

Uniting Voices For Children

CHILDREN'S
RIGHTS

ALLIANCE

Submission to the Mid-Term Review of the Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025

October 2022



Founded in 1995, the Children's Rights Alliance unites over 140 members working together to make Ireland one of the best places in the world to be a child. We change the lives of all children in Ireland by making sure that their rights are respected and protected in our laws, policies and services.

Accompaniment Support Service for Children (A.S.S.C.)
Alcohol Action Ireland
Amnesty International Ireland
An Cosán
Aoibhneas
AsIAM
Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland (ASTI)
ATD Fourth World – Ireland Ltd
Atheist Ireland
Barnardos
Barretstown Camp
Bedford Row Family Project
BeLonG To Youth Services
Blossom Ireland
Bodywhys
Catholic Guides of Ireland
Child Law Project
Childhood Development Initiative
Childminding Ireland
Children in Hospital Ireland
Children's Books Ireland
Children's Grief Centre
Clarecare
COPE Galway
Cork Life Centre
Cork Migrant Centre
Crann Centre
Crosscare
CyberSafeKids
Cycle Against Suicide
Dalkey School Project National School
Daughters of Charity Child and Family Service
Dental Health Foundation of Ireland
Department of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy, UCC
Disability Federation of Ireland
Doras
Down Syndrome Ireland
Dublin Rape Crisis Centre
Dyslexia Association of Ireland
Dyspraxia/DCD Ireland
Early Childhood Ireland
Early Learning Initiative (National College of Ireland)
Educate Together
EPIC
Equality for Children
Extern Ireland
FAMILIBase
Féach
Focus Ireland
Foróige
Gaelscoileanna Teo
Galway Traveller Movement
Good Shepherd Cork
Immigrant Council of Ireland
Inclusion Ireland
Institute of Guidance Counsellors
Irish Aftercare Network
Irish Association for Infant Mental Health
Irish Association of Social Workers
Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU)
Irish Council for Civil Liberties (ICCL)
Irish Foster Care Association
Irish Girl Guides
Irish Heart Foundation
Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO)
Irish Penal Reform Trust
Irish Primary Principals' Network
Irish Refugee Council
Irish Second Level Students' Union (ISSU)
Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children

Irish Traveller Movement
Irish Youth Foundation
iScoil
Jack and Jill Children's Foundation
Jigsaw
Katharine Howard Foundation
Kids' Own Publishing Partnership
Kinship Care
Leap Ireland
Let's Grow Together! Infant and Childhood Partnerships CLG.
LGBT Ireland
Mecpaths
Mental Health Reform
Mercy Law Resource Centre
Migrant Rights Centre Ireland
Mothers' Union
My Mind
My Project Minding You
Museum of Childhood Ireland
Music Generation
New Directions
National Childhood Network
National Council for the Blind of Ireland
National Forum of Family Resource Centres
National Parents Council Post Primary
National Parents Council Primary
National Youth Council of Ireland
Novas
One Family
One in Four
Parents Plus
Pavee Point
Peter McVerry Trust
Prevention and Early Intervention Network
Psychological Society of Ireland
Rainbow Club Cork
Rainbows Ireland
Rape Crisis Network Ireland (RCNI)
Realt Beag/Ballyfermot Star
Respond Housing
SAFE Ireland
Saoirse Housing Association
SAOL Beag Children's Centre
Scouting Ireland
School of Education UCD
Sexual Violence Centre Cork
SIPTU
Simon Communities of Ireland
Social Care Ireland
Society of St. Vincent de Paul
SPHE Network
SpunOut.ie
St. Nicholas Montessori College
St. Nicholas Montessori Teachers' Association
St. Patrick's Mental Health Services
TASC
Teachers' Union of Ireland
Terenure College Rugby Football Club
Transgender Equality Network Ireland
The Anne Sullivan Foundation
The Ark, A Cultural Centre for Children
The Irish Red Cross
The UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway
Traveller Visibility Group Ltd
Treoir
UNICEF Ireland
Women's Aid
Youngballymun
Young Social Innovators
Youth Advocate Programme Ireland (YAP)
Youth Work Ireland

Children's Rights Alliance

7 Red Cow Lane, Smithfield, Dublin 7, Ireland

Ph: +353 1 662 9400

Email: info@childrensrights.ie

www.childrensrights.ie

© 2022 Children's Rights Alliance – Republic of Ireland Limited The Children's Rights Alliance is a registered charity – CHY No. 11541

1. Introduction

The Children's Rights Alliance unites over 140 members working together to make Ireland one of the best places in the world to be a child. We change the lives of all children by making sure their rights are respected and protected in our laws, policies and services. We also provide legal information and advice to children, young people and their families through our legal information line and nationwide legal advice outreach clinics.

The Alliance welcomes the opportunity to make a written submission to the mid-term review of the *Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025*. In this submission we respond to the four questions set out in the consultation survey.

The issue of child poverty is of central concern to the Children's Rights Alliance. Tackling child poverty through a whole of government approach is critical to ensure that all children can attain their rights as articulated in the United Nations Convention on Rights of a Child. Under the Convention, children have the right to an adequate standard of living for their physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development¹ and States are required to 'take appropriate measures to assist parents and others responsible for the child to implement this right and shall in case of need provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing'.² The Convention also provides that every child has the right to enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical health and governments have an obligation to combat disease and malnutrition through the provision of adequate nutritious food.³ The Committee on the Rights of the Child has recommended that in implementing this right, providing food in school is 'desirable to ensure all pupils have access to a full meal every day' and recommends that this is combined with education on nutrition and health.⁴ The Committee further recommends that this should include the training of teachers in child nutrition and healthy eating habits.⁵

At an EU level, *Investing in Children* recommends tackling child poverty and social exclusion through integrated strategies encompassing not only children's material security but also the promotion of equal opportunities.⁶ Furthermore, on 14 June 2021, the European Commission formally adopted a Council Recommendation to establish the European Child Guarantee and supporting the 27 Member States to make efforts to guarantee access to quality key services for children in need.⁷

2. Progress on Reduction in Poverty and Social Exclusion

What progress do you feel has been made in reducing poverty and social exclusion since publication of the Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020 – 2025 in January 2020?

The annual poverty statistics captured by the Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) provide important data on the percentage of children at risk of poverty, experiencing deprivation and living in

1 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (20 November 1989) 1577 UNTS 3 (UNCRC) Art 27.

2 *ibid.*

3 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (20 November 1989) 1577 UNTS 3 (UNCRC) Art 24.

4 UNCRC General comment No. 15 (2013) on the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health (art. 24) CRC/C/GC/15, para 46.

5 *ibid.*

6 European Commission 'Recommendation on Investing in Children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage' (20 February 2013) C(2013) 778

7 European Commission, Proposal for a Council Recommendation establishing the European Child Guarantee, Brussels, 24.3.2021 COM(2021) 137 final, 1.

consistent poverty. The latest available data provides a comparative between 2020 and 2021 as detailed in Table 1 below.

Table 1 – SILC Child Poverty Statistics 2020 and 2021

	At risk of Poverty	Deprivation	Consistent Poverty
2020 – all children	16.4	18.9	7.2
2021 – all children	13.6	17.0	5.2

Source: CSO, Survey on Income and Living Conditions 2021, (2022) CSO.

As can be seen, the rates of child poverty fell between 2020 and 2021. While this may indicate progress in reducing poverty, the CSO highlight that without COVID-19 income supports, poverty rates in Ireland would be much higher. For instance, while the at risk of poverty rate for the entire population was 13.2 per cent in 2021 without the COVID-19 income supports this would have risen to 19.9 per cent.⁸ Furthermore, the COVID-19 income supports had the greatest impact on those in younger age cohorts. The poverty risk for the 0-17 age group was reduced from 24.2 per cent to 13.6 per cent, a reduction of almost 11 percentage points.

The data collection for SILC 2021 was collected prior to the onset of sustained increases in the cost of living. According to the CSO, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) rose by 8.7 per cent in the 12 months between August 2021 and 2022.⁹

The impact of inflation has a varying effect on different groups in society depending on their individual consumption patterns.¹⁰ The household budget of lower income households tends to largely comprise of necessities.¹¹ A more in-depth analysis of key indices and sub-indices highlights the growth in prices for essential items such as food, clothing, and energy. These price increases will have a profound impact on low-income families and many of those who in or at-risk of poverty identified in SILC 2021.

The Irish social welfare system has been found to play a key role in reducing inequality in Ireland.¹² It is critical that social welfare payments are adequate to meet the costs of living and responsive to situations where these costs rise. While the Roadmap commits to benchmarking pensions a wider commitment to benchmarking is needed if a reduction in poverty is to be delivered for households with children.

3. Areas working well

In your experience, what has worked well in reducing the number of people in Ireland experiencing poverty and social exclusion?

Food Poverty

The *Programme for Government* has committed to ‘work across government to address food poverty in children and ensure no child goes hungry’.¹³ Further action on this is provided in the *Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025* which commits to developing a programme of work to explore the drivers of food

⁸ Central Statistics Office, *Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2021* (CSO 2022).

⁹ Central Statistics Office, *Consumer Price Index August 2022* (CSO September 2022).

¹⁰ TASC, *The state we are in: inequality in Ireland 2022* (TASC May 2022) 28.

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² TASC, *The state we are in: inequality in Ireland 2022* (TASC May 2022) 28.

¹³ Government of Ireland, *Programme for Government, Our Shared Future* (Government Publications 2020) 96.

poverty and to identify mitigating actions.¹⁴ This will require coordinating activities across several government departments. It is positive to see some joint working between departments on the school meals rollout through the development of nutrition standards for the Hot School Meals Scheme,¹⁵ and the launch of the first *Healthy Eating Guidelines for 1-4 Year-Olds, Children's Food Pyramid* in October 2020.¹⁶

In May 2021, a cross-government Working Group on Food Poverty was established by Minister for State with responsibility for social Inclusion, Joe O'Brien TD which also includes community and voluntary organisations.¹⁷ The group has met on several occasions since its establishment and has focused on two pieces of work. The first was a mapping exercise to establish what government initiatives currently exist to address food poverty.¹⁸ A publication arising from this exercise highlighted that in 2021 over €89m was spent on schemes directly addressing food poverty with a further €399m spent on initiatives that include a food poverty aspect.¹⁹

The second piece of work to be undertaken by the working group involves commissioning case study research on a small number of geographic areas on the prevalence and drivers of food poverty alongside a mapping exercise of the actors and service providers in these areas.²⁰ It is envisaged that the outcome of this research will inform the realisation of the commitment contained in the *Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025*.²¹

In addressing food poverty, schools are an excellent setting to reach children, teachers, families and the surrounding community.²² They provide a social environment where children can access and enjoy food, without financial constraints.²³ Ireland is unusual in the European Union (EU) context in not providing a universal school meal programme.²⁴ Currently, funding is provided through the targeted School Meals Programme.²⁵ 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.²⁶

The launch of a pilot hot school meals initiative in September 2019 and its continued expansion over subsequent years is extremely welcome. The findings of research conducted with principals, teachers/Special Needs Assistants, parents and suppliers regarding all aspects of the provision of the hot meals, noted predominantly positive feedback with the scheme.²⁷ Over two-thirds of principals, teachers and Special Needs Assistants noted that the hot meals were of better quality compared to the cold food provided previously.²⁸ One-third of parents said the provision of hot meals had a positive impact on their children in terms of attendance at school, physical health and emotional/psychological wellbeing.²⁹ Two-thirds of principals and teachers indicated that universal

14 Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection 'Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025' (DEASP 2020).

15 Communication received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the Department of Social Protection, 21 December 2020. The Department of Health, the Department of Social Protection and the Department of Education and Skills are working together on the development of the standards.

16 Communication received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the Department of Health on 12 January 2021.

17 Membership of the group includes the Departments of Agriculture, Food and the Marine; Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth; Education; Health; Rural and Community Development and Social Protection. Organisations from the community and voluntary sector are also involved in the group including the Children's Rights Alliance, Crosscare and Society of St Vincent de Paul.

18 *ibid*.

19 Department of Social Protection, *Food poverty Government programmes, schemes and supports* (DSP 2022).

20 Joe O'Brien TD, Minister for State for Social Inclusion, Food Poverty, Written Answers, 25 November 2021 [57822/21].

21 Communication received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the Department of Social Protection on 11 January 2022.

22 *Healthy Food For All, A Good Practice Guide to School Food Initiatives* (Healthy Food for All 2009).

23 *ibid*.

24 *ibid*.

25 Department of Social Protection, 'Minister Humphreys announces extension of Hot School Meals Programme' (Press release 22 November 2021) <<https://bit.ly/3GeUvpe>> accessed 31 January 2022.

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

27 Ian McShane and Rachael Joyce, 'Hot School Meals Pilot Project' <<https://bit.ly/3zCQf0R>> accessed 31 January 2022.

28 Ian McShane and Rachael Joyce, 'Hot School Meals Pilot Project' <<https://bit.ly/3zCQf0R>> accessed 31 January 2022.

29 *ibid*.

provision within the school would be important.³⁰ In 2023, an additional €23m in funding will be provided for school meals denoting the continued expansion of the scheme,³¹ with further growth dependent on the completion of an evaluation of the entire school meals programme which is currently underway.³² This aligns with the commitment in the roadmap to bring forward further proposals in this area and momentum should continue on this.

However, holiday hunger remains a serious concern for children and young people experiencing food insecurity.³³ This phenomenon relates to the inability of children to access ‘an adequate supply of nutritious food’ outside of school term times.³⁴ In the UK, the establishment of holiday clubs in schools and communities in response to this issue ensured children got access to nutritious food but also the opportunity to engage in healthy activities as opposed to being more sedentary (a particular issue for low income families who may not be able to afford participation in paid activities) during holiday time.³⁵ Generally, the Irish school meals programme does not provide funding to cover school holidays or for days when the school is closed. Calls have been made for this to be extended through the summer months and other holiday periods.³⁶ There is a need to prioritise a means of continuing the provision of school meals outside of term time to combat holiday hunger as well as realising the Roadmap’s commitment to pilot the provision of meals in early years settings.

4. Areas where challenges exist

And in your experience, what has not worked so well or is challenging in reducing the number of people in Ireland experiencing poverty and social exclusion?

One area of increasing concern is the regression in the numbers of children and their families trapped in emergency accommodation. In addition to this there are an unknown number who are experiencing hidden homelessness.³⁷

From the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic in Q1 2020 up until Q1 2021 there was a noted decline in the number of children living in emergency accommodation. During this 12-month period the number of children living in such accommodation fell from 3,335 in March 2020 to 2,166. However, the trend then began to reverse and homeless organisations linked increases during 2021 to the discontinuation of the pandemic measures, along with an inability to tackle the structural causes of homelessness.³⁸ The latest figures show the continuation of an upward trend with 3,220 children in emergency accommodation in August 2022.³⁹

30 *ibid.*

31 Department of Social Protection, ‘Minister Humphreys announces Social Protection Budget worth €2.2 billion’, [Press Release, 27 September 2022].

32 Communication received by the Children’s Rights Alliance from the Department of Social Protection, 11 January 2022.

33 Pamela L. Graham et al. *School Holiday Food Provision in the UK: A Qualitative Investigation of Needs, Benefits, and Potential for Development* *Frontiers in Public Health*, (2016) Vol. 4, Article 172.

34 Pamela L. Graham et al. *School Holiday Food Provision in the UK: A Qualitative Investigation of Needs, Benefits, and Potential for Development* *Frontiers in Public Health*, (2016) Vol. 4, Article 172.

35 Pamela L. Graham et al. *School Holiday Food Provision in the UK: A Qualitative Investigation of Needs, Benefits, and Potential for Development* *Frontiers in Public Health*, (2016) Vol. 4, Article 172.

36 Kitty Holland ‘Thousands at risk of holiday hunger if school meals dropped’ *Irish Times*, 11 June 2020.

37 Hidden homelessness can include instances such as not having a secure place to call home, staying with friends or relatives, living in unsuitable or overcrowded accommodation. Such instances are not captured in the monthly homeless figures. See Barnardos, Focus Ireland, Simon and Society of St Vincent de Paul, *Hidden Homelessness*, <https://bit.ly/3RXkGH0> accessed 12 October 2022.

38 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’ (Press release 28 August 2020) accessed 4 February 2022.

39 Department of Housing, *Homeless Data August 2022*, (Government of Ireland 2022).

The lack of housing affordability in Ireland is most evident in the EU-SILC statistics which highlight significant increases in the at risk of poverty rate after rent and mortgage interest.⁴⁰

The at risk of poverty rate describes the proportion of the population who have an income below 60 per cent of the national median income. A separate indicator considers income after the payment of rent and mortgage interest. Therefore, it considers the number of households who have an income below 60 per cent of the median once housing costs (rent and mortgage interest) are accounted for.⁴¹

While approximately one-in-ten of the population are at risk of poverty this jumps to one-in-five after rent and mortgage interest are taken into consideration. For those in the 0-17 age cohort the rate increases from 13.6 per cent to 23.7 per cent respectively, while over half of one-parent families are at risk of poverty after rent and mortgage interest.⁴²

Addressing the structural causes of the current housing crisis in Ireland, requires radical actions such as building social housing and reforming existing supports such as increasing the limits for HAP and Rent Supplement and consideration of the effectiveness of the measures introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic. The effects of homelessness on children is profound. Children are the fastest-growing homeless population in Ireland, and global evidence reviews have found that homelessness in children is associated with multiple negative physical, mental, and behavioural health outcomes.⁴³ Children who experience homelessness are also more likely to have developmental and learning delays and poorer academic attainment,⁴⁴ with the duration of homelessness compounding and elevating the risk of adverse outcomes.⁴⁵

5. Priority Areas up to 2025

What would you like to see prioritised in terms of moving people out of poverty and social exclusion, up to the end of the Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020 – 2025 in 2025?

On 14 June 2021, the European Commission formally adopted a Council Recommendation to establish the European Child Guarantee. The Guarantee aims to prevent and combat child poverty and social exclusion in the European Union (EU) by supporting the 27 Member States to make efforts to guarantee access to quality key services for children in need.⁴⁶ The Guarantee focuses on a number of key commitments:

- Providing free access to early childhood education and care
- Providing free access to education (including school - based activities)
- Providing free access to a healthy meal each school day and effective access to nutrition
- Providing free access to healthcare
- Ensuring effective access to adequate housing

40 Central Statistics Office, *Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2021* (CSO 2022).

41 Central Statistics Office, *Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2021* (CSO, 2022) <<https://bit.ly/3QIm5rb>> accessed 15 June 2022.

42 *ibid.*

43 Laura E Gultekin et al, 'Health risks and outcomes of homelessness in school-age children and youth: a scoping review of the literature' (2020) *Journal of School Nursing* 36(1) 10– 18.

44 Children Rights Alliance, 'Home Works – A Study on Educational Needs of Children Experiencing Homelessness and Living in Emergency Accommodation' (July 2018).

45 Saskia D'Sa et al, 'The psychological impact of childhood homelessness—a literature review' (2020) *Irish Journal of Medical Science*. See also Mercy Law Resource Centre, 'Report on the Lived Experiences of Homeless Families' <https://bit.ly/3CMFIK0> accessed 12 October 2022.

46 European Commission, Proposal for a Council Recommendation establishing the European Child Guarantee, Brussels, 24.3.2021 COM(2021) 137 final, 1.

The Guarantee⁴⁷ calls on Member States to be responsive to the needs of specific groups of children exposed to multiple disadvantages. Children and young people from Roma communities, migrant and ethnic minorities, children with a disability, those living in alternative care, families at particular risk of poverty, including one-parent families and those in precarious family situations experience disadvantage on a multitude of levels and therefore government responses, need both a central driver at the highest level as well as cross-departmental action.

In order to tackle the ongoing high levels of child and family poverty it is critical that the Roadmap provides further focus on these areas to ensure that all children and young people have the best start in life. There is a need to establish a dedicated and fully resourced Child Poverty Office. This office could oversee the implementation of a cross-government child poverty strategy with national goals and objectives. The mid-term review of the Roadmap for Social Inclusion is an opportune time to establish this office. The office could co-ordinate and monitor a whole-of-government approach to child poverty, delegating specific actions to relevant government departments.

⁴⁷ European Commission, Proposal for a Council Recommendation establishing the European Child Guarantee, Brussels, 24.3.2021 COM(2021) 137 final, 2.