preventing families falling into poverty and in lifting them out of economic vulnerability.<sup>30</sup> Long-term exposure to economic vulnerability impacts on children's outcomes across a number of domains including their physical and mental health, educational attainment and socio-emotional well-being and can result in them having a poor self-concept which can lead to mental health difficulties in later life.<sup>31</sup>

One parent families are significantly more vulnerable to experiencing poverty with 17.1 per cent living in consistent poverty versus 6.1 per cent of two parent families.<sup>32</sup> Lone parents in Ireland are almost five times more likely to experience in-work poverty than other households with children.<sup>33</sup> 2019 saw a worrying increase in deprivation among children, with 23.3 per cent of children under 18 experiencing enforced deprivation compared with 19.7 per cent in 2018.<sup>34</sup> Forty-five per cent of persons living in households with one adult and children under 18 experienced enforced deprivation in 2019.<sup>35</sup> Single people, along with couples without children experienced similar losses and gains in disposable income during the austerity and recovery periods following the last recession.<sup>36</sup> However, lone parents lost proportionately more disposable income than single people without children during the period of austerity, and continued to see a fall in their income even during the recovery period, mainly due to policy reforms and cuts to the One Parent Family Payment.<sup>37</sup>

#### Children Living in Consistent Poverty in Ireland

In January 2020, the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection published its *Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025*.<sup>38</sup> This plan is the successor to *the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016*. The Roadmap reaffirms the Government's commitment to reducing the number of children in consistent poverty by 70,000 from its 2011 level. It also commits to setting a new national child poverty target. There will be a mid-term review in 2022 to 'facilitate an evaluation of the impact of the Roadmap commitments, as well as allowing commitments to be updated to reflect new actions and strategies across Government'.<sup>39</sup> It also commits to establishing and reporting 'on a new target in respect of Child Poverty, to improve Ireland's ranking from 20th to at least 5th for the EU SILC reporting year of 2025'.<sup>40</sup>

The Department of Social Protection has developed a profile of children living in consistent poverty in Ireland. It notes that children in consistent poverty:

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<sup>28</sup>Bertrand Maitre, Helen Russell, and Emer Smyth *The Dynamics of Child Poverty Evidence from the Growing Up in Ireland Survey* (ESRI 2021) <<https://bit.ly/3iiUtEG>> accessed 4 June 2021.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Central Statistics Office, *Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 201*. (CSO 2019).

<sup>33</sup> Society of St Vincent de Paul, *Working, Parenting, and Struggling? An analysis of the employment and living conditions of one parent families in Ireland* (SVP 2019) <<https://bit.ly/2F7Rbmz>> accessed 10 September 2020.

<sup>34</sup> Central Statistics Office, *Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) Enforced deprivation 2019* (CSO 2020) <<https://bit.ly/2RaDtI6>> accessed 10 September 2020.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>36</sup>Karina Doorley, Maxime Bercholz, Tim Callan, Claire Keane and John R. Walsh, *The gender impact of Irish budgetary policy* (ESRI 2018).

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, *Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025* (DEASP 2020).

<sup>39</sup> Government of Ireland, 'Social Inclusion Forum 2021' <<https://bit.ly/33CqQFR>> accessed 12 May 2021.

<sup>40</sup> Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, *Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025* (DEASP 2020), 37.

- tend to live in households headed by a single adult and households headed by a woman.
- tend to live in households where there is no person at work.
- tend to live in households headed by individuals with low levels of educational attainment; households headed by someone who is unemployed, on home duties, ill or disabled.
- are more likely to be resident in the Border, Midlands or Western regions.
- slightly more likely to live in rural rather than urban locations.<sup>41</sup>

An analysis of the 2018 SILC data by age cohort found that preschool children (0-5 years) have the lowest consistent poverty rate (4.8 per cent), while primary school aged children (6-11 years) have the highest consistent poverty rate (nine per cent).<sup>42</sup> Almost nine per cent of children at second level experience consistent poverty.<sup>43</sup>

The Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) is a longitudinal survey that collects information at the household and personal level. It does not collect information from hostels, hotels or communal institutions. This methodology is therefore inadequate to capture some children who are experiencing the most fundamental material deprivation. This includes asylum seeking children living in Direct Provision centres, children who are living with their families in emergency homeless accommodation or domestic violence refuges and children living on unofficial Traveller halting sites.

#### Other Groups of Vulnerable Children

Research has identified that alongside children living in households headed by single parents more generally, three discrete groups of children that are at high risk of experiencing poverty and social exclusion and have specific rights and needs include:

- Children living in Direct Provision centres (children seeking asylum or another form of international protection).<sup>44</sup>
- Children living with their families in emergency homeless accommodation.
- Children from Traveller and Roma communities.<sup>45</sup>

While one parent families comprise 17 per cent of all family units in the State, there tends to be a disproportionate number of these families in both emergency accommodation<sup>46</sup> and Direct Provision accommodation.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, there are comparatively more lone parents in the Traveller community.<sup>48</sup> It is recognised that not all of these children are captured in official measures of poverty and so will not impact on the achievement of a national child poverty target. However, to ensure our response to children in consistent poverty includes all children experiencing such poverty, specific actions are needed in relation to these three specific groups. The Child Guarantee for vulnerable children is structured to provide a specific opportunity in the short term to leverage EU funds in supporting vulnerable children in these particular target groups.

<sup>41</sup> Department of Social Protection, *Who are the children living in consistent poverty?* (Unpublished communication 2015).

<sup>42</sup> Department of Children and Youth Affairs, *Income, poverty and deprivation among children: A statistical baseline analysis* (DCYA 2020).

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Samantha K Arnold, *State Sanctioned Child Poverty and Exclusion* (2012 Irish Refugee Council).

<sup>45</sup> Brian Harvey, Social Research (2013) *'Travelling with austerity': Impacts of cuts on Travellers, Traveller Projects and Services* (2013 Pavee Point). L. Pohiolainen, *Roma and Education*, (2014 Pavee Point) and L. Pohiolainen, *Challenging barriers and misperceptions: Roma maternal health in Ireland* (2014 Pavee Point).

<sup>46</sup> Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, *Homelessness Report April 2021* <<https://bit.ly/2Sv8STu>> accessed 14 June 2021.

<sup>47</sup> Reception and Integration Agency *Monthly Report November 2018* <<https://bit.ly/3zqJyPl>> accessed 14 June 2021.

<sup>48</sup> Central Statistics Office *Census of Population 2016 – Profile 8 Irish Travellers, Ethnicity and Religion* (CSO 2017) <<https://bit.ly/2SEeLxI>> accessed 15 June 2021.



While there has been an improvement in the rates of child poverty in Ireland between 2011 and 2018 this was coming from a severely low base, with most gains made after 2016.<sup>49</sup> However, between 2018 and 2019 the rate of both consistent poverty and deprivation among children increased.<sup>50</sup> The introduction of a number of measures from 2013 to 2019 reversed some of the cuts to the incomes of some of the poorest families in Ireland. These included increases to the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance<sup>51</sup>; a new higher rate of the Qualified Child Increase for older children<sup>52</sup> and increases to adult social welfare rates<sup>53</sup> and the National Minimum Wage rate<sup>54</sup> which result in positive effects on household income. Investment in prevention and early intervention services and their ongoing integration into the mainstream<sup>55</sup>, and the introduction of the National Childcare Scheme have also been significant. While not an exhaustive list, these examples give an indication of the types of policy responses and societal developments which are likely to have impacted positively on the rate of child poverty in Ireland (see Appendix One for a more detailed list of examples of these measures).

### 2.3 Prioritisation of Child Poverty at the EU Level

Since 2013, a number of key initiatives from the European Commission have called on Member States to concentrate on eliminating child poverty. In response, the Irish government has prioritised addressing child poverty within a number of national strategies. The scope of these policy initiatives informs the current national and European context for the development of a national action plan on child poverty. A chronological overview of the main developments is summarised below.

In 2013, the European Commission issued its recommendation *Investing in children: Breaking the cycle of disadvantage* which outlined a three-pillar approach to tackling child poverty: access to adequate resources; access to affordable, quality services and children's right to participate.<sup>56</sup>

In April 2014, the Government set a national child poverty reduction target and committed to adopt a multidimensional approach to tackle child poverty.<sup>57</sup> This pledge formed part of Ireland's commitment to radically reduce poverty by 2020 under the European Commission's *Europe 2020* strategy.<sup>58</sup>

In October 2017, the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, in conjunction with partner departments, published a paper detailing the whole-of-government approach to tackling child poverty. Its approach is based upon the European Commission's *Recommendation on Investing in Children* and 'emphasises the need for a combined approach to tackling child poverty levels in

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<sup>49</sup> Department of Children and Youth Affairs, *Income, poverty and deprivation among children: A statistical baseline analysis* (DCYA 2020).

<sup>50</sup> Central Statistics Office, *Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2019*. (CSO 2020).

<sup>51</sup> Government of Ireland, *Budget 2019 – Expenditure Report* (Government of Ireland 2018) <<https://bit.ly/3xlGpZX>> accessed 15 July 2021

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Government of Ireland *Budget 2019 – Expenditure Report* (Government of Ireland 2018) <<https://bit.ly/3xlGpZX>> accessed 15 July 2021 and Government of Ireland *Budget 2018 – Expenditure Report* (Government of Ireland 2017) <<https://bit.ly/3igwEvh>> accessed 15 July 2021

<sup>54</sup> Low Pay Commission, *Low Pay Commission: Three Year Report 2015-2018* (2019 Low Pay Commission) <<https://bit.ly/3wL4uxM>> accessed 15 July 2019

<sup>55</sup> Claire Hickey, O'Riordan, et. al. *National Evaluation of the Area Based Childhood Programme: Main Report* (2018 Department of Children and Youth Affairs, The Atlantic Philanthropies, and the Centre for Effective Services)

<sup>56</sup> European Commission, *Commission Recommendation of 20.2.2013: Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage* (Brussels, 20.2.2013 C(2013) 778 final)

<sup>57</sup> Department of Children and Youth Affairs, *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020*, (2014 Department of Children and Youth Affairs).

<sup>58</sup> European Commission, *Communication from the Commission Europe 2020: A strategy for smart, inclusive and sustainable growth* (Brussels, 3.3.2010 (Com 2010) 2020 final).

Ireland, involving both income supports and services'.<sup>59</sup> That paper also utilises the three-pillar approach outlined in the *Recommendation* (access to resources, access to services and children's right to participate). Alongside income supports and the provision of services the paper also prioritises improving employment prospects for parents as a way of reducing child poverty.<sup>60</sup> Notably, many of the commitments outlined in that paper were existing commitments and did not add new actions to tackle child poverty.

In 2017, the European Pillar of Social Rights was adopted by the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission and set out 20 key principles to work towards 'a strong social Europe that is fair, inclusive and full of opportunity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century'.<sup>61</sup> It notes that children have the right to protection from poverty' and that '[c]hildren from disadvantaged backgrounds have the right to specific measures to enhance equal opportunities'.<sup>62</sup> The Pillar also commits to provide access to essential services, education, training and life-long learning, childcare and support to children, social protection, minimum income and active support to employment.<sup>63</sup> The *2021 European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan* includes a target to reduce the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion by 15 million by 2030.<sup>64</sup> The Porto declaration agreed by the European Council in May 2021 states that EU Member States are:

[...] committed to reducing inequalities, defending fair wages, fighting social exclusion and tackling poverty, taking on the objective of fighting child poverty and addressing the risks of exclusion for particularly vulnerable social groups such as the long-term unemployed, the elderly, persons with disabilities and the homeless.<sup>65</sup>

In June 2020, the European Commission published the Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee, following a call from the European Parliament to ensure that every child at risk of poverty or social exclusion in Europe has access to free healthcare, free education, free early childhood education; decent housing and adequate nutrition.<sup>66</sup> The target groups for the child guarantee are children in institutions; children with disabilities; children of recent migrants and refugees; and children living in precarious family situations.<sup>67</sup>

In March 2021, the European Commission published a new comprehensive *EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child* to better protect all children, to help them fulfil their rights and to place them at the centre of EU policy making. The Strategy covers six thematic areas including participation in political and democratic life; socio-economic inclusion, health and education; combatting violence against children and ensuring child protection; child-friendly justice; digital and information society; and the global dimension. In parallel, it also presented its proposal for a Council Recommendation establishing the European Child Guarantee. Both initiatives have been informed by extensive consultations with citizens, stakeholders and, most importantly, more than 10,000 children. The Guarantee aims to impact prevention and reduction of child poverty and social exclusion by supporting Member States efforts to guarantee access to quality key services for children in need. It

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<sup>59</sup> Department of Children and Youth Affairs, *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020* (2014 Department of Children and Youth Affairs).

<sup>60</sup> Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection *Distilled paper on whole of Government approach to tackling child poverty*.

<sup>61</sup> European Commission, *European Pillar on Social Rights* <<https://bit.ly/3ijmyKe>> accessed 16 July 2021

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/social-summit-european-pillar-social-rights-booklet\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/social-summit-european-pillar-social-rights-booklet_en.pdf)

<sup>64</sup> <https://www.iiea.com/eu-affairs/the-european-pillar-of-social-rights-action-plan/>

<sup>65</sup> European Council, 'The Porto Declaration' (8 May 2021) <<https://bit.ly/2V20Kuz>> (20 July 2021).

<sup>66</sup> European Commission *Child Guarantee for Vulnerable Children* <https://bit.ly/33CrAdt> accessed 17 September 2020.

<sup>67</sup> European Commission (2020) *Feasibility study for a child guarantee final report*.

calls on Member States to guarantee children in need free access to early childhood education and care; education (including school-based activities); a healthy meal each school day; healthcare; and to ensure effective access to healthy nutrition and adequate housing. The Guarantee was finalised on 14 June 2021.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> European Council, 'Access to key services for children in need: Council agrees European Child Guarantee' (14 June 2021) <<https://bit.ly/2UvCQrv>> accessed 19 July 2021.

### 3. Implementation of a National Child Poverty Action Plan

International evidence shows that the challenge of eliminating child poverty requires a range of measures to effect real change. Overall responsibility for implementation of the action plan should be led by a dedicated and fully resourced Child Poverty Office (CPO) within the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. The Office should co-ordinate and monitor a whole-of-government approach with specific actions delegated to relevant Departments. It should facilitate interagency working and implementation at local level by coordinating with the Child and Young People Services Committees (CYPSC) National Steering Group.

Oversight and accountability should ultimately be to the Houses of the Oireachtas. This includes reporting on progress to the Cabinet Committee system and the scrutiny of plans and progress by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Children. Drawing further on international best practices, a commitment in legislation through a Child Poverty Reduction Act would provide a sharp policy focus, political accountability, and a mandated monitoring and reporting framework<sup>69</sup> charged with scrutinising progress. Embedding a coherent approach to child poverty, through poverty proofing and equality budgeting, can mitigate the unintended impact of new policies on child poverty. While leadership from central government is critical, the development, implementation and oversight of the Plan should involve key social stakeholders along with the participation of children and young people.

#### 3.1 Departmental Structures

While the whole-of-government approach is important, it requires a concerted focus and a real driver for change to develop, fund and implement a national action plan to end child poverty. The need for this type of approach across Departments is evidently required given the breadth of the challenge. Government thinking and ambition needs to be on a scale similar to other ‘wicked problems’ requiring special arrangements such as we have seen in recent years in for example, employment action and climate change.

The DCEDIY should be designated the lead Department for child poverty, in partnership with the Department of Social Protection as the lead Department for the whole population mandate on social inclusion. The continued close cooperation and support of the Department of Social Protection is vital. The CPO would work to build its leadership capacity over a two-year timeframe. The DCEDIY is already in the process of establishing an EU/International Unit which will act as the coordinator for the Child Guarantee.<sup>70</sup> The Child Guarantee role should be embedded in the CPO. The Office must be adequately resourced and staffed. The adequate resourcing of the CPO would cost approximately €3.5 million over five years, based on a Principal Officer supported by a team of five officials at various appropriate levels to work on policy, strategic engagement, communications and operations. The total cost includes a budget for events, publications and research. The Child Poverty unit in New Zealand consists of six staff members.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Child Poverty Reduction Act 2018, New Zealand <<https://bit.ly/3zchfmM>> accessed 19 July 2021.

<sup>70</sup> Minister of State, Joe O’Brien TD announced the EU/International Office at an event hosted by the Children’s Rights Alliance on 24 May 2021.

<sup>71</sup> Correspondence with the New Zealand Child Poverty Unit at the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

The CPO should have an important role in raising the profile of child poverty within national and local government. It should also provide support and advice to government departments and public bodies on how to poverty-proof their actions and address child poverty. The Cabinet Sub-Committee on Social Policy and Public Sector Reform, chaired by the Taoiseach, and supported by the Senior Officials Group, should set direction, and receive and review annual progress reports.

The CPO should be established as a distinct entity alongside whatever arrangements are needed to drive the successor to BOBF. They should work in unity as two components of one national policy framework, for all children and young people, with the child poverty targets a central commitment in BOBF 2, but with a specific team (the CPO) working on the action plan to drive implementation of the targets. This would acknowledge the distinct and additional coordination and leadership required to drive delivery of the plan across Departments and agencies.

### 3.2 Oversight and Accountability

Accountability for the implementation of the national action plan on child poverty and progress on the child poverty target should come from the top-down. Drawing on the experience of New Zealand and Scotland, this would mean introducing legislation to support the reduction of poverty levels.<sup>72</sup>

#### Box 1 – International Experience

##### **Best Practice Example 1 – The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017**

The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 sets out four statutory income targets to be met by 2030 and four interim income targets to be met by 2023.<sup>73</sup> The Act also requires Scottish ministers to publish and report on child poverty delivery plans and local authorities and health boards must report every year on actions they are taking, and will take, to reduce child poverty.<sup>74</sup> An independent, statutory Poverty and Inequality Commission was established under the Act in July 2019. The Commission provides independent advice to Scottish ministers on poverty and inequality, monitors progress towards reducing poverty and proposes solutions to reduce poverty and inequality in Scotland.<sup>75</sup>

While many of the policy areas which impact on child poverty rates in Scotland remain with Westminster, including social security policy, makes it difficult for the Scottish Government to implement policy that will reduce child poverty rates, there are lessons that would be relevant in the Irish context. Achieving buy-in and changing the discourse around child poverty are the successes achieved so far as a result of the introduction of poverty reduction legislation in Scotland, as it is too early yet to see the impact on child poverty rates. It is likely that the Covid-19 crisis will make achieving the targets more difficult.<sup>76</sup> One key difference between the Irish and Scottish contexts to note is that national policy is delivered by 32 local authorities in Scotland rather than directly by government departments like in Ireland.

##### **Best Practice Example 2 – The Child Poverty Reduction Act 2018**

<sup>72</sup> Society of St Vincent de Paul, *Investing in measures to end poverty. SVP Election 2020 Priorities* (SVP 2020) <<https://bit.ly/3kJE362>> accessed 26 September 2020.

<sup>73</sup> NHS Health Scotland *1 Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017: An overview* (NHS Health Scotland 2018) <<https://bit.ly/334Y1SV>> accessed 26 September 2020.

<sup>74</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> Poverty and Inequality Commission *Reducing Poverty and Inequality in Scotland* <<https://bit.ly/3rCQZzr>> accessed 28 July 2021.

<sup>76</sup> Satwat Rehman input to *Measures to tackle child poverty during and after Covid 19*. Online discussion panel 29 September 2020. <<https://bit.ly/2GAtdQV>> accessed 3 October 2020.

The Child Poverty Reduction Act 2018 in New Zealand requires the Government of the day to set long-term and intermediate targets on a set of child poverty measures; report annually on the set of child poverty measures; report on Budget Day how the budget will reduce child poverty and report on child-poverty related indicators.<sup>77</sup> This ensures political accountability of both current and future governments. The New Zealand child poverty reduction legislation is connected to the Public Finance Act, which is a strong lever in ensuring that policy makers must take cognisance of the impact of budgetary measures on child poverty. New Zealand has seen some progress towards meeting the child poverty target, although reporting timeframes mean that the full impact of a NZ\$5 billion family support package has yet to be seen. The Covid-19 pandemic is likely to make achieving the targets more difficult.<sup>78</sup>

As part of the accountability mechanisms enshrined in legislation in New Zealand, the government is required to report on progress to address child poverty on budget day.<sup>79</sup> Similar action could be undertaken as part of the series of papers published on Budget Day by the Departments of Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform. Such a report should report on progress towards the agreed child poverty target and supporting measures. As is the case in New Zealand the report should also comment on the implications of the Budget measures on the child poverty target.

Further reporting mechanisms should include reporting to the Oireachtas Committee on Children on progress towards the target and the implementation of solutions identified within the action plan.

#### Poverty Proofing/Poverty Impact Assessment and Equality Budgeting

Poverty proofing is the process by which government departments, local authorities and state agencies assess policies and programmes at design and review stage in relation to the likely impact they will have, or have had, on poverty and inequalities which are likely to lead to poverty, with a view to poverty reduction.<sup>80</sup> It was introduced in 1998 following on from the *National Anti-Poverty Strategy*.<sup>81</sup> However, poverty proofing has been weak and poorly implemented since its introduction.<sup>82</sup> Poverty proofing and poverty impact assessment have the potential to ensure that the impact of government spending on public services, as well as changes to taxes and social welfare payments on poverty can be understood. Every major policy, across all government departments should be assessed for their impact on poverty and contribution towards poverty reduction.<sup>83</sup>

The introduction of equality budgeting on a pilot basis in 2017 was a positive first step towards advancing equality and reducing poverty in the context of budgetary decisions. The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) has provided support to government departments in

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<sup>77</sup>Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Child poverty measures, targets and indicators* <<https://bit.ly/3iqISjk>> accessed 3 October 2020.

<sup>78</sup>Kristie Carter input to *Measures to tackle child poverty during and after Covid 19*. Online discussion panel 29 September 2020. <<https://bit.ly/2GAtdQV>> accessed 3 October 2020.

<sup>79</sup> New Zealand Government, *Wellbeing Budget 2021 Securing our Recovery*, <<https://bit.ly/3wQhcM0>> accessed 16 July 2021

<sup>80</sup> Combat Poverty Agency and Equality Authority *Poverty and inequality: applying an equality dimension to poverty proofing* (CPA and EA 2003) <<https://bit.ly/2EyxZxM>> accessed 26 September 2020.

<sup>81</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> Society of St Vincent de Paul *Submission to the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection on the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion* (2018 SVP) <<https://bit.ly/36aXZKX>> accessed 26 September 2020.

<sup>83</sup>Combat Poverty Agency and Equality Authority *Poverty and inequality: applying an equality dimension to poverty proofing* (CPA and EA 2003) <<https://bit.ly/2EyxZxM>> accessed 26 September 2020.

relation to equality budgeting.<sup>84</sup> In 2019, an OECD review of this pilot identified the need to establish an inter-departmental network of equality budgeting contact points. This has the potential to embed equality and poverty proofing across policy development and implementation. Further progress on this action is needed to realise its full potential.<sup>85</sup> While initially equality budgeting was primarily focused on gender specific indicators and socio-economic status, it is to be expanded to include all nine grounds covered in equality legislation. This is a particularly welcome step given the impact of poverty on households such as one parent headed households, households with a disability, Traveller families and other ethnic minorities.<sup>86</sup>

The gender dimension to poverty is clearly acknowledged in the Citizens Assembly report on Gender Equality which states that '[g]ender equality is vital for a sustainable and equitable economy. It helps to reduce poverty and promotes economic growth'.<sup>87</sup> *The National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020* recognised that women experience higher levels of consistent poverty than men and outlines supportive measures to address this.<sup>88</sup> Proactive poverty reduction measures for women, girls and female-headed households should be a key feature of the updated strategy.

### 3.3 Involvement of Stakeholders

The National Advisory Council on BOBF itself has been an important element of the Better Outcomes Brighter Futures oversight mechanisms and affords a direct link to the sector, sector interests and independent expertise. The combination of Government and civil society actors in pursuit of shared goals has resulted in real impact and a greater understanding of how to achieve those shared aims. The Council should be a key stakeholder with a defined role in overseeing the implementation of the plan.

A central aspect of the European Commission's Investing in Children Recommendation is that child and youth participation and children's rights should be a central aspect of efforts to tackle child poverty.<sup>89</sup> The involvement of children and young people should be an integral part of the development, monitoring and evaluation of the national action plan. The participation framework recently published by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth highlights the involvement of young people in the development of the LGBTI+ youth strategy as an example of good practice which incorporated Lundy's 'model of participation'.<sup>90</sup> This comprises four distinct elements including space, voice, audience and influence. It also encompasses two stages, the right to express views and the right to have those views given due weight.

Of central importance, given the remit of the plan, will be the inclusion of seldom-heard voices. Barriers to participation for children from ethnic minorities, members of the Traveller and Roma community, children with disabilities and those living in institutions (e.g. homeless accommodation)

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<sup>84</sup> Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, *Budget Proofing for Human Rights and Equality* <<https://bit.ly/3igZ1JV>> accessed 16 July 2021.

<sup>85</sup> Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Michael McGrath TD, Parliamentary Questions, Written Answers, 31 March 2021 [16949/21]

<sup>86</sup> Sarah Swaine, *Equality Budgeting: Proposed Next Steps in Ireland*, (Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service and Department of Public Expenditure and Reform 2017) <<https://bit.ly/3igfZlz>> accessed 16 July 2021.

<sup>87</sup> Citizens Assembly, *Report of the Citizens Assembly on Gender Equality* (Citizens Assembly 2021) <<https://bit.ly/3A7M51h>> accessed 28 June 2021.

<sup>88</sup> Department of Justice and Equality, *National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017:2020: creating a better society for all* (Department of Justice and Equality, 2017).

<sup>89</sup> European Commission, Commission Recommendation of 20.2.2013: Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage (Brussels, 20.2.2013 C(2013) 778 final) <<https://bit.ly/2UtvhSf>> accessed 20 July 2021.

<sup>90</sup> Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth *National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making* (DCEDIY 2020) <<https://bit.ly/3hQaQs3>> accessed 25 May 2021.

should be identified and steps taken to address these.<sup>91</sup> Consultation with those experiencing poverty should be meaningful and consideration should be given to setting up a youth panel who will feed in to the development and monitoring of the strategy at key stages.

### Box 2 – Children and Young People’s Participation

#### **Best Practice Example - Involvement of Young People in LGBTI+ Youth Strategy**

Children and Young People’s participation was central to the development of the LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy 2018-2020<sup>92</sup>. In collaboration with BeLonG To and the National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) a Youth Advisory Group (YAG) was set up. Representatives of the YAG were included in the committee established to oversee the development of the Strategy. The YAG also contributed to the organisation of youth consultation events that took place across the country.

Following the development of the Strategy, young people were involved in the implementation process through the establishment of a Youth Forum. The Forum included representatives from a range of backgrounds and it supported the implementation of a number of key actions under the Strategy.

The Lundy model of participation was central to the decision-making process involving the Forum in the Strategy’s implementation.

In the most recent local, European and General elections, the power of children and young people to be engaged and influence the votes of their parents and grandparents, who were reported to have credited their children and grandchildren with pushing them towards voting in a particular direction was noteworthy.<sup>93</sup> However, young people under the age of 18 cannot vote in Ireland in any elections. A range of multilateral bodies such as the EU, the Council of Europe and the UN have called for a voting age of 16. In 2013, the Constitutional Convention recommended that the voting age in Ireland be reduced to 16 years of age in all elections.<sup>94</sup> Internationally there is momentum towards extending the right to vote to young people at 16 and 17 years old such as in Scotland and Austria.<sup>95</sup> Given that children and young people experience the highest rates of poverty and social exclusion, and many budgetary and political decisions impact them directly, a change to the voting age for 16 and 17 year olds should be considered to empower young people to have their voices heard and influence decisions that are based on their best interests. Expanding the right would lead

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<sup>91</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth *National Framework for Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-making* (DCEDIY 2020) <<https://bit.ly/3hQaQs3>> accessed 25 May 2021 46-50.

<sup>93</sup> Harry McGee, ‘Elections 2019: Climate change sees Greens move to centre of politics’ *The Irish Times* (Dublin, 25 May 2019); *The Irish Examiner*, ‘#Elections2019: ‘It’s wide open’, says Martin as first counts start rolling in’, <<https://bit.ly/2UPmt9h>> accessed 16 July 2021.

<sup>94</sup> A change to the voting age for Dáil and presidential elections would require a constitutional referendum. A change to the voting age for local and EU elections would require an amendment to the Electoral Act 1992, the European Parliament Elections Act 1997 and the Local Government Act 2001.

