

# Country Report Ireland



## Eurochild Child Guarantee Taskforce

Recommendations for the Child  
Guarantee National Action Plan  
in Ireland



**Eurochild**  
Putting children at  
the heart of Europe



There are 1,201,635 children in Ireland. Children make up 24.2% of the total population. 23.8% of children in Ireland are at risk of poverty of social exclusion.

## Governance

### National actors and their functions

The National Coordinator for Ireland is Mr. Albert O'Donoghue. He is the Principal Officer, EU and International Unit, Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Department of Children or DCEDIY).

### Best practices of reaching out to stakeholders and relevant parties

The DCEDIY has established an EU/International Unit to coordinate the Child Guarantee in Ireland. It is working with an interdepartmental group on priorities for the national action plan. The Minister for CEDYI has also appointed an attaché in Brussels who will link work at national and European levels.

The CEO of the Children's Rights Alliance, Tanya Ward, is chair of the Better Outcomes Brighter Futures National Advisory Council. The Council includes representatives from community and voluntary organisations and academia along with independent experts who have expertise on issues impacting

children and young people. The Council provides expert advice and its view have already been sought in relation to the European Child Guarantee. Overall responsibility for managing ESF+ Funding lies with the Department of Further and Higher Education.

### Main Recommendations by Taskforce Ireland

- The National Coordinator of the European Child Guarantee should be a central component of a fully resourced child poverty office established jointly between the Department of Children and the Department of Social Protection;
- The DCEDIY should draw on the resources of the participation unit and the guidance in the child participation framework document to ensure that meaningful consultation involving children and young people takes place before, during and in monitoring the National Action Plan. A youth panel could feed into the development and monitoring of the plan at key stages.

# Children in Need and Outreach Measures

## Towards a consensus on who children in need are and why

The most recent data from the [Survey on Income and Living Conditions \(SILC\)](#) relates to 2020. It shows that children are most vulnerable to poverty, with 8.0% of children living in consistent poverty, while 16.9% of children were at risk of poverty. Lone parents are also significantly more vulnerable. Recent [analysis of the Growing up in Ireland survey data](#) identifies a number of drivers of child poverty, including lone parenthood, ethnicity, disability and family size.

In January 2020, the Department of Social Protection (DSP) published its [Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025](#), which reaffirms the government's commitment to reducing the number of children in consistent poverty by 70,000 from its 2011 level. It also commits to setting a new child poverty target, following a mid-term review in 2022, to improve Ireland's ranking in the EU SILC from 20th to 5th place by 2025.

SILC data provides some insights about the profile of children living in poverty, but it only collects information at the household and personal level. It does not cover children experiencing the most fundamental material deprivation. Research has identified three distinct groups, asylum seekers in Direct Provision centres, children in emergency accommodation and domestic violence refuges and children on unofficial Traveller sites.



Research has identified three distinct groups of children, as well as children in single parent households, at high risk of poverty and social exclusion:

- [Children living in Direct Provision centres](#) (seeking asylum/ international protection);
- Children living with their families in emergency homeless accommodation;
- [Children from Traveller and Roma communities](#).

While one parent families comprise 17% of all family units in the State, there tends to be a disproportionate number of these families in both [emergency accommodation](#) and [Direct Provision accommodation](#) and in the [Traveller community](#). The fact that not all of these children are captured in official measures of poverty or that disaggregated data is not available makes it more challenging to monitor progress on a national child poverty target. Furthermore; [2018 data](#) suggests that 4.8% of children of children under five were living in extreme poverty. As stated in the Ireland Country Report for the First Years First Priority campaign, data available indicates that lone parents and their children are particularly exposed to a higher risk of poverty and need targeted support.

## Previous or ongoing outreach activities by the government as well as other relevant actors

A [public consultation](#) on the European Child Guarantee was launched on 1 December 2021 by the Minister for Children. Written submissions were to be completed online by 14 January 2022. Guidance on submissions includes questions such as: What is working well for children to effectively access these services? What key processes achieve the desired outcomes? What is not working well? What could improve efficiency?

The DCEDIY plans to build on existing consultations with children and young people and hopes to hold focus groups with children and young people to inform the national action plan, but this is time dependent. The Department has a participation unit to enable children to voice their views on the development and delivery of policies and services. The [National](#)

Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision Making provides practical guidance and examples on how children can be supported to have their voices heard.

