

Pre-Budget 2018 Submission

July 2017



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.

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Ag Eisteacht
Alcohol Action Ireland
Alliance Against Cutbacks in Education
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
Dun Laoghaire Refugee Project
Early Childhood Ireland
Educate Together
EPIC
EQUATE
Extern Ireland
Focus Ireland
Foróige
Future Voices Ireland
Gaelscoileanna Teo
GLEN- the LGBTI equality network
Immigrant Council of Ireland
Inclusion Ireland
Independent Hospitals Association of Ireland
Institute of Community Health Nursing
Institute of Guidance Counsellors
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
Law Centre for Children and Young People
Lifestart National Office
Mental Health Reform
Migrant Rights Centre Ireland
Mounttown Neighbourhood Youth and Family 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
One Family
One in Four
Parentstop
Pavee Point
Peter McVerry Trust
Rape Crisis Network Ireland (RCNI)
Realt Beag
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
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

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Introduction



Who we are

The Children's Rights Alliance unites over 100 organisations, working together to make Ireland one of the best places in the world to be a child. We aim to improve the lives of all children and young people by campaigning for the full implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, through securing the necessary changes in Ireland's laws, policies and services.

Introduction

The Children's Rights Alliance welcomes the opportunity to submit its views in relation to the development of Budget 2018.

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 2018 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 2018 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 2018.

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.

Summary of Key Recommendations

Area	Recommendations	Responsible Department
Child Rights Budgeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proof all Budget 2018 proposals for their impact on children’s rights, with a particular focus on preventing and alleviating child poverty and meeting the 2020 target. • Provide a social impact assessment of the potential impact of the Department’s budgetary proposals on children’s rights in advance of decisions being made. • Develop a mechanism to track and analyse expenditure on children and young people across departments and agencies. This should include the publication of disaggregated departmental Votes to indicate the proportion of the budget devoted to expenditure on children. 	All
Measures to Address Child Poverty	<p><i>Child and Family Income Supports</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce a higher rate for the Qualified Child Increase for families with children over the age of 12 years of €34.80 per week, in recognition of the higher costs faced by families with older children. • Restore the rate of the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance to the 2011 level of €305 for children over 12, and to €200 for children under 12. <hr/> <p><i>Food Poverty</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide funding for a pilot extension of the School Meals Programme to youth services, early years settings and afterschool programmes to address issues of food poverty for children and young people availing of those services. [DCYA/DES/DSP] 	DSP
Direct Provision Payment for Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the weekly payment for children in Direct Provision to the amount recommended by the Working Group on the Protection Process by a further €8.20 to €29.80. 	DJE/DSP

1. Child Rights Budgeting

Under Article 4 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Ireland has an obligation to take all appropriate legislative and administrative measures to ensure that children's rights are implemented. This includes prioritising children 'through effective, efficient, equitable, transparent and sustainable public budget decision-making'.² Prioritising children's rights in budgets contributes to 'long-lasting positive impacts on future economic growth, sustainable and inclusive development, and social cohesion'.³

Economic policies are never neutral in their effect on children's rights.⁴ The Committee on the Rights of the Child has recommended that children be made visible in budgets as:

No State can tell whether it is fulfilling children's economic, social and cultural rights 'to the maximum extent of ... available resources' ... unless it can identify the proportion of national and other budgets allocated to the social sector and, within that, to children, both directly and indirectly.⁵

The national Budget in Ireland is not disaggregated to show the proportion of the budget devoted to expenditure on children. In 2014, the Government committed to explore the development of a mechanism to track and analyse expenditure on children across departments, agencies and non-governmental organisations.⁶ However, this has not yet been put in place. The Committee on the Rights of the Child has recommended that 'reliable, timely, accessible and comprehensive disaggregated information and data in reusable formats on the macroeconomic, budget and child rights situation, both current and projected' is needed for both current and projected expenditure.⁷

It is welcome that the Department of Social Protection publishes social impact assessments following the Budget.⁸ The Department should, however, build on this by conducting and publishing assessments in advance of decisions being made. This model should be replicated by all other government departments whose budgetary decisions have an impact on children.

Recommendations:

- Proof all Budget 2018 proposals for their impact on children's rights, with a particular focus on preventing and alleviating child poverty and meeting the 2020 target.
- Provide a social impact assessment of the potential impact of the Department's budgetary proposals on children's rights in advance of decisions being made.
- Develop a mechanism to track and analyse expenditure on children and young people across departments and agencies. This should include the publication of disaggregated departmental Votes to indicate the proportion of the budget devoted to expenditure on children.