<sup>95</sup> In the Scottish referendum on independence the right to vote was extended to 16 and 17 year olds with 75% of this age cohort voting. Given this success, the Scottish Government allowed young people aged 16 and 17 to vote in the Scottish Parliamentary elections. Austria has also lowered the voting age for all elections to 16. Seven of the 16 states in Germany have lowered the voting age and a region in Switzerland has introduced it. In Austria and Germany the voter turnout of young people aged 16 and 17 was equal to that of older age groups. Other countries such as the UK and Denmark are also considering such a move. Vote at 16 has been introduced in the Isle of Man, Jersey and Guernsey.



to an increase in voter turnout in the long run<sup>96</sup> and increase political consciousness and engagement among adolescents.<sup>97</sup>

### 3.4 Local Child Poverty Action Plans

The Feasibility Study on the Child Guarantee identifies local authorities as a key aspect of ensuring the effective use of European funding.<sup>98</sup> While local actors are seen as key to the implementation of this funding, country experts involved in the study identified a lack of capacity amongst local actors.<sup>99</sup> The involvement of such bodies in all aspects of the design, implementation and monitoring of actions under the Child Guarantee is identified as a means of tackling this challenge.<sup>100</sup> In Scotland, under the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017, local child poverty action reports are developed by local authorities and health boards each year.<sup>101</sup> The reports contain specific actions that aim to mitigate against factors contributing to child poverty.<sup>102</sup>

The development of local action plans to tackle child poverty could be led and implemented by existing structures such as the CYPSC and City and County Childcare Committees. The development of these plans could build on the work completed to date by CYPSCs in profiling the population of children and young people in their areas and identify concrete actions for change. This would also ensure that the response at local level would be tailored to the particular demographic and circumstances of the children and young people living in each county and would take account of the existing services, resources and amenities available in the area that could be used to deliver key actions. While they might focus on what action is needed locally, they are also useful to gather data and help provide evidence to influence policy at a national level and the government response.

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<sup>96</sup> See, e.g., the *Council of Europe draft Resolution on expansion of democracy by lowering the voting age to 16*, Parliamentary Assembly, Minimum age for voting, Report, Doc. 12546, 22 March 2011, <http://assembly.coe.int/ASP/Doc/XrefViewPDF.asp?FileID=13110&Language=EN>.

<sup>97</sup> “If voting is in part a habit [...] acquired in late adolescence and early adulthood, then this habit will likely be strengthened by allowing 16- and 17-year-olds to vote.” (Hart/Atkins 2011: 218); see also Dinas, 2012; Gerber et al., 2003; Plutzer, 2002; Parliamentary Assembly, Minimum age for voting, Report, Doc. 12546, 22 March 2011, <http://assembly.coe.int/ASP/Doc/XrefViewPDF.asp?FileID=13110&Language=EN>.

<sup>98</sup> Hugh Frazer, Anne-Catherine Guio, and Eric Marlier, *Feasibility study for a child guarantee (FSCG)* (European Commission 2020) 167

<sup>99</sup> Hugh Frazer, Anne-Catherine Guio, and Eric Marlier, *Feasibility study for a child guarantee (FSCG)* (European Commission 2020) 178

<sup>100</sup> Hugh Frazer, Anne-Catherine Guio, and Eric Marlier, *Feasibility study for a child guarantee (FSCG)* (European Commission 2020) 167

<sup>101</sup> Public Health Scotland, ‘Local Child Poverty Action Reports’, (14 January 2021) <<https://bit.ly/3wPvXhT>> accessed 20 July 2021.

<sup>102</sup> *ibid.*

## 4. Monitoring, Measuring and Reporting on Child Poverty

The plan must set out clear actions, milestones and progress measures that would help end child poverty. It needs to ensure that economic, tax, benefit and labour market policies work alongside education, childcare and housing policy, to prevent and reduce poverty in communities throughout Ireland.

### 4.1 A Target for Child Poverty and Policy

It is important that the CPAP contains an ambitious target (an agreed percentage rather than a numerical value) to end consistent poverty among children. An ambitious target to end child poverty, supported by sub-targets for particular vulnerable groups should drive policy actions and the allocation of resources.<sup>103</sup> Lone parents, households where no parent is in paid work, people with disabilities and those living in social and private rented housing have the highest rates of poverty. Tackling poverty among these groups through setting appropriate targets for policy across government departments will support the achievement of the overall child poverty target.<sup>104</sup>

The Government's child poverty reduction target outlined in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020*, seeks to reduce the number of children living in consistent poverty by at least two-thirds on 2011 levels.<sup>105</sup> To support the Government in achieving its child poverty target, a child poverty subgroup was established under the auspices of the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* National Advisory Council for Children and Young People in October 2015. The subgroup comprised both statutory and non-governmental (NGO) representatives<sup>106</sup> and was co-convened by the Department of Social Protection and the Children's Rights Alliance. The subgroup developed a paper based upon the European Commission's *Recommendation on Investing in Children* to inform the whole-of-government approach to tackling child poverty in Ireland which was adopted by the Advisory Council in November 2016 and published in May 2017.

Reducing and ultimately ending poverty should be a fundamental aspiration of Irish society and a commitment of Government.<sup>107</sup> The latest national child poverty target aimed to lift over 70,000 children (0-17) out of consistent poverty by 2020, a reduction of at least two thirds on the 2011 level.<sup>108</sup> Between 2010 and 2014 the number of children experiencing consistent poverty rose by 53,000. Between 2014 and 2018 the number fell by 60,000, rising again by 5,000 in 2019. The numbers would have to reduce by 60,000 to meet the 2020 target.<sup>109</sup> Maintaining the downward trend in the level of child poverty in Ireland will require a significant investment of resources in income supports and public services. The Covid-19 pandemic and the impact of Brexit highlight the areas which should be prioritised in the coming months and years in order to maintain progress on reducing child poverty.

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<sup>103</sup> Society of St Vincent de Paul, *Review of the implementation of the NAPS 2007-2017* (SVP 2019).

<sup>104</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> Department of Children and Youth Affairs, *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020* (DCYA 2014).

<sup>106</sup> Barnardos, ISPC, National Youth Council of Ireland, One Family, Early Childhood Ireland, Society of St Vincent de Paul, Children's Rights Alliance.

<sup>107</sup> Society of St Vincent de Paul, *Review of the implementation of the NAPS 2007-2017* (SVP 2019)

<sup>108</sup> Department of Children and Youth Affairs, *Income, poverty and deprivation among children: A statistical baseline analysis* (DCYA 2020).

<sup>109</sup> *ibid.*

## 4.2 Child Poverty Indicators

The development of a National Child Poverty Action Plan provides an opportunity to develop a dashboard of indicators which are related to the causes and consequences of child poverty and which will capture the impact of policy measures on children and young people's lives. Data needs to be collected on engagement (e.g. participation in arts and cultural events, participation in sport), rates of early school leaving, access to safe places to play, rates of childhood obesity, housing affordability, levels of overcrowding, number of children living in emergency accommodation, length of time spent in direct provision, number of children on waiting list for speech therapy, mental health services, occupational therapy etc., give an insight into the experience of child poverty and child well-being more broadly and should focus policy action. Thematic reporting on this data should take place on a regular basis throughout the lifetime of the plan.

The plan should contain an ambitious target to end consistent child poverty. Indicators such as vulnerable to consistent poverty,<sup>110</sup> persistent at risk of poverty<sup>111</sup> and deep income poverty<sup>112</sup> can be used to help identify trends, patterns and vulnerable groups. Complimentary to this the new plan could require Government to report on a number of sub-targets by capturing specific outcomes connected to child poverty. Capturing and tracking thematic data on, for example, education (e.g. rates of early school leaving) and the outcomes from prevention and early intervention programmes could provide further insights on progress achieved in tackling child poverty.

The challenge will be in developing a small number of agreed-upon indicators which do not create a huge reporting burden and which are clearly related to child poverty. For example, New Zealand has five child poverty related indicators in addition to the headline targets, and Government is only required to report on one of these.<sup>113</sup> The target groups and programme areas identified within the Child Guarantee provide a guide to areas for indicator selection and would also solidify the Guarantee within the wider Child Poverty Office.

## 4.3 Research on Child Poverty

The Child Specific Poverty Research Programme which uses the Growing Up in Ireland data<sup>114</sup> is a welcome development. Recent polling research has found that most people feel that child poverty is the result of bad choices by parents, with a resistance to even using the word 'poverty' noted among survey participants.<sup>115</sup> There is a lack of research on the lived experience of poverty and a need to draw on children's experiences of poverty.<sup>116</sup> The Child Specific Poverty Research Programme provides an opportunity to challenge misconceptions about poverty, to highlight the structural and systemic failures which result in child poverty and to give a voice to children experiencing poverty.

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<sup>110</sup> Household income at 70 per cent of median and experiencing 2+ deprivation items.

<sup>111</sup> The proportion of those who are living below the poverty line in the current year and two of the preceding three years. See Social Justice Ireland, 'A measure of persistent poverty in Ireland is crucial, and long overdue' <<https://bit.ly/2HjImb1>> accessed 16 July 2021.

<sup>112</sup> Income below 50 per cent of median income.

<sup>113</sup> Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet *Child poverty measures, targets and indicators* <<https://bit.ly/3iqLSjk>> accessed 3 October 2020.

<sup>114</sup> Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 'Minister Zappone hosts Open Policy Debate on Child Poverty in association with the Children's Rights Alliance' (13 December 2019) <<https://bit.ly/3Bab985>> accessed 16 July 2021.

<sup>115</sup> Carl O'Brien 'Public has limited sympathy for children locked in poverty' *Irish Times*, 21 December 2019.

<sup>116</sup> Department of Children and Youth Affairs, *Income, poverty and deprivation among children: A statistical baseline analysis* (DCYA 2020).

## 5. Unlocking Funding

### 5.1 European Social Funds – EU Child Guarantee

To access EU funding, Member States need to have national strategic policy frameworks in place for poverty reduction and social inclusion with specific attention to preventing and tackling child poverty. The Government has confirmed that the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth is the Department with lead responsibility for the implementation of the EU Child Guarantee.<sup>117</sup> Given that levels of child poverty in Ireland are above the EU average, the State will be required to spend at least five per cent of its national European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) allocation on tackling child poverty.<sup>118</sup> Funding will also be available under the European Regional Development Fund, InvestEU, and the Recovery and Resilience Facility.<sup>119</sup> Given that the current rate of children at risk of poverty and social exclusion in Ireland is higher than the EU average, 5 per cent of our ESF+ allocation will need to be targeted at addressing child poverty.<sup>120</sup> While this level of financing will be relatively modest, its allocation and distribution can provide a clearing house for government intent and action on child poverty more systematically.

### 5.2 Philanthropy as a Driver of Change

The Irish government has a strong track record of partnering with philanthropy to achieve change in the area of service delivery and innovation. In its three decades of operation in Ireland, the Atlantic Philanthropies partnered with the Irish government on a number of flagship initiatives. Areas requiring innovation were identified as being particularly amenable to this collaborative approach.<sup>121</sup> While Atlantic has ceased operation, organisations such as the Community Foundation for Ireland and Rethink Ireland have the capacity to leverage funding from Government and private donors to establish and administer funding for innovative responses to tackling child poverty. This could be one useful tool in unlocking elements within overall funding available that call for child poverty initiatives, programmes and innovation.

#### **Box 3 – Government and Philanthropy Partnerships**

##### **Best Practice Example 1 – Prevention and Early Intervention Programme**

Through the work of the Prevention and Early Intervention Programme, The Atlantic Philanthropies and the Irish government co-funded evidence based programmes including area-based responses to child poverty in 13 areas across Ireland between 2013 and 2017.<sup>122</sup> Tusla is now supporting mainstreaming in this area.

##### **Best Practice Example 2 - Innovate Together**

<sup>117</sup> Information received by the Children’s Rights Alliance as part of the Community and Voluntary Pillar from the Department of Social Protection, 26 May 2021

<sup>118</sup> European Commission, Proposal for a Council Recommendation establishing the European Child Guarantee, Brussels, 24.3.2021 COM(2021) 137 final.

<sup>119</sup> European Commission, Commission proposes action to uphold child rights and support children in need, (24 March 2021) <<https://bit.ly/2Uu235J>> accessed 20 July 2021.

<sup>120</sup> European Commission, Proposal for a Council Recommendation establishing the European Child Guarantee, Brussels, 24.3.2021 COM(2021) 137 final, 6.

<sup>121</sup> Richard Boyle and Shannon, Laura, *Better Together? Philanthropy and Government Lessons from The Atlantic Philanthropies and Irish Government Partnership-based Co-Investments* (Institute of Public Administration and Atlantic Philanthropies 2018) <<https://bit.ly/3ipWbUJ>> accessed 9 June 2021.

<sup>122</sup> Government of Ireland, ‘Government announces €30m investment in new ABC (Area-Based Childhood) Programme’ (27 November 2013) <<https://bit.ly/3xasE1W>> accessed 9 June 2021.

As part of the Irish government's response to the COVID-19, a philanthropy fund of €5m was established through the use of the Dormant Accounts Fund.<sup>123</sup> The purpose of this funding is to support innovative solutions which tackle challenges associated with the pandemic. The fund is being administered by Rethink Ireland and has secured the support of private funders to enhance the government commitment.<sup>124</sup>

### **Best Practice Example 3 – RTE Does Comic Relief**

In the summer of 2020, RTE announced an emergency fundraiser in response to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>125</sup> The fundraiser took the format of a Telethon and the Government announced it would match all donations up to a value of €3m.<sup>126</sup> The funds raised through the public, government and other private donors were administered through the Community Foundation for Ireland.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Department of Rural and Community Development 'Ministers Ring and Canney launch €40 million COVID-19 support package for community and voluntary organisations, charities and social enterprises' (8 May 2020) <<https://bit.ly/3grpJ1M>> accessed 16 July 2021.

<sup>124</sup> Rethink Ireland 'Record Funding of €5.6 million by Rethink Ireland from Innovate Together 2020 COVID Fund' (9 December 2020) <<https://bit.ly/3gn1Xnf>> accessed 9 June 2021.

<sup>125</sup> RTE, RTE Does Comic Relief – All you Need to Know <<https://bit.ly/3v7BjEq>> accessed 9 June 2021.

<sup>126</sup> RTE, 'Government to match donations up to €3m for RTE Comic Relief' <<https://bit.ly/3iqbNHP>> accessed 9 June 2021.

<sup>127</sup> Community Foundation for Ireland, 'RTE Does Comic Relief Grantees Announced' (15 December 2020) <<https://bit.ly/3w9YXRR>> accessed 9 June 2021.

## 6. Summary and Recommendations

Ireland is in a good position institutionally to make further progress to address child poverty. Opportunities now exist with the development of a new national child poverty action plan which, along with aiding with the implementation of the Child Guarantee, can make ending child poverty a priority. The principle of progressive universalism should inform the development of the plan.

The new child poverty action plan could:

- Leverage learning from the comprehensive approaches to reducing child poverty legislation in Scotland and New Zealand, in particular considering how to use a range of drivers acting together. This should include a scoping exercise on how a combination of child poverty legislation, linkage to national budgets, poverty proofing, independent expert commentary, and use of whole-of-government structures has been used in those jurisdictions and the impact they have had.
- Designate the DCEDIY as the lead department for child poverty with the DSP holding the overall mandate for social inclusion. Establish a Child Poverty Office and incorporate the Child Guarantee Unit within it.
- The Oireachtas Committee on Children should provide an accountability mechanism for progress on achieving the key target and sub-targets of the Plan.
- The National Child Poverty Plan should focus on four pillars including adequate income supports, decent and sustainable parental employment, family support and access to good quality services.
- Outline a robust implementation and monitoring mechanism and use a range of indicators to capture progress within the Plan. The publication of a paper on measuring well-being as part of Budget 2021 is a welcome first step<sup>128</sup> but should be built on.
- Set a new, ambitious headline target to end child poverty based on income and deprivation levels. It is recommended that there should be a ten year target based on the most up to - date data. An interim target will allow progress to be measured at a mid-point.
- Set sub-targets for vulnerable groups, and for selected active measures in key services areas, informed by the Child Guarantee, including:
  - actions for children who are particularly vulnerable to poverty, including those in one parent families; children with a disability or living with a family member with a disability; migrant children; those who are experiencing homelessness; members of the Traveller or Roma community; children living in Direct Provision;
  - priority measures for services improvement in areas such as early childhood (First Five), area based/prevention and early intervention programmes, access to child health services, and elimination of early school leaving
- Embed the Child Poverty Action Plan as a specific constituent strategy within the larger successor Framework policy to BOBF.
- Strengthen children and young people's participation in decision-making. This includes reducing the voting age for the local and European elections.
- Establish a fund to support innovative responses to child poverty jointly supported by government and philanthropy.

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<sup>128</sup>Department of Finance, *Budget 2021 Wellbeing and the Measurement of Broader Living Standards in Ireland* (Government of Ireland 2020) <<https://bit.ly/3B9GkAC>> accessed 16 July 2021.

- Require poverty proofing of all policy decisions by government departments and agencies to examine their impact on child and youth poverty.
- Ring-fenced funding for local agencies to implement child and family social inclusion measures.

## Section B: Policy Priorities to Address Child Poverty

This section identifies 11 policy areas that require action over a medium-term period in order to have a positive impact on the overall and supporting child poverty targets. The Council recognises that many of the recommendations outlined will require a number of budget cycles to implement. However, there are a number of priority recommendations that could be implemented in the short-term to address child poverty. Some of these will require investment in Budget 2022 while others are administrative changes or actions that could be implemented in the shorter-term. These include:

- Allocating sufficient funding for the adequate resourcing of the EU/International Unit which will act as the Child Guarantee coordinator [cost: €3.5m].
- Building on the progress of recent Budgets and improve income adequacy in households headed by one parent and those with older children.
- Publishing the report on the benchmarking of social welfare rates as committed to in the *Roadmap for Social Inclusion*.
- Increasing the thresholds for the Working Family Payment including those in larger families.
- Excluding Child Benefit and child maintenance as reckonable income for the purposes of the National Childcare Scheme.
- Providing free school books to all children in primary school [cost: €20m].
- Increasing funding for domestic violence services and refuges to reflect the additional challenges in providing services and responding to increased demands due to Covid-19.
- Establishing a working group to review the current models of funding provided to Tusla-funded organisations supporting families (e.g. those providing services under Section 56).
- Restoring the full rate of Jobseekers Allowance to all young people under 25.
- Commencing the extension of the GP visit card to children aged over six.
- Extending the hot school meals programme to all schools participating in the cold meals programme.



## 7. An Income to Afford a Minimum Essential Standard of Living for All Families

A reduction in poverty demands investment in public spending beyond supporting parental labour market participation.<sup>129</sup> Data on poverty highlights the significant role played by social transfers in alleviating poverty in Ireland, with this country being ‘among the best performing EU states for reducing poverty through social transfers’.<sup>130</sup> The *EU Recommendation on Investing in Children* recommends that the State ‘[d]eliver means-tested or other targeted benefits in a way that avoids stigmatisation, differentiates between children’s needs’.<sup>131</sup>

The Pandemic Unemployment Payment and Temporary Wage Subsidy scheme significantly cushioned family incomes from the initial effects of the Covid crisis, in particular for lower income households.<sup>132</sup> The reduction and phasing out of these supports and the ending of payment breaks on mortgages, the moratoria on evictions and energy disconnections and other emergency measures which were introduced at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic are likely to make it more difficult for families to maintain living standards.<sup>133</sup>

### Benchmarking Social Welfare Payments to the Cost of a Minimum Essential Standard of Living

A Minimum Essential Standard of Living is one which meets the minimum needed to live and participate in Irish society and is a standard of living which no one should be expected to live below.<sup>134</sup> The households with the greatest risk of having an inadequate income under this measure are households with older children and working age households headed by one adult.<sup>135</sup> However, the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice (VPSJ) points out that there remains a notable incidence of deep income inadequacy in one parent families with only younger children.<sup>136</sup> The cost of a child varies according to age, with parents of adolescents facing costs which are 63 per cent higher than the cost of meeting the minimum needs of younger children.<sup>137</sup>

Despite recent budget increases and the welcome introduction of a higher rate of Qualified Child Increase (QCI) for older children over 12, the latest VPSJ assessment still places all social welfare dependent households with children below the level of income adequacy.<sup>138</sup> The *Roadmap for Social Inclusion* contains a commitment that by the third quarter of 2020 the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection will “Consider and prepare a report for Government on the potential application of the benchmarking approach to other welfare payments”.<sup>139</sup> The approach proposed in the *Roadmap* for the benchmarking of pensions takes account of price inflation and earnings,

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<sup>129</sup> Department of Children and Youth Affairs, *Income, poverty and deprivation among children: A statistical baseline analysis* (DCYA 2020).

<sup>130</sup> Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Regina Doherty TD, Written Answers, Child Poverty, 31 January 2019 [4892/19].

<sup>131</sup> European Commission, *Commission Recommendation of 20.2.2013: Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage* (Brussels, 20.2.2013 C(2013) 778 final) <<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1060&langId=en>>.

<sup>132</sup> Keelan Beirne, Karina Doorley, Mark Regan, Barra Roantree, Dora Tuda, *The potential costs and distributional effect of Covid-19 related unemployment in Ireland* (ESRI 2020).

<sup>133</sup> Merike Darmody, Emer Smyth and Helen Russell, *The implications of the Covid-19 pandemic for policy in relation to children and young people: A research review* (ESRI 2020) <<https://bit.ly/33kVJ0J>> accessed 12 September 2020.

<sup>134</sup> Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice, [www.budgeting.ie](http://www.budgeting.ie) accessed 10 September 2020.

<sup>135</sup> Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice, *2020 MESL Adequacy Benchmark* (VPSJ 2020) <<https://bit.ly/3ihOblW>> accessed 8 September 2020.

<sup>136</sup> Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice, *MESL Pre Budget 2021* (VPSJ 2020) <<https://bit.ly/3m30TW6>> accessed 9 September 2020.

<sup>137</sup> Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice, *Budget 2019 MESL Pre Budget 2019 Submission* (VPSJ 2018) <<https://bit.ly/3k6A9no>> accessed 10 September 2020.

<sup>138</sup> Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice, *Budget 2021 - MESL Impact Briefing* (VPSJ 2020) <<https://bit.ly/3tWnpEq>> accessed 17 May 2021.

<sup>139</sup> Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection *Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025* (DEASP 2020).

however it does not take into consideration the real costs facing households. The headline Consumer Price Index (CPI) does not accurately reflect the changing cost of a Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) as a greater proportion of household expenditure for a minimum essential standard of living is concentrated on basics such as food, electricity and home heating.<sup>140</sup> The CPI rate tends to under-estimate changes in the cost of a MESL.<sup>141</sup> During the last recession lower-income households experienced higher rates of inflation than both the national average, as well as those experienced by higher income households.<sup>142</sup> A benchmarking process which utilises the headline CPI will not improve income adequacy among social welfare dependent households and an alternative methodology is required. Recent research reviewed and rebased the MESL basket and found the cost was four per centage points higher than the annual update linked to inflation. The divergence in cost was identified as being related to the actual price of the items in the basket as opposed to the CPI adjusted cost.<sup>143</sup>

### A Family Living Income

Parental employment is a key factor both in preventing families falling into poverty and in lifting them out of economic vulnerability/persistent poverty.<sup>144</sup> Access to full-time employment is particularly critical with both the move from part-time to full-time employment for either parent or moving from non-employment to full-time employment for a mother associated with a positive move out of economic vulnerability.<sup>145</sup> However, moving from non-employment to part-time employment is not effective in addressing poverty in families.<sup>146</sup> Almost one in four workers in Ireland are on low pay (earning below two thirds of median income).<sup>147</sup> The 2020-21 Living Wage rate has been calculated at €12.30 per hour, which is the rate of pay which will allow full-time employed adults (without dependants) across Ireland to afford a socially acceptable standard of living.<sup>148</sup> Families with children experience additional costs which are not reflected in the national rate of the Living Wage.<sup>149</sup> An income which is adequate to stave off poverty and allow a minimum essential standard of living is not always available to family earners engaging in the labour market. This is reflected by the need for a Working Family Payment (WFP) which is a weekly, tax-free payment to support employees with children working at least 19 hours per week or 38 hours per fortnight. A two-parent family can combine their working hours to reach the threshold to qualify for the WFP, however a lone parent must reach this threshold alone, making it more difficult for lone parents to qualify for this support. Recipients of the WFP receive an average of €150 per week to supplement their low earnings<sup>150</sup> and recipients of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment continue to receive their WFP at the same rate as prior to the pandemic.<sup>151</sup> While the WFP thresholds have

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<sup>140</sup> Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice, *Changes in the cost of a MESL in comparison to CPI inflation*, (VPSJ 2013) <<https://bit.ly/3iPHqHZ>> accessed 20 September 2020.

<sup>141</sup> Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice, *Submission to the Low Pay Commission* (VPSJ 2020) <<https://bit.ly/3cjM0vY>> accessed 20 September 2020.

<sup>142</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>143</sup> Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice, *MESL Review & Rebase Examining the accuracy of inflation adjustment and quantifying the impact of basket changes*, (VPSJ 2020) <<https://bit.ly/3fnDnSW>> accessed 17 May 2021.

<sup>144</sup> Bertrand Maitre, Helen Russell, and Emer Smyth *The Dynamics of Child Poverty Evidence from the Growing Up in Ireland Survey* (ESRI 2021) <<https://bit.ly/3iiUtEG>> accessed 4 June 2021..

<sup>145</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>146</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>147</sup> Social Justice Ireland (2020) *Low pay in Ireland is still a huge issue* <<https://bit.ly/2ZUtrt1>> accessed 20 September 2020.

<sup>148</sup> [www.livingwage.ie](http://www.livingwage.ie)

<sup>149</sup> Living Wage Technical Group (2019) *Living Wage Update 2019* <<https://bit.ly/3bRsw1h>>

<sup>150</sup> Minister for Social Protection, Heather Humphreys, Dáil Debates, Written Answers, 'Social Welfare Schemes Data' [19709/21].

<sup>151</sup> Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (2020) *Information on the Change in rate of payment from the Covid 19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment* <<https://bit.ly/3ckvlsd>> accessed 17 September 2020.

been increased for small families, they have not been increased for larger families which have a higher risk of poverty.

Income disregards are a crucial support for lone parents in work since a certain portion of their earned income is not considered or is 'disregarded' for the purposes of means-testing for social welfare payments. Lone parents require additional supports to ensure that they can engage in paid work while caring for their children. However, transitioning to Jobseeker's Allowance (JA) may act as a disincentive to taking up part-time work since income disregards drop significantly in these cases. It is important to note that the parents transitioning from Jobseekers Transition (JST) Payment to JA have older children who have high levels of consistent poverty and are at high risk of income inadequacy. Child Maintenance currently is classed as a means-tested income.<sup>152</sup> This means that receiving child maintenance frequently does not increase income for lone parents.

The recent increases in the earnings disregard for the One Parent Family Payment (OPFP) and JST Payment and the increase in the income thresholds of the Working Family Payment are welcome. However, earnings disregards and qualifying income thresholds are not linked to changes in wages, in particular the National Minimum Wage (NMW). This means that increases in the NMW can be taxed away due to the withdrawal of social welfare supports, resulting in a high Marginal Effective Tax rate for workers who increase their hours or earnings in employment.<sup>153</sup>

#### Families with Disabilities

Almost half of those not at work due to illness or disability are at risk of poverty.<sup>154</sup> Families where a parent has a disability are at risk of persistent poverty. This is particularly notable where the primary care giver is unable to work due to disability/illness.<sup>155</sup> The Growing Up in Ireland research has found higher incidences of chronic illness and disability among children from lower socio-economic backgrounds with greater numbers of children being described as 'severely hampered in daily activities'.<sup>156</sup> The primary carer of a child with a disability is less likely to participate in the labour market especially if the child's disability is more limiting.<sup>157</sup> The Covid-19 crisis also has implications for labour market participation of people with disabilities, who may be at greater risk of severe outcomes if they contract Covid-19.<sup>158</sup> Twenty per cent of children in one parent families are reported as having some type of long-term illness or disability.<sup>159</sup> The Department of Social Protection has commissioned research into the cost of disability<sup>160</sup> which should inform the introduction of a cost of disability payment in response to the high rates of poverty and deprivation being experienced by people with disabilities.

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<sup>152</sup> Citizens Information, 'Maintenance and Social Welfare Payments' <<https://bit.ly/3sHDiyA>> accessed 2 March 2021.

<sup>153</sup> Society of St Vincent de Paul *National Minimum Wage Submission to the Low Pay Commission* SVP 2020 <<https://bit.ly/33eW4Iz>> accessed 10 September 2019.

<sup>154</sup> Disability Federation of Ireland (2020) *Time to get real. DFI Pre Budget Submission 2021* <<https://bit.ly/3ceEZfC>> accessed 20 September 2020.

<sup>155</sup> Bertrand Maitre, Helen Russell, and Emer Smyth *The Dynamics of Child Poverty Evidence from the Growing Up in Ireland Survey* (ESRI 2021) <<https://bit.ly/3iiUtEG>> accessed 4 June 2021.

<sup>156</sup> ESRI, *Growing up in Ireland: Key findings No 4 the health of 9 year olds*, (ESRI 2009).

<sup>157</sup> John Cullinan, 'The Economic Costs of Disability for Families' (Frontline Magazine 2015).

<sup>158</sup> Disability Federation of Ireland, *Impact of Covid-19 on people with disabilities and the disability sector*, (DFI 2020) <<https://bit.ly/2DPRI1b>> accessed 11 September 2020.

<sup>159</sup> Michelle Millar, and Rosemary Crosse, *Lone parents and activation: What works and why: A review of the international evidence in the Irish context*, (UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway 2016).

<sup>160</sup> Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, 'Minister Doherty announces tender process underway', (19 March 2019) <<https://bit.ly/3mbQhWD>> accessed 11 September 2020.

## Summary and Recommendations

Social welfare rates are inadequate for households with children to achieve a Minimum Essential Standard of Living, and benchmarking welfare rates to the Consumer Price Index would fail to reflect the actual costs facing families with children. Ireland has a high rate of low paid employment, and households with children face high Marginal Effective Tax Rates and cannot fully benefit from increases to the National Minimum Wage. Disability and poverty are closely connected, with a high incidence of disability among children from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Targeted payments for the most vulnerable children have been introduced through the higher QCI rate for over 12s.

A national child poverty action plan should commit to ensuring that children and young people do not experience poverty when their parents are reliant on support from the State. This could be done by:

- Ensuring that levels of adequacy, as established by the research of the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice, inform the benchmarking of social welfare payments. A target to progressively achieve adequate social welfare rates over the lifetime of the national child poverty action plan should be set. Child income support payments for the children most vulnerable to poverty should continue to be targeted through differential rates of Qualified Child Increase for older and younger children.
- Linking the means tests, earnings disregards and the income limits for qualifying for social welfare payments (OPF, JST, JA) and secondary benefits (e.g. Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance, National Childcare Scheme) to increases in the National Minimum Wage so that parents can benefit fully from any increases in their earnings and child maintenance and to remove poverty and unemployment traps from the system.
- Increasing thresholds for the Working Family Payment including for larger families (four or more children) and make the Working Family Payment more accessible for lone parents in employment by reducing the number of hours they are required to work in order to qualify for the payment.
- Introducing a Cost of Disability payment derived from the real additional costs facing people with disabilities.

## 8. Support One Parent Families to Access Quality Jobs in the Labour Market

Policies that successfully reduce poverty for the population as a whole are not enough to support vulnerable groups to exit poverty.<sup>161</sup> Higher rates of child poverty are associated with lone parent households and households with adults with a disability, highlighting the need for specific interventions to address poverty among these groups.<sup>162</sup>

The Government is committed to taking a more pro-active approach to encouraging and supporting lone parents to enter the workforce in order to address the relatively low employment rate among one parent families which is seen as a factor driving child poverty.<sup>163</sup> The European Commission 2013 Recommendation *Investing in Children* recommends that the State: ‘Support the employability and participation of single parents and second earners in paid work, promoting gender equality in the labour market and in family responsibilities’.<sup>164</sup>

One parent families make up 25 per cent of families with children in the general population<sup>165</sup> but are over-represented in the share of families experiencing poverty, making up 38 per cent of families at risk of poverty based on income, and 42 per cent of families in consistent poverty (meaning they are also experiencing material deprivation).<sup>166</sup> Over the past three decades, there has been a consistently high incidence of both income poverty and deprivation amongst one parent families.<sup>167</sup> The most acute presentation of poverty is homelessness and in March 2021, 54 per cent of families experiencing homelessness were headed by a single parent.<sup>168</sup>

Since 2016, eight reports on one parent families and poverty have been published, including the 2017 Joint Committee on Social Protection Report on the Position of Lone Parents in Ireland. Each of these reports paints a similar picture of children growing up in the grip of poverty and of parents who are struggling to make ends meet and gain access to education, training and employment.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> ESRI, *Ireland’s deprivation gap is large and increased over time*, (ESRI 2018) <<https://bit.ly/35w0FC9>> accessed 15 November 2020.

<sup>162</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection *Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025* (DEASP 2020).

<sup>164</sup> 2013/112/EU: Commission Recommendation of 20 February 2013 *Investing in Children: Breaking the cycle of disadvantage* OJL 59 2.3.2013.

<sup>165</sup> CSO: Census 2016 [EY016]

<sup>166</sup> CSO: EU-SILC survey [SIA31]

<sup>167</sup> Barra Roantree, , Bertrand Maître, Alyvia McTague, Ivan Privalko, *Poverty Income Inequality and Living Standards in Ireland* (ESRI and The Community Foundation for Ireland 2021) <<https://bit.ly/33QDPDK>> accessed 17 May 2021.

<sup>168</sup> Department of Housing, Planning & Local Government ‘Homelessness Report March 2021’ <<https://bit.ly/3wPQram>> accessed 19 July 2021.

<sup>169</sup> Since 2016, the following reports have been published detailing the living standards of one parent families:

- (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) Lone-Parent Incomes and Work Incentives. Budget Perspectives 2019. Paper 1, July 2018. Regan, M., Keane, C., and Walsh, J.R. ESRI.
- (2018) 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) 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.

These challenges are recognised in policy and both the *National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020* and the *Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025* contain important commitments to one parent families. However, there is currently no comprehensive or strategic articulation of the long-term vision for one parent families and their children in government policy. Therefore, a whole-of-government approach is required to help lone parents and their children move out of poverty for good.

### Lone Parents in Employment

The proportion of lone parents in employment increased from 46 per cent in 2012 to 64.3 per cent in 2018.<sup>170</sup> However, the at-risk-of-poverty rate among lone parents in employment more than doubled from nine per cent in 2012 to 21 per cent in 2017 even as employment levels increased.<sup>171</sup> Almost two thirds of lone parents in full time employment report high levels of deprivation, going without three or more items on the deprivation index.<sup>172</sup> Data from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection suggests that increased employment among lone parents has largely been in low paid and low hour employment.<sup>173</sup> Forty per cent of lone parents have no formal educational qualifications, limiting their options in terms of accessing employment.<sup>174</sup> The challenge of high poverty rates among one parent families in employment can be seen in other European countries where increases in employment levels have failed to reduce poverty rates, in large part due to the type of work which many lone parents are able to access, which for many has the problems of low pay, low hours and precarity.<sup>175</sup> Lone parents are the main care givers and the main earner for their families, and as such, have needs, experiences and requirements for support which are different to other jobseekers.

*Our Shared Future, the Programme for Government* commits to supporting women who have taken time out of employment due to caring responsibilities to re-enter the labour market through new education, training and personal development programmes.<sup>176</sup> It also commits 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’.<sup>177</sup>

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- (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](http://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

<sup>170</sup> Central Statistics Office *Labour Force Survey Households and Family Units* <<https://bit.ly/3mhF6Mn>> accessed 10 September 2020.

<sup>171</sup> Society of St Vincent de Paul, *National Minimum Wage Submission to the Low Pay Commission*, (SVP 2020) <<https://bit.ly/33eW4lz>> accessed 10 September 2020.

<sup>172</sup> One Family, *Response to Indecon report: Indecon independent review of the amendments to the One Parent Family Payment since 2012*, (9 October 2017) <<https://bit.ly/33rpog>> accessed 4 October 2020.

<sup>173</sup> Society of St Vincent de Paul, *Working, Parenting, and Struggling? An analysis of the employment and living conditions of one parent families in Ireland*, (SVP 2019) <<https://bit.ly/2F7Rbmz>> accessed 10 September 2020.

<sup>174</sup> Michelle Millar, and Rosemary Crosse, *Lone parents and activation: What works and why: A review of the international evidence in the Irish context*, (UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway 2016).

<sup>175</sup> Society of St Vincent de Paul, *National Minimum Wage Submission to the Low Pay Commission*, (SVP 2020) <<https://bit.ly/33eW4lz>> accessed 10 September 2019.

<sup>176</sup> Government of Ireland, *Programme for Government: Our Shared Future*, (Government of Ireland 2020), 76.

<sup>177</sup> Government of Ireland, *Programme for Government: Our Shared Future*, (Government of Ireland 2020), 75.

## Covid-19 and the Labour Market

The Covid-19 crisis has had a serious impact on the labour market. As a result of the measures taken to contain the virus many businesses have reduced the size of their workforce, or closed altogether.<sup>178</sup> Fourteen months into the pandemic, in May 2021 there were 177,969 individuals on the Live Register and 376,665 dependent on the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP).<sup>179</sup> In the previous month there were also 315, 647 people accessing the Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme.<sup>180</sup> The largest job losses have occurred in the tourism, hospitality, food and retail sectors, with a potentially long-lasting impact on these sectors.<sup>181</sup> Half of workers in the retail, accommodation and food sector earn the National Minimum Wage,<sup>182</sup> demonstrating the impact of the pandemic on low-income earners. While there has been much discussion about low-paid workers who saw an increase in their income with the introduction of the PUP<sup>183</sup> these income gains are neither large nor pervasive enough to lift children out of income poverty that they were already experiencing.<sup>184</sup>

The Covid-19 crisis has highlighted the socio-economic disparities that exist between occupations in Ireland.<sup>185</sup> The pandemic has exposed the importance of precarious/low-paid but essential jobs.<sup>186</sup> Many low-paid workers in less secure professions are in fact the essential workers who have had to continue to work throughout the pandemic. These workers include health and social care workers, security staff, cleaners, housekeeping staff, public transport workers and workers in food production, supply and retail.<sup>187</sup> Just over half of essential employees have children, with a high rate of lone parenthood among these workers.<sup>188</sup> Covid-19 has made poorly paid jobs worse for the worker (in terms of greater exposure to illness) but more valuable to society.<sup>189</sup> Improving the quality of these jobs is one way in which high rates of poverty and job precarity among low-income parents, particularly those parenting alone, can be addressed.

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<sup>178</sup> Keelan Beirne, Karina Doorley, Mark Regan, Barra Roantree, Dora Tuda, *The potential costs and distributional effect of Covid-19 related unemployment in Ireland*, (ESRI 2020).

<sup>179</sup> The Pandemic Unemployment Payment is a social welfare payment for employees or self-employed people who have lost all their employment due to the Covid 19 public health emergency (Citizens Information <<https://bit.ly/328OXvF>> accessed 15 July 2021).

<sup>180</sup> The Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme allowed employers to continue to pay employees during the Covid 19 emergency. It closed on 31 August and was replaced with the Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme which will run until 30 June 2021. (Citizens Information <<https://bit.ly/2GzbSba>> accessed 8 September 2020).

<sup>181</sup> Coates, Dermot, and Corcoran, et. Al., *The initial impacts of the Covid 19 pandemic on Ireland's labour market*, (DEASP and Central Bank of Ireland 2020).

<sup>182</sup> Paul Redmond, *Minimum Wage Policy in Ireland: Budget perspectives 2021*, (ESRI 2020).

<sup>183</sup> Pat Leahy and Martin Wall, 'Over 200,000 earning more on Covid-19 unemployment payment', *The Irish Times* (Dublin, 21 May 2020).

<sup>184</sup> Mark Regan and Bertrand Maitre, *Child poverty in Ireland and the pandemic recession*, (ESRI 2020) <<https://bit.ly/3bzTgn5>> accessed 7 September 2020.

<sup>185</sup> Brendan Walsh, Paul Redmond and Barra Rowntree *Differences in risk of severe outcomes from Covid 19 across occupations in Ireland*, (ESRI 2020) <<https://bit.ly/2R3yIPw>> accessed 8 September 2020.

<sup>186</sup> Cathal Fitzgerald, *How we value work: the impact of Covid-19*, (NESC 2020) <<https://bit.ly/2Rg7kZi>> accessed 10 September 2020.

<sup>187</sup> Brendan Walsh, Paul Redmond and Barra Rowntree, *Differences in risk of severe outcomes from Covid 19 across occupations in Ireland*, (ESRI 2020) <<https://bit.ly/2R3yIPw>> accessed 8 September 2020.

<sup>188</sup> Paul Redmond and Seamus McGuinness, *Essential employees during the Covid crisis*, (ESRI 2020) <<https://bit.ly/2EZC9PJ>> accessed 8 September 2020.

<sup>189</sup> Cathal Fitzgerald, *How we value work: the impact of Covid-19*, (NESC 2020) <<https://bit.ly/2Rg7kZi>> accessed 10 September 2020.

There are large differences in the potential risk of severe outcomes from Covid-19 to workers across occupations in Ireland, related to underlying health conditions, age and deprivation.<sup>190</sup> Many essential workers, especially those in elementary occupations (cleaning, security, process plant working, care workers, housekeeping and related services) tend to live in deprived areas, with high rates of Covid-vulnerable chronic illness and have the highest risk of severe outcomes if they contract Covid.<sup>191</sup>

The closure of schools and childcare facilities, as well as the guidance for older people to cocoon and avoid contact with children posed challenges for parents remaining in employment and proved particularly difficult for people parenting alone. Keeping schools open during the pandemic was a priority for Government. However school closures are likely to have had a disproportionate impact on female employment, with almost 17 per cent of mothers reporting that they may have to give up work in order to manage the education and care of their children when faced with further school closures.<sup>192</sup> Combining paid employment with supporting children's learning at home placed a disproportionate burden on mothers during the period of school closures.<sup>193</sup> Disruption to education continued into 2021 and placed additional pressure on parents, particularly women and those in essential occupations who cannot work from home.<sup>194</sup>

While lone parents have attracted considerable policy attention in welfare and education and training, little attention has been given to widening access to higher education for lone parents.<sup>195</sup> Access to higher education has the potential to reduce poverty rates among adults and children as well as increasing labour market activity,<sup>196</sup> and should be a consideration in the whole-of-government approach to tackling child poverty. An 'education first' approach, rather than a 'work first' approach to supporting lone parents is recommended by the Joint Committee on Social Protection.<sup>197</sup> This approach is supported by research which is critical of de-emphasising higher education pathways in favour of rapid labour force attachment.<sup>198</sup>

### Summary and Recommendations

Poverty rates are increasing among working lone parents. The Covid crisis has brought to light the crucial role played by cleaners, shop workers, health care workers and other low paid workers in sustaining essential services. It has also highlighted the additional health risks associated with some types of work for workers with underlying health conditions or living in deprived areas. It has exposed the extent of low pay and poor conditions in essential jobs and is changing the delivery of

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<sup>190</sup> Brendan Walsh, Paul Redmond and Barra Rowntree *Differences in risk of severe outcomes from Covid 19 across occupations in Ireland* (ESRI 2020) <<https://bit.ly/2R3yIPw>> accessed 8 September 2020.

<sup>191</sup> Brendan Walsh, Paul Redmond and Barra Rowntree *Differences in risk of severe outcomes from Covid 19 across occupations in Ireland*, (ESRI 2020) <<https://bit.ly/2R3yIPw>> accessed 8 September 2020.

<sup>192</sup> Central Statistics Office *Social impact of Covid-19 Survey August 2020: The reopening of schools* (CSO 2020), <<https://bit.ly/33zqXRW>> accessed 17 September 2020.

<sup>193</sup> Jennifer Symonds, Dymna Devine, Seaneen Sloan, Gabriela Martinez Sainz, Margaret Crean, Barbara Moore, Emma Farrell, *Experiences of Remote Teaching and Learning In Ireland during the Covid 19 Pandemic, Report No 2*, Children's School Lives (UCD 2020).

<sup>194</sup> Central Statistics Office, *Social Impact of COVID-19 Survey February 2021: Impact of School Closures* (CSO 2021), <<https://bit.ly/3oyV85Y>> accessed 21 May 2021.

<sup>195</sup> Delma Byrne and Cliona Murray, *An independent review to identify the supports and barriers for lone parents in accessing higher education and to examine measures to increase participation* (DEASP DES DCYA NUIM 2017) <<https://bit.ly/33AMA10>> accessed 17 September 2020.

<sup>196</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>197</sup> Joint Committee on Social Protection, *Report on the position of lone parents in Ireland* (Houses of the Oireachtas 2017) <<https://bit.ly/35XGj5N>> accessed 17 September 2020.

<sup>198</sup> Delma Byrne and Cliona Murray, *An independent review to identify the supports and barriers for lone parents in accessing higher education and to examine measures to increase participation* (DEASP DES DCYA NUIM 2017) <<https://bit.ly/33AMA10>> accessed 17 September 2020.



education and training, including higher education. Brexit has the potential to hit unskilled lower paid workers harder than more skilled workers.<sup>199</sup> Specific interventions are needed for lone parent households and households containing adults with a disability in order to address high rates of child poverty in these families.

A national child poverty action plan should commit to setting a strategic target to reduce poverty and improve outcomes for parents and children in one-parent families. The new plan should build upon the commitments and recommendations in the *National Strategy for Women and Girls*, the *Roadmap for Social Inclusion* and the Joint Oireachtas Committee Report on Lone Parents as referenced in the Programme for Government. This could be done by:

- Setting a specific poverty reduction target for one parent families based on four policy pillars:
  1. Address the deep levels of income inadequacy found among one parent families by benchmarking social welfare rates against the cost of a Minimum Essential Standard of Living and by establishing a child-centred statutory child maintenance service.
  2. Invest in publicly-funded early years care and education which provides free access to quality accessible childcare including school age childcare for low-income and one parent households.
  3. Support access to sustainable and family-friendly employment by providing tailored employment and training supports, improving in-work income supports supporting lone parents to take up and increase their working hours and introducing a living wage. Recognise the link between quality employment and reducing child poverty by adopting an 'education first' approach to activating lone parents. Improve access to further education and training by expanding eligibility to SUSI grants, specialist bridging programmes and other educational supports.
  4. Pursue a housing-first approach by increasing the output of built and acquired Local Authority and Approved Housing Bodies social housing units, addressing the housing needs of one parent families who are more at risk of becoming homeless.

Many of the policy actions that sit within each of the four main pillars would bring about positive changes in the lives of all children experiencing poverty, not just those living in one parent families. However, it is important that the new plan to address child poverty, and government policy more broadly, recognises the specific needs of children living in one parent families and makes provisions for the additional challenges faced by parents who are parenting alone.

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<sup>199</sup> Pat Leahy, *Brexit will hit lower paid workers the most, report finds*, Irish Times, February 13 2018.

## 9. Ensure Access to Affordable and Quality Early Childhood Education and Care and School Age Childcare

Article 18 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child recognises that support for parents in the early years of a child's life is particularly important. In interpreting this provision, the UN Committee requires the State 'to take all appropriate measures to ensure that children of working parents have the right to benefit from childcare services, maternity protection and facilities for which they are eligible'.<sup>200</sup> The UN Committee also advocates 'an integrated approach' which focuses on health and education supports for new parents and includes 'interventions that impact indirectly on parents' ability to promote the best interests of children (e.g. taxation and benefits, adequate housing, working hours)'.<sup>201</sup>

Children who grow up in households with low work intensity and experience high levels of poverty have poorer developmental, educational, and employment outcomes across their lifespan.<sup>202</sup> Early childhood education and care (ECEC) can be an effective leveller in tackling the negative impacts of poverty on a child's development.<sup>203</sup> However, the relationship between childcare (ECEC and school-age childcare), disadvantage, and developmental outcomes is complex. Universal services, which provide good quality programmes for all children and in which special attention is given to disadvantaged children, are preferable to separate provision focussed exclusively on targeted populations.<sup>204</sup> Children from disadvantaged backgrounds benefit most when ECEC services are closely linked to employment, health and social policies that promote a more equal distribution of resources across a population.<sup>205</sup> The *EU Recommendation on Investing in Children* recommends that the State 'provide access to high quality, inclusive early education and care; ensure its affordability and adapt provision to the needs of families'.<sup>206</sup> The outgoing National Strategy for Women and Girls (2017-2020) identifies access to childcare as a central aspect of advancing socio-economic equality and recommends continued investment in this area.<sup>207</sup> It is worth noting that welfare states that prioritise gender equality are those that also prioritise quality education and care for children.<sup>208</sup>

Early childhood education and care can support families in poverty by improving access to the labour market for parents. However, access to childcare, in particular School Age Childcare (SAC) and childcare for young children (under two years of age) can be problematic for parents. There is also a tension which needs to be resolved between ECEC and SAC as primarily a support for working parents versus a model which prioritises the development, care and education of children particularly those with additional needs or vulnerable family circumstances.

In November 2018, the Government launched Ireland's first ever cross-departmental strategy to support babies, young children and their families: *First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for*

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<sup>200</sup> UNCRC, 'General Comment No. 7 on Implementing Rights in Early Childhood' (2006) UN Doc CRC/C/GC/7 Rev.1 Para 21.

<sup>201</sup> *ibid* Para 20 (a).

<sup>202</sup> Evelyn Ring 'Ireland tops for children in jobless homes', *The Irish Examiner*, 16 March 2018.

<sup>203</sup> Gosta Esping-Andersen, 2008 'Childhood investment and skill formation', *International Tax and Public Finance*, 15: 19-44.

<sup>204</sup> John Bennet, *ECEC for children from disadvantaged backgrounds: findings from a European literature review and two case studies* (European Commission 2013).

<sup>205</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>206</sup> European Commission, *Commission Recommendation of 20.2.2013: Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage* (Brussels, 20.2.2013 C(2013) 778 final).

<sup>207</sup> Department of Justice and Equality, *National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020: creating a better society for all* (DoJE: 2017) 29.

<sup>208</sup> Gosta Esping-Andersen, 'Welfare regimes and social stratification' (2015) *Journal of European Social Policy* 25(1): 124-134.

*Babies, Young Children and their Families*.<sup>209</sup> This strategy prioritises quality, affordable and accessible childcare and outlines five building blocks to improve affordability, accessibility and quality of services.<sup>210</sup>

More research is needed on the issue of quality in early childhood education and care in the Irish context.<sup>211</sup> However, there is growing recognition that the quality of care is an important determinant of whether childcare has a beneficial effect on child development.<sup>212</sup> Gains from childcare tend to be largest for low-income or immigrant households, and those with less-educated parents, however these positive effects are not universal.<sup>213</sup> Some research suggests that young children from disadvantaged or unstable homes may benefit more from full-day services in a quality setting in relation to their socio-emotional development compared with their peers who access only 12 hours a week with absences or long breaks.<sup>214</sup> However, other research suggests that deprivation of maternal care can have negative effects on the socio-emotional development of young children under 18 months.<sup>215</sup> A positive home-learning environment has a significant positive influence on children's cognitive processes.<sup>216</sup> Salmons et al (2002) as part of the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project, a longitudinal study of the effectiveness of pre-school in the UK, found that the home-learning environment is not strongly correlated to socio-economic status or mother's education, leading to the suggestion that it can also be a source of social resilience and an effective means of countering disadvantage.<sup>217</sup>

### Public and Private Provision

The *Programme for Government* contains a commitment to introduce a long-term sustainable model for childcare which promotes quality, better outcomes for children and makes a career in childcare more attractive.<sup>218</sup> Ireland has the highest level of private provision of ECEC in the OECD, along with relatively low government investment, low wages for educators and high fees for consumers.<sup>219</sup> A shift to a system of universal, public ECEC may boost affordability, accessibility and quality of childcare services, and enhance maternal and child well-being.<sup>220</sup> Countries which provide ECEC through public provision tend to have services which are more affordable, accessible and of higher quality than countries which rely heavily on private provision.<sup>221</sup> Publicly provided childcare creates the means to better reconcile work and care for some parents; while also influencing children's

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<sup>209</sup> Children's Rights Alliance, *Report Card 2020* (CRA 2020) 103.

<sup>210</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>211</sup> Frances McGinnity, Helen Russell, and Aisling Murray, *Non parental childcare and child cognitive outcomes at age 5: results from the Growing up in Ireland Infant cohort* (ESRI TCD and DCYA 2015).

<sup>212</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>213</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>214</sup> John Bennet, *ECEC for children from disadvantaged backgrounds: findings from a European literature review and two case studies* (European Commission 2013)

<sup>215</sup> John Bennet, *ECEC for children from disadvantaged backgrounds: findings from a European literature review and two case studies* (European Commission 2013) 36.

<sup>216</sup> Frances McGinnity, Helen Russell, and Aisling Murray, *Non parental childcare and child cognitive outcomes at age 5: results from the Growing up in Ireland Infant cohort* (ESRI TCD and DCYA 2015); Frank Niklas, Caroline Cohrssen, and Collette Tayler, 'Home Learning Environment and Concept Formation: A Family Intervention Study with Kindergarten Children' (2016) *Early Childhood Education Journal* 44, 419–427 <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-015-0726-1>>

<sup>217</sup> Frances McGinnity Helen Russell, and Aisling Murray, *Non parental childcare and child cognitive outcomes at age 5: results from the Growing up in Ireland Infant cohort* (ESRI TCD and DCYA 2015).

<sup>218</sup> Government of Ireland, *Programme for Government: Our Shared Future*, (Government of Ireland 2020).

<sup>219</sup> Oireachtas Library and Research Service, *L&RS Note: Public provision of early childhood education: an overview of the international evidence*, (Houses of the Oireachtas 2020) <<https://bit.ly/3nFD4wC>> accessed 4 October 2020.

<sup>220</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>221</sup> Mara A Yerkes and Jana Javornik, 'Creating capabilities: childcare policies in comparative perspective' (2019) *Journal of European Social Policy*, Vol 29: 4.

development needs and socialisation.<sup>222</sup> Creating high quality childcare has generally been difficult in countries which marketise childcare, whereas childcare quality has been found to be higher where it is publicly provided.<sup>223</sup>

An expert group has been established to develop a new funding model for Early Learning and Care and School Age Childcare<sup>224</sup> and the scope of this group's work should be broadened to consider a shift to a universal, public system of ECEC, including budgetary and implementation challenges. The first suite of research papers to inform the development of a new funding model for ECEC and SAC were published by the expert group in November 2020 and ongoing stakeholder engagement took place in April and May 2021 to inform the work of the expert group.

In April 2021, the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality made a number of recommendations in relation to childcare which should inform any action taken by the State in terms of reforming the ECEC system.<sup>225</sup> The Assembly recommended that the State:

- Move to a publicly funded, accessible and regulated model of childcare over the next decade.
- Increase the State share of GDP spent on childcare, from the current 0.37 per cent of GDP to at least 1 per cent by no later than 2030.
- Paid leave for parents should cover the first year of a child's life, be non-transferable, provide lone parents with the same total leave period as a couple and be incentivised by increasing payment levels to encourage increased take up.

### National Childcare Scheme

The National Childcare Scheme (NCS) was launched in March 2019 to provide financial support with the cost of childcare. It will replace existing targeted childcare support programmes and the current universal childcare subsidy by 2021.<sup>226</sup> Parents with an income below €26,000 per annum qualify for the maximum hourly childcare support subsidy under the Scheme.<sup>227</sup> From September 2020 a standard hours subsidy of up to 20 hours per week is available to parents not engaged in work or study and who do not qualify under other enhanced hours criteria.<sup>228</sup> An enhanced hours subsidy provides up to 45 hours of childcare per week (from September 2020) where both parents are engaged in work; or study; or transitioning out of work or study; or are unavailable to care for the child.<sup>229</sup> The NCS does not include the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)/free preschool scheme.

Child Benefit and child maintenance is currently included as reckonable income for the National Childcare Scheme. Child Benefit is not assessed as means for any other payment or service, representing a significant shift in policy and practice.<sup>230</sup> Including Child Benefit as reckonable income

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<sup>222</sup> Mara A Yerkes and Jana Javornik, 'Creating capabilities: childcare policies in comparative perspective' (2019) *Journal of European Social Policy*, Vol 29: 4

<sup>223</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>224</sup> Department of Children and Youth Affairs, *Minister Zappone announces expert group to develop a new funding model for early learning and care and school age childcare*, (18 September 2019) <<https://bit.ly/35SEduQ>> accessed 20 September 2020.

<sup>225</sup> Citizens Assembly, *Report of the Citizens Assembly on Gender Equality* (Citizens Assembly 2021) <<https://bit.ly/3A7M51h>> accessed 28 June 2021.

<sup>226</sup> Citizen's Information, *National Childcare Scheme*. <<https://bit.ly/35litLc>> accessed 16 September 2020.

<sup>227</sup> Government of Ireland, *National Childcare Scheme Policy Guidelines* <<https://bit.ly/2H91t6i>> accessed 20 September 2020.

<sup>228</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>229</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>230</sup> Letter to Minister Katherine Zappone, October 2019

pushes a lone parent working 19 hours per week over the income threshold to qualify for the maximum childcare support subsidy.<sup>231</sup> This demonstrates a lack of policy coherence in a context where Government wishes to support more lone parents in employment and where poverty rates among working lone parents are increasing.

