

Pre-Budget 2020 Submission to the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection

14 June 2019



Founded in 1995, the Children's Rights Alliance unites over 100 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. Current members include:

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Ag Eisteacht
Alcohol Action Ireland
Amnesty International Ireland
An Cosán
ASH Ireland
Assoc. for Criminal Justice Research and Development (ACJRD)
Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland (ASTI)
ATD Fourth World – Ireland Ltd
Atheist Ireland
Autism Network Ireland
Barnardos
Barretstown Camp
Bedford Row Family Project
BeLonG To Youth Services
Care Leavers' Network
Catholic Guides of Ireland
Child Care Law Reporting Project
Childhood Development Initiative
Children in Hospital Ireland
COPE Galway
Cork Life Centre
Crosscare
Cybersafe
Dental Health Foundation of Ireland
Department of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy, UCC
Disability Federation of Ireland
Down Syndrome Ireland
Dublin Rape Crisis Centre
Early Childhood Ireland
Educate Together
EPIC
Extern Ireland
Focus Ireland
Foróige
Future Voices Ireland
Gaelscoileanna Teo
Good Shepherd Cork
Home-Start National Office
Immigrant Council of Ireland
Inclusion Ireland
Independent Hospitals Association of Ireland
Institute of Guidance Counsellors
Irish Aftercare Network
Irish Association for Infant Mental Health
Irish Association of Social Workers
Irish Centre for Human Rights, NUI Galway
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 (IYF)
Jack & Jill Children's Foundation
Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice
Jigsaw
Kids' Own Publishing Partnership
Lifestart National Office
Mecpaths
Mental Health Reform
Mercy Law Resource Centre
Migrant Rights Centre Ireland
Mothers' Union
Mounttown Neighbourhood Youth and Family Project
Museum of Childhood Project
MyMind
National Childhood Network
National Organisation for the Treatment of Abusers (NOTA)
National Parents Council Post Primary
National Parents Council Primary
National Youth Council of Ireland
Novas
One Family
One in Four
Parentstop
Pavee Point
Peter McVerry Trust
Rainbows Ireland
Rape Crisis Network Ireland (RCNI)
Realt Beag
Respond Housing
SAFE Ireland
Saoirse Housing Association
SAOL Beag Children's Centre
Scouting Ireland
School of Education UCD
Sexual Violence Centre Cork
Simon Communities of Ireland
Social Care Ireland
Society of St. Vincent de Paul
Sonas Domestic Violence Charity
Special Needs Parents Association
SPHE Network
SpunOut.ie
St. Nicholas Montessori College
St. Nicholas Montessori Teachers' Association
St. Patrick's Mental Health Services
Step by Step Child & Family Project
Suas Educational Development
Teachers' Union of Ireland
Terenure Rugby Football Club
The Ark, A Cultural Centre for Children
The Prevention and Early Intervention Network
The UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway
Traveller Visibility Group Ltd
Treoir
UNICEF Ireland
youngballymun
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

1. Introduction

The Children's Rights Alliance welcomes the opportunity to share its views with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection with regard to provision for children under Budget 2020. The Alliance unites over 100 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.

Ireland has an international obligation under Article 27 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to 'recognize the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development' and that States

... shall 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.¹

Budget 2020 should seek to maintain an appropriate balance between universal policies, aimed at promoting the well-being of all children, and targeted approaches, aimed at supporting the most disadvantaged. In particular Budget 2020 should ensure a focus on children who face an increased risk due to multiple disadvantage. The Children's Rights Alliance calls on the Government to prioritise investment in services over tax cuts in Budget 2020.

1 Convention on the Rights of the Child (adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession on 20 November 1989) 1577 UNTS 3 (UNCRC). Ireland ratified the Convention in 1992.

2. Summary of Budget 2020 Asks

School Meals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enable schools and non-formal educational settings to provide a hot nutritious meal to every child by establishing a small grants scheme to put in place kitchen or cooking facilities. To reach more children in need, early years and youth work settings should have access to enhanced, appropriate funding under the existing School Meals Programme.
Parental Leave	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase individual paid parental leave entitlement by two weeks in Budget 2020 in line with the action set out in the <i>First Five</i> Implementation Plan.
Children aged over 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To help offset the higher costs faced by families with older children, increase the QCI rate for older children by €5 to €42 per week. The rate of the Back to Work Family Dividend should also be increased by the same amount to support families moving into employment.
Income Disregard for Lone Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restore the value of the weekly income disregard to 2011 levels, in line with increased national minimum wage and inflation rates, to €165.62 for all lone parents receiving the One Parent Family Payment, Jobseekers Transitional Payment and Jobseekers Allowance.
Child Benefit for Older Post-Primary Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restore Child Benefit to those aged 18 and over in full time second level education.
Refundable Tax Credits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce refundable tax credits for families in work on a low income.
Social Protection for Children living in Direct Provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a review to assess the specific social protection needs of children living in the Direct Provision system and make recommendations on how to alleviate poverty for these children.

3. Our Budget 2020 Asks

a. School Meals

Budget 2020 Ask: Enable schools and non-formal educational settings to provide a hot nutritious meal to every child by establishing a small grants scheme to put in place kitchen or cooking facilities. To reach more children in need, early years and youth work settings should have access to enhanced, appropriate funding under the existing School Meals Programme.

Rationale: Just over one in ten households with children in Ireland experience food poverty, meaning almost 80,000 households with children under 18 years² cannot afford a meal with meat or vegetarian equivalent every other day, are unable to afford a weekly roast dinner or miss one substantial meal.³ Schools provide a way to reach children, families and the surrounding community.⁴ They provide a social environment where children can access and enjoy food, without financial constraints.⁵ In the UK, free school meals have resulted in educational achievement gains, especially among those from disadvantaged backgrounds.⁶ The universal approach helps to counter stigma to ensure take-up of school meals and ensures that children who are living in poverty but not in disadvantaged areas can be reached.⁷

b. Parental Leave

Budget 2020 Ask: Increase individual paid parental leave entitlement by two weeks in Budget 2020 in line with the action set out in the *First Five* Implementation Plan.

Estimated Cost: €32 million

Rationale: The Budget 2019 announcement to introduce two weeks paid parental leave for each parent is an important milestone. The Parental Leave Scheme, due to commence in November 2019,⁸ will enable both parents to access two weeks of parental leave paid at the same rate as maternity and paternity benefit during the first year of their child's life.⁹ Leave under the scheme will be non-transferable between parents in recognition of the equal role a father has to play in their child's life¹⁰ and to encourage both parents to take time off work to care for their children.¹¹ When combined with maternity and paternity benefit, parents will be supported to care for their children at home for the first 30 to 32 weeks of a child's life.¹² The *First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019 - 2028* committed to introduce an individual entitlement of seven weeks of paid parental leave per parent by 2021.¹³ In 2019, an estimated 2,700

2 Calculated using Central Statistics Office, *Census 2016 Profile 4 – Households and Families* (2017 CSO).

3 Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, *Social Inclusion Monitor 2016*, <<https://www.welfare.ie/en/downloads/SIM2016.pdf>> accessed 3 May 2019.

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

5 *ibid.*

6 Emer Smyth, Selina McCoy, Gillian Kingston, *Learning from the Evaluation of DEIS* (ESRI 2015).

7 Scottish Parliament, 'Free school meals consultation' (2017) <http://www.parliament.scot/S2_MembersBills/Draft%20proposals/schoolMeals-consult.pdf> accessed 7 February 2019.

8 Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Regina Doherty TD, Written Answers, Parental Leave, 6 November 2018 [45579/18].

9 Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP), 'Minister Doherty Announces Budget Package to Deliver Increases Across Core Welfare Payments and Specifically Impact on Children in Need' <<https://bit.ly/2DjH7mA>> accessed 8 November 2018.

10 Communication received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the DEASP, 9 January 2019.

11 Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Regina Doherty TD, Written Answers, Parental Leave, 6 November 2018 [44849/18].

12 Maternity benefit runs for 26 weeks, alongside two weeks for paternity benefit and 2 weeks per parent of paid parental leave.

13 Government of Ireland, *First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019 – 2028*, (DCYA 2018) Strategic Action 1.1.

recipients are expected to avail of parental leave benefit at a cost of €1.5 million.¹⁴ In a full year, 60,000 people are expected to receive the benefit at the cost of €32 million.¹⁵

c. Children over the age of 12

Budget 2020 Ask: To help offset the higher costs faced by families with older children, increase the QCI rate for older children by €5 to €42 per week. The rate of the Back to Work Family Dividend should also be increased by the same amount to support families moving into employment.

Estimated Cost: The differentiation between older and younger children in receipt of QCI came into effect in March 2019 so statistics are not yet available to calculate the estimated cost. While this means a full year of data will not be available, the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection will have access to data on which to base costings ahead of Budget 2020 in October 2019.

Rationale: The Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) Research has consistently identified older children as having additional and distinct needs in comparison to younger children.¹⁶ In 2019, it notes that deep inadequacy exists exclusively in households headed by one adult or households with older children.¹⁷ The minimum needs of children aged 12 and over, cost more than €120 per week, which is 63 per cent more expensive than the minimum needs of younger children.¹⁸ Additional costs relating to food, clothing, personal care, social inclusion and second level education account for much of the difference. The rate of consistent poverty is also higher among older children. The decision to introduce a higher rate of Qualified Child Increase for older children in Budget 2019 was very positive and must be built upon in Budget 2020.

d. Income Disregard for Lone Parents

Budget 2020 Ask: Restore the value of the weekly income disregard to 2011 levels, in line with increased national minimum wage and inflation rates, to €165.62 for all lone parents receiving the One Parent Family Payment, Jobseekers Transitional Payment and Jobseekers Allowance.

