

Supports for Children in International Protection

Dear Sir,

Our organisations work with and on behalf of children, young people and their families in communities across Ireland, including those in Direct Provision. We have been following the political discussions on the upcoming budget and are very concerned about the lack of attention being paid to the delivery of a child-benefit like payment for children in international protection that was secured in Budget 2024.

In February 2021, the Government published *A White Paper to End Direct Provision and to Establish a New International Protection Support Service*, which made a commitment to introduce an “additional monthly payment per child in the form of an International Protection Child Payment.” The commitment stated that the rate of the International Protection Child Payment would be aligned to the rate of Child Benefit. The payments were due to be made available in 2022. Currently, children and young people living in international protection accommodation receive a payment of just €29.80 per week.

Despite Minister O’Gorman securing €4.7 million in Budget 2024 for a new Child Payment for children in International Protection, nearly a year on it has still not been implemented. We have had two successive budgets that were focused on children in poverty, but children and young people in Direct Provision were left behind. Not only was there no provision made for those in the international protection system to receive a child benefit payment at a time when a double child welfare payment was introduced and when a double social welfare payment for Christmas was provided, they also do not qualify for the Increase for a Qualified Child (IQC), an income support available to children whose parents are in receipt of social welfare payments. This is the only group of children in successive Budgets that have not received any additional support to tackle the increased cost of living. This is simply not good enough.

The monthly payment for children and young people in Direct Provision needs to be introduced as a matter of priority. The lack of an adequate income means that children living in Direct Provision inevitably face a childhood severely compromised by poverty. Simple activities most children take for granted like playing sports or going out with friends are miles out of reach, creating a major barrier to community integration. Children are washing their hair with bars of soap or eating only cold meals with no nutritional value for months on end as their family has no access to cooking facilities and no income to afford hot food.

Their education is also negatively impacted, as it is simply not possible to cover expenses like school fees, uniforms, books, mock exam fees, exam papers and transport all within a budget of less than €30 a week. We have heard from young people in Direct Provision 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 to and after sport activities is a major barrier to participation and integration.

While we acknowledge that the current Government is under immense pressure due to the significant increase in the number of people seeking international protection in Ireland, children in the Direct Provision system cannot be consistently left behind. We are deeply concerned with the lack of progress in this matter, and we urge the Government to act immediately on this by providing

an adequate child payment for those in Direct Provision with the €4.7 million secured in last year's Budget.

Yours sincerely,

Tanya Ward – Chief Executive, Children's Rights Alliance

Suzanne Connolly – Chief Executive, Barnardos

Dr Naomi Masheti – Programme Coordinator, Cork Migrant Centre

Conor Hickey – Chief Executive, Crosscare

Alex Cooney – CEO, CyberSafeKids

John Lannon – CEO, Doras

Teresa Heeney – CEO, Early Childhood Ireland

Emer Nowlan – Chief Executive Officer, Educate Together

Fiona Kearney Braiden – CEO, FamiliBase

Fergal Landy – CEO, Family Resource Centre National Forum

Charlotte O'Donovan – School Connect Project Lead, Good Shepherd Cork

Siân Muldowney – Coordinator, Inner City Organisations Network (ICON)

Brian Killoran – CEO, Immigrant Council of Ireland

Nick Henderson – CEO, Irish Refugee Council

Berni Smyth – CEO, Kerry Diocesan Youth Service

Fiona Hurley – CEO, NASC, the Migrant and Refugee Rights Centre

Dr Michelle Walsh – CEO, MOVE Ireland

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Karen Kiernan – CEO, One Family

Maria O'Dwyer – National Coordinator, Prevention for Early Intervention Network (PEIN)

Ian Power – CEO, SpunOut

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Dr Patrick Burke – Chief Executive Officer, Youth Work Ireland