### Stepping up efforts – reaching more children in need

#### ***Involvement of Young People in LGBTI+ Youth Strategy***

Children and Young People's participation was central to the development of the LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy 2018-2020. A Youth Advisory Group (YAG) was set up by the Department and two leading national youth organisations and YAG representatives were included in the committee to oversee the Strategy. A Youth Forum was also established with representatives from a range of backgrounds to support the implementation of key actions under the Strategy.

#### ***Comhairle na nÓg and the Youth Travel Card***

Comhairle na nÓg (Youth Councils) comprises child and youth councils from all 31 local authorities in Ireland. It enables children's voices to be heard in the development of local services and policies. Since 2019 the Comhairle has been working on sustainable transport solutions resulting in the Government committing to a Youth Travel Card which will provide a 50% discount on public transport for people under 24.

Other best practice examples include the establishment of a youth assembly as part of Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025 and a consultation with children on After School Care.



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**To influence the implementation of the European Child Guarantee in Ireland, we plan to conduct an annual child poverty monitor and publish the findings.**

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The National Advisory Council has a child poverty subgroup which has made evidence-based recommendations to the Minister for Children on priorities for the national child poverty action plan to implement the European Child Guarantee.

#### ***Points to Note***

At the time of developing this report, the Children's Rights Alliance was not aware of planned outreach activities by the Department. We recommend that the Department ensures that meaningful consultation with children, including seldom-heard children, is a central feature of the National Action Plan.

To date there has been limited participation in the development of the National Action Plan. The public consultation was completed in January 2022 and the National Advisory Council on Better Outcomes Brighter Futures has been 'invited to give input and collaborate with government on the implementation'. The DCEDIY will be responsible for the overall implementation of the Child Guarantee in Ireland and is therefore our main target. The Department has convened an interdepartmental working group of key officials from relevant government departments to progress the commitments in the Child Guarantee. We will use other levers to influence implementation including building on existing relationships with the Departments of Social Protection, of Education and of Health.

# Key Services and Policy Reform for Children in Need

## Current national policies and strategies

The National Childcare Scheme provides financial support for childcare to parents, and policy objectives include poverty reduction and a narrowing of the disadvantage gap. A review showed the benefits of the scheme were higher for low-income families and those living in disadvantaged areas.

The DSP funds the School Meals Programme. A pilot was launched in September 2019 to provide hot food to children in receipt of the cold food option under the School Meals Programme was launched. This was expanded further in Budgets 2020, 2021 and 2022.

## Gaps and omissions in current national policies

In September 2021, the Department of Housing launched a new Housing for All strategy which had the potential to address the underlying causes of homelessness. However, there is little focus on children except for emphasising the importance of early intervention initiatives and the role of Family Support services. There is a lack of a dedicated plan or specific actions to tackle family homelessness.

The National Childcare Scheme aims to address poverty reduction. However, in the review of the

scheme 14% of very disadvantaged families said they had less money to spend under the scheme, partly due to the scheme's higher threshold rates for subsidies.

The Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme has brought together several initiatives tackling educational disadvantage. Schools in this programme tend to be in disadvantaged communities. There is a relatively sharp distinction between DEIS and non-DEIS schools, which means that accurately classifying a school's socio-economic/demographic profile is crucial for the delivery of appropriate services. Half of children experiencing poverty attend non-DEIS schools. Currently only children attending DEIS schools can access the hot school meals scheme.

The underfunding of schools means that the financial burden has fallen to parents. An estimated shortfall of €46m in funding, for basic overhead costs, is made up each year through the support of parents and local communities. Measures have been taken to restore approximately 40% of the capitation grant to 2010 levels with increases provided for in the 2019 and 2020 budgets. Households still face financial strain due to the cost of education.

# Building an Enabling Policy Framework to create a 'whole of government approach'

## Current national policies and strategies on children and young people

Existing policy framework documents such as First Five and the Roadmap for Social Inclusion provide examples of a whole of government approach in two adjacent policy areas.

It is positive that the Roadmap of Social Inclusion review in 2022 will include a review of the child poverty target in line with commitments under the

European Child Guarantee. The DCEDIY and the DSP are in discussions about how this review will align with the national child poverty action plan.

An Advisory Council for the National Policy Framework on Children and Young People harnesses expertise from the community and voluntary sector, academia and independent experts and individuals working with and for children. It brings into one forum a diverse range of interests from sectorial stakeholders in the domains of children and young people's policy and

provision. The Council aims to: advise the Children and Young People's Policy Consortium and the Minister for Children on the implementation of Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (BOBF); support the implementation of BOBF in and across the community and voluntary sector, and in wider society and ensure that the specific expertise and perspectives from respective areas of children and young people's services inform the work of the Council.