Estimated Cost: €13 million.

Rationale: The at-risk-of poverty rate among lone parents in employment has doubled between 2012 and 2017.¹⁹ This is a worrying trend which should be monitored, given the disproportionately high rates of child poverty among one-parent families. The increase in the income disregard for the One Parent Family Payment and Jobseekers Transition Payment in Budget 2019 was most welcome and should be built on further. Budget 2020 should increase the earnings disregard to €165.62 per week, in order to restore it to 2011 levels in terms of hours worked in National Minimum Wage employment.

e. Child Benefit for Older Post Primary Students

Budget 2020 Ask: Restore Child Benefit to those aged 18 and over in full time second level education.

Estimated Cost: €80 million

14 Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Regina Doherty TD, Written Answers, Parental Leave Expenditure, 13 November 2018 [46883/18].

15 *ibid.*

16 Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice, *MESL 2019: Update Report*, (VPSJ 2019) 15.

17 *ibid.* 2.

18 *ibid.* 15.

19 SVP, *Working, Parenting, Struggling? An analysis of the employment and living conditions of one parent families in Ireland* (SVP 2019) 35.

Rationale: Child Benefit is currently linked to participation in full time education and training for children aged 16 and 17. There were almost 27,000 young people aged 18 or 19 in post-primary education in 2017/2018.²⁰ Since January 2010, Child Benefit is no longer payable in respect of young people aged 18 years in full-time second level education.²¹ This is despite the higher costs of older children generally, extra costs such as Leaving Certificate examination fees which families may be enduring and the fact that children are starting and finishing school at an older age. SVP and One Family are aware of cases where these costs have prevented a young person from completing their second level education. The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection has estimated that this would cost in the region of €80 million.²²

f. Refundable Tax Credits

Budget 2020 Ask: Introduce refundable tax credits for families in work on a low income.

Estimated Cost: €142 million.

Rationale: Social Justice Ireland has set out detailed proposals for introducing a system of refundable tax credits to support households in low paid employment.²³ As proposed, the benefits of a refundable tax credit system would accrue mainly to workers earning between €15,000 and €25,000, with most individuals receiving a refund of €15-€19 per week. This proposal allows the role of the tax system to be considered when addressing child poverty, with almost 40 percent of refunds going to low income households in employment who live below the poverty line.²⁴ This approach also supports the Government's policy of ensuring that work pays and is the route out of poverty.

g. Social Protection for Children living in Direct Provision

Budget 2020 Ask: Conduct a review to assess the specific social protection needs of children living in the Direct Provision system and make recommendations on how to alleviate poverty for these children.

Estimated Cost: No budget cost

Rationale: Children and young people in Direct Provision have spoken about the shame they have felt because they cannot afford to go to swimming lessons, on school trips or to birthday parties. Children living in Direct Provision centres are at a high risk of consistent poverty although they are not counted in the official poverty statistics.

Budget 2019 increased the rate of the weekly Direct Provision allowance for children, increasing it from €21.60 to €29.80 in line with the McMahon Report recommendation.²⁵ This is a positive measure and was the third increase in less than three years to the payment. However, at the time of the McMahon report, the recommendation equated to the rate of Qualified Child Increase (QCI). In the intervening years the Qualified Child Increase rate has been increased to €34 (children under the age of 12) and €37 (children over the age of 12) for children of other social welfare recipients, the

20 Statistics received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the Department of Education and Skills, 13 June 2019.

21 Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, 'Changes in Child Benefit (CB)' <<https://bit.ly/2wnpK01>> accessed 28 May 2019.

22 Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Regina Doherty TD, Written Answers, Question to Employment, 11 June 2019 [23308/19].

23 Social Justice Ireland 'Refundable Tax Credits needed to help the working poor' (SJI 2019) <<https://bit.ly/2MasYi4>> accessed 27 May 2019.

24 *ibid.*

25 At the time of the McMahon report, the recommendation equated to the rate of Qualified Child Increase (QCI). Notably, Budget 2019 increased the Qualified Child Increase rate to €34 (children under the age of 12) and €37 (children over the age of 12) for children of other social welfare recipients. Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, 'Budget 2019' accessed 27 November 2018.

increase was not extended to children in Direct Provision.²⁶ Children in Direct Provision can also not access other social welfare supports like Child Benefit. The introduction of the right to work for people in the protection process after a set period of time means that some parents may have access to supports like the Working Family Payment to supplement a low income from employment but it is not clear how many people, if any, are receiving these types of supports.

26 *ibid.*

8 | Children's Rights Alliance (2019) *Pre-Budget 2020 Submission to the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection*