

1. RIGHT TO AN ADEQUATE STANDARD OF LIVING

Chapter Grade



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Intervening early, when a child has a difficulty or preventing that difficulty from happening, makes a lot of sense. This means supporting families so that children do better at school, are healthier and can fulfil their potential. The Government needs to get it right from the start so every child gets the chance that they're entitled to."

Marian Quinn, Chair, The Prevention and Early Intervention Network

Right to an Adequate Standard of Living

Every child has the right to a standard of living that is adequate to their development – physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social. While parents and guardians have the primary responsibility to provide for the child's material needs, the State also has the responsibility to assist parents and guardians to alleviate poverty where needed.

Summary of Article 27 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child



IN THE NEWS

7,000 PEOPLE HOMELESS IN IRELAND INCLUDING 2,549 CHILDREN IN EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION

Irish Examiner, 30 December 2016

An 'unprecedented' 7,000 people are now homeless in Ireland, with one family losing their home every day last month and a shocking 2,549 children now living in emergency accommodation. [...]

Details released as part of the Department's latest homelessness update report show that at the end of November a total of 6,985 people were officially considered homeless in Ireland.

The rate includes 4,436 adults, 2,549 children and a shocking 1,205 families nationwide, and means there are now 20 per cent more adults homeless in Ireland and 30 per cent more families and children homeless compared to November 2015. [...]

In addition, between October and November, 27 more families and 79 children became homeless. And while charities and campaign groups have previously warned more than 7,000 people are without a home nationwide, the 6,985 latest figure is the first time Ireland's homelessness crisis has officially reached such levels. [...]

By Fíachra Ó Cionnaith and Joyce Fegan

1.1

Child and Family Homelessness

GOVERNMENT COMMITMENT

A Programme for a Partnership Government commits to:

- > End the use of unsuitable long-term emergency accommodation for homeless families in part by providing 500 rapid-delivery housing units.



Progress: Some but limited

'Child and Family homelessness' receives an 'E' grade in *Report Card 2017*. Despite a range of policy and legislative measures introduced to address family homelessness, this grade reflects the unprecedented level of families with children living in unsuitable emergency accommodation. The Minister for Children and Youth Affairs has clearly influenced Government commitments to minimise the impact of homelessness on children and families. The commitment by the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government to end the use of emergency accommodation for families by mid-2017 is welcome but its progress has been slow in providing long-term sustainable solutions.

Every child has the right to adequate housing.¹ 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'.² The right to adequate housing is defined as being accessible, habitable and affordable with certain 'facilities essential for health, security, comfort and nutrition'.³ Households should have security of tenure.⁴

In 2016, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed its concern at 'reports of families affected by homelessness facing significant delays in accessing social housing and frequently living in inappropriate, temporary or emergency accommodation on a long-term basis'.⁵ Children as a priority group must be 'accorded full and sustainable access to adequate housing resources'.⁶ The UN Committee has called on the State to undertake measures to increase the availability of social housing and emergency housing support.⁷

Family homelessness is at an all-time high and the number of families living in State-funded emergency accommodation continues to increase.

Homeless families and unsuitable accommodation:

Family homelessness is at an all-time high and the number of families living in State-funded emergency

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

2 *ibid* Art 27(3).

3 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.

4 *ibid*.

5 UNCRC 'Concluding Observations: Ireland' (2016) UN Doc CRC/C/IRL/CO/3-4 para 61.

6 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).

7 UNCRC 'Concluding Observations: Ireland' (2016) UN Doc CRC/C/IRL/CO/3-4 para 62.

accommodation continues to increase with 1,205 families with 2,505 children entering homeless accommodation in December 2016.⁸ This compares to 775 families with 1,616 children in December 2015.⁹ While the majority of these families are based in Dublin, in December 2016 there were 177 families with 409 children living in emergency accommodation outside Dublin.¹⁰ There are currently 91,600 households on the social housing waiting list,¹¹ 55 per cent with children.¹² Families become homeless for a variety of reasons including insecure tenancies, rising rents and the lack of sustainable housing options.¹³ In 2015, 48 families were forcibly evicted from local authority houses¹⁴ while other families in the private rented sector were served with eviction notices due to the purchase of mortgages in arrears by so-called 'vulture funds'.¹⁵ The Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016, commenced in January 2017, included measures to address such scenarios and protect existing tenants, other than in exceptional circumstances. Overall, one parent families account for 65 per cent of homeless families.¹⁶ Levels of hidden homelessness – cases where families and children are living in or sharing unsuitable and inappropriate accommodation – remain unknown.

In July 2016, Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Dr Katherine Zappone TD and her officials convened an important child homelessness summit which represented a unique child-specific, proactive initiative to tackle the issues surrounding child and youth homelessness, which informed *Rebuilding Ireland: An Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness*,

launched later that month. It provides for the delivery of 47,000 social housing units by 2021, supported by an investment of €5.35 billion.¹⁷ The intention to end the use of unsuitable emergency accommodation for families including hotels and B&Bs by mid-2017¹⁸ is welcome, given that 76 per cent of families experiencing homelessness are allocated hotel-style accommodation rather than designated family accommodation.¹⁹ In advance of this deadline, the current stock should be assessed to ensure that families with children are placed in the most suitable accommodation available. However, without suitable alternative accommodation, ultimately the target will not be achieved.

The quality and standard of emergency accommodation is often inappropriate for family life given that whole families have to live in a hotel bedroom in overcrowded conditions. The lack of cooking facilities, recreational spaces for children, lack of access to transport and living at a distance from school have all been identified as issues that impact on families with children in particular.²⁰ A mapping exercise under *Rebuilding Ireland* will identify the number of families who are homeless and match them with available services in an area and identify any gaps in service provision.²¹

Food poverty and unhealthy eating have been identified as particular issues in emergency accommodation,²² and there are concerns that the way in which families are provided with food may lead to unhealthy

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- 8 Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, 'Emergency Accommodation Figures, December 2016' <<http://bit.ly/2keOobm>> accessed 4 February 2017.
- 9 Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, 'Homeless Persons – December 2016' <<http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/other/homeless-persons-december-2015>> accessed 4 February 2017.
- 10 Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, 'Emergency Accommodation Figures, December 2016' <<http://bit.ly/2keOobm>> accessed 4 February 2017.
- 11 Housing Agency, *Summary of Housing Needs Assessments 2016: Key Findings*, (Housing Agency 2016) 5.
- 12 *ibid* 14.
- 13 Dr Kathy Walsh & Brian Harvey, *Family Experiences of Pathways into Homelessness* (Housing Agency 2015) 17.
- 14 Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, 'Local Authority Mortgage Repossessions 2005-2009' <<http://www.environ.ie/sites/default/files/attachments/c1-repossess-by-yr.xlsx>>
- 15 RTE, 'Tyrrelstown tenants meeting over eviction notices' (14 March 2016) <<http://www.rte.ie/news/2016/0314/774762-tyrrelstown-properties-eviction/>> accessed 3 February 2017. In March 2016, more than 100 families were informed that their rented houses would be sold over the next four years and that they were facing eviction.
- 16 Focus Ireland 'Lone Parents and Homelessness: Presentation to Oireachtas Joint Committee on Social Protection' (Focus Ireland 12 January 2017) <<http://bit.ly/2lcHQyh>> accessed 6 February 2017.
- 17 Government of Ireland, *Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness* (Government Publications 2016) 11.
- 18 *ibid* 13.
- 19 Dublin Homeless Region Homeless Executive, 'Families who are Homeless (infographic)' (November 2016). <http://www.homelessdublin.ie/sites/default/files/DRHE_Families_November_2016.JPG> accessed 3 February 2017.
- 20 Government of Ireland, *Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness* (Government Publications 2016) 36.
- 21 Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government *Rebuilding Ireland, Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness; First Quarterly Report* (DHPCLG 2016).
- 22 Dr Kathy Walsh & Brian Harvey, *Family Experiences of Pathways into Homelessness* (Housing Agency 2015) 31.

overeating or spending limited resources on expensive fast food.²³ Research commissioned by Focus Ireland, and partly funded by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Department of Health, is also underway to examine food access and nutritional health among families experiencing homelessness in Dublin.²⁴



NUMBER OF HOMELESS CHILDREN

Notably, the Special Rapporteur on Child Protection, Professor Geoffrey Shannon has highlighted the importance of the right to play for children living in poverty who have 'lower levels of access to facilities, often cannot afford to participate in activities' and may live in 'environments with insufficient space or opportunities for play and recreation'.²⁵ In homeless accommodation where play facilities may be limited or not accessible,²⁶ children and young people should be provided with alternative recreational opportunities and access to local leisure facilities.

Complaints to Dublin Region Housing Executive have highlighted a number of serious issues with the standard of accommodation used to accommodate homeless families with children.²⁷ Some families are living in unhygienic and unsafe conditions with used syringes left in bedrooms, insect infestations, mould and damp causing respiratory issues, significant overcrowding and children being kept awake due to noise from surrounding pubs and clubs.²⁸ The UN Committee urged the State to take measures to increase housing support for homeless families ensuring that the supports are 'appropriate to the needs of children affected and subject to adequate safeguards, reviews and evaluations'.²⁹ In a welcome development Tusla and the Dublin Region Homeless Executive have agreed a joint protocol to address child protection concerns,³⁰ which is fully operational in the Dublin area and [...] will be extended to Galway, Limerick and Cork in 2017.³¹

The development of National Quality Standards for homeless services³² is also a welcome step. The Standards were completed and piloted in services in four of the nine homeless regions during 2016.³³ The Standards aim to set minimum requirements for organisations, and put in place a framework for improvement. However, they are voluntary and have not yet been published. These Standards must ensure the protection and welfare of children receiving homelessness services. They should address child protection and safety in terms of assessing and managing risk, meeting children's educational, health and play needs, and ensuring a safe physical environment. These Standards should ensure consistency of application across all forms of homeless accommodation.

23 Breaking News, 'Food poverty highlighted as key issue facing homeless children living in emergency accommodation' (7 July 2016) <<http://bit.ly/2lcClKw>> accessed 3 February 2017.

24 Communication received by the Children's Rights Alliance from Focus Ireland, 16 January 2017.

25 Prof Geoffrey Shannon *Ninth Report of the Special Rapporteur on Child Protection: A Report Submitted to the Oireachtas* (Department of Children and Youth Affairs 2016) 71.

26 Dr Kathy Walsh & Brian Harvey, *Family Experiences of Pathways into Homelessness* (Housing Agency 2015) 29.

27 Cormac Fitzgerald, 'Pregnant mother 'had to view men exposing themselves to her and her son' in homeless accommodation' *TheJournal.ie* (15 December 2016) <<http://www.thejournal.ie/homeless-conditions-3137432-Dec2016/>> accessed 3 February 2017.