2 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 1.

3 *ibid* para 13.

4 UNCRC 'General Comment No. 5 General Measures of Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child' (2003) UN Doc CRC/GC/2003/5 para. 52.

5 *ibid* para. 51.

6 Department of Children and Youth Affairs, *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020*, Dublin: Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA 2014) 113.

7 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 67.

8 Department of Social Protection *Social impact assessment of the main welfare and tax measures in Budget 2017* (Department of Social Protection 2016).

2. Measures to Address Child Poverty

Every child has the right to a standard of living that is adequate to their development – physical, mental spiritual, moral and social.⁹ 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.¹⁰

The Children’s Rights Alliance is deeply concerned about the unacceptably high number of children living in poverty in Ireland. *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020* (BOBF) commits to lifting over 70,000 children people out of consistent poverty by 2020, a reduction of at least two-thirds on the 2011 level.¹¹ The target has been adjusted to take account of the increase in child poverty since the target was set. The target is now to lift 97,000 children out of consistent poverty by 2020.¹²

In 2015 there was a slight improvement to the rates of consistent poverty for two-parent families in 2015 with a rate of 7.7 per cent down from 8.9 per cent in 2014.¹³ For one parent families, the rate of consistent poverty has increased to 26.2 per cent in 2015 from 25 per cent in 2014. That equates to going without a square meal every other day and not always having enough money to heat the home.

The Children’s Rights Alliance recognises that both investment in public services and well-designed income supports are necessary to progress towards achieving the target to reduce child poverty set out in BOBF. Ireland has a relatively high level of expenditure on children and families, with the majority of this spending in the form of cash and tax supports to families rather than on services.¹⁴ The impact of social transfers in reducing the ‘at risk of poverty rate’ in Budget 2017 was 0.8 per cent.¹⁵ In spite of this high level of spending our child poverty outcomes are poor.¹⁶ The success of our social transfer system in reducing the risk of poverty must now be built upon by investment in public services. The Children’s Rights Alliance proposes that three key areas are prioritised in Budget 2018 to tackle child poverty.

Child and Family Income Supports

The Government commitment on Child Income Supports is to maintain the combined value of child income supports at 33 to 35 per cent of the minimum adult social welfare payment and maximise their effectiveness in reducing child poverty, while continuing to support all parents with the costs of rearing children.¹⁷ The current system of child income supports consists of a universal payment in the form of Child Benefit,¹⁸ combined with means-tested payments for families in receipt of social welfare (Qualified Child Increase) and for families in employment on low incomes (Family Income Supplement and the Back to Work Family Dividend).

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

10 *ibid.*

11 Department of Children and Youth Affairs, *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020* (DCYA 2014) Commitment 4.2. This target includes reducing the higher consistent poverty rate for households with children as compared to non-child households (8.8 per cent compared with 4.2 per cent) and for children as compared to adults (9.3 per cent compared with 6 per cent).

12 Communication received by the Children’s Rights Alliance from the Department of Social Protection, 2 December 2015.

13 Central Statistics Office, *Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2015* (CSO November 2016).

14 Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development, ‘Family benefits public spending (indicator)’ <http://www.oecd.org/els/soc/PF1_1_Public_spending_on_family_benefits_Oct2013.pdf> accessed 16 June 2017.

15 Department of Social Protection, *Social impact assessment of the welfare and income tax measures in Budget 2017* (DSP 2016).

16 Central Statistics Office, *Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2015* (CSO November 2016).

17 Department of Social Protection, *Updated National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2015-2017* (DSP 2016).

18 This is subject to the Habitual Residence Condition so not all parents receive it for their children living in Ireland.

Households with older children, aged between 12 and 17 years of age, are more likely to experience poverty than those with younger children.¹⁹ While social welfare payments meet the greatest proportion of Minimum Essential Standard of Living need for households with younger children, households with adolescent children have the greatest income inadequacy when reliant on social welfare.²⁰ The Children's Rights Alliance recommends that the Qualified Child Increase be amended as it is paid to all social welfare recipients and so is a clear route to target families living in consistent poverty. Given that under the Back to Work Scheme there is a tapered withdrawal of the Qualified Child Increase (QCI), we do not believe that an increase in QCI for older children will act as a work disincentive.

The Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance (BSCFA), a means-tested social welfare payment, is the only targeted payment dedicated to supporting parents with school costs by providing assistance to meet school uniform and footwear costs.²¹ The average cost in 2016 was between €140 and €265 per child.²² In 2016, the BSCFA cost €41.4 million and benefited 281,000 children.²³

From July 2017, the BSCFA is €125 for a child in primary school and €250 for a child in secondary school.²⁴ While we welcome the recent increase announced in June, the rates still fall short of average costs.

Recommendations:

- Introduce a higher rate for the Qualified Child Increase for families with children over the age of 12 years of €34.80 per week, in recognition of the higher costs faced by families with older children. [DSP]
- Restore the rate of the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance to the 2011 level of €305 for children over 12, and to €200 for children under 12. [DSP]

Food Poverty

Clear health inequalities exist between children who live in disadvantaged areas and the general population.²⁵ Food poverty is one of the driving forces behind higher rates of obesity and ill-health in disadvantaged communities.²⁶ Since 2010, the percentage of people experiencing food poverty in Ireland has risen from 10 to 13.1 per cent.²⁷ Research has found that the rate of social welfare payments and level of earnings based on the minimum wage in Ireland make it difficult to follow a healthy diet.²⁸ Food poverty is contributing to malnutrition, obesity, and poor concentration in school.²⁹ The issue of food poverty is multi-faceted and complex and requires a similar multi-faceted approach across four key areas to tackle food poverty:³⁰ affordability,³¹ accessibility,³² availability³³ and awareness.³⁴

19 Department of Social Protection, *Who are the children living in consistent poverty?* (unpublished communication 2015).

20 Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice, 'Minimum Essential Standard of Living 2017 Update Report' 15 <https://www.budgeting.ie/download/pdf/mesl_2017_update_report.pdf> accessed 16 June 2017.

21 To be eligible for the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance, the applicant (parent or guardian) must be getting certain social welfare benefits or payments for training, employment schemes or adult education and total household income must be below a certain amount see the Citizen's Information website <http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/primary_and_post_primary_education/educational_supports/school_books_sch_eme.html> accessed 16 June 2017.

22 Barnardos, School Costs Survey 2016 < <https://www.barnardos.ie/media-centre/news/latest-news/school-costs-2016-infographic.html>> accessed 16 June 2017.

23 Communication from the Department of Social Protection to the Community and Voluntary Pillar of Social Partnership on 20 July 2016.

24 Department of Social Protection, Varadkar increases Back to School allowance by 25%, (press release) 14 June 2017 <<https://www.welfare.ie/en/pressoffice/Pages/pr140617.aspx>> accessed 16 June 2017.

25 Department of Health, *A Healthy Weight for Ireland: Obesity Policy and Action Plan 2016-2025*, (Stationery Office 2016) 50.

26 Irish Heart Foundation, 'Pre-Budget Submission Investing in children's future health July 2015' <http://www.irishheart.ie/media/pub/advocacy/final_prebudget_submission_2016__childrens_future_health_fund__july_2015_3.pdf> accessed 30 January 2017.

27 Department of Social Protection, *Social Inclusion Monitor 2014* (Department of Social Protection 2016).

28 B. MacMahon, and G. Weld, *The cost of a minimum essential food basket in the Republic of Ireland: Study for six household types* (Safefood 2015) 63.

29 Healthy Food for All, *Pre-Budget Submission 2014*, (Healthy Food for All 2013).

30 Healthy Food for All Initiative, 'Food Poverty' <<http://healthyfoodforall.com/food-poverty/>> accessed 30 January 2017.

The School Meals Programme, funded through the Department of Social Protection, continues to be a positive way of ensuring regular food services for disadvantaged school children. In 2016, over 200,000 children benefitted from this programme at a cost of €4.2 million.³⁵ An additional €5.7 million was allocated to the School Meals Programme for 2017.³⁶ However, unlike in other European countries, Ireland has a poor infrastructure of kitchen facilities in schools.³⁷ The current programme does not cover the cost of kitchen equipment, facilities or staff costs requiring schools to pay from their core budget or charge students to implement the programme.³⁸

The School Meals Programme is not universal, an application process is in place and priority is given to schools which are part of the DEIS initiative.³⁹ However, the additional funding provided in Budget 2017 is expected to allow for some extension of the scheme to breakfast clubs in non-DEIS schools from September 2017.⁴⁰ While this is welcome more needs to be done to address food poverty. The risk of low income families experiencing food poverty is related to the age of their children, with expenditure greatest for infants (who have specific dietary requirements) or teenagers (who need to consume more food).⁴¹ The settings where children most at risk of experiencing food poverty are, early years settings for young children and youth services for teenagers, do not form part of the School Meals Programme. A pilot scheme should be introduced in youth services, early years settings and afterschool programmes as a positive way of ensuring regular and healthy food services for disadvantaged children and young people availing of those services.

