



“The challenges facing the families we talked to are heartbreaking. Every single parent wants to give their children the best they can. But the impact of five brutal budgets is pushing them to the limits. Many parents have told us that putting food on the table for their children often means going without food themselves.”

Fergus Finlay, Chief Executive, Barnardos

Chapter 4:

Right to an Adequate Standard of Living

Grade D



In The News

Boost for local children

By Jack Gleeson

PARENTS and young children in Finglas are set to benefit from a new childhood programme designed to improve the lives of children in disadvantaged areas.

Finglas was one of 13 locations nationwide selected for the €30 million Area-Based Childhood (ABC) early intervention programmes to support health and social projects in several countries. The ABC programme targets investment in evidence-based early interventions – from pregnancy onwards – to improve the lives and futures for children and families living in areas of disadvantage.

Local TD Róisín Shortall (Ind) welcomed the inclusion of Finglas in the children and parenting initiative, which was the result of a successful application from Better Finglas, a consortium made up of local groups, schools, Dublin City Council and State agencies. "I fought hard to have a commitment to such funding contained in the Programme for Government," said Deputy Shortall. "I am glad to see that this is one promise the Government appears to be delivering on. Early intervention programmes are vital if we are ever to break the cycle of poverty and exclusion in large parts of Dublin." "It is about giving kids a chance in life and preventing problems before they begin. And it saves money in the long run."

Following the successful application confirmed last week, the Finglas ABC Programme now moves forward to design stage. If it receives final approval it will be a Barnardos-led project designed to provide better services for parents and children in Finglas South, Finglas West and part of Finglas East.

The Finglas programme will be modelled on the successful youngballymun Initiative with an emphasis on child mental health, supports for parents and early interventions in literacy, numeracy and identifying health issues.

There was good news too for the youngballymun programme which is now set to come under the ABC umbrella. Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Frances Fitzgerald, said that evaluations from three pilot programmes, including youngballymun, demonstrated significant improvements in outcomes for children in a number of areas.

Northside People West, 2 December 2013
www.dublinpeople.ie

4 | Right to an Adequate Standard of Living

Overall
Grade **D**

The 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 UNCRC

The Right to an Adequate Standard of Living gets a 'D' grade this year, a slight increase from last year's 'D-' grade. However, child poverty remains high: the EU Survey of Income and Living Conditions (EU SILC) figures, published in 2013, shows that 9.3% of children are living in consistent poverty while 18.8% of children are at risk of poverty.⁴²⁶ While the Department of Social Protection's *Social impact assessment of the main welfare and direct tax measures in Budget 2013* found that there was no significant change in the at-risk-of-poverty rate, it also confirmed that households with children were the worst affected by the cuts made in Budget 2013, in particular lone parent households.⁴²⁷

Child Poverty gets an 'E-' grade this year – an improvement on *Report Card 2013*. This is due to the fact that although the Government, protected rates of child income supports in Budget 2014 and children for the most part, and families were spared the harsh cuts of previous budgets, it was not enough to reverse the impact that austerity budgets have already had on them. It is also disappointing that the sub-target to reduce child poverty has still not been set. Area Based Childhood (ABC) Programme gets a 'C+' grade in recognition of the allocation of €4 million in Budget 2014 and the selection of an additional nine sites for this important initiative. In *Children and the Social Welfare System*, the recommendations of the Advisory Group on Tax and Social Welfare have not been implemented resulting in a 'D' grade to reflect the lack of any real change.

Budget 2014 maintained child income supports at existing rates. This is a welcome reprieve from severe cuts in successive budgets, which has saved the Exchequer €450 million since 2009.⁴²⁸ However, cuts to Maternity Benefit will have a detrimental effect on working mothers with newborn babies contrary to Article 18 (parental responsibilities) of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Furthermore, the failure to reverse cuts to the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance will have a negative impact on children fulfilling their right to education under Article 28 as many parents cannot afford the high cost of school uniforms or the necessary clothing items to ensure that their child is properly dressed for school.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, in its 2007 day of General Discussion on 'Resources for Rights', made clear the obligation on States to undertake targeted measures to move as expeditiously and effectively as possible towards the full realisation of economic, social and cultural rights of children and that a financial crisis should not be used as a reason to delay.⁴²⁹ The UN Independent Expert on Human Rights and Extreme Poverty reiterated this point on her trip to Ireland in 2011.⁴³⁰ The Government's commitment in its *Strategy for Growth: Medium-Term Economic Strategy 2014 – 2020* to 'reduce inequality and improve poverty outcomes across society, with a particular emphasis on child poverty'⁴³¹ is welcome but this must not be done at the expense of human rights.

426 Central Statistics Office (2013) *EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions 2011 & Revised 2010 Results*, Dublin: Stationery Office.

427 Department of Social Protection, *Social impact assessment of the main welfare and direct tax measures in Budget 2013*, http://www.welfare.ie/en/downloads/2013-03_SIABudget2013_Final.pdf, p. 1. [accessed 11 February 2014].

428 End Child Poverty Coalition, *Position Paper on Reforming Child Income Supports April 2013*, <http://www.endchildpoverty.ie/publications/documents/ECPCPositionPaperReformingChildIncomeSupports.pdf>, p. 3. [accessed 11 February 2014].

429 UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 46th session (2007) Day of General Discussion on 'Resources for the Rights of the Child – Responsibility of States', <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/CRC/Discussions/Recommendations/Recommendations2007.doc> [accessed 5 January 2014].

430 UN General Assembly (2011), *Report of the Independent Expert on the Question of Human Rights and Extreme Poverty*, A/HRC/17/34/Add.2.

431 Department of Finance (2013) *A Strategy for Growth: Medium-Term Economic Strategy 2014 – 2020*. Dublin: Stationery Office, p.15.

4.1 Child Poverty

Grade E-

Commitment

The *Programme for Government* states that the elimination of poverty is an objective of this Government and that it is committed to achieving the targets in the *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion* to reduce the number of people experiencing poverty.

Progress

Limited progress

What's happening?

A new national sub-target to reduce child poverty was promised but has not yet been set by Government. There were no further cuts to child income supports in Budget 2014. However, Maternity Benefit was subject to a further cut and the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance was not restored to its previous value. The School Meals budget was maintained at €37 million.

Budget 2014 did not introduce any further cuts to rates for child or family income supports. However, the change announced in Budget 2013 to introduce a uniform rate of Child Benefit of €130 per month for all children came into operation in January 2014.

The rate of Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance (BSCFA) was not reduced as it had been in the previous two years. However, young people over 18 in third level education will no longer receive the payment: this measure is expected to save €2.5 million.

Maternity Benefit and Adoptive Benefit were standardised to a weekly rate of €230 for all new applicants. Previously the minimum rate of payment was €217.80 and the maximum rate was €262.⁴³² 90% of women claim the higher rate of Maternity Benefit.⁴³³

In the *National Action Plan for Social (NAP) Inclusion 2007-2016*,⁴³⁴ the Government committed to reduce the number of people experiencing consistent poverty to between 2% and 4% by 2012, with the aim of eliminating consistent poverty⁴³⁵ by 2016. In 2012, the Government revised this figure, following publication of a review of the national poverty target.⁴³⁶ The target has been renamed the 'national social target for poverty reduction' and is now set at reducing consistent poverty to 4% by 2016 (interim target) and to 2% or less by 2020, from the 2010 baseline rate of 6.2%. In November 2013, a biennial report was

432 For full analysis of Budget 2014 and its impact on children, see: Children's Rights Alliance (2013) *Analysis of Budget 2014 and its Impact on Children*, Dublin: Children's Rights Alliance.