28 *ibid.*

29 UNCRC 'Concluding Observations: Ireland' (2016) UN Doc CRC/C/IRL/CO/3-4 para 62.

30 Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Dr Katherine Zappone TD, Dáil Debates, Priority Questions, Homeless Persons Supports, 9 June 2016 [15260/16].

31 Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Dr. Katherine Zappone TD, Dáil Debates, Priority Questions, Child and Family Agency Remit, 14 December 2016 [40304/16].

32 Dublin Region Homeless Executive, 'About Putting People First' <<http://www.homelessdublin.ie/putting-people-first>> accessed 3 February 2017.

Rapid-delivery housing units: Budget 2017 allocated €98 million to address homelessness by supporting homeless households to gain secure and sustainable housing.³⁴ A temporary rapid build scheme aimed at moving homeless families out of emergency accommodation was initiated in 2016.³⁵ While approximately 350 additional units were advancing through the tender process or were on-site by the end of 2016,³⁶ with a further 650 rapid-build units planned for 2017,³⁷ only 22 rapid-build units were completed in 2016.³⁸ Costs and protests at proposed sites have added to delays.³⁹ The location of the potential sites 'adjacent to services including transport, schools, retail neighbourhood centres, medical services, recreational and community amenities'⁴⁰ is welcome as this will address some of the issues affecting families in emergency accommodation. However, the small number of units built to date coupled with the growing number of homeless families with children, means that the Rapid Build Programme has not provided an effective solution to the housing crisis, and a sustainable solution to provide families with adequate housing must be prioritised.

The quality and standard of emergency accommodation is often inappropriate for family life given that whole families have to live in a hotel bedroom in overcrowded conditions. The lack of cooking facilities, recreational spaces for children, lack of access to transport and living at a distance from school have all been identified as issues that impact on families with children in particular.

33 Communication received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, 18 January 2017.

34 Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, 'Coveney announces transformational housing budget' (11 October 2016) <<http://bit.ly/2Klad6B>> accessed 3 February 2017.

35 Dublin City Council, 'Modular Housing' <<http://bit.ly/2jVbAiM>> accessed 3 February 2017.

36 Communication received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, 18 January 2017.

37 *ibid.*

38 Dublin Regional Homeless Executive, 'Rapid Build Housing' <<http://bit.ly/2kAiLtG>> accessed 3 February 2017.

Child and Family Homelessness

Immediate Actions for 2017



IMPLEMENT HOUSING FIRST COMMITMENTS AS A MATTER OF URGENCY AND END THE LONG-TERM USE OF UNSUITABLE EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES BY MID-2017.

Prioritise families with children and move them from unsuitable emergency accommodation including hotels into long-term sustainable housing. Ensure that families are provided with the necessary financial and material supports to ensure that children are not forced to live in unsafe and unsuitable conditions. Children should also be able to access play and recreational facilities while in homeless accommodation.

ROLL-OUT NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARDS FOR HOMELESS SERVICES AND ESTABLISH A ROBUST COMPLIANCE FRAMEWORK TO ENSURE THE PROTECTION AND WELFARE OF CHILDREN.

The National Quality Standards must address child protection and safety in terms of assessing and managing risk, meeting children's educational, health and play needs, and ensure a safe physical environment. These Standards should ensure consistency of application across all forms of homeless accommodation and must be accompanied by the establishment of a robust compliance and monitoring framework.

COMPLETE THE RAPID BUILD PROGRAMME AS A MATTER OF URGENCY BUT CONTINUE TO SOURCE ALTERNATIVE ACCOMMODATION SUITABLE FOR FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN.

The Rapid Build programme will help to address the issue of short supply in the shorter-term but this must be supplemented by ensuring that families have access to affordable rental accommodation as well as increasing the social housing stock.

1.2

Parental Leave and Income Supports

GOVERNMENT COMMITMENT

A Programme for a Partnership Government commits to:

- > Increase paid parental leave in the first year after birth and support stay-at-home parents through an increase in the Home Carers Credit.



Progress: Satisfactory

- > Introduce a new Working Family Payment to promote work over welfare and supplement the income of a household to ensure that every parent working at least 15 hours per week will have more take-home pay for each hour they work. Support middle-income lone parents in work by increasing income disregards through this scheme.



Progress: Some

'Parental Leave and Income Supports' receives a 'C+' grade in *Report Card 2017*. This grade reflects the first step being taken towards increasing paid parental leave through the introduction of two weeks' paternity benefit. It also reflects increases in Budget 2017 to the Home Carers Credit and income disregards for lone parents. The Working Family Payment is in the early stages of development so cannot yet be assessed.

Every child has the right to a standard of living that is adequate to their development – physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social.⁴¹ While parents and guardians have the primary responsibility to provide for the child's material needs, the State also has the responsibility to assist parents and guardians to alleviate poverty where needed.⁴² 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' and in particular referred to single-parent households.⁴³ 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 'acknowledges that many parents are economically active, often in poorly paid occupations which they combine with their parental responsibilities' so it 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'.⁴⁴ The UN Committee also promotes 'an integrated approach' which focuses on health and education supports for new parents and includes 'interventions that impact

39 RTE, 'Rapid build houses could cost €243k each' (12 April 2016) <<http://bit.ly/1RRPNSa>> accessed 3 February 2017.

40 Dublin Regional Homeless Executive, 'Rapid Build Housing' <<http://bit.ly/2kAiLtG>> accessed 3 February 2017.

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

42 *ibid.*

indirectly on parents' ability to promote the best interests of children (e.g. taxation and benefits, adequate housing, working hours).⁴⁵

By the end of 2016 there were 4,572 paternity benefit claims and expenditure was €2,058,244.

Paid Parental Leave: The Paternity Leave and Benefit Act 2016 introduced a statutory entitlement to two weeks' paid paternity leave from September 2016.⁴⁶ By the end of 2016 there were 4,572 paternity benefit claims and expenditure was €2,058,244.⁴⁷ A Family Leave Bill, which will consolidate existing leave entitlements including maternity, parental, carer's and adoptive leave, is due to be published in 2017.⁴⁸ This may provide an opportunity to increase leave for parents in the first year of birth.

While the annual cost of implementing the commitment to increase paid parental leave by six months is estimated to be around €273 million,⁴⁹ the long-term benefits are clear. Children do best when cared for at home for at least the first year of life.⁵⁰ Ireland has the fourth shortest period of paid leave for parents out of 26 European countries, most of which provide an average of 19 months' paid leave after the birth of a child.⁵¹ The *Report of the Inter-Departmental Working Group: Future Investment in Childcare in*

*Ireland*⁵² and *Right from the Start: Report of the Expert Advisory Group on the Early Years Strategy*⁵³ both recommend extending State income support in the first year of life for all working parents particularly through enhanced parental leave and benefit provision.

The commitment to increase parental leave in the first year after birth is commendable, and the introduction of paid paternity benefit in the first few months of its tenure is a positive indication of the Government's clear intention. However, this is only the first step in ensuring that parental leave is extended to at least the first year after a child is born. These changes must continue to happen, albeit incrementally, as recommended by the Inter-Departmental Working Group.⁵⁴

Additional Support for Low-Income Families: A *Programme for a Partnership Government* committed to introduce a Working Family Payment and work is ongoing to develop the payment in advance of Budget 2018.⁵⁵ An Interdepartmental Working Group was established in October 2016.⁵⁶ In addition to the introduction of this payment, which will aim to reduce child poverty and make work pay,⁵⁷ the Government has also committed to a number of measures to tackle low pay including an increase in the minimum wage and strengthening the role of the Low Pay Commission to examine the gender pay gap and in-work poverty, as well as strengthening regulations on precarious work.⁵⁸ These commitments are welcome, in particular the intention to reduce 'poverty levels by supporting an

43 UNCRC 'Concluding Observations: Ireland' (2016) UN Doc CRC/C/IRL/CO/3-4 para 59.

44 UNCRC 'General Comment No. 7 on Implementing Rights in Early Childhood' (2006) UN Doc CRC/C/GC/7/Rev.1 para 21.

45 *ibid* para 20(a).

46 The Paternity Leave and Benefit Act 2016, s 6.

47 Communication received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the Department of Social Protection, 23 January 2017.

48 Minister of State for Justice and Equality David Stanton TD, Written Answers, Employment Rights, 6 December 2016 [38691/16].

49 Inter-Departmental Group on Future Investment in Early Years and School-Age Childcare and Education, 'Report of Inter-Departmental Working Group: Future Investment in Childcare in Ireland' (DCYA 2015) 11 <<http://bit.ly/1GDVkBn>> accessed 6 February 2017.

50 NICHD, 'Study of Early Childcare and Youth Development: Findings for children aged up to 4 ½ years' (2006) <https://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/pubs/documents/secycd_06.pdf> 1, accessed 31 January 2017.

51 Start Strong, 'Family Leave in Ireland, How Do We Compare?' (2015) <<http://bit.ly/2kjVMoa>> accessed 6 February 2017.

52 Inter-Departmental Group on Future Investment in Early Years and School-Age Childcare and Education, 'Report of Inter-Departmental Working Group: Future Investment in Childcare in Ireland' (DCYA 2015) 86 <<http://bit.ly/1GDVkBn>> accessed 6 February 2017; Department of Children and Youth Affairs *Right from the Start: Report on the Expert Advisory Group on the Early Years Strategy* (DCYA 2013) 5.

53 Department of Children and Youth Affairs, *Right from the Start: Report of the Expert Advisory Group on the Early Years Strategy* (Government Publications 2013) 5.

54 Department of Children and Youth Affairs, *Report of the Inter-Departmental Working Group: Future Investment in Childcare in Ireland* (DCYA 2015).

55 Communication received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the Department of Social Protection, 23 January 2017.

56 *ibid*. The Group comprises representatives from the Departments of Children and Youth Affairs; Education and Skills; Finance; Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government; Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation; Public Expenditure and Reform; Social Protection and Revenue.

57 *ibid*.

58 Government of Ireland, *A Programme for a Partnership Government* (Government Publications 2016) 40.

increase in the minimum wage to €10.50 per hour over the next five years.⁵⁹ However, the initial increase in January 2017 from €9.15 to €9.25 per hour means that the Government's own target remains a long way off and significant work must be undertaken to increase the minimum wage to make a real difference to low-paid workers.



ONE PARENT FAMILIES

The Home Carer's Tax Credit is a tax credit given to married couples or civil partners to reduce their payable tax by a specific amount where one partner works in the home caring for a child or other dependent person and they are jointly assessed for tax purposes.⁶⁰ In 2014, there were 80,900 recipients of the credit at a cost of €60.9 million to the State.⁶¹ In Budget 2017 the Home Carer's Tax Credit was increased from €1,000 to €1,100 per year where the home carer has an annual income of less than €7,200.⁶² This is the second increase in two years (the maximum credit was previously set at €810).⁶³

Income Disregards for Lone Parents: More than 215,000 lone parent families live in Ireland⁶⁴ and they experience disproportionate rates of poverty compared with other family types.⁶⁵ More than a third of lone parent households are at risk of poverty, more than a quarter live in consistent poverty and almost 60 per cent experience two or more types of deprivation.⁶⁶ This compares to an overall consistent child poverty rate of 11.5 per cent⁶⁷ meaning that children of lone parents are more than twice as likely to live in consistent poverty as the general child population.

Income disregards are an important mechanism to support lone parents in work as they mean that a certain portion of a person's earned income will not be considered when a person is means-tested for a social welfare payment. Budget 2017 increased the income disregard for parents in receipt of One Parent Family Payment (OPFP) and Jobseeker's Transition Payment (JST) by €20 per week. From January 2017, lone parents can earn up to €110 per week and still qualify for their full social welfare payment. Prior to 2012, a lone parent was permitted to earn €146.50 per week and retain their full payment.⁶⁸ However, following reforms to the payment, the income disregard was reduced to €90 a week, representing a significant drop. The rate of employment amongst lone parents is almost 20 percentage points lower than that of two-parent households⁶⁹ and almost 30 percentage points lower for lone parents whose youngest child was five or under.⁷⁰ Lone parents require additional supports to ensure that they can engage in paid work and there are concerns that with a focus on employment activation measures, transitioning to other payments such as Jobseekers Allowance (JA) or Family Income Supplement (FIS) acts as a disincentive to taking up part-time work due to the loss of income disregards.⁷¹

59 ibid 41.

60 Revenue, 'Home Carer Tax Credit' <<http://www.revenue.ie/en/tax/it/credits/home-carers.html>> accessed 31 January 2017.

61 Minister for Finance Michael Noonan TD, Written Answers, Tax Credits, 22 November 2016 [36281/16].

62 Revenue, 'Home Carer Tax Credit' <<http://www.revenue.ie/en/tax/it/credits/home-carers.html>> accessed 31 January 2017.

63 Revenue, 'Tax relief Charts' <<http://www.revenue.ie/en/tax/it/tax-chart.html>> accessed 31 January 2017.

64 Central Statistics Office, *Census 2011: Profile 5 – Households and Families* (The Stationery Office 2012) 22.

65 Fran McGinnity et al., *Winners and Losers? The Equality Impact of the Great Recession in Ireland* (Equality Authority and ESRI 2014).

66 Central Statistics Office, 'Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2015 Results' (CSO 2017) <<http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/silc/surveyonincomeandlivingconditions2015/>> accessed 2 February 2017.

67 Communication received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the Central Statistics Office, 2 February 2017.

68 One Family, 'One-Parent Family Payment & Income Disregards' (2014) <<http://bit.ly/1guyvYj>> accessed 31 January 2017.

69 Central Statistics Office, 'CSO Statistical Release: Quarterly National Household Survey Quarter 2 2016' (CSO 2016) <<http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/qnhs-fu/qnhs-householdsandfamilyunitsq22016/>> accessed 31 January 2017. In the second quarter of 2016, 56.4 per cent of lone parents were in work compared with 74.4 per cent of couples with children.

70 ibid.

There are more than 14,000 OPFP recipients in employment, and of 14,500 JST recipients, 5,000 recipients work.⁷² The FIS is also an important support for working parents with approximately 27,000 lone parents in receipt of the payment.⁷³

Of the approximately 56,000 lone parents in receipt of OPFP or JST, 34,700 are not engaged in employment and so remain below the income poverty threshold.⁷⁴ The *Social Impact Assessment of Budget 2017* found that non-earning households benefitted most, with non-earning single parent households experiencing a 4.5 per cent increase in their income.⁷⁵ Other measures that have been taken to support working lone parents in receipt of payments include an exemption from the requirement to seek full-time work, making supports available for longer periods of time, targeted engagement with lone parents with children between the ages of seven and 14 years, and ensuring that lone parents in education are not subject to a means-test for the Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) grant.⁷⁶ However, while these supports are welcome they do not restore the cuts made to the One Parent Family Payment during the term of the previous Government. More can be done to fulfil the commitment in *Better Outcome, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework on Children and Young People 2014-2020* 'to reform the One Parent Family Payment so that lone parents have access to a range of supports and services designed to provide them with pathways to work while acknowledging their caring responsibilities'.⁷⁷ This position is reinforced by the European Commission's 2016 Country Specific Recommendations for Ireland which recommended that the Government '[e]xpand and accelerate the implementation of activation policies to increase the work intensity of households and address the poverty risk of children. Pursue measures to incentivise employment by tapering the withdrawal of benefits and supplementary payments'.⁷⁸ Further measures to address the social housing needs of lone parents experiencing homelessness should be prioritised alongside targeted measures to increase access to affordable childcare which have been proposed.

71 M. Millar and R. Crosse *Lone Parents and Activation, What Works and Why: A Review of the International Evidence in the Irish Context* (The UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, National University of Ireland, Galway 2016) 32.

72 Communication received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the Department of Social Protection, 23 January 2017.

73 *ibid.*

74 Communication received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the Department of Social Protection, 8 July 2016.

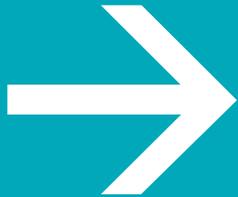
75 Department of Social Protection 'Social impact assessment of the welfare and income tax measures in Budget 2017' (November 2016) <<https://www.welfare.ie/en/downloads/SocialImpact2017.pdf>> accessed 31 January 2017.

76 Communication received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the Department of Social Protection, 23 January 2017.

77 Department of Children and Youth Affairs, *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020* (DCYA 2014) 93.

Parental Leave and Income Supports

Immediate Actions for 2017



CONTINUE TO INCREASE PAID PARENTAL LEAVE IN THE FIRST YEAR OF A CHILD'S LIFE.

Work towards introducing one years' paid parental leave, which could be taken after maternity leave by either parent. This would allow a parent and child to spend the first 12 months at home, in line with the recommendations of the 2015 *Report of the Inter-Departmental Group on Childcare*.

DEVELOP THE WORKING FAMILY PAYMENT IN ADVANCE OF BUDGET 2018.

Develop the Working Family Payment and consult with relevant stakeholders to ensure that it is an effective targeted payment that will help to alleviate family and child poverty.

RESTORE THE INCOME DISREGARD FOR ONE PARENT FAMILY PAYMENT AND JOBSEEKERS' PAYMENTS FOR LONE PARENTS.

Increase the income disregard to its pre-recession level of €146.50 per week for the One Parent Family Payment, the Jobseekers Transition Payment and for lone parents in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance to support lone parents to take up employment.

1.3

Prevention and Early Intervention

GOVERNMENT COMMITMENT

A Programme for a Partnership Government commits to:

- > Tackle child poverty by increasing community-based early intervention programmes, such as the ABC Programme.



Progress: Steady

- > Ensure the sharing and implementation of learnings from such programmes.



Progress: Slow

- > Establish a dedicated Prevention and Early Intervention Unit in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform/Finance in the first 100 days.



Progress: Good

‘Prevention and Early Intervention’ receives a ‘C+’ grade in *Report Card 2017*. This grade reflects steps taken towards the establishment of a Prevention and Early Intervention Unit in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. It also reflects the new direction taken by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs to replace reactive intervention with a community-based prevention and early intervention approach for children experiencing poverty and disadvantage. However, progress has been slow in relation to sharing evidence-based learning to child and family services.

Every child has the right to survival and development.⁷⁹ The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child recognises that prevention and intervention strategies during early childhood have the potential to impact positively on young children’s current well-being and future prospects.⁸⁰ Prevention is defined as stopping a problem from happening in the first place; early intervention means acting at the first signs of trouble; while treatment means responding once what could go wrong, has gone wrong.⁸¹ The UN Committee requires that States take all possible measures to improve perinatal care for mothers/ babies, reduce infant and child mortality, as well as create conditions that promote the well-being of all young children during this critical phase of their lives.⁸²

78 Council of the European Union, *Recommendation for a Council Recommendation on the 2016 national reform programme of Ireland and delivering a Council opinion on the 2016 stability programme of Ireland* (European Commission 2016) 10.

79 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (20 November 1989) 1577 UNTS 3 (UNCRC) Art 6.

80 UNCRC ‘General Comment No.7: Implementing child rights in early childhood’ (2006) UN Doc CRC/C/G/GC/7/Rev.1 para 8.

Young children in difficult circumstances often face a violation of their rights in early childhood, for example in cases of abuse and neglect and parental substance abuse.⁸³ They are especially vulnerable to the harm caused by unreliable, inconsistent relationships with parents and caregivers, growing up in extreme poverty and deprivation, or being surrounded by conflict and violence.⁸⁴ The realisation of interdependent children's rights requires the provision of appropriate assistance and resources to their parents or guardians responsible for their care.⁸⁵ The UN Committee has highlighted that 'underinvestment in children in their early years can be detrimental to cognitive development and can reinforce existing deprivations, inequalities and intergenerational poverty'.⁸⁶ Rights-based, coordinated, multi-sectoral strategies should be developed to ensure that children's best interests inform service planning and provision. These should be based around a comprehensive framework for early childhood services, provisions and facilities, backed up by an information and monitoring system.⁸⁷

Universal prevention and early intervention programmes for children are currently delivered through, for example, immunisation, primary education, prenatal and infant programmes, to positive effect for child outcomes.⁸⁸ However, there is a social gradient to child outcomes in Ireland⁸⁹ impacting health and wellbeing in childhood and over the lifecycle.⁹⁰ The Government-funded national longitudinal study on children's lives, *Growing Up in Ireland* suggests that much of the variation in child outcomes may be associated with a family's economic, educational and social resources, migrant status, a child's special education needs or a disability.⁹¹

International evidence suggests that prevention and early intervention approaches achieve much better results for children than later intervention, and can reduce the need for costly less effective interventions later in life.⁹² Yet only 20 per cent of all of Ireland's public spending on children and families goes towards early childhood (ages 0-5), with 37 per cent to the middle years (6-11), and 44 per cent to the later years (12-17).⁹³ The change of approach outlined in *A Programme for a Partnership Government* is welcome as it seeks to move away from 'expensive reactive interventions to proactive supports and long term planning starting from birth', and to intervene early in the areas of health, childcare, education and youth crime.⁹⁴

International evidence suggests that prevention and early intervention approaches achieve much better results for children than later intervention, and can reduce the need for costly less effective interventions later in life.

Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020 identifies prevention and early intervention as a transformational goal. It commits to implementing the Area Based Childhood (ABC) Programme as a way to address the impact of child poverty and to improve child outcomes. *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* aims

81 Michael Little and Sonia Sodha, *Prevention and Early Intervention in Children's Services* (NESTA 2012) 3.

82 UNCRC 'General Comment No.7: Implementing child rights in early childhood' (2006) UN Doc CRC/C/G/GC/7/Rev.1 para 10.

83 *ibid* para 36.

84 *ibid* para 36.

85 *ibid* para 31.

86 UNCRC 'General Comment No. 19 on public budgeting for the realization of children's rights (art. 4)' (2016) UN Doc CRC/C/GC/19 para 50.

87 UNCRC 'General Comment No.7: Implementing child rights in early childhood' (2006) UN Doc CRC/C/G/GC/7/Rev.1 para 22.

88 For example, in the mid-1940s about 500 children died every year in Ireland of vaccine preventable diseases (measles, whooping cough, diphtheria, tuberculosis and polio). Today's death rate figure for these illnesses is zero. Deborah Condon, 'Pre-immunisation: Ireland in the Bad Old days', *Irish Health* (3 May 2011) <<http://www.irishhealth.com/article.html?id=19092>> accessed 6 February 2017.

89 Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, *Growing Up in Ireland – Infant Cohort Key Finding No. 1 Pregnancy and Birth*, (DCYA 2011) <<http://bit.ly/2jEAz5S>> accessed 6 February 2017.

90 *ibid*.

91 James Williams, Elizabeth Nixon, Emer Smyth and Dorothy Watson, 'Concluding Observations', James Williams, Elizabeth Nixon, Emer Smyth and Dorothy Watson (eds.) *Cherishing All the Children Equally? Ireland 100 Years on From the Easter Rising* (Economic and Social Research Institute 2016) 295.

92 Prevention and Early Intervention Network, 'The Case for Prevention and Early Intervention' (PEIN 2014) <www.pein.ie/images/uploads/docs/The_Case_for_Prevention_and_Early_Intervention_April_2014.pdf> accessed 7 February 2017, 3.

93 Start Strong, *The Economics of Children's Early Years Early Care and Education in Ireland: Costs and Benefits* (Start Strong 2012) 5.

94 Department of the Taoiseach, *A Programme for a Partnership Government* (Department of the Taoiseach 2016) 80.

to 'mainstream the learning from the programme to services throughout the country'.⁹⁵

Community-based Early Intervention Programmes:

Since 2004, the Government and The Atlantic Philanthropies have co-funded major targeted investments in evidence-informed prevention and early intervention services and programmes.⁹⁶ Between 2013 and 2017, €34 million was invested in the ABC Programme, which funded initiatives to improve outcomes for children and families in 13 urban areas of disadvantage.⁹⁷ The initiatives, led by consortia of statutory and voluntary agencies, aim to improve outcomes for children by intervening from the pre-natal stage to 18 years in the lives of children and their parents in a range of areas. These include services that provide assistance for family support, youth mental health, quality early years practice, literacy and numeracy, ante-natal care and education, social and emotional wellbeing⁹⁸ and restorative practice.⁹⁹ The ABC Programme facilitates coordination and interagency collaboration to ensure that services are timely, accessible, and have the potential to be mainstreamed.¹⁰⁰

The Atlantic Philanthropies completed its grant-making in 2016.¹⁰¹ A nationwide ABC Programme evaluation framework will provide both individual and aggregated data on the extent to which ABC changed child and family outcomes, the progress made in implementing evidenced-informed programmes and approaches, and cost-benefit analysis.¹⁰²

Budget 2017 extended Government funding to maintain the 13 ABC sites in 2017.¹⁰³ This is to provide the ABC Programme sites with additional opportunities

to evaluate their activities, focus on mainstreaming the interventions and programmes that make a real difference to children's lives, and bring the conclusion of the ABC Programme closer in line with the expected delivery of the national evaluation report in 2018.¹⁰⁴ The Department of Children and Youth Affairs is currently reviewing the emerging learning on service design and implementation from the ABC Programme. It plans to use the learning and the national evaluation findings to design future community-based prevention and early intervention initiatives to meet the Government's commitment.¹⁰⁵



CHILDREN SUPPORTED IN ABC PROGRAMMES

Sharing and Implementing Learning: The Department of Children and Youth Affairs is developing the Quality and Capacity Building Initiative (QCBI), funded by the Dormant Accounts Funding Scheme, as a co-ordinated approach to enhance capacity, knowledge and quality in prevention and early intervention for children, young people and their families.¹⁰⁶ It aims to link the learning arising from local programmes like the ABC Programme

- 95 Department of Children and Youth Affairs, *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People* (DCYA 2014) Commitment 4.1, 93.
- 96 Department of Children and Youth Affairs, *Overview of the Quality and Capacity Building Initiative: Enhancing Prevention and Early Intervention for Children and Young People* (DCYA November 2016).
- 97 Centre for Effective Services, 'The Area Based Childhood Programme 2013-2017' <www.effectiveservices.org/downloads/ABC-Programme-2pager_April2016.pdf> accessed 2 February 2017. 16,459 children were supported through the ABC Programmes in 2016. Communication received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the Prevention and Early Intervention Network, 25 January 2017.
- 98 Young Ballymun <http://www.youngballymun.org/our_work/incredible_years/> accessed 19 January 2017.
- 99 Childhood Development Initiative, 'Restorative Practice' <<http://twcdi.ie/our-programmes/restorative-practice>> accessed 19 January 2017.
- 100 Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 'ABC Overview' <<http://bit.ly/2jZZzEU>> accessed 24 January 2017.
- 101 The Atlantic Philanthropies, 'Investing in a Better Future for All' <www.atlanticphilanthropies.org/our-story> accessed 19 January 2017.
- 102 Children's Rights Alliance, *Report Card 2016* (Children's Rights Alliance 2016) 79.
- 103 Government of Ireland, *A Programme for a Partnership Government* (Government Publications 2016) 13.
- 104 Communication received by Children's Rights Alliance from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2 February 2017.
- 105 *ibid.*
- 106 *ibid.*

to national programmes such as Tusla's Prevention Partnership and Family Support Programme¹⁰⁷ and the Health Service Executive's Nurture Programme.¹⁰⁸ The QCBI will enhance access and use of data through a central 'datahub', while also supporting the collection, collation and assessment of evidence to inform interventions and create an online two-way learning platform for policymakers, providers and practitioners. The QCBI also aims to enhance the capacity and skills development of stakeholders in the appraisal and application of evidence-informed approaches. It will align and improve quality systems and standards to mainstream developments and establish quality benchmarks in prevention and early intervention.

Universal prevention and early intervention programmes for children are currently delivered through, for example, immunisation, primary education, prenatal and infant programmes, to positive effect for child outcomes. However, there is a social gradient to child outcomes in Ireland impacting health and wellbeing in childhood and over the lifecycle.

The QCBI implementation will be overseen by an implementation group comprising key statutory and non-statutory organisations and experts, and specific working groups.¹⁰⁹ In 2017, the QCBI, in partnership with Tusla, will develop a draft datahub and pilot a training course to utilise it for outcome-based multi-agency planning, with an initial focus on Children and Young People's Services Committees. Specific outputs will be

agreed following consultation and agreement within the governance structures.¹¹⁰

Prevention and Early Intervention Unit: The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform is in the process of establishing a new Prevention and Early Intervention Unit (PEIU). To date, the Department has scoped the work of the Unit and is currently recruiting staff.¹¹¹ The PEIU will operate as an evaluation unit in relation to prevention and early intervention models in respect of children and also older people with chronic conditions.¹¹² It will provide added value to the delivery of prevention and early intervention services across sectors through the provision of research and analysis. The PEIU will establish and manage inter-departmental/agency and stakeholder consultation and interaction.¹¹³ A key role of the Unit is monitoring departmental expenditure on prevention and early intervention, making associated recommendations and reporting to relevant Oireachtas Committees.¹¹⁴ The role of the PEIU to enhance information and accountability in relation to PEI policy, operation and outcomes is welcome, as is the consultative and interactive approach to the development and operation of the Unit.

107 The Prevention, Partnership and Family Support Programme (2015 – 2018) aims to embed early intervention and prevention within Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, by building sustainable intellectual capacity and person power within Tusla and partner organisations to perform early intervention work. It is funded by a once-off non-discretionary grant of €8.3 million from The Atlantic Philanthropies.

108 Communication received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2 February 2017. Nurture's purpose is to improve the information and professional supports provided to parents during pregnancy and the first three years of their baby's life. It's a partnership between the Health Service Executive, the Atlantic Philanthropies, the Katharine Howard Foundation and the Centre for Effective Services.

109 Communication received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2 February 2017.

110 *ibid.*

111 Communication received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, 3 February 2017.

112 *ibid.*

113 *ibid.*

114 *ibid.*

Prevention and Early Intervention

Immediate Actions for 2017



DEVELOP A CLEARLY-RESOURCED PLAN TO MAINSTREAM AREA-BASED CHILDHOOD PROGRAMME SERVICES AND INITIATIVES WHERE EVIDENCE DEMONSTRATES THAT THEY HAVE MADE A POSITIVE IMPACT ON THE LIVES OF CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES.

Where services are making a clear difference for children and their families, particularly in the absence of other service provision, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs should ensure continuity of services and interventions through mainstreaming learning and activities.

DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT THE QCBI PROCESS IN 2017 TO TRANSFER THE LEARNING FROM ABC AND OTHER PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION PROGRAMMES TO MAINSTREAM CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES.

The Quality and Capacity Building Initiative should be progressed in 2017 to ensure that the learning at local level is integrated in national programmes. The datahub must be developed and piloted to ensure that learning from the local level informs existing and future national programmes.

FINALISE RECRUITMENT FOR THE PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION UNIT IN EARLY 2017 AND ENSURE THAT ITS WORK IS INFORMED BY THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILD PRINCIPLE, IN PARTICULAR IN ITS ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC SPENDING AND ITS DECISION MAKING.

The work of the Prevention and Early Intervention Unit should inform decisions on prevention and early intervention spending in Budget 2018. The Unit's analysis should make the case for increased investment on evidence-based initiatives and programmes to improve child outcomes through public spending.