Recommendations:

- Provide funding for a pilot extension of the School Meals Programme to youth services, early years settings and afterschool programmes to address issues of food poverty for children and young people availing of those services. [DCYA/DES/DSP]

31 Healthy Food for All Initiative, 'Healthy Food Basket' <<http://healthyfoodforall.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/healthy-food-basket-summary-sheet-roi-final.pdf>> accessed 30 January 2017.

32 This is a critical and challenging issue, as even though low income families may know about choosing healthier options, their scope to do so is limited by physical as well as financial constraints. People living in areas with a lack of local shops and supermarkets, or limited transport options can mean they are unable to buy and bring food home.

33 Most particularly for poor families living in disadvantaged areas, the availability of fresh and healthy food options can be an issue. In these areas, families are often reliant on local convenience stores, rather than large supermarkets. Fresh foods have shorter shelf lives, with higher storage costs, and lower profit margins and therefore smaller local shops may not stock a full range of fresh produce.

34 What constitutes 'healthy eating' can be confusing: there's a lot of misinformation about nutrition and healthy eating in the media, which can be difficult to negotiate for even the best informed consumers. For people who never learned the basics of food preparation and cooking – whether in school or at home – and/or have literacy difficulties, the challenge can be particularly acute. Families who are both income and time poor need much more support about how to make healthy, nutritious and economical food choices.

35 Communication received by the Community and Voluntary Pillar from the Department of Social Protection 24 November 2016.

36 *ibid.*

37 Educational Disadvantage Centre, 'National Strategy Hunger Prevention in Schools' <<https://www4.dcu.ie/edc/hunger-prevention-schools.shtml>> accessed 30 January 2017.

38 Communication received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the Irish Heart Foundation, 20 April 2015.

39 Communication received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the Department of Social Protection, 2 December 2015.

40 Communication received by the Community and Voluntary Pillar from the Department of Social Protection 24 November 2016.

41 B. MacMahon, G. Weld, R. Thornton and M. Collins, *The Cost of a Child: A Consensual Budget Standards Study Examining the Direct Cost of a Child Across Childhood* (Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice 2012) 32.

3. Direct Provision Payment for Children

The €6 increase in the child's Direct Provision payment from €15.60 to €21.60 announced in June 2017 was a welcome mid year interim measure towards addressing the poverty and social exclusion experienced by the 1,233 children living in Direct Provision.

However the payment continues to fall short of the recommendation made by the Working Group on the Protection Process to increase the weekly payment to €29.80. Increasing the payment by €8.20 to €29.80 would bring it in line with the Increase for Qualified Child (IQC) payment which is an extra allowance for children whose parents are in receipt of a social welfare payment.

Asylum-seekers are not entitled to receive the Child Benefit payment and are not entitled to work so they have no opportunity to supplement their social welfare payment. This significantly impacts on asylum-seeking children's lives and their integration into Irish society. Research tells us asylum-seeking children living in Direct Provision are an extremely vulnerable group experiencing high rates of poverty and social exclusion.⁴² A recent HIQA report revealed that some asylum-seeking children lack clothes and toys.⁴³

Children in Direct Provision should be treated equally to other children whose parents are in receipt of a social welfare payment and get an extra allowance of €29.80. Like any other child they have the right to an adequate standard of living and should be able to access basic necessities.

Recommendation

- Increase the weekly payment for children in Direct Provision to the amount recommended by the Working Group on the Protection Process by a further €8.20 to €29.80.

Cost of the increase to the payment: €521,487.20

42 Samantha K Arnold, *State Sanctioned Child Poverty and Exclusion* (2012 Irish Refugee Council).

43 Health and Information Quality Authority 'Report on inspection of the child protection and welfare services provided to children living in Direct Provision accommodation under the National Standards for the Protection and Welfare of Children and Section 8(1) (c) of the Health Act 2007' (HIQA 25 May 2015)