

Tacking Child Poverty: Child Poverty Unit Priorities Paper

March 2023



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

Accompaniment Support Service for Children (A.S.S.C.)
Alcohol Action Ireland
Amnesty International Ireland
An Cosán
Anew
Aoibhneas
Archways
AslAm
Association of Occupational Therapists of Ireland (AOTI)
Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland (ASTI)
ATD Fourth World – Ireland Ltd
Atheist Ireland
Barnardos
Barretstown Camp
Bedford Row Family Project
BeLonG To Youth Services
Bodywhys
Catholic Guides of Ireland
Child Law Project
Childhood Development Initiative
Children in Hospital Ireland
Children's Books Ireland
Children's Grief Centre
Clarecare
COPE Galway
Cork Life Centre
Cork Migrant Centre
Crann Centre
Crosscare
CyberSafeKids
Cycle Against Suicide
Dalkey School Project National School
Daughters of Charity Child and Family Service
Dental Health Foundation of Ireland
Department of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy, UCC
Disability Federation of Ireland
Doras
Down Syndrome Ireland
Dublin Rape Crisis Centre
Dyslexia Association of Ireland
Dyspraxia/DCD Ireland
Early Childhood Ireland
Early Learning Initiative (National College of Ireland)
Educate Together
EPIC
Equality for Children
Extern Ireland
FamiliBase
Féach
Focus Ireland
Foróige
Gaelscoileanna Teo
Galway Traveller Movement
Good Shepherd Cork
Grow It Yourself
Helium Arts
Immigrant Council of Ireland
Inclusion Ireland
Institute of Guidance Counsellors
Irish Aftercare Network
Irish Association for Infant Mental Health
Irish Association of Social Workers
Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU)
Irish Council for Civil Liberties (ICCL)
Irish Foster Care Association
Irish Girl Guides
Irish Heart Foundation
Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO)
Irish Penal Reform Trust
Irish Primary Principals' Network
Irish Refugee Council
Irish Second Level Students' Union (ISSU)
Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
Irish Traveller Movement
Irish Youth Foundation
iScoil
Jack and Jill Children's Foundation
Jigsaw
Katharine Howard Foundation
Kerry Diocesan Youth Service
Kids' Own Publishing Partnership
Kinship Care
Leap Ireland
Let's Grow Together! Infant and Childhood Partnerships CLG.
LGBT Ireland
Mecpaths
Mental Health Reform
Mercy Law Resource Centre
Migrant Rights Centre Ireland
Mothers' Union
My Mind
My Project Minding You
Museum of Childhood Ireland
Music Generation
New Directions
National Childhood Network
National Council for the Blind of Ireland
National Forum of Family Resource Centres
National Parents Council Post Primary
National Parents Council Primary
National Youth Council of Ireland
Novas
One Family
One in Four
Parents Plus
Pavee Point
Peter McVerry Trust
Prevention and Early Intervention Network
Psychological Society of Ireland
Rainbow Club Cork
Rainbows Ireland
Rape Crisis Network Ireland (RCNI)
Realt Beag/Ballyfermot Star
Respond Housing
SAFE Ireland
Saoirse Housing Association
SAOL Beag Children's Centre
Scouting Ireland
School of Education UCD
Sexual Violence Centre Cork
SIPTU
Simon Communities of Ireland
Social Care Ireland
Society of St. Vincent de Paul
SPHE Network
SpunOut.ie
St. Nicholas Montessori College
St. Nicholas Montessori Teachers' Association
St. Patrick's Mental Health Services
TASC
Teachers' Union of Ireland
Terenure College Rugby Football Club
Transgender Equality Network Ireland
The Anne Sullivan Foundation
The Ark, A Cultural Centre for Children
The Irish Red Cross
The UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway
Traveller Visibility Group Ltd
Treoir
UNICEF Ireland
Variety – the Children's Charity of Ireland
Women's Aid
Youngballymun
Young Social Innovators
Youth Advocate Programme Ireland (YAP)
Youth Work Ireland

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1. Introduction

The Children's Rights Alliance unites over 140 members working together to make Ireland one of the best places in the world to be a child. We change the lives of all children in Ireland by making sure that their rights are respected and protected in our laws, policies and services. We identify problems for children. We develop solutions. We educate and provide information and legal advice on children's rights.