Section 14 of the Childcare Support Act 2018 provides for access to childcare supports for vulnerable families when required for family support or child development reasons rather than income or parental employment reasons. Access to an enhanced hours childcare support subsidy under Section 14 is via referrals from five statutory agencies.<sup>232</sup> However, some vulnerable children may fall between the cracks as their families may not be known to, or engage with, these agencies. A more flexible approach to referring vulnerable children for additional childcare supports would allow these children to benefit from early years services as a prevention and early intervention measure. For example, services funded by Tusla to deliver family support (Area-Based Childhood (ABC) Programmes, Family Resource Centres, Barnardos, One Family and other Tusla-funded partner organisations) could play a role in referring these children for early years' services under section 14. County or City Childcare Committees could also be used to identify children needing these supports. Greater flexibility should be built into the design and provision of childcare supports for vulnerable families in recognition of the challenges facing some families which can make it more difficult for them to attend services consistently.

#### Covid-19 and Childcare

Following on from the closure of childcare services in March 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, a number of measures were introduced to try and shore up the early learning and care and school aged childcare sectors.<sup>233</sup> These included measures to cover wages and operational costs during the closures, as well as to help providers meet the increased costs facing ELC and SAC settings after reopening.<sup>234</sup> While these measures were broadly welcomed, pre-existing challenges in the sector remain and have been exacerbated by Covid-19. In particular, challenges in recruiting qualified staff are likely to be worsened as further difficulties emerge relating to sick leave, increased staffing demands and holiday leave as services remain open during the pandemic.<sup>235</sup>

#### Summary and Recommendations

Early childhood education and care of good quality can be invested in as a prevention and early intervention measure, to help to overcome some of the adverse effects of poverty on children and to support the labour market participation of parents and their engagement in education or training. The Covid-19 crisis has exacerbated the pre-existing challenges in the sector, particularly in relation to conditions of service, recruitment and retention of staff. Vulnerable children may need access to full-time childcare at no cost to their parents, in order to support their development and well-being.

School-age childcare and ECEC for children under two years of age can be very difficult to access due to a shortage in places. There are many benefits associated with a publicly provided model of ECEC and School Age Childcare rather than a market-based model.

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<sup>231</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>232</sup> The agencies are the Health Service Executive; Tusla, the Child and Family Agency; the Department of Education and Skills; local authorities, and the Department of Justice and Equality.

<sup>233</sup> Early Childhood Ireland, *Dealing with the pandemic: The case of early years and school age childcare providers in Ireland* <<https://bit.ly/2UbrB7K>> (ECI 2020) accessed 16 July 2021.

<sup>234</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>235</sup> *ibid.*

A national child poverty action plan should commit to investing in publicly funded early childhood care and education which provides free access to quality accessible childcare for low-income and lone parent households. As part of this model there should be a funding top-up and wrap-around supports for the most vulnerable children and young people where resources follow the child rather than the early years centre like the UK Pupil Premium model (see section on education).

This could include:

- Commissioning research into the impact of ECEC services on children's outcomes, for all children, but with a particular focus on children experiencing poverty.
- Engaging in a quality audit of ECEC services.
- Ensuring that childcare and school-aged care is provided free to children of those engaging in education or training, particularly for low income and lone parent households. This should also be reflected in the next National Women's Strategy.
- Ensure that the Department of Education is included as a key partner in the development of ECEC.
- Expanding the remit of the expert group for the funding model of Early Learning and Care and School Age Childcare to include examining and making a recommendation on a shift away from private provision and towards universal public provision of quality ECEC services for all children.
- Developing a multi-annual plan to increase investment in ECEC for all children to one per cent of GDP/GNI\* by 2025.<sup>236</sup>
- Excluding Child Benefit and child maintenance as reckonable income for the purposes of the National Childcare Scheme.
- Developing a mechanism (for example through the Medical Card) to unlock access to free childcare and school aged care for vulnerable children.
- Developing a mechanism to accept referrals from Tusla-funded services for children who would benefit from an enhanced hours childcare subsidy for child development or family support reasons.

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<sup>236</sup> Early Childhood Ireland, *Dealing with the pandemic: The case of early years and school age childcare providers in Ireland* <https://bit.ly/2UbrB7K>, (ECI 2020) accessed 16 July 2021.

## 10. Address Educational Disadvantage and Inequalities

Every child has a right to education and should have an equal opportunity to participate in education.<sup>237</sup> The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has stated that the goal of education is to ‘empower the child by developing his or her skills, learning and other capacities, human dignity, self-esteem and self-confidence’.<sup>238</sup> The Committee states further that education goes beyond formal schooling to embrace the broad range of life experiences and learning processes which enable children, individually and collectively, to develop their personalities, talents and abilities and to live a full and satisfying life within society’.<sup>239</sup> States are required to take measures to ‘encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates’.<sup>240</sup>

Education has the power to transform lives, lift people out of poverty and break down cycles of disadvantage.<sup>241</sup> In Ireland, a person’s socio-economic background remains a strong determining factor of their level of educational attainment. Poverty is closely associated with low levels of educational attainment and intersects with inequalities that also arise in relation to gender, ethnicity and disability.<sup>242</sup> Living on a low income can also prevent children and young people from participating fully in education.<sup>243</sup> Supporting educational retention, attainment and progression for all children is crucial to tackling child poverty and enabling all children and young people to reach their potential. The *EU Recommendation on Investing in Children* recommends that the State ‘provide for the inclusion of all learners, where necessary by targeting resources and opportunities towards the more disadvantaged’.<sup>244</sup>

### DEIS and non-DEIS schools

There is a relatively sharp distinction between Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) and non-DEIS schools,<sup>245</sup> which means that accurately classifying school socio-economic/demographic profile is crucial for the delivery of appropriate services. Currently schools with relatively high levels of disadvantage may fall below the cut-off for additional support, with recent research suggesting that up to 22 per cent of principals at primary level indicate their school is not appropriately classified.<sup>246</sup>

The DEIS Plan contains a set of objectives and actions to support children who are at greatest risk of educational disadvantage.<sup>247</sup> One of the objectives set out in the 2017 DEIS plan was to develop a more robust and responsive framework for assessing individual schools.<sup>248</sup> The new DEIS identification process uses the Central Statistics Office Small Area data as represented in the Haase

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<sup>237</sup> UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, A/RES/44/25 (20 November 1989) Art 28.

<sup>238</sup> UNCRC General Comment No. 1 on Article 29(1) the Aims of Education (2001) CRC/GC/2001/1 para 2.

<sup>239</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>240</sup> UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, A/RES/44/25 (20 November 1989) Art 28(e).

<sup>241</sup> Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection *Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025* (DEASP 2020).

<sup>242</sup> Joint Committee on Education and Skills, *Report on education inequality and disadvantage and barriers to education* (Houses of the Oireachtas 2019) <<https://bit.ly/33k4OXz>> accessed 11 September 2020.

<sup>243</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>244</sup> European Commission, *Commission Recommendation of 20.2.2013: Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage* (Brussels, 20.2.2013 C(2013) 778 final) <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1060&langId=en>.

<sup>245</sup> Emer Smyth, Selina McCoy and Gillian Kingston, *Learning from the evaluation of DEIS*, (ESRI 2015).

<sup>246</sup> Dymna Devine, Jennifer Symonds, Seaneen Sloan, Abbie Cahoon, Mags Crean, Emma Farrell, Aisling Davies, Tamsyn Blue, Julie Hogan, *Children’s School Lives – An Introduction, Report No 1*, Children’s School Lives (UCD School of Education 2020).

<sup>247</sup> Department of Education and Skills, *DEIS Plan 2017: Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools* (DES 2017).

<sup>248</sup> Department of Education and Skills, *DEIS Identification Process*, (DES 2017) <<https://bit.ly/3hGSR6K>> accessed 2 December 2020.

Pratschke Index of Deprivation (HP Index) combined with Department of Education Primary and Post Primary data supplied by schools.<sup>249</sup> Using 2016 census data, the initial application of the model found that most schools have pupils from disadvantaged families but that the concentration of disadvantage varied across geographical areas. Disadvantaged children and young people were located in 78 per cent of mainstream schools at primary level and across approximately 695 out of 709 (98 per cent) of mainstream post-primary schools. This would align with previous ESRI research which indicated that a large proportion of disadvantaged students attend non-DEIS schools, making the case for a degree of tapering of funding for schools, rather than a sharp cut-off point.<sup>250</sup> Importantly, the DEIS Plan recommends creating a more dynamic model where levels of resources more accurately follow the levels of need identified by the new objective model.

The Programme for Government also commits to “complete the new DEIS identification model, ensuring the extension of DEIS status to schools that are identified as being suitable”.<sup>251</sup> This is an opportunity to replace the sharp distinction between DEIS and non-DEIS schools with a tapered model of resource allocation that still recognises the need to target resources towards the schools with the highest levels of children in poverty. Currently schools with relatively high levels of disadvantage may fall below the cut-off for additional support.<sup>252</sup>

Reflecting the reality that disadvantaged children are not always located in DEIS schools, consideration should also be given to ensuring that the resource allocation model follows the child rather than the school. For example, in the UK, the Pupil Premium model allocates funding to schools on a per capita basis. Schools are given a “pupil premium” for children who qualify for free schools meals (£1,345 per pupil per year for primary schools and £955 per pupil at secondary level) and for children in care (£2,345 per pupil per year).<sup>253</sup> It is up to schools to decide how to spend the pupil premium based on the view that school leaders are best placed to identify what would be of most benefit to children who are eligible.<sup>254</sup> Guidelines for the Pupil Premium suggested a tiered approach focusing on teaching development, academic support (e.g. one to one tuition or small group support within the class room) or wider approaches to non-academic barriers (supports for attendance, behaviour, and social and emotional well-being).<sup>255</sup> This type of model could complement the DEIS model and help address the Programme for Government commitment to “provide additional supports for students who are homeless, resident in family hubs, or in direct provision”.<sup>256</sup>

### School Closures due to Covid-19

The enforced closure of schools in March 2020 and again in January 2021 in response to the Covid-19 pandemic impacted children’s learning, social development and well-being and their interactions with classmates and teachers.<sup>257</sup> It also reduced time spent learning<sup>258</sup> and widened the gap for children already in need. In addition children’s experience of the curriculum was radically altered,

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<sup>249</sup> Department of Education and Skills, *DEIS Identification Process*, (DES 2017) <<https://bit.ly/3hGSR6K>> accessed 2 December 2020.

<sup>250</sup> Emer Smyth, Selina McCoy and Gillian Kingston, *Learning from the evaluation of DEIS* (ESRI 2015).

<sup>251</sup> Government of Ireland, *Programme for Government: Our Shared Future*, (Government of Ireland 2020).

<sup>252</sup> Emer Smyth, *Off to a good start? Primary school experiences and the transition to second-level education*, (ESRI 2017).

<sup>253</sup> Department of Education (UK) *Policy paper: Pupil premium*, <<https://bit.ly/3epNLtN>> accessed on the 2 December 2020.

<sup>254</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>255</sup> Education Endowment Foundation, *The EEF Guide to the Pupil Premium*, (EFF 2019) <<https://bit.ly/36Hx4FW>> accessed 2 December 2020.

<sup>256</sup> Government of Ireland, *Programme for Government: Our Shared Future*, (Government of Ireland 2020).

<sup>257</sup> Central Statistics Office, *Social impact of Covid-19 Survey August 2020: The reopening of schools* (CSO 2020), <<https://bit.ly/2Roftei>> accessed 13 September 2020.

<sup>258</sup> *ibid.*



with considerably less time spent learning subjects such as PE, Drama, Music, SESE and Irish.<sup>259</sup> At primary level, just under half of principals/teachers indicated that all children in their schools could access remote teaching and learning, with lack of access to digital devices at home perceived as the greatest barrier to participation, alongside the challenges of combining parental work demands with home schooling needs. In addition, challenges specifically related to poverty was identified by 31 per cent of principals, with concerns around access to devices especially pronounced in DEIS schools.<sup>260</sup> For families experiencing acute poverty, schools serve as a key front line service, supplying food and social supports in addition to educational provision.<sup>261</sup> The Child Care Law Reporting Project (CCLRP) has observed that the Children First approach whereby teachers, early years providers and youth workers have a responsibility to 'identify and report concerns about children at risk is likely to be significantly hindered during this pandemic as children are now indoors and "invisible" to these mandated professionals'.<sup>262</sup> A fall off in the number of referrals to Tusla during the first four weeks of school closures in 2020 is demonstrative of the vital role schools and other community outlets play in relation to this.<sup>263</sup> Children are unable to confide in teachers and may not have the privacy and space to phone Childline for help and advice.<sup>264</sup> The impact of school closures and social distancing on vulnerable young people means that many are 'cut off access to key protective factors for their mental health/well-being'.<sup>265</sup>

More than 40 per cent of parents reported that enforced school closures had a negative impact on their child's learning at primary level, while almost half of parents report a negative impact on their child's learning at second level.<sup>266</sup> Two thirds of primary school children spent two hours or less on learning activities during school closures, with over 40 per cent of second level students spending two hours or less on learning activities.<sup>267</sup> Up to 25 per cent of children in some schools/classes were not accessing remote learning activities nine weeks into the initial school closure period in 2020, with particular concerns expressed in DEIS schools.<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> Jennifer Symonds, Dympna Devine, Seaneen Sloan, Gabriela Martinez Sainz, Margaret Crean, Barbara Moore, Emma Farrell, *Experiences of Remote Teaching and Learning In Ireland during the Covid 19 Pandemic, Report No 2*, Children's School Lives (UCD 2020).

<sup>260</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>261</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>262</sup> The Child Care Law Reporting Project, Observations on Concerns for Vulnerable Children Arising from the Covid-19 Pandemic <<https://bit.ly/3qjBv1J>> accessed 12 February 2021. In one stark example, a child was hospitalised with infections caused by a head lice infestation as the staff did not have any contact with the child when classes went online and were not able to intervene at an early stage like they had in the past. See the Child Care Law Reporting Project, *Case Reports 2020 Volume 2* <<https://www.childlawproject.ie/publications/>> accessed 12 February 2021.

<sup>263</sup> Shauna Bowers, 'Covid-19 resulted in decrease of child welfare referrals to Tusla' *The Irish Times* (Dublin 5 August 2020).

<sup>264</sup> The Child Care Law Reporting Project, Observations on Concerns for Vulnerable Children Arising from the Covid-19 Pandemic <<https://bit.ly/3qjBv1J>> accessed 12 February 2021.

<sup>265</sup> National Educational Psychological Service, *The Wellbeing and Mental Health of Young People in Ireland: Factors for Consideration for the Leaving Certificate Examination in the context of the Covid-19 Pandemic: Advice from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)* (Department of Education and Skills & NEPS 2020)

<sup>266</sup> Central Statistics Office, *Social impact of Covid-19 Survey August 2020: The reopening of schools* (CSO 2020) <<https://bit.ly/2Roftei>> accessed 13 September 2020.

<sup>267</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>268</sup> Jennifer Symonds, Dympna Devine, Seaneen Sloan, Gabriela Martinez Sainz, Margaret Crean, Barbara Moore, Emma Farrell, *Experiences of Remote Teaching and Learning In Ireland during the Covid 19 Pandemic, Report No 2*, Children's School Lives (UCD 2020).

The closure of schools exacerbated pre-existing social and educational inequalities and the move to learning online will have the biggest impact on disadvantaged children, making it harder for them to 'catch up'.<sup>269</sup> The different educational, time and cultural resources available to parents to support their children's learning, combined with varying levels of access to digital resources and books suggest that educational inequalities are likely to be exacerbated due to the closure of schools.<sup>270</sup> Schools and teachers also varied according to how they are able to support remote learning, with some schools making a smoother transition to remote provision of education than others.<sup>271</sup> At primary level, only 45 per cent of principals felt their school was sufficiently resourced with digital technology, while 68 per cent of teachers of third class had never previously used an on-line educational platform.<sup>272</sup> Children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to have experienced learning loss over the period of school closures. Disengagement from learning by Junior Cert students in May to June 2020 was found to be related to the educational attainment of parents. The impact of this disengagement is likely to have further impact on these students future educational trajectory compounding intergenerational educational disadvantage.<sup>273</sup> Young people from working class backgrounds and the Traveller community had lower levels of school engagement prior to the Covid crisis which may have worsened due to school closures.<sup>274</sup> Children and young people with Special Educational Needs have experienced disruption to learning and routines which may make it more difficult for them to adjust to the return to school.<sup>275</sup> School closures compounded the difficulties facing families living in direct provision centres, over-crowded housing, family hubs and emergency homeless accommodation such as hotels, where the opportunity to get some respite from unsuitable accommodation was removed when schools closed, and the physical space to engage in home learning was simply not available. Children without access to a garden missed out on opportunities for outdoor learning, sunlight and play during the period of school, park and playground closures.<sup>276</sup>

Keeping schools, early childhood education and care and school age childcare services open has been identified as a top priority by Government,<sup>277</sup> however as seen in January to March 2021 there has been more interruption to learning in the current academic year and perhaps beyond, and plans will need to be developed to ensure that this does not compound already existing educational inequalities. Schools were asked to provide a special September 2020 return to the Tusla Education Support Service (TESS) to indicate whether students have returned to education following the school closures to allow for follow up where students have not returned to school.<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> Merike Darmody, Emer Smyth And Helen Russell, *The Implications Of The Covid-19 Pandemic For Policy In Relation To Children And Young People* (ESRI 2020) <<https://bit.ly/3jJhSh3>> accessed 12 February 2021, 41.

<sup>270</sup> Merike Darmody, Emer Smyth and Helen Russell, *The implications of the Covid-19 pandemic for policy in relation to children and young people: A research review*, (ESRI 2020) <<https://bit.ly/33kVJOJ>> accessed 12 September 2020.

<sup>271</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>272</sup> Jennifer Symonds, Dympna Devine, Seaneen Sloan, Gabriela Martinez Sainz, Margaret Crean, Barbara Moore, Emma Farrell, *Experiences of Remote Teaching and Learning In Ireland during the Covid 19 Pandemic, Report No 2*, Children's School Lives (UCD 2020).

<sup>273</sup> Carl O'Brien, *Junior Cert students 'disengaged' due to exam cancellation* The Irish Times (Dublin, 12 May 2021).

<sup>274</sup> Merike Darmody, Emer Smyth and Helen Russell, *The implications of the Covid-19 pandemic for policy in relation to children and young people: A research review* (ESRI 2020) <<https://bit.ly/33kVJOJ>> accessed 12 September 2020.

<sup>275</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>276</sup> Jennifer Symonds, Dympna Devine, Seaneen Sloan, Gabriela Martinez Sainz, Margaret Crean, Barbara Moore, Emma Farrell, *Experiences of Remote Teaching and Learning In Ireland during the Covid 19 Pandemic, Report No 2*, Children's School Lives (UCD 2020).

<sup>277</sup> Government of Ireland, *Resilience and Recovery 2020-2021 Plan for Living with Covid-19*, (Government of Ireland 2020).

<sup>278</sup> Roderic O Gorman TD, Minister for Children, Disability, Equality and Integration Dail Debates Other Questions Special Educational Needs 8 September 2020 <<https://bit.ly/3hObGSI>> accessed 20 September 2020.

While the immediate focus has been on logistical issues and the changes needed to the physical school infrastructure in order to get children and young people back to school as safely as possible,<sup>279</sup> attention is urgently required to address educational inequalities which were present before the pandemic, and which are likely to have been exacerbated due to the extended school closures. Clear questions arise in relation to the digital divide for children and families in challenging circumstances, alongside the provision of timely, appropriate, and targeted supports to all schools and families, in addition, to teacher education for digital learning. A refocusing on the particular challenges and supports for school leadership in a context of profound disruption is also warranted.<sup>280</sup> Questions also arise in relation to ensuring children's rights to a balanced and rich experience of their learning, be it at home or in school and that this is not reduced to a narrow range of knowledge and competencies, especially for those who are most marginalised.<sup>281</sup>

Learning loss, educational underachievement, student disengagement, challenges of retention and meeting the needs of children and young people with special educational needs remain a challenge and must now be prioritised.<sup>282</sup> It is welcome that the Department of Education in its *Statement of Strategy 2021-2023* has committed to '[s]upporting school communities through and post Covid-19 to enable continuity of education and assessment, and to help alleviate the impact of Covid-19 especially for those students at risk of educational disadvantage'.<sup>283</sup> The actions set out in the Statement of Strategy should inform the child poverty action plan but should be added to in terms of the issues listed in this paper. The Minister for Education has indicated that a budget package will be made available to address the impact of school closures. While the detail and amount of funding available is currently being finalised, the measures funded will target both primary and secondary school.<sup>284</sup>

### Digital Divide

Even before the Covid crisis, access to digital devices was challenging for many low-income families, with the Society of St Vincent de Paul noting that the cost involved in providing equipment, software and e-books is beyond the reach of many low-income households.<sup>285</sup> The experience of remote schooling was not uniform among families nor among schools, especially for those hard to reach and already living in challenging circumstances.<sup>286</sup> Evidence of digital exclusion has emerged at second level, with a dual problem of poor broadband and lack of access to digital devices more common where household incomes are low.<sup>287</sup> For families dependent on a low income, access to a laptop

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<sup>279</sup> Merike Darmody, Emer Smyth and Helen Russell, *The implications of the Covid-19 pandemic for policy in relation to children and young people: A research review*, (ESRI 2020) <<https://bit.ly/33kVJQJ>> accessed 12 September 2020.

<sup>280</sup> Jennifer Symonds, Dympna Devine, Seaneen Sloan, Gabriela Martinez Sainz, Margaret Crean, Barbara Moore, Emma Farrell, *Experiences of Remote Teaching and Learning In Ireland during the Covid 19 Pandemic, Report No 2*, Children's School Lives (UCD 2020).

<sup>281</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>282</sup> Merike Darmody, Emer Smyth and Helen Russell, *The implications of the Covid-19 pandemic for policy in relation to children and young people: A research review*, (ESRI 2020) <<https://bit.ly/33kVJQJ>> accessed 12 September 2020.

<sup>283</sup> Department of Education, *Statement of Strategy 2021-2023*, (Department of Education 2021) 18.

<sup>284</sup> Jess Casey (2021) 'Government to fund catch-up for education missed during school closure' *Irish Examiner* 3 June <<https://bit.ly/3vxvz7a>> accessed 18 June 2021

<sup>285</sup> Society of St Vincent de Paul, *Submission to the Joint Committee on Education and Skills* (SVP 2019) <<https://bit.ly/2Zxjr96>> accessed 13 September 2020

<sup>286</sup> Jennifer Symonds, Dympna Devine, Seaneen Sloan, Gabriela Martinez Sainz, Margaret Crean, Barbara Moore, Emma Farrell, *Experiences of Remote Teaching and Learning In Ireland during the Covid 19 Pandemic, Report No 2*, Children's School Lives (UCD 2020).

<sup>287</sup> Gretta Mohan, Selina McCoy, Eamonn Carroll, Georgina Mihut, Sean Lyons and Ciaran Mac Domhnaill, *Learning for all? Second level education in Ireland during Covid-19* (ESRI 2020).

and broadband is a luxury and purchasing equipment in an emergency is out of their reach.<sup>288</sup> Issues have also been noted in relation to the poor quality of devices available in homes to support continuous remote learning.<sup>289</sup> An additional €10 million top up for ICT funding was provided to schools to purchase equipment for students in need of support.<sup>290</sup> However, this was insufficient to meet demand and the Society of St Vincent de Paul often had to step in to make up the shortfall.<sup>291</sup>

### Education Costs

The cost of education remains an issue for low-income households. The Barnardos Back to School Costs survey 2020 highlights the basic back to school costs facing parents:

Barnardos cost of school survey 2020<sup>292</sup>

	Senior Infants Pupil	4 <sup>th</sup> Class Pupil	1 <sup>st</sup> Year Student
Uniform (including footwear)	€120	€130	€235
School books and stationery	€95	€115	€285
Classroom resources	€40	€40	€75
Voluntary contribution	€75	€80	€140
<b>Total</b>	<b>€330</b>	<b>€380</b>	<b>€735</b>

Increases to the school capitation rates and new funding for a free school books pilot in Budget 2019 and Budget 2020 are welcome as measures which increases funding available to schools. Schools should be encouraged to reduce reliance on voluntary contributions from parents as capitation rates increase. Recent increases to the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance are also welcome. However, just under half of parents at primary level are able to meet the costs of returning to school out of their regular household budget, while only one third of parents at second level can do likewise, demonstrating the financial strains on households due to the cost of education.<sup>293</sup>

Barnardos estimates that it would cost an additional €103 million annually to delivery free primary education and €127 million to delivery free second level education to every child and young person in Ireland.<sup>294</sup>

<sup>288</sup> Society of St Vincent de Paul, *Mitigating the Impact of School Closures on Disadvantaged Students*, (SVP 2021) <<https://bit.ly/3ubF9Me>> accessed 21 May 2021.

<sup>289</sup> Jennifer Symonds, Dymna Devine, Seaneen Sloan, Gabriela Martinez Sainz, Margaret Crean, Barbara Moore, Emma Farrell, *Experiences of Remote Teaching and Learning In Ireland during the Covid 19 Pandemic, Report No 2*, Children's School Lives (UCD 2020).

<sup>290</sup> Department of Education, 'Minister McHugh announces ICT funding for schools including €10 million top up funding' (22 April 2020) <<https://bit.ly/3mhD8LW>> accessed 13 September 2020.

<sup>291</sup> Society of St Vincent de Paul, *Mitigating the Impact of School Closures on Disadvantaged Students* (SVP 2021) <<https://bit.ly/3ubF9Me>> accessed 21 May 2021.

<sup>292</sup> Barnardos, *The real cost of school 2020 Back to School Briefing Paper* (Barnardos 2020)2, <https://bit.ly/3bTtES1> accessed 13 September 2020.

<sup>293</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>294</sup> *ibid.*

## Educational Needs of Children Experiencing Homelessness

Children experiencing homelessness, living in unsuitable accommodation cannot meaningfully engage and participate in education and learning if their basic needs are not being met.<sup>295</sup> Inadequate nutrition, lack of sleep, poor health and illness, lack of security and routine, long journeys to school and lack of space to do homework all impact on the ability of children experiencing homelessness to participate in education.<sup>296</sup> The Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) service allows schools to provide additional supports to children experiencing homelessness, however this service is not available in non-DEIS schools.<sup>297</sup> An extension of the HSCL service to non-DEIS schools supporting children who are homeless would allow additional supports to be provided to these vulnerable children<sup>298</sup> and recognise that poverty and its impact on children and their families is not only experienced in DEIS schools.

## Children with a Disability

Under the provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, every child has a right to education, regardless of their needs or ability.<sup>299</sup> From a rights perspective, the goal of education is 'to empower the child by developing his or her skills, learning and other capacities, human dignity, self-esteem and self-confidence'.<sup>300</sup> The right to education extends beyond formal school to embrace a wide range of life experiences and learning processes so as to enable children 'to develop their personalities, talents and abilities and to live a full and satisfying life within society'.<sup>301</sup> States must ensure, as a priority, that children with disabilities 'have equal opportunities to participate fully in education and community life, including by the removal of barriers that impede the realization of their rights'.<sup>302</sup>

In 2016, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed concern about Ireland's lack of a 'comprehensive strategy for the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream education and the encouragement of their autonomy'.<sup>303</sup> It recommended that the State should 'adopt a human rights-based approach to disability'.<sup>304</sup> It also recommended action to 'train and employ a sufficient number of specialized teachers and professionals in order to provide special needs education support' and to establish 'a clear and objective framework to ensure that children with disabilities are provided with reasonable accommodation for their education needs'.<sup>305</sup>

Ireland ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on 20 March 2018.<sup>306</sup> The Convention recognises the rights of people with disabilities to an education that is inclusive, free from discrimination and directed to the 'full development of the human potential and sense of

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<sup>295</sup> Geraldine Scanlon and Grainne McKenna, *Home Works: A study on the educational needs of children experiencing homelessness and living in emergency accommodation*, (Children's Rights Alliance 2018).

<sup>296</sup> Geraldine Scanlon and Grainne McKenna, *Home Works: A study on the educational needs of children experiencing homelessness and living in emergency accommodation*, (Children's Rights Alliance 2018).

<sup>297</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>298</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>299</sup> UNCRC, 'General Comment No. 9: The rights of children with disabilities' (2006) UN Doc CRC/C/GC/9 para 62. All children in Ireland up to the age of 18 have the right to primary education under Article 42 of the Irish Constitution.

<sup>300</sup> UNCRC, 'General Comment No. 1: Article 29 (1) The aims of education' (2001) UN Doc CRC/GC/2001/1 para 2.

<sup>301</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>302</sup> UNCRC, 'General Comment No. 7: Implementing child rights in early childhood' (2006) UN Doc CRC/C/G/GC/7/Rev.1 para 36(d).

