

A Plan to End Child Poverty Among Children and Young People

In June 2015, the members and supporters of Start Strong, the Children's Rights Alliance and the National Youth Council of Ireland came together to discuss key asks for children and young people in the next Programme for Government. A clear theme emerged from the meeting – that growing up in poverty should be part of our history.

This document details our Plan to End Child Poverty Among Children and Young People. We believe if these commitments are included in the next Programme for Government and implemented by our next Government, they will help eliminate child and youth poverty in Ireland.

Topic	The Problem	Programme for Government Commitment Needed
Level of Child Poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 child in every 9 lives in consistent poverty (over 134,000 children). Consistent poverty is measured using income and 11 deprivation indicators – 4 on material deprivation (clothing, footwear and furniture); 2 on food poverty; 2 on energy poverty and 3 on the ability of a child to participate in normal childhood social activities, such as buying a birthday present or going on a family outing. The Vincentian Partnership found that the weekly cost of raising a child increases in adolescence in relation to food, education and social inclusion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce the number of children and young people in consistent poverty by 50% during the lifetime of the Government, with a few to eliminating it completely within 10 years, through a combination of enhanced access to affordable public services and income support. Increase the rate of the Qualified Child Increase for families with children over 12 years.
National Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020</i> establishes a national child-specific target to reduce child poverty by at least two-thirds on the 2011 level by 2020. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a whole of government rights-based Implementation Plan and allocate necessary resources to achieve the target to reduce child poverty, as set out in the National Policy Framework, in line with the <i>EU Recommendation on Investing in Children</i>.
Constitutional Rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2014, the Constitutional Convention recommended that economic, social and cultural rights be given enhanced protection in the Irish Constitution. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hold a constitutional referendum on whether or not economic, social and cultural rights should be given enhanced protection in the Irish Constitution.

Early Years Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children do best at home for the first year of their life. Ireland lags behind European norms in paid leave available to parents. • Research tells us that only high-quality services benefit young children. The quality of early care and education services is variable across the country. • Nearly 50,000 pre-school children are cared for by childminders every day, but most of their 19,000 childminders remain exempt from regulation and operate without supervision or support. Only 1% of paid childminders are currently subject to inspection. • Childcare costs are among the highest in the Organisation of Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD). The high cost of pre-school and after-school care is a barrier for low-income families seeking to engage in work, training or education. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce 6-months paid parental leave (to follow the current paid maternity leave provision), to ensure children can remain at home for the first year of their lives. • Reduce inequality at a young age through increased investment in quality, inclusive, affordable and accessible early years provision. • Continue to increase investment in early childhood care and education to reach the OECD average of 0.8 % of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) within 5 years and the UNICEF recommended 1% of GDP within 10 years. • Increase investment in the quality of early care and education, linking public funding to quality, and supporting inclusion of children with additional needs. • Regulate childminders and, where they provide quality services, include childminders in state-funded schemes. • Ensure early education services are accessible to all children.
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A child's socio-economic background remains a strong determining factor in their educational attainment. • The Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) Programme has been found to positively impact on disadvantage in education. However, there has been uncertainty on its future since 2008, when its initial cycle formally ended. • The costs associated with sending a child to State-funded schools place a significant burden on families. • The School Book Grant Scheme is administered at the discretion of each school's Principal, who can set up a book rental scheme or help individual students. • Most families must purchase school uniforms for the child at commercial rates. Since 2012, the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance was cut between 34% and 50%. An anomaly makes it more difficult for one-parent families to access the payment. • Family Income Supplement (FIS) is an important in-work benefit support specifically designed to assist low wage-earning employees with children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a national strategy on educational disadvantage and the DEIS programme, with a particular focus on Traveller, Roma and migrant children, early school leavers and children with special educational needs. • Reform the School Book Grant Scheme to require the operation of a Book Rental Scheme in every State-funded school, rather than leave the administration of the scheme at the discretion of the Principal. • Conduct a feasibility study to identify the benefits and cost of publishing and providing free school books to all children. • Restore the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance to the 2012 level and expand eligibility grounds in line with the Family Income Supplement; amend its income limits to ensure equitable access by one-parent families. • Develop an implementation plan with a monitoring and evaluation tool for the Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy; this should include a review of the impact of cuts made to dedicated Traveller education supports since 2011.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The completion rate at second level school is only 13% for Traveller children compared to 90% for the general population. Dedicated education supports for Travellers were abolished in 2011. 	
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over 1,500 children are living in emergency accommodation with their families. • Families with children are being placed in inappropriate emergency accommodation, including hotel rooms, which raise child protection and welfare concerns. • 90,000 households are on local authority social housing waiting lists, with 47% waiting seven years or more. • The drivers behind the increasing number of homeless families include low levels of rent supplements in an era of rapidly increasing rent prices, increased demand for rental accommodation, landlords refusing to accept rent allowance, lack of availability of social housing and personal indebtedness. In some areas rent supplement levels are as much as 20% below market rents. • Some Traveller families with children continue to live on the side of the road with no access to basic amenities including running water or sewage facilities. Due to a lack of data, exact figures for Traveller children living in appropriate accommodation are not available. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vindicate a child's right to a home by providing appropriate emergency accommodation to homeless families with children and long term housing solutions. • Enact legislation to prohibit the placement of families with children in inappropriate emergency accommodation, including hotel rooms. • Conduct a child protection and welfare audit of emergency accommodation provided to families. • Prevent more families becoming homeless by increasing area-based Rent Supplement limits to realistic levels, as a temporary measure pending sufficient increases in housing stock. • Carry out a review of the Social Housing Strategy 2020 to ensure it is delivering sufficient, affordable, quality housing (including social housing) for families with children and care leavers. • Establish a national Traveller Agency to drive urgent improvements to provide culturally appropriate Traveller accommodation.
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to healthcare in Ireland is severely undermined by a two-tier system. • Thousands of children face long waiting lists to access public health care, while others can access a faster service through private health care. • Differences in the health of children from less well-off areas are obvious from as early as three years of age. • Some children with high-level health needs (e.g. serious health conditions, disabilities and severe developmental delays) do not have access to a Medical Card. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enact legislation to provide children with a right to access timely, affordable, quality healthcare. • Continue to extend free access to GP care for all children and young people over 12 years. • Extend the reformed eligibility criteria for a Medical Card to all children with high-level health needs. • Invest in workforce development and services and ring-fence budgets to address waiting lists in orthodontics treatment and surgeries (e.g. spinal surgery for scoliosis) and therapeutic services (in particular speech and language therapy and children and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS)).

Food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food poverty is contributing to malnutrition, obesity, and poor concentration in school. • The School Meals Programme is often only available to cover one meal a day. It does not cover the cost of kitchen equipment, salaries or facilities at schools. • The Programme is not available to early years and non-formal education settings. • Healthy foods are up to 10 times more expensive than poorer quality foods with high concentrations of sugar, fat and salt. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-model the funding system for the School Meals Programme to cover both capital and non-food operating costs. • Extend the Programme to enable the provision of affordable and nutritious breakfast, lunch and dinner meals in DEIS schools and more limited provision to all publicly-funded schools. • Extend access to a reformed Programme to early years and non-formal education settings for young people. • Develop a national strategy on school food provision. • Introduce measures to subsidise healthy food.
Asylum-Seeking Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1,527 children live in Direct Provision, some for 8 years and more. • HIQA tells us some asylum-seeking children lack clothes and toys. • Asylum seekers are not entitled to work. They receive room and board and a weekly allowance of €19.10 per adult and €9.60 per child. Families of asylum-seeking children are not entitled to receive the Child Benefit payment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the weekly allowance for asylum-seeking children from €9.60 to €29.80, in line with the recommendation of the Working Group to the Government on Improvements to the Protection Process, including Direct Provision and Supports for Asylum Seekers (McMahon Report).
One Parent Families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nearly 60% of lone parent households with children experience deprivation. • Since 2012, reform of the One Parent Family Payment (OPFP) has required about 60,000 recipients to transfer to Jobseekers payments or move into employment. • The OPFP reform is being implemented without tackling structural barriers to support labour activation. • In 2012, 60% of lone parents receiving the OPFP worked at least part-time outside the home, this figure has fallen to 36% in 2014. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake a review to assess the impact of the One Parent Family Payment reforms on child poverty rates and work activation. • Ensure lone parents have access to a range of supports and services designed to provide them with pathways to work while acknowledging their caring responsibilities.
Social Protection for Young People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Almost 1 young person in every 5 (aged 15 to 24 years) is not in education, employment or training (NEET). • The risk of poverty among young people (aged 15 to 24 years) rose from 26% in 2007 to 38% in 2013. • Many educated and capable young people face unmet expectations, part- 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement the Youth Guarantee which provides that all young people on the live register for 4 months or more are guaranteed an education, training and/or work experience opportunity. • Draw up a specific plan to address youth unemployment and high levels of young people who are not in education, employment or training.

	<p>time work or underemployment and emigration.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people over 18 years are entitled to Jobseekers' Allowance. The full rate is €188 but a reduced rate of €100 applies to those aged 18 and 24 years and €144 for those aged 25 years (with some exemptions). The Vincentian Partnership found that the cost of a single adult living as part of a household was €184. • Research tells us 4 out of 10 young people on Jobseekers' Allowance are struggling to make ends meet, and anecdotal evidence points to increasing homelessness among young people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To avoid young people becoming unemployed, provide sufficient quality education and training places and support young people to take up these opportunities, invest in measures to smooth the transition from education to employment and reduce under-employment. • Restore the full rate of Jobseekers Allowance to those under 26 years to €188.
Living Wage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A growing number of young people are on low pay and in precarious employment. 39.1% of young people, aged 18-29 years in the labour force are on the minimum wage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gradually increase the minimum wage to reach a Living Wage of €11.50 per hour – the average gross salary which will enable full time employed adults (without dependents) to afford a socially acceptable standard of living.
Parental Employment and Income	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ireland has a high rate of low work intensity households (where an individual works less than 20% of their total work potential in a year) and in-work poverty (income is below the poverty threshold). • Subsidised childcare is not currently available to many low-income families. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simplify the application process and use the 'sign off' from the Live Register as a trigger. • Provide subsidised high-quality childcare (including after-school care). Income related subsidies, linked to quality, would ensure all families can afford to work.
Community Supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Area-Based Childhood (ABC) Programme operates in 13 disadvantaged communities. Each site is running programmes, with a key focus on the early years, parenting and literacy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide targeted support to children and their parents living in poverty to improve their outcomes, including through the Area-Based Childhood Programme.



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