The Children's Rights Alliance welcomes the establishment of a dedicated Child Poverty and Wellbeing Unit at the Department of An Taoiseach.¹

Since the announcement of the unit's establishment, new data from the CSO's Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) shows that the rates of child poverty increased in 2022. In Ireland, 7.5 per cent of children were living in consistent poverty in 2022, 19.9 per cent were experiencing deprivation and 15.2 per cent of children at risk of poverty.² Children have the highest rates of consistent poverty and deprivation and the second highest at risk of poverty rate when compared by age cohort.³

With the growing numbers of children experiencing poverty, it is critical that the Child Poverty and Wellbeing Unit has the capacity to drive a cross-government approach to policy implementation as well as identifying key actions that will have the most meaningful impact on children living in or at risk of poverty.

This paper sets out how the unit should operate as well as considering what these priority actions, for the next two years, should be.

2. Operation of child poverty and wellbeing unit

Leadership and Capacity

One of the major challenges in Ireland to date, when it comes to addressing child poverty, is that there is no central driver for change at government level. Instead, responsibility is dispersed across individual departments. Other countries (for example formerly the UK, Scotland, and New Zealand) have addressed this issue by creating a dedicated, fully resourced Child Poverty Office.

In Ireland, we have seen some impact from cross governmental work on addressing child poverty. A key commitment under *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures* (BOBF) was the target to lift 70,000 children out of consistent poverty by 2020. A co-convened grouping between the BOBF Advisory Council and the Department of Social Protection furthered work in this area and the adoption of a Whole of Government Approach. This grouping secured big changes in Budget 2020 including:

- Free School Books: €1 million allocated for a pilot scheme for free books for primary school children in 50 schools.
- Hot School Meals: €4 million to ensure over 35,000 children in primary school could access hot school meals in 2020, as well as children in 45 non-profit early learning settings.

¹ Children's Rights Alliance, 'Child Poverty Unit is a gamechanger in the campaign to end child poverty in Ireland - say Children's Rights Alliance', Press Release 18 December 2022.

² Central Statistics Office, *Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2022* (CSO 2023).

³ Central Statistics Office, *Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2022* (CSO 2023).

- Medical cards: Expansion of the free GP care to children under eight and free dental care for children under six.
- Targeted payments: Working lone parents could earn an extra €15/week and keep their payment while families on Working Family Payment could earn extra €10/week. Children on welfare payments will get an extra €2/week for under 12s, €3 for over 12s.
- Childcare: Additional €54 million for childcare. Extra 5 hours of childcare for lower income families and lone parents can keep existing subsidies until August 2021.

This co-convened group was for a limited time period and following on from this, a child poverty sub-group was established by the Advisory Council in order to generate further thinking for the successor policy framework to BOBF. There is a need to build further on this cross governmental work to drive change in order to reduce the number of children experiencing poverty.

The Child Poverty and Wellbeing Unit will provide the much-needed leadership to tackle child poverty. However, it will be important that the Unit not only builds on the work happening across Government departments in particular the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and the Department of Social Protection, but acts as a vehicle to monitor and drive implementation. The Unit should act as a co-ordinator to monitor a whole-of-government approach with specific actions delegated to relevant Departments.

In order for the Unit to achieve success it ought to be adequately resourced and staffed. A staff team led by a senior civil servant supported by a team of five officials, at various appropriate levels, could work on policy, strategic engagement, communications and operations. The Child Poverty unit in New Zealand consists of six staff members.⁴

Accountability and Reporting

Accountability for the implementation of key child poverty actions should come from the top-down. The new broadened Cabinet Sub-Committee focused on children could set direction and receive and review annual progress reports. This should be supported by the Senior Officials Group and chaired by the Taoiseach. Additional oversight and accountability should ultimately be to the Houses of the Oireachtas. This includes reporting on progress and the scrutiny of progress on actions by a relevant Joint Oireachtas Committee.

Legislation

Drawing further on international best practices, a commitment in legislation through a Child Poverty Reduction Act would provide a sharp policy focus and political accountability.⁵ As part of the accountability mechanisms enshrined in legislation in New Zealand, the government is required to report on progress to address child poverty on budget day. Similar action could be undertaken as part of the series of papers published on Budget Day by the Departments of Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform. As is the case in New Zealand the report should also comment on the implications of the Budget measures on the child poverty target.

Recommendations

- Adequately resource the Child Poverty and Wellbeing Unit so that it has a staff team with the capacity to engage in a range of activities that can drive cross-government action.
- Establish systems of accountability and reporting at Cabinet and Oireachtas level in order to oversee the implementation of actions to reduce child poverty.
- Leverage learning from the comprehensive approaches to reducing child poverty legislation in Scotland and New Zealand by putting the reduction of child poverty on a legislative basis.

⁴ Correspondence with the New Zealand Child Poverty Unit at the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

⁵ Society of St Vincent de Paul, *Investing in measures to end poverty. SVP Election 2020 Priorities* (SVP 2020) <<https://bit.ly/3kJE362>> accessed 26 September 2020.

- Introduce Child rights impact assessments (CRIAs) as a tool for “examining existing and proposed policies and legislation on changes in administrative services to determine their impact on children and whether they effectively protect and implement the rights expressed in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.”⁶

3. Priority Actions

International evidence shows that the challenge of eliminating child poverty requires a range of measures to effect real change. In 2013, the European Commission issued its recommendation *Investing in children: Breaking the cycle of disadvantage* which outlined a three-pillar approach to tackling child poverty: access to adequate resources; access to affordable, quality services and children’s right to participate.⁷ In this section we identify specific, measurable and achievable actions that could be undertaken in the next two years that would have an impact on the numbers of children in poverty. These actions are in the areas of:

- Income (for implementation by the Departments of Social Protection and Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth)
- Food Poverty (for implementation by the Department of Social Protection)
- Early Years (for implementation by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth)
- Education (for implementation by the Department of Education)
- Health (for implementation by Department of Health)
- Play and Recreation (for implementation by Departments of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and Housing, Local Government and Heritage)

Income

Qualified Child Increase

While the SILC 2022 figures point to increasing levels of child poverty, the income reference period that the data relies on is from 2021. Therefore, the true impact that the cost of living crisis, and in particular the significant increase in inflation in 2022, is yet to be fully captured. According to the CSO, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) rose by 8.2 per cent in the 12 months between December 2021 and 2022. This represented the 16th consecutive month where inflation was at least 5 per cent.⁸

The impact of inflation has a varying impact on different groups in society depending on their individual consumption patterns.⁹ The household budget of lower income households tends to largely comprise of necessities.¹⁰ The Irish social welfare system has been found to play a key role in reducing inequality in Ireland.¹¹ It is critical that social welfare payments are adequate to meet the costs of living and responsive to situations where these costs rise.

A Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) is one which establishes the minimum needed to live and participate in Irish society and is a standard of living which no one should be expected to live

⁶ Lisa Payne, Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA): A review of comparative practice across the UK (UNICEF UK 2017) 16

⁷ European Commission, Commission Recommendation of 20.2.2013: Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage (Brussels, 20.2.2013 C(2013) 778 final)

⁸ Central Statistics Office, Consumer Price Index January 2023 (CSO 2023).

⁹ TASC, The state we are in: inequality in Ireland 2022 (TASC May 2022) 28.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ TASC, The state we are in: inequality in Ireland 2022 (TASC May 2022) 28.

below.¹² Benchmarking weekly social welfare rates to MESL can ensure that such income is responsive to the actual costs incurred by families and less likely to be masked by inflation.

Adequate social welfare rates that address the changing needs of a child are vital to ensuring their basic needs are met. The MESL research has consistently identified older children as having additional and distinct needs in comparison to younger children.¹³ To address this issue, there has long been a call for additional resources to be targeted towards households with older children who are in receipt of the Increase for a Qualified Child (IQC).

In Budget 2019, all IQC payments were increased by €2.20 with an additional €3 provided for households with children over the age of 12. Over the course of three subsequent Budgets further targeted increases were provided. However, Budget 2023 returned to a flat rate increase.

The targeting of increased resources towards older children based on evidence informed policy making is welcome and it is critical that Budget 2024 returns to this approach. Furthermore, the latest MESL post-Budget analysis indicates that there is likely to be increased levels of income inadequacy in 2023.

Recommendation

- Increase the QCI based on the evidence produced on the cost of an MESL and target Budget resources towards this payment. This would mean providing a minimum increase of €10 for the over 12s payment and €5 for the under 12s payment in Budget 2024. Further budgets should ensure that any increase reflects the real cost of inflation for families dependent on social welfare.

International Protection Child Payment

Children and their families living in Direct Provision centres are not captured in the CSO SILC data. However, the exclusion of these families is not to say that these children are not experiencing or at risk of poverty. Children and young people in Direct Provision have spoken about how a lack of income means they have few opportunities to take part in activities with their friends and peers after school.¹⁴ The financial cost of school trips or the need to take public transport to and after sport activities is a major barrier to participation and in terms of integrating into the community.¹⁵

In February 2021, the Government published *A White Paper to End Direct Provision and to Establish a New International Protection Support Service*.¹⁶ Section 4 of the White Paper identifies what supports are needed to support independence of individuals and families living in Direct Provision. Under the Economic and Family Supports, the White Paper states the Department of Children, Equality, Diversity, Integration and Youth will pay for living expenses for those living in phase two accommodation through a weekly International Protection Payment. Those with dependent children will receive an “additional monthly payment per child in the form of an International Protection Child Payment”. The commitment is that the rate of the International Protection Child Payment will be aligned to the rate of Child Benefit. The payments were due to be made available in 2022¹⁷ however, this commitment has still failed to be realised.

Recommendation

¹² Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice, ‘What is minimum essential budget standards research?’ <www.budgeting.ie> accessed 23 June 2022.

¹³ Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice, MESL 2018: Update Report (VPSJ 2018) 11.

¹⁴ Ombudsman for Children, *Direct Division Children’s views and experiences of living in Direct Provision* (OCO 2020) 28.

¹⁵ Ombudsman for Children, *Direct Division Children’s views and experiences of living in Direct Provision* (OCO 2020) 28.

¹⁶ Government of Ireland, *A White Paper to End Direct Provision and to Establish a New International Protection Support Service* (Government Publications 2021).

¹⁷ Communication received by the Children’s Rights Alliance from the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 18 January 2022.

- Introduce the International Protection Child Payment for children living in Direct Provision at the same rate of the universal Child Benefit payment. This will ensure that all families are treated equally.

Food Poverty

In November 2022 the CSO published updated statistics on enforced deprivation. One in every five children in Ireland experienced enforced deprivation – that is a quarter of a million children and young people living in a house where the heating is not on, or they are without a hot, nutritious meal on the table. Children are experiencing a higher rate of deprivation than the population as a whole.¹⁸

Schools are an excellent setting to reach children, teachers, families, and the surrounding community.¹⁹ They provide a social environment where children can access and enjoy food without financial constraints.²⁰ The Department of Social Protection (DSP) funds the School Meals Programme. The objective of the scheme is to provide regular, nutritious food to children who are unable, due to lack of good quality food, to take full advantage of the education provided to them.²¹ The programme provides funding towards the provision of food through the allocation of a per pupil rate for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Funding provided during the 2021/2022 school year, enabled 1,257 schools and 221 organisations to participate in the scheme benefitting 228,007 children.²²

Following a successful pilot of hot school meals in 2019, there has been an overall expansion of this initiative from an initial cohort of 37 to over 500 schools.²³ In March 2021, the DSP published the findings of research conducted in 2020 with principals, teachers/Special Needs Assistants, parents and suppliers regarding all aspects of the provision of the hot meals.²⁴ The feedback overall was predominantly positive. However, the concentration of the expansion of this initiative to only DEIS schools, fails to take in to account the large proportion of children experiencing poverty who attend non-DEIS schools.²⁵

The current rates of funding for school meals are €0.60 for breakfast or a snack; €1.40 for a cold lunch and €1.90 for dinner. The rate for hot school meals is €2.90. In many instances, meals are prepared offsite and delivered to the school.²⁶ The rates payable have not changed since 2003 and recent increases in inflation have meant that providers are now struggling to continue to provide meals to schools.²⁷ Furthermore, while the objective of the scheme is to provide access to nutritional food, whether this is the case is questionable as there are no nutritional standards in place for breakfast or cold lunch, just the hot lunch with anecdotal feedback pointing to poor presentation. It is also critical that funding is provided to support schools with the costs of physical infrastructure such as cookers etc.

Recommendation:

- Expand the availability of the School Meals Programme and in particular the hot school meals initiative to more schools through the development and implementation of an action plan. An annual target to expand hot schools meals by 25 per cent should be established.

¹⁸ Central Statistics Office, Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC): Enforced Deprivation 2022 (CSO 2022).

¹⁹ Healthy Food For All, *A Good Practice Guide to School Food Initiatives* (Healthy Food for All 2009).

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ Heather Humphries TD, Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, School Meals Programme, Written Answers 14 July 2020 [15434/20].

²² Department of Social Protection, 'Food poverty Government programmes, schemes and supports' (DSP 2022) <https://bit.ly/3TUOiqh> accessed 1 November 2022.

²³ Communication received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the Department of Social Protection 16 January 2023.

²⁴ Ian McShane and Rachael Joyce, 'Hot School Meals Pilot Project' <<https://bit.ly/3zCQf0R>> accessed 31 January 2022.

²⁵ Emer Smyth, Selina McCoy and Gillian Kingston, Learning from the evaluation of DEIS (ESRI 2015).

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

²⁷ Carl O'Brien, 'It's at breaking point': Thousands of pupils risk losing school meals', *The Irish Times*, 21 December 2022.

- Increase the rates payable for meals under the school meals programme to ensure improved quality.

Early Years

High-quality early childhood education and care is beneficial for all children, but it can be of particular value for more disadvantaged children by helping to redress inter-familial inequalities,²⁸ thereby ensuring all children receive a baseline level of developmental support irrespective of home circumstances and parenting capacity. This is particularly important because there is robust evidence to show that children who are disadvantaged at age three are at increased risk of disadvantage across the life cycle.²⁹

Children in poverty do not start on a level playing field and prevention and early years intervention services can play a critical role in closing that gap to ensure that all children get the best start in life. European Commission research found that in Ireland, the participation rate of children from low-income families in formal childcare was less than a quarter of that of their high-income peers.³⁰ *First 5* has committed to developing a Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) type model for Early childhood education and care.³¹ The development of such a model should consider the inclusion of wraparound services such as parental support and in instances where there are complex issues, such as addiction, domestic violence, parental mental health and other vulnerabilities, more intensive programmes that support the entire family.

Comparatively, parents in Ireland are paying amongst the highest monthly fees for ECEC in Europe.³² A challenge with the National Childcare Scheme and the cost of childcare is the fact that subsidies do not take account of the actual cost of childcare. The fact that Ireland has a private market-based system means that childcare costs vary hugely across the State. For example, the latest Pobal Annual Early Years Sector Profile Report 2020/2021 found that Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown remains the most expensive local authority area in the country for ELC and SAC, with an average weekly cost of €244.08 for a full-time place.³³ Carlow has become the least expensive county in the country for full time care, at €152.08.³⁴

The State needs to provide free (or nearly free access to ECEC, for example, a small contribution of no more than €10 for people on the lowest incomes) for parents living in consistent poverty. This would include those currently on welfare payments or in low paid jobs. This is the single most important measure in addressing child poverty based on the evidence that what works is providing education/training/quality employment alongside quality childcare.³⁵ Models of support have been developed whereby parents only have to pay a small percentage of the total childcare costs (around 3-4 per cent).

Recommendations

- Provide free access (or nearly free access) to childcare for families on the lowest incomes by providing higher levels of subsidisation under the National Childcare Scheme for all families

²⁸ A Pearce et al, 'Pathways to inequalities in child health' (2019) *Archives of Disease in Childhood*, 104:998–1003.

²⁹ A Caspi, RM Houts, DW Belsky, et al, Childhood forecasting of a small segment of the population with large economic burden, (2016) *Nature Human Behaviour*, 1.

³⁰ European Commission, *Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the development of childcare facilities for young children with a view to increase female labour participation, strike a work-life balance for working parents and bring about sustainable and inclusive growth in Europe (the "Barcelona objectives")* (EU Commission 2018) 19.

³¹ Government of Ireland, *First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019 – 2028* (Government of Ireland 2018) strategic action 8.3.

³² European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019. Eurydice Brief: Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

³³ Pobal and Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, *Annual Early Years Sector Profile Report – 2020/2021* (Pobal 2022).

³⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵ Daly, M. *Fighting Child Poverty: The Child Guarantee* (European Parliament 2019), 5

in receipt of the Medical Card. This can be achieved by amending the current IT system to include an additional field for Medical Card holders.

- The Government needs to prioritise the development of the DEIS-type model of early years. It is welcome to see this work commenced but it must be a central focus in 2023 with a clear commitment set out in Budget 2024 to resource its implementation.

Education

The Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) service allows schools to provide additional supports to children experiencing homelessness, however this service is not available in non-DEIS schools.³⁶ An extension of the HSCL service to non-DEIS schools supporting children who are homeless or experiencing other disadvantages would allow additional supports to be provided to these vulnerable children³⁷ and recognise that poverty and its impact on children and their families is not only experienced in DEIS schools. The Children's Rights Alliance understands that for the first time the HSCL service has been expanded to schools with high numbers of Traveller children. This is a welcome development that should be built on further so that all children and young people experiencing disadvantaged can be provided with additional supports.

Recommendation

- Expand the Home School Community Liaison service to non-DEIS Schools on a phased basis.

Health

The Public Health Nursing service provides one-to-one support for parents of all babies and is seen as having a key role in ensuring that babies and young children have access to primary, preventative and specialist healthcare.³⁸ Public health nurses play a critical role in advising and supporting parents and referring families to other interventions. They are often the first service that parents, and carers come into contact with and can be a critical the entry point for early intervention. They are a consistent point of contact for parents and children in the first 3 years of a child's life and are an important link through to early childhood education and care services, particularly prevention and early intervention services.

First Five, commits to developing a dedicated public health nurse service for children. The redeployment of staff during the pandemic has impacted on visits to and from PHNs particularly with regard to developmental screenings. While the national target for these screenings is 95 per cent of all babies, data from the HSE indicates that just over half of babies were receiving these checks during the pandemic. The continued shortage of PHNs staff means that the service has moved away from universal provision and targeted towards those most in need in a community.³⁹

Recommendation

- Prioritise the development of a dedicated public health nursing service for children.

Play and Recreation

Facilities provided at a local level play a significant role in the recreational lives of children and young people. These can include libraries, playgrounds, parks, etc. Policy makers should aim to ensure that the creation of safe spaces for families to gather and for children to play are a priority. Consideration should be given to the needs for safety, age-friendly, family-friendly and equitable access.⁴⁰

³⁶ *ibid.*

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ Government of Ireland *First 5: A Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their families 2019-2028* (Stationery Office 2018).

³⁹ [pq-40444-22-denise-mitchell.pdf \(hse.ie\)](#)

⁴⁰ Woods CB, Powell C, Saunders JA, O'Brien W, Murphy MH, Duff C, Farmer O, Johnston A., Connolly S. and Belton S "The Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Study 2018" (CSPPA 2018)

The Growing up in Ireland survey found that nine per cent of mothers of nine-year-olds felt it was not safe to play outdoors in their local area during the day and 42 per cent felt there were no safe parks, playgrounds and play spaces in their local area.⁴¹ Housing and communities that are not child or youth friendly, or are perceived by children and their parents to have unsafe public spaces, are associated with poverty and non-participation in play and recreational opportunities.⁴² Children living in temporary accommodation and those living in Direct Provision centres do not have adequate access to safe play and recreation facilities.⁴³ The negative implications of play deprivation may be significant to a child's development as play impacts their social, emotional, cognitive and physical development.⁴⁴ Play also has a crucial role in creating stronger bonds between parents and their children.⁴⁵

First Five acknowledges the emergence of child-friendly approaches to local planning and design internationally, as well as the importance of local planning and delivery structures to the successful implementation of the strategy. The commitment in *First Five* to develop guidelines for local authorities on the development of child-friendly communities will ensure that children have 'safe environments to play, explore and learn'.⁴⁶ It is welcome that a review of existing guidelines has been completed as part of this action, but further progress is needed on the development of best practice in the incorporation of child-centred approach to planning.⁴⁷

Recommendation

- Develop a new National Play and Recreation Strategy for Children and Young People that has a focus on the need for green spaces and recreational facilities in local communities and education settings. In developing this strategy a review should be carried out of what exists at local authority levels. The national strategy should place an obligation on local authorities to develop play and recreation facilities for all children and young people, with a particular emphasis on children and young people experiencing poverty.

⁴¹ Growing up in Ireland Study Team, *The Lives of 9-Year-Olds* (ESRI and TCD 2009).

⁴² National Children's Office, *Teenspace: National Recreation Policy for Young People* (The Stationery Office 2008) and National Children's Office, *Ready, Steady! A National Play Strategy* (The Stationery Office 2004).

⁴³ Kathy Walsh, and Brian Harvey, *Family Experiences of Pathways into Homelessness - The Families' Perspective* (DRHE 2015) <<https://bit.ly/2UpaT4J>>; Working Group on the Protection Process, *Report to Government on Improvements to the Protection Process, including Direct Provision and Supports to Asylum Seekers* (Working Group on the Protection Process 2015) para 1.59,2.22.

⁴⁴ Milteer R and others, 'The Importance Of Play In Promoting Healthy Child Development And Maintaining Strong Parent Child Bond: Focus On Children In Poverty' (2012) 129 *Pediatrics*

⁴⁵ Milteer R and others, 'The Importance Of Play In Promoting Healthy Child Development And Maintaining Strong Parent-Child Bond: Focus On Children In Poverty' (2012) 129 *Pediatrics*

⁴⁶ Government of Ireland *First 5 A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028* (DCEDIY).

⁴⁷ Government of Ireland *First Five: Annual Implementation Plan 2019* (DCEDIY 2020).