433 Kitty Holland, 'Maternity benefit cut anti-women and anti-family' *The Irish Times*, 15 October 2013.

434 Office for Social Inclusion (2007) *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016*, Dublin: Stationery Office.

435 A person is consistently poor if he or she lives in a household with equivalised income below the 60% of median income threshold and they lack two of more of the 11 basic deprivation items.

436 The Review focused on developing and adopting appropriate and achievable national poverty targets in line with national and EU commitments. See: Department of Social Protection (2012) *National Social Target for Poverty Reduction: Policy Briefing on the Review of the National Poverty Target*, Dublin: Department of Social Protection.

issued⁴³⁷, which monitors progress on the four high level goals relating to children contained in *NAPinclusion 2007-2016* with a focus on children as one of the key lifecycle groups. Three of these high level goals relate to education (pre-school education, literacy initiatives and second-level education completion rates), while one relates to income support. A number of government departments are also involved in the 49 actions underpinning the high level goals including the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (21 actions) and the Department of Education and Skills (12 actions) in relation to the child lifecycle group.⁴³⁸

A new national sub-target for the reduction of child poverty has yet to be agreed, in consultation with relevant stakeholders, to reduce the differential in the rate of consistent poverty between children and adults. According to the latest available data, the differential between adults and children experiencing consistent poverty in 2011 was 9.3 per cent as the child poverty rate was 1.6 times the adult rate.⁴³⁹ The sub-target for child poverty reduction is expected to be included in the Policy Framework on Children and Young People, which is due to be published in the first quarter of 2014.⁴⁴⁰ This framework will take a 'multi-dimensional social investment approach' to a child's lifecycle across a number of different policy areas.⁴⁴¹

The *EU 2020 Strategy* requires EU Member States to set a national poverty target that will contribute to meeting the EU poverty target of lifting at least 20 million people out of poverty or social exclusion by 2020.⁴⁴² Ireland's contribution to reaching the EU target is to lift a minimum of 200,000 people out of poverty by 2020.⁴⁴³ In February 2013, the EU Commission issued a recommendation on child poverty and well-being called *Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage*⁴⁴⁴, which recognised that children are more susceptible to poverty than the overall population.⁴⁴⁵

Food poverty is an issue of growing concern and a number of different factors can have an impact on this type of poverty including adequate income, the cost of food as well as education about nutrition and access to healthy food choices. A paper funded by the Department of Social Protection in 2012 used EU SILC data to examine how to construct a food poverty indicator for Ireland.⁴⁴⁶ This research found that 10% of the population in Ireland were living in food poverty; the rate of food poverty increased to 18% for households with three or more children and 23% for lone parent families.⁴⁴⁷ Furthermore, the Health Behaviour Survey in School-aged Children (HBSC)⁴⁴⁸ carried out with 12,556 children aged between 10 and 17 years found that almost 21% stated that they had gone to school or to bed hungry.⁴⁴⁹ The research found that 10- and 11-year-olds were most likely to answer that they sometimes went hungry.⁴⁵⁰ According to an analysis of 2012 data by the Central Statistics Office, food prices in Ireland were above the EU average.⁴⁵¹

437 Department of Social Protection (2013) *Social Inclusion Report Incorporating Annual Reports for 2011 & 2012*, Dublin: DSP, <http://www.socialinclusion.ie/documents/2013-11-14AnnualReportInDesignWEBCopy.pdf> [accessed 3 February 2014].

438 Department of Social Protection (2013) *Social Inclusion Report Incorporating Annual Reports for 2011 & 2012*, Dublin: Department of Social Protection, and also see the associated Table of Actions, http://www.socialinclusion.ie/documents/FinalwithBlankTableofActionLandscapeReport_000.pdf [accessed 3 February 2014].

439 Office for Social Inclusion (2013) *Social Inclusion Monitor*, Dublin: Department of Social Protection, p.12.

440 Communication received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the Department of Social Protection on 18 December 2013.

441 Communication received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the Department of Social Protection on 31 January 2014.

442 This target is broader than just the number of people at risk of poverty as it also refers to households experiencing severe material deprivation and very low work intensity households. Communication received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the Department of Social Protection on 31 January 2014.

443 The EU will be tracking the 'at risk of poverty' measure. The Irish figure is based on the 2010 baseline rate of 6.3%. Department of Social Protection (2012) *National Social Target for Poverty Reduction: Policy Briefing on the Review of the National Poverty Target*, Dublin: Department of Social Protection, p.3.

444 European Commission (2013) *Recommendation on investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage*, Brussels: European Commission.

445 *Ibid.*, p.2.

446 C. Carney and B. Maitre (2012) *Social Inclusion Technical Paper No. 3 Constructing a Food Poverty Indicator for Ireland using the Survey on Income and Living Conditions*, Dublin: Department of Social Protection.

447 Food Safety (2012) *Measuring Food Poverty in Ireland - the indicator and its implications*, Dublin: The Food Safety Promotion Board.

448 M. Callaghan & S. Nic Gabhainn (2013). *Appendix 1: Nutrition behaviours and outcomes: a special analysis of the HBSC survey as part of the implementation of the National Strategy for Research and Data on Children's Lives, 2011-2016*. Dublin: Department of Children and Youth Affairs, p.53. The figures in Table 185 were used to calculate the overall percentage.

449 The majority stated that they have gone to school or bed hungry 'sometimes' while smaller percentages stated that they go to bed or school hungry 'always' or 'often'.

450 *Ibid.*, Table 183.

451 Central Statistics Office Price Level Indices for Food, Beverages and Tobacco in Europe 2012, http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/prices/2012/plieur_2012.pdf [accessed 11 February 2014].

Comment

Child Poverty gets an 'E-' grade in *Report Card 2014*, an increase on last year's 'F' grade. While Budget 2014 was a more reasonable budget for children and families, it did not reverse or negate the impact of previous austerity budgets. The 12% cut to Maternity Benefit was particularly harsh given the high birth rate in Ireland. Budget 2014 was not poverty proofed; each government department has a responsibility to carry out social impact assessments in relation to their own budgetary decisions. However, only the Department of Social Protection published such an assessment of Budget 2013 but only after final budgetary decisions were made.

The exit of the European Union (EU)/International Monetary Fund (IMF)/European Central Bank (ECB) Troika in December 2013 was a positive step that hopefully signalled a reduced need for continuing austerity measures. However, it is important to note that the Government is also subject to other international obligations, namely international human rights law. In particular, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) requires the State to ensure the implementation of economic, social and cultural rights to the fullest extent possible even in times of recession. Article 4 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) reiterates this obligation in the context of children's economic, social and cultural rights. The Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights has repeatedly highlighted the onus on states to provide 'minimum essential levels of non-contributory social protection – not as a policy option, but rather as a legal obligation'.⁴⁵² She has also highlighted the need to prioritise children's rights 'given that most of those living in poverty are children and that poverty in childhood is a root cause of poverty in adulthood'.⁴⁵³ She calls on States to take steps to eradicate childhood poverty.