<sup>303</sup> UNCRC, 'Concluding observations on the combined third and fourth periodic reports of Ireland' 29 January 2016 UN Doc CRC/C/IRL/CO/3-4 par 47(a).

<sup>304</sup> *ibid* para 48 (a).

<sup>305</sup> *ibid* para 48.

<sup>306</sup> UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities A/RES/61/106 (3 May 2008).

dignity and self-worth'.<sup>307</sup> Under the Convention, children with special educational needs have a right to individualised support and reasonable accommodations to enable their effective participation in the general education system.<sup>308</sup> The UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities emphasises the central importance of inclusion in the education system, stating that this 'involves a process of systemic reform ... to provide all students ... with an equitable and participatory learning experience and environment that best corresponds to their requirements and preferences. Placing students with disabilities within mainstream classes without accompanying structural changes does not constitute inclusion'.<sup>309</sup>

### Early School Leavers

Ireland still faces challenges in terms of early school leaving and young people from disadvantaged areas not engaged in employment, education or training.<sup>310</sup> An early school leaver is three times more likely to be unemployed than the general population aged 18-24, while those in employment have lower median earnings than other young people who have completed school.<sup>311</sup> There is a need for second chance education pathways, support for non-traditional entry routes to higher education, and improved access to lifelong learning and community education opportunities to address the impacts of early school leaving.<sup>312</sup>

### Summary and Recommendations

Educational inequalities which were already present have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic and measures to address these inequalities need to be implemented. Such inequalities have their roots in wider inequalities in Irish society and are interconnected with wider social policy related to wealth, housing, health, employment, welfare transport and childcare. Inter-agency /inter-professional collaboration needs to underpin the provision of education and be resourced accordingly. This needs to place the needs of children and their families at the heart of the delivery of professional supports and schools as central to community services. The cost of education continues to be a heavy burden for low-income families. Limitations in the DEIS model mean that many children and young people who need additional support in school may not receive it.

A national child poverty action plan should commit to investing the necessary funding to provide free high quality education at primary and secondary level for all children and young people over the lifetime of the strategy with extra supports put in place for disadvantaged students. This could be achieved by:

- Introducing a resource allocation model follows the child rather than the school similar to the UK Pupil Premium model. This type of model could complement the DEIS model.
- Prioritising the provision of free school books to all children and young people in primary and post-primary school.
- Developing a new model of funding for schools which will ensure the removal of voluntary contributions paid by families each school year.
- Introducing a tapering of supports under the DEIS programme to address the sharp distinction between DEIS and non-DEIS schools and reflecting the fact that a significant

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<sup>307</sup> *ibid* Article 24.

<sup>308</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>309</sup> Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 'General Comment No. 4, Article 24: Right to inclusive education' (2016) UN Doc CRPD/C/GC/4 para 11.

<sup>310</sup> Social Justice Ireland, *The impact of early school leaving* (Social Justice Ireland 2020) <<https://bit.ly/2SrtI2s>> accessed 4 October 2020.

<sup>311</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>312</sup> *ibid*.

proportion of disadvantaged children attend non-DEIS schools. This should begin by extending the Home School Community Liaison service and the School Completion Programme to non-DEIS Schools in light of the disruption to education and increasing educational inequalities due to the pandemic, as well as the additional needs of children experiencing homelessness and attending non-DEIS schools.

- As committed to in the Programme for Government, complete the new DEIS identification model and extend DEIS status to schools which meet the necessary criteria.
- Reducing the gap in retention rates between DEIS and non-DEIS schools in order to reduce the incidence of early school leaving among disadvantaged students. There needs to be systematic compilation of data related to retention rates in the school system on the basis of social class, and the nine grounds identified in the Equality Status Acts. This also applies to national annual statistical data on the take up of examinations by diverse groups at junior cycle and senior cycle levels.
- Monitoring of school selection practices to ensure that children are not discriminated against in accessing schools in their local areas. Further, practices within schools in relation to working with diversity and inequality should be directly monitored through Whole School Evaluation processes. Particular attention should be paid to the elimination of streaming.
- Urgently reforming the examination system in second level, incorporating the experiences of both continuous and dual assessments successfully implemented during the Covid-19 Pandemic.
- Reforming the education system to ensure that the best interests of children are central to decision-making and developing a whole-of-government approach to address the impact of Covid on children and young people.

## 11. Ensure Every Child has a Secure, Affordable, Warm Home

The right to adequate housing is defined as a right to housing that is accessible, habitable and affordable with certain 'facilities essential for health, security, comfort and nutrition'.<sup>313</sup> Households should have legal security of tenure<sup>314</sup> and States must take steps to prevent illegal evictions.<sup>315</sup> The right to housing also means that States must 'progressively and to the extent allowed by their available resources, prevent and address homelessness; provide the physical infrastructure required for housing to be considered adequate ... or ensure adequate housing to individuals or groups unable, for reasons beyond their control, to enjoy the right to adequate housing, notably through housing subsidies and other measures'.<sup>316</sup> In 2016, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed its concern at families with children in Ireland were 'facing significant delays in accessing social housing and frequently living in inappropriate, temporary or emergency accommodation on a long-term basis'.<sup>317</sup> The Committee said that children, as a priority group, must be 'accorded full and sustainable access to adequate housing resources'.<sup>318</sup> It called on the State to undertake measures to increase the availability of social housing and emergency housing support.<sup>319</sup>

Child homelessness has increased by over 250 per cent between 2014 and 2020.<sup>320</sup> In April 2021, 925 families with 2,193 children were living in emergency accommodation funded by local authorities.<sup>321</sup> More than half of homeless families in April 2021 were one parent families.<sup>322</sup> These homeless figures do not include families in 'own door' emergency accommodation, those living in domestic violence accommodation or people seeking asylum who are living in emergency accommodation. Additionally, it is estimated that 591 Traveller families were living in unauthorised halting sites in 2018, lacking access to basic facilities.<sup>323</sup> The stark living conditions children were exposed to on one halting site were recently highlighted by the Ombudsman for Children. These included living in extremely overcrowded and rodent-infested accommodation without adequate heat, sanitation or safe play areas.<sup>324</sup> 61,880 households, (including 24,646 households with children) were assessed as having a social housing need which is not being met in 2020.<sup>325</sup> Lone parent families, particularly lone mothers, people with disabilities and people from lower socio-economic backgrounds face high levels of discrimination in accessing housing.<sup>326</sup> Travellers are more likely to be homeless than the general population, with some Travellers experiencing difficulty in accessing emergency accommodation and a high level of hidden homelessness and overcrowding among Traveller

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<sup>313</sup> UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 'General Comment No. 4 on the Right to Adequate Housing (Art 11(1) of the Covenant)' (1991) UN Doc E/1992/23 Para 8 (b).

<sup>314</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>315</sup> *ibid* Para 8 (e).

<sup>316</sup> UN & Habitat, *The Right to Adequate Housing*, Factsheet No 21/Rev. 1 (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2014) 34.

<sup>317</sup> UN CRC 'Concluding Observations: Ireland' (2016) UN Doc CRC/C/IRL/CO/3-4 para 61.

<sup>318</sup> UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 'General Comment No. 4 on the Right to Adequate Housing (Art 11(1) of the Covenant)' 1991 UN Doc E/1992/23 para 8(e).

<sup>319</sup> UNCR, 'Concluding Observations: Ireland' (2016) UN Doc CRC/C/IRL/CO/3-4 para 62.

<sup>320</sup> Focus Ireland, 'Latest figures on homelessness' <<https://bit.ly/33puHp1>> accessed 13 September 2020.

<sup>321</sup> Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, 'Homelessness Report April 2021' <<https://bit.ly/2Sv8STu>> accessed 14 June 2021.

<sup>322</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>323</sup> Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, 'Traveller families in LA and LA assisted accommodation and on unauthorised halting sites Annual Estimate 2018' <<https://bit.ly/2Rnp9G4>> accessed 13 September 2020.

<sup>324</sup> Ombudsman for Children's Office, *No End in Site*, (Ombudsman for Children's Office 2021) 4 <<https://bit.ly/34cmw09>> accessed 24 May 2021.

<sup>325</sup> Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (2021) *Summary of Social Housing Assessments 2020* <<https://bit.ly/3fsERv9>> accessed 18 May 2021.

<sup>326</sup> Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, *Discrimination and Inequality in Housing in Ireland* (IHREC 2018) IX – XI.



families.<sup>327</sup> Large families and those with family members with disabilities often spend longer in emergency accommodation as appropriate accommodation is more difficult to source. The *EU Recommendation on Investing in Children* recommends that the State ‘make it possible for families with children to live in affordable, quality housing (including social housing), address situations of exposure to environmental hazards, overcrowding and energy poverty.’<sup>328</sup>

*Rebuilding Ireland* has a target of 50,000 social housing units to be delivered by 2021, supported by an investment of €6 billion.<sup>329</sup> It is likely that there will be a shortfall in terms of meeting the 2020 house completion targets set out in *Rebuilding Ireland*.<sup>330</sup> In its 2020 Country Report for Ireland, the European Commission concluded that while policy measures to increase the supply of social housing are in place, their effectiveness is still limited.<sup>331</sup> There is an over-reliance on the private rented sector to meet social housing need, exposing children and families to high rents and insecure tenures. There is a strong link between housing and poverty, with the largest increase in deprivation in 2019 observed among households living in the private rented sector.<sup>332</sup> Low-income households facing high rents often cut back on other essentials as rent is prioritised, leading to enforced deprivation.

### Child and Family Homelessness

A Focus Ireland research study with homeless families published in 2019 showed that most of the families involved in the study had stable housing histories and prior to becoming homeless had been living in the private rental sector in receipt of Rent Supplement or the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP).<sup>333</sup> In July 2017, the roll-out of family supported accommodation facilities or ‘family hubs’ began as a way of transitioning families out of unsuitable emergency hotel and B&B accommodation and of providing ‘a greater level of stability than is possible in hotel accommodation’.<sup>334</sup> While some family hubs may be preferable to hotel and B&B emergency accommodation for families, parents living in hubs describe very challenging living situations, with the rules in the hubs, noise levels, living in close proximity to strangers and the lack of space and privacy impacting on normal parenting routines and practices.<sup>335</sup> A number of parents and older children living in hubs expressed the view that family hubs are not appropriate accommodation for families, and some expressed concern that the hubs are being seen as a longer-term solution to family homelessness.<sup>336</sup> The use of family hubs must be reviewed, particularly in light of the Covid crisis which highlights the vulnerability of people living in congregated settings.

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<sup>327</sup> Independent Expert Group on behalf of the Minister of the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, *Traveller Accommodation Expert Review* (DHPLG 2019) <<https://bit.ly/2LLuWD5>> accessed 7 December 2019.

<sup>328</sup> European Commission, *Commission Recommendation of 20.2.2013: Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage* (Brussels, 20.2.2013 C(2013) 778 final)

<sup>329</sup> *Rebuilding Ireland, Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness* (DHPLG 2016) 106.

<sup>330</sup> Paschal Donohoe TD, Minister for Finance Written Answers House Prices 30 July 2020 <<https://bit.ly/3hMSSHQ>> accessed 20 September 2020.

<sup>331</sup> European Commission *Country report for Ireland* (European Commission 2020) <<https://bit.ly/3hswBtU>> accessed 13 September 2020

<sup>332</sup> Central Statistics Office, *Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) Enforced deprivation 2019* (CSO 2020) <<https://bit.ly/35SnvEP>> accessed 20 September 2020.

<sup>333</sup> Alice Emily Long, Sarah Sheridan, Letizia Gambi and Daniel Hoey, *Family Homelessness in Dublin: Causes, housing histories and finding a home* (Focus Ireland 2019) <<https://bit.ly/2rJyWnc>> accessed 2 December 2019.

<sup>334</sup> *Rebuilding Ireland, Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness: Third Quarterly Progress Report* (DHPLB 2017).

<sup>335</sup> Ombudsman for Children’s Office, *No Place Like Home: Children’s views and experiences of living in family hubs* (Ombudsman for Children’s Office 2019).

<sup>336</sup> *ibid.*

The Joint Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government<sup>337</sup> and the Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs,<sup>338</sup> in separate reports published in November 2019, made a number of recommendations on the issue of child and family homelessness. These include considering enumerating the right to housing in the Constitution, ensuring that the best interests of the child are taken into account when responding to families that are homeless, placing a limit on the time a family can spend in emergency accommodation, the ending of self-accommodating and ‘one night only’ accommodation for families, phasing out the use of hotel and B&B accommodation for families. The reports recommend that the effectiveness of the overall response to family homelessness be reviewed, including the use of family hubs.<sup>339</sup> They also stress the need to accelerate the delivery of social and affordable housing in response to the housing crisis.

### Covid-19, Housing and Homelessness

Just over 68 per cent of households who have been affected by a moderate to severe financial shock due to Covid are renters.<sup>340</sup> The Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (Covid-19) Act 2020 was introduced in March 2020 and banned all rent increases and tenancy terminations, with limited exceptions, during the Covid-19 emergency period.<sup>341</sup> The number of homeless children and families decreased significantly while these measures were in place,<sup>342</sup> with the lowest number of homeless families recorded in Dublin since 2016.<sup>343</sup> There was a continued reduction in these numbers into 2021.<sup>344</sup> Additionally, homes which were previously only available on short-term let basis have been made available to house individuals and families who are homeless.<sup>345</sup> One night only accommodation has been converted to 24 hour services, with meals provided on site.<sup>346</sup> The use of night-by-night temporary accommodation for families has been highly criticised<sup>347</sup> however anecdotally concerns have been raised about increased levels of rough sleeping among families with children as night-by-night accommodation is no longer available.

The emergency measures to prevent homelessness expired on 1 August 2020 and were replaced by measures contained in the Residential Tenancies and Valuation Act 2020.<sup>348</sup> Tenancies can now be terminated by a landlord on the same six grounds and with the same notice periods as prior to the Covid crisis. However, tenants who have experienced a financial loss due to Covid-19 are protected

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<sup>337</sup> Joint Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government, *Family and Child Homelessness* (Houses of the Oireachtas 2019) <<http://bit.ly/3a2BkAa>> accessed 10 January 2020.

<sup>338</sup> Houses of the Oireachtas, Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs, *Report on the Impact of Homelessness on Children* (2019) <<http://bit.ly/2tX50hg>> accessed 10 January 2020.

<sup>339</sup> Joint Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government, *Family and Child Homelessness* (2019) <<http://bit.ly/3a2BkAa>> accessed 10 January 2020; Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs, *Report on the Impact of Homelessness on Children* (2019) <<http://bit.ly/2tX50hg>> accessed 10 January 2020.

<sup>340</sup> Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection and Central Bank of Ireland (2020) *The initial impacts of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Ireland's Labour Market*.

<sup>341</sup> Government of Ireland (2020) *The Residential Tenancies and Valuation Act 2020: What this means for landlords and tenants* <<https://bit.ly/3hrlema>> accessed 13 September 2020.

<sup>342</sup> Focus Ireland (2020) *Homeless numbers increase to 8728 as Focus Ireland calls for reintroduction of eviction bans and rent freezes due to recent Covid-19 restrictions* <<https://bit.ly/35vVe6M>> accessed 13 September 2020.

<sup>343</sup> Dublin Region Homeless Executive, *Report/update on Covid-19 and Homelessness* (DRHE 2020) accessed 13 September 2020.

<sup>344</sup> Dublin Region Homeless Executive, *Report/update on Covid-19 and Homelessness* (DRHE 2021) <<https://bit.ly/3bCp3EV>> accessed 18 May 2021.

<sup>345</sup> Rory Hearne, ‘Covid 19 shows we need a new housing direction in Ireland’ *Irish Examiner* 3 June 2020.

<sup>346</sup> Kitty Holland, ‘Coronavirus: Dublin accommodation sourced for homeless people’ *Irish Times*, 26 March 2020.

<sup>347</sup> Mercy Law Resource Centre, *Report on the lived experiences of homeless families* (Mercy Law Resource Centre 2019) <<https://bit.ly/30bMVcl>> accessed 27 September 2020.

<sup>348</sup> Government of Ireland, *The Residential Tenancies and Valuation Act 2020: What this means for landlords and tenants* (Government of Ireland 2020) <<https://bit.ly/3wJrxcs>> accessed 19 July 2021.

from rent reviews and eviction on the grounds of rent arrears until 12 July 2021.<sup>349</sup> The legislation introduces a new 8 step process for landlords and tenants facing rent arrears.<sup>350</sup> Rent increases can also now take effect.<sup>351</sup> Organisations have expressed concerns that the numbers of homeless families will begin to increase again as there are no protections against tenants being evicted due to landlords selling their property.<sup>352</sup> Rents across Ireland have moderated since the pandemic began.<sup>353</sup> It is suggested that rents may mirror trajectories in incomes and unemployment in the coming months<sup>354</sup> which could be beneficial for new tenants entering the private rented sector.

### Energy Poverty among Families with Children

140,000 children are living in homes that have issues with leaks, damp and rot and 31 per cent of lone parents are spending more than 10 per cent of their income on energy costs.<sup>355</sup> Children in one parent families are at the greatest risk of exposure to energy poverty and the associated health risks, with 43 per cent of children living in one parent families experiencing energy poverty.<sup>356</sup> Children living in energy poor households are more likely to have asthma and to have been on two or more courses of antibiotics in the past twelve months than other children.<sup>357</sup> Over three-quarters of children experiencing energy poverty are living in the private rented sector or in social housing.<sup>358</sup> In the context of Covid-19, ensuring that children and families are protected from energy poverty and the resultant health risks is even more important. Rising energy costs, inadequate social welfare supports and the limited coverage of energy efficiency schemes for non-owner occupiers must be addressed in order to protect families from energy poverty.<sup>359</sup>

However, despite this greater risk for children, particularly those living in one parent families, current policies and schemes have not effectively targeted children and families experiencing energy poverty.<sup>360</sup> The Warmer Home Scheme, which is available to social welfare recipients who own their own home, received welcome additional funding in Budget 2020 and Budget 2021. However, there are challenges in terms of access to and take up of these schemes among families. Over 75% of applicants for the Warmer Home Scheme qualified based on being in receipt of Fuel Allowance— the majority of which were pensioners.<sup>361</sup> Therefore, this scheme may be a good option for older people who own their own homes but for energy poor households with children, it is more likely they are

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<sup>349</sup> Focus Ireland, 'Homeless numbers increase to 8728 as Focus Ireland calls for a reintroduction of eviction bans and rent freezes due to recent Covid-19 restrictions' (28 August 2020) <<https://bit.ly/2DWsqZV>> accessed 13 September 2020. Those impacted financially due to the pandemic must declare this to the RTB. If you have not declared yourself to the RTB you cannot avail of these protections. This will particularly affect vulnerable tenants / families who may not be engaging with any supports (e.g. Threshold, Citizens Information). See statement from Threshold for further details <<https://bit.ly/3flrG03>>

<sup>350</sup> Government of Ireland, *The Residential Tenancies and Valuation Act 2020: What this means for landlords and tenants* (Government of Ireland 2020) <<https://bit.ly/3wJrxcs>> accessed 19 July 2021.

<sup>351</sup> Government of Ireland (2020) *The Residential Tenancies and Valuation Act 2020: What this means for landlords and tenants* <<https://bit.ly/3hrlema>> accessed 13 September 2020.

<sup>352</sup> Focus Ireland, 'Homeless numbers increase to 8728 as Focus Ireland calls for a reintroduction of eviction bans and rent freezes due to recent Covid-19 restrictions' (28 August 2020) <<https://bit.ly/2DWsqZV>> accessed 13 September 2020.

<sup>353</sup> Matthew Allen-Coughlan, Cathal Coffey and Conor O'Toole, *Exploring the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic on rental prices in Ireland from January to June 2020: Early insights from a monthly rent index* (RTB 2020) <https://bit.ly/3bTHOCF> accessed 13 September 2020.

<sup>354</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>355</sup> Society of St Vincent de Paul, *Growing up in the cold: a policy briefing on the nature and extent of energy poverty in households with children* (SVP 2019) <<https://bit.ly/2RjkogN>> accessed 13 September 2020.

<sup>356</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>357</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>358</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>359</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>360</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>361</sup> *ibid.*

living in social housing or the private rented sector. Since 2016, 900 homes have been upgraded under Warmth and Well-Being Scheme, a targeted scheme for vulnerable households (home owner or social housing tenants) with respiratory problems, but just 30 households with children have received support under this scheme.<sup>362</sup> This suggests there may be barriers to take up among families with children which should be assessed and addressed if the scheme is rolled out nationally.

### Domestic Violence

In 2018 2,572 children received supports from a domestic violence service in Ireland, while an average of nine requests per day for refuge accommodation could not be accommodated because the refuges were full.<sup>363</sup> Capacity in domestic violence specialist accommodation has been reduced by approximately 25 per cent due to Covid-19 measures while demand for domestic violence services has grown.<sup>364</sup> Between March and August 2020, 3,450 women and 589 children who had never contacted a domestic violence service before, sought support and safety from a service for the first time.<sup>365</sup> A further 486 children accessed domestic violence services for the first time with their mother between September and December 2020.<sup>366</sup> Priority access to Rent Supplement for survivors of domestic abuse has been introduced in order to help women and children fleeing abusive partners to access housing as quickly as possible.<sup>367</sup> The protocol established between Tusla and the Department of Social Protection to trigger access to this support has been extended to the end of 2021.<sup>368</sup>

### Summary and Recommendations

Some households experience discrimination in trying to access housing in the private rented sector and an over reliance on the private rented sector to meet social housing need has left many families vulnerable to homelessness and unaffordable housing. The number of homeless families has fallen due to emergency measures introduced in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Congregated settings such as family hubs as a response to family homelessness may be even more inappropriate due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Delivery of social housing is likely to be delayed due to Covid-19. Additional supports are needed for domestic violence services which are responding to unprecedented levels of demand.

A child poverty action plan should commit to eliminating child and family homelessness and ensuring that there is high quality affordable housing in a variety of tenures in sustainable communities.

This could be achieved by:

- Limiting the amount of time a child/family should spend in emergency accommodation to six months or less with appropriate alternative accommodation provided.
- Promoting tenancy protections in order to prevent homelessness.

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<sup>362</sup> Society of St Vincent de Paul, *Growing up in the cold: a policy briefing on the nature and extent of energy poverty in households with children* (SVP 2019) <<https://bit.ly/2RjkogN>> accessed 13 September 2020.

<sup>363</sup> Safe Ireland, '10782 women and 2572 children receive support from a domestic violence service in one year' (10 December 2019) <<https://bit.ly/3mhROKP>> accessed 13 September 2020.

<sup>364</sup> Safe Ireland 'Air BnB partners with Safe Ireland and Women's Aid to offer free accommodation for domestic violence survivors' (25 June 2020) <<https://bit.ly/3kdfWwf>> accessed 13 September 2020.

<sup>365</sup> Safe Ireland, 'Nearly 3,500 women contacted a domestic violence service for the first time during initial lockdown' (10 November 2020) <<https://bit.ly/36tCNOQ>> accessed 14 November 2020.

<sup>366</sup> Safe Ireland, *Tracking the Shadow Pandemic – Lockdown 2* (Safe Ireland 2020) <<https://bit.ly/3oqBfOl>> accessed 18 May 2021.

<sup>367</sup> Safe Ireland, 'Safe Ireland welcomes prioritisation of Rent Supplement for survivors of domestic abuse' (15 June 2020) <<https://bit.ly/3hrCyHl>> accessed 13 September 2020.

<sup>368</sup> Department of Social Protection, 'Access to Rent Supplement for victims of domestic violence to continue to the end of 2021– Minister Humphreys' (19 February 2021) <<https://bit.ly/2Qx3bng>> accessed 18 May 2021.

- Strengthen family support services to prevent homelessness as a result of family conflict.
- Holding a referendum on the right to housing.
- Recognising the link between poverty, deprivation and housing, particularly for families who are living in rented accommodation (private rented and social rented) and ensuring that housing policy reflects the needs of families with children.
- Introducing a rent arrears fund to prevent evictions and homelessness as a result of the impact of Covid-19.
- Increasing the provision of social housing via Approved Housing Bodies and Local Authorities with an increased emphasis on two bed housing for smaller families.
- Improving the supply and affordability of rental accommodation and security of tenure for renters, as set out in the Programme for Government. Affordability should be in relation to ability to pay based on income.
- Addressing energy poverty among households with children, ensuring that low income households with children are targeted through income and energy efficiency measures to address energy poverty across all housing tenures.
- Enhance income supports for low income households to ensure everyone has an adequate income to meet their energy costs and future proof payments in the context of price increases and environmental taxes. Make sure support reaches all low-income households by expanding eligibility to the Fuel Allowance to households in receipt of the Working Family Payment.
- Increasing funding for domestic violence services and refuges to reflect the additional challenges in providing services and responding to increased demands due to Covid-19.
- Meeting the housing needs of Traveller families, with reference to the findings of the Traveller Accommodation Expert Review.<sup>369</sup>
- Ensuring the needs of asylum seekers are incorporated fully into the response to the housing and homeless crisis.
- Develop a Family Homeless Strategy, which is child-centred, has clear responsibilities, targets and timelines. One parent families should be specifically targeted under this strategy with tailored objectives and goals.

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<sup>369</sup> Independent Expert Group on behalf of the Minister of the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, *Traveller Accommodation Expert Review* (DHPLG 2019) <<https://bit.ly/2LLuWD5>> accessed 27 September 2020.

## 12. Ensure Timely Access to Healthcare

Every child has the right to enjoy the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.<sup>370</sup> Article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child places particular emphasis on the development of primary healthcare, which includes access to General Practitioner (GP) care.<sup>371</sup> The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has stressed that primary care should include the provision of information and services, as well as the prevention of illness and injury.<sup>372</sup> *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014–2020* reiterated a commitment, first articulated in the 2012 *Future Health Framework*, to introduce universal GP services.<sup>373</sup>

There is a strong social gradient in the prevalence of poor health and well-being, dental health, socio-emotional difficulties, consumption of unhealthy food, hunger, and anxiety among children and young people.<sup>374</sup> Children and young people in Ireland generally describe themselves as healthy, however a significant minority have longstanding illnesses, conditions or disabilities, with those from families with lower levels of education and income more likely to have such a condition.<sup>375</sup> Traveller children are more likely to have hearing, sight or speech difficulties than children in the general population.<sup>376</sup> Poorer mental health and socio-emotional difficulties are more prevalent among children and young people whose parents have not been in employment, and least prevalent for children and young people in professional families.<sup>377</sup> Ensuring that children can access the supports and services they need in order to have good health both mitigates the damaging impact of poverty on children, and helps to overcome the accumulated disadvantage over the lifecycle that poverty creates. The *EU Recommendation on Investing in Children* recommends improving the responsiveness of the health system to better address the needs of disadvantaged children by dismantling ‘the obstacles to accessing healthcare faced by children and families in vulnerable situations, including costs’ and by investing in prevention.<sup>378</sup> Early childhood education and care, primary schools and the wider community can play significant supportive roles in children’s health<sup>379</sup>, demonstrating the opportunity for cross-departmental initiatives in this area. The Health Service Executive has identified prevention and early intervention with regard to children’s health as a key objective of its current strategy.<sup>380</sup> Such an approach seeks to ‘act early’ in order to have the ‘greatest impact’ in terms of individual health and well-being.

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<sup>370</sup> UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (20 November 1989) 1577 UNTS 3 (UNCRC) Art 24.

<sup>371</sup> *ibid* Art 24 (b).

<sup>372</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, ‘General Comment No. 15 on the Right of the Child to the Enjoyment of the Highest Attainable Standard of Health (Art 24)’ (2013) UN Doc CRC/C/GC/15 para 26.

<sup>373</sup> Department of Children and Youth Affairs, *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014–2020* (Stationery Office 2014) Commitment G9, 30; Department of Health, *Future Health: A Strategic Framework for Reform of the Health Service 2012–2015* (DOH 2012) ii.

<sup>374</sup> Merike Darmody, Emer Smyth and Helen Russell, *The implications of the Covid-19 pandemic for policy in relation to children and young people: A research review* (ESRI 2020) <<https://bit.ly/33kVJOJ>> accessed 12 September 2020.

<sup>375</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>376</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>377</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>378</sup> European Commission, *Commission Recommendation of 20.2.2013: Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage* (Brussels, 20.2.2013 C(2013) 778 final) <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1060&langId=en>.

<sup>379</sup> Government of Ireland *First 5: A Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their families 2019–2028* (Stationery Office 2018).

<sup>380</sup> Health Service Executive, *HSE Corporate Plan 2021 – 2024* (HSE 2021) <<https://bit.ly/3fM0tTs>> accessed 26 May 2021.