The Children and Young People's Policy Consortium was established in 2014 as part of the implementation structures outlined in BOBF. It comprises senior officials from government departments and agencies and representatives from advisory and local operational fora. The Consortium has oversight of the implementation of BOBF and reports annually to government on progress.

A child poverty subgroup was established in October 2015. Comprising of both statutory and non-governmental (NGO) representatives it was co-convened by the DSP and the Children's Rights Alliance. The subgroup developed a paper based on the European Commission's Recommendation on Investing in Children to inform the whole of government approach to tackling child poverty in Ireland and its recommendations were reflected in the 2017 and 2018 Budgets. A further paper detailing the whole of government approach to tackling child poverty, based on the European Commission's Recommendation on Investing in Children, was published in October 2017. It welcomed the government's three pillar approach as demonstrably effective in reducing child poverty and urged the government to continue to use it in the national child poverty action plan. The Cabinet Committee on Social Policy is also an important vehicle for implementation and accountability.

In our [submission](#) to the Department on the European Child Guarantee recommended the following:

- A dedicated child poverty office established by the Departments of Children and Social Protection;
- Reporting structures for the next children and young people's policy framework should incorporate oversight of the European Child Guarantee;
- Meaningful participation of children and young people particularly seldom heard groups;
- Development of indicators to track progress on child poverty;
- Pilot Local Child Poverty Action Plans.

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**“The establishment of a child poverty office will drive change across government and will be the most important change to bring about an enabling policy framework.”**

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### **Suggested steps to improve the national response to child poverty**

#### ***Creating a Child Poverty Office***

The National Coordinator of the European Child Guarantee should be a central component of a dedicated and fully resourced child poverty office. The attaché in Brussels will provide an important link between the national and European / international levels.

In Ireland, the Alliance recommends that this child poverty office should be established jointly between the Departments of Children and of Social Protection. The remit of this office should include the implementation of the European Child Guarantee but it should also drive a broader child poverty strategy with goals and objectives beyond those outlined in the Guarantee.

The 2022 mid-term review of the [Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025](#) would be an opportune time to establish this office, which could co-ordinate and monitor a whole of government approach delegating specific actions to relevant government departments. It is critical that the office is adequately staffed and resourced with a team of officials to work on policy, strategic engagement, communications and operations.

# Accountability - Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation

## Existing checks and balances

The primary data collection tool on child poverty in Ireland is the Survey on Income and Living Conditions. The latest available data is from 2020. Valuable data and information on a wide range of related issues is also available from the longitudinal study [Growing up in Ireland](#).

Our annual flagship publication, the [Report Card](#) series, holds the government to account on its own Programme for Government commitments. Report Card examines commitments related to a child's right to early childhood care and education, housing, education, adequate nutrition including hot school meals and health. Report Card will include references to the State's obligations under the Child Guarantee and monitor progress in relation to that.

## Suggested steps towards a more robust monitoring and evaluation framework

The development of a broader National Child Poverty Action Plan, under which the European Child Guarantee sits, provides an opportunity to develop a dashboard of indicators which are related to the causes and consequences of child poverty and which will capture the impact of policy measures on children's and young people's lives.

Data needs be collected on engagement (e.g. participation in arts and cultural events, participation in sport), rates of early school leaving, access to safe places to play, rates of childhood obesity, housing affordability, levels of overcrowding, number of children living in emergency accommodation, length of time spent in direct provision, number of children on waiting lists for speech therapy, mental health services, occupational therapy etc., to give an insight into the experience of child poverty and child well-being more broadly and to focus policy action. Thematic reporting on this data should take place on a regular basis throughout the lifetime of the plan.

Indicators such as vulnerability to consistent poverty, [persistent risk of poverty](#) and deep income poverty (income below 50% of median income), can be used to help identify trends, patterns and vulnerable groups.

Specific cohorts of children should be targeted in the implementation of the European Child Guarantee. This includes children experiencing homelessness, children in alternative care and Traveller and Roma children. Existing data sources, such as SILC, fail to adequately capture these groups and therefore a specific programme of research should be undertaken to bridge the gap in data.

The [EU-SILC](#) provides a comparable data set of information and indicators that could be included in an EU common monitoring framework. Data using this survey approach is being captured in most European countries and provides a standardised approach to capturing poverty levels.