The Center for Economic and Social Rights (CESR), in its 2012 rights analysis of the economic crisis in Ireland, called on the Government to introduce progressive tax reforms; it was concerned that Ireland's low tax rates may prevent the realisation of economic and social rights as they may 'place a greater burden on the poor and may be discriminatory in effect'.⁴⁵⁴ The CESR also notes that indirect taxation such as increases to Value Added Tax (VAT) hits families on low incomes particularly hard.⁴⁵⁵ This is because VAT and other forms of indirect taxation reduce a person's spending power. If Government is considering tax reforms, it should take steps to make the tax system more equitable, and in particular, examine the rate of VAT as well as its application to different types of consumer goods and services.

Children and families were not directly targeted in Budget 2014 as they had been in previous budgets but the cumulative impact of cuts since 2008 means that monthly child income supports have been reduced by almost €100 for families with three or more children over the past six years. Despite a 9% decrease in the birth rate since the same quarter in 2012,⁴⁵⁶ Ireland still records the highest fertility rate in the EU at 2.05 live births per woman,⁴⁵⁷ the EU average was 1.57 births. There were 22,781 recipients of Maternity Benefit at the end of November 2013.⁴⁵⁸

The decision to cut Maternity Benefit by 12%, on top of taxing this payment in Budget 2013, will push women back to work early, interfering with their ability to breastfeed and care for their newborn child. The Department of Social Protection has indicated that the decision to reduce the rate of the payment was made as a savings measure but it prioritised maintaining the 26 week duration of the payment 'because this time is important for families and their children' and it is also longer than the 14 weeks requirement set out in EU law.⁴⁵⁹

452 Sepúlveda and Nyst, (2012) *Human Rights Approach to Social Protection*, Finland: Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

453 United Nations Human Rights Council (2012) *Final draft of the guiding principles on extreme poverty and human rights, submitted by the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Magdalena Sepúlveda Carmona A/HRC/21/39*, p.8.

454 Center for Economic and Social Rights (2012) *Mauled by the Celtic Tiger: Human Rights in Ireland's Economic Meltdown*, Rights in Crisis Briefing Paper, p.14.

455 Ibid., p. 15.

456 Central Statistics Office (2013) *Vital statistics First Quarter 2013* Dublin: Stationery Office.

457 Eurostat (2013) *Basic Figures on the EU: Winter 2013/2014 edition*, Brussels: European Commission.

458 Communication received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the Department of Social Protection on 18 December 2013.

459 Ibid.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in its General Comment No. 7 on implementing child rights in early childhood highlighted that: '[e]arly childhood is the period of most extensive (and intensive) parental responsibilities related to all aspects of children's well-being covered by the Convention'.⁴⁶⁰ The Committee reminds States that children's rights and well-being are dependent on the support and resources available to their parents and encourages the State to ensure that the best interests of the child are considered when making decisions that may impact on a parent's ability to care for his or her child, including taxation and social security benefits. It is not clear that the best interests of newborn children were taken into consideration when making cuts to Maternity Benefit.⁴⁶¹

Child Benefit is a payment designed to assist parents with the cost of raising a child while it also contributes to alleviating child poverty. It is currently paid to 611,000 families in respect of almost 1.17 million children.⁴⁶² This payment ensures that the State is providing the necessary support to parents and legal guardians in compliance with Article 18 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, from January 2014, larger families will be subjected to a further monthly cut as a result of the reduction of the payment from €140 to €130 for fourth and subsequent children, announced in Budget 2013. Furthermore, some children are not able to avail of this crucial support as their parents do not meet certain qualifying criteria set out in social welfare legislation.⁴⁶³ In these cases, parents are prevented from accessing the payment on the basis of their immigration status, which contravenes the non-discrimination principle in Article 2 of the UNCRC.

“The Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights has repeatedly highlighted the onus on states to provide ‘minimum essential levels of non-contributory social protection – not as a policy option, but rather as a legal obligation’.”

460 UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2005) General Comment No. 7: Implementing Child Rights in early Childhood, UN Doc. CRC/GC/2005/7.

461 For full analysis of Budget 2014 and its impact on children see: Children's Rights Alliance (2013) *Analysis of Budget 2014 and its Impact on Children*, Dublin: Children's Rights Alliance.

462 Communication received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the Department of Social Protection on 18 December 2013. These figures are accurate as of the end of November 2013.

463 The Habitual Residence Condition (HRC) is set out in Section 246 of the Social Welfare (Consolidation) Act 2005. At the end of 2009, the legislation was changed to exclude anyone in the asylum process from being habitually resident following a number of successful social welfare appeals which demonstrated that there was no blanket exclusion of these applicants being able to access social welfare payments subject to HRC.

The failure to reverse the cuts to Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance will continue to cause hardship for families struggling with the high costs of going back to school. The expense of attending school coupled with the year-on-year reduction to the payment means that this could negatively impact on a child's right to education (Article 18). Almost 174,000 families availed of the payment in 2013.⁴⁶⁴ In its *2013 School Costs Survey*, Barnardos found that the cost of sending a child to senior infants was €350 while parents had to spend €785 to send a child to secondary school.⁴⁶⁵ The survey also found that the cost of crested uniforms greatly increases school clothing costs, an issue which the Minister for Education, Ruairi Quinn TD has committed to address through the introduction of a policy to give parents control over the cost of uniforms.⁴⁶⁶ In December 2013, schools were issued with a survey, developed in consultation with the education partners which schools were due to implement by the end of February 2014. This is to ensure that any necessary changes can be made by Boards of Management before the beginning of the next year school year in September 2014.⁴⁶⁷

The allocation of €5 million towards a national book rental scheme in 2014 is an important first step to encourage widespread book rental schemes and should help to alleviate the burden of school book costs on parents. But more can be done. The European Commission also noted in its recommendation on *Investing in Children* that impoverishment can have a negative impact on the school performance of less well-off children as well as on their health and that they are less likely to 'realise their full potential later in life'.⁴⁶⁸

Child Poverty: The Department of Social Protection's impact assessment of Budget 2013 demonstrated that households with children were the worst affected by the main welfare and direct tax measures.⁴⁶⁹ Rates of child poverty remain high, with 18.8% of children and young people under the age of 18 living at risk of poverty while 9.3% continue to live in consistent poverty.⁴⁷⁰ However, further research by the ESRI has also found that while 'Ireland has the highest at-risk-of-poverty before social transfers for children and for the working-age population', the impact of social transfers has resulted in reducing 'the Irish child at-risk-of-poverty rate to a lower level than the EU15 average'.⁴⁷¹

According to research published by UNICEF in 2013,⁴⁷² Ireland was ranked tenth best place to be a child in 2011, out of a total of 29 countries; however, it fell to 17th place when material well-being was measured. Furthermore, UNICEF's Report Card noted that several countries including Ireland 'allowed the child poverty gap to widen to more than 30%' by 2011.

Following Budget 2014, the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice highlighted that while the majority of primary social welfare payments had not been reduced, the rise in the cost of living coupled with the 'failure to at least increase social welfare rates in line with inflation results in an effective cut in the value of social welfare payments to households trying to attain a minimum standard of living'.⁴⁷³ The Partnership also noted the higher cost of raising a teenager and called for an increase in the Qualified Child Increase to acknowledge this additional expense for parents.⁴⁷⁴

464 Statistics supplied to the Children's Rights Alliance by the Department of Social Protection on 18 December 2013.

465 Barnardos (2013) *School Costs Survey 2013*, Dublin: Barnardos.

466 Katherine Donnelly, 'School uniform price controls on way, says Quinn' *Irish Independent*, 16 October 2013.

467 Communication received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the Department of Education and Skills on 14 January 2014.

468 European Commission (2013) *Recommendation on investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage*, Brussels: European Commission.

469 Department of Social Protection (2013) *Social impact assessment of the main welfare and direct tax measures in Budget 2013*, Dublin: Department of Social Protection.

470 Central Statistics Office (2013) *EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2011 & revised 2010 results*, Dublin: CSO.

471 Watson, D, and Maitre, B (2013) *Social Transfers and Poverty Alleviation in Ireland: An Analysis of the CSO Survey on Income and Living Conditions 2004-2011*, Social Inclusion Report No. 4. Dublin: Department of Social Protection and the Economic and Social Research Institute.

472 UNICEF Office of Research (2013) *Child Well-being in Rich Countries: A comparative overview*, Innocenti Report Card 11, Florence: UNICEF Office of Research.

473 Dr. B. Mc Mahon et al (2013), *Budget 2014: Minimum Essential Budget Standards Impact Briefing*, Dublin: Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice, p.1.

474 *Ibid.*, p.3.

Children in certain situations are particularly at risk of poverty, including children in lone parent families and children in jobless households. In addition, Traveller and Roma children, migrant children, children living in direct provision centres,⁴⁷⁵ young care leavers, children with a disability and homeless children experience high levels of poverty, but large scale studies, such as the EU SILC, fail to capture these children's experiences.⁴⁷⁶

Indeed, current measures of poverty are, with some exceptions, household-focused, rather than child-focused. By using indicators that primarily relate to adults' lives they do not give a clear or full picture of children's lived experiences.⁴⁷⁷ The ESRI has stated that child poverty must be addressed in the context of poverty among people of working age as in the majority of households with children, the social welfare supports are not child-related but are related to the status of the parents, whether they are unemployed, lone parents or disabled.⁴⁷⁸ Using a direct measure of child deprivation would provide a more complete understanding of child poverty.⁴⁷⁹ There are currently three official national measures of poverty in Ireland: at-risk-of-poverty; material deprivation and consistent poverty, an overlap of the two.

Poverty targets: Since 1997, five targets have been set by Government to reduce poverty. The first target was the 1997 *National Anti-Poverty Strategy* which aimed to reduce the consistent poverty rate from 9% to 5% and the at-risk of poverty rate from 15% to 10%, in the period 1997-2007.⁴⁸⁰ *Building an Inclusive Society*, the 2002 review of the national anti-poverty strategy, set a second target aimed to reduce consistent poverty from 6.2% to 2%, and, if possible, to 0% between 2002 and 2007.⁴⁸¹ A third target was set by the *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016*, which aimed to reduce consistent poverty from 7% to 0% by 2016, with an interim target of between 2% and 4% by 2012.⁴⁸²

In 2012, a fourth target was set (a revision of the third target) to reduce consistent poverty to 4% by 2016 (interim target) and to 2% or less by 2020.⁴⁸³ 2012 also saw the setting of a fifth target (to be reached in tandem with the fourth target), 200,000 people are to be lifted out of poverty by 2020, in line with Ireland's obligations under the EU 2020 Strategy, which commits to lift at least 20 million people out of at-risk of poverty in the EU.⁴⁸⁴

Child poverty target: Children are the group most at risk of poverty, and, without earning capacity, they are reliant on their parents' income and on the State for support. The UN Committee, in its *General Comment No. 5*, is clear that implementation of children's socio-economic rights is not a charitable process but a basic obligation of Government.⁴⁸⁵ The Children's Rights Alliance, as part of the End Child Poverty Coalition, called for a specific child poverty target linked to the national target; the Government has committed to introduce such a sub-target.⁴⁸⁶ The target for reducing poverty among children is due to be announced in early 2014, following consultation with relevant stakeholders, including children's Non-Governmental Organisations. The new sub-target will act as a means through which progress on child poverty can be measured and as a tool to inform children's policy development. To ensure the target is met, it must be accompanied by an implementation plan. Furthermore, achieving the target must be seen as a whole of Government target and not solely the

475 Direct provision is a scheme whereby asylum seekers and people seeking other forms of protection are provided with accommodation on a full board basis with all their basic needs provided for directly. Direct provision residents receive a weekly payment of €19.10 for an adult and €9.60 for a child.

476 H. Frazer and M. Devlin (2011) *An Assessment of Ireland's Approach to Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion among Children from European and Local Perspectives*, Maynooth: Department of Applied Social Studies, National University of Ireland Maynooth.

477 L. Swords et al (2011) *All you need is... Measuring children's perceptions and experiences of deprivation*, Dublin: Children's Research Centre, Trinity College Dublin.

478 D. Watson and B. Maitre (2013) *Social Transfers and Poverty Alleviation in Ireland: An Analysis of the CSO Survey on Income and Living Conditions 2004 - 2011*, Social Inclusion Report No. 4. Dublin: Department of Social Protection and Economic and Social Research Institute.

479 Eurostat (2012) *Measuring material deprivation: Indicators for the whole population and child-specific indicators*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

480 Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs (1997) *Sharing in Progress: the National Anti-Poverty Strategy*, Dublin: Stationery Office.

481 Department of An Taoiseach (2002) *Building an Inclusive Society: Review of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy under the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness*, Dublin: Stationery Office.

482 Office for Social Inclusion (2007) *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016*, Dublin: Stationery Office.

483 Department of Social Protection (2012) *National Social Target for Poverty Reduction: Policy Briefing on the Review of the National Poverty Target*, Dublin: Department of Social Protection.

484 Department of An Taoiseach (2011) *National Reform Programme for Ireland under the EU 2020 Strategy*, Dublin: Stationery Office.

485 UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2003) *General Comment No. 5: General measures of implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, CRC/GC/2003/5*, Arts. 4, 42 and 44, paragraph 6.

486 For further detail on the Children's Rights Alliance position on ending child poverty, see www.childrensrights.ie/resources.

concern of the Department of Social Protection. Another sub-target on jobless households will also be set in tandem with the child poverty sub-target.⁴⁸⁷

The European Commission encourages Member States to put in place and implement 'multidimensional' integrated strategies that address 'child poverty and social exclusion' while 'promoting children's well-being'.⁴⁸⁸ The Commission also recommends that Member States adopt a rights-based approach with particular reference to the European Charter of Fundamental Rights as well as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.⁴⁸⁹ This important recommendation adopted at EU level will bring a welcome focus to tackling child poverty and ensuring that children within the EU can live in dignity.

Food poverty: Food poverty is a growing issue of concern. Although it does not have an official definition in Irish social policy, it is usually referred to 'as the inability to have an adequate and nutritious diet due to issues of affordability or accessibility'.⁴⁹⁰ Research has found that lone parent households or larger families with three or more children are more likely to suffer food poverty.⁴⁹¹ The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has made it clear that, even in times of recession or economic adjustment, States have a positive obligation to ensure that everyone has the right to be free from hunger.⁴⁹² This means that people must have adequate food as well as being able to access nutritious food. Eurostat information has shown that prices for food in Ireland are above the EU average; fresh fruit, vegetables and potatoes cost 38% more than the EU average while milk, eggs and cheese cost 19% more.⁴⁹³

The School Meals Programme, funded through the Department of Social Protection, is a positive way to ensure regular and healthy food services for disadvantaged school children. In 2013, 205,000 children in almost 1,600 schools and local organisations benefitted from the programme.⁴⁹⁴ In 2013/2014, a total of 2,573 food clubs will be funded of which 647 are Breakfast Clubs. Funding is also provided for snacks, lunches, dinners and afterschool clubs.⁴⁹⁵ This is an important initiative to combat food poverty given that one in ten people were found to suffer from food poverty in 2010.⁴⁹⁶

More must be done to reduce the high numbers of people who now find themselves and their families suffering from food poverty. According to the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice, food is one of the biggest expenses for households with children, second only to rent and childcare.⁴⁹⁷ Meanwhile food banks like that operated by Crosscare estimated that by the end of 2013, they will have distributed 750 tonnes of food to people in need⁴⁹⁸ while the Capuchin Daycare Centre feeds on average more than 1,000 people a day.⁴⁹⁹ Concern has also been expressed about the negative impact of food poverty on a child's ability to learn⁵⁰⁰ as well as the lack of knowledge about healthy eating amongst early school leavers.⁵⁰¹

487 Communication received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the Department of Social Protection on 31 January 2014.

488 European Commission (2013) *Recommendation on Investing in Children: Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage*, Brussels: European Commission, p.4.

489 Ibid.

490 Food Safety (2012) *Measuring Food Poverty in Ireland - the indicator and its implications*, Dublin: The Food Safety Promotion Board.

491 C. Carney and B. Maitre (2012) *Social Inclusion Technical Paper No. 3 Constructing a Food Poverty Indicator for Ireland using the Survey on Income and Living Conditions*, Dublin: Department of Social Protection, p.38.

492 UN Economic, Social and Cultural Committee (1999) *General Comment No. 12: The Right to Adequate Food (Article 11)*, E/C.12/1999/5.

493 Central Statistics Office Price Level Indices for Food, Beverages and Tobacco in Europe 2012, http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/prices/2012/plieur_2012.pdf [accessed 11 February 2014].

494 Communication received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the Department of Social Protection on 31 January 2014.

495 All of the statistics related to this programme have been provided to the Children's Rights Alliance by the Department of Social Protection on 18 December 2013.

496 Mandate Trade Union and Unite Trade Union (2013) *Hungry for Action: Mapping Food Poverty in Ireland* Dublin: Mandate and Unite.

497 Dr B. Mac Mahon, G. Weld, R. Thornton and Dr M. Collins (2012) *The Cost Of A Child: A consensual budget standards study examining the direct cost of a child across childhood* Dublin: Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice.

498 Sinead O'Carroll 'Food appeal for struggling Dublin families as Food Bank can't cope with requests' *The Journal*, [online].

<http://www.thejournal.ie/food-appeal-dublin-1175124-Nov2013/> [accessed 11 February 2014].

499 Jim Cusack 'Many 'new poor' among 1,540 seeking food aid from Capuchins in a single day', *Irish Independent*, 7 April 2013.

500 Michelle Hennessy, 'Rising food poverty hinders students' ability to learn' <http://www.thejournal.ie/food-poverty-primary-school-767184-Jan2013/> [accessed 11 February 2014].

501 M. Share, M. Hennessy, B. Stewart-Knox & J. Davison (2013) *Early School Leavers and Nutrition: A needs assessment from a nutrition perspective*. Dublin: Safefood, The Food Safety Promotion Board.

Each government department should carry out a social impact assessment in advance of budgetary decisions being finalised for Budget 2015 to protect children and families

While the Department of Social Protection has begun to carry out social impact assessments following the Budget, it should ensure that these are conducted and published in advance of decisions being made. In addition, other government departments should also carry out similar assessments as their decisions often have an impact on children. Budget 2015 should be poverty proofed and ensure that even in times of recession, human rights are respected.

Introduce the promised child poverty target as a matter of urgency

Both Report Card 2012 and Report Card 2013 called for the introduction of the child poverty target as an immediate action but this has been delayed and did not take place in 2013. Some consultation has taken place but a national sub-target for child poverty reduction must be prioritised and introduced in early 2014. It should be accompanied by a Child Poverty Target Implementation Plan, outlining the objectives, actions and agreed timelines for each Department or Agency with responsibility for delivery, though overall monitoring responsibility should rest with the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs.

4.2 Area Based Childhood (ABC) Programme

Grade C+

Government Commitment

The *Programme for Government* acknowledges that a new approach is needed to break the cycle of child poverty where it is most deeply entrenched. It pledges to adopt a new Area Based Approach to Child Poverty, which draws on best international practice and existing services to tackle every aspect of child poverty. Initially, this model will be rolled out to up to ten of Ireland's most disadvantaged communities, in cooperation with philanthropic partners to co-fund and manage the project.

Progress

Some progress made

What's happening?

Budget 2014 provided €1.5 million in additional funding for the Area-Based Childhood (ABC) Programme bringing the total 2014 government spend on the programme to €4 million with a further €5 million allocation from Atlantic Philanthropies.

In April 2013, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs invited proposals for funding under the *Area Based Response to Child Poverty Programme 2013-2016*⁵⁰² to break the cycle of child poverty where poverty is most deeply entrenched. While the application process was open to all projects working with children up to the age of 18 years, particular emphasis was placed on programmes working with children from birth to six years of age. The programme builds on and continues the work of the Prevention and Early Intervention Programme. There will be an overall investment of almost €30 million into the ABC Programme from 2013-2016. A total of 12 sites will be funded under the ABC Programme with a further three being supported through these projects, which exceeds the Government's own commitment to fund up to ten sites.

An Interdepartmental Project Team was established comprising representatives from the Departments of Children and Youth Affairs, Public Expenditure and Reform, Social Protection, Education and Skills and the Department of Health, as well as the Department of the Taoiseach and the Office of the Tánaiste. Representatives from the Centre for Effective Services (CES), the HSE, Pobal and co-funder, the Atlantic Philanthropies, also form part of this team.⁵⁰³ The team has met a total of five times and has helped to identify specific difficulties in inter-agency working while at the same time helping to find workable solutions. Individual members of the team have brought experience and knowledge to the process of designing the programme.⁵⁰⁴ A Working Group was also set up comprised of Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Atlantic Philanthropies, CES and Pobal, which meets more regularly and deals with tasks that the Project Team has assigned to it.⁵⁰⁵

502 Department of Children and Youth Affairs *Area Based Response to Child Poverty Programme 2013-2016* : Application/Programme Guidelines, [https://www.pobal.ie/FundingProgrammes/Area%20Based%20Childhood%20\(ABC\)%20Programme/Pages/default.aspx](https://www.pobal.ie/FundingProgrammes/Area%20Based%20Childhood%20(ABC)%20Programme/Pages/default.aspx) [accessed 2 December 2013].

503 Ibid., Appendix 4.

504 Communication received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs on 18 December 2013.

505 Ibid.

The application form and guidelines issued by Pobal included specific selection and scoring criteria with projects having to demonstrate evidence of need which made up 40% of the overall score. The deadline for applications was 31 May 2013 and the selection process consisted of two stages. The first stage identified the applications with the greatest likelihood of success and those with the highest score were invited to proceed to the second stage where successful projects had to meet all of the programme requirements.

The programme, now called the Area Based Childhood (ABC) programme, is co-funded by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and The Atlantic Philanthropies and has a total funding allocation over 2013-2016 of almost €30 million.

Fifty applications were received in total⁵⁰⁶, which included applications from the three existing pilot Prevention and Early Intervention Programmes (PEIP). As well as the existing three pilot schemes, an additional nine areas were selected to participate in the design stage of the ABC programme including: Bray; Ballyfermot/Dublin 10; Clondalkin/Archways; the Dublin Docklands; a Barnardos-led project in Finglas; Grangegorman/North West Inner City; Knocknaheeny in Cork; a joint proposal facilitated by Limerick Children Services Committee; Drogheda and Dundalk in Louth and the Midlands as part of Northside project.⁵⁰⁷

Three existing projects were already operating in Dublin under the Prevention and Early Intervention Programme on a five-year pilot basis: the Childhood Development Initiative in Tallaght West; Preparing for Life in the Northside communities of Darndale, Belcamp and Moatview; and youngballymun. A fund of €36 million was provided by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and Atlantic Philanthropies for these projects over a five year period. The Minister highlighted the positive evaluation reports of the pilot programmes carried out at each of the three existing sites, which 'demonstrated significant improvements in outcomes for children' including in relation to parenting programmes and programmes to 'support pro-social skills, emotion understanding...have shown significant improvements in school attendance and improvements in children's' behaviour towards each other'.⁵⁰⁸

The majority of the other sites approved for design stage require further development before they can begin to provide services under the ABC programme. In some cases the project intends to carry out further consultation before choosing the type of intervention to use, while others have to develop the service model, finalise the consortium of members or verify costs. Pobal and the Centre for Effective Services (CES) will manage the implementation of the programme on behalf of the Department and the Atlantic Philanthropies and will support applicants to proceed to the final approval stage.⁵⁰⁹

Comment

An Area Based Approach to Tackling Child Poverty gets a '**C+**' grade in *Report Card 2014*, an increase on last year's 'C-' grade. The rise in the grade is in recognition of the allocation of an additional €1.5 million in Budget 2014 to commence an Area Based Childhood Programme as well as the additional number of sites selected to participate in the initiative. The open application process – recommended in *Report Card 2013* – is a welcome development and ensures greater transparency and fairness in relation to the selection criteria, in particular the need for prospective grantees to demonstrate that they intend to operate evidence-based programmes. However, it is regrettable that the project is so dependent on philanthropic funding and there are no independent experts on the Working Group on the Area Based Response to Child Poverty as recommended by the Children's Rights Alliance last year.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child recognises the negative impacts of growing up in both relative and absolute poverty, noting that absolute poverty poses a threat to a child's survival and their health. Growing up in relative poverty also 'undermines children's wellbeing, social inclusion and self-esteem and reduces opportunities for learning and development'.⁵¹⁰

506 Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 'Government announces €30m investment in new ABC (Area-Based Childhood) programme' [press release], <http://www.dcy.gov.ie/viewdoc.asp?DocID=3034> [accessed 20 December 2013].

507 Three additional programmes were invited to participate but not as standalone projects; instead they will be affiliated with two of the successful proposals. This means a total of 15 out of the original 50 proposals are now at design stage while a further 12 projects have been invited to avail of mentoring under the programme. Information received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs on 18 December 2013.

508 Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 'Government announces €30m investment in new ABC (Area-Based Childhood) programme' [press release], <http://www.dcy.gov.ie/viewdoc.asp?DocID=3034> [accessed 20 December 2013].

509 Ibid.

510 UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2005) General Comment No. 7: Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood, CRC/C/GC/7/Rev.1, paragraph 10.

Commenting on obligations arising from Article 27 (adequate standard of living), the Committee has called on States to implement systematic strategies to reduce poverty in early childhood as well as combat its effects on children's wellbeing. All possible means should be employed, including 'material assistance and support programmes' for children and families, to assure young children a basic standard of living consistent with rights.⁵¹¹

Area-Based Projects: The ABC projects are a positive development which will hopefully contribute to the alleviation of poverty in a number of disadvantaged areas. However, in the wider context of child poverty, this initiative must be part of a suite of measures to tackle child poverty and inequalities, including addressing parental unemployment, household debt and access to housing and health care. In order to ensure that the projects can have longer-term impacts, the structural causes of inequalities must be identified and addressed in each area. This will provide information and an evidence base for future developments of the overall project.

Poverty exists in communities across Ireland, but the experience of a child may differ depending on the community. The experience of a child growing up in a densely populated urban area with a concentration of families living in poverty and with a high rate of criminality and anti-social behaviour will differ from the experience of a child growing up in a small rural townland, whose family live in consistent poverty, but whose neighbours, for the most part, do not. The social context of poverty may result in a multiplier effect.

It is vital that the evidentiary lessons from the existing pilot sites form the basis for the design of the new initiative. The programme design must take into account the specific conditions that led to the successful outcome of the selected interventions, for example embryonic projects may take some time to yield results. In the past, the three projects have not applied the same, standardised model, rather they have used a range of pilots that will be benchmarked and evaluated, to provide learning for future policy and service development, and direct government investment in children. There have been a number of evaluations carried out but further evaluations have yet to emerge from the PEIP. However, the findings produced to date have informed the selection process for the proposals under the ABC programme, and will continue to inform developments and consideration for improvement of children and young people's services in the future.⁵¹² The Department's intention is that a standardised evaluation process will be used throughout the new projects to allow trends to emerge as it may be that a certain programme is more effective in a particular context. These may also have to be adapted in certain local contexts but the intention is to keep the evaluation of each intervention as comparable as possible so that by the end of the Programme, robust data will be available to show which programmes most positively impact on child outcomes. Where possible, that evidence will be used to support the case for further investment in these interventions on a wider and/or more comprehensive basis, as appropriate.⁵¹³

Furthermore, research has shown that the impact of early investment in disadvantaged children is lessened if it is not followed up by investment at a later age: investments appear to be complementary and require follow-up to be effective.⁵¹⁴ There must be a connection to other key sites of investment, for example the DEIS programme, which also adopts an area-based approach. How a child fares in education is the single most important determinant of his or her future success and a proven route out of poverty.⁵¹⁵ Continued and sustained investment must be made to prepare children for school and reduce the incidences of early school leaving.

The ABC programme can benefit hugely from the learnings from the existing programmes and must implement best practice from each. However, it is also clear that each site must tailor its selection and implementation of evidence-based interventions to suit the particular needs of the children living in poverty in its vicinity to ensure that they benefit from this targeted support.

511 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, A/RES/44/25 (20 November 1989).

512 Communication received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs on 18 December 2013.

513 Ibid.

514 F. Cunha and J.J. Heckman (2010) *Investing in Our Young People, Working Paper 16201*, Cambridge: National Bureau of Economic Research, p 5.

515 UK Cabinet Office (2009) *Getting On, Getting Ahead: a discussion paper analysing the trends and drivers of social mobility*, London: Cabinet Office.

Immediate actions for 2014

Put in place adequate supports to allow the communities selected for the area-based childhood initiative to begin providing services as soon as possible in 2014

The fact that a total of fifteen proposals will be funded under the ABC programme is welcome but the design stage must not be prolonged given the limited lifespan of the project funding. In order to guarantee impact they must be operational at an early date to allow them to be bedded down in the community and produce positive and measureable outcomes.

Ensure communities and those participating in the ABC projects are involved in the oversight and evaluation of the projects

Communities and participants must be consulted in examining how the projects will be implemented in the community. Children's voices, in particular, must be heard when evaluating how the project is working.

Ensure that the different ABC projects are proofed against the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Children's rights principles must underpin the various ABC projects and be incorporated into their methods of working. In particular each project must consider the best interests of the child and consult with children when making decisions that will impact on them.

Introduce a standardised evaluation process to the greatest extent possible

A standardised evaluation process will ensure that the results of the various projects are measured in a comparable way in order for them to provide useful data for policy development and service provision for children and families into the future.

4.3 Children and the Social Welfare System

GRADE: D

Commitment

The *Programme for Government* pledges that the Commission on Taxation and Social Welfare will examine and make recommendations on the interaction between taxation and the welfare system to ensure that work is worthwhile. In particular, it will examine family and child income supports.

Progress

No change

What's happening?

A report on child and family income supports by the Advisory Group on Tax and Social Welfare was published in February 2013. It recommended that Child Benefit should remain a universal payment but that a 'two-tier' system should be introduced with better targeted supports for low income families. The recommendations have been put on hold.

An Advisory Group on Tax and Social Welfare was established by the Minister for Social Protection, Joan Burton TD, in June 2011. The Group's terms of reference 'constitute a forum to which the Minister [...] may refer specific issues around income supports and tax systems so that they provide good incentives to take up work and to contribute to the reduction of poverty and child poverty in particular'.⁵¹⁶ The Group, chaired by Ita Mangan, comprises 15 members, drawn from the public service, including a representative from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, as well as from academia, business and trade unions.⁵¹⁷ Members were selected by the Minister on the basis of their expertise but no civil society representative was nominated.

In 2012, the Advisory Group submitted its report on child and family income supports to the Minister for Social Protection who shared it with her colleagues in a ministerial steering group that also included the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, the Minister for Finance and the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. The report was published in February 2013⁵¹⁸, but no final decision has yet been made on the core recommendations given the complexity of the 'fiscal, operational and legal considerations, as well as the implications for child poverty and employment incentives'.⁵¹⁹

⁵¹⁶ Department of Social Protection, Advisory Group on Tax and Social Welfare: Terms of Reference, http://www.welfare.ie/EN/AboutUs/Documents/Terms_of_reference.pdf [accessed 7 November 2011].

⁵¹⁷ Membership as of May 2012: Ita Mangan, Chairman of the Advisory Group; John Bohan, Department of Social Protection; Gerry Harrahill, Office of the Revenue Commissioners; Micheál Collins, Department of Economics, Trinity College Dublin (since moved to a position with the Nevin Economic Research Institute); John Conlon, Department of Public Expenditure and Reform; Catherine Hazlett, Department of Children and Youth Affairs; Paul Kealy, Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation; GERALYN McGARRY, Citizens Information Board; Aebhric McGibney, Dublin Chamber of Commerce; Pat Mahon, Pricewaterhouse Coopers (PwC); Brenda McVeigh, Department of Finance; Mary P. Murphy, Department of Sociology, National University of Ireland, Maynooth; Brian Nolan, School of Applied Social Science in UCD; Marie Sherlock, SIPTU; John Sweeney, National Economic and Social Council.

⁵¹⁸ Department of Social Protection, 'Minister Burton publishes the Report of the Advisory Group on Tax and Social Welfare' [press release], <http://www.welfare.ie/en/pressoffice/pdf/pr200213.pdf> [accessed 11 February 2014].

⁵¹⁹ Communication received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the Department of Social Protection, 18 December 2013.

The Advisory Group recommended the retention of Child Benefit as a universal payment for all families but at a reduced rate and the introduction of a 'second tier' child income support for families on low incomes or in receipt of primary social welfare payments. The second tier support would replace Qualified Child Increases and Family Income Support (FIS). The Group also gave one example where the gross household income limit for means-testing families to qualify for a second-tier payment would be set at €25,000 but a number of different options could be possible.

Comment

Children and the Social Welfare System gets a 'D' grade, which is the same as last year's grade as there has been no meaningful change. The Group's report has now been published and while the proposals to retain a universal payment to support children is most welcome, there are concerns that the proposed abolition of Family Income Supplement⁵²⁰ would lead to low-paid working families being unfairly affected by this change. However, there has been no further action on this issue.

Article 27 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child provides that every child has the right to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development. While the provision recognises that parents and guardians have the primary role in providing financially for a child, the State must take appropriate measures to assist parents and guardians according to its means, including the provision of material assistance and support programmes. This is a qualified right,⁵²¹ subject to the economic conditions of the State. That said, children and struggling families should not disproportionately bear the brunt of budgetary cuts, nor should there be unreasonable delays in receiving payments to which they are entitled. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has stated that States should not take regressive steps in a recession.

The recession has had a deep impact on families and children, with many experiencing poverty for the first time as a result of job losses, falling incomes and cuts to take home pay. A recent longitudinal study of children showed that the percentage of parents of three-year-olds reporting financial difficulties rose from 44% in 2008/2009 to 61% in 2010/2011.⁵²² Families who had the lowest income at the beginning of the recession were more likely to report that the recession had 'a very significant negative impact on them than those with higher incomes at that time'.⁵²³ The Central Statistics Office *Quarterly National Household Survey* for July to September 2012 examined the effect on households of the economic downturn⁵²⁴ and found the primary reason given by households with children that experiencing financial difficulties was the loss of employment, while a reduction in working hours as well as pay-cuts were also given as reasons. This survey found that up to 82% of households had reduced their spending during the recession, with almost a quarter of them cutting back on five or more categories of spending including groceries, clothing, footwear, housing, health insurance (where relevant) and social activities. Households with children were found to have significantly more cutbacks than others while the two main additional costs that contributed to financial difficulties for these households were utility bills and school or university costs.

The social welfare system, however, continues to provide a vital safety net and is responsible for protecting many families from being pushed even deeper into poverty. The Central Statistics Office Household Budget Survey showed an increase of 73% in State financial supports to families since 2005, from €125.41 to €217.00, to support them through wage cuts and job losses.⁵²⁵ However, according to research conducted by the Children's Research Centre in Trinity College Dublin and the Family Support Agency, 40% of families 'at risk of poverty' reported that they did not receive any social welfare supports in addition to the Child Benefit payment while one third of families relied on social welfare for all of their household income.⁵²⁶

520 Family Income Supplement (FIS) is a weekly tax-free social welfare payment available to low-paid employees with children.

521 A qualified right is a right that the State can lawfully interfere with in certain circumstances where the public or state interest, on balance, overrides those of the individual.

522 Economic and Social Research Institute, Trinity College Dublin, Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2013), *Growing Up In Ireland, National Longitudinal Study of Children, Infant Cohort, Key Findings: 3 Year Olds, No. 5*, Dublin: Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

523 *Ibid.*, p.112.

524 Central Statistics Office, *Quarterly National Household Survey: Effect on Households of the Economic Downturn*, <http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/labourmarket/2012/QNHSeconomicdownturnq32012.pdf> [accessed 4 December 2013].

525 Central Statistics Office, *Household Budget Survey 2009-2010: volume 2*, <http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/housing/2010/full.pdf> [accessed 4 December 2013].

526 L. Swords, B. Merriman and M. O'Donnell (2013) *Family Wellbeing on a Limited Income: A Study of Families Living at Risk of Poverty in Ireland*, Dublin: Children's Research Centre, Trinity College and the Family Support Agency, p.58.

“The recession has had a deep impact on families and children, with many experiencing poverty for the first time as a result of job losses, falling incomes and cuts to take home pay. A recent longitudinal study of children showed that the percentage of parents of three-year-olds reporting financial difficulties rose by 17% between 2008 and 2011.”

The Advisory Group on Tax and Social Welfare noted that the Department’s own value for money report demonstrated that while Ireland spent significantly more on cash benefits, the child poverty rate in Ireland was still higher than the average in other Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries.⁵²⁷ Meanwhile the Department of Social Protection’s *Social Impact Assessment of Budget 2013* showed that without these social welfare payments, 51% of Ireland’s population would be at risk of poverty – a steady increase from 39.8 % in 2004.⁵²⁸

Addressing child poverty means ensuring that the social welfare system works for those that need it most, namely vulnerable children and families. The Children’s Rights Alliance has long advocated on this issue, calling for greater coordination between the tax and social welfare systems to allow for more efficient targeting of child income supports, by facilitating a move towards an integrated child income support payment. Our position is built on learning from the United Kingdom, where the Government, having considered integration of tax and social welfare systems, opted for strategic (partial) rather than structural (full) integration. This approach means greater coordination between tax and welfare systems, with closer cooperation on policy, standardisation of information systems and more transfer of information between the agencies concerned, but not full integration of systems and services.⁵²⁹ Steps have been taken to ensure that the tax and welfare systems work better together in relation to child income supports. It is important that poverty and unemployment traps are avoided.⁵³⁰

Towards an integrated child income support payment: The debate over the last number of years has centred on the issues related to taxing or means testing the Child Benefit payment, which is a universal payment (paid to more than 611,000 families in 2013 at a cost of more than €1.9 billion to the Exchequer, 84% of the total amount spent on child income supports)⁵³¹

However, the package of child income supports is larger than Child Benefit alone and a change to this payment will automatically impact on others. To truly address this issue, the current social welfare system (which is complex and cumbersome) must be reformed to become more responsive to individual families’ needs, through more joined-up working between the tax and welfare systems⁵³² The successful introduction and administration of a new, integrated child income support payment, as outlined in the Department of Social Protection’s *2010 Policy and Value for Money Review of Child Income Supports and Associated Programmes*, would require significant cooperation between the Department of Social Protection and the Revenue Commissioners. There is precedence for such

527 Advisory Group on Tax and Social Welfare, First Report: Child and Family Income Support, p.11, <http://www.welfare.ie/en/downloads/Advisory-Group-on-Tax-and-Social-Welfare-First-Report-Child-and-Family-Income-Support.pdf> [accessed 11 February 2014].

528 Central Statistics Office (2011) *European Survey of Income and Living Conditions (EU SILC) 2010*, Cork: CSO, p. 26.

529 D. Clinton et al (1994), *The Commission for Social Justice: Integrating Taxes and Benefits?* London: Institute of Public Policy Research. See also: Martin Taylor (1998), *The Modernisation of Britain’s Tax and Benefit System*, Number Two: Work Incentives, London: HM Treasury.

530 Work has been done to better integrate the information held by the Department of Social Protection and the Revenue Commissioners.

531 Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, (2013) *Revised Estimates for Public Services 2014*, Dublin: Stationery Office. However, this figure does not include the Qualified Child Increase. In 2013, the estimated expenditure on QCIs was €694 million according to a communication received by the Children’s Rights Alliance from the Department of Social Protection on 31 January 2014.

532 This would involve greater coordination between the Revenue Commissioners and the Department of Social Protection, with closer cooperation on policy, standardisation of information systems and more transfer of information between relevant agencies, but not full integration of systems and services.

cooperation.⁵³³ Currently the level of matching of Department of Social Protection data from the Child Benefit file with data on households held by the Revenue Commissioners is around 87%.⁵³⁴

Moving to a new system would, of course, incur initial costs and take time, but these costs must be considered in the context of the longer-term costs of failing to address child poverty and the Government's commitment to reduce poverty and make efficient and effective budgetary decisions, with positive long-term savings and impact. ESRI research in 2007, looking at a potential 'second tier' child income support payment similar to the integrated payment, estimated that this measure would reduce child poverty by 4.5%,⁵³⁵ thus ultimately generating Government savings that would reduce the need for State supports, specifically in relation to income, health and justice.

A key stumbling block is how to compensate low income families that currently receive the Family Income Supplement (FIS), could face significant losses under an integrated child income support payment. FIS is not solely a child support payment, but an employment support, so reforming FIS requires both a child and an employment response. Reform of 'in-work' income supports – for example by introducing a refundable working tax credit – is urgently needed. While the Advisory Group recommended the abolition of FIS in favour of introducing a second tier payment, the analysis found that this would result in over 80% of FIS recipients losing some portion of their income supports.⁵³⁶ Instead, FIS should be retained, at least on an interim basis, to assist those families currently in employment as well as those who may require an in-work income support payment for future employment. Furthermore, the proposed annual income threshold of €25,000 for means-testing a household for the second-tier payment is much too low. The End Child Poverty Coalition, of which the Children's Rights Alliance is a member, has recommended that this income threshold is raised to at least €35,000.⁵³⁷ The Advisory Group is also reviewing 'working age' income supports and its report is due to be completed in the second quarter of 2014.⁵³⁸ Through its Pathways to Work programme, the Government intends to make it easier to apply for FIS and to encourage employers to raise awareness of the support available to eligible employees.⁵³⁹ Given that ESRI research has demonstrated the importance of maintaining child income supports, this must be prioritised.

533 The Revenue Commissioners and the Department of Social Protection currently cooperate in relation to two existing tax credits: the One-Parent Family Tax Credit and the Home Carers' Tax Credit. The Office of the Revenue Commissioners, Home Carer Tax Credit, <http://www.revenue.ie/en/tax/it/credits/home-carers.html> [accessed 1 March 2010].

534 Communication received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the Department of Social Protection on 31 January 2014.

535 T. Callan et al (2006), *Child Poverty and Income Supports: Ireland in a Comparative Perspective* in Callan (ed.), *Budget Perspectives 2007*, Dublin: ESRI.

536 Advisory Group on Tax and Social Welfare, First Report: Child and Family Income Support, p.28, <http://www.welfare.ie/en/downloads/Advisory-Group-on-Tax-and-Social-Welfare-First-Report-Child-and-Family-Income-Support.pdf> [accessed 11 February 2014].

537 End Child Poverty Coalition, Position Paper on Reforming Child Income Supports, p.3. <http://www.endchildpoverty.ie/publications/documents/ECPCPositionPaperReformingChildIncomeSupports.pdf> [accessed 11 February 2014].

538 Department of Finance (2013) *A Strategy for Growth: Medium-Term Economic Strategy 2014 – 2020*, Dublin: The Stationery Office.

539 Ibid, p.50.

Immediate action for 2014

Introduce a modified two-tier system of child income supports with specific additional in-work support for low-income working families

The Government should consider the recommendations made by the Advisory Group on Tax and Social Welfare to introduce a two-tier structure with a universal element and an in-work benefit for working families with a low income. FIS should be maintained until a more effective substitute is put in place. Furthermore, the income threshold for an in-work support should be set at a minimum of €35,000 rather than the €25,000 limit suggested by the Advisory Group.