## Covid-19 Crisis Impact on Health and Well Being

The employment losses and increased parental stress as a result of the pandemic are likely to have negative effects on the physical and mental health of children and young people, with those families who were on a low income before the pandemic worst affected.<sup>381</sup> Schools and youth services may have to respond to higher levels of anxiety, stress and depression among children and young people as already over-stretched child and adolescent mental health services may not be able to cope with additional demands.<sup>382</sup> Access to broader services, such as speech and language therapy have been affected by the pandemic.<sup>383</sup> Speech and language therapists, physiotherapists and occupational therapists who would have been working in primary care and disability services have been redeployed as Covid-19 testers and contact tracers, despite long waiting lists for these services.<sup>384</sup> This has led to an increase in the number of children waiting to access vital services. For instance, the waiting list for an initial speech and language assessment has grown from just over 12,000 in January 2020<sup>385</sup> to almost 16,500 in December 2020.<sup>386</sup> Similar increases are observed for those waiting separately for initial and further speech and language therapy.<sup>387</sup> In total almost 45,000 children were waiting to access speech and language therapy at the end of 2020.<sup>388</sup> The waiting list for an appointment with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) grew from 2,327 in December 2019 to 2,736 in December 2020.<sup>389</sup>

Demand for mental health supports, food and home supplies increased sharply due to the Covid-19 restrictions, with increased rates of relationship breakdown, loneliness and isolation, domestic violence, increased drug use and behavioural challenges in children reported by Family Resource Centres responding to additional demands for their services.<sup>390</sup>

## GP Care for Children

The 2017 report of the all-party Committee on the Future of Healthcare, *Sláintecare*, recommended the delivery of expanded primary care services by the introduction of universal free GP over a five year period at a cost of €91 million.<sup>391</sup> The Health (General Practitioner and Service and Alteration of Criteria for Eligibility) Act 2020 provides for the extension of the GP visit card for children under the

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<sup>381</sup> Merike Darmody, Emer Smyth and Helen Russell, *The implications of the Covid-19 pandemic for policy in relation to children and young people: A research review* (ESRI 2020) <<https://bit.ly/33kVJ0J>> accessed 12 September 2020.

<sup>382</sup> Merike Darmody, Emer Smyth and Helen Russell, *The implications of the Covid-19 pandemic for policy in relation to children and young people: A research review* (ESRI 2020) <<https://bit.ly/33kVJ0J>> accessed 12 September 2020.

<sup>383</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>384</sup> Marese McDonagh and Paul Cullen 'Concern grows as HSE therapists redeployed as Covid-19 testers' Irish Times 3 September 2020

<sup>385</sup> HSE, Parliamentary Questions, Written Answer: Speech and Language Therapy Lists, 11 March 2020 [3613, 3614, 3615/20] <<https://bit.ly/3eYUifn>> accessed 19 May 2021

<sup>386</sup> HSE, Parliamentary Questions, Written Answer: Disability Services Data, 27 January 2021 [3008, 3009, 3010/20] <<https://bit.ly/2S4GWP2>> accessed 19 May 2021.

<sup>387</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>388</sup> Darragh Bermingham 'Almost 45,000 children on 'appalling' waiting lists for speech and language help' The Irish Examiner (Cork 7 March 2021).

<sup>389</sup> HSE, Parliamentary Questions, Written Answer: Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, 4 February 2021 [3297/21] <<https://bit.ly/3ouSCgU>> accessed 19 May 2021.

<sup>390</sup> Family Resource Centre National Forum, *FRCs: Supporting Families During the Covid-19 Crisis* (Family Resource Centre National Forum 2020).

<sup>391</sup> Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Future of Healthcare, *Sláintecare, Report of the Oireachtas Committee on the Future of Healthcare* (Houses of the Oireachtas 2017) 6.

age of 13.<sup>392</sup> This will be introduced in three phases, six and seven year olds, eight and nine year olds and 10, 11 and 12 year olds.<sup>393</sup> It is not yet clear when these phases will be commenced.

In Ireland, a full medical card provides eligible households with free access to primary care including GP, oral, opticians and aural services, medicines and prescriptions, in-patient and out-patient services, medical appliances and maternity care.<sup>394</sup> Medical card holders may also be exempt from paying school transport charges and exam fees.<sup>395</sup> Access to a medical card is therefore an important support for low income households. In most cases if a family's income is derived solely from social welfare they qualify for the medical card, as they have already satisfied a means test. Families in receipt of Working Family Payment typically do not meet this criteria and although allowances can be made for working families when applying for the medical card in relation to travel, housing and childcare costs, the assessment is complex and may contribute to the lack of take-up by those who are working but still living in poverty.<sup>396</sup> The income thresholds for the medical card have not been revised since 2005. Currently, the medical card income threshold for a family of two adults with two children under 16 is €342.50 per week<sup>397</sup> while the poverty line for this household in 2021 is €664.63.<sup>398</sup>

### Public Health Nursing

The Public Health Nursing service provides one to one support for parents of all babies and is seen as having a key role in ensuring that babies and young children have access to primary, preventative and specialist healthcare.<sup>399</sup> Public health nurses play a critical role in advising and supporting parents and referring families to other interventions.<sup>400</sup> They are a consistent point of contact for parents and children in the first 3 years of a child's life<sup>401</sup> and are an important link through to early childhood education and care services, particularly prevention and early intervention services, again demonstrating the opportunity for integrated responses to child poverty. Public health nursing is under pressure due to a historical hiring embargo, current recruitment challenges and the implications of a generalist model of public health nursing.<sup>402</sup> Public Health Nurses may lack the time and supports necessary to move away from primarily treating ill health and towards health promotion and early intervention in children's early years.<sup>403</sup> *Slaintecare* recommends the hiring of 900 community registered nurses to free up Public Health Nurses with specialist child training to carry out their child health work.<sup>404</sup> The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted on visits to and from Public Health Nurses particularly with regard to developmental screening. Just 55 per cent of babies

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<sup>392</sup> Health (General Practitioner Service and Alteration of Criteria for Eligibility) Act 2020 <<https://bit.ly/2H9SXUC>>

<sup>393</sup> Stephen Donnelly TD Minister for Health Covid 19 (Health) Statements Dail Debates 24 July 2020

<sup>394</sup> Citizens Information 'Medical Cards' <<https://bit.ly/3ivgLAe>> accessed 14 September 2020.

<sup>395</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>396</sup> Patricia Keilthy, *Medical Card Eligibility: Profiling People Living in Poverty without a Medical Card using EU-SILC 2006*, (Combat Poverty Agency 2009).

<sup>397</sup> Citizens Information 'Medical Cards' <<https://bit.ly/3ivgLAe>> accessed 14 September 2020.

<sup>398</sup> Social Justice Ireland, *Poverty Focus 2021* (Social Justice Ireland 2021) <<https://bit.ly/2S2XIKG>> accessed 19 May 2021.

<sup>399</sup> Government of Ireland *First 5: A Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their families 2019-2028* (Stationery Office 2018).

<sup>400</sup> Children's Rights Alliance, *The next programme for Government: Every Child Every Chance* (Children's Rights Alliance 2020).

<sup>401</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>402</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>403</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>404</sup> *ibid.*



received their developmental screening within 10 months between July and September 2020,<sup>405</sup> compared to 98 per cent in the same period in 2019.<sup>406</sup>

### Summary and Recommendations

Health inequalities in both mental health and physical health have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic and access to services has been reduced. It is not clear when universal access to GP visit cards will be extended to children over the age of 6. Income thresholds for the Medical Card have not been revised since 2005. Pressure on the Public Health Nursing service means that the focus remains on curative rather than preventative services.

A child poverty action plan should commit to investing in the full speedy implementation of Sláintecare in particular the introduction of a one tier health system.

Measures that can be taken to achieve this include:

- Commencing the extension of the GP visit card to children aged over six.
- Revising the income thresholds for the medical card to ensure that all families with children who are at risk of poverty will have access to a full medical card.
- Investing in creating a dedicated public health nurse service for children.
- Developing a home visiting strategy to ensure every child has access to prevention and early intervention supports in their own community.
- Enhancing access to specialist psychological and therapeutic supports through schools building on NEPS and the SCP in order to improve socio-emotional well-being through schools.
- Enhancing access to occupational therapy and speech and language therapy in communities in line with the level of need in each community.
- As we transition to a system of universal health care, ensure everyone on a low income can access care by increasing the medical card income thresholds to the equivalent of the highest means-tested welfare payment.

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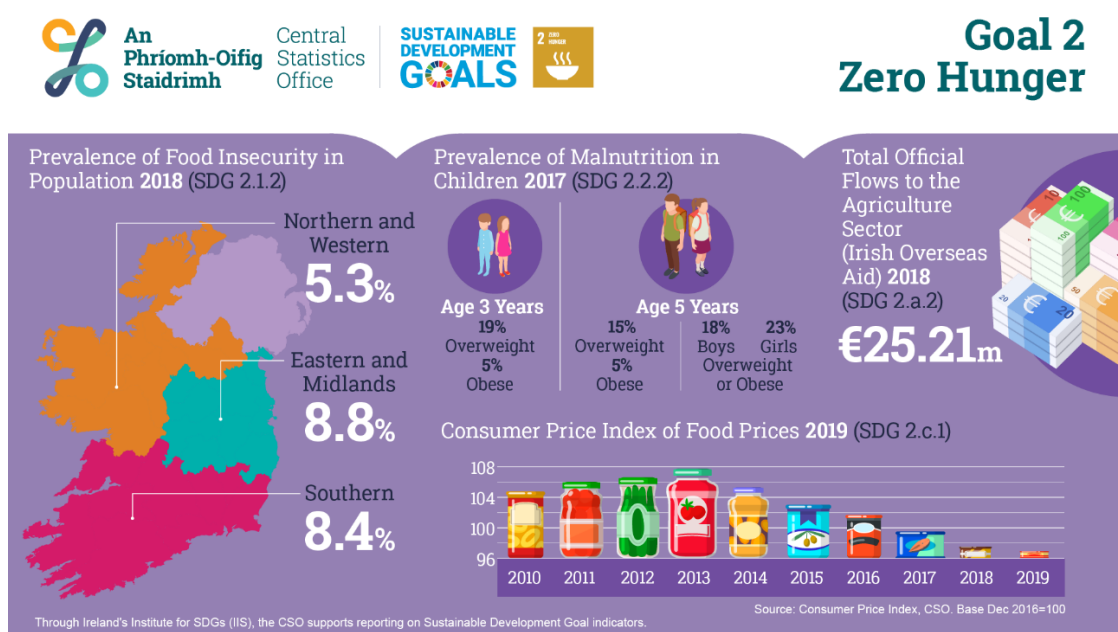
<sup>405</sup> HSE, *Performance Profile July – September 2020* (HSE 2020) <<https://bit.ly/2S4T8Gk>> accessed 19 May 2021.

<sup>406</sup> HSE, *Performance Profile July – September 2019 Quarterly Report* (HSE 2019) <<https://bit.ly/2S96yRP>> accessed 19 May 2021.

### 13. Address Food Poverty

Food poverty is defined as the inability to have an adequate or nutritious diet due to issues of affordability or accessibility.<sup>407</sup> Food poverty is multidimensional, encompassing a lack of access to a nutritionally adequate diet and the impact on health and social participation.<sup>408</sup> The at risk of food poverty rate was 8 per cent in 2018, down from 13.3 per cent in 2013.<sup>409</sup> The *EU Recommendation on Investing in Children* recommends that states ‘invest in prevention, particularly during early childhood years, by putting in place comprehensive policies that combine nutrition, health, education and social measures’.<sup>410</sup>

The Irish government has also committed to ‘end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round by 2030’ (Sustainable Development Goals).<sup>411</sup> As part of the State’s reporting on the second SDG related to ending hunger, the Central Statistics Office has pulled together useful information on the prevalence of food insecurity in the population by region and the prevalence of malnutrition in young children. The CSO has produced the following infographic:<sup>412</sup>



The average weekly cost of a minimum healthy food basket fell by 4.4 per cent between 2016 and 2018.<sup>413</sup> Food costs rise as children grow older, with a household with a teenager, reliant on social welfare, required to spend 30 per cent of their income to meet the cost of a healthy food basket.

<sup>407</sup> Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice, *What is the cost of a healthy food basket in 2018?* (VPSJ 2019) <<https://bit.ly/2RrI56A>> accessed 14 September 2020

<sup>408</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>409</sup> Central Statistics Office, *Ireland's UN SDGs 2019 Report on Indicators for Goal 2 Zero Hunger* (CSO 2020) <<https://bit.ly/3bWkSl2>> accessed 15 September 2020.

<sup>410</sup> European Commission, *Commission Recommendation of 20.2.2013: Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage* (Brussels, 20.2.2013 C(2013) 778 final)

<sup>411</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Disability '#Envision2030 Goal 2: Zero Hunger' <<https://bit.ly/3bhOH2n>> accessed 8 January 2021.

<sup>412</sup> Central Statistics Office, 'Ireland's UN SDGs 2019 - Report on Indicators for Goal 2 Zero Hunger Infographic', <<https://bit.ly/3ye4tEJ>> accessed 30 April 2021.

<sup>413</sup> Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice, *What is the cost of a healthy food basket in 2018?* (VPSJ 2019) <<https://bit.ly/2RrI56A>> accessed 14 September 2020.

There has been increased demand for food during the Covid-19 pandemic with St Vincent De Paul reporting that 25 per cent of people surveyed cut back on food and utilities during Covid-19.<sup>414</sup> Those under 55 were more likely to cut back on food while one in four lone parent families cut back on food due to cost. Food Cloud has also noted that despite an increase in demand for food parcels, - up 59 per cent since July 2020, at the same time there was a '21% reduction in local charities that were able to collect free retail donations in the last year due to the pandemic'.<sup>415</sup> The way in which organisations distributed food changed with more food parcels being distributed than cooking meals for clients. The main services that sought more food for the people they work with included Community Centres, Meals on Wheels, Family Resource Centres and Food Banks as well as youth centres.<sup>416</sup> Two of the key reasons identified for engaging with services distributing food, was becoming unemployed and insufficient income.<sup>417</sup>

The Department of Social Protection operates the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) Programme which 'is designed to support Member States in addressing the basic needs of the most deprived people in our community'.<sup>418</sup> The FEAD Ireland fund for 2014-2020 totalled €26.7 million (€22m European funding and €4m of Irish Exchequer funding) with 75 per cent of this used to provide food to groups of people most in need including children in low income households as well as those experiencing homelessness, certain members of the Traveller and Roma communities and victims of domestic violence.<sup>419</sup> Food Cloud is the primary not-for-profit partner that administers the food element of the FEAD programme to over 150 charities nationwide who are working at local level with children and families. These include organisations like Barnardos, Family Resource Centres, The Society of St Vincent De Paul, Youth Work Ireland, Youth Reach and others projects working with Travellers, victims of domestic violence and families experiencing homelessness.<sup>420</sup>

Food poverty is one of the driving forces behind higher rates of obesity and ill-health in disadvantaged communities.<sup>421</sup> Research on the links between dietary energy density and dietary energy cost has found that refined foods, added sugars and added fats are some of the cheapest sources of dietary energy as opposed to more costly nutrient dense foods such as lean meat, fruit and vegetables.<sup>422</sup> The high cost of good quality, nutritious food often prices low-income families out of maintaining healthy diets by limiting their choices to more processed and refined food based diets as a cost-effective way of meeting daily calorific requirements.<sup>423</sup> In Ireland, by age three, children from lower socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to have consumed energy-dense food like hamburgers and crisps, but less likely to have eaten fresh fruit or vegetables.<sup>424</sup> Poor nutrition in children is linked to reduced development, cognitive function, delayed school enrolment, impaired

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<sup>414</sup> Society of St Vincent de Paul, *Cutting Back and Falling Behind: An analysis of the financial impact of the Covid-19 pandemic* (SVP 2021) <<https://bit.ly/33nELiG>> accessed 6 May 2021.

<sup>415</sup> Food Cloud, *Annual Survey Findings 2021* (Food Cloud 2021) 3.

<sup>416</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>417</sup> Food Cloud, *Annual Survey Findings 2021* (Food Cloud 2021) 8.

<sup>418</sup> Department of Social Protection, 'FEAD – The Fund for the European Aid to the Most Deprived' <<https://bit.ly/33ZCWst>> accessed 17 May 2021.

<sup>419</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>420</sup> A list of charities in receipt of FEAD Food Product support can be found at: <<https://bit.ly/2Tm0vu7>> accessed 17 May 2021.

<sup>421</sup> Irish Heart Foundation, *Investing in children's future health Pre-Budget Submission* (IHF July 2015) 3.

<sup>422</sup> David Madden, 'The Poverty Effects of a 'Fat-Tax' in Ireland' (2015) 24(1) *Health Economics*, 4.

<sup>423</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>424</sup> James Williams, Aisling Murray, Cathal McCrory, Sinéad McNally, *Growing Up in Ireland - Development From Birth To Three Years* (Department of Children and Youth Affairs 2013) 37.

concentration, increased illness, absenteeism and early school leaving.<sup>425</sup> Being able to buy nutritious food locally or having access to transport to a local supermarket helps to prevent food poverty, and more economically advantaged households do not have to travel as far for food shopping.<sup>426</sup>

In response to the issue of food poverty, Government has committed to develop a programme of work to explore the drivers of food poverty and to identify mitigating actions.<sup>427</sup> This will require coordinating activities across a number of Departments. The Programme for Government commits to work across Government to address food poverty among children and ensure that no child goes hungry.<sup>428</sup> Arising out of this commitment, the Department of Social Protection is putting in place an interdepartmental Working Group on Food Poverty.

The Department of Health and the Health Service Executive are also working together to provide the Healthy Communities Initiative which will target 18 disadvantaged communities with a targeted range of interventions which will include healthy food made easy and signposting to this programme from the link workers and other programmes such as parenting programmes. This work commenced in July 2020 and is ongoing.<sup>429</sup>

The response to food poverty must address affordability, accessibility, availability and awareness.<sup>430</sup> People living in communities with a lack of shops, supermarkets or public transport and who have to shop more often in local convenience stores can find it more difficult to access healthy fresh foods, highlighting the relationship between low income, housing policy, local development plans, provision of public transport and food poverty. Families who are income and time poor, living in 'food deserts' and who may have literacy or language difficulties need more support to access healthy, nutritious and affordable food.

### School Meals

The Department of Social Protection (DSP) funds the School Meals Programme which provides funding towards the provision of food to 1,557 schools and benefits 227,000 children.<sup>431</sup> A pilot was launched in September 2019 and this was expanded in Budget 2020 to provide hot food to children in receipt of the cold food option. Funding to extend the school meals programme over the summer months was made available (to those schools who had availed of the offer at Easter), in recognition of the hardship being experienced by families due to the Covid-19 pandemic,<sup>432</sup> however, it is not clear how many children and families were able to benefit from this additional funding. The objective of the scheme is to provide regular, nutritious food to children who are unable, due to lack of good quality food, to take full advantage of the education provided to them.<sup>433</sup> The universal provision of hot meals through schools counters stigma and provides a social environment where children can access and enjoy food without financial constraints.<sup>434</sup>

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<sup>425</sup> Alessandro Rhyll Demaio, Francesco Branca, 'Decade of action on nutrition: our window to act on the double burden of malnutrition' (2017) *BMJ Glob Health*, 3

<sup>426</sup> Richard Layte and Cathal McCrory, *Growing up in Ireland Overweight and obesity among 9 year olds*. (DCYA 2011)33

<sup>427</sup> Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, *Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025* (DEASP 2020).

<sup>428</sup> Government of Ireland, *Programme for Government: Our Shared Future*, (Government of Ireland 2020).

<sup>429</sup> Information received by the Children's Rights Alliance as part of the All-Island Network on Food Poverty in April 2021.

<sup>430</sup> Healthy Food for All initiative, 'Food Poverty' <<https://bit.ly/2UUpRjc>> accessed 19 July 2021.

<sup>431</sup> Communication received by Children's Rights Alliance from the Department of Social Protection, 23 December 2020.

<sup>432</sup> Heather Humphries TD, Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection School Meals Programme Written Answers 14 July 2020 [15434/20]

<sup>433</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>434</sup> Healthy Food for All, *A good practice guide to School Food Initiatives* (Healthy Food for All 2009).

The evaluation of the pilot Hot Meals Programme was published in March 2021.<sup>435</sup> Overall, the findings were very positive and indicated buy-in on the part of schools, parents and suppliers. Some key findings include:

- Principals, teachers, Special Needs Assistants (SNA) and parents were surveyed for the evaluation and rated the hot meals 'highly in terms of quality, choice, portion sizes, dietary requirements and nutritional value - the vast majority (of the combined total of parents, teachers/SNAs and principals) rate each of these aspects positively, with around a third giving a rating of excellent'.
- More than two thirds of the principals, teachers and SNAs surveyed found the hot meals as better quality than the cold food previously provided with 30 per cent saying they were much higher quality.
- The majority of parents thought the project had a positive impact on their children with more than a third of parents saying it 'had a very positive impact on their child's attendance at school, physical health and psychological well-being'.
- Two thirds of teachers and SNAs surveyed felt the project had a positive impact on children's diet and eating habits while around half thought it impacted positively on children's behaviour, attentiveness and psychological well-being but the majority did not think it had any impact on attendance.
- Almost two thirds of the combined total of teachers/SNAs and principals say it is important all children in the school receive a hot meal; less than a third of teachers/SNAs would prefer the programme be targeted to those children who need it.
- Those working in schools highlighted that there was increased food waste although suppliers did not report this. When they were told this some indicated it could be due to the same size portions being given to younger and older children. Where food was prepared onsite and children were able to bring home leftovers, less food waste was reported. In one school there was less waste where self-serve options were available.
- Parents of children attending smaller, DEIS schools were more likely to rate the hot meals as excellent.
- Suppliers initially identified challenges with delivering the meals hot but as the project progressed they found solutions to these problems through communicating with schools. Overall, their experience of the pilot project was reported as 'very positive' and 'all those interviewed felt the programme is an extremely worthwhile one'.
- Most principals found interaction and coordination with suppliers to be 'very easy' and implementation relatively easy with a fifth saying that 'working around class routines, the overall administration and the project set-up to be difficult to some extent'.<sup>436</sup>

All new primary and secondary schools should be designed and built with adequate kitchen and cooking facilities and eating spaces so every child can have a hot nutritious meal on-site. Existing schools should be able to access National Development Plan funding to retrofit a space for preparing nutritious food. To really improve children's diets and their health through food provision, school kitchens will integrate food provision and education for children, and provide community-based opportunities for food awareness and food skills training for families.

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<sup>435</sup> Ian McShane and Rachael Joyce, *Hot School Meals Pilot Project Main Report July 2020*, (Department of Social Protection 2021) <<https://bit.ly/36lBEnp>> accessed 29 April 2021.

<sup>436</sup> Ian McShane and Rachael Joyce, *Hot School Meals Pilot Project Main Report July 2020* (Department of Social Protection 2021) <<https://bit.ly/36lBEnp>> accessed 29 April 2021.

Holiday hunger remains a serious concern for children and young people experiencing poverty, who rely on school meals and calls have been made for meal schemes to be extended through the summer months and other holiday periods.<sup>437</sup> Increasing reliance on food banks and charitable support for food costs during the Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated the challenges facing low-income families, however the institutionalisation of food banks as a response to food insecurity in the UK has been widely criticised.<sup>438</sup> Longer term solutions to food poverty, which respond to the multi-faceted nature of this problem are needed.

## Summary and Recommendations

Food poverty is a driver of poor health among children in disadvantaged communities. The cost of a healthy diet is beyond the reach of many low-income households. Issues of affordability, accessibility, availability and awareness must be addressed in responding to food poverty. Government has committed to addressing this issue and a number of welcome initiatives have taken place in providing hot meals in schools. This should be built on.

A child poverty plan should commit to addressing the multifaceted and multidimensional nature of food poverty.

This could be done by:

- Assigning a coordinating role to the Department of Health in addressing food poverty among children with a central role being played by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Department of Social Protection, Department of Education and the Department of Rural and Community Development.
- Extending the hot school meals programme to all schools participating in the cold meals programme.
- Ensuring that all new school buildings have a kitchen where hot meals can be prepared daily.
- Providing universal access to a hot meal in school settings, early years settings and youth work settings over the lifetime of the plan.

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<sup>437</sup> Kitty Holland 'Thousands at risk of holiday hunger if school meals dropped' Irish Times, 11 June 2020.

<sup>438</sup> Olivier de Schutter and others 'Food banks are no solution to food poverty' The Guardian, (London 24 March 2019).

## 14. Introduce Measures to Address Poverty among Young People

The consistent poverty rate of young adults (aged 18-24) is seven per cent, with 29,000 young adults living in consistent poverty in Ireland.<sup>439</sup> The *EU Recommendation on Investing in Children* recommends that the State provide opportunities to participate in informal activities that take place outside the home and after regular school hours.<sup>440</sup>

The *Youth Justice Strategy 2021-2027* provides an overarching framework which aligns youth justice responses and programmes.<sup>441</sup> Implicit in the Strategy is the acknowledgement that disadvantage and involvement in the criminal justice system are connected.

### Covid-19 and its Impact on Youth

Young people born between 1990 and 2005 have already experienced two global shocks – the 2008/9 financial crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic.<sup>442</sup> The economic shock created by Covid-19 risks compounding already existing inequalities between young people.<sup>443</sup> Lack of physical learning opportunities and increased economic distress increase the risk of disengagement and drop out from education and training, impacting on the future employment prospects and earnings of young people.<sup>444</sup> Just prior to the pandemic the number of young people not engaged in employment, education and training remained high and demonstrative that the effects of the financial crisis still lingered on.<sup>445</sup>

The Covid-19 crisis has had negative impacts on the health and well-being of young people, especially among some marginalised groups.<sup>446</sup> Young people report loneliness and isolation, missing friends and relatives, concerns about education, reduction in access to services, worry, anxiety, depression and a sense of hopelessness as some of the challenges they are experiencing during the pandemic.<sup>447</sup> Loss of employment and reduction in disposable income, disruptions in access to education, the toll on mental health, pressure on familial relationships and friendships, limitations to individual freedoms and concerns for the future are among the impacts of Covid-19 on young people across the OECD.<sup>448</sup>

### Youth Unemployment and Low Paid Work

Pre-Covid-19, the rate of youth unemployment ranged from 7.1 per cent in the two highest social classes to 20.7 per cent among those in the two lowest social classes. There were 112,000 fewer people between the ages of 15 to 34 years in employment at the end of 2020 compared to 12 months earlier.<sup>449</sup> Youth unemployment is concentrated among early school leavers, with the gap

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<sup>439</sup> Department of Children and Youth Affairs, *Income, poverty and deprivation among children: A statistical baseline analysis* (DCYA 2020).

<sup>440</sup> European Commission, *Commission Recommendation of 20.2.2013: Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage* (Brussels, 20.2.2013 C(2013) 778 final)

<sup>441</sup> Department of Justice, *Youth Justice Strategy 2021 – 2027* (DoJ 2021) <<https://bit.ly/3fUxYTM>> accessed 27 May 2021.

<sup>442</sup> OECD, *Youth and Covid-19: Response, Recovery and Resilience* (OECD 2020) <<https://bit.ly/36DRJtM>> accessed 14 November 2020.

<sup>443</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>444</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>445</sup> Barra Roantree, Bertrand Maître, Alyvia McTague, Ivan Privalko, *Poverty Income Inequality and Living Standards in Ireland* (ESRI and The Community Foundation for Ireland 2021) <<https://bit.ly/33QDPDK>> accessed 17 May 2021.

<sup>446</sup> Department of Children and Youth Affairs, *How's your head? Young voices during Covid 19. Report of a national consultation with young people on mental health and wellbeing* (DCYA 2020).

<sup>447</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>448</sup> OECD, *Youth and Covid-19: Response, Recovery and Resilience* (OECD 2020) <<https://bit.ly/36DRJtM>> accessed 14 November 2020.

<sup>449</sup> Barra Roantree, Bertrand Maître, Alyvia McTague, Ivan Privalko, *Poverty Income Inequality and Living Standards in Ireland* (ESRI and The Community Foundation for Ireland 2021) <<https://bit.ly/33QDPDK>> accessed 17 May 2021.

between early school leavers and those who completed third level education widening during the last recession.<sup>450</sup> Young Travellers have a high risk of leaving school early and facing difficulties in entering the labour market.<sup>451</sup>

Employment among young people in Ireland and across Europe tends to be concentrated in the sectors worst affected by the Covid-19 crisis, such as hospitality and retail.<sup>452</sup> The traditional Monthly Unemployment Rate for young adults (aged 15-24) was 19 per cent in October 2020, with the Covid-19 adjusted measure of unemployment standing at 45.3 per cent for those aged 15-24 years.<sup>453</sup> A quarter of those in receipt of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment on 10 November 2020 were under the age of 25.<sup>454</sup> One in three of those in receipt of the lowest €203 per week rate of the PUP are young workers aged under 25.<sup>455</sup> Young people have limited financial assets, placing them at higher risk of poverty in the event of job loss or reduction in income.<sup>456</sup>

Youth unemployment takes longer to recover following recession.<sup>457</sup> The scarring effect of youth unemployment on the subsequent earnings, health, well-being and job satisfaction of young people is well established in the literature,<sup>458</sup> suggesting that measures to address youth unemployment are needed more urgently than ever, particularly as the safety valve of emigration is not available to young people due to Covid-19 and the likely impact of Brexit.

Young adults aged 18-24 who are not living independently continue to receive a lower rate of Jobseekers Allowance of €112.70 per week.<sup>459</sup> This rate is inadequate for young people who are living in the family home, making it difficult for young people to live with dignity and afford a Minimum Essential Standard of Living.<sup>460</sup> Notably, the lower rate of Jobseekers Allowance for under 25s has not increased employment for that cohort and the ESRI recommends equalising the rates.<sup>461</sup>

Young workers (aged 15-24) account for approximately 10 per cent of all employees in Ireland, however they make up half of all minimum wage employees.<sup>462</sup> While the National Minimum Wage is often a stepping stone to higher paid employment, young people are among those who are less likely to transition from minimum wage to higher pay.<sup>463</sup> Lower rates of the National Minimum Wage apply to young people aged 19 and under.<sup>464</sup>

The importance of investing in young people's employability requires increased national focus. The skills most often identified by employers as being critical to success in the world of work are soft

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<sup>450</sup> Merike Darmody, Emer Smyth and Helen Russell, *The implications of the Covid-19 pandemic for policy in relation to children and young people: A research review* (ESRI 2020) <<https://bit.ly/33kVJOJ>> accessed 20 September 2020.

<sup>451</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>452</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>453</sup> Central Statistics Office, *Monthly Unemployment* (CSO 2020) <<https://bit.ly/2IGOKII>> accessed 14 November 2020.

<sup>454</sup> Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection *Update on Payments Awarded for Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment and Enhanced Illness Benefit – Statistics* <<https://bit.ly/3krVLdX>> accessed 14 November 2020.

<sup>455</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>456</sup> OECD, *Youth and Covid-19: Response, Recovery and Resilience* (OECD 2020). <<https://bit.ly/36DRJtM>> accessed 14 November 2020.

<sup>457</sup> Merike Darmody, Emer Smyth and Helen Russell, *The implications of the Covid-19 pandemic for policy in relation to children and young people: A research review* (ESRI 2020) <<https://bit.ly/33kVJOJ>> accessed 20 September 2020.

<sup>458</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>459</sup> Citizens Information *Jobseekers Allowance* <<https://bit.ly/35Tun4D>> accessed 20 September 2020.

<sup>460</sup> National Youth Council of Ireland, *Pre Budget Submission 2020* (NYCI 2019) <<https://bit.ly/2ROVF3T>> accessed 20 September 2020.

<sup>461</sup> Claire Keane, Karina Dooley and Dora Tudo, *Covid-19 and the Irish Welfare System* (ESRI 2021).

<sup>462</sup> Paul Redmond, *Minimum Wage Policy in Ireland* (ESRI 2020) <<https://bit.ly/3kCr4mP>> accessed 20 September 2020.

<sup>463</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>464</sup> Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, *National Minimum Wage will increase on 1 February* <<https://bit.ly/2FOTFpM>> accessed 20 September 2020.



skills such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and communication. The development of these skills is largely left to chance for young people in Ireland and this needs to be addressed so that all young people, but particularly those who are marginalised, vulnerable or at risk are given the opportunity to acquire these skills by design.<sup>465</sup>

### Youth Homelessness

Youth homelessness in Ireland more than doubled between 2014 and 2019.<sup>466</sup> Youth homelessness is distinct from adult homelessness, and entries into youth homelessness often signify a loss of family support or structure, disengagement from education, increases in the rate of drug and alcohol dependency and adverse mental health experiences.<sup>467</sup> Higher rates of homelessness are found among LGBT youth, young people from ethnic minorities and migrants.<sup>468</sup> Most homeless young people have experienced poverty, disadvantage and housing instability.<sup>469</sup> A primary reason for young people entering homelessness is rising housing costs.<sup>470</sup> Young care leavers are also at high risk of homelessness.<sup>471</sup>

The Programme for Government commits to develop a new Youth Homelessness Strategy with a related commitment to 'ensure that aftercare and transition plans and protocols are developed for vulnerable homeless people or those at risk of homelessness leaving hospital, state care, foster care, prison, or other state settings'.<sup>472</sup>

### Youth Work Services

The relevance of youth services to mitigate the effects of poverty among young people is widely recognised.<sup>473</sup> Young people experiencing the effects of poverty are often trapped in a cycle of intergenerational poverty. Youth services offer opportunities to prevent and remedy this cycle.

Youth work is defined as a planned programme of education, designed for the purpose of aiding, and enhancing the personal and social development of young persons through their voluntary participation and which is:

- A) Complimentary to their formal academic and vocational education and training
- B) Provided primarily by voluntary youth work organisations<sup>474</sup>

Rooted in local communities, youth work services have unique engagements with young people outside of formal education or family structures. It provides bespoke, tailored solutions and opportunities to the myriad of issues young people face through the provision of advice, support, developmental programmes, targeted interventions, opportunities for non-formal learning and opportunities for positive integration into local communities.

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<sup>465</sup> Communication from Sean Campbell, CEO Foroige, 2 October 2020.

<sup>466</sup> Focus Ireland, 'Focus Ireland Conference calls for National Youth Homelessness Strategy as number of 18-24 year olds homeless has doubled in 5 years' (24 October 2019) <<https://bit.ly/3iN1Bqj>> accessed 20 September 2020.

<sup>467</sup> Clíodhna Bairead and Michelle Norris, *Youth Homelessness in the Dublin Region: A profile of young, single emergency accommodation users in 2016, 2017 and 2018* (Focus Ireland 2020).

<sup>468</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>469</sup> Paula Mayock, Sarah Parker and A Murphy, *Young people, homelessness and housing exclusion* (Focus Ireland 2014).

<sup>470</sup> Clíodhna Bairead and Michelle Norris, *Youth Homelessness in the Dublin Region: A profile of young, single emergency accommodation users in 2016, 2017 and 2018* (Focus Ireland 2020).

<sup>471</sup> Kitty Holland 'Young people leaving State care face real risk of homelessness' Irish Times, (Dublin, 16 April 2019).

<sup>472</sup> Government of Ireland, *Programme for Government, Our Shared Future* (Government of Ireland 2020) 55.

<sup>473</sup> European Council Resolution of 27 November 2009 on a renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010 – 2018), OJ C 311, 19.12.2009

<sup>474</sup> Youth Work Act 2001

Ireland is fortunate in the diversity of youth work services on offer. All young people in Ireland, regardless of socio-economic background, should have the potential to engage in some form of youth work service. The following outlines the types of youth work services provided.

1. **Targeted Youth Services:** Professionally run services and projects focused on vulnerable and at-risk young people. These projects work with small numbers of mostly referred young people and address issues such as family conflict, school engagement, anti-social behaviour, drug and alcohol misuse, and more. There are a wide variety of project types based on the local needs of young people and include but are not limited to:
  - UBU, funded by the DCEDIY
  - Garda Youth Diversion Projects, funded by the Department of Justice
  - Family Support Projects and Neighbourhood Youth Projects, funded by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency
  - Peace and Reconciliation Programmes, funded by Peace4 and International Fund for Ireland
2. **Universal Youth Work:** Available to all young people without referral and involves open-access activities such as youth clubs and cafés, special interest groups, youth work programmes, uniformed clubs, church youth groups, etc. Universal Youth Work is typically volunteer-led, supported by professional staff. It is the cornerstone of youth work in Ireland and has been the catalyst for innovation, development and governance in the youth sector for many years. This is funded mainly by the Youth Service Grant Scheme through DCEDIY. Volunteer-led youth work services are particularly active in supporting young people in disadvantaged communities, with more than half of all participants coming from these areas (urban and rural).<sup>475</sup>
3. **Mentoring:** This is one of the most common forms of youth engagement worldwide. It has been extensively evaluated both nationally<sup>476</sup> and internationally.<sup>477</sup> It is proven to have positive outcomes for young people in terms of school engagement, better social support and relationships and reduced engagement in risky behaviour.<sup>478</sup>
4. **Youth Participation:** Youth participation provides opportunities for young people to input on decisions and policies that affect their lives. A young person's perspective on the issues that impact them can be transformative for both the policies themselves and the young person.<sup>479</sup>
5. **Youth Information:** All young people deserve access to accurate, relevant youth information in a format that they can understand and use. Youth workers, both paid and volunteer, help young people access and interpret information on areas that affect their lives including career, employment, mental health and community opportunities.

Youth work services play a pivotal role in preventing and redressing the intergenerational cycle of poverty. All young people should be able to access and benefit from youth work and this is especially true for vulnerable, marginalised, or at-risk young people, both urban and rural.

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<sup>475</sup> National Youth Council of Ireland, *Pre Budget Submission 2020* (NYCI 2019) <<https://bit.ly/2ROVF3T>> accessed 20 September 2020.

<sup>476</sup> Pat Dolan, Bernadine Brady, Connie O'Regan, Dan Russell, John Canavan, and Cormac Forkan, *Big Brothers Big Sisters of Ireland: Evaluation Study. Report 1: Randomised Control Trial and Implementation Report* (Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway 2011).

<sup>477</sup> Marjory, L. Moodie, and Jane Fisher, 'Are youth mentoring programmes good value for money? An evaluation of the Big Brothers Big Sisters Melbourne Program', (2009) *BMC Public Health*, 9, pp. 1-9.

<sup>478</sup> Foroige, 'Big Brother Big Sister Impact', <<https://bit.ly/36lVoai>> accessed 19 July 2021.

<sup>479</sup> Hub na nOg, 'Library' <<https://bit.ly/3wZKHLr>> accessed 19 July 2021.

Youth work services enable young people, regardless of their academic background to develop knowledge, skills and attitudes that increase their self-confidence, resilience and capacity. Further, through providing young people with a space and a voice, young people become active agents of change in their own lives and in their communities. Youth services open up possibilities to young people for further education, employment and community development thus mitigating the effects of poverty. The Bonn declaration under the German presidency of the EU and the Council of Europe proposed the principle of a basic youth work offering for all young people all over Europe.<sup>480</sup>

Youth work services have been traditionally underfunded and suffered disproportionately in the recession. In 2008, investment in youth work services was €76 per young person. This fell to €58 per young person in 2014 and has since increased to €64 per young person currently. For every €1 invested in youth work the economic benefit/costs saved by the State in the long run are €2.20.<sup>481</sup>

The Covid-19 pandemic has made it more difficult for youth work services to engage with at risk or marginalised young people.<sup>482</sup> The move to online models of working for youth services has resulted in a drop in engagement levels, with young people experiencing poverty and other vulnerabilities the least likely to engage with online youth work services.<sup>483</sup> A lack of digital access and a reluctance to engage with online services among young people are major challenges in delivering youth services remotely.<sup>484</sup> Safeguarding concerns and a lack of digital skills among staff compound these challenges, demonstrating the importance of face-to-face youth work services, particularly for young people in vulnerable and marginalised situations.<sup>485</sup>

There is a major concern regarding the broader impact of Covid-19 on the youth population. Early research, both national and international, is showing that young people have been disproportionately impacted during the pandemic. It will take a concerted effort to ensure that its effects don't result in more young people being pushed into the poverty trap.

The Covid-19 pandemic showed youth services to be innovative, agile and effective in maintaining services especially to the most vulnerable despite enormous challenges. It showed how new ways of engaging online through digital youth work could reach and engage young people who don't normally have the opportunity to participate. It will help them to access youth work opportunities and develop digital skills, literacy, values and competencies necessary for accessing further education and employment and help break the cycle of poverty.

### Summary and Recommendations

Universal youth work, along with targeted services for young people who need them most, can improve outcomes for all young people, and in particular for those who are marginalised, vulnerable or at risk of poverty. Youth work services and youth mentoring can benefit young people who are in care, young asylum seekers, ethnic minority young people, early school leavers and young people engaging in risky behaviour.

A national child poverty plan should commit to:

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<sup>480</sup> Final Declaration of the 3rd European Youth Work Convention Signposts for the future <<https://bit.ly/3bUJfIF>> accessed 26 May 2021.

<sup>481</sup> Indecon Economic Consultants, *Assessment of the Economic Value of Youth Work*, (NYCI 2012).

<sup>482</sup> Debora Erwin, and Lorraine Thompson, *A review of the youth work sector response to the Covid-19 pandemic* (NYCI 2020).

<sup>483</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>484</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>485</sup> *ibid.*

- Developing a Youth Homelessness Strategy in line with the Programme for Government commitment. This should include Housing First for Youth , Prevention and Early Intervention and address policies that disadvantage young people and leave them at risk of homelessness.<sup>486</sup>
- Resourcing and implementing the new Youth Justice Strategy.
- Developing a youth employment strategy which builds on the European Commission Youth Employment Support package,<sup>487</sup> including a target to reduce youth unemployment by half.
- Significantly increase investment in universal, targeted, digital and mentoring services for young people, particularly measures to address disadvantage, early school leaving and employability and the impact of Covid-19. This is particularly important in light of the projected population growth of young people, historical underfunding of youth work and to support the implementation of the National Youth Strategy.
- Investing in youth work services to ensure that the sector has the capacity to respond to the needs of all young people, especially those who are vulnerable and at risk, to provide a blended approach to youth services combining digital and face-to-face services.
- Improving jobseeker supports for people aged under 24 as per the Programme for Government commitment. This should include restoring the full rate of Jobseekers Allowance to all young people.
- Initiate and complete as a matter of urgency the development of the new youth strategy and the review of the youth service grant scheme.
- Adopt the recommendations of the Bonn declaration 2020.

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<sup>486</sup> Irish Coalition to End Youth Homelessness, *Call for Government Action on homelessness among young adults* (Irish Coalition to End Youth Homelessness 2019).

<sup>487</sup> Social Justice Ireland, *Time for a youth employment strategy* (Social Justice Ireland 2020) <<https://bit.ly/3hNrIMu>> accessed 20 September 2020.

## 15. Play, Recreation, Sports, Arts and Cultural Activities

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child affords children the right to ‘rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts’.<sup>488</sup> The State is also obliged to ‘respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity’.<sup>489</sup>

The arts are categorised as play, recreation and sports in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*.<sup>490</sup> It also notes that ‘young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, and early school-leavers in particular, have lower levels of participation in play, recreation, sport, arts and culture, and are therefore a priority in terms of policy and provision’.<sup>491</sup> It recognises the benefits of engagement in arts, culture and sport for children’s health and well-being as well as encouraging their ‘self-confidence and self-efficacy, as well as physical, social, cognitive and emotional strength and skills’.<sup>492</sup>

Much progress has been made in terms of acknowledging this right in policy in the past five years. The right to participate in culture is cited in *Culture 2025*,<sup>493</sup> which underpins the Arts Council’s *Equality Human Rights and Diversity Strategy and Policy*,<sup>494</sup> and has shaped the thinking behind the Creative Ireland programme.<sup>495</sup> However, a systematic plan to uphold this right for all children does not exist. Notably, there is currently no arts and social inclusion in education strategy at national level in Ireland. The arts are only mentioned once in the current DEIS Plan<sup>496</sup> and DEIS schools that are currently providing afterschool arts activities are mainly funding them through the School Completion Programme.

The *EU Recommendation on Investing in Children* recognises how important children’s and young people’s participation in play, recreation, sport and cultural activities is to their development, health and well-being. Facilities and services provided at local level by local government and community organisations play an important role in a child’s recreational life such as public libraries, playgrounds, local sports facilities and sporting organisations. While local authorities deliver many services, central government funding remains key to ensuring access to the arts and culture, play, recreation and sport. For children and young people experiencing poverty, this means that having opportunities for play, recreation (including rest), and engagement in sport and cultural activities regardless of parental income, work situation or background.

It is important to encourage engagement in cultural activities from a young age to influence participation in these activities later in life.<sup>497</sup> In 2018, 186,000 children attended an early years service<sup>498</sup> and this is significant as children from different socio-economic backgrounds can be

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<sup>488</sup> UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (20 November 1989) 1577 UNTS 3 (UNCRC) Art. 31.

<sup>489</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>490</sup> Department of Children and Youth Affairs, *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, 2014-2020* (DCYA 2014) <<https://bit.ly/3vrJNan>> accessed 26 May 2021

<sup>491</sup> *ibid.* 55.

<sup>492</sup> *ibid.* 56.

<sup>493</sup> Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, *Culture 2025* (DAHRRGA 2016) <<https://bit.ly/2REfOxy>> accessed 26 May 2021

<sup>494</sup> The Arts Council, ‘Equality, Human Rights and Diversity’ <<https://bit.ly/3wVXEpy>> accessed 19 July 2021.

<sup>495</sup> Creative Ireland, <<https://bit.ly/3BesXzf>> accessed 19 July 2021.

<sup>496</sup> Department of Education and Skills *Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools* (DES 2017) <<https://bit.ly/3wFiGch>> accessed 26 May 2021.

<sup>497</sup> Emer Smyth, *Arts and Cultural Participation among Children and Young People: Insights from the Growing Up in Ireland Study*, (The Arts Council and ESRI 2016) 98.

<sup>498</sup> Early Childhood Ireland, ‘Early Childhood Ireland Summing It Up: The ECI Stats Series 2018’ <<https://bit.ly/3zbJyBN>> accessed 2 May 2019.

exposed to cultural and arts activities in early years settings.<sup>499</sup> Similar can be said for youth work activities in which an estimated 380,000 young people take part each year.<sup>500</sup> Youth organisations play a key role in supporting young people who experience social and economic disadvantage and 80 per cent of organisations are engaged in arts, cultural or sports activities.<sup>501</sup> Both settings offer a valuable space where children and young people can avail of opportunities to participate in arts and cultural activities that could be beneficial to them in terms of development, educational attainment and building relationships as well as exploring and growing their creativity and talent. The ESRI and the Arts Council have recommended that given the financial barriers to participation, subsidies should be provided to families experiencing disadvantage.<sup>502</sup> Giving a subsidy directly to children and families would help to ensure that children have their individual say in the type of activity they would like to do and that all children can benefit.

Children who take part in artistic and cultural activities cope better with school work and have more positive attitudes towards school later on.<sup>503</sup> Singing, art, dancing and performing help children to develop better social skills and positive relationships but children from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to participate in arts and cultural activities than children from more affluent families.<sup>504</sup> Household income is also a barrier to participation in cultural activities.<sup>505</sup> There is evidence to suggest that people from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds with lower levels of educational attainment display equal levels of interest in the arts, but are much less likely to participate in cultural events than those on higher incomes.<sup>506</sup>

Housing and communities that are not child or youth friendly, or are perceived by children and their parents to have unsafe public spaces are associated with poverty and non-participation in play and recreational opportunities.<sup>507</sup> Exclusion from play and recreation can also be due to a lack of income and parents being unable to afford their children's participation.<sup>508</sup> Children living in temporary accommodation and those living in Direct Provision centres do not have adequate access to safe play and recreation facilities.<sup>509</sup> Lower levels of access to public transport, libraries, social welfare offices and recreational facilities have been observed among more disadvantaged families.<sup>510</sup> The removal of fines and the intention to promote services available with local partners in disadvantaged to promote greater usage of the library is a named action in the current public library strategy.<sup>511</sup>

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<sup>499</sup> Emer Smyth, *Arts and Cultural Participation among Children and Young People: Insights from the Growing Up in Ireland Study*, (The Arts Council and ESRI 2016) x.

<sup>500</sup> National Youth Council of Ireland, 'About Us' <<https://bit.ly/3hNgb2M>> accessed 2 May 2019.

<sup>501</sup> National Youth Council of Ireland, *Assessment of the Economic Value of Youth Work* (NYCI 2012) 42

<sup>502</sup> Emer Smyth, *Arts and Cultural Participation among Children and Young People: Insights from the Growing Up in Ireland Study*, (The Arts Council and ESRI 2016) 100-101.

<sup>503</sup> Emer Smyth, *Arts and Cultural Participation among Children and Young People: Insights from the Growing Up in Ireland Study*, (The Arts Council and ESRI 2016).

<sup>504</sup> Aideen Howard, 'Children have a right to access art and culture', Irish Times, 20 September 2019.

<sup>505</sup> Emer Smyth, *Arts and Cultural Participation among Children and Young People: Insights from the Growing Up in Ireland Study*, (The Arts Council and ESRI 2016).

<sup>506</sup> FLAC, *Our Voices, Our Rights* (FLAC 2014)

<sup>507</sup> National Children's Office, *Teenspace: National Recreation Policy for Young People* (The Stationery Office 2008) and National Children's Office, *Ready, Steady! A National Play Strategy* (The Stationery Office 2004).

<sup>508</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>509</sup> Kathy Walsh, and Brian Harvey, *Family Experiences of Pathways into Homelessness - The Families' Perspective* (DRHE 2015) <<https://bit.ly/2UpaT4J>>; Working Group on the Protection Process, *Report to Government on Improvements to the Protection Process, including Direct Provision and Supports to Asylum Seekers* (Working Group on the Protection Process 2015) para 1.59,2.22.

<sup>510</sup> James Williams et al., *Growing Up in Ireland: The Lives of 9 Year Olds Child Cohort* (Office of the Minister for Children 2009), Executive Summary

<sup>511</sup> Government of Ireland *Our Public Libraries 2022* (Government of Ireland 2018) <<https://bit.ly/34l9fSY>> accessed 26 May 2021.

Low levels of physical activity are linked to poor physical and mental health and well-being.<sup>512</sup> Participation in regular sporting activity is almost universal among primary school children, however this changes as children get older.<sup>513</sup> Children from families in lower socio-economic groups have similar rates of participation in extra-curricular sport to middle-class children, however they are less likely to participate in extra-school sports, for example, at clubs, sports centres and other locations not linked to their school. Data from the Growing up in Ireland survey shows that 63 per cent of children (five year olds) in the highest income group attended a sports club/group for one hour or more per week compared to just 34 per cent of those in the lowest income group.<sup>514</sup> The development of a diversity and inclusion policy by Sport Ireland is currently underway and it aims to enable greater participation across a number of grounds including socio-economic background, gender and disability.<sup>515</sup> This policy sits under the main National Sports Policy, 2018-2027 with the objective of increasing participation amongst underrepresented groups.<sup>516</sup> In communities across Ireland the Local Sports Partnerships promote participation in sport particularly targeting young people and individuals and groups living in disadvantaged areas.<sup>517</sup> Participation in sport decreases for young people at second level school, and early school leavers are much less likely to participate in sport.<sup>518</sup> Young people who participate in sport tend to do better in exams, although many young people reduce their participation in sports during exam years.<sup>519</sup> School closures, cancellation of events, closure of institutions and reduction in disposable income as a result of the Covid-19 crisis are likely to impact on participation in sport, recreation, arts and cultural activities.

### Summary and Recommendations

The EU Recommendation Investing in Children advocates for the consideration of children's best interests in local planning to allow children and young people to grow up in a safe, healthy and child-friendly environment. Access to play, recreation, sports and cultural activities is often determined by ability to pay as well as failure to provide for the needs of children and young people in housing, development and planning processes.

A national child poverty plan should commit to:

- 'Child proofing' local development plans<sup>520</sup> and national plans such as Ireland 2040 to ensure that the needs of children and young people for access to safe, walkable communities with access to a range of play and recreational facilities are met.
- Requiring local authorities to develop play and recreation facilities for all children and young people, with a particular emphasis on children and young people experiencing poverty.

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<sup>512</sup> Pete Lunn, Elish Kelly and Nick Fitzpatrick, *Keeping them in the game: Taking up and dropping out of sport and exercise in Ireland* (ESRI 2013).

<sup>513</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>514</sup> Growing up in Ireland Study Team, *Key Findings: Infant Cohort (at 5 Years). No. 3: Well-Being, Play and Diet Among Five-Yea-Olds* (ESRI and TCD 2015).

<sup>515</sup> Sport Ireland, *Sport Ireland seeking input from the public to inform the new Diversity & Inclusion Policy*, (7 April 2021) <<https://bit.ly/3v0bjf3>> accessed 19 May 2021.

<sup>516</sup> Government of Ireland, *National Sport Policy 2018-2027* (Government of Ireland 2018) <<https://bit.ly/3fsL36u>> accessed 19 May 2021.

<sup>517</sup> Sport Ireland, *Local Sport Partnerships Annual Report 2019* (Sport Ireland 2020) <<https://bit.ly/3bzat0Y>> accessed 19 May 2021.

<sup>518</sup> Pete Lunn, Elish Kelly and Nick Fitzpatrick, *Keeping them in the game: Taking up and dropping out of sport and exercise in Ireland* (ESRI 2013).

<sup>519</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>520</sup> Development plans set out the overall planning policies of the local authority for 6 years, and set out local authority objectives for development in the area <https://bit.ly/30wCLE1>

- Supporting the participation of children and young people experiencing poverty in arts, sport, recreation and cultural events, by introducing a culture subsidy.
- Prioritising access to the arts and cultural events for children and young people who are experiencing poverty via increased central government investment in this area.
- Developing sports participation programmes that target young people, in particular early school leavers, to support participation in sporting activity outside of the education system.
- The national investment in arts for children should be proportional to that for adults.
- The Creative Ireland Programme should be expanded to include all DEIS schools nationwide.
- The Creative Youth programmes which focuses on outside-of-school activities should prioritise children living in disadvantage.
- Local Authority funding for children’s recreation, play and culture should be ring-fenced.



## 16. Family Support Services, Prevention and Early Intervention

The Recommendation of the Council of Europe<sup>521</sup> with regard to fulfilling children's rights in social services planning, delivery and evaluation states that social services delivery for the protection of vulnerable children 'should, inter alia, adhere to the following principles: (a) prevention and early intervention; (b) child-focused partnership with parents; (c) careful assessment of the child's needs with regard to protective factors ... as well as risk factors in the child's environment ...'.<sup>522</sup> The *EU Recommendation on Investing in Children* notes that 'early intervention and prevention are essential for developing more effective and efficient policies, as public expenditure addressing the consequences of child poverty and social exclusion tends to be greater than that needed for intervening at an early age'.<sup>523</sup> The Recommendation also emphasises the need for enhanced access to family support, the destigmatising of parenting support and that children no longer in the care of their parents should live in an environment that meets their needs.<sup>524</sup>

The type and intensity of support outside the home that is required is dependent on the needs of the child and their family. The Hardiker model is a way of understanding the different levels of need children have and is used as a way planning the delivery of services.<sup>525</sup> While all families may need a basic level of support (Hardiker Level 1) those with more complex needs (Hardiker Levels 2-4) will require more tailored and intensive services.<sup>526</sup> Sufficiently resourced services across the spectrum of need will ensure all children experiencing disadvantage and adversity can thrive and reach their full potential. Ireland's national policy governing the lives of children and young people in Ireland 'Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures', gives a clear commitment to supporting parents and families through the provision of early intervention and prevention services aiming to address early indicators of challenges and breaking intergenerational disadvantage.<sup>527</sup>

The adoption of a progressive universalist approach to service delivery, working alongside targeted provision, ensures that all parents will receive some level of support with those needing greater support being able to readily access it. For instance, the development of a national model of parenting under *First 5*, is designed to ensure that parents can access support if and when they need them. This new model will provide a range of interventions from universal to targeted and will draw on international comparisons and consultations with parents.<sup>528</sup>

More tailored and intensive supports are needed for children and families experiencing complex issues, for example mental health difficulties. Exposure to the effects of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) can include inappropriate care giving, chaotic environments, unpredictable stress, persistent fear or physical threat. The development of children may be negatively affected by

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<sup>521</sup>The Council of Europe is a human rights institution. It includes 47 member states, 28 of which are in the EU. It promotes human rights through international conventions, monitoring member states' implementation progress and making recommendations through independent expert monitoring bodies. It oversees the European Convention on Human Rights. The European Court of Human Rights is a key institution.

<sup>522</sup>Council of Europe, *Council of Europe Recommendation on children's rights and social services friendly to children and families* (Council of Europe 2011) 9.

<sup>523</sup>European Commission, *Commission Recommendation of 20.2.2013: Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage* (Brussels, 20.2.2013 C(2013) 778 final) <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1060&langId=en>

<sup>524</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>525</sup>Stella Owens, *An introductory guide to the key terms and interagency initiatives in use in the Children's Services Committees in Ireland*, (Centre for Effective Services 2019) <<https://bit.ly/3hVvfvC>> accessed 26 May 2021.

<sup>526</sup>Pauline Hardiker, Kenneth Exton and Mary Barker, *Policies and Practices in Preventive Child Care* (Aldershot 1991).

<sup>527</sup>Department of Children and Youth Affairs, *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020* (DCYA 2014).

<sup>528</sup>Government of Ireland, *First 5 – Annual Implementation Report 2019* (Government of Ireland 2020) <<https://bit.ly/3u9XOb7>> accessed 20 May 2021.

the experience of stresses generated by being abused/neglected and/or exposed to concerning familial circumstances.<sup>529</sup> This can have a negative and defining effect on the developing brain of a child, damaging their emotional, social and cognitive development.<sup>530</sup> Similarly, the experience of ACEs are cumulative and can magnify other negative experiences in a child's life, for example, the majority of children who experience domestic violence are also likely to experience abuse or neglect.<sup>531</sup>

State-delivered or state-funded services are particularly pertinent for those in or at risk of poverty as they may not have the means to access support through their own means.<sup>532</sup> Children can be exposed to adversity at both the family and community level.<sup>533</sup> While the presence of poor parental mental health, domestic violence and addiction can occur across the socioeconomic spectrum of families<sup>534</sup> for those experiencing poverty these issues can be particularly prevalent.<sup>535</sup> The involvement of children in serious crime has been found to be an issue in communities across Ireland with disadvantaged areas and communities with high levels of anti-social behaviour common factors associated with prevalence.<sup>536</sup> The impact of poverty and deprivation on children's lives and on their life outcomes is well documented internationally and in the UK.<sup>537</sup> There is a direct correlation between living in an area of deprivation and a child's chance of becoming engaged in state-led interventions. Children that are poor have a greater chance of being involved in child protection and children in care proceedings.<sup>538</sup>

A dual approach is required to address the impact of adversity on children's lives which focus on providing early intervention and prevention to families and addressing the structural inequalities of poverty and deprivation that compound these adversities.<sup>539</sup> A focus purely on providing support to families without an acknowledgement of the impact of these structural inequalities can lead to a

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<sup>529</sup> Trevor Spratt and Mary Kennedy, 'Adverse Childhood Experiences: Developments in trauma and resilience aware services'. (2021) *The British Journal of Social Work*, 51(3), 999-1017.

<sup>530</sup> Barnardos (2019) Children's Budget 2020. <<https://bit.ly/36uE9dW>> accessed 4 October 2020.

<sup>531</sup> Sherry Hamby et al., 'The overlap of witnessing partner violence with child maltreatment and other victimizations in a nationally representative survey of youth' (2010) *Child Abuse & Neglect* 34(10):734-741; Lian McGavock, and Trevor Spratt, 'Children Exposed to Domestic Violence: Using Adverse Childhood Experience Scores to Inform Service Responses' (2016) *British Journal of Social Work*, 1 – 19.

<sup>532</sup> Morag Traynor, 'Poverty and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)' (Children 1<sup>st</sup>, 27 September 2018) <<https://bit.ly/3f4T7LF>> accessed 21 May 2021.

<sup>533</sup> Ellis, Wendy R. and William H. Dietz, 'A New Framework for Addressing Adverse Childhood and Community Experiences: The Building Community Resilience Model' (2017) *Frameworks and Measurement*, 17(7).

<sup>534</sup> Morag Traynor, 'Poverty and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)' (Children 1<sup>st</sup>, 27 September 2018) <<https://bit.ly/3f4T7LF>> accessed 21 May 2021.

<sup>535</sup> There is limited research on the prevalence of ACEs in Ireland (examples include Sharon Lambert, Graham Gill-Emerson, et al., *Moving Towards Trauma Informed Care. A model of research and practice*, (Cork Simon Community 2017); Aoife Dermody A., Sharon Lambert et al., (2020) *An Exploration of Early Life Trauma and its Implications for Garda Youth Diversion Projects* (Youthrise and Quality Matters 2020). Internationally some research indicates there is a connection between child poverty and the prevalence of ACEs.

<sup>536</sup> Catherine Naughton, and Sean Redmond, *National Prevalence Study Do the findings from the Greentown study of children's involvement in criminal networks (2015) extend beyond Greentown?* (DCYA, DoJ, Irish Youth Justice Service and University of Limerick 2017) <<https://bit.ly/340hZ0j>> accessed 20 May 2021.

<sup>537</sup> Paul Bywaters et al., 'Inequalities in child welfare intervention rates: the intersection of deprivation and identity' (2014) *Child and Family Social Work*, 21(4), 452-463.

<sup>538</sup> Brid Featherstone, Kate Morris, Brigid Daniel, Paul Bywaters, Geraldine Brady, Lisa Bunting, Will Mason, and Nughmana Mirza 'Poverty, inequality, child abuse and neglect: Changing the conversation across the UK in child protection?', (2019) *Children and Youth Services Review* 97, 127-133.

<sup>539</sup> David C. Taylor-Robinson, Straatmann, Viviane. S. and Margaret Whitehead, 'Adverse childhood experiences or adverse childhood socioeconomic conditions?', (2018) *The Lancet*, 3,. 262-263

diversion away from addressing the causes such as child poverty,<sup>540</sup> to focusing the lens of blame on families where there are high numbers of adverse experiences.<sup>541</sup> The ‘Troubled Families’ programme in England, where intensive services are targeted at families assessed as having multiple problems, being one such example of the latter approach.<sup>542</sup>

It is possible to intervene and improve the life chances of children experiencing poverty-related adversity by providing early childhood interventions to children and to their parents.<sup>543</sup> Family Support is an umbrella term under which clusters a broad range of family-focused services and programmes. It is concerned with anticipating, recognising and responding to the needs of families, especially during a time of difficulty.<sup>544</sup> Family support practice has goals which include improved parenting, child development, social support for parents, child and family health care, child abuse prevention, parent self-help and empowerment, parent literacy and employment training, parent, young person, child community and school involvement and where appropriate behavioural change. The current Irish definition of Family Support describes it as:

“both a style of work and a set of activities which reinforce positive informal social networks through integrated programmes. These programmes combine statutory, voluntary and community and private services and are generally provided to families in their own homes and communities. The primary focus is on early intervention aiming to promote and protect the health, well-being and rights of all children, young people and their families paying particular attention to those who are vulnerable or at risk”.<sup>545</sup>

The central positioning of family support and its relationship with Youth Work is evident in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*. The framework sets out national outcomes for all children and young people with the aim that they are active and healthy, achieving their full potential in learning and development, safe and protected from harm, have economic security and opportunity, and are connected and contributing to their world. Supporting parents is identified as one of the six core transformational goals by which the national outcomes for children and young people are to be achieved. The *National Youth Strategy 2015 – 2020* also reflects the commitments set out in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*. While it is a universal strategy for all young people and is based on an understanding of youth as a distinctive period of development between childhood and adulthood it also provides for the needs of young people experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, the poorest outcomes. It recognises that the key supportive factors in young people’s lives are parents, family, friends, other adults such as youth workers and teachers, and the community.

Tusla’s Prevention, Partnership and Family Support (PPFS) programme encompasses a wide range of interventions which seek to address situations of childhood adversity.<sup>546</sup> However, insufficient capacity of community family support services can reduce the ability of services to respond to needs

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<sup>540</sup> Michael Marmot, ‘Social justice, epidemiology and health inequalities’, *European Journal of Epidemiology*, (2017) 23(7), 537-546.

<sup>541</sup> Tracey Monson, A. Risk attitudes within ‘complex youth’ assessment and decision making: Professional perspectives (2020) *Child Care in Practice*, 26(2), 210-222.

<sup>542</sup> Alex Bate, and Alexander Bellis, ‘The Troubled Families programme (England)’, (House of Commons Library 2018), BRIEFING PAPER Number CBP 07585, 1-36.

<sup>543</sup> Katherine A. Beckmann, ‘Mitigating Adverse Childhood Experiences through Investments in Early Childhood Programs’, (September – October 2017), *Academic Paediatrics*, 17(7), Supplement, S28–S29.

<sup>544</sup> Department of Children and Youth Affairs, *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020* (DCYA 2014).

<sup>545</sup> Pinkerton et al, *Family Support in Ireland. A paper for the Department of Health & Children* (The Stationery Office 2004), 16.

<sup>546</sup> Tusla, Prevention, ‘Partnership and Family Support’ <<https://bit.ly/3oVlpLJ>> accessed 19 July 2021.

in a timely manner, with longer waiting times resulting in increased complexity of cases, pressure to close cases prematurely and missed opportunities to intervene early.<sup>547</sup> Meaningful investment in services based within the community which are needs led and outcome focused can have a transformative impact on a child's life and their future potential. Further investment in early childhood interventions will mean that over time there will be a reduced need for later and more costly interventions.

The Area Based Childhood (ABC) Programme is delivered in 13 areas, led by consortia which coordinate the planning and development of services in their area to address child poverty.<sup>548</sup> The ABC programme supports services for children and families living in disadvantaged areas, where outcomes are significantly poorer than they are for children and young people living elsewhere in the State.<sup>549</sup> The transfer of the ABC Programme to Tusla in 2018<sup>550</sup> enabled key learnings to be incorporated into established services. Aligning the ABC Programme with Tusla's Prevention, Partnership and Family Support (PPFS) Programme helped to embed and enhance the Agency's prevention and early intervention work. The transfer will enable 'the ongoing delivery of innovative measures, and mainstream evidence-based practice to improve outcomes for children and families'<sup>551</sup> and build on the Tusla PPFS programme.<sup>552</sup> Interventions delivered through the programme include parent and family supports, community-based ante natal and post-natal care, services to promote youth mental health, supports for the transition from early years settings to primary schools and supports for literacy, numeracy and oral language development.<sup>553</sup> An evaluation of the ABC programme found increased school readiness among children, improved family relationships, and improvements in children's social and emotional well-being.<sup>554</sup> Outside of these designated areas, a network of 121 Family Resource Centres across the country delivers universal programmes across the lifecycle. The importance of these community-based services came to the fore during the pandemic as they reported an increased need for their services particularly in relation to family support, mental health and food provision.<sup>555</sup> It is worth noting that while an area-based approach is beneficial in densely populated urban areas, it is challenging to deliver in rural areas due to the dispersal of the population and services in these communities.<sup>556</sup>

Tusla's Creative Community Alternatives (CCA) projects which engage young people at Hardiker level 3 and 4 are hugely important in helping families and young people deal with crises and enable them overcome difficulties that may lead to poverty. These projects respond in a comprehensive, holistic way to the needs of vulnerable young people and their families. Interventions delivered are

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<sup>547</sup> Barnardos, *Children's Budget 2020*, (Barnardos 2019) <<https://bit.ly/36uE9dW>> accessed 4 October 2020.

<sup>548</sup> Claire Hickey et. al. *National Evaluation of the Area Based Childhood Programme: Main Report* (2018 Department of Children and Youth Affairs, The Atlantic Philanthropies, and the Centre for Effective Services).

<sup>549</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>550</sup> Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Katherine Zappone TD, Written Answers, Area Based Childhood Programme, 18 October 2018 [43139/18].

<sup>551</sup> Government of Ireland, *First 5- A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028* (Stationary Office 2018) 48.

<sup>552</sup> *ibid.*, 127

<sup>553</sup> Claire Hickey et. al. *National Evaluation of the Area Based Childhood Programme: Main Report* (2018 Department of Children and Youth Affairs, The Atlantic Philanthropies, and the Centre for Effective Services).

<sup>554</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>555</sup> Family Resource Centres National Forum *FRCs: Supporting Families During the Covid-19 Crisis* (Family Resource Centres National Forum 2020) <<https://bit.ly/3j4Re4b>> accessed 18 June 2021.

<sup>556</sup> Claire Hickey et. al. *National Evaluation of the Area Based Childhood Programme: Main Report* (2018 Department of Children and Youth Affairs, The Atlantic Philanthropies, and the Centre for Effective Services).

experiential, developmental, resilience building programmes designed to promote coping capacities and self-care in the face of stressful and difficult circumstances.

CCA aims to provide alternative responses to children and young people who are either on the edge of alternative care, or currently in alternative care due to complex factors that may include abuse, neglect, parental separation, attachment issues, alcohol and /or drug misuse, mental health and economic disadvantage. CCA is a tool for high level prevention work aimed at delivering wraparound supports for children and families within their own community. It refers to a holistic service designed to meet the identified needs of children, young people, caregivers and siblings and to address a range of life areas through the team-based planning and implementation process, within the community. CCA also aims to develop the problem-solving skills, coping skills, and self-efficacy of the young people and family members. There is also an emphasis on integrating the youth into the community and building the family's social support network.

### Impact of Covid-19

The pandemic has exacerbated the experience of childhood adversity. Parents have reported increased stress in the household due to school closures which have impacted on children's temperaments and bedtime routines.<sup>557</sup> Domestic violence services have reported an increase in demand for their services.<sup>558</sup> Alcohol consumption at home has risen<sup>559</sup> and as the pandemic has progressed overall well-being amongst adults has decreased with increased rates of self-reporting of depression.<sup>560</sup> The closure of schools, in March 2020 and again in January 2021, has meant that children living in households where such issues are present are isolated without any means of support.<sup>561</sup> This reduced contact between children and trusted adults has led to a reduction in referrals to Tusla.<sup>562</sup> In his annual report the Ombudsman for Children reinforced this point stating 'we fear that children who were at risk of abuse or neglect and other issues that went under the radar due to school closures will come to the fore this year'.<sup>563</sup> Organisations delivering Family Support services have observed an increased need for their services and for more prolonged periods.<sup>564</sup> Analysis from the ESRI highlights starkly the disproportional impact of the pandemic on those more disadvantaged. Parental job losses and the possibility of longer term unemployment because of the pandemic will impact on children's well-being in the longer term through greater stress in families. The negative effects on well-being and mental health have been more apparent among those from disadvantaged backgrounds as well as among younger adults.<sup>565</sup> The nature of the

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<sup>557</sup> Padraic Fleming and Jodie O'Hara, *Impact on Family Life During Covid19 Pandemic* (Barnardos 2020) <<https://bit.ly/3pGDexX>> accessed 10 June 2021.

<sup>558</sup> Safe Ireland, 'Nearly 3,500 women contacted a domestic violence service for the first time during initial lockdown' (10 November 2020) <<https://bit.ly/36tCNOQ>> accessed 14 November 2020; Women's Aid, 'New Figures show that calls to Women's Aid up by 41% since the start of Covid-19 Pandemic' (21 December 2020) <<https://bit.ly/3hF2004>> accessed 20 May 2021.

<sup>559</sup> Central Statistics Office, *Social Impact of COVID-19 Survey (November 2020)* (CSO 2020) <<https://bit.ly/2QCloQk>> accessed 20 May 2021.

<sup>560</sup> Central Statistics Office (2021) *Press Statement Social Impact of COVID-19 Survey February 2021: Well-being* <<https://bit.ly/2T9JUcB>> accessed 20 May 2021.

<sup>561</sup> Child Care Law Reporting Project, *Interim care orders for two children following hospitalisation of one for headlice infestation*, (Child Care Law Reporting Project 2020) <<https://bit.ly/3v5gnP6>> accessed 20 May 2021

<sup>562</sup> Shauna Bowers, 'Covid-19 resulted in decrease of child welfare referrals to Tusla' *The Irish Times* (Dublin 5 August 2020).

<sup>563</sup> Ombudsman for Children's Office, *The Ombudsman for Children publishes 2020 Childhood Paused: Annual Report* (16 June 2021) <<https://bit.ly/3gyYWBH>> accessed 18 June 2021.

<sup>564</sup> Barnardos, 'Increase in referrals to intensive family support services in 2020' (9 June 2021) <<https://bit.ly/3v7vRRt>> accessed 10 June 2021.

<sup>565</sup> Merike Darmody, Emer Smyth and Helen Russell *The implications of the Covid-19 pandemic for policy in relation to children and young people: A research review* (ESRI 2020) <<https://bit.ly/33kVJ0J>> accessed 12 September 2020.

COVID-19 pandemic has added further complexity to cases involving children in care including delays in receiving assessments and restriction on the frequency of access.<sup>566</sup> Investment in existing services and organisations established in communities across Ireland will be critical in terms of addressing the complexity of needs that have arisen.

### Summary and Recommendations

A national child poverty action plan should commit to:

- Providing more holistic models of support to families, with a particular focus on family functioning and relationships, with greater links to families experiencing poverty;
- Resourcing the *First Five* strategy national parenting model, which will provide supports on the continuum of need (universal to targeted) for parents nationally.
- Committing to funding early intervention and prevention programmes that focus on supporting children and families at early stages of need. This will have a significant impact on breaking the cycle of intergenerational adversity.
- Continued consolidation and mainstreaming of prevention/early intervention approaches including area-based responses within Tusla.
- Establishing a working group to review the current models of funding provided to Tusla-funded organisations supporting families.
- Specialist services focussed on the safety and best interests of children need to be developed and incorporated into the reform of the Family Law Justice system.
- Continue to invest in family support through the PPFs initiative to support families at risk of poverty.
- Grow the roll out of the CCA programme to ensure it is available nationally to ensure support for the most vulnerable young people and families.
- A national campaign at governmental level that highlights the impact of poverty and deprivation on children's lives and on families' ability to support children and a resourced commitment to supporting parents at a structural level to address these issues.

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<sup>566</sup> Child Care Law Reporting Project, *Case Reports 2020 Volume 2* (Child Care Law Reporting Project 2020) <<https://bit.ly/3bK8tTQ>> accessed 20 May 2021.

## 17. Access to Transport

The lack of public transport in rural communities makes it very difficult for families to avail of public services, employment opportunities, healthcare and recreational activities and is recognised as a key contributor to social exclusion.<sup>567</sup> A lack of transport particularly impacts on low-income households, and families with a disability who may not have access to a car and depend on public transport.<sup>568</sup>

As well as increasing the rise of social exclusion, a lack of public transport can also hinder a family's ability to make ends meet. The additional costs faced by households living in rural areas has been extensively researched by the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice. This research shows that households in rural areas have different and additional needs to meet the same socially acceptable minimum standard of living as households based in urban areas. Core costs (before housing) are generally higher in rural areas, primarily due to additional costs related to transport and home energy. For rural households' private transport is a minimum need, as public transport options are limited and do not tend to offer an adequate level of service to rely on to meet all transport needs.<sup>569</sup> Their research finds that car related costs (fuel, maintenance, insurance, etc.) add an additional €59 per week.

Currently, there is little visibility of the needs of low-income households or children in national transport policy. In Scotland, the independent Poverty and Inequality Commission which advises the Government on policy, recently recommended that a rights-based approach is incorporated into transport policy. This approach would recognise that access to suitable transport, no matter your level of income or where in you live, is a necessary requirement in order to achieve other human rights such as the right to work, right to education, right to take part in cultural and public life, and right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.<sup>570</sup>

A national child poverty plan should commit to:

- Child and poverty proof transport policy ensuring the needs of children, parents and young people living in poverty are met in the design of integrated systems of public transport in rural and urban areas.
- Invest in the Rural Transport Programme, increasing the range of public transport options, promoting social inclusion for children living in rural areas, and improving access to services.
- Provide free school transports to all eligible children.
- Increase funding to the school transport scheme to support and facilitate access to sports, play, recreation and activities for children in isolated areas.
- Optimise the use of the school bus fleet by mobilising it for use in the summer months and outside of school times.

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<sup>567</sup> Julian Hine, "Transport Disadvantage and Social Exclusion" Presentation to International conference on public transport and urban citizenship', Trinity College, Dublin 21st September 2007. <[https://www.tcd.ie/policy-institute/assets/pdf/Julian\\_Hine.pdf](https://www.tcd.ie/policy-institute/assets/pdf/Julian_Hine.pdf)>

<sup>568</sup> National Disability Authority, *Transport and access for people with disabilities* (NDA 2007).

<sup>569</sup> Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice, *Minimum Essential Standard of Living 2019: Update Report* (VPSJ 2019) <<https://bit.ly/3iszlKq>> accessed 19 July 2021.

<sup>570</sup> Poverty and Inequality Commission, *Transport and poverty in Scotland: Report of the Poverty and Inequality Commission* (Poverty and Inequality Commission 2019) <<https://bit.ly/3eS6b6L>> accessed 19 July 2021.

## Appendix One

### Initiatives that have made a positive contribution to the reduction in child poverty include:

- The proportion of children living in jobless households fell from 18 per cent in Q2 2013 to 11.3 per cent in Q2 2019.<sup>571</sup>
- The maximum rate of adult social welfare payments was restored and therefore it increased from €188 per week to €203 per week.
- A new higher rate of Qualified Child Increase for older children has been introduced. The full Qualified Child Increase payment has also been increased from €29.80 to €38 per week for a child under 12 and to €45 per week for a child aged 12 and older.
- The Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance has also been restored with an increase from €100 to €150 for younger children and from €200 to €275 for older children.
- The National Minimum Wage increased from €8.65 per hour to €10.20 per hour.
- The earnings disregard for the One Parent Family Payment and Jobseekers Transition Payment increased from €90 to €165 per week.
- The number of families in receipt of the Working Family Payment has doubled since 2009.
- The Daily Living Allowance for people seeking asylum has increased from €19.10 per week for adults and €9.60 per child to €38.80 and €29.80 respectively.
- The Area Based Childhood (ABC) Programme was introduced in 2013, and Tusla the Department of Children and Youth Affairs have taken on a lead role in seeking to embed prevention and early intervention services.<sup>572</sup>
- The introduction of Tusla's Prevention Partnership and Family Support (PPFS) programme provides a unified framework for the delivery of preventive and support services by Tusla and its partners.
- The National Childcare Scheme was introduced in 2019 with targeted supports for low-income households.

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<sup>571</sup> Central Statistics Office, *Labour Force Survey Households and Family Units* (CSO 2019) <https://bit.ly/3mhF6Mn> accessed 10 September 2020.

<sup>572</sup> Children's Rights Alliance, *Report Card 2020*, (Children's Rights Alliance 2020).



## Appendix Two

### Opinion of the National Advisory Council on shaping the new Policy Framework for Children and Young People (BOBF2)



## Opinion of the National Advisory Council on shaping the new Policy Framework for Children and Young People (BOBF2)

### Achievements

1. Better Outcomes Brighter futures (BOBF) was a significant departure as an ambitious, whole of Government framework, and has afforded the rights and interests of children and young people a central role in the policy system. Its significance and impact was assisted also by a range of parallel structural developments including the establishment of DCYA as a separate Department, and of TUSLA.
2. The wellbeing of children and young people is widely acknowledged as a key value of a civilised society. For all children and young people, the goal is to ensure that they live full lives and can draw on supports and development seamlessly. For some young people who face specific challenges, the goal is to offer deeper and tailored supports, and make the connections needed between services. This requires a sophisticated approach to planning and implementation that can go wide and deep. This is recognised in the architecture of the BOBF Policy Framework.
3. The National Advisory Council itself has been an important element of the structure, affording a direct link to the sector, sector interests and independent expertise. The combining of Government and Civil Society in pursuit of shared goals is a strength.
4. The publication in 2017 of the BOBF Indicator Set provides a basis for stronger evidence based assessment of child outcomes achieved in the lifetime of the next strategy. The Set was not available for BOBF monitoring and needs to be built into ongoing reporting in the next cycle.
5. We conclude that the next period should therefore be one of development and consolidation. If used to the full, the current BOBF oversight structures, broadly as currently constituted, are fit for purpose and are essential to successful implementation as a whole of Government Framework.

## **Challenges**

6. Challenges are to be expected in this novel, crosscutting way of working, and these, along with successes, are documented in the BOBF midterm review (2018). Full effectiveness has not been realised in all circumstances, and this merits a redoubling of effort in the next cycle to ensure that government and civil society structures are truly aligned in support.
7. The key ingredient to sustained success is leadership at all levels. This must be made visible from the top of government, to breathe life into the current structures. Leadership needs to be seen in action through using the structures (especially Consortium and Sponsors Group) to drive implementation.
8. The BOBF oversight structures are more effective currently as *enablers* of the Framework, especially across departmental and sectoral silos. They have not always been as successful as *drivers*. There is some evidence of specific changes being driven, or bottlenecks in implementation cleared, directly through Sponsors Group, Consortium, or Cabinet Committee system. However, under BOBF2, we believe that this approach could be stepped up.
9. Government Departments have cooperated with and embraced BOBF to varying degrees. Some have used the Framework successfully to advance policy goals that chime with the Framework. Engagement with the Dept. of Education has been a particular challenge, perhaps because that Department's overlap with BOBF goals is, naturally, high, and therefore 'the bar' for engagement is higher. In any event, addressing this issue in the next framework is essential.
10. BOBF as an instrument of policy delivery has been challenged by lack of focus and, in particular, the mixing of a long and undifferentiated list of micro and more macro actions (163 in all). This can weaken the overall focus on effective implementation.
11. Core national objectives – especially elimination of child poverty – are not sufficiently differentiated from more operational actions. While BOBF has made an impact on tackling child poverty, for a more far-reaching impact a complementary and aligned set of arrangements are required.
12. The "Transformational Goals" in the Framework have added complexity without always adding value, and make the task of monitoring more complex.
13. Agreement on an appropriate level of public visibility of BOBF has been unclear – the mid-term Review raised useful suggestions but limited resourcing is a barrier here.
14. The Implementation Team needs to be resourced to provide additional resourcing to the BOBF structures including the work of the Advisory Council. The work of coordination and influencing needs full time resourcing. This is different to the work needed to drive implementation of specific more micro actions, and relies on skilful influencing allied to a strongly supported mandate from the top.
15. The role of BOBF and its structures (especially the Advisory Council) in monitoring constituent strategies is not always clear and has been uneven.

## **Recommendations**

- 16.** Tackling child poverty through a specific parallel Action Plan should be embedded as a key element towards overall achievement of the Framework Goals. At the same time, international evidence shows that successfully tackling child poverty requires its own closely aligned project driven arrangements. The New Zealand model is recommended for further consideration in that regard, especially the operation in tandem of two discrete teams, about 12 people in total, for the overall Framework and the Poverty Action Plan respectively.
- 17.** The Department for Children should have the lead role at line Department level for child poverty. The continued close cooperation of the Dept. of Employment Affairs and Social Protection continues to be vital, as is the renewed leadership and problem solving role we see through the whole of Government BOBF structures. The Council is bringing forward proposals on these lines as part of the work of its Child Poverty Subcommittee. We emphasise that for line departmental leadership to work successfully, it must be backed by strong support from the centre when needed.
- 18.** The National Policy Framework should contain the key drivers for change, and the priority actions, needed to achieve the national outcomes and should exercise selectivity in naming these. Constituent Strategies, are the place for detailed measures.
- 19.** The commitment to monitor ‘constituent strategies’ (eg Youth Justice, Participation) through BOBF structures needs to be effectively operationalised and implemented. The First Five Implementation Plan is the current exemplar in this regard. A number of key common features are suggested:
- each constituent strategy should contain its own robust in-built arrangements and standards for monitoring including data collection reporting, and ongoing stakeholder involvement;
  - these should be reflected in the form of a 3 Year Implementation Plan completed within 6 months of completion of each Strategy, containing the main outcomes and disaggregated metrics drawn from the 2017 BOBF Indicator Set;
  - the National Advisory Council should produce an independent commentary upon each Implementation Plan at agreed intervals, working to an agreed template contained in the Plan;
  - The Consortium should ultimately sign off on Plans, intervening on the advice of the Advisory Council in cases where there is a significant shortfall in implementation;
  - Plans including the Commentary should be published .
- 20.** The voice of children and young people should be strengthened in the development of the Strategy (the LGBTI+ Strategy provides a useful pathway) and should continue to meaningfully participate in the delivery structures.
- 21.** As the National Advisory Council we have reflected on our own role and performance and would suggest consideration of some adjustments to strengthen its role:
- Forging links with a newly constituted youth monitoring group and the other advisory structures and possible cross fertilisation ie CYPSC and Comhairle na nOg
  - A selection process (eg through expressions of interest) for selection of the Expert Members of the Advisory Council and the Chair.
  - A stipend to support the time of the Chair. This will be particularly important if they are an independent person and not connected to any organisation or body.
  - A principle of two thirds retention and one third replacement to get the balance right in terms of succession and the need to refresh membership.

22. The National Indicator Set (2017) should be used as a routine companion to reporting in the next BOBF; the Consortium should have regard to progress on the high level indicators as a priority.
23. A broad Evaluation Plan should be built into the next Framework from the start, to check its effectiveness as a set of structures over the full period of the Plan. This should include appointment of an evaluation partner to provide both annual feedback and to conduct a mid and end-term evaluation.
24. In the medium term, legislation to underpin the Framework's significance should be considered; In the short term, the addition of an Oireachtas link would strengthen accountability of the Framework, perhaps through the Oireachtas committee system.
25. The Implementation Team needs proper resourcing for the task set out in the Framework. The successes and failures of cross government work need to be documented and that this should be included as a key task for the Team.

**Submitted for final approval to the National Advisory Council for Children and Young People**

**December 11, 2020**