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CHILD POVERTY IN IRELAND 2005: AN OVERVIEW



Child Poverty in Ireland 2005: An Overview was compiled by Jo Harding of the End Child Poverty Coalition and Maria Corbett of the Children's Rights Alliance. The report marks the 2005 United Nations International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. Since its creation in 1983, October 17th has been a day for those living in extreme poverty to speak out and for all citizens to consider how they can contribute to the eradication of extreme poverty.

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End Child Poverty Coalition

The End Child Poverty Coalition is a partnership of seven national non-governmental organisations that have come together to achieve a common goal: to promote greater awareness of child poverty and to effect change in public policy in order to eliminate child poverty in Ireland.

The Coalition partners are:

- Barnardos
- Children's Rights Alliance
- Focus Ireland
- National Youth Council of Ireland
- OPEN - One Parent Exchange and Network
- Pavee Point
- Society of St. Vincent de Paul

Our aim is to influence the development of public policy so that eliminating child poverty becomes a realistic and achievable objective. Our activities include:

- Develop, promote and monitor policies and actions to end child poverty
- Promote public awareness and understanding of child poverty
- Provide mutual support on issues of shared concern relating to children and poverty
- Promote the participation of children and young people experiencing poverty in policy making
- Encourage local action to end child poverty

We work to promote the implementation of the plan to end child poverty embraced by the revised *National Anti-Poverty Strategy 2002-2007*, the *National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2003-2005* and the *National Children's Strategy (2000)*.



The work of the Coalition is supported by the Irish Youth Foundation.

1. Introduction

Despite a buoyant economy and increased wealth, child¹ poverty remains unacceptably high in Ireland today. Many find it hard to believe that poverty exists alongside our new wealth but Government statistics show that one in seven children live in consistent poverty and nearly one in four children live in relative poverty in Ireland.

Poverty among children manifests itself across a range of areas that go beyond income. The longer a child is poor, the greater the impact on the life chances of the child and the subsequent deprivation in later life. Growing up in poverty affects every area of a child's development – social, educational and personal.

Child Poverty is a denial of the basic right of a child to an adequate standard of living, a right guaranteed by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The UN Convention provides that every child has the right to an adequate standard of living, which includes adequate income and accommodation, a right to education and health and a right to have access to necessary supports and services. In other words, every child has a right to the material and other resources necessary to allow them to experience a childhood free of poverty and deprivation and which enables them to reach their full potential.

Ireland ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1992. It thereby committed itself to fully implement the Convention's provisions, to the maximum extent of its available resources. Our economic resources have grown enormously over the past decade. Ireland is, therefore, in a much better position to fully implement the commitments made when it ratified the Convention.

The Government committed to reduce the number of children in consistent poverty to below 2% and, if possible, to end child poverty completely in the *National Anti-Poverty Strategy* and set 2007 as the target date for achieving this commitment.

Realising this commitment requires the Government to take the appropriate policy and budgetary measures. Budget 2006 is the last budget before the 2007 goal date, and the Government's last opportunity before that date to allocate the necessary resources to honour its commitment. Budget 2006 is also the last budget in the life of *Sustaining Progress*, and thus the last chance to make progress in the 'Ending Child Poverty Special Initiative'.

The Government has, since 2001, consistently broken its own commitment to increase the Child Benefit payment. Additionally the rate of Child Dependent Allowance remains frozen since 1994 and Child Benefit is now denied to incoming asylum seeker and migrant children. These decisions have compounded the effects of poverty for the most vulnerable children in Ireland.

Eliminating child poverty must now be moved up to the top of the political and economic agenda and kept there. Ending child poverty, like any major national objective, requires sustained and comprehensive action supported by the allocation of significant resources. Achieving the goal of ending child poverty by 2007 is a challenge that can be met, but only if the effort is a matter of national and political priority.

2. Children Living in Poverty

The definition of poverty underpinning the *National Anti-Poverty Strategy 2002-2007* (NAPS) and the *National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2003-2005* (NAP/Incl.) is:

People are living in poverty if their income and resources (material, cultural and social) are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living which is regarded as acceptable by Irish society generally. As a result of inadequate income and other resources people may be excluded and marginalised from participating in activities, which are considered the norm for other people in society.

Children in Consistent Poverty – 148,000 (one in seven)

The most recent statistics on the incidence of child poverty in Ireland are from 2003.² In that year, 14.6% of children³ were living in consistent poverty.

This means that approximately 148,000 children⁴ were identified as living in households with incomes below 60% of the national median income and experiencing enforced basic deprivation of one or more of the following eight basic deprivation items:

- No substantial meal for at least one day in the past two weeks due to lack of money
- Without heating at some stage in the past year due to lack of money
- Experienced debt problems arising from ordinary living expenses
- Unable to afford two pairs of strong shoes
- Unable to afford a roast once a week
- Unable to afford a meal with meat, chicken or fish (or vegetarian equivalent) every second day
- Unable to afford new (not second-hand) clothes
- Unable to afford a warm waterproof coat

Children At Risk of Poverty – 242,000 (nearly one in four)

In 2003, approximately 23.9% of all children in Ireland were 'at risk of poverty'. This is the official EU definition of income poverty; it is often referred to in Ireland as 'relative income' poverty.

This means that 242,000 children were living in households where the income is less than 60% of national median income.

Additionally, research indicates that the depth of 'relative income' child poverty has increased, with a greater percentage of children now living in households with incomes below 40% of average disposable income.⁵

New Poverty Survey: EU-SILC

The statistics quoted above are taken from the EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) First Results 2003, published by the Central Statistics Office in 2005. The EU-SILC replaces the Living in Ireland Survey (LIIS)⁶, which was conducted by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) between 1994 and 2001. The EU-SILC will be an annual survey and will collate common EU indicators, which will facilitate cross country comparisons.

Unfortunately difficulties exist in making comparisons between the two surveys, particularly in regard to the measurement of consistent poverty. Hence, no conclusions can be drawn regarding the direction or scale of any real changes between the years 2001 and 2003.

Ireland's Comparative Poverty Ranking

Within Europe, Ireland performs poorly in comparative child poverty rankings. In 1999, the average EU-15 child poverty rate was 19%, but Ireland's was 21%. Denmark and Finland had levels of 6% and 7% respectively.

For lone parents, the EU-15 average income poverty rate was 38%, but was 44% for Irish lone parents. In relation to families with three or more children the EU-15 average was 25%, Ireland was again above the average with a rating of 27%.⁷

Ireland has one of the highest rates of poverty among developed countries, ranking third highest in the United Nations Human Development Index (2005) which measures the extent of 'human poverty' in eighteen OECD countries.⁸

3 At Risk Groups

A greater proportion of children than adults face a risk of poverty in Ireland – children are twice as likely to be poor as adults.⁹ Once in poverty, children often stay in poverty well into adult life and certain groups of children are particularly at risk of experiencing poverty and social exclusion. Some of these at risk groups are not included in the LIIS and EU-SILC surveys which produce the official figure for poverty among children in Ireