



**CHILDREN'S
RIGHTS
ALLIANCE**

Uniting Voices For Children



Child Poverty Monitor



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Department of Rural and
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An Roinn Forbartha
Tuaithe agus Pobail



government supporting communities



The Community
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INTRODUCTION

This is the first edition of a new annual publication for the Children's Rights Alliance. The *Child Poverty Monitor* will document, analyse and report on child poverty in Ireland. The Monitor will track Government progress on reducing the number of children trapped in poverty, showcase best practice solutions and spotlight key areas of concern across issues including food poverty, income adequacy, education inequality and the high cost of living.

Child poverty is defined by the deprivation of essential resources for a minimum standard of living. What that means, is a child in poverty, has limited or no access to the basic essentials which we would consider the bare minimum any citizen should have such as healthcare, housing, education, food.

Poverty pulls children back from opportunities to reach their full potential. Instead of focusing on what resources or supports a child needs to thrive in life, the focus becomes on what is needed to just survive. Poverty affects every aspect of your life – your health, wellbeing, anxiety levels and behaviour. Growing up in poverty, you are less likely to go to college and more likely to have mental health issues throughout your life. The longer a child stays in a cycle of consistent poverty, the greater the negative impact on their outcomes. Long-term exposure to economic vulnerability impacts on children's outcomes across a number of domains including their physical and mental health, educational attainment and socio-emotional well-being and can result in them having a self-esteem, which can lead to mental health difficulties in later life. These outcomes are not inevitable. Investment, national and local actions can reduce the impact of poverty and support children to reach their full potential.

In Ireland, 5.2 per cent of children live in consistent poverty with 13.6 per cent of children at risk of poverty. In December 2019, the then Minister for Children, Katherine Zappone TD, initiated a Child-specific Poverty Research Programme. Research

reports from this series have revealed that among the children living in consistent poverty, 43 per cent are in deep poverty, where household income is 50 per cent or less of median income. The research analysis of the 2018 SILC data by age cohort found that primary school aged children (6-11 years) have the highest consistent poverty rate (nine per cent), while preschool children (0-5 years) have the lowest (4.8 per cent). Almost nine per cent of children at second level experience consistent poverty.

Lone parenthood, ethnicity, disability and family size has been identified as being associated with persistent poverty. A multi-dimensional measure of poverty, known as 'economic vulnerability', was established as part of this research. 'Economic vulnerability' is based on three indicators – low household income (bottom 20 per cent), difficulty making ends meet and material deprivation. Household transitions, such as the breakdown of a relationship or job loss for a parent and the inability of the mother to work due to disability or illness have been found to make families particularly vulnerable.

Enhancing our understanding of the drivers of economic vulnerability and poverty is essential to the development of policy solutions to reverse the tide.

The very drivers ushering people into poverty, could also be considered as a way of breaking the cycle of poverty for many families. For example, this research found that parental employment was a key factor both in preventing families falling into poverty and in lifting them out of economic vulnerability.

Taking a children's rights approach, the Child Poverty Monitor's is informed by the measures called for in the European Commission's Recommendation *Investing in Children: Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage*. The Recommendation sets out a concrete roadmap for addressing child poverty which draws on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It provides European Union (EU) Member States with a common framework to ensure synergies across

policy areas along with taking into account the specific local, regional and national needs. Investing in Children recommends tackling child poverty and social exclusion through integrated strategies encompassing not only children's material security but also the promotion of equal opportunities. The recommendation sets out a three-pillar approach which focuses on adequate resources and affordable quality services and the right to participate.

1

Pillar 1: Access to adequate resources

Member States should prioritise parental participation in the labour market. This acknowledges the link between parental employment and 'children's living conditions'. 13 Member States should also ensure the optimisation of income benefits so that they can provide an adequate standard of living

2

Pillar 2: Access to affordable quality services

A reduction in inequality at a young age can be ensured through investment in early childhood education and care can. The improvement of education systems should ensure impact on equal opportunities. The responsiveness of health services should be improved to meet the needs of children experiencing disadvantage. Member States should prioritise a 'safe, adequate housing and living environment' to support children's 'development and learning needs'. 14 Family Support and alternative care settings should be enhanced and of good quality.

3

Pillar 3: Children's participation

Member States should support children to participate in play and recreation including sport and cultural activities. Mechanisms that support children's participation in decision-making should be supported particularly in areas that impact their lives.

On 14 June 2021, the European Commission formally adopted a Council Recommendation to establish the European Child Guarantee. The Guarantee aims to prevent and combat child poverty and social exclusion in the European Union (EU) by supporting the 27 Member States to make efforts to guarantee access to quality key services for children in need. As part of this work, Member States will submit action plans on how they will implement Guarantee including describing existing and planned measures of intervention.

In June 2022, Ireland's National Action Plan on the EU Child Guarantee was published. The Plan was developed by the Irish National Coordinator for the EU Child Guarantee, responsibility for which lies with a newly established EU and International Unit in the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. The Plan restates the current services, programmes and supports in place across relevant government departments within the scope of the Guarantee. In addition, the plan proposes to leverage the relationship between Local Community Development Committees and Children and Young People's Services Committees to develop Local Area Child Poverty Plans.

A pilot programme of four sites will seek to 'maximise learning and assess the feasibility of local area child poverty action plans being embedded in local co-ordinating structures' planning frameworks'.¹

Investing in Children calls on Member States to establish systems of governance, implementation and monitoring with regard to child poverty. One of the major challenges in Ireland when it comes to addressing child poverty is that that we do not have a driver at government level. Instead, responsibility is dispersed across government 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. The establishment of a dedicated office should build on the learnings of the role played by the Combat Poverty Agency in Ireland, over its two decades of operating, in supporting the implementation of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy.

A dedicated team could manage research, coordinate joint initiatives across government, poverty-proof government actions and launch new programmes to address key issues. It could also take responsibility for implementing the EU Child Guarantee. The Cabinet Committee on Social Policy is also an important vehicle for implementation and accountability.

In 2022, a mid-term review of the Roadmap for Social Inclusion is to be undertaken and we believe that this provides an opportune time to establish this office that can lead Ireland with direction and purpose towards our goal of ending child poverty.

Recommendation

Establish a dedicated and fully resourced child poverty office with a team of staff. The office should drive the implementation of a cross-government strategy to end child poverty.

1 Government of Ireland, EU Child Guarantee Ireland's National Action Plan (DCEDIY 2022), p.27

Showcasing Solutions:

BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLE IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES ADDRESSING CHILD POVERTY



What is the issue?

Poverty manifests differently in different communities. It can impact children and young people in different ways. The issue is, we need more research, at a local level to truly understand the impact of poverty in order to develop workable solutions.

Ending child poverty requires a commitment at national government level which cascades down to action in individual communities. To impact poverty at a local level, bespoke plans which address the specific needs of each individual community should focus on co-ordinating an approach across all organisations and services.

What is the solution?

In 2021, the Childhood Development Initiative (CDI) published *Over the Fence: Perspectives on and experiences of child poverty in Tallaght*. The report identifies the challenges faced in the Tallaght community and called for additional recovery resources for children disproportionately affected in relation to formal and non-formal education, social and therapeutic services. The extensive and comprehensive analysis provided a clear insight into the reality for children living in poverty in the local community and has enabled the initiative to put forward an action plan with recommendations to address the causes of these issues.

The report is an exemplar in developing a local action plan to address child poverty – from its research phase and consultative approach to the recommendations included. The CDI are also working with the local Child and Young People Services Committees (CYPSC) and Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) to develop and implement a detailed local plan.

How does it work?

The report *Over the Fence*, is based on research undertaken during 2020 and it presents a needs-analysis of the local community in order to inform and develop solutions to the key emerging issues. The analysis was conducted during 2020 and included comprehensive consultations with children, parents and service providers living and working in Tallaght. This ensured the lived experience of children and young people was reflected and their voice heard in any plans to address the issues they experience on a day-to-day basis. A central recommendation of the study was that children should be involved in the development of services and programmes targeted towards them. Identifying solutions to tackle child poverty at a local level should include the involvement of the young people and children they seek to target.

What is the impact?

The research reviewed national and international frameworks, and policies which inform interventions to address poverty and child poverty in Ireland. Socio-economic data illustrated that poverty remains a major concern in Ireland and children are the most vulnerable group to poverty.

The findings of the research enhance the public and political understanding of the complexity of child poverty and therefore will ensure responses to address these issues reach the root cause of the problem.

Learnings/ How can it be emulated?

The Over the Fence research project is one that could and should be replicated across the country. It outlines a needs analysis for the children and families in the community and through the research and participation of children, young people and families, puts forward specific solutions framed in the local context. We know that poverty can look different in urban, rural and suburban areas. The State could support local communities to carry out high quality research and then invest in local child poverty plans that would be tailored to the needs of children and families in the area.

This would be a great time to start this work as Ireland's National Action Plan on the EU Child Guarantee proposes to leverage the relationship between Local Community Development Committees and Children and Young People's Services Committees to develop Local Area Child Poverty Plans. A pilot programme of four sites will seek to 'maximise learning and assess the feasibility of local area child poverty action plans being embedded in local co-ordinating structures' planning frameworks'. However, resourcing of these local area child poverty action plans will be required in order to ensure they are based on effective consultation.

"The families love the visit to the library as part of the programme. They are always so amazed at how much the library has to offer and we know that regular visits become a feature for most children as a result. Reading for enjoyment and having books in the home are well known predictors of children's educational attainment, so this is hugely important."

(Doodle Den Facilitator)

"Working with parents who are stressed and under pressure, helping them to put some self-care strategies in place has really made a difference to them. They are calmer, and the kids are better as a result."

(Parent Carer Facilitator)



Adequate Income



ADEQUATE INCOME

“Everything’s bad there. I think the worst one there is his parents do not have a job and cannot get money or any of those things.”²

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child is clear that implementation of children’s socio-economic rights is not a charitable process but a basic obligation of Government.³ Ensuring that children and their families have access to adequate resources is a central pillar of *Investing in Children*. The commitments under this pillar are concerned with supporting parents’ participation in the labour market and providing for adequate living standards through a combination of cash income and in-kind benefits.⁴

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.⁵ *Investing in Children* is clear - of primary importance are adequate benefits including specific income supports for families and children and access to schemes providing minimum income.⁶ Eligibility for support should be sensitive to the adequate redistribution of resources across income groups.⁷ The facilitation of access to benefits should be a user-friendly process and outreach services should be provided.⁸ Member States need to ensure that disincentives to work are not created for single parents as well as ensuring targeted supports avoid stigmatisation and poverty traps.⁹

Access to an adequate income

The annual poverty statistics captured by the Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) provide important data on the proportion of the population without an adequate income.

The ‘at risk of poverty’ rate describes the proportion of the population who have an income below 60 per cent of the national median income.¹⁰ When examined by age cohort, children have the second highest risk of poverty rate at 13.6 per cent, higher than the rate amongst the general population at 11.6 per cent.¹¹ Households with children headed by one adult have a higher rate of 22.8 per cent versus those in two adult households (9.1 per cent).

SILC measures a household’s experience of deprivation, i.e. the proportion of households unable to afford a set of 11 goods and services which are considered the norm for society. While 13.8 per cent of the population experience deprivation the rate was higher amongst children (17 per cent) and in one parent families (44.9 per cent).

A third measure, consistent poverty, combines the proportion of the population who are identified as being at risk of poverty and experiencing deprivation. Children are most vulnerable to consistent poverty,

2 Childhood Development Initiative, *Over the Fence: Perspectives on and experiences of child poverty in Tallaght* (CDI 2021) 20.

3 UNCRC ‘General Comment No. 5 General measures of implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Arts. 4, 42 and 44)’ (2003) CRC/GC/2003/5 para 6.

4 European Commission, *Commission Recommendation: Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage* (Brussels, 20.2.2013 C(2013) 778 final) 3-4.

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

6 European Commission, *Commission Recommendation: Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage* (Brussels, 20.2.2013 C(2013) 778 final) 3-4) 778.

7 *ibid.*

8 *ibid.*

9 *ibid.*

10 Central Statistics Office, *Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2021* (CSO 2022).

11 *ibid.*

with a rate of 5.2 per cent versus an overall rate of 4 per cent. Children living in households headed by a lone parent are significantly more vulnerable to consistent poverty at a rate of 13.1 per cent compared to 3 per cent of two parent families.

	At risk of Poverty	Deprivation	Consistent Poverty
State	11.6	13.8	4.0
0-17 age group	13.6	17.0	5.2
1 adult, with children under 18 years	22.8	44.9	13.1
2 adults, with 1-3 children under 18 years	9.1	10.7	3.0

Source: CSO Survey of Income and Living Conditions 2021

Further insight about the inadequacy of a household's income to meet all expenditure costs is provided in SILC. In 2021, 42 per cent of all households reported some level of difficulty (from great to little) in making ends meet with 5.6 per cent reporting great difficulty.

While a similar pattern of difficulty was reported by adult households with children (39.7 per cent and 5.4 per cent respectively), one parent families reported much higher rates across all levels of difficulty. Three-quarters of all one parent households reported some level of difficulty making ends meet, 15.9 per cent of whom had great difficulty.

A shortcoming of SILC is that it does not contain data on the Traveller community. Research from the EU Fundamental Rights Agency found that in 2018, 38 per cent of Traveller and Roma families experienced difficulties in making ends meet.

The inability of a mother to work due to disability or illness has been identified as a strong predictor of economic vulnerability.¹² The latest SILC figures show an at risk of poverty rate of 39.1 per cent for those unable to work due to illness.¹³ The Growing Up in Ireland research has found higher incidences of chronic illness and disability among children from lower socio-economic backgrounds with greater numbers of children being described as 'severely hampered in daily activities'.¹⁴ The primary carer of a child with a disability is less likely to participate in the labour market especially if the child's disability is more limiting.¹⁵

Cost of Living Increases

While the SILC 2021 figures illustrate high levels of poverty and income inadequacy for one parent families, this data was collected prior to the onset of sustained increases in the cost of living.

According to the CSO, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) rose by 7.8 per cent in the 12 months between May 2021 and 2022.¹⁶

The impact of inflation has a varying impact on different groups in society depending on their individual consumption patterns.¹⁷ The household budget of lower income households tends to largely comprise of necessities.¹⁸ A more in-depth analysis of key indices and sub-indices highlights the growth in prices for essential items such as food, clothing and energy. These particular price increases will have a profound impact on low-income families and presumably many of those who self-reported difficulty in making ends meet in SILC 2021.

In some instances, the annual percentage change in prices for essential items is in excess of the overall growth in CPI. For instance, while food has risen by 4.5 per cent overall, staple items as bread (8.8 per cent), milk (10.5 per cent) and pasta (11.7 per cent) all exceed the overall increase for this category of CPI.¹⁹

12 Bertrand Maitre, Helen Russell, and Emer Smyth *The Dynamics of Child Poverty Evidence from the Growing Up in Ireland Survey* (ESRI 2021).

13 Central Statistics Office, *Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2021* (CSO 2022).

14 ESRI, *Growing up in Ireland: Key findings No 4 the health of 9 year olds*, (ESRI 2009).

15 John Cullinan, 'The Economic Costs of Disability for Families' (Frontline Magazine 2015).

16 Central Statistics Office, Consumer Price Index May 2022 (CSO June 2022) <<https://bit.ly/3NO8UgN>> accessed 14 June 2022.

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

18 *ibid.*

19 Central Statistics Office, Consumer Price Index May 2022 (CSO June 2022) <<https://bit.ly/3NO8UgN>> accessed 14 June 2022.

The costs of clothing have increased by 3 per cent, however, footwear is up 7.1 per cent. Given the propensity for the growth in children's feet this is an unavoidable item to purchase for families with children.²⁰

"My eight-year old daughter said "mummy I want a birthday party" and I had to say "you're a big girl now; you don't need a birthday party." It was very difficult to see the disappointment on her face. I had to explain that we don't have the money."²¹

The rise in energy costs has been borne out in an increase in calls for help from low-income households.²² Overall energy has increased by 56.7 per cent. There are significant annual increases across a number of sub-indices with a 25.9 per cent increase in the cost of solid fuels, 40.9 per cent increase for electricity, 57.1 per cent increase for Gas and 102.5 per cent for liquid fuels.²³ While these increases are staggering the Government has warned that there are further challenges ahead with regard to energy prices.²⁴

The Irish social welfare system has been found to play a key role in reducing inequality in Ireland.²⁵ 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 below.²⁶

The latest MESL analysis from post-Budget 2022 indicates that deep income inadequacy, whereby social welfare meets just 90 per cent of the MESL costs, will continue in 2022, and may increase, for households with older children.²⁷ Therefore those households dependent on social welfare were already in receipt of inadequate income supports prior to the onset of substantial increases in CPI.

Commitment no. 25 in the *Roadmap for Social Inclusion* will "(c)onsider and prepare a report for Government on the potential application of the benchmarking approach to other welfare payments".²⁸ This task was due to be completed by the third quarter of 2020. The delay in actioning the commitment is related to a linked commitment on benchmarking pensions. The Government is still due to respond to the latter which is part of the recommendations of the Pensions Commission.²⁹ The *Roadmap* proposes that the benchmarking of pensions should consider price inflation and earnings, however it does not take into consideration the real costs facing households.

Since 2004, the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice (VPSJ) has focused on establishing the cost of a standard of living which no one should be expected to live below.³⁰ This research, known as a Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL), is updated annually to reflect the impact of changes to policy and prices.

Typically, the update to the MESL data uses a blended approach of direct pricing and inflation adjustments of the items in each component of the budget. In 2020, however, a more extensive research project was

20 *ibid.*

21 Society of St. Vincent De Paul, *Experiences of Living Below the Minimum Essential Standard of Living: Stories of Struggle* (Society of St. Vincent De Paul 2018) 16.

22 Society of St. Vincent De Paul, 'SVP in the North Region reveals Requests for Help have soared' <<https://bit.ly/3QkZVXX>> accessed 14 June 2022.

23 Central Statistics Office, Consumer Price Index May 2022 (CSO June 2022) <<https://bit.ly/3NO8UgN>> accessed 14 June 2022.

24 Tony Connelly, 'Taoiseach warns of 'new era' for high energy prices' (RTÉ, 31 May 2022) <<https://bit.ly/3tBI3MT>> accessed 14 June 2022.

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

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

27 Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice, Budget 2022 MESL Impact Briefing (VPSJ 2021) <<https://bit.ly/3xvtmw2>> accessed 14 June 2022.

28 Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, *Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025* (DEASP 2020).

29 Department of Social Protection, Social Inclusion Division (Department of Social Protection 2020) <<https://bit.ly/3b9ITel>> accessed 24 June 2022.

30 Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice, 'Minimum essential budget standards research centre' <www.budgeting.ie> accessed 27 June 2022.

undertaken and the MESL was reviewed and rebased. This involved re-engaging in deliberative focus group discussions to determine whether the contents of the budget should be amended. Research comparing the costs of both approaches showed a divergence in costs, with the CPI rate tending to under-estimate changes in the cost of the MESL.³¹ For example, in households with children the rebased food basket 'is an average of 16% higher than the adjusted cost in the parental budgets, and 18% higher for school age children'.³² In the clothing budget children's rebased costs were one-third higher.

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.

Adequacy of Income Supports for Families with Children

Adequate social welfare rates that address the changing needs of a child are vital to ensuring their basic needs are met. The VPSJ's research has consistently identified older children as having additional and distinct needs in comparison to younger children.³³ The minimum needs of children aged 12 and over, cost over €120 per week, which is 63 per cent more expensive than the minimum needs of younger children.³⁴ Additional costs relating to food, clothing, personal care, social inclusion and second level education account for much of the difference.

To address this issue, the VPSJ, along with other national non-governmental organisations, have long called 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 meaning that the rate for over 12s is now

€8 higher than that for under 12s.³⁵ The targeting of increased resources towards older children based on evidence informed policy making is welcome. However, the VPSJ's assessment post-Budget 2022 indicated that social welfare supports would meet just 64 per cent of MESL costs for older children versus 89 per cent for younger children.³⁶ This analysis, coupled with the increases in CPI (see previous section) means that substantial increases to the IQC payment is needed in Budget 2023 for both rates of the payment.

An important aspect of the MESL research is the fact that it makes a number of assumptions about the household types under study. For instance, it is assumed that neither the adults or children in the households have a disability or long-term illness. Further research by the VPSJ has considered the costs associated with caring for a child with a disability.³⁷ This research found that households with an adolescent child with a profound intellectual disability have additional weekly costs of €243.95.³⁸ Social welfare rates for such households should be reflective of the additional costs of disability. The next Budget needs to implement this measure in full.



31 Vincintian Partnership for Social Justice, *Submission to the Low Pay Commission* (VPSJ 2020) <<https://bit.ly/3cjM0vY>> accessed 27 June 2022.

32 Vincintian Partnership for Social Justice, *MESL Working Paper Examining the accuracy of inflation adjustment and quantifying the impact of basket changes*. (VPSJ 2021) <<https://bit.ly/3NYczZE>> accessed 27 June 2022, 6.

33 Vincintian Partnership for Social Justice, *MESL 2018: Update Report* (VPSJ 2018) 11.

34 Vincintian Partnership for Social Justice, *Minimum Essential Standard of Living 2019 update report* (VPSJ 2019) <<https://bit.ly/2Qz0tJv>> accessed 10 July 2020, 23.

35 Citizens Information, 'Claiming for a child dependant' <<https://bit.ly/3xtOfHT>> accessed 15 June 2022.

36 VPSJ, *Budget 2022 MESL Impact Briefing* (VPSJ 2021).

37 VPSJ, *Care at Home: Costs of Care Arising from Disability* (Family Carers Ireland and VPSJ 2022).

38 *ibid.*

Access to an Adequate Income for Families in Direct Provision

It is critical that all families with children are treated equally regarding access to social welfare income. In January 2022, approximately one in every four applicants for international protection was a child, with 1,822 children being accommodated by the International Protection Accommodation Service.³⁹ Children living in Direct Provision centres are at a high risk of consistent poverty although they are not counted in the official poverty statistics.

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. The financial cost of school trips or the need to take public transport after sport activities is a major barrier in terms of integrating into the community.⁴⁰

Recent budget increases to the rate of the weekly Direct Provision allowance for children, in line with the 2015 McMahon Report recommendation,⁴² made a positive impact on the incomes of these families. However, at the time of the McMahon report, the recommendation equated to the rate of Qualified Child Increase (QCI) and subsequent increases to this payment were not extended to children in Direct Provision.

The publication of *A White Paper to End Direct Provision and to Establish a New International Protection Support Service* in 2021 includes the recommendations around the introduction of income supports for families seeking asylum.⁴³ The introduction of an International Protection Child Payment means that for the first time, in more than 20 years, children in the protection process will be treated equally to other children living in Ireland who get a Child Benefit payment every month.

**"I have to watch every penny...
I always go to second-hand
shops, and I buy cheaper food...
I learned how to find free things
I can bring the kids to, like
festivals in the park." ⁴¹**



39 Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, *International Protection Accommodation Services Monthly Report – January 2022* (DCEDIY January 2022) <<https://bit.ly/3b5Rmyg>> accessed 15 June 2022.

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

41 *ibid* 33.

42 Working Group to Report to the Government on Improvements to the Protection Process, including Direct Provision and Supports to Asylum Seekers, Final Report (June 2015). At the time of the McMahon report, the recommendation equated to the rate of Qualified Child Increase (QCI). Notably, Budget 2019 increased the Qualified Child Increase rate to €34 (children under the age of 12) and €37 (children over the age of 12) for children of other social welfare recipients. Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, 'Almost 1.5 million to Gain as Budget 2019 Increases Commence' <https://bit.ly/3NDbt4B> accessed 27 June 2022.

43 *ibid*.

Complementarity of income supports and in-kind benefits

In this section the complementarity of responses to the cost-of-living increases is discussed. Analysis of in-kind benefits related to nutrition, childcare, education, health, housing, transport and access to sports or socio-cultural activities are described in the relevant sections later in the report under access to affordable quality services.

The government has responded to the cost-of-living increases in an ad-hoc manner outside of the normal Budget cycle. In February⁴⁴ and May 2022⁴⁵ several measures aimed at providing targeted support for households and families in the areas of energy, health and transport were announced. These measures included:

- **Energy:** A €125 lump sum payment in March and a second of €100 in May for those in receipt of the fuel allowance. An increase in the energy credit to €200 and a temporary reduction in the VAT rate on gas and electricity (from 13.5 per cent to 9 per cent) between May and October.
- **Health:** Reduction in the drug payment scheme threshold to €80.
- **Transport:** Temporary 20 per cent reduction in public transport fees and a reduction on the caps on school transport costs for multiple families. A reduction in the excise duty applied to Petrol and Diesel by 20c and 15c a litre respectively and a further reduction for green diesel. The introduction of a reduction in travel fares by 50 per cent for young people aged 19 to 23 as part of Budget 2022.⁴⁶

- **Social Welfare:** Increase in the threshold for the Working Family Payment by €10 from 1 April.

While these actions provide some supports for low-income families they do not go far enough. Public transport cost reductions are only beneficial to those who have access to such services, while the drug payment scheme adjustment is unlikely to benefit low-income families who will have access to the medical card.⁴⁷ More targeted and effective solutions would be the extension of the Fuel Allowance to recipients of the Working Family Payment in order to protect working families on low incomes⁴⁸ by providing them with support for increased energy costs. Targeting supports as opposed to universal interventions is a more effective means of tackling energy and fuel poverty.⁴⁹ The inaction on benchmarking of social welfare rates to date means that those dependent on such payments will continue to struggle to make ends meet.⁵⁰

Effective and Fair Administration of Income Supports

The Irish Social Welfare system provides an important role in preventing poverty and supporting people to access employment.⁵¹ According to SILC, income from social transfers play an important role in preventing poverty. The exclusion of social transfers from income sees the at risk of poverty rate rise from 11.6 per cent to 38.6 per cent.⁵² For individuals who do not have sufficient social insurance contributions for contributory payments, a range of social assistance payments are available providing for 'the main contingencies putting people at risk of poverty'.⁵³

44 Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, 'Ministers McGrath and Donohoe announce €505 million package in measures to mitigate the cost of living' (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform 2022) <<https://bit.ly/3zAS0y1>> accessed 14 June 2022.

45 Department of the Taoiseach, 'Government announces further measures to help households with rising cost of energy' (Department of the Taoiseach 2022) <<https://bit.ly/3Oghd4R>> accessed 14 June 2022.

46 Department of Transport 'Budget 2022 to help transform how we travel' (Press Release 12 October) <<https://bit.ly/3A7uKrM>> accessed 27 June 2022.

47 Social Justice Ireland, 'Government cost of living package fails to reach many of the most vulnerable' (Social Justice Ireland) <<https://bit.ly/3NTi7UZ>> accessed 14 June 2022.

48 One Family, Cost-of-living measures a missed opportunity to protect families from poverty (One Family 2022).

49 Barrett, M., Farrell, N. and Roantree, Energy Poverty and Deprivation in Ireland (ESRI 2022).

50 Social Justice Ireland, Government cost of living package fails to reach many of the most vulnerable <<https://bit.ly/3NTi7UZ>> accessed 14 June 2022

51 National Economic and Social Council, Toward a More Integrated Income Support System (NESC March 2021) 5.

52 Central Statistics Office, Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2021 (CSO 2022) <<https://bit.ly/3QpVZTV>> accessed 14 June 2022.

53 National Economic and Social Council, Toward a More Integrated Income Support System (NESC March 2021) 5.

The social welfare and tax systems should be responsive to different family structures and parenting arrangements. Currently there is a lack of data on the issue of shared parenting in Ireland. According to the last Census almost one in five families in Ireland were one parent families.⁵⁴ It is likely that some level of shared parenting is present amongst this cohort of the population.⁵⁵ A survey on shared parenting published in 2017 highlighted the financial impact experienced by those in shared parenting arrangements and a need for the social welfare system to be responsive to this.⁵⁶

Reform of existing social welfare and tax supports is needed to ensure shared parenting is promoted and supported. For example, both the One Parent Family and Job Seekers Transition payments apply rules relating to co-habitation. Families who have shared parent arrangements are often assessed as co-habiting and this acts a financial disincentive. A child-centred approach would ensure that rules are amended to ensure that the social welfare system would meet the best interest of the child.⁵⁷

The Department of Social Protection has published a strategy on customer service which sets out its vision for customer service and the actions required to realise this. The Department as a member of the International Social Security Association (ISSA) has received recognition for the quality of its service delivery.⁵⁸ As part of its model of customer service the Department adopts a customer focus approach and captures the 'voice of the participant' through a range of fora.⁵⁹ Other components include staff training and various means of capturing and measuring feedback.⁶⁰

Despite the Department's customer focus approach, anecdotal evidence indicates that customer service at the Department of Social Protection is problematic for some social welfare recipients. In particular, groups working with one parent families have indicated that the provision of information on entitlements needs improvement and there is a lack of consistency of service delivery by staff across the organisation.⁶¹ To further exacerbate the experience of poor customer service, in some instances there is a requirement for lone parents to provide the same information to different bodies charged with administering supports. Reform of existing systems and processes would ensure a more efficient use of resources and a reduced burden on those accessing the system.⁶²

Members of the Citizens Assembly on Gender Equality have supported a call for improved social protection services. In particular the Citizens Assembly supported 'greater efficiency and accountability for public funding and reprioritisation between current spending and revenue raising'.⁶³



- 54 Central Statistics Office, *Census of Population 2016 - Profile 4 Households and Families* (CSO) <<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cp4hf/cp4hf/fmls/>> accessed 14 June 2022.
- 55 One Family, *Submission to the Commission on Taxation and Welfare Reform - Your Vision, Our Future* (One Family 2022) <<https://bit.ly/3Hqd641>> accessed 15 June 2022.
- 56 One Family, *Ireland's First National Shared Parenting Survey* (One Family) 12.
- 57 One Family, *Submission to the Commission on Taxation and Welfare Reform - Your Vision, Our Future* (One Family 2022) <<https://bit.ly/3Hqd641>> accessed 15 June 2022.
- 58 Department of Social Protection, *Customer Service Strategy 2020 - 2022* (Department of Social Protection 2021) <<https://bit.ly/3HtnyHY>> accessed 15 June 2022, 15.
- 59 *ibid* 18.
- 60 *ibid*.
- 61 One Family, *Submission to the Commission on Taxation and Welfare Reform - Your Vision, Our Future* (One Family 2022) <<https://bit.ly/3Hqd641>> accessed 15 June 2022.
- 62 *ibid*.
- 63 The Citizens Assembly, *Report of the Citizens Assembly on gender equality* (The Citizens Assembly 2021) 138.

Ensuring that one parent families have sufficient access to income supports

Investing in Children calls for Member States to ensure that means tested and targeted benefits avoid creating work disincentives for lone parents and second earners. Over the last recession (2008-2013), research has highlighted that discretionary policy changes particularly affected the incomes of lone parents. It is vital that measures are taken to increase income for lone parents to address the discrepancies of the WFP that have a negative impact on lone parents.

In 2020, the average cost of sending a child to school was €380 for a child in fourth class and €735 for a child in first year.⁶⁴ The Irish League of Credit Unions report that one-in-three parents are getting into debt to pay for schools costs.⁶⁵ Budget 2022 made a progressive change to the thresholds for the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance by increasing the income thresholds to ensure that lone parents have the same access to the payment as two-parent households. Given that school costs per child are the same for all families, regardless of how many adults are in the household, this change has ensured that one parent families are not disadvantaged.

The Working Family Payment (WFP) is a weekly tax-free payment available to employees with children. It gives extra financial support to people on low pay. You must be an employee to qualify for WFP and you cannot qualify if you are only self-employed. Currently one-parent families need to work the same number of hours per week as two-parent families to benefit from the Working Family Payment. A reduction in the weekly threshold to 15 hours per week for one-parent families would reduce the disproportionate pressure they are under and help them increase their earning capacity.

64 Barnardos, *School Costs Survey 2020 Briefing Paper* <<https://bit.ly/3wQbCK2>> accessed 22 June 2021.

65 Irish League of Credit Unions, 'Irish League of Credit Union survey finds more than a third of families in debt' <<https://bit.ly/2VtnmQp>> accessed 22 June 2021.

Recommendations

Budget 2023

- Raise the Qualified Child Increase by a minimum of €7 for the under 12s and a minimum of €12 for over 12s. Increase adult social welfare rates by a minimum of €20 for all households with children. Such increases will help to address both the cost of living and the pre-existing inadequacy of social welfare rates.
- Expand the **length of time** the Fuel Allowance is paid to families from 28 to 32 weeks. This will increase the purchasing power of this payment at a time when energy costs have increased substantially.
- 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.
- To ensure equality between different household types, and to increase the income of one parent families in work, reduce the Working Family Payment weekly work threshold from 19 hours to 15 hours for one parent families.

Medium-term

- Benchmark all social welfare rates to MESL to ensure that all households with children can afford a minimum standard of living.
 - Extend Jobseekers Transition Payment to parents in work, education or training until their youngest child reaches the end of second level education.
 - Further develop IT and administration systems to ensure families can efficiently maximise their incomes. Once documentation or verification of circumstances is provided by a customer once it should be uploaded to the system. Entitlements should be automatically added to a customer's account.
 - Consideration should be given to how data on Traveller ethnicity can be captured in SILC. This would provide greater evidence on the levels of poverty in this cohort of the population.
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Showcasing Solutions:

BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLE IN ADDRESSING COSTS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

What is the issue?

Children, young people and their families have spoken about how a lack of income mean they have fewer opportunities to take part in activities with their friends and peers after school. This is particularly apparent for children and young people in Direct Provision. The financial cost of school trips or the need to take public transport after sport activities is a major barrier in terms of integrating into the community. Reducing these costs would have a positive impact in the lives of young people and also increase accessibility to a more sustainable, climate-friendly transport system.

What is the solution?

In 2021, Comhairle na nÓg had a positive influence on the decision-making process for Budget 2022. Through participative action, they secured a commitment from the government to introduce a youth travel card in 2022. This will have a direct impact on the costs incurred by young people in relation to transport at a time when the cost of living has increased significantly.

How does it work?

Comhairle na nÓg are child and youth councils in the 31 local authorities of the country, designed to enable young people to have a voice on the services, policies and issues that affect them in their local area. The core programme of Comhairle na nÓg centres on young people identifying, prioritising and progressing topics important to them. Every Comhairle na nÓg holds an Annual General Meeting to which children and young people are invited from local schools and youth groups. At the AGM, the young people work on identifying the topics of most importance to them. A Comhairle na nÓg Committee is also elected (or sometimes selected) at the AGM. This committee is then responsible for working on the topics identified at the AGM and being the consultative forum that works with decision-makers.

The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and the National Participation Office team conduct annual regional networking events for young people from Comhairle na nÓg. Every second year 500 young people attend the Comhairle na nÓg Showcase event with approximately 15 young people from every Comhairle na nÓg in attendance.

The purpose of the event is to give young Comhairle members the opportunity to showcase their work, share information and network with other young people in their region and voice their opinions on developing Comhairle na nÓg.

In order to ensure young people's voices are heard, Comhairle na nÓg acts as a consultative forum for adult decision-makers in the locality. Increasingly, local agencies use the Comhairle



na nÓg as a mechanism to get the views of young people on the development of relevant services and policies, such as heritage plans, play and recreation policies, policing plans, giving feedback on youth-friendly questionnaires, giving feedback on the location or type of new sports facility to be established in the area. Comhairlí na nÓg are often asked for (or volunteer) formal submissions on local policies or to take part in public consultations.

What is the impact?

The Comhairle na nÓg is a best practice example of youth participation mechanism which directly impacts the lives of young people in Ireland. The young people shape the National Executive and what topics they will focus on and through consultative forum, they work together to build momentum behind causes most important to them. Last year, focusing on the theme of Climate Change, the National Executive sent a proposal to the Government on sustainable transport solutions. This identified key areas where young people wanted to see change: cycling and public transport. The proposal contained robust recommendations to address key issues preventing young people from using public transport including a Youth Travel Card which would offer a 50 per cent discount on all public transport for young people aged 16-25. This proposal was accepted and announced by Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Michael McGrath, during the Budget 2022 announcement. The development will be particularly welcome for young people in or at risk of poverty. Providing young people with a travel subsidy will help to lower the cost barriers to participation in social and cultural activities which require access to public transport. [Watch the campaign video here!](#)

Learnings/ How can it be emulated?

The Comhairle na nÓg campaign for free transport is a best-practice example of where a group of young people who had first-hand experience of this barrier and recognised the ripple-effect this had on a young person's life, came together to identify where a financial intervention by Government could make an enormous difference.

This demonstrates that those closest to the issue need to be consulted on the solutions. Here, we see the added value young people brought to the development of a solution that had a multiplier impact effect across a number of different aspects of a young person's life. It also demonstrates the positive impact of making essential services free and accessible, and therefore relieving financial everyday burdens. The Government needs to look at similar interventions when addressing other issues.

"We can now say to our friends that their transport costs have been halved and we had a part to play in it..." "In the past, there was a belief that young people should be seen and not heard. We hope this will empower young people all over the country and make them believe that they can achieve things, if they work for it." (Molly, 16, Roscommon)



Food Poverty



FOOD POVERTY

“My experience of not having enough money means a totally unhealthy lifestyle because you do not have the money to buy food, like, well, you can buy food, but it is not healthy food.”⁶⁶

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) provides that every child has the right to enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical health and governments have an obligation to combat disease and malnutrition through the provision of adequate nutritious food.⁶⁷ The Committee on the Rights of the Child has recommended that in implementing this right, providing food in school is ‘desirable to ensure all pupils have access to a full meal every day’ and recommends that this is combined with education on nutrition and health.⁶⁸

The *EU Recommendation on Investing in Children* calls on Member States to take action to tackle food poverty by introducing complementary in-kind benefits related to nutrition and to tackle ‘the social gradient in unhealthy lifestyles’ by providing children with ‘access to balanced diets’.⁶⁹ Furthermore the recommendation calls for investment ‘in prevention, particularly during early childhood years, by putting in place comprehensive policies that combine nutrition, health, education and social measures’.⁷⁰

Access to adequate income and in-kind supports to tackle food poverty

Food poverty is defined as the inability to have an adequate or nutritious diet due to issues of affordability or accessibility.⁷¹

The latest data from SILC indicates that 27.2 per cent of those living in consistent poverty were unable to afford a roast once a week while 17.9 per cent were unable to afford meat, chicken or fish every other day.⁷² This was substantially higher than the rates for those not in consistent poverty who reported not being able to afford such items at a rate of 2.7 and 1.0 per cent respectively.⁷³

Table 1: SILC 2021 Statistics

	Percentage of individuals in consistent poverty	Percentage of individuals not in consistent poverty
Unable to afford a roast once a week	27.2	2.7
Unable to afford meat, chicken or fish every other day	17.9	1.0

66 [CDI-Child-Poverty-Report-min.pdf](#) p 21

67 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (20 November 1989) 1577 UNTS 3 (UNCRC) Art 24.

68 UNCRC General comment No. 15 (2013) on the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health (art. 24) CRC/C/GC/15, para 46.

69 European Commission ‘Recommendation on Investing in Children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage’ (20 February 2013) C(2013), 8.

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

71 Safe Food, *What is the cost of a healthy food basket in 2018?* (Safe Food 2019).

72 [Poverty and Deprivation - CSO - Central Statistics Office](#)

73 [Poverty and Deprivation - CSO - Central Statistics Office](#)

A healthy diet is out-of-reach for families with inadequate disposable incomes with food costs rising as children grow older.⁷⁴ Low-income households can often only afford cheap, concentrated energy from foods full of fat, salt and sugar rather than healthier, more expensive foods such as wholegrains, fish, vegetables and fruit.⁷⁵ A household with a teenager, reliant on social welfare, is required to spend 30 per cent of their income to meet the cost of a healthy food basket.⁷⁶ Rural households are particularly at risk of food poverty. In 2020, the weekly cost of a healthy food basket for a two-parent family with two children (one attending primary school and one attending secondary school) living in a rural area was €169. This compared to €147 for the same size of family living in an urban area.⁷⁷

A survey published in February 2022 indicated that one-quarter of parents were always or sometimes worried about being unable to provide sufficient food for their children.⁷⁸ This rose to one-third amongst those not in employment.⁷⁹ In the same survey, one-fifth of adults indicated, that in the past year, they skipped meals or reduced portions to ensure children have enough to eat.⁸⁰ The cost of living crisis is no doubt impacting these family in a more pronounced way as well as expanding outwards the numbers struggling (see section on Income Adequacy). Benchmarking social welfare rates to a Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL), is critical and could ensure that everyone can afford adequate and nutritious food.

In-kind support (i.e. provision of food) for access to food is provided through the operation of the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) Programme administered by the Department of Social Protection. The programme 'is designed to support

Member States in addressing the basic needs of the most deprived people in our community'.⁸¹ The FEAD Ireland fund for 2014-2020 totaled €26.7 million (€22m European funding and €4m of Irish Exchequer funding) with 75 per cent of this used to provide food to groups of people most in need including children in low income households as well as those experiencing homelessness, certain members of the Traveller and Roma communities and victims of domestic violence.⁸² Food Cloud is the primary not-for-profit partner that administers the food element of the FEAD programme to over 150 charities nationwide who are working at local level with children and families. These include organisations like Barnardos, Family Resource Centres, The Society of St Vincent De Paul, Youth Work Ireland, Youth Reach and others projects working with Travellers, victims of domestic violence and families experiencing homelessness.⁸³

Providing access to meals in school settings

Schools are an excellent setting to reach children, teachers, families and the surrounding community.⁸⁴ They provide a social environment where children can access and enjoy food, without financial constraints.⁸⁵ Generally, there are two approaches to food education and school food: education separated from school meals, and education integrated into the provision of school meals.⁸⁶ A systematic review of 42 European interventions to promote healthy diet and obesity prevention provides strong evidence that multi-component interventions (food availability, education curriculum integration, and parent involvement) had relatively strong effects on dietary improvements among children.⁸⁷ The message is that

74 Safe Food, *What is the cost of a healthy food basket in 2020?* (2021)

75 Adam Drewnowski, *The Real Contribution of Added Sugars and Fats to Obesity*, *Epidemiologic Reviews*, Volume 29, Issue 1, January 2007, Pages 160–171.

76 Safe Food, *What is the cost of a healthy food basket in 2020?* (2021)

77 Safe Food, *What is the cost of a healthy food basket in 2020?* (2021)

78 Amarach, *Food Poverty the Impact on Vulnerable Children and Families* (Barnardos 2022) <https://bit.ly/3bo0vlO>

79 Amarach, *Food Poverty the Impact on Vulnerable Children and Families* (Barnardos 2022) <https://bit.ly/3bo0vlO>

80 Amarach, *Food Poverty the Impact on Vulnerable Children and Families* (Barnardos 2022) <https://bit.ly/3bo0vlO>

81 Department of Social Protection, 'FEAD – The Fund for the European Aid to the Most Deprived' <https://bit.ly/33ZCWst> accessed 17 May 2021.

82 Department of Social Protection, 'FEAD – The Fund for the European Aid to the Most Deprived' <https://bit.ly/33ZCWst> accessed 17 May 2021.

83 A list of charities in receipt of FEAD Food Product support can be found at: <<https://assets.gov.ie/70190/72525eaf4916436bb598b7462e04dfbf.pdf>> accessed 17 May 2021.

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

85 *ibid.*

86 M Oostindjer and JAschemann-Witzel et al, *Are school meals a viable and sustainable tool to improve the healthiness and sustainability of children's diet and food consumption?* A cross-national comparative perspective (2017) *Critical Reviews in Food Science and Nutrition*, 57:18, 3942-3958.

87 *ibid.*

multi-component interventions are more effective than only providing food to children.

Ireland is unusual in the European Union (EU) context in not providing a universal school meal programme.⁸⁸ However, a targeted School Meals Programme is funded by the Department of Social Protection. The programme provides funding towards the provision of food through the allocation of a per pupil rate for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Currently, funding is provided to 1,506 schools and benefits 230,000 children.⁸⁹ 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.⁹⁰

In September 2019, the Department launched a hot school meals pilot which initially involved 37 primary schools benefitting 6,744 students for the 2019/2020 academic year.⁹¹ Further expansions of the scheme announced in Budget 2020 and the two subsequent budgets means that in 2022 the provision of hot school meals will reach over 55,000 children.⁹² The Programme for Government has committed to 'continue to review and expand the rollout of the Hot School Meals initiative'.⁹³

The findings of research conducted with principals, teachers/Special Needs Assistants, parents and suppliers regarding all aspects of the provision of the hot meals, noted predominantly positive feedback with the scheme.⁹⁴ Over two-thirds of principals, teachers and Special Needs Assistants noted that the hot meals were of better quality compared to

the cold food provided previously.⁹⁵ One-third of parents said the provision of hot meals had a positive impact on their children in terms of attendance at school, physical health and emotional/psychological wellbeing.⁹⁶ Two-thirds of principals and teachers indicated that universal provision within the school would be important.⁹⁷

An evaluation of the School Meals Programme, which will include a review of the provision of hot meals, is currently underway.⁹⁸ This evaluation will be completed in nine to twelve months and will include the views of children and young people receiving school meals under the programme.⁹⁹ The evaluation will also consider the feasibility of leveraging funding available through the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) under the EU Child Guarantee.¹⁰⁰

The universal provision of hot meals in a school setting counters stigma and provides a social environment where children can access and enjoy food without financial constraints.¹⁰¹ However, holiday hunger remains a serious concern for children and young people experiencing food insecurity.¹⁰² This phenomenon relates to the inability of children to access 'an adequate supply of nutritious food' outside of school term times.¹⁰³ In the UK, the establishment of holiday clubs in schools and communities in response to this issue ensured children got access to nutritious food but also the opportunity to engage in healthy activities as opposed to being more sedentary (a particular issue for low income families who may not be able to afford participation in paid activities)

88 *ibid.*

89 Department of Social Protection, 'Minister Humphreys announces extension of Hot School Meals Programme' (Press release 22 November 2021) <<https://bit.ly/3GeUvpe>> accessed 31 January 2022.

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

91 Heather Humphries TD, Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, School Meals Programme, Written Answers 14 July 2020 [15434/20]. All primary schools (over 3,000) were invited to apply with 506 schools registering interest, suggesting high demand for the limited pilot. The schools chosen to participate in the pilot were selected randomly, having regard to geographical spread, numbers enrolled, range of suppliers and the overall budget available.

92 Department of Social Protection, 'Minister Humphreys announces extension of Hot School Meals Programme' (Press release 22 November 2021) <<https://bit.ly/3GeUvpe>> accessed 31 January 2022.

93 Government of Ireland, *Programme for Government, Our Shared Future* (Government Publications 2020) 96.

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

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

96 *ibid.*

97 *ibid.*

98 Communication received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the Department of Social Protection, 11 January 2022.

99 *ibid.*

100 *ibid.*

101 Healthy Food for All, *A good practice guide to School Food Initiatives* (Healthy Food for All 2009).

102 Pamela L. Graham et al. *School Holiday Food Provision in the UK: A Qualitative Investigation of Needs, Benefits, and Potential for Development Frontiers in Public Health*, (2016) Vol. 4, Article 172.

103 Pamela L. Graham et al. *School Holiday Food Provision in the UK: A Qualitative Investigation of Needs, Benefits, and Potential for Development Frontiers in Public Health*, (2016) Vol. 4, Article 172.

during holiday time.¹⁰⁴ Generally, the Irish school meals programme does not provide funding to cover school holidays or for days when the school is closed. Calls have been made for this to be extended through the summer months and other holiday periods.¹⁰⁵ There is a need to clearly identify a means of continuing this initiative to combat holiday hunger.

Education on nutrition and health

Food poverty is one of the driving forces behind higher rates of obesity and ill-health in disadvantaged communities.¹⁰⁶ Research on the links between dietary energy density and dietary energy cost has found that refined foods, added sugars and added fats are some of the cheapest sources of dietary energy, as opposed to more costly nutrient-dense foods such as lean meat, fruit and vegetables.¹⁰⁷ The high cost of good quality, nutritious food often prices low-income families out of maintaining healthy diets by limiting their choices to more processed and refined food-based diets as a cost-effective way of meeting daily calorific requirements.¹⁰⁸ In Ireland, by age three, children from lower socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to have consumed energy-dense food like hamburgers and crisps, but less likely to have eaten fresh fruit or vegetables.¹⁰⁹ Poor nutrition in children is linked to reduced development, cognitive function, delayed school enrolment, impaired concentration, increased illness, absenteeism and early school leaving.¹¹⁰ Being able to buy nutritious food locally or having access to transport to a local supermarket helps to prevent food poverty, and more economically advantaged households do not have to travel as far

for food shopping.¹¹¹ Evidence also shows that families living on low and fixed incomes tended to cut back on food expenditure as it was easier to control than the cost of rent, utilities, or education.¹¹² Parents - and mothers in particular - within low-income households sometimes reduce their food intake in order to provide more for their children.¹¹³

Parents describe feeling anxious and guilty about the type of food they provide as feeding their child is their priority rather than the quality or content of the food.¹¹⁴ They may choose unhealthy processed convenience foods so that their children will want to eat it and will not experience hunger.¹¹⁵ Energy-dense foods composed of refined grains, added sugars, or fats are cheaper per calorie than healthier nutrient-dense foods. In Ireland, by age three, children from lower socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to have consumed energy-dense food like hamburgers and crisps, but less likely to have eaten fresh fruit or vegetables.¹¹⁶

Parents need to be supported and empowered to feed their children sufficient nutritious food. An adequate healthy diet can be inaccessible if parents do not have information to make healthy food choices or if they do not have the skills to prepare and cook fresh food.¹¹⁷ Given the relationship between food poverty and risk of obesity, there is also work to be done in terms of education programmes of what constitutes a healthy diet. While lower levels of education have been found to be a predictor of food poverty in the Irish context,¹¹⁸ 'socially disadvantaged groups display awareness of what constitutes healthy eating, yet are

104 Pamela L. Graham et al. *School Holiday Food Provision in the UK: A Qualitative Investigation of Needs, Benefits, and Potential for Development* *Frontiers in Public Health*, (2016) Vol. 4, Article 172.

105 Kitty Holland 'Thousands at risk of holiday hunger if school meals dropped' *Irish Times*, 11 June 2020.

106 Richard Layte and Cathal McCrory, *Growing up in Ireland Overweight and obesity among 9 year olds*. (DCYA 2011).

107 David Madden, 'The Poverty Effects of a 'Fat-Tax' in Ireland' (2015) 24 *Health Economics*, 4.

108 *ibid*.

109 James Williams, Aisling Murray, Cathal McCrory, Sinéad McNally, *Growing Up in Ireland - Development From Birth To Three Years* (Department of Children and Youth Affairs 2013) 37.

110 Alessandro Rhyll Demaio, Francesco Branca, *Decade of action on nutrition: our window to act on the double burden of malnutrition*, *BMJ Glob Health* 2017; 3

111 Richard Layte and Cathal McCrory, *Growing up in Ireland Overweight and obesity among 9 year olds*. (DCYA 2011) 33

112 Society of St. Vincent de Paul, *Stories of Struggle: Experiences of living below the minimum essential standard of living* (SVP 2018).

113 Society of St Vincent de Paul, "It's the hardest job in the world": *An exploratory research study with one-parent families being assisted by the Society of St Vincent de Paul* (SVP 2014).

114 Safefood, *Food on a low income Four households tell their story* (Safefood 2011) 5, 48, 51.

115 *ibid*, 22.

116 James Williams, Aisling Murray, Cathal McCrory, Sinéad McNally, *Growing Up in Ireland - Development From Birth To Three Years* (Department of Children and Youth Affairs 2013) 37.

117 Purdy J., McFarlane G., Harvey H., Rugkasa J. and Willis K., *Food Poverty- Fact or Fiction* (Public Health Alliance of Ireland).

118 Caroline Carney and Bertrand Maitre, *Constructing a Food Poverty Indicator for Ireland using the Survey on Income and Living Conditions* (Department of Social Protection 2012).

constrained primarily by affordability'.¹¹⁹ However, Growing Up in Ireland data found that parents are unaware of when their child is not a healthy weight.¹²⁰ Parents need to understand the child health consequences of overweight and obesity and be aware when their child has a problem. Irish pilots of parenting programmes found challenges in recruiting and retaining participation in targeted programmes, attributed in part to a lack of awareness or reluctance by parents to accept their child had a problem, particularly when the child was overweight rather than obese.¹²¹ Well-resourced universal parenting education programmes and public health campaigns are needed on what constitutes a healthy weight for children, and their parents, and how to work towards its achievement.

A cross-government approach to tackling food poverty

The Programme for Government has committed to 'work across government to address food poverty in children and ensure no child goes hungry'.¹²² Further action on this is provided in the *Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025* which commits to developing a programme of work to explore the drivers of food poverty and to identify mitigating actions.¹²³ This will require coordinating activities across several government departments. It is positive to see some joint working between departments on the school meals rollout through the development of nutrition standards for the Hot School Meals Scheme,¹²⁴ and the launch of the first *Healthy Eating Guidelines for 1-4 Year-Olds, Children's Food Pyramid* in October 2020.¹²⁵

In May 2021, a cross-government Working Group on Food Poverty was established by Minister for State with responsibility for social Inclusion, Joe O'Brien TD which also includes community and voluntary organisations.¹²⁶ The group met on four occasions in 2021 and has focused on two pieces of work. The first was a mapping exercise to establish what government initiatives currently exist to address food poverty.¹²⁷ The second involved the development of a proposal to commission case study research on a small number of geographic areas on the prevalence and drivers of food poverty alongside a mapping exercise of the actors and service providers in these areas.¹²⁸ It is envisaged that the outcome of this research will inform the realisation of the commitment contained in the *Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025*.¹²⁹

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- 119 Diarmuid Sugrue 'Food Poverty and Policy In Ireland: A Review of the Literature' UCD School Of Medicine And Medical Science <<http://www.ucdsmj.com/food-poverty>> accessed 18 May 2021 citing The Survey on Lifestyle and Attitude to Nutrition (SLÁN) 2007.
- 120 Michelle Queally, Edel Doherty, Karen Matvienko-Sikar, Elaine Toomey, John Cullinan, Janas M. Harrington, Patricia M. Kearney, Do mothers accurately identify their child's overweight/obesity status during early childhood? Evidence from a nationally representative cohort study, *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, 01815:56;
- 121 Phil Jennings, Sarah O'Brien and Donal O'Shea, 'Tackling Childhood Obesity - A written submission from the Health Service Executive to the Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs' <<https://bit.ly/2HRMo7B>> (accessed 13 September 2018) 14.
- 122 Government of Ireland, *Programme for Government, Our Shared Future* (Government Publications 2020) 96.
- 123 Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection 'Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025' (DEASP 2020).
- 124 Communication received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the Department of Social Protection, 21 December 2020. The Department of Health, the Department of Social Protection and the Department of Education and Skills are working together on the development of the standards.
- 125 Communication received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the Department of Health on 12 January 2021.
- 126 Membership of the group includes the Departments of Agriculture, Food and the Marine; Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth; Education; Health; Rural and Community Development and Social Protection. Organisations from the community and voluntary sector are also involved in the group including the Children's Rights Alliance, Crosscare and Society of St Vincent de Paul.
- 127 *ibid.*
- 128 Joe O'Brien TD, Minister for State for Social Inclusion, Food Poverty, Written Answers, 25 November 2021 [57822/21].
- 129 Communication received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the Department of Social Protection on 11 January 2022.

Recommendations

Budget 2023

- Extend the Hot School Meals Programme to all schools participating in the existing meals programme and set out a roadmap with a clear timeline for how the scheme can be expanded to all schools within the lifetime of this Government.
- Develop a pilot initiative for the expansion of school meals during holiday time by leveraging existing community infrastructure and relationships between schools and summer camps.

Medium-term

- Identify best practice models of interagency working at a local level delivering nutritious food to children in or at risk of poverty. Scale these initiatives up through the support of government and philanthropic funding.
 - Finalise and publish the research on exploring the drivers of food poverty and identify mitigating actions in line with the commitment in the Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025.
 - Using the mapping exercise currently being undertaken by the Food Poverty working group led by the Department of Social Protection and the research on the drivers of food poverty, develop a national action plan to tackle food poverty with a view to associated plans being put in place at local level.
 - Conduct and publish the findings of the evaluation of the School Meals Programme, including the hot school meals initiative, ensuring that children and young people are consulted on their views. The findings of evaluation should be used to inform the further expansion and rollout of the School Meals Programme.
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Showcasing Solutions:

BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLE IN ADDRESSING FOOD POVERTY

What is the issue?

Research has found that poor nutrition in children is linked to reduced development, cognitive function, delayed school enrolment, impaired concentration, increased illness, absenteeism and early school dropout. Hunger is strongly associated with aggression and anxiety in young children. It can make children feel unloved. Children can be simultaneously malnourished and obese because of the poor quality of their diets. And for thousands of families in Ireland, with inadequate disposable incomes, a healthy diet is simply out-of-reach.

An adequate healthy diet can be inaccessible if parents do not have information to make healthy food choices or if they do not have the skills to prepare and cook fresh food. Given the relationship between food poverty and obesity risk, there is also work to be done in terms of education programmes of what constitutes a healthy diet. While lower levels of education have been found to be a predictor of food poverty in the Irish context, 'socially disadvantaged groups display awareness of what constitutes healthy eating, yet are constrained primarily by affordability'.

What is the solution?

St Ultan's was named one of Ireland's most innovative schools by The Irish Times in 2022 for its "one-of-a-kind education and social care campus." St. Ultan's is an example of how to implement the best interest principles when it comes to education and care of children and young people. Their innovative model is designed around the child and their individual needs, but it also seeks to develop and sustain strong relationships with family and guardians and the local community.

How does it work?

At St. Ultan's they have developed a system of integrated care and education with a multi-disciplinary team that includes teachers, special-needs assistants, social care workers, early-years practitioners, therapeutic staff and a wide range of service providers from each part of the school campus. The team meet to discuss the needs of children attending and under the direction of three 'Campus Managers', (*School Principal, Care Manager and Building & Finance Manager*), they collaborate on which responses they can offer.

The campus meets the needs of children on site, providing meals and a range of additional activities including sport and music. Addressing the issue of food poverty, the working model does not stop with the provision of a school meal. With cooking happening on site, the children are taught about food and nutrition. The campus also runs programmes for parents to build their understanding of nutrition and the positive impact good nutrition has on their child. The cooking



is managed through a community enterprise, so children are seeing people from their local community at the centre of something positive they experience every day.

What is the impact?

Everyday St Ultan's produce a healthy meal for each child on campus, providing almost 500 meals per day from children as young as babies to teenagers. Over the course of a year, they provide almost 100,000 meals children & young people. They are the only primary school in Ireland that provides such a service. In addition, St Ultan's offers a breakfast club which provides a breakfast every morning before school where children and their parents can sit and have a relaxed breakfast before the day begins. The certainty that the programme rollout provides, relieves families of the stress and anxiety that many feel, particularly during the cost-of-living crisis we are now experiencing or for example, during the pandemic.

"Most children arrive as infants and we get to know them and their families and provide the supports they need to flourish as they grow into toddlers and transition across the hall to the primary school"

How can it be emulated?

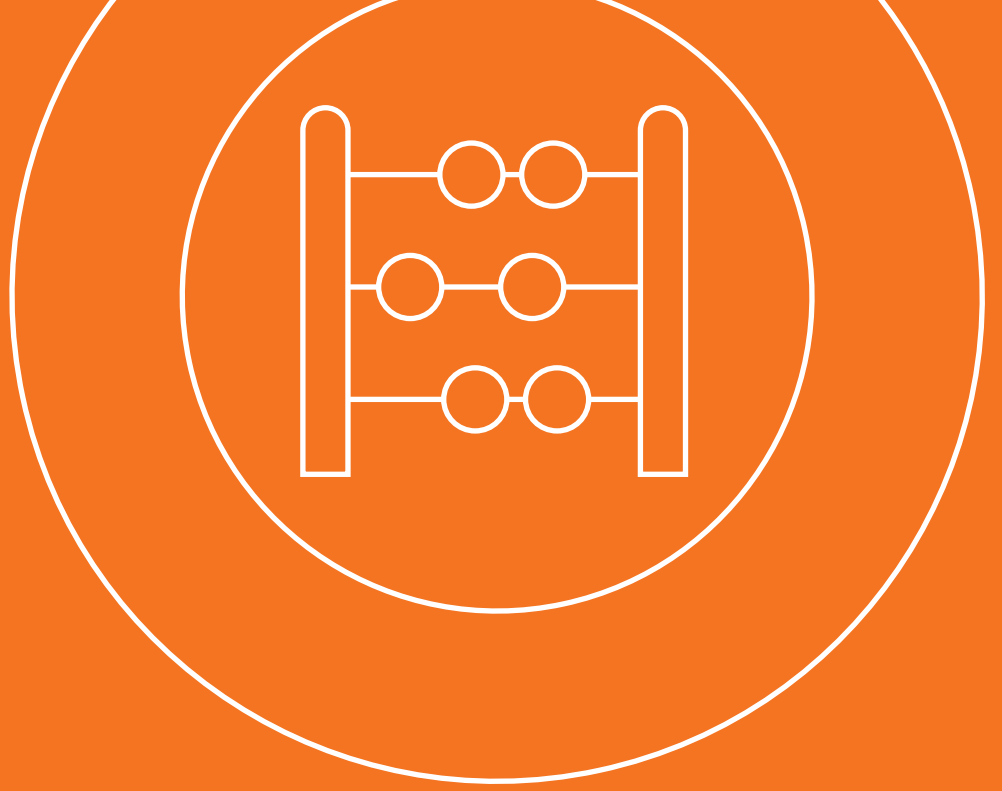
The St. Ultan's model has been very effective at meeting the needs of its students and maximising the impact of the support it receives from the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, as well as other funders. Ireland is unusual in that school meals are not part of the ordinary education system. In May 2021, a cross-government Working Group on Food Poverty was established by Minister for State with responsibility for social Inclusion, Joe O'Brien TD. The Group includes: the Departments of Agriculture, Food and the Marine; Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth; Education; Health; Rural and Community Development and Social Protection. Organisations from the community and voluntary sector are also involved in the group including the Children's Rights Alliance, Crosscare and Society of St Vincent de Paul.

The Groups is conducting a mapping exercise of existing initiatives and is also planning to commission research on the prevalence of food poverty. The establishment of this cross-government Group as a focal point for action is welcome as food poverty can slip between different government departments. It represents an important opportunity to ensure that initiatives like St. Ultan's Programme can continue to be funded and replicated across the country.

"It's great that the children become used to a wide variety of healthy meals from a very young age on our campus. It helps them to develop familiarity with the tastes and textures of foods that they might not otherwise encounter. It's a joy to see the children as they walk excitedly into the canteen on the days when their favourite meals are being served. [Also], seeing the happy faces of our junior infants with their mouths stained red by Bolognese sauce on spaghetti day is a heart-warming (& messy) sight!"

"We've also adapted in order to meet the children's tastes particularly as the children grow up and become more confident in expressing their likes and dislikes. We started with focus-groups on our menu, consisting of our older students and then progressed to "Choice Days" on which the children can choose their meal from two options. We realise that having an element of choice is important and it has resulted in reduced food waste and a happier environment in the canteen." (Gary Jones, School Principal)





Early Childhood Education and Care



EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

“More women like me would work full-time if there was free or more accessible childcare, especially during the summer holidays, if there was a proper childcare scheme for low-income families.”¹³⁰

Article 18 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child recognises that support for parents, in the early years of a child’s life, is particularly important. In interpreting this provision, the UN Committee requires the State ‘to take all appropriate measures to ensure that children of working parents have the right to benefit from childcare services, maternity protection and facilities for which they are eligible’.¹³¹ The *EU Recommendation on Investing in Children* recommends that the State ‘provide access to high quality, inclusive early education and care; ensure it is affordable and adapt provision to the needs of families’.¹³² The recommendation calls on Member States to reduce inequality by investing in early childhood education and care.¹³³ This can be achieved by providing access to high-quality services which are affordable and responsive to the needs of families.¹³⁴ Specific incentives should be provided to ensure children from disadvantaged backgrounds participate in early childhood education and care in a way that doesn’t stigmatise or segregate.¹³⁵

Access to affordable ECEC for all children and their families

Early childhood education and care (ECEC), also known as Early Learning and Care (ELC) is defined as non-parental care provided to children before they enter the formal education system.¹³⁶ Ireland has the second lowest public spending on ECEC in the Organisation on Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), amounting to less than 0.5 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP).¹³⁷ At present, the State provides subsidies directly to all providers of childcare services in an attempt to reduce the financial cost for parents and carers availing of services at market prices.¹³⁸ Public funding is only provided for programmes offered by those registered with Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. Other forms of childcare such as that provided by relatives or unregistered childminders are not covered by publicly funded childcare subsidies or schemes.¹³⁹

130 Society of St. Vincent De Paul, “Experiences of Living Below the Minimum Essential Standard of Living: Stories of Struggle” (Society of St. Vincent De Paul 2018) 30.

131 UNCRC ‘General Comment No. 7 on Implementing Rights in Early Childhood’ (2006) UN Doc CRC/C/GC/7/Rev.1 para 21

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

133 *ibid.*

134 *Ibid* 778.

135 *ibid* 778.

136 Parliamentary Budget Office, *Childcare in Ireland: An Analysis of Market Dynamics, Public Programmes and Accessibility* (Houses of the Oireachtas 2019) 70.

137 OECD, ‘OECD Family database PF3.1: Public spending on childcare and early education’ <<https://bit.ly/3az4cRP>> accessed 14 February 2022.

138 See Government of Ireland, ‘National Childcare Scheme’, <<https://bit.ly/3LwNhAK>> accessed 14 February 2022.

139 Parliamentary Budget Office, *Childcare in Ireland: An Analysis of Market Dynamics, Public Programmes and Accessibility* (Houses of the Oireachtas 2019) 70.

Comparatively, parents in Ireland are paying amongst the highest monthly fees for ECEC in Europe.¹⁴⁰ The provision of services by a market-model is a common factor for the three countries with the highest fees.¹⁴¹ The latest available data shows that in 2020/21 average weekly fees in Ireland were €186.84 for a full day or €110.92 for part-time and €74.20 for sessional.¹⁴² However, there is great geographical disparity. Across the country fees were highest in Dun Laoghaire/ Rathdown (at €244.08; €139.10; €84.71 respectively) versus the lowest in Carlow (€152.08; €88.36; €71.27 respectively).¹⁴³

While fees are high, the average hourly wage of staff working in the sector was €12.60.¹⁴⁴ The hourly rate for Early Years assistants, who constitute 49 per cent of all staff working with children, is €12.33 for those working with children participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education Programme (ECCE - a universal two-year pre-school programme available to all children),¹⁴⁵ but just €11.77 for those working with non-ECCE children.¹⁴⁶ These rates of pay are close to the Living Wage of €12.30 per hour (2020/21).¹⁴⁷

In 2019, the Government pledged to continue increasing investment in ECEC in order to bring Ireland in line with OECD averages.¹⁴⁸ As part of the overall system reform the Government appointed an Expert Group to develop a set of principles on which childcare in Ireland should be based and how additional funding should be structured drawing on international evidence.¹⁴⁹ Notably, the Group's Terms

of Reference state that it was not asked to propose changes to the current model of delivery (i.e. privately operated provision) but that it should seek to further achieve the policy objectives of quality, affordability, accessibility and contributing to addressing disadvantage in a privately-operated market through increased public funding and public management.¹⁵⁰

The Expert Group on the Funding Model's final report, *Partnership for the Public Good: A New Funding Model for Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare* was published in December 2021.¹⁵¹ The report recommends a new approach to funding early learning and childcare services. A new Core Funding stream will ensure better staff pay and conditions, the improved management of fees and will ensure sustainable funding.¹⁵² It will play a critical role in addressing the most challenging issues facing the sector. It recommends the development by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) of 'national indicators outlining the benefits which it expects to achieve from this additional funding (reduced staff turnover, better-qualified staff, more stable parental fees, increases in non-contact time, etc.)' and recommends progress reports on the indicators be published.¹⁵³ The report also calls for an expanded role for the State in managing core aspects of services including supply, quality and affordability.¹⁵⁴

Budget 2022 saw an additional allocation of €78m funding for ECEC bringing the total allocation to a

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

141 *ibid.*

142 Pobal, *Annual Early Years Profile Report 2020/2021* (Pobal 2022).

143 *ibid.*

144 *ibid.*

145 The programme is provided for three hours per day, five days per week over 38 weeks per year and the programme year runs from September to June each year. Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth 'Early Childhood Care and Education Programme (ECCE)' <<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/2459ee-early-childhood-care-and-education-programme-ecce/>> accessed 29 June 2022.

146 Pobal, *Annual Early Years Profile Report 2020/2021* (Pobal 2022).

147 *ibid.*

148 Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 'Minister Zappone announces Expert Group to develop a new Funding Model for Early Learning and Care and School Age Childcare' (Press Release 18 September 2019) <<https://bit.ly/2YEo1Bk>> 14 February 2022.

149 *ibid.* The Group was asked to review the existing policy and approach against these principles and its effectiveness in delivering against objectives on quality, affordability, accessibility and contributing to addressing disadvantage; and finally drawing on international evidence, to consider how additional funding could be structured to deliver on the guiding principles and objectives.

150 Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 'Funding Model for Early Learning and Care and School Age Childcare Expert Group: Terms of Reference' <<https://bit.ly/3oKzwBV>> accessed 14 February 2022.

151 Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 'Minister O'Gorman launches major reform of funding for early learning and childcare following Report of Expert Group' (Press Release 7 December 2021) <<https://bit.ly/3H2Fkk1>> accessed 19 December 2021.

152 Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, *Partnership for the Public Good: A New Funding Model for Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare* (DCEDIY 2021) 143.

153 *ibid.*

154 *ibid.*

record €716m investment for 2022. The vast majority of the increased resources - €69m – will go towards the new Core Funding income stream for early learning and childcare providers. This funding, which will benefit 4,700 providers from September 2022, will be linked to quality improvement and will require a freeze in parents' fees.¹⁵⁵

Support for families on low incomes

There is a need to poverty proof the ECEC system. To support parental labour market participation, *Investing in Children* calls for all families, particularly those in vulnerable situations and in disadvantaged areas to have access to ECEC.

The OECD is clear that if ECEC is not sufficiently subsidised, fewer children from disadvantaged backgrounds participate in it.¹⁵⁶ This echoes the concerns made by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in relation to discrimination in early childhood where the provision of services does not follow a universal model.¹⁵⁷ An analysis of OECD data indicates that supporting parents from low-income families to participate in full-time employment is a critical objective in terms of significantly reducing child poverty.¹⁵⁸ Notwithstanding this, challenges exist in relation to accessing work with decent pay and conditions and a substantial number of households continue to experience in-work poverty.¹⁵⁹ Children from disadvantaged backgrounds benefit most when ECEC services are closely linked to employment, health and social policies that promote a more equal distribution of resources across a population.¹⁶⁰

In Ireland, while access to the National ECCE programme (universal two-year pre-school programmes) is free for all children, access to other forms of childcare is not. The National Childcare Scheme (NCS), launched in March 2019, provides

financial support with the cost of childcare and aims to address poverty reduction. Parents with an income below €26,000 per annum qualify for the maximum hourly childcare support subsidy under the Scheme.¹⁶¹ An enhanced hours subsidy provides up to 45 hours of childcare per week where both parents are engaged in work; or study; or transitioning out of work or study; or are unavailable to care for the child.¹⁶² While the Expert Group on the Funding Model considered the requirement to be in work or study to be 'reasonable', they recognised the valid concerns of the impact of the 'limitation on children from disadvantaged families'.¹⁶³

Changes introduced to the NCS in Budget 2022 mean that the universal subsidy will be extended to children up to 15 years. For those in receipt of the income assessed subsidy, there will no longer be a deduction of the hours spent in pre-school or school from the subsidised hours. These changes will be particularly beneficial to one parent families and those experiencing disadvantage. They reflect the recommendations by the Expert Group on the Funding Model.¹⁶⁴ However, while a 2021 review of the NCS found that the benefits of the scheme were higher for low-income families and those living in disadvantaged areas, and more than half of families reported they had more money to spend, 14 per cent 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.¹⁶⁵ Another challenge with the NCS and the cost of childcare is the fact that subsidies do not take account of the actual variance in cost across Ireland. The fact that Ireland has a private market-based system means that childcare costs vary hugely across the State.

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

155 Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, *Budget 2022 Overview and FAQ for Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School-Age Childcare (SAC) Providers*, (DCEDIY 2021).

156 OECD, *Education at a Glance 2019: OECD Indicators*. (OECD 2019) 165.

157 UNCRC, General Comment No.7: Implementing child rights in early childhood' (2006) UN Doc CRC/C/G/GC/7/Rev.1 para 12.

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

159 Social Justice Ireland 'Substantial portion of workers cannot achieve a socially acceptable standard of living', <<https://bit.ly/2X8w78p>> accessed 13 October 2021.

160 John Bennet, *ECEC for children from disadvantaged backgrounds: findings from a European literature review and two case studies* (European Commission 2013).

161 Government of Ireland, *National Childcare Scheme Policy Guidelines* <<https://bit.ly/2H91t6i>> accessed 30 June 2022.

162 *ibid*.

163 *ibid* 132.

164 Expert Group on the Funding Model, *Partnership for the Public Good: A New Funding Model for Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare*, (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth: 2021) 145.

165 Frontier Economics, 12-Month Review of the National Childcare Scheme: A report prepared for the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Ireland) (DCEDIY 2021) 16.

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.

There is also a need to provide practical supports to marginalised families, such as families from the Traveller Community, to access ECEC. Traveller organisations supporting families on the ground have found that families are often not aware of the subsidies available for ECEC or how to apply for them. Even with the information about the supports available, families often face other barriers, such as low levels of literacy, or the practicalities of having internet access, to completing the necessary paperwork. Consideration should be given to utilising the European Social Funds available for the implementation of the Child Guarantee to invest in community workers on the ground to support Traveller families in accessing ECEC for their children.

A new model to tackle disadvantage

First 5 committed to develop a Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) type model for early childhood education and care.¹⁶⁶ The Report of the Expert Group on the Funding Model addresses this commitment by recommending the introduction of a new funding stream to tackle socio-economic disadvantage.¹⁶⁷ The report proposes two funding strands, universal and targeted, to tackle disadvantage. The universal strand will build on elements of the Access Inclusion Model (AIM) and the targeted strand will be informed by the (DEIS) programme. Enhancements to existing programmes are also recommended.¹⁶⁸

This is welcome as is the recognition that it will take time to put in place this funding stream as it will be based on developing a model based on additional data to identify early years settings with

'high concentrations of disadvantaged children'.¹⁶⁹ The changes made to NCS eligibility in Budget 2022 are one way that the Expert Group thought the Department could bridge the gap 'to avoid a situation in which, by the time our recommended supports to address disadvantage are being introduced, a significant number of the most disadvantaged children would not be accessing services...'.¹⁷⁰ The allocation of an additional €9m to extend the NCS to children under 15 years of age will benefit 40,000 children and a further 5,000 disadvantaged children will benefit from increased support under the NCS subsidised hours when the practice of deducting hours spent in education (including pre-school) is removed from Spring 2022.¹⁷¹ Prior to the introduction of this change parents were entitled to a reduced number of subsidised hours during term time as their child was in education. For example, where parents were not engaged in work or study the entitlement for children participating in ECCE was five hours during term-time and 20 hours during school holidays. The introduction of this change means that parents will retain an entitlement to 20 hours subsidised childcare all year round.

However, other short to medium-term solutions utilising existing mechanisms and available data while the new model is being developed, could include the adoption of a new eligibility criterion to access higher levels of subsidisation under the NCS. For example, the Medical Card could act as an important lever for access to childcare. Qualification for the Medical Card can mean that a child qualifies for other benefits including free school transport, no State exam fees, and some financial help with purchasing schoolbooks.¹⁷²

Successive governments have invested in Child Income Supports and Child Benefit as a universal payment more so than provision of services as the main method of tackling child poverty.¹⁷³ However, as part of the calculation of reckonable income under the NCS, Child Benefit and child maintenance are

166 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.

167 Expert Group on the Funding Model, *Partnership for the Public Good: A New Funding Model for Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare* (DCEDIY 2021) 119.

168 *ibid.*

169 *ibid* 130.

170 *ibid* 132.

171 Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, *Budget 2022 Overview and FAQ for Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School-Age Childcare (SAC) Providers*, (DCEDIY 2021).

172 Citizens Information, 'Medical Cards' (Citizens Information, 11 December 2018) <<https://bit.ly/2IHxJNA>> .

173 Social Justice Ireland, 'Child Benefit and Child Poverty', July 2012, [2012-07-19-briefingonchildbenefitandchildpovertyrecovered.pdf](https://www.socialjustice.ie/2012-07-19-briefingonchildbenefitandchildpovertyrecovered.pdf) (socialjustice.ie)

currently included. Child Benefit is not assessed as means for any other payment or service, representing a significant shift in policy and practice.¹⁷⁴ Including Child Benefit as reckonable income pushes a lone parent working 19 hours per week over the income threshold to qualify for the maximum childcare support subsidy.¹⁷⁵ This demonstrates a lack of policy coherence in a context where Government wishes to support more lone parents in employment and where poverty rates among working lone parents are increasing.

In its final report, the Expert Group on the Funding Model noted the adoption of the European Child Guarantee. It specifically refers to the need for better data collection and analysis to monitor the efficacy of interventions and the impact of 'supports to tackle disadvantage on specific cohorts and groups of children, for example, children from minority groups, including Traveller and Roma children, and other groups identified in the EU Child Guarantee'.¹⁷⁶ In the National Action Plan on the European Child Guarantee 'a new approach to monitoring and evaluation' will be developed to support the implementation of the Guarantee alongside the development of the next policy iteration of Better Outcomes Brighter Futures.¹⁷⁷

The Expert Group also recommended that settings in receipt of targeted funding should be required to develop and publish 'an annual 'tackling disadvantage plan' while the DCEDIY should develop a 'short set of national indicators outlining the benefits that it expects to achieve from this additional funding'.¹⁷⁸ The findings of the *12 Month Review of the National Childcare Scheme* contains clear actions to conduct research 'analysing the financial viability of services in disadvantaged areas under the NCS'.¹⁷⁹ These actions will be critical to developing a new funding model for the sector that supports all children but particularly those experiencing disadvantage and social exclusion.

It requires Member States to provide free access to early childhood education and care. In Ireland, while access to the National Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme is free for all children, access to other forms of childcare is not. ECEC in Ireland is provided through a subsidised 'for -profit' model.

There is clear support for moving towards a 'publicly funded, accessible and regulated model of quality, affordable early years and out of hours childcare' as in June 2021, the Citizens' Assembly on gender equality recommended that this happens over the next decade.¹⁸⁰

A public funded model of ECEC would see the State establishing ECEC as a wholly public service, akin to primary education. It would recognise ECEC as a public good and provide secure and stable wages for educators.

The timeframe set out by the Citizens' Assembly aligns with the timeframe of the Child Guarantee, so the implementation of the Guarantee provides an opportunity to explore how best to realise the provision of publicly funded ECEC for children in need.

174 Letter to Minister Katherine Zappone, October 2019.

175 *ibid.*

176 Expert Group on the Funding Model, *Partnership for the Public Good: A New Funding Model for Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare*, (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth: 2021) 136.

177 Government of Ireland, *EU Child Guarantee Ireland's National Action Plan* (DCEDIY 2022).

178 *Ibid.*, 95-6 and 131.

179 Frontier Economics, *12-Month Review of the National Childcare Scheme: A report prepared for the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Ireland)* (DCEDIY 2021) 212.

180 The Citizen's Assembly, *Report of the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality*, (The Citizens' Assembly 2021) 13. Membership of the Assembly consisted of 100 people, comprising a Chairperson and 99 citizens entitled to vote at a referendum who were broadly representative of Irish society.

Recommendations

Budget 2023

- Budget 2023 should ensure that in the short-term Ireland is brought in line with the OECD average of 0.7 per cent of GDP, with a longer-term objective of moving closer to world leader, Iceland, which invests 1.8 per cent of GDP.
 - Increase NCS subsidies by 10 per cent to ensure that all families continue to benefit from sustained investment in ECEC.
 - Exclude Child Benefit and child maintenance as reckonable income for the purposes of the National Childcare Scheme.
 - Prioritise addressing the lack of availability of childcare for low-income families accessing further training and employment opportunities by establishing an inter-departmental working group tasked with examining this issue.
 - In advance of the new funding model being developed and implemented and the new funding stream to tackle disadvantage being introduced, 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 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.
 - Using the European Social Funds available to implement the EU Child Guarantee, invest in establishing Community Workers to support Traveller families to access ECEC by providing practical information, work with them in applying for the NCS and ECCE schemes and engage in community awareness about the supports available.
-

Long-term Sustainable Solutions

- Continue to increase public investment in Early Childhood Education and Care and implement the recommendations of the Expert Group on the Funding Model including:
 - the continued investment in Core Funding for services and,
 - the development of national indicators to track progress linked to this investment.
-

181 The State could choose an alternative measure to control the cost of fees. For example, through contract, the State could require that only a certain fee is charged to parents in particular income brackets.

Showcasing Solutions:

BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLE IN EARLY YEARS SERVICES

What is the issue?

For children born into families experiencing poverty, inequality can be locked in from the very beginning. 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, resulting in poorer outcomes. 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. Despite this, and the existing evidence based on the importance of these formative years in a child's life, Ireland has the second lowest public spending on early childhood education and care in the Organisation on Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), amounting to less than 0.5 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). There is also no specific policy or programme to help early years services to tackle socio-economic disadvantage.

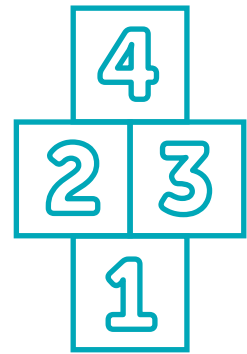
What is the solution?

Launching a national programme to address socio-economic disadvantage is one of the most important actions the Government could initiate. Despite the fact that there is no national programme to address disadvantage some community and voluntary sector organisations have developed special programmes to supporting young children experiencing poverty. Barnardos early years' services are based in communities which have a range of complex social issues. Work takes place with parents and the wider family alongside the child's participation in a pre-school programme. The families that Barnardos work with can present with a myriad of complex social issues. Many have been impacted by parental mental health, domestic abuse and addiction.

Barnardos early years programme is delivered at seven sites across the country. The centres are warm and welcoming. The service provides a high-quality intervention the delivery of a specific curriculum is aimed at maximising children's educational and developmental outcomes along with ensuring they are ready to transition to primary school.

How does it work?

Children attend the Early Years' service each weekday morning. While some parents drop their children to the centre, many come on a bus. The Barnardos bus collects the children and brings them to the service by 9am each day. The day begins by all the children having breakfast together. The rest of the morning is broken into different activities which are all part of the Barnardos Tús Maith curriculum. These include outdoor time, play and reading. At the end of the morning, before returning home, all of the children have a hot dinner together with the centre's staff.



Mealtimes are a happy time for everyone in the service. The children all sit and eat their food together. The staff chat with the children and there is always a sense of fun. Each day, the cook prepares homemade meals and on Thursdays there is the added treat of dessert. The cook knows every child's favourite food.

Connecting with friends, doing activities, having fun, learning and enjoying dinners together every day are all things that children attending Barnardos Early Years' Service get to enjoy.

What is the impact?

Each year approximately 200 young children benefit from the Barnardos Early Years' programme. Attendance at the service benefits the child but also their wider family. These programmes ensure that children get a hot meal every day, and that if families are struggling, Barnardos are able to link them with family support services or provide support directly. Children also get to benefit from play recreational activities. As a result, they can develop their own social skills, including self-regulation. These programmes also prepare young children for school and help make the transition easier for the child.

How can it be emulated?

High intervention early years' programmes need to be available to young children throughout the country irrespective of whether they are living in urban or rural locations. First Five, commits to targeting additional support into early years settings in a manner similar to the Department of Education (Delivering Equality of Opportunities in School - DEIS) model. The [Report of the Expert Group on the Funding Model](#) addresses this commitment by recommending the introduction of a new funding stream to tackle socio-economic disadvantage. The report proposes two funding strands, universal and targeted, to tackle disadvantage. The universal strand will build on elements of the Access Inclusion Model (AIM) (which supports children with disabilities) and the targeted strand will be informed by the (DEIS) programme. Enhancements to existing programmes are also recommended. This is welcome as is the recognition that it will take time to put in place this funding stream as it will be based on developing a model based on additional data to identify early years settings with 'high concentrations of disadvantaged children'.

It is essential that the Government move ahead with developing its national programme to target socio-economic inequalities in early childhood as a matter of priority. Ensuring that children reach their full potential has to start here.

"We have 20 children coming here on a daily basis and we provide a safe, fun environment, where they can learn, where they are nurtured, where they can develop and where they can get ready to move on to the next phase of their lives." (Sharon McCormick, Barnardos Early Years Service Dun Laoghaire)



Education



EDUCATION

“Parent: Our kids are dragged down; we are dragged down and because of that when we do like try to get our kids to do something good, they feel that they cannot do that. And I noticed as well that private schools and schools that have more income and that are not in the DEIS area, they have all the better IT equipment and software. Their kids do get a better education because they are paying for it, but every child should have them equal opportunities.”¹⁸²

Under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) every child has a right to education. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child is clear that the overall objective of this right is to maximize the child’s ability and opportunity to participate fully in their society.¹⁸³

Education has the power to transform lives, lift people out of poverty and break down cycles of disadvantage.¹⁸⁴ In Ireland, a person’s socio-economic background remains a strong determining factor of their level of educational attainment. A person is almost three times more likely to go on to higher education if their parents have a higher education

than someone whose parents have not completed primary-level education.¹⁸⁵ Living on a low income can prevent children and young people from participating fully in education.¹⁸⁶

This section focuses on specific aspects of *Investing in Children* related to education. Particular relevance to the Irish context include the provisions that the State ‘provide for the inclusion of all learners, where necessary by targeting resources and opportunities towards the more disadvantaged’.¹⁸⁷ The Recommendation further emphasises that the State take measures to address barriers which hinder children attending school, including financial

182 CDI, ‘Over the Fence: Perspectives on and experiences of child poverty in Tallaght’ (CDI 2021).

183 UNCRC General Comment No. 1 on Article 29(1) the Aims of Education (2001) CRC/GC/2001/1 para 12.

184 Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection *Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025* (DEASP 2020) 48.

185 Central Statistics Office, ‘Census of Population 2016 – Profile 10 Education, Skills and the Irish Language’ (CSO 2016) <<https://bit.ly/2FJtGyG>> accessed 28 June 2022.

186 Joint Committee on Education and Skills *Report on education inequality and disadvantage and barriers to education* (Houses of the Oireachtas 2019).

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

barriers, by providing targeted educational aid.¹⁸⁸ The introduction and implementation of policies to reduce early school leaving, and initiatives for those at risk of early school leaving is a further element outlined in *Investing in Children*. The recommendation also identifies the need for responses to social diversity and the deployment of role models to support integration of children from ethnic minorities and immigrant backgrounds into schools.

Targeting resources towards those experiencing disadvantage

Since its launch in 2005, the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) Programme has been the State's main vehicle for supporting children who experience educational disadvantage. Schools in the DEIS programme avail of a range of targeted supports aimed at tackling educational disadvantage, including additional classroom teaching posts, home school community liaison coordinator posts, DEIS grant funding and access to the School Completion Programme. Schools are assigned to DEIS Urban Band 1, DEIS Urban Band 2 or DEIS Rural on the basis of the location of the schools and its level of disadvantage. In the 2021/22 school year there are 3,106 Primary Schools and 730 Post Primary schools in the State, of these 687 Primary and 197 Post-Primary are categorised as DEIS.¹⁸⁹

Under the Action Plan for Education 2016–2019 a revised action plan for educational inclusion,¹⁹⁰ a new DEIS Plan, was published in 2017.¹⁹¹ This plan outlines the Government's vision for social inclusion in education and contains a set of objectives and actions to support children who are at greatest risk of educational disadvantage.¹⁹² One of the objectives set out in the plan was to develop a more robust

and responsive framework for assessing individual schools.¹⁹³

In March 2022, the Department of Education published the new DEIS identification model committed to in the Programme for Government¹⁹⁴ and announced an expansion of the DEIS programme representing a €32 million investment in the programme. The extended programme will bring an additional 310 schools into the DEIS programme with an additional 37 existing DEIS schools being reclassified, meaning they will receive increased supports.¹⁹⁵ This means that from September 2022, 1,194 schools and over 240,000 students will benefit from being part of the programme.¹⁹⁶

The refined DEIS identification model uses information from the 2021/22 Department of Education enrolment databases and 2016 national census data¹⁹⁷ and includes components to reflect the levels of educational disadvantage experienced by children who have self-identified as Traveller or Roma, children in direct provision centres and children who are experiencing homelessness.¹⁹⁸ The new model seeks to improve on the single cut-off point in the 2017 version of the model to account for children and young people who are from areas designated borderline disadvantaged.¹⁹⁹

The DEIS program has been recognised as having a positive effect on tackling educational disadvantage for the majority of young people.²⁰⁰ However, there is a relatively sharp distinction between DEIS and non-DEIS schools,²⁰¹ which means that accurately classifying school socio-economic/demographic profile is crucial for the delivery of appropriate services. Schools with relatively high levels of disadvantage may fall below the cut-off for additional support, with research suggesting that up to 22 per

188 15 *ibid.*

189 Communication received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the Department of Education, 27 January 2022.

190 Department of Education and Skills, *Action Plan for Education 2016–2019* (DES 2016) 60.

191 Department of Education and Skills, *DEIS Plan 2017: Delivering equality of opportunity in schools* (DES 2017). This replaced the 2005 Action Plan; see Department of Education and Skills, *DEIS (Delivering Equality Of Opportunity In Schools): An action plan for educational Inclusion* (DES 2005).

192 Department of Education and Skills, *DEIS Plan 2017: Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools* (DES 2017).

193 Department of Education and Skills, *DEIS Identification Process*, (DES 2017) <<https://bit.ly/3hGSR6K>> accessed 28 June 2022.

194 Government of Ireland, *Programme for Government: Our Shared Future*, (Government of Ireland 2020).

195 Department of Education, 'DEIS Delivering Equality of Opportunity In Schools' <<https://bit.ly/3QTaUGE>> accessed 28 June 2022.

196 *ibid.*

197 as represented by the [Pobal HP Deprivation index](#).

198 Department of Education, *The refined DEIS identification model* (DES 2022) 6–8.

199 *ibid.* 7.

200 Department of Education, *Review of Class Size in DEIS Urban Band 1 Primary Schools* (DE 2022) 6.

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

cent of principals at primary level indicate their school is not appropriately classified.²⁰² Research indicates that a large proportion (up to 50 per cent) of disadvantaged students attend non-DEIS schools.²⁰³

As disadvantaged children are not always located in DEIS schools, consideration should be given to ensuring that the resources also follow the child rather than the school. The Pupil Premium model, in the UK, allocates funding to schools on a per capita basis. A “pupil premium” is allocated for children who qualify for free schools meals (£1,345 per pupil per year for primary schools and £955 per pupil at secondary level) and for children in care (£2,345 per pupil per year).²⁰⁴ Schools can decide how to spend these resources based on the view that school leaders are best placed to identify what would be of most benefit to eligible children.²⁰⁵ Guidelines suggest a tiered approach by focusing on teaching development, academic support or wider approaches to non-academic barriers.²⁰⁶ This type of model could complement the DEIS model and help address the Programme for Government commitment to “provide additional supports for students who are homeless, resident in family hubs, or in direct provision”.²⁰⁷

Addressing the financial barriers to education

The UNCRC calls on States to take steps to achieve the right to education on the ‘basis of equal opportunity’ and to ‘take appropriate measures such as the introduction of free education and offering financial assistance in case of need’.²⁰⁸ In June 2021, building on the *Investing in Children Recommendation*,²⁰⁹ the European Child Guarantee was adopted by the European Union (EU). It aims to prevent and combat child poverty and social exclusion by supporting the

27 EU Member States to make efforts to guarantee access to quality key services for children in need.²¹⁰



To achieve this commitment, each State is required to identify and address financial and non-financial barriers to participation in education along with ensuring provision of educational materials, including books and uniforms.²¹¹

Just under half of parents at primary level are able to meet the costs of returning to school out of their regular household budget.²¹² Only one third of parents at second level can do likewise, demonstrating the financial strains on households due to education costs.²¹³ In 2021, the Irish League of Credit Unions reported that one in four parents say they have borrowed money to pay for school costs, incurring a debt of €336 on average.²¹⁴

- 202 Dympna Devine, Jennifer Symonds, Seaneen Sloan, Abbie Cahoon, Mags Crean, Emma Farrell, Aisling Davies, Tamsyn Blue, Julie Hogan, *Children’s School Lives – An Introduction, Report No 1*, Children’s School Lives (UCD School of Education 2020).
- 203 Emer Smyth, Selina McCoy and Gillian Kingston, Learning from the evaluation of DEIS (ESRI 2015).
- 204 Department of Education (UK) *Policy paper: Pupil premium*, <<https://bit.ly/3epNLtN>> accessed on the 28 June 2022.
- 205 *ibid.*
- 206 Education Endowment Foundation, *The EEF Guide to the Pupil Premium*, (EEF 2019) <<https://bit.ly/36Hx4FW>> accessed 28 June 2022.
- 207 Government of Ireland, *Programme for Government: Our Shared Future*, (Government of Ireland 2020).
- 208 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, A/RES/44/25 (20 November 1989) Art 28(1).
- 209 *ibid.* European Commission issued its recommendation “Investing in children: Breaking the cycle of disadvantage” in 2013. This Recommendation outlined a three pillar approach to tackling child poverty: access to adequate resources; access to affordable, quality services and children’s right to participate.
- 210 European Commission, *Proposal for a Council Recommendation establishing the European Child Guarantee* (Brussels 24.3.2021 COM(2021) 137 final) 1.
- 211 *ibid* 26.
- 212 Barnardos *The real cost of school 2020 Back to School Briefing Paper* (Barnardos 2020).
- 213 Barnardos *The real cost of school 2020 Back to School Briefing Paper* (Barnardos 2020).
- 214 Irish League of Credit Unions, ‘ILCU back to school survey shows cost of sending child to secondary school now averaging €1,500’, (Press Release 15 July 2021) <<https://bit.ly/3lGoN5Q>> accessed 28 June 2022.

It is estimated that it would cost an additional €103 million annually to deliver free primary education and €127 million to deliver free second level education to every child and young person in Ireland.²¹⁵ Table 1 below outlines the costs of making both primary and secondary education free.

	Free School Books	Removing Voluntary Contribution	Free Classroom Resources	Free School Transport	Restoring Capitation Grant Level	Total
Additional cost to make Primary Education free	€20 m	€42 m	€19.5 m	€5 m	€16.7 m	€103.2 m
Additional cost to make Secondary Education free	€20 m	€47 m	€19 m	€22.4 m	€18.5 m	€126.9 m
Additional cost to make education free for all	€40 m	€89 m	€38.5 m	€27.4 m	€35.2 m	€230.1 m

Source: Barnardos School Costs Survey 2018

This level of government investment would cover all textbooks and workbooks, remove the need for voluntary contributions, classroom resources fees, transport fees (for those availing of the School Transport Scheme) and a restoration of the capitation rates back to 2010 levels. Effectively it would remove any financial barriers to participation in education that children and their families face. Measures have been taken to restore approximately 40 per cent of the capitation grant to the 2010 levels with budget increases provided for in two of the last four budgets.²¹⁶

In the context of growing energy costs, it is critical that Budget 2023 should maintain momentum on increasing school capitation rates. Doing so will ensure that schools are no longer reliant on contributions from parents to meet day-to-day running costs.

An annual survey conducted by Barnardos highlights the basic costs parents face when preparing their children to return to school.²¹⁷ In 2021, parents with primary school going children spent an average of €336.²¹⁸ School books, costing €101, made up almost a third of the total cost for primary school children.²¹⁹ At second level, school books represent the biggest outlay for parents costing €201 out of an average total of €573.²²⁰

As far back as 2013, the then Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Social Protection called for a 'five-year template for the delivery of an entirely free schoolbook system, based on the UK model' and to discontinue the use of workbooks in all schools.²²¹ The UK model has been in place since the 1940s.²²²

To date the Committee's recommendation has still not been implemented.

215 Barnardos *The real cost of school 2020 Back to School Briefing Paper* (Barnardos 2020) 31.

216 Budget 2019 provided for a five per cent increase in capitation funding and Budget 2020 provided for a further two and a half per cent increase. Communication received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the Department of Education on 12 January 2021.

217 Barnardos *The real cost of school 2021 Back to School Briefing Paper* (Barnardos 2021) 15.

218 *ibid.*

219 *ibid.*

220 *ibid.*, 15.

221 Joint Committee on Education and Social Protection, *Report on Tackling Back to School Costs* (Houses of the Oireachtas 2013) 20.

222 Butler Act 1945.

The Department of Education provides grant assistance to schools for books which includes schoolbook rental schemes. In 2017, a circular was issued to management boards to take measures to reduce school costs including the setting up of book rental schemes.²²³ The circular viewed the schemes as being cost effective and estimated that parents can save up to 80 per cent of book costs.²²⁴

However, there is conflicting data on the availability of these schemes. The Department's data states that 96 per cent of primary schools and 69 per cent of post primary schools operate a book rental scheme.²²⁵ According to the Barnardos School Costs Survey 2021, 73 per cent of primary school parents had access to a school book rental scheme, while only 47 per cent of secondary school parents had access to a school book rental scheme.²²⁶

One key issue is that funding is allocated towards the purchase of books but this does not take into account the necessary staff time to administer the scheme.²²⁷ Without dedicated resources to administer the scheme, schools can be dependent on the voluntary involvement of parents or other members of the school community. Moreover, parents still have to pay a contribution to the scheme which does not completely remove the financial pressure that many low-income families experience at back-to-school time.

The introduction of a new pilot to provide free schoolbooks in Budget 2020 was a welcome first step in tackling these costs.²²⁸ The pilot provided €1 million in funding for the provision of free school books to 102 primary schools for the school year 2020/21.²²⁹ This amounted to just over three per cent of all primary schools. The aim of this pilot was to provide

free school books for students in the schools involved, and to support these schools in eliminating the cost of school books for parents.²³⁰ The scheme was made available for Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) designated schools and was anticipated to benefit 15,500 children.²³¹ The additional funding was issued to the participating schools in May 2020 and it provided an additional €64 per student to increase the overall book grant given to DEIS schools to €85 per student.²³² Subsequent budgets have failed to build on this initiative or to incrementally tackle the cost of school books for families across Ireland.

The Programme for Government committed to 'Commence a free school books scheme pilot in September 2020 and, pending a successful review of that pilot, expand the scheme to schools nationwide as resources allow'.²³³ There is currently no timeline for the review of the scheme and it is not clear if a decision will be made on further roll-out. The review of the pilot scheme should take into account that a large proportion of disadvantaged students attend non-DEIS schools. It is important that the learnings from the pilot are used as a tool to inform wider systemic change. The review should consider how the future expansion of the scheme can target children experiencing disadvantage attending non-DEIS schools in order to have a greater impact on child poverty.

Even before the Covid crisis, access to digital devices was challenging for many low-income families, with the Society of St Vincent de Paul noting that the cost involved in providing equipment, software and e-books is beyond the reach of many low-income households.²³⁴ Evidence of digital exclusion has emerged at second level, with a dual problem of poor broadband and lack of access to digital devices

223 Department of Education and Skills, 'Circular 0032/2017: Measures to be adopted by schools to reduce the cost of school uniforms and other costs' (DES 2017).

224 Department of Education and Skills, *Guidelines for Developing Textbook Rental Schemes in Schools* (DES 2012) 5.

225 Communication received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the Department of Education 12 January 2021.

226 Communications received by the Children's Rights Alliance from Barnardos 6 December 2021; Barnardos *The real cost of school 2021 Back to School Briefing Paper* (Barnardos 2021) 15.

227 Teachers Union of Ireland, 'Textbook Grants and Book Rental Schemes – Department of Education and Skills Draft Guidelines and Report for Consultation: Teachers' Union of Ireland (TUI) Observations - June 2012' <<https://bit.ly/2GH84T3>> accessed 28 June 2022.

228 Department of Education 'Minister McHugh announces additional funding of €1 million to reduce the cost of school books in DEIS schools' (Press Release January 2020) <<https://bit.ly/3J7uQAX>> accessed 28 June 2022.

229 *ibid.*

230 Communication received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the Department of Education, 11 November 2020.

231 *ibid.* For full list of schools see: Department of Education 'School Book Pilot Scheme 2020' <<https://bit.ly/2Y1CtDo>> accessed 31 January 2022.

232 Department of Education 'Minister McHugh announces additional funding of €1 million to reduce the cost of school books in DEIS schools' (Press Release January 2020) <<https://bit.ly/3J7uQAX>> accessed 28 June 2022.

233 Government of Ireland, *Programme for Government, Our Shared Future* (Government Publications 2020) 96.

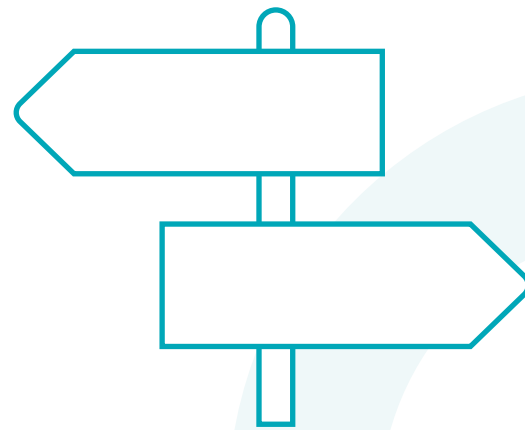
234 Society of St Vincent de Paul, *Submission to the Joint Committee on Education and Skills* (SVP 2019) <<https://bit.ly/2Zxjr96>> accessed 28 June 2022.

more common where household incomes are low.²³⁵ For families dependent on a low income, access to a laptop and broadband is a luxury and purchasing equipment in an emergency is out of their reach.²³⁶

An additional €10 million top up for ICT funding was provided to schools to purchase equipment for students in need of support.²³⁷ However, this was insufficient to meet demand and the Society of St Vincent de Paul often had to step in to make up the shortfall.²³⁸ Access to digital technology is now a routine part of education for children and young people even though remote learning is no longer taking place. During the pandemic non-profit organisations provided laptops to children and young people who did not have access to the technology to engage in remote learning. Budget 2021 provided €50million to schools to ‘support learners who are most at risk of educational disadvantage through lack of access to appropriate digital infrastructure’.²³⁹ To determine the level of need, an audit should be conducted to establish what the gaps are to accessing digital technologies. This audit should not only include access to hardware but also look to establish the gaps in terms of connectivity.

Guidance Counselling

Guidance counselling (encompassing career, personal/social and educational guidance) has benefits to both the individual and to the wider economy.²⁴⁰ Research has shown that guidance counsellors are the only other professionals children and young people turn to when they suffer from mental health issues and are reluctant to seek help from health services.²⁴¹ The Institute of Guidance Counsellors have noted that



‘educational guidance counselling relates to student retention and attainment and to subject choices to match specific career paths’ and note that there is ‘evidence that access to guidance counselling in secondary education has a positive effect on 3rd level retention rates and can mitigate socio-economic disadvantage’.²⁴² Section 9 (c) of the Education Act 1998 provides that schools should ‘ensure that students have access to appropriate guidance to assist them in their educational and career choices’. While there has been some increase in the number of full-time guidance counsellors,²⁴³ the number are still far below the resources that in place in 2012. At this time there was an ex-quota system in place and there are concerns that even an increase back to the 2012 levels will not be sufficient to deal with the high level of need following the impact of the covid pandemic.²⁴⁴

Policies to reduce early school leaving

Article 29 of the UNCRC clarifies that the right to education encompasses more than academic achievement and sets out a number of aims including the ‘development of the child’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest

235 Gretta Mohan, Selina McCoy, Eamonn Carroll, Georgina Mihut, Sean Lyons and Ciaran Mac Domhnaill, *Learning for all? Second level education in Ireland during Covid-19* (ESRI 2020).

236 Society of St Vincent de Paul, *Mitigating the Impact of School Closures on Disadvantaged Students*, (SVP 2021) <<https://bit.ly/3ubF9Me>> accessed 28 June 2022.

237 Department of Education, ‘Minister McHugh announces ICT funding for schools including €10 million top up funding’ (22 April 2020) <<https://bit.ly/3mhD8LW>> accessed 28 June 2022.

238 Society of St Vincent de Paul, *Mitigating the Impact of School Closures on Disadvantaged Students* (SVP 2021) <<https://bit.ly/3ubF9Me>> accessed 28 June 2022.

239 Department of Education, ‘Ministers Foley and Madigan announce details of €9.2 billion education funding in Budget 2022, including measures to tackle disadvantage and support children with special educational needs’ (Press release 14 October 2021) <<https://bit.ly/3NpXqiE>> accessed 28 June 2022.

240 Institute of Guidance Counsellors, ‘Pre-Budget Submission 2023’ <<https://bit.ly/3nq9mX3>> accessed 28 June 2022.

241 *ibid.*

242 *ibid.* 2.

243 Department of Education, ‘0022/2022 Staffing arrangements in Voluntary Secondary Schools for the 2022/23 school year’ <<https://bit.ly/3y0seRd>> accessed 28 June 2022. Department of Education, ‘Staffing arrangements in Community and Comprehensive Schools for the 2022/23 school year’ <<https://bit.ly/3y3yisp>> accessed 28 June 2022. Department of Education, ‘0024/2022 Staffing arrangements in Education and Training Boards for the 2022/23 school year’ <<https://bit.ly/3u30QZV>> accessed 28 June 2022.

244 Institute of Guidance Counsellors, ‘Pre-Budget Submission 2023’ <<https://bit.ly/3nq9mX3>> accessed 28 June 2022, 3.

potential'.²⁴⁵ The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has provided guidance to address early school leaving stating that 'to develop the fullest potential of adolescents, consideration must be given to the design of learning environments which capitalise on their capacity for learning, motivation to work with peers, and focus on experiential learning, exploration and limit testing'.²⁴⁶

Although patterns of early school leaving continue to differ across EU national contexts and systems of education, research consistently shows that a disproportionate number of young people who leave school early are from disadvantaged social class backgrounds.²⁴⁷ Both national and international studies show that early school leavers have common characteristics in that they are more likely to be male, have low school attainment, experience behavioural problems, have ongoing social, emotional or health issues, have special educational needs, are living in poverty and have ill-health or have experienced trauma.²⁴⁸ Students in the lowest streamed class are 13 times more likely to leave school early compared to those in mixed ability classes.

A disproportionate number of young people who have experienced poverty become what is termed "early school leavers".²⁴⁹ One of the main misconceptions about early school leavers is that they are academically incapable of completing mainstream education, however, 53 per cent will continue their

education in facilities such as a voluntary education setting or Youthreach where they can receive necessary support and continue a more participant-centred form of education.²⁵⁰ Those who leave school early experience 'a high complexity of challenges and needs' in the area of mental health, wellbeing, engagement with work or education, and possible involvement with the judicial system, while also being three times more likely to be unemployed than others aged 18-24 who are not early school leavers'.²⁵¹ The reform of the Junior and Senior Cycle respectively which focus on providing more varied subjects and an increased focus on wellbeing could have the potential to have a positive impact on student wellbeing and engagement in mainstream education.

Alternative education has developed in many jurisdictions as a response to state-provided mainstream education.²⁵² International experience indicates that alternative education providers are informal, have smaller classes with a student-centred curriculum and a focus on experiential learning to support the personal, professional, and emotional development of each student.²⁵³

In Ireland, young people who leave school before the age of 16 have limited²⁵⁴ state-funded opportunities for continuing their education. Except for Youthreach, which is a state-provided programme of 'second chance' education, the area of alternative education is not explicitly defined and mentioned in the Irish

245 *ibid*, Art 29(1)(a).

246 UNCRRC 'General Comment No. 20 on the Rights of the Child During Adolescence' (2016) UN Doc CRC/C/GC/20 para 77.

247 Emer Smyth, Joanne Banks, Jessica O'sullivan, Selina Mccoy, Paul Redmond and Seamus Mcguinness "Evaluation of the National Youthreach Programme" (2019) Research Series Number 82.

248 *ibid*.

249 Lynch S. "From exclusion to inclusion: Defining alternative education in Ireland" 4.

250 *ibid* 5.

251 T Kovačić, C Forkan, P Dolan, L Rodriguez, *Enabling An Inclusive And Equitable Quality Education For All, Through The Implementation Of A New, Evidence-Based Model On Educational Progression And Transformation, Findings From An Evaluation Of Rethink Ireland's Education Fund June, 2021* (UNESCO NUIG 2021) <<https://bit.ly/3wDL53v>> accessed 12 November 2021, 2.

252 T Kovačić, et al *Identifying Innovative Models for Supporting Vulnerable Learners achieve Educational Progression; Early findings from an Evaluation of Social Innovation Fund Ireland's Education Fund* (UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre NUIG 2019) 59.

253 *ibid*.

254 Youth Encounter Projects (YEPs) provide non-residential educational facilities for children who have either become involved in minor delinquency, or are at risk of becoming involved. A pupil may be referred to one of these schools by a number of agencies or by the court system. Youth Encounter Projects provide these children with a lower pupil teacher ratio and a personalised education plan. Department of Education, High Support Special Schools, Youth Encounter Projects (YEP) and Children Detention Schools <<https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation-information/743aab-high-support-special-schools-youth-encounter-projects-yep-and-childr/>> accessed 28 June 2022.

The Youthreach programme provides two years integrated education, training and work experience for unemployed early school leavers without any qualifications or vocational training who are between 15 and 20 years of age. Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, Youthreach <<https://www.gov.ie/en/service/5666e9-youthreach/>> accessed 28 June 2022.

education system.²⁵⁵ While Youthreach supports some students in their progression in education, it is not suitable for all students who leave school early. In this context some alternative education providers have stepped in to provide education at both Junior and Leaving Cert level, however there is no funding line to support it and a lack of information on the types and numbers of alternative programmes of education in Ireland.

In May 2022, the Review of Out-of-School Education Provision was published by the Department of Education.²⁵⁶ The Review notes that education settings that fall outside the parameters of mainstream education have been operating within the State since the establishment of Youth Encounter Project schools in the 1970s.²⁵⁷ Alternative Education settings continue to provide different pathways for young people who have become disengaged within the mainstream education system and have had a highly positive impact on the lives of many young people.²⁵⁸ Despite Ireland having a high retention rate to Leaving Certificate, there is a small cohort of students who find it difficult to engage in mainstream education.²⁵⁹ Factors that may contribute to this include the young person's own needs and personal situation and/or their relationship with school and their learning. The nature of the provision to date has been unstructured and the Review commits to address this to ensure a consistency of approach and governance standards. There is also a welcome commitment to provide a framework of supports and services to schools for students who are at risk of becoming disengaged from education.

The Department of Education should consider how to grow and expand upon and fund out-of-school education provision to ensure a child-centred approach to education by providing alternatives best suited to the individual child.

The leaving certificate points system was created by the Higher Education sector as a way of admitting children and young people into Higher Education.²⁶⁰ It has a considerable 'backwash' effect on the experience of second level schooling, as it makes teaching and learning over-focused on exams, rather than learning, and it measures all people by the same metric, regardless of their circumstances. While programmes such as the Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) and Disability Access Route to Education (DARE) schemes go some way to addressing access routes to Higher Education, consideration needs to be given to diversifying progression routes for children and young people.

Integration of ethnic minorities within school

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed several concerns about the experiences of Traveller and Roma children, noting the stigmatisation and social exclusion they experience during Ireland's examination in 2016.²⁶¹ The Committee was particularly concerned about the structural discrimination minority children faced in access to education, health and an adequate standard of living²⁶² and recommended the State define specific budgetary lines for Traveller and Roma children which are protected at all times, including during times of economic crisis.²⁶³

Investing in Children calls on member states to facilitate the integration of Roma children and those from an immigrant background through the preparation of teachers for social diversity. While the overall attainment level of Irish Travellers increased between 2011 and 2016, with more Travellers completing secondary school than before, many still do not.²⁶⁴

255 T Kovačić, C Forkan, P Dolan, L Rodriguez, *Enabling An Inclusive And Equitable Quality Education For All, Through The Implementation Of A New, Evidence-Based Model On Educational Progression And Transformation, Findings From An Evaluation Of Rethink Ireland's Education Fund June, 2021* (UNESCO NUIG 2021) <<https://bit.ly/3wDL53v>> accessed 12 November 2021, 2.

256 Department of Education, *Review of Out-of-School Education Provision* (DE 2022).

257 *ibid.*

258 *ibid.*

259 *ibid.*

260 IPPN, 'Higher Education Selection – The History of The Points System' in *Towards a Better Future: A Review of the Irish School System* (IPPN 2017) 105.

261 UNCRC 'Concluding Observations: On the combined third and fourth periodic report of Ireland' (2016) UN Doc CRC/C/IRL/CO/3-4 para 28(a).

262 *ibid* para 69.

263 *ibid* para 16(d).

264 Department of Children and Youth Affairs, *Statistical Spotlight #4, Young Travellers in Ireland* (DCYA 2020)32.

Traveller children and young people are four times more likely to attend schools in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme than non-DEIS schools, and the number of Travellers receiving support in non-DEIS schools has declined.²⁶⁵



Comprehensive data on Roma children and young people is lacking, however, recent analysis highlights that the number of Roma children attending mainstream and special primary school classes has increased across the 2016 to 2018 period.²⁶⁶ Given the absence of accurate population numbers, the proportion of Roma children attending primary or secondary school is not available.

The marginalisation of Traveller and Roma culture within the Irish education system adversely affects young people's sense of belonging and place.²⁶⁷ A review of the position of Traveller history and culture in the school curriculum undertaken by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment concluded

that 'the dissonance between the social, linguistic and cultural environments of the home and school can account for disaffection' which is then compounded by conscious and unconscious bias against Travellers in the school community.²⁶⁸ Furthermore, the 2010 *All Ireland Traveller Health Study* highlighted that reluctance amongst the community to continue in mainstream education was because of the high level of discrimination they faced when seeking employment following education.²⁶⁹ For Roma children, insufficient English language and literacy support can compound experiences of bullying and marginalisation at school.²⁷⁰

A key commitment under the *National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021* (NTRIS) was that access, participation and outcomes for Travellers and Roma in education should be improved to achieve outcomes that are equal to those for the majority population.²⁷¹ The NTRIS includes ten education actions to improve outcomes for children at primary and post primary level. These include actions on Traveller culture and history, bullying research and school admissions.²⁷² On foot of these, a number of actions were commenced that attempt to better understand and address the barriers that Traveller and Roma children face in education, including a new two-year inclusion strategy pilot project.²⁷³ The pilot began in September 2019 with three sites and a fourth site added in 2020.²⁷⁴ The Department of Education estimates the investment in the pilot has been €2 million over the first two years.²⁷⁵ The project has been extended for a third year.²⁷⁶

Each pilot area is being provided with one additional Educational Welfare Officer, funded by the Department of Education via Tusla and one additional Home School Liaison Co-ordinator, funded by the Department of Education. In line with the *Investing in Children* commitment, to deploy special cultural mediators and role models, two additional

265 *ibid* 28.

266 *ibid* 44.

267 Kathleen Marie Lawrence, *Traveller outcomes in education: A Traveller perspective* (Maynooth University 2017); Pavee Point & Department of Justice and Equality, *Roma in Ireland: A National Needs Assessment* (Pavee Point 2018).

268 National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, *Traveller culture and history in the curriculum: a curriculum audit* (NCCA 2019) 61.

269 Department of Justice and Equality, *The National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021* (Department of Justice and Equality 2017) 12.

270 Pavee Point & Department of Justice and Equality *Roma in Ireland: A National Needs Assessment* (Pavee Point 2018) 115.

271 Department of Justice and Equality, *The National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021* (Department of Justice and Equality 2017) 25-26.

272 *ibid*.

273 Communication received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the Department of Education, 20 January 2021.

274 *ibid*.

275 Communication received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the Department of Education, 27 January 2022.

276 *ibid*.

Traveller and Roma education workers, funded by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth have also been provided.²⁷⁷ As well as supporting educational participation and engagement, the aim of the pilot is to increase engagement with Traveller groups. The Government has stated that the pilot will inform the development of policy and innovative solutions to issues identified as barriers to participation and engagement.²⁷⁸ With all sites operational, the pilot is currently available in around 59 schools, to over 1,300 children.²⁷⁹

The Programme for Government has committed to undertake an independent assessment of the pilot projects aimed at retaining Traveller and Roma children in education. Fieldwork to establish an understanding of the current baseline scenario began in September 2019 and a report based on the findings was published online in November 2021.²⁸⁰ In total, the research comprised of interviews and interactive workshops across four sites with children, parents and teachers, to provide a range of views on the subject of Traveller and Roma children's engagement with school.²⁸¹

Traveller parents taking part in the study outlined how they want their children to feel included in school and to have a better educational experience than they had.²⁸² Increased support provided at primary school level for their children had a positive impact but, the transition to secondary school is challenging as the same level of support was not available.²⁸³ In the absence of parents' direct experience or 'legacy knowledge' of secondary school, it was difficult for parents to support their children.²⁸⁴ Parents were often faced with the challenge of balancing their commitment and desire for their children to acquire a second level education with the continued negative impact on their children's mental health that the participation in school created.²⁸⁵ Roma parents also had strong ambitions for their children's participation

in school however, practical barriers related to language, a lack of financial resources and transport were challenging with regard to participation.²⁸⁶

Traveller young people also expressed negative experiences of attending secondary school. Actions such as having to sit at the back of the class, racist name calling with no redress from teachers or principals meant that feelings of isolation and exclusion were commonplace. Young people expressed the desire to talk more about Traveller culture. Roma young people reflected their parents' ambitions for them to positively participate in education and they recognised the need to acquire certain educational qualifications to have a career.²⁸⁷ The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth has confirmed that the second phase of the research will involve an evaluation of the actual pilots under the responsibility of the Department of Education.²⁸⁸

277 *ibid.*

278 Enda Hughes, Principal Officer, Department of Education, Joint Committee on Education and Skills and Joint Committee on Key Issues affecting the Traveller Community, 3 December 2019.

279 Communication received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the Department of Education, 20 January 2021.

280 Maria Quinlan, *Out of the Shadows Traveller and Roma Education: Voices from the Communities* (Government of Ireland 2021).

281 Communication received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 1 February 2021.

282 *ibid.*

283 *ibid.*

284 *ibid.*

285 *ibid.*

286 *ibid.*

287 *ibid.*

288 Communication received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 1 February 2021.

Recommendations

Budget 2023

- Increase the capitation fee by a minimum of 10 per cent in order to address the chronic underfunding of primary and secondary schools and rising costs associated with energy and other day to day living expenses.
 - €5m towards the expansion of the free schoolbooks scheme piloted in 2020/21.
 - Ring-fence allocation of hours for guidance counsellors and restore all qualified guidance counsellors to full guidance counselling only positions in schools.
-

Medium-term

- Carry out an audit to establish what the gaps are to accessing digital technologies for disadvantaged students. This audit should not only include access to hardware but also look to establish the gaps in terms of connectivity.
 - Expand the free schoolbook pilot scheme by investing an additional €20 million of free school books in primary school as a first step towards realising the commitment of the EU Child Guarantee. As a first step, set clear numeric targets to scale-up the pilot so this is transparent and to allow progress to be measured year-on-year with specific targets for DEIS and non-DEIS schools.
 - Building on the work of the review of out of school education, develop a national policy and approach to providing out of school provision for young people who fall out of mainstream education. The goal of the policy should be both to work towards supporting young people to return to mainstream education and providing alternative education and pathways for learning and accreditation for those who cannot attend mainstream education.
 - The Department of Education needs to publish the Request for Tender document for the evaluation and commence it as a matter of priority. The pilot evaluation design should ensure Traveller and Roma children and young people, as service users, are involved as co-collaborators throughout the process.
 - Introduce a resource allocation model follows the child rather than the school similar to the UK Pupil Premium model. This type of model could complement the DEIS model.
 - Introduce a tapering of supports under the DEIS programme to address the sharp distinction between DEIS and non-DEIS schools and reflecting the fact that a significant proportion of disadvantaged children attend non-DEIS schools.
-

Long-term Sustainable Solutions

- Building on the approach undertaken in the baseline study, and on the recommendations contained within it, ensure that solutions aimed at improving the experience of Traveller and Roma children in schools are co-created by the communities.
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Showcasing Solutions:

BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLE IN ADDRESSING EDUCATION INEQUALITY AND RAISING ASPIRATIONS

What is the issue?

There are a number of government policies and initiatives aimed at tackling educational inequality that have had a positive impact on many children and young people. Despite this, there remain challenges particularly with regard to progression to third level education in areas of disadvantage. An evaluation of alternative education initiatives by [UNESCO NUIG](#) found that they had significant positive impact on young people's educational progression.

Citywise is located in the heart of the community of West Tallaght. West Tallaght is categorised as one of the most disadvantaged and underserved areas in Ireland. Less than 5% of the people living within the community hold a third-level college degree, this is compared to 42% nationally (Census 2016). The Pobal deprivation index (2016) denotes 21 areas in Tallaght as very disadvantaged. In addition to this the community has the highest levels of deprivation in the Dublin and Dun Laoghaire Education Training Board (DDLETB) remit. There is a cycle of poverty in the surrounding area, as intergeneration unemployment is 30% (CYPSC Plan, 2020). Progress to third-level education in the extending area is significantly low as The Higher Education Authority cites college progression rates of 29% in Dublin 24. In the sub-community of Jobstown and Killinarden this figure drops to around 12%.

What is the solution?

Citywise Education is an educational charity based in Jobstown, Tallaght putting an innovative approach to addressing education inequality into practice. Citywise programmes are designed to not just help people advance through the educational system but also to provide them with the soft skills needed to survive tertiary education once they get there.

How does it work?

Academic work is the focal point of Citywise Education programmes. Young people learn to work hard, acquire study habits and develop their academic ambition. Recognising the threat that drugs, gangs and crime present to a youngster's future, Citywise Education gives importance to character development, personal qualities and the need for each young person to serve society.

Citywise Education also looks for a strong commitment from parents and guardians given the crucial role family plays in a child's education. Similarly, their work is never carried out in isolation from the other supports a child or young person may need. Citywise Education works in collaboration with other agencies, especially local schools, in seeking to address the needs of children.



Educational programmes at Citywise Education are designed around the needs of young people in underserved areas, providing educational and personal support. One focus area has been the transition from second level to third level education.

The Fast Track programmes are designed to help young people set their sights on third-level education.

Primary school students are recommended by their teachers; students in secondary school may refer themselves. Fast Track includes Junior Fast Track for primary students, Intermediate Fast Track to Junior Cert level. Senior students can then move on to Fast Track Academy. The Fast Track Academy aims to:

- Provide educational supports to senior year students at second level to complete their programme of study successfully and identify their career paths
- Increase the number of young people from West Tallaght progressing to third level/ further education
- Provide targeted supports to students who have made the transition to Higher/Further education so that they continue to progress and succeed in realising their personal and professional ambitions
- Promote a positive experience of education.

A community based personalised programme, the Fast Track Academy draws heavily on local volunteers and on corporate-sector role models. It delivers focused classes, mentoring, career guidance and study support, and is now following students through into college with additional supports. The Academy seeks to build communities through heightening an interest of local young people in education and then providing them with the means to follow up on that interest – growing the community leaders of the future.

Many of the non-academic programmes run by Citywise are in place to encourage young people to join the centre, they then see older people from their own communities enjoying the academic programmes and it normalises this transition for the younger member too.

What is the impact?

Well over 500 local young people, aged from 8 to 18 years, ranging from highly alienated youth to young people with third level aspirations, attend Citywise Education's character building, education and sporting programmes.

The Fast Track programmes currently aim to reach 250 young people annually impacting firstly on the Tallaght West community where it is based. This holistic community model is achieving above 70% rate in accessing college. Far above the 12% average for the area.

The model of education run by Citywise Education is the reorientation that is needed in the future of education in Ireland. Focusing on the child or young person at the heart,



the primary objective is fostering the aspirations of every student. Supports and resources are then built around the individual needs of the child. This results in incredibly positive outcomes for the young people engaging with the programme from an educational point of view but also a self-confidence, personal development and wellbeing perspective.

How can it be emulated?

The innovative programmes at Citywise Education meet the issue of educational inequality head-on, with academic work as the focal point and focused classes and support to help students achieve their educational aspirations. However, through these programmes they are building something much bigger. We need responses that address essential educational needs but also raise the educational aspirations of children and young people. The research is telling us that this is one of the major reasons why young people do not progress to third level or pursue further education and professional development. The future of education in this country should be one that embodies the values we see in organisations like Citywise, that raise aspirations and target responses to help them reach their full potential.

"I've a lot of experience in witnessing first-hand the struggles faced by young people but what encourages me to get involved and help them out is seeing the potential they have. I love how Citywise is all about providing students with that additional helping hand to help them on their way, as well as letting young people know that you can do whatever you want in life, once you set your mind on it! I think it's really important to remind students that there are so many options in life and that there is never only one way to get to where you want to be in life!" (Tara, Fast Track Academy Officer)



Health



HEALTH

“It is based on a failed, fantasy model of “family centred” provision which involves provision of NO services to children with defined complex disabilities.”²⁸⁹

Every child has the right to enjoy the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.²⁹⁰ *Investing in Children* calls on Member States to ensure that all children can access quality health services including those concerned with ‘disease prevention’ and ‘health promotion’.²⁹¹ Member States should tackle barriers to healthcare for families and children in poverty such as those related to cost and information.²⁹² Prevention strategies for early childhood should be inclusive of needs around nutrition, health and social measures.²⁹³ Children with disabilities or mental health difficulties should be given special attention along with undocumented children, teen parents and families with substance abuse issues.²⁹⁴

Addressing the costs of healthcare

Investing in Children calls on member states to remove obstacles to healthcare including those related to cost. This aligns with Article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which places particular emphasis on the development of primary healthcare, including access to General Practitioner (GP) care.²⁹⁵

In 2017, the expansion of primary care services, including the introduction of universal free GP care was recommended under Sláintecare. Under legislation introduced in 2020, Health (General Practitioner and Service and Alteration of Criteria for Eligibility) Act 2020, access to GP care will be extended for children under 13 years of age.²⁹⁶ Funding was provided in Budget 2022 to cover the first of three phases of expansion.²⁹⁷ This will see GP care provided for six and seven year olds in the first instance with the timing for further phases of expansion, to eight and nine year olds and 10 to 12 year olds yet to be announced.

While it is welcome that free GP care will be extended on a universal basis for all children on a phased basis, a full Medical Card is essential for those in low-income households. A full Medical Card ensures access to more extensive primary care services such as optical and aural services, prescriptions, and out-patient health services and medical appliances.²⁹⁸ Medical Card holders may also be exempt from paying school transport charges and exam fees.²⁹⁹

289 Inclusion Ireland, *Progressing disability services for children and young people - Parent experience survey report* (Inclusion Ireland February 2022).

290 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (20 November 1989) 1577 UNTS 3 (UNCRC) Art 24.

291 European Commission, *Commission Recommendation: Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage* (Brussels, 20.2.2013 C(2013) 778 final) 8.

292 Ibid.

293 Ibid.

294 Ibid.

295 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (20 November 1989) 1577 UNTS 3 (UNCRC) Art 24 (b).

296 *Health (General Practitioner Service and Alteration of Criteria for Eligibility) Act 2020*.

297 Department of Health, ‘Budget 2022: Minister Donnelly announces €21 billion, the biggest ever investment in Ireland’s health and social care services’ (Press Release 14 October 2021) <<https://bit.ly/3Ox9aRs>> accessed 15 June 2022.

298 Citizens Information ‘Medical Cards’ <<https://bit.ly/3ivgLAe>> accessed 01 June 2022.

299 Ibid.

As the full Medical Card is a targeted support, recipients generally must satisfy a means test.³⁰⁰ Families whose income is derived solely from social welfare will normally qualify for the Medical Card. Other groups such as children in foster care and those living in Direct Provision qualify for the card without a means test.³⁰¹ However, those on low incomes from a combination of work and social welfare may not meet the criteria for qualification. This is due to the inadequacy of the income thresholds for the Medical Card. These rates have not been revised since 2005. The current Medical Card income threshold for a family of two adults with two children under 16 is €342.50 per week³⁰² while the poverty line for this household in 2021 was €664.63.³⁰³ A review of these thresholds is required if coverage of the Medical Card is to be more comprehensive for those that need it.

Medical Card recipients also have access to free in-patient care. Given the substantial costs incurred by families of children in hospital³⁰⁴ these costs further add to the burden and stress for families in vulnerable situations. It is welcome that the Minister for Health is bringing forward legislation to tackle the cost of in-patient care for all children. Under the proposed legislation, the existing charge of €80 per night for in-patient care in a public hospital will be removed for all under 16 years.³⁰⁵

Preventative supports in early childhood

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.³⁰⁶ Public health nurses play a critical role in advising and supporting parents and referring families to other interventions.³⁰⁷ They are a consistent point of contact for parents and children in the first 3 years of a child's life³⁰⁸ and are an important link through to early childhood education and care services, particularly prevention and early intervention services.

Public health nursing is under pressure due to a historical hiring embargo, current recruitment challenges and the implications of a generalist model of public health nursing.³⁰⁹ The redeployment of Public Health Nurses throughout the pandemic, including their involvement in the vaccination programme, severely curtailed routine visits and checks undertaken by these health professionals.³¹⁰ This reduced level of contact with new-born babies and their parents has meant that just 55 per cent received their developmental screening within 10 months between July and September 2020.³¹¹ In the same period in 2021 this fell to 53.6 per cent.³¹² Prior to the pandemic, in 2019, the rate was 98 per cent.³¹³ The community-based nature of this service has meant that any interactions with the service during the pandemic varied based on where families live.³¹⁴ There has also been a reduction in health visits to schools for hearing, vision and dental screenings.³¹⁵

300 *ibid.*

301 *ibid.*

302 *ibid.*

303 Social Justice Ireland, *Poverty Focus 2021* (Social Justice Ireland 2021).

304 Children in Hospital, Childhood Illness, *Financial Stress The Hidden Costs of Hospital Care for Children (Children in Hospital 2019)*.

305 Department of Health, 'Minister for Health receives Cabinet approval to abolish public in-patient charges for children' (Press Release 26 April 2022) <<https://bit.ly/3xG9nL1>> accessed 15 June 2022.

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

307 Children's Rights Alliance, *The next programme for Government: Every Child Every Chance* (Children's Rights Alliance 2020).

308 *ibid.*

309 *ibid.*

310 Health Service Executive, *The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the societal restrictions on the health and wellbeing of the population, on our staff and on health service capacity and delivery: A plan for healthcare and population health recovery* (HSE 2022).

311 Health Service Executive, *Performance Profile July – September 2020* (HSE 2020) <<https://bit.ly/2S4T8Gk>> accessed 27 June 2022.

312 *ibid.*

313 *ibid.*

314 Sheila Wayman, 'Child development checks in a time of pandemic', *The Irish Times*, 24 March 2021.

315 Health Service Executive, *The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the societal restrictions on the health and wellbeing of the population, on our staff and on health service capacity and delivery: A plan for healthcare and population health recovery* (HSE 2022).

Public Health Nurses may lack the time and supports necessary to move away from primarily treating ill health and towards health promotion and early intervention in children's early years.³¹⁶ The 2017 *Houses of the Oireachtas Committee on the Future of Healthcare Sláintecare Report* recommends investing in child health and well-being services by putting in place Public Health Nurses that are dedicated to child health work. *Sláintecare* also recommends the hiring of 900 community registered nurses to free up Public Health Nurses with specialist child training to carry out their child health work.³¹⁷ *First 5: The Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028*, contains a related commitment to; 'in line with the principles set out in *Sláintecare*, develop a dedicated child health workforce, adopting a population-based approach, focussed initially in areas of high population density and disadvantage, recognising that this will require additional resources'.³¹⁸

Public Health Nurses remain, alongside General Practitioners and their Practice Nurses, the first and consistent point of contact for parents and children in the first three years of a child's life.

Public Health Nurses remain, alongside General Practitioners and their Practice Nurses, the first and consistent point of contact for parents and children in the first three years of a child's life through the National Healthy Childhood Programme, and they play a critical role in advising and supporting parents and referring families to other interventions.

Promotion of breastfeeding

Malnutrition is responsible, directly or indirectly, for 60 per cent of the 10.9 million deaths annually among children under 5.³¹⁹ Article 24 UNCRC provides the child with a right to nutritious food in order to prevent disease and malnutrition. The Committee on the Rights of the Child affirmed that exclusive breastfeeding of a child up to 6 months and continued, along with solids until 2 years of age should be protected and promoted as breastfeeding is providing the best source of nutritious food to the infant while also providing the best defence against malnutrition and diseases.³²⁰

It is recommended that children are breastfed exclusively for the first 6 months of their lives.³²¹ As a result an infant does not need a diverse diet to satisfy their dietary requirements, but rather breast milk as it provides all essential nutrients. This is likely to fulfil the child's right to adequate food while further strengthening the importance of protecting a woman and child's right to breastfeed as it is one of the only ways to provide the infant with their dietary requirements.

Article 24(2)(e) of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child obliges States to ensure society, in particular parents are 'informed, have access to education and are supported in [...] the advantages of breastfeeding....'. In 2016 the Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended that the Irish State 'strengthen its efforts to promote exclusive and continued breastfeeding by providing access to materials and raising awareness concerning the importance of breastfeeding and the risks of formula feeding and to develop and implement a national strategy on breastfeeding'.³²²

316 Children's Rights Alliance, *The next programme for Government: Every Child Every Chance* (Children's Rights Alliance 2020).
317 *ibid.*

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

319 World Health Organisation, *Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding* (WHO 2003) 5.

320 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (20 November 1989) 1577 UNTS 3 (UNCRC) Art 24 (b).

321 Health Service Executive, 'Infant and Child Feeding' (Health Service Executive, 2013) <<https://bit.ly/3N9zobB>> accessed 15 June 2022.

322 UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the combined third and fourth periodic reports of Ireland (2016) CRC/C/IRL/CO/3-4, para 52.

The HSE *Breastfeeding in a Healthy Ireland – HSE Action Plan 2016–2021* sets out the priority areas to be addressed to enhance breastfeeding supports and to enable more mothers in Ireland to breastfeed. Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the delivery of some actions, the action plan will run until 2022.³²³ There is no indication as to when a successor strategy will be developed. An additional €1.58 million of funding to provide an additional 24 lactation consultants across hospital and community settings was provided in Budget 2021.³²⁴

Despite these initiatives, breastfeeding rates in Ireland are low by international standards and the lowest in Europe.³²⁵ Research found that just over half of mothers (56 per cent) initiate breastfeeding in hospital compared with over 90 per cent in Scandinavian countries.³²⁶ The figure falls to 48 per cent once mothers leave hospital and just a quarter of mothers who initiate breastfeeding continue to do so at six months.³²⁷ There is no mechanism to monitor breastfeeding rates after discharge from hospital.³²⁸ Factors most likely to influence breastfeeding initiation and duration rates are maternal age, level of education, socio-economic background,³²⁹ and whether the mother had undergone a Caesarean section.³³⁰

Services for children with a disability

Children with a disability have the right 'to special care, education and training designed to help them to achieve the greatest possible self-reliance and to lead a full active life in society' according to Article 23 of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child.

The lack of availability of services for children with a disability was the top finding from a recent survey of over 1,000 parents.³³¹ Included in the issues highlighted by families participating in the survey was communication from the HSE indicating that a service required would not be delivered for two years.³³² Despite existing long waiting lists for services, speech and language therapists, physiotherapists and occupational therapists based in primary care and disability services were redeployed during the pandemic.³³³ It is not surprising, therefore, that the waiting lists for these services continued to grow significantly in the past 24 months meaning there is an increased number of children waiting to access vital services. While it was critical that all resources were targeted towards responding to the increased pressure caused by the pandemic on specific health services, the redirecting of personnel and the impact of this on waiting lists will have a detrimental impact on the development, health and well-being of children and young people, most particularly those exposed to pre-existing health conditions.

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- 323 Minister of State with responsibility for Public Health, Well Being and National Drugs Strategy, Frank Feighan TD, Dáil Debates, Written Answers, Health Promotion 15 September 2021 [43546/21].
- 324 Minister of State with responsibility for Public Health, Well Being and National Drugs Strategy, Frank Feighan TD, Dáil Debates, Written Answers, Healthcare Policy, 8 March 2022 [12645/22].
- 325 R. Layte & C. McCrory, *Growing up in Ireland, National Longitudinal Survey on Children, Maternal Health Behaviours and Child Growth in Infancy, Analysis of the Infant Cohort of the Growing Up in Ireland Study* (ESRI, Trinity College Dublin, Department of Children and Youth Affairs 2014) 48; Women from the original twelve EU countries and African countries are four and 10 times more likely, respectively, to be breastfeeding at discharge from hospital compared to an Irish woman.
- 326 Economic and Social Research Institute and HSE National Office of Health Promotion, 'Breastfeeding in Ireland 2012: Consequences and Policy Response' (Press Release 1 October 2012) <<https://www.esri.ie/news/breastfeeding-in-ireland-2012>> accessed 27 June 2022.
- 327 R. Layte & C. McCrory, *Growing up in Ireland, National Longitudinal Survey on Children, Maternal Health Behaviours and Child Growth in Infancy, Analysis of the Infant Cohort of the Growing Up in Ireland Study* (ESRI, Trinity College Dublin, Department of Children and Youth Affairs 2014) 45.
- 328 *ibid* 40.
- 329 *ibid* 46.
- 330 *ibid* 40.
- 331 Inclusion Ireland, 'Progressing disability services for children and young people - Parent experience survey report' (Inclusion Ireland February 2022).
- 332 *ibid*.
- 333 Marese McDonagh and Paul Cullen 'Concern grows as HSE therapists redeployed as Covid-19 testers', *The Irish Times*, 3 September 2020 <<https://bit.ly/39HGrdO>> accessed 15 June 2022.

According to data from the HSE, in February 2022 there were almost 25,000 children on the waiting lists waiting for speech and language therapy, almost half of these children were waiting for an initial assessment.³³⁴ There was over 7,000 children waiting on psychological therapy, and 11,510 waiting on occupational therapy.³³⁵ Of those children waiting for a psychology services, there are 4,166 waiting greater than six months of which 2,421 were waiting greater than 12 months.³³⁶ Over 4,500 children were waiting over a year for occupational therapy.³³⁷ With a gap of 732 posts out of 2,000 roles in disability teams,³³⁸ it is difficult to see how waiting lists will be reduced in the short-term to medium term as the shortage of professionals equates to a loss of 480,000 intervention hours for children on waiting lists.³³⁹

Over a decade ago the process of re-configuring the delivery of disability services begun with the final Disability Network Team reconfigured in December 2021.³⁴⁰ While the reconfiguration of services is complete, parents report difficulties with staff turnover and gaps in terms of professionals on the team.³⁴¹ As part of a review being carried out by the OECD on Ireland's skills strategy the Department of Health has identified key gaps in the HSE in relation to a number of professions related to these teams.³⁴² While the Department of Higher Education is actively engaging with key actors to progress additional places for healthcare professionals in the next academic year, there are practical limitations on the expansion of the number of places on such courses.³⁴³



Mental health

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child affords every child the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.³⁴⁴ This right covers the full spectrum of health and wellbeing and fulfilling the right requires 'a comprehensive multisectoral response ... through integrated systems ... that involve parents, peers, the wider family and schools and the provision of support and assistance through trained staff'.³⁴⁵ The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child endorses a public health and psychosocial support approach to mental health rather than overmedicalisation and institutionalisation.³⁴⁶

Under Ireland's last examination by the Committee in 2016, the Committee expressed several concerns relating to mental healthcare, including the long waiting times for treatment.³⁴⁷

334 Health Service Executive, 'Correspondence to Sean Sherlock T.D. in Response to Parliamentary Questions 15247/22 and 15248' (6 April 2022) <<https://bit.ly/3bwHtKf>> accessed 27 June 2022. 11,582 children are waiting on an initial assessment, 5,538 are waiting on initial therapy and 7,489 are waiting on further therapy.

335 *ibid.*

336 *ibid.*

337 *ibid.*

338 Pat McGrath, 'Significant challenges' to disability services recruitment – Reid', RTE News 27 June 2022 <<https://bit.ly/3O14COa>> accessed 27 June 2022.

339 *ibid.*

340 Inclusion Ireland, *Progressing disability services for children and young people - Parent experience survey report* (Inclusion Ireland February 2022).

341 *ibid.*

342 Minister for Further and higher Education, Simon Harris T.D., Dáil Debates, Written Answers, Departmental Strategies, 26 April 2022 [20218/22].

343 *ibid.*

344 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (20 November 1989) 1577 UNTS 3 (UNCRC) Art 24.

345 UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), *General comment No. 20 (2016) on the implementation of the rights of the child during adolescence*, 6 December 2016, CRC/C/GC/20, para 58.

346 *ibid.*

347 UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the combined third and fourth periodic reports of Ireland (2016) CRC/C/IRL/CO/3-4, para 53.

Research conducted with a representative sample of children and young people in Ireland suggests that approximately one in three young people will have experienced some type of mental disorder by the age of 13, with this rate rising to more than one in two by the age of 24 years.³⁴⁸ While mental health problems are not selective, certain groups of children are at greater risk of poor mental health, including children who have experienced abuse or neglect,³⁴⁹ including domestic abuse,³⁵⁰ children living in poverty,³⁵¹ children who have experienced discrimination, including homophobia or transphobia,³⁵² and children with chronic physical health conditions.³⁵³

There is a wide range of evidence available that indicates that children and young people's mental health have been impacted by the pandemic. An analysis of presentations at paediatric emergency departments in Dublin found that there was an increase in the number of children attending due to mental health concerns in the second half of 2020.³⁵⁴ Surveys conducted by other services have indicated that there is a need to address increased levels of anxiety, stress and depression by schools and other services as an already over-stretched child and adolescent mental health services are unable to respond with additional demands.³⁵⁵

Amongst the ongoing issues facing Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are long waiting lists for treatment,³⁵⁶ combined with poor investment³⁵⁷ and workforce recruitment and retention issues.³⁵⁸ A welcome investment of an additional €4m in primary care psychology in August 2021 should provide much needed interventions for those children and young people waiting over 12 months for a first appointment.³⁵⁹ Further investment secured in Budget 2022 is targeted towards enhancing the capacity of teams engaged in community mental health as well as the setting up of two new CAMHS telehubs.³⁶⁰ However, the latest available data shows there continues to be a significant growth in the numbers waiting for a service. In April 2022 there 4,003 children and young people on the waiting list for CAMHS compared to 2,919 in April 2021.³⁶¹

Two-tiered healthcare system

The public versus private system of healthcare in Ireland means that while those on a low income with a Medical Card have no financial barriers to accessing GP service, there are challenges to accessing other services.³⁶² While higher income families can access private counselling the costs associated with such a

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- 348 Cannon and Coughlan *et al*, *The Mental Health of Young People in Ireland: a report of the Psychiatric Epidemiology Research across the Lifespan (PERL) Group* (Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland 2013) 7.
- 349 Norman and Byambaa *et al*, *The long-term health consequences of child physical abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect: a systematic review and meta-analysis*, PLoS Medicine, 2012; Schaefer and Moffitt *et al*, *Adolescent victimization and early-adult psychopathology: Approaching causal inference using a longitudinal twin study to rule out non-causal explanations*, (2018) Clinical Psychological Science.
- 350 Roberts and Campbell *et al*, *The role of parenting stress in young Children's mental health functioning after exposure to family violence* (2013) Journal of Traumatic Stress, 26(5).
- 351 Wickham, Whitehead, Taylor-Robinson, Barr, *The effect of a transition into poverty on child and maternal mental health: A longitudinal analysis of the UK millennium cohort study* (2017) The Lancet Public Health, 2 (3).
- 352 Tina Dürrbaum, Frank A. Sattler, *Minority stress and mental health in lesbian, gay male, and bisexual youths: A meta-analysis* (2020) Journal of LGBT Youth 17:3; Liu & Mustanski, *Suicidal Ideation and Self-Harm in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth* (2012) *American Journal of Preventative Medicine*, 42(3).
- 353 Vanessa E. Cobham, *et al.*, *Systematic Review: Anxiety in Children and Adolescents With Chronic Medical Conditions*, (2020) Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 59(5).
- 354 T McDonnell *et al*, 'Increased Mental Health Presentations by Children Aged 5-15 at Emergency Departments During the First 12 Months of COVID-19' *Irish Medical Journal* 144(5) 356.
- 355 Merike Darmody, Emer Smyth and Helen Russell, *The implications of the Covid-19 pandemic for policy in relation to children and young people: A research review* (ESRI 2020).
- 356 Maresa Fagan, 'Barnardos 'deeply concerned' over mental health waiting list for children and teens', *Irish Examiner* 9 June 2020.
- 357 Irish Hospital Consultants Association, 'New mental health policy fails to address critical staffing deficits, says IHCA' (Press Release 7 June 2020) <<https://bit.ly/3qPT2OV>> accessed 27 June 2022.
- 358 *ibid.*
- 359 Department of Health, 'Minister for Mental Health and Older People, Mary Butler TD announces the approval of €4 million to reduce the Primary Care Psychology waiting list' (Press Release 4 August 2021) <<https://bit.ly/3tAmkET>> accessed 15 June 2022.
- 360 Department of Health, 'Minister for Mental Health and Older People announces further increases on mental health and older persons funding in Budget 2022' (Press release 14 October 2021).
- 361 Dyane Connor, 'CAMHS waiting list grows by more than a quarter' RTÉ News, 23 May 2022 <<https://bit.ly/3tEffU9>> accessed 15 June 2022
- 362 Prof E McCarthy and Prof C Comiskey, *The InBetweeners, Identifying and quantifying the unmet mental health needs of children and adolescents in Tallaght* (CDI Tallaght 2019).

service for those on a low income can be too great.³⁶³ This means that lower-income families are reliant on statutory services which as previously outlined are not accessible in a timely manner.³⁶⁴ For those who stretch their income to pay for a private service there is a negative impact on the household budget.³⁶⁵

One of the challenges in meeting the demand for services is the limited number of newly qualified psychologists that graduate each year. The Psychological Society of Ireland estimates that a modest investment of €1.3m would help increase the workforce by providing funding for trainees linked to the HSE.³⁶⁶ In the interim qualification period these individuals could work under supervision and increase capacity within existing public services.

A further innovative approach could be locating resources within school settings. Two reports published by the Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, one on the Impact of Covid on Primary and Secondary Education³⁶⁷ and second on mental health and school bullying³⁶⁸ have recommended that emotional counselling and therapeutic supports be provided in all primary and secondary schools. This would mean that children and young people would be able to access supports in the school without the need to pay and would ensure that children could access supports in a non-stigmatising way when they need it.

363 *ibid.*

364 *ibid.*

365 *ibid.*

366 Psychological Society of Ireland, Pre-budget Submission 2022 <<https://bit.ly/3Noyfgl>> accessed 27 June 2022.

367 Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, The Impact of Covid on Primary and Secondary Education (Houses of the Oireachtas 2021).

368 Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, School Bullying and the Impact on Mental Health (Houses of the Oireachtas 2021).

Recommendations

Budget 2023

- Build on the momentum from Budget 2022 to expand GP care to all children under 13 years by providing funding to cover eight- and nine-year-olds.
 - Revise the income thresholds for the Medical Card to ensure that all families with children who are at risk of poverty will have access to a full Medical Card. At a minimum these thresholds should be set above the poverty thresholds.
 - Invest in the development of the mental health workforce by targeting resources towards training places for clinical psychology and additional posts in primary care psychology. Address the increased prevalence of eating disorders since the onset of the pandemic by funding specific teams to support children and young people.
 - Allocate €10 million in funding to implement a pilot programme which would situate emotional and therapeutic services in a select number of primary and secondary schools across the country.
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Medium-term

- Invest in creating a dedicated public health nurse service for children and develop a strategy for 'home visits' to ensure every child has access to prevention and early intervention supports they deserve in their own community.
 - Ensuring that all children with a disability have access to timely and fully-resourced professional services delivered locally should be a central pillar of the next children and young people's policy framework (BOBF2).
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Long-term Sustainable Solutions

- Expand GP Medical Card to all children under the age of 18.
 - Fully implement the commitments contained in Sláintecare.
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Housing and Homelessness



HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

“Well, sometimes I have to read in the toilet if my sister wants to go to sleep. I love reading, my favourite book is Harry Potter.” (Lena, aged 9)³⁶⁹

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) requires the State to assist parents and guardians who are in need by providing ‘material assistance and support programmes particularly regarding nutrition, clothing and housing’.

The infringement of a child’s right to adequate housing and living environment, can have a significant adverse impact on their development and wellbeing. Global evidence reviews have found that homelessness is associated with multiple negative physical, mental, and behavioural health outcomes, with the duration of homelessness compounding and elevating the risk of adverse outcomes.³⁷⁰ Children who experience homelessness are also more likely to have developmental and learning delays and poorer academic attainment.³⁷¹

Investing in Children connects children’s living environment with their development and learning needs and calls on Member States to provide ‘a safe, adequate housing and living environment’.³⁷² Achieving this requires actions which address affordability, quality accommodation and issues related to ‘environmental hazards, overcrowding and energy poverty’.³⁷³ Families at risk of homelessness need to be supported to ensure evictions are avoided.

In instances where homelessness is experienced, temporary shelter needs to be provided along with long-term solutions. Taking each of these aspects of the *Investing in Children* recommendation this section considers the gaps and solutions in Irish housing policy.

Affordability

Housing costs often comprise the largest proportion of expenditure in household budgets.³⁷⁴ The percentage of income that goes on housing can impact on a household’s consumption of other goods and services and subsequently economic growth.³⁷⁵ Households who have particular challenges in affordability include those renting privately and those on low incomes.³⁷⁶ Low-income households pay between two-fifths and half of their income on housing versus just one-fifth for the general population.³⁷⁷

369 Ombudsman for Children’s Office, No Place Like Home Children’s views and experiences of living in Family Hubs OCO No Place Like Home (Ombudsman for Children’s Office 2019) 41.

370 Laura E Gultekin et al, ‘Health risks and outcomes of homelessness in school-age children and youth: a scoping review of the literature’ (2020) *Journal of School Nursing* 36(1) 10–18.

371 Saskia D’Sa et al, ‘The psychological impact of childhood homelessness—a literature review’ (2020) *Irish Journal of Medical Science*.

372 European Commission, Commission Recommendation: Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage (Brussels, 20.2.2013 C(2013) 778 final) 8.

373 *ibid.*

374 Eoin Corrigan et al *Exploring Affordability in the Irish Housing Market* The Economic and Social Review, Vol. 50, No. 1, Spring 2019, pp. 119-157.

375 *ibid.*

376 *ibid.*

377 *ibid.*

The lack of housing affordability in Ireland is most evident in the EU-SILC statistics which highlight significant increases in the at risk of poverty rate after rent and mortgage interest.

The at risk of poverty rate describes the proportion of the population who have an income below 60 per cent of the national median income. A separate indicator considers income after the payment of rent and mortgage interest. Therefore, it considers the number of households who have an income below 60 per cent of the median once housing costs (rent and mortgage interest) are accounted for.³⁷⁸

While approximately one-in-ten of the population are at risk of poverty this jumps to one-in-five after rent and mortgage interest are taken into consideration.

For those in the 0-17 age cohort the rate increases from 13.6 per cent to 23.7 per cent respectively, while over half of one-parent families are at risk of poverty after rent and mortgage interest.³⁷⁹

Table 1: At risk of poverty rate compared with at risk of poverty rate after rent or mortgage interest³⁸⁰

	Population	0-17 years	1 adult with children under 18
At risk of poverty rate	11.6	13.6	22.8
At risk of poverty rate after rent and mortgage interest	19.0	23.7	51.0

Source: CSO, Survey of Income and Living Conditions 2021

Under the Housing Act 1988 local authorities have responsibility to provide housing for individuals and households who are unable to afford to do so for themselves.³⁸¹ Households who are on their local authority's housing list can qualify for help with their rent through the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP).³⁸² In November 2021, almost 40 per cent (21,932) of all households identified as needing housing support and on the social housing list contained children.³⁸³ The provision of HAP has increasingly become a primary means to support low-income households address affordability in the private rental sector.³⁸⁴ In certain other circumstances, such as families who have been victims of domestic violence, Rent Supplement is available as a short-term support.³⁸⁵

Rent limits for both Rent Supplement and HAP have not kept pace with market value and the limits for each have not been reviewed since 2016 and 2017, respectively.³⁸⁶ Local authorities have the flexibility to extend the HAP limit by 20 per cent should no accommodation be available at the designated rate.³⁸⁷ The Minister for Housing has increased this discretionary amount to 35 per cent of the limit from July 2022.³⁸⁸ Although local authorities can use this

378 Central Statistics Office, Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2021 (CSO, 2022) <<https://bit.ly/3QIm5rb>> accessed 15 June 2022.

379 *ibid.*

380 *ibid.*

381 Citizens Information 'Housing and other supports for homeless people' <<https://bit.ly/3xZIMcg>> accessed 29 June 2022.

382 Citizens Information 'Housing Assistance Payment (HAP)' <<https://bit.ly/2L3Qxqj>> accessed 29 June 2022.

383 Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, *Summary of Social Housing Assessments 2021 – Key Findings* (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage March 2022).

384 Michael Doolan et al *Low Income Renters and Housing Supports* (ESRI 2022).

385 Citizens Information 'Rent Supplement' <<https://bit.ly/31PHGv>> accessed 29 June 2022.

386 Department of Social Protection, 'Rent Supplement Limits' <<https://bit.ly/3NEjSFi>> accessed 4 February 2022; S.I. No. 56/2017 – Housing Assistance Payment (Amendment) Regulations 2017.

387 Citizens Information, 'Housing Assistance Payment (HAP)' <<https://bit.ly/3HqklDu>> accessed 14 June 2022

388 Aisling Kenny, 'HAP discretion rate to increase by up to 35%' (RTE, June 2022) <<https://bit.ly/3aYaX3i>> accessed 14 June 2022.

flexibility at their discretion evidence indicates that not all households who would benefit from accessing a higher rate of HAP are actually receiving it.³⁸⁹

A review of the HAP rates has been carried out and is currently under examination by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.³⁹⁰ The publication of this review and expedited action is needed in order to ensure these payments can adequately support families.

"I like nothing about living here, I have none of my friends here, I can't do a sleep over ... [it] makes me feel sad. There's nothing nice about how I feel." (Charlie, aged 6)³⁹¹

The inadequacy of the Rent Supplement and HAP rates to meet the market price of rent is borne out by the lack of available properties within their set thresholds. In March 2022, there was just 4 properties available within the standard HAP limits for both families with one child and families with two children.³⁹² Vulnerable families are often left with no option but to pay an unofficial 'top-up' directly to their landlord, in addition to their differential rent contribution to the local authorities.³⁹³ This exposes families to a greater risk of poverty as further evidenced in SILC. Households renting with such forms of social housing support have an at risk of

poverty rate of 10.9 per cent but this rises to 59.1 per cent after rent or mortgage interest.³⁹⁴

While Rent Supplement and HAP are important supports in terms of affordability, many prospective and current tenants face discrimination from landlords who refuse to accept them as a means of rent payment.³⁹⁵ Discrimination based on the use of these supports is prohibited under the Equal Status Acts³⁹⁶ and the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) operates as a means of redress in such incidents. Between 2017 and 2020 the WRC received 329 complaints from tenants who say they have experienced such discrimination.³⁹⁷

Ensuring access to quality housing by addressing overcrowding and energy poverty

In monitoring the right to adequate housing in Ireland, the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission established a baseline framework containing six key aspects, one of which focuses on housing quality. First, a collective measure of housing quality is considered, based on the age profile of the housing stock in Ireland. Second, a number of individual indicators relating to housing quality including overcrowding and the ability to heat the home are explored.³⁹⁸ A further individual measure establishes a housing quality index which takes account of issues such as dampness, dark rooms, lack of central heating and poor insulation.³⁹⁹

In general, a large proportion of the housing stock in Ireland was built post 1980.⁴⁰⁰ However, for the 40 per cent of dwellings built before this time, occupiers may incur extra costs such as needing to replace windows or spend more money on adequately heating their

389 Threshold and Society of St Vincent de Paul, *The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP): Making the Right Impact?* (Threshold and SVP 2019) 11-16

390 Minister for Housing Planning and Local Government, Darragh O'Brien, TD, Dáil Debates, Written Answers, Housing Schemes 10 May 2022 [22598/22].

391 *ibid* 44.

392 Simon Communities of Ireland *Locked Out of the Market* (Simon Communities March 2022).

393 Threshold and Society of St Vincent de Paul, *The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP): Making the Right Impact?* (Threshold and SVP 2019) 11-16

394 Central Statistics Office, Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2021 (CSO, 2022) <<https://bit.ly/3QIm5rb>> accessed 15 June 2022

395 Threshold, *HAP and Rent Supplement Discrimination* (Threshold 2021).

396 On 1 January 2016, the Equality (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2015 introduced "housing assistance" as a new discriminatory ground. This means that discrimination in the provision of accommodation or related service and amenities against people in receipt of rent supplement, HAP or other social welfare payments is prohibited. Further information is available at Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, 'Housing Assistance Payment' <<https://bit.ly/3rr3rnr>> accessed 4 February 2022.

397 Threshold, *HAP and Rent Supplement Discrimination* (Threshold 2021).

398 Helen Russell, Ivan Privalko, Frances McGinnity & Shannen Enright, *Monitoring adequate housing in Ireland* (ESRI 2021).

399 *ibid* 125.

400 *ibid* 125-126.

home.⁴⁰¹ Analysis of SILC data in 2018 indicates that almost one-quarter of homes built before 1940 'had two or more quality problems compared to 5-6 per cent for those built in 1991'.⁴⁰² Overcrowding is also experienced by less than six per cent of all households in the general population.⁴⁰³

Ethnicity has been identified as a strong variable in terms of overcrowding.⁴⁰⁴ For Irish Traveller households overcrowding is a significant issue with 40 per cent living in overcrowded accommodation.⁴⁰⁵

In 2020, there were over 200,000 children living in homes that have issues with leaks, damp and rot.⁴⁰⁶ Such measures of poor quality are evident amongst Roma and Traveller groups. Many Roma live in accommodation without basic facilities such as a kitchen, cooker, running water or heat and some Roma children live in overcrowded housing with rats, damp and sewerage.⁴⁰⁷ Approximately 1,700 Traveller families are living in inadequate, unsafe and impermanent conditions.⁴⁰⁸ The poor quality of Traveller housing is particularly apparent in Local Authority halting sites where 952 families were living in 2019 (the latest available data).⁴⁰⁹ Of this number, 350 families had particularly poor quality accommodation with only an outside cold tap, no electricity and shared access with other families to a port-a-loo or outside toilet.⁴¹⁰ In addition, 311 families were living on unauthorised sites and 218 of these families have no access to any services at all.⁴¹¹

Further evidence of the poor quality of accommodation Traveller children are exposed to was highlighted by the Ombudsman for Children's Office who published an investigation report *No End in*

Site.⁴¹² The investigation found serious and significant failings on the part of a Local Authority in relation to a Traveller halting site. The report highlighted that 66 children were found to be living in extremely overcrowded and rodent-infested accommodation without adequate heat, sanitation or safe play areas. Instead, they were playing amongst rubbish which hadn't been removed and arriving to school with dirty clothes and shoes because the route they took was muddy and full of water.⁴¹³ The Ombudsman for Children highlighted the abject failure of the Local Authority to consider the best interests of children, living on the site, including those with additional needs.⁴¹⁴

The inability to heat one's home, also a measure of quality, is often referred to as energy poverty a concept which encompasses 'household income, energy costs and the energy efficiency of a home'.⁴¹⁵ While overall 5 per cent report being unable to heat their home the issue of fuel poverty is more pronounced amongst lone parent households compared to all other household types.⁴¹⁶ 11 per cent of one parent households versus 4 per cent for two parent households reported experiencing fuel poverty.⁴¹⁷ Housing tenure is also an important factor with fuel poverty more common amongst those in the rented sector (9 per cent) versus home owners (2 per cent).⁴¹⁸ Those in local authority housing had an even higher frequency of reporting fuel poverty at 15 per cent.⁴¹⁹

The consequences of living in energy poverty impacts on children's health with an increased likelihood that they will have asthma and two or more courses

401 *ibid* 127.

402 *ibid*.

403 *ibid*.

404 *Ibid*.

405 CSO, 'Census of Population 2016 – Profile 8 Irish Travellers, Ethnicity and Religion' <<http://bit.ly/2AtCuoX>> accessed 25 January 2019.

406 Eurostat, 'Children (aged 0 to 17) living in a dwelling with a leaking roof, damp walls, floors or foundation, or rot in window frames or floor - EU-SILC survey' <<https://bit.ly/3y4WPgE>> accessed 29 June 2022.

407 Pavee Point & DJE, *Roma in Ireland: A National Needs Assessment* (Pavee Point 2018).

408 The Irish Traveller Movement, 'Comments on the 18th National Report of Ireland on the implementation of the European Social Charter' (2021) RAP/RCha/IRL/18.

409 *ibid*.

410 *ibid*.

411 *ibid*.

412 Ombudsman for Children, *No End in Site* (OCO 2021).

413 *ibid*.

414 *ibid*.

415 Society of St Vincent de Paul *Growing up in the cold: a policy briefing on the nature and extent of energy poverty in households with children* (SVP 2019) <<https://bit.ly/2RjkogN>> 2.

416 Helen Russell, Ivan Privalko, Frances McGinnity & Shannen Enright, *Monitoring adequate housing in Ireland* (ESRI 2021).

417 *ibid*.

418 *ibid*.

419 *ibid*.

of antibiotics in a 12-month period.⁴²⁰ Children experiencing energy poverty are predominantly living in the social housing and private rented sectors with over three-quarters of those impacted living in these tenures.⁴²¹ As noted in the section on adequate income, rising energy costs and inadequate social welfare must be addressed in order to protect families from energy poverty.⁴²² However, there is limited coverage of energy efficiency schemes for non-owner occupiers.⁴²³ For example, the majority of those who qualified for the Warmer Home Scheme were recipients of Fuel Allowance and predominantly older people in owner occupied housing. For many households with children experiencing energy poverty are living in social housing or the private rented sector. Similar issues were identified with the Warmth and Well-Being Scheme which targeted households with individuals with respiratory problems. While 900 homes were supported through this scheme it included just 30 households with children.⁴²⁴ Targeted interventions for families living in the private rented sector are needed in order to ensure energy poverty is addressed in a sustainable way.

Prevention of Evictions

In fulfilling the right to housing States have a responsibility to prevent and address homelessness by various measures for example, appropriate legislation.⁴²⁵ Private rental tenancies come under the provisions of the Residential Tenancies Act 2004. The Act sets out a number of grounds for ending a tenancy such as the use of the property for personal or family use or if the landlord wishes to sell the property.⁴²⁶ In Q4 2021, Threshold noted the most frequent type of query raised by renters in the private rented sector with them related to security of tenure and what a tenant's rights are in relation to this. Of 1,050 queries

raised with Threshold in relation to the validity of a notice of termination almost half were found to be invalid.⁴²⁷

In 2020, the Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (Covid-19) Act 2020 was introduced with the aim of helping to restrict the movement of people as part of a national effort to suppress the spread of Covid-19. Additional legislation enacted in August 2020 provided better protections for tenants by prohibiting rent increases in all cases, and tenancy terminations in all but limited and exceptional cases.⁴²⁸ These additional protections, coupled with the potential ability to stay temporarily with family or friends for a longer duration given the context of a national lockdown, appears to have led to a drop of twelve per cent on emergency accommodation usage between March and June 2020.⁴²⁹

However, the easing of public health restrictions meant that the number of children experiencing homelessness began to rise again. In the 12 month period from May 2021 to May 2022 an additional 880 children were being accommodated in emergency accommodation.⁴³⁰ Homeless organisations have linked the increase in the number of people living in Emergency Accommodation during 2021 to the discontinuation of the pandemic measures as well as the inability to tackle the structural causes of the homelessness.⁴³¹

Providing Temporary Shelter

There are many routes into homelessness, including lack of affordable housing, poverty, unsupported mental illness, and for women and children in particular, experience of domestic abuse.⁴³² In May 2022, there were 3,028 children living in Emergency Accommodation.⁴³³

420 Society of St. Vincent de Paul, *Growing up in the cold: a policy briefing on the nature and extent of energy poverty in households with children* (SVP 2019) <<https://bit.ly/2RjkogN>> accessed 14 June 2022.

421 *ibid.*

422 *ibid.*

423 *ibid.*

424 *ibid.*

425 UN Habitat "The Right to Adequate Housing" Fact Sheet No. 21/Rev.1 <<https://bit.ly/3NTpzQ0>> accessed 15 June 2022.

426 Residential Tenancies Board 'Grounds to end a tenancy' <<https://bit.ly/3NySt74>> accessed 29 June 2022.

427 Threshold, *Quarterly Impact Report Q1 2022*, (Threshold 2022).

428 Residential Tenancies and Valuation Act 2020.

429 Focus Ireland, 'Focus on Homelessness: Homeless Figures and the Impact of COVID-19' <<https://bit.ly/3iXzVQf>> accessed 29 June 2022.

430 Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, *Monthly Homelessness Report* (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, May 2021)

431 Focus Ireland, 'Homeless numbers increase to 8728 as Focus Ireland calls for a reintroduction of eviction bans and rent freezes due to recent Covid-19 restrictions' (Press release 28 August 2020) <<https://bit.ly/2DWsqZV>> accessed 4 February 2022.

432 C Sullivan & L Olsen, 'Common ground, complementary approaches: adapting the Housing First model for domestic violence survivors' (2016) *Housing and Society* 43:3, 182-194.

433 Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 'Homeless Report, May 2022' (DHLGH 2022).

Table 1: Number of Children and Young People Living in Emergency Accommodation

Indicator	May 2022
No. of Children in Emergency Accommodation	3,028
No. of Young People (18-24 year olds) in Emergency Accommodation	1,242

Source: Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Homeless Report, May 2022

While the right to housing comes with a duty to monitor the numbers of people who are homeless and those at increased risk of being disadvantaged with regard to housing,⁴³⁴ official statistics published by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage only give a limited view of the prevalence of homelessness in Ireland given the specific remit of this department.⁴³⁵ They do not include families that are homeless but are accommodated in own-door accommodation or transitional housing. Nor do they include women and children in domestic violence refuges, asylum seekers living in emergency accommodation, or people who have been granted asylum or some other form of protection but cannot find accommodation outside the Direct Provision system. Families who have had to leave their home and are 'couch surfing' or relying on friends or family for emergency assistance are also not captured in the official monthly statistics.

"Are they [the Government] in charge of landlords? Tell the landlords to keep the prices down and to build more houses."

(Lena, aged 9)⁴³⁶

In 2019 the Ombudsman for Children's Office published a report exploring children's views and experience of living in family hubs.⁴³⁷ Children who participated in the consultation expressed feelings of shame, sadness, anger, embarrassment, confusion, frustration and worry as well as a sense of injustice at being homeless while other people have a secure home.⁴³⁸ The lack of space and privacy was particularly difficult for teenagers having to share a room with parents and younger siblings.⁴³⁹ A number of parents and older children living in hubs expressed the view that family hubs are not appropriate accommodation for families, and some expressed concern that the hubs are being seen as a longer-term solution to family homelessness. As part of the consultation children and young people were asked about what the government should do to tackle the housing and homeless crisis.

"[The Government] stopped building in the recession and now the price of houses are ridiculous, there's so many people without homes no one can be affording €1,500 a month of a three bedroomed house. People just can't afford it ... I do think the government can do better. The government needs to do so much more, more money invested. Like family hubs are grand, but it's not home, it's not normal, it isn't your home." (Anna, aged 16)⁴⁴⁰

434 *ibid* para 13.

435 Colette Bennett 'Rebuilding Ireland for Everyone: A review of the government's housing strategy for young and old' in Brigid Reynolds and Sean Healy (eds) *The Challenges of Success: Addressing population growth in Ireland* (Social Justice Ireland 2019).

436 *ibid* 54.

437 Ombudsman for Children, *No Place Like Home Children's views and experiences of living in Family Hubs* (Ombudsman for Children's Office, 2019)

438 *ibid* 2.

439 *ibid*.

440 *ibid* 54.

By the end of 2021, 5,234 families with children had exited emergency accommodation.⁴⁴¹ Almost 70 per cent of these exits were into the private rental sector or through the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP).⁴⁴² In the first quarter of 2022, 65 per cent of families exiting homeless accommodation did so into the private rental sector. Despite these positive initiatives, at the end of 2021 almost one-in-four children living in emergency accommodation in Dublin were there for more than two years.⁴⁴³

The Government's strategy, *Housing for All*, had the potential to address the underlying causes of homelessness. The strategy makes an explicit commitment to eradicate homelessness by 2030, in line with the Government's signing of the 'Lisbon Declaration on the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness'.⁴⁴⁴ The Strategy recognises the importance of early intervention initiatives and the role of Family Support services, both in terms of preventing homelessness and in providing a pathway to exit emergency accommodation.⁴⁴⁵ There is a strong commitment to prevent entry into homelessness and to help those who are homeless to exit into sustained tenancies.⁴⁴⁶ Specific targeted measures are included for those with complex needs.⁴⁴⁷ However, there is little specific focus on children and in particular, there is a lack of a dedicated plan or actions to tackle family homelessness.

A dedicated plan to tackle child and family homelessness would target resources at various points across the lifecycle of homelessness.⁴⁴⁸ Using the insights and evidence collected about family homelessness to date resources would seek to tackle causes of family homelessness and ameliorate the experiences of children and their families living in

emergency accommodation. As a first step measures to prevent homelessness would be introduced.⁴⁴⁹ This could include introducing longer notice periods for tenants and restrictions on selling for institutional landlords.⁴⁵⁰ Secondly, the amount of time spent living in emergency accommodation should be minimised. Building on the Housing First approach used for rough sleepers, this model could be piloted for families.⁴⁵¹ Thirdly, for those living in homeless accommodation targeted supports and interventions should seek to reduce the harm that this experience exposes them to.⁴⁵² This could include providing additional educational resources for children and access to therapeutic supports.⁴⁵³ The penultimate aspect of such an approach should focus on housing supply and the introduction of measures to increase the suitability of the existing housing stock as well as building new social homes.⁴⁵⁴ Finally there should be a systematic focus on the collection of evidence in order to capture new and emerging trends.⁴⁵⁵ For such a targeted plan to be successful there should be oversight and governance from cabinet, to inter-departmental and local and regional levels.⁴⁵⁶

One Parent Families make up a disproportionate number of homeless families. In May 2022, over half of all families experiencing homelessness were one parent families.⁴⁵⁷ Lone parents have a lower rate of homeownership, and a higher rate of occupancy in both the private rental and local authority sectors.⁴⁵⁸ These families are also likely to have more affordability issues and experience housing deprivation, such as an inability to heat their home.⁴⁵⁹

441 Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage *Homeless Quarterly Progress Report Quarter 4 2021* (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage 2022) <<https://bit.ly/34pay6y>> accessed 1 February 2022.

442 *ibid.*

443 *ibid.*

444 Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, *Housing for All*, (Government of Ireland 2021) 51

445 *ibid.*

446 *ibid.*

447 *ibid.*

448 Focus Ireland, "*Towards a Family Homelessness Strategy*" <<https://bit.ly/3OAx5Qb>> accessed 29 June 2022.

449 *ibid.*

450 *ibid.*

451 *ibid.*

452 *ibid.*

453 *ibid.*

454 *ibid.*

455 *ibid.*

456 *ibid.*

457 Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, *Homeless Report, May 2022* (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage 2022).

458 H Russell et al, *Monitoring Adequate Housing in Ireland* (ESRI 2021).

459 *ibid.*

Traveller families face significant barriers to accessing their right to housing and are at greater risk of experiencing homelessness than settled families.⁴⁶⁰

In one recent study by Focus Ireland, Traveller families represented a disproportionate number of homeless families: they made up seven per cent of homeless families while making up less than one per cent of the general population.⁴⁶¹ Roma also experience significant discrimination in accessing accommodation.⁴⁶² The Roma Needs Assessment reported that some families had their water turned off or fuses removed by landlords when their rent was overdue.⁴⁶³

Since the pandemic began there have been reports that it is increasingly difficult to accommodate homeless Roma families in emergency accommodation, if they were not already registered in PASS (Pathway Accommodation and Support System) and this has exacerbated with time.⁴⁶⁴ Furthermore, one of the qualifying criteria for the allocation of social housing is employment,⁴⁶⁵ but given that the national needs assessments suggest that just 17 per cent of Roma are employed,⁴⁶⁶ most Roma will be ineligible for social housing support.

While the numbers in homeless accommodation continue to increase in 2022, local authorities responding to homelessness are still engaging in prevention work which is helping to divert many children and families from the experience of living in emergency accommodation. In 2021, 53 per cent of families were prevented from entering emergency accommodation through the provision of a new tenancy arrangement in the Dublin region.⁴⁶⁷ However, increased efforts along with a review of the measures introduced during the pandemic is required to have the needed impact on homelessness.

460 Independent Expert Group on behalf of the Minister of the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, *Traveller Accommodation Expert Review* (DHPLG 2019).

461 A Long et al, *Family Homelessness in Dublin: Causes, Housing Histories, and Finding a Home* (Focus Ireland 2019) 24.

462 Pavee Point & Department of Justice and Equality, *Roma in Ireland: A National Needs Assessment* (Pavee Point 2018) 75.

463 Pavee Point & Department of Justice and Equality, *Roma in Ireland: A National Needs Assessment* (Pavee Point 2018) 75.

464 Communication received by the Children Rights Alliance from Pavee Point, 16 October 2020.

465 Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 'Circular Housing 41/2012 - Access to Social Housing Supports for non-Irish nationals' (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage 2012) <<https://bit.ly/3oLnUSj>> accessed 4 February 2022.

466 Pavee Point & Department of Justice and Equality, *Roma in Ireland: A National Needs Assessment* (Pavee Point 2018) 75.

467 *ibid.*

Recommendations

Budget 2023

- Publish and implement the review of HAP limits. In Budget 2023 introduce changes to the HAP and Rent Supplement limits so that they align to market rents.
 - Invest in homeless prevention services to support families from becoming homeless. Aligned to this, consider introducing legislative measures that increase tenancy rights and introduce measures to secure long terms tenancies.
 - Extend free energy upgrade programmes to tenants in receipt of HAP on a pilot basis, subject to their landlord providing a long-term lease.
 - Building on the learnings from Housing First, pilot this intervention approach with families experiencing homelessness.
-

Medium-term

- Prioritise building social housing and meeting the target of building an average of 10,000 homes each year as outlined in Housing for All.
 - Conduct a review of all local authority practices in delivering Traveller Accommodation Programmes. The recommendations of the Expert Review on Traveller Accommodation should be expedited and an independent national Traveller accommodation authority be established.
 - Implement the recommendations of the Traveller Accommodation Expert Review and establish the National Traveller Accommodation Authority (NTAA).
-

Long-term Sustainable Solutions

- Commit to a date for the referendum on the right to housing.
-



Play, Culture and Participation



PLAY, CULTURE AND PARTICIPATION

“I think participation is speaking about your views then trying to act about those views. Anybody can have views, but you have to try to act on them, if you want them to actually be carried out.”⁴⁶⁸

The third pillar of *Investing in Children* concentrates on children’s right to participate.⁴⁶⁹ This pillar focuses on two distinct aspects of participation. The first is children’s participation in play, including recreation and sport, and cultural activities.⁴⁷⁰ Under Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, children have the right to ‘rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts’.⁴⁷¹ *Investing in Children* calls on member states to specifically address barriers to participation in culture such as cost and access and emphasises the importance of participation outside of school.⁴⁷² The provision of safe spaces in local communities, particularly those experiencing disadvantage is also critical.⁴⁷³

The second aspect of this pillar focuses on children’s participation in decision-making.⁴⁷⁴ Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child obliges States to ‘assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the

age and maturity of the child’.⁴⁷⁵ *Investing in Children* calls on Member States to ensure that children are included in decision-making about how services they are involved in are run as well as being consulted on relevant policy planning. In relation to existing participation structure, the inclusion of children from disadvantaged backgrounds is of particular importance.⁴⁷⁶

Addressing barriers to participation in culture

Investing in Children recognises the impact that participation in play, recreation, sport and cultural activities has for young people’s development, health and wellbeing. It is important to encourage engagement in cultural activities from a young age to influence participation in these activities later in life.⁴⁷⁷

Children and young people should have access to cultural and arts activities both inside and outside school. Those from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to participate in arts and cultural activities

468 Martinez Sainz, G. and Daminelli, J. *Voice, Rights, Action! Children’s Knowledge about their Rights & Rights Education to Access Justice*. (Children’s Rights Alliance 2022), 31.

469 European Commission, *Commission Recommendation: Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage* (Brussels, 20.2.2013 C(2013) 778 final) 3-4.

470 *ibid.*

471 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (20 November 1989) 1577 UNTS 3 (UNCRC) Art. 31.

472 European Commission, *Commission Recommendation: Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage* (Brussels, 20.2.2013 C(2013) 778 final) 3-4.

473 *ibid.*

474 *ibid.*

475 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (20 November 1989) 1577 UNTS 3 (UNCRC) Art. 12.

476 European Commission, *Commission Recommendation: Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage* (Brussels, 20.2.2013 C(2013) 778 final) 3-4.

477 Emer Smyth, *Arts and Cultural Participation among Children and Young People: Insights from the Growing Up in Ireland Study*, (The Arts Council and ESRI 2016) 98.

than children from more affluent families.⁴⁷⁸ They can also face a number of barriers to participating in activities related to culture, in particular, cost.⁴⁷⁹ Taking part in cultural activities like singing, painting, dance, and theatre benefits children academically and in developing better social skills and positive relationships.⁴⁸⁰ *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework on Children and Young People 2014 – 2020* (BOBF) notes that ‘young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, and early school-leavers in particular, have lower levels of participation in play, recreation, sport, arts and culture, and are therefore a priority in terms of policy and provision’.⁴⁸¹ BOBF recognises the benefits of engagement in arts, culture and sport for children’s health and wellbeing along with encouraging their ‘self-confidence and self-efficacy, as well as physical, social, cognitive and emotional strength and skills’.⁴⁸²

In the past five years there has been progress in acknowledging the right to participate in culture at a policy level. The right for everyone to participate in culture ‘irrespective of where they come from, where they live, their religious beliefs or their economic or social backgrounds’ is a central value of *Culture 2025*, the first Framework policy for the entire culture sector.⁴⁸³ It also underpins the Arts Council’s *Equality Human Rights and Diversity Strategy and Policy*,⁴⁸⁴ and

has shaped the thinking behind the all-of-government Creative Ireland culture and wellbeing programme.⁴⁸⁵ As part of the latter initiative, Creative Youth aims to ensure all children have access to participation in activities such as art, music and drama by 2022.⁴⁸⁶ The policy sets out a number of actions including to develop creativity programmes for young people in disadvantaged communities.⁴⁸⁷ While the Creative Youth programme seeks to promote opportunities both in formal education and out of school settings, there is currently no focus on arts and social inclusion in education strategy at national level in Ireland. The current DEIS plan mentions the arts just once⁴⁸⁸ and schools have been providing afterschool arts activities by mainly funding them through the School Completion Programme.⁴⁸⁹ A systematic plan is required to ensure that all children can access arts activities. The evidence indicates that children who are exposed to arts and culture during school time are more likely to engage in cultural activities outside school hours including ‘music, dance or drama lessons and to read for pleasure’.⁴⁹⁰ Children living in poverty may be deprived of the benefits of safe and creative playtime and access to age-appropriate extracurricular activities.⁴⁹¹

It is important to encourage engagement in cultural activities from a young age to influence participation in these activities later in life.⁴⁹²

478 *ibid* 100-101.

479 Emer Smyth, *Arts and Cultural Participation among Children and Young People: Insights from the Growing Up in Ireland Study*, (The Arts Council and ESRI 2016) 100-101.

480 *ibid*.

481 Department of Children and Youth Affairs, *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014–2020* (DCYA 2014) 55.

482 *ibid*.

483 Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, *Culture 2025* (DAHRRGA 2016) <<https://bit.ly/2REfOxv>> accessed 26 May 2021

484 The Arts Council, ‘Equality, Human Rights and Diversity’ <<https://bit.ly/3wVXEpy>> accessed 1 July 2022.

485 Creative Ireland, <<https://bit.ly/3BesXzf>> accessed 1 July 2022.

486 Creative Ireland, ‘Creative Youth’, <<https://bit.ly/311CygB>> accessed 29 June 2022.

487 *ibid* Action 13.

488 Department of Education and Skills *Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools* (DES 2017) <<https://bit.ly/3wFiGch>> accessed 26 May 2021.

489 Emer Smyth, *Arts and Cultural Participation among Children and Young People: Insights from the Growing Up in Ireland Study* (ESRI 2016), xi.

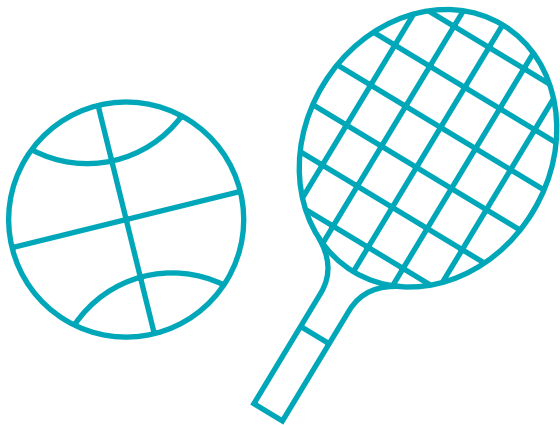
490 *ibid*.

491 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*.

492 Emer Smyth, *Arts and Cultural Participation among Children and Young People: Insights from the Growing Up in Ireland Study*, (The Arts Council and ESRI 2016) 98.

Sports

Children from families in lower socio-economic groups have similar rates of participation in extra-curricular sport to children from higher-income families, however they are less likely to participate in activities at sports centres and other locations not linked to their school.⁴⁹³ Data from the Growing up in Ireland survey shows that 63 per cent of children (five year olds) in the highest income group attended a sports club/group for one hour or more per week compared to just 34 per cent of those in the lowest income group.⁴⁹⁴ The impact of the costs of participating in sports (for example the cost of football boots, clothing and equipment) needs to be examined to determine if it has an impact on participation rates in sports for children coming from lower income families. Across Ireland, Local Sports Partnerships promote participation in sports in different communities, targeting young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in particular.⁴⁹⁵ Participation in sport decreases once young people enter second level school and early school leavers are less likely to participate in sports.⁴⁹⁶ Young people who participate in sport tend to do better in exams, although many young people reduce their participation in sports during exam years.⁴⁹⁷



Access to safe places to play

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.⁴⁹⁸

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.⁴⁹⁹ 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.⁵⁰⁰ Children living in temporary accommodation and those living in Direct Provision centres do not have adequate access to safe play and recreation facilities.⁵⁰¹ The negative implications of play deprivation may be significant to a child's development as play impacts their social, emotional, cognitive and physical development.⁵⁰² Play also has a crucial role in creating stronger bonds between parents and their children.⁵⁰³

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

493 Growing up in Ireland Study Team, *Key Findings: Infant Cohort (at 5 Years). No. 3: Well-Being, Play and Diet Among Five-Year-Olds* (ESRI and TCD 2015).

494 *ibid.*

495 Sport Ireland, *Local Sport Partnerships Annual Report 2019* (Sport Ireland 2020) <<https://bit.ly/3bzat0Y>> accessed 19 May 2021.

496 Pete Lunn, Elish Kelly and Nick Fitzpatrick, *Keeping them in the game: Taking up and dropping out of sport and exercise in Ireland* (ESRI 2013).

497 *ibid.*

498 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)

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

500 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).

501 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.

502 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*.

503 *ibid.*

play, explore and learn'.⁵⁰⁴ 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.⁵⁰⁵ Some local councils, such as Laois County Councils have developed recreation and play strategies that plan for the continued development of Sport, Recreation & Play,⁵⁰⁶ however a national Play strategy is needed to ensure that this is consistent throughout the country and that there is a focus on the provision of green spaces in local communities and education settings, for children and young people.

It is critical that all children, regardless of background or family income, have some form of access to nature. DEIS schools should be given adequate funding to create and maintain school gardens to provide children and young people with an opportunity to engage with nature in an educational environment.

Youth Services

Ireland has one of the highest levels of involvement by young people in youth and student organisations in the European Union, 20 per cent higher than the EU average.⁵⁰⁷ Youth organisations work across many areas including mental health, social and political education, training, youth justice, equality and school completion with 53 per cent⁵⁰⁸ of an estimated 380,000 young people involved in youth work organisations annually,⁵⁰⁹ come from economically or socially disadvantaged communities. Youth organisations play a key role in supporting young people who experience social and economic disadvantage and 80 per cent of organisations are engaged in arts, cultural or sports activities.⁵¹⁰ Based in local communities, youth work services have unique engagements with young people outside of formal education or family structures. Youth work in Ireland is delivered through a mixture of universal and

targeted interventions. Targeted interventions focus on at-risk young people and work with small numbers impacted by issues such as family conflict, school engagement, anti-social behaviour, drug and alcohol misuse, and more.⁵¹¹ While universal services involve open-access activities such as youth clubs and cafés, volunteer-led youth work services are particularly active in supporting young people in disadvantaged communities, with more than half of all participants coming from these areas (urban and rural).⁵¹² Youth service settings offer a valuable space where children and young people can avail of opportunities to participate in arts and cultural activities that could be beneficial to them in terms of development, educational attainment and building relationships as well as exploring and growing their creativity and talent.

Universal youth work, along with targeted services for young people who need them most, can improve outcomes for all young people, and in particular for those who are marginalised, vulnerable or at risk of poverty.

Investment in youth work services decreased by 31.8 per cent over an eight-year period, from €73.1m in 2008 to €49.8m in 2014.⁵¹³ In the last three Budgets incremental increases have been allocated to youth services and now funding stands just below that of over a decade ago. However, the youth population is growing significantly along with rising inflation for services. Continued and sustained investment is needed to expand the reach of universal programmes to all young people needing them.

Participation in Decision Making

The *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020* aims to make sure that children and young people have a voice in their everyday lives and regarding decisions that affect their lives such as in the community,

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

505 DCEDIY, *First Five Annual Implementation Plan 2019* (2019) 82.

506 Laois County Council. 'The Recreation, Play and Sports Strategy 2018-2022' <<https://laois.ie/departments/sport-and-leisure/the-recreation-play-and-sports-strategy-2018-2022/>> accessed 1 July 2022.

507 EU Eurobarometer Number 478, March 2019 <<https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/survey/getsurveydetail/instruments/flash/surveyky/2224>> accessed 1 July 2022.

508 Assessment of the Economic Value of Youth Work by Indecon Economic Consultants (November 2012) 49.

509 DCEDIY, *First Five Annual Implementation Plan 2019* (2019) 82

510 National Youth Council of Ireland, Assessment of the Economic Value of Youth Work (NYCI 2012) 42.

511 National Youth Council of Ireland, 'Targeted vs mainstream Youth Work' <<https://bit.ly/3AgA0ZR>> accessed 30 June 2022.

512 National Youth Council of Ireland, Pre Budget Submission 2020 (NYCI 2019) <<https://bit.ly/2ROVF3T>> accessed 1 July 2022.

513 NYCI, *Budget 2022 "Progress on Youth Work but Youth Issues ignored again"* (NYCI 2022).

education, health and legal settings.⁵¹⁴ Initiatives which aim to support children and young people's participation include the development of 'Hub na nÓg' (Youth Hub) which aims to provide resources and Comhairle na nÓg which comprises of local youth councils that meet in every local authority area of the country.⁵¹⁵ A representative from each area is elected to be part of a National Executive which meets once a month for a term of two years. The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth support the National Executive of Comhairle na nÓg and ensure they can engage and meet with relevant decision makers including Ministers.⁵¹⁶ Prior to the most recent Government Budget, the Comhairle put forward a proposal to the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth that public transport should be reduced for young people aged 16 to 25 years by 50 per cent.⁵¹⁷ The spirit of the proposal was accepted and a youth travel card for 19 to 23 year olds was introduced providing half price fares across the travel network.⁵¹⁸

The power of children and young people to be engaged and influence the votes of their parents and grandparents, was evident in recent local, European and General elections. It is noteworthy that adults have credited their children and grandchildren with pushing them towards voting in a particular direction.⁵¹⁹ However, young people under the age of 18 cannot vote in Ireland in any elections. A range of multilateral bodies such as the EU, the Council of Europe and the UN have called for a voting age of 16. In 2013, the Constitutional Convention

recommended that the voting age in Ireland be reduced to 16 years of age in all elections.⁵²⁰ There is momentum towards extending the right to vote to young people at 16 and 17 years old internationally in countries such as Scotland and Austria.⁵²¹ Given that children and young people experience the highest rates of poverty and social exclusion, and many budgetary and political decisions impact them directly, a change to the voting age for 16 and 17 year olds should be considered to empower young people to have their voices heard and influence decisions that are based on their best interests. Expanding the right would lead to an increase in voter turnout in the long run⁵²² and increase political consciousness and engagement among adolescents.⁵²³ Rights on paper are not enough and it is clear from research undertaken by young people themselves that when they are given the right information and opportunities to do so, they bring valuable insights to the table.⁵²⁴ There is a need to give children and young people a true voice in our political system by lowering the voting age to 16.

514 DCEDIY, National Strategy on Children and Young People's Decision making (DCEDIY 2019).

515 Comhairle na nÓg, 'National Executive' <<https://bit.ly/3AeSGcK>> accessed 29 June 2022.

516 Comhairle na nÓg, 'National Executive' <https://bit.ly/3AeSGcK> accessed 29 June 2022.

517 [National-Executive-Presentation-on-Youth-Travel-Card.pdf \(comhairle.nanog.ie\)](#)

518 [gov.ie - Budget 2022 to help transform how we travel \(www.gov.ie\)](#)

519 Harry McGee, 'Elections 2019: Climate change sees Greens move to centre of politics' The Irish Times (Dublin, 25 May 2019); The Irish Examiner, '#Elections2019: 'It's wide open', says Martin as first counts start rolling in', <<https://bit.ly/2UPmt9h>> accessed 16 July 2021.

520 A change to the voting age for Dáil and presidential elections would require a constitutional referendum. A change to the voting age for local and EU elections would require an amendment to the Electoral Act 1992, the European Parliament Elections Act 1997 and the Local Government Act 2001.

521 In the Scottish referendum on independence the right to vote was extended to 16 and 17 year olds with 75% of this age cohort voting. Given this success, the Scottish Government allowed young people aged 16 and 17 to vote in the Scottish Parliamentary elections. Austria has also lowered the voting age for all elections to 16. Seven of the 16 states in Germany have lowered the voting age and a region in Switzerland has introduced it. In Austria and Germany the voter turnout of young people aged 16 and 17 was equal to that of older age groups. Other countries such as the UK and Denmark are also considering such a move. Vote at 16 has been introduced in the Isle of Man, Jersey and Guernsey.

522 See, e.g., the Council of Europe draft Resolution on expansion of democracy by lowering the voting age to 16, Parliamentary Assembly, Minimum age for voting, Report, Doc. 12546, 22 March 2011, <http://assembly.coe.int/ASP/Doc/XrefViewPDF.asp?FileID=13110&Language=EN>.

523 "If voting is in part a habit [...] acquired in late adolescence and early adulthood, then this habit will likely be strengthened by allowing 16- and 17-year-olds to vote." (Hart/Atkins 2011: 218); see also Dinas, 2012; Gerber et al., 2003; Plutzer, 2002; Parliamentary Assembly, Minimum age for voting, Report, Doc. 12546, 22 March 2011, <http://assembly.coe.int/ASP/Doc/XrefViewPDF.asp?FileID=13110&Language=EN>.

524 Martinez Sainz, G. and Daminelli, J. *Voice, Rights, Action! Children's Knowledge about their Rights & Rights Education to Access Justice*. (Children's Rights Alliance 2022) 31

Recommendations

Budget 2023

- Prioritise access to the arts and cultural events for children and young people who are experiencing poverty via increased central government investment in this area.
 - Introduce an annual €30 subsidy to cover the cost of a child and an accompanying adult to attend one cultural or arts activity of their choice. Based on the population of under 18s in Census 2016, would cost an estimated €36 million.
 - Invest in Universal youth work, along with targeted services for young people who need them most to improve outcomes for all young people, and in particular for those who are marginalised, vulnerable or at risk of poverty by increasing funding by a further 5 per cent to restore the value of funding this sector received previously.
 - The national investment in arts for children should be proportional to that for adults.
 - The Creative Ireland Programme should be expanded to include all DEIS schools nationwide.
 - The Creative Youth programmes which focuses on outside-of-school activities should prioritise children living in disadvantage.
 - 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.
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Medium-term

- Lower the voting age to 16.
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Showcasing Solutions:

BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLE IN ACCESS TO PLAY

What is the issue?

Access to green spaces and safe environments to play is a critical part of child's development and wellbeing. However, for so many children living in areas of disadvantage, there is little to no access to recreational spaces that are fit for purpose or meet their needs. 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.

This was true for the Liberties area of Dublin. With a population density as high as 18,000 per sq km and clusters of extreme disadvantage, the area was acknowledged in the Dublin City Council's 2014 [Greening Strategy](#), as "extremely deficient in quality green space". The average Liberties resident has 0.7 square metres of green space, far behind the World Health Organisation recommendation of 9 square metres of green space and incomparable to families in Dublin 4 and Dublin 6 with 15 square metres.

Near Oliver Bond Street, there are 150 children under the age of 10 with access to playing facilities for a capacity of 38 children. There are no other parks that children and families can get to easily. With densely built housing, families were desperate for open, green spaces for their children, "we need to breathe."

What is the solution?

Plans for a new community park were championed by campaigners in the area. Building a safe, green space that is child-friendly and accessible is the first step in bridging the gap of access that children in the area were experiencing compared to their peers in other areas of Dublin. The additional facilities also enable family members and other members of the community to engage and utilise the space which helps to foster a community

How does it work?

A new park was built on one of the least green parts of the city.

The [Bridgefoot Street Park](#) was officially opened in May 2022 and includes beautiful landscaping, games and playground areas, terraces and spaces that allow for community meetings and events and, a community garden with allotments.



What is the impact?

The new park will make a huge difference to the 150 children under the age of 10 living in the area. With little to no access to green space before, it opens horizons for children in the area to opportunities for play, personal development and socialisation with children their own age. Play impacts children's social, emotional, cognitive and physical development. Play also has a crucial role in creating stronger bonds between parents and their children.

Learnings/ How can it be emulated?

The Bridgefoot Street Park is a fantastic model of how creating access to greener and safer spaces to play can have a transformative impact on the children and young people in a community. This should be a priority area for action at central government. Dedicated funding would ensure that local authorities have the resources to recreate such spaces in local communities throughout Ireland. The Government should develop a new National Play and Recreation Strategy for Children and Young People that has a focus on the need for this level of green space and recreational facilities in local communities and education settings.

"The park is great for my girls. I have three children, 15, 9 and 4 years-old and the park is a great place for them to learn about nature and flowers." (Local resident)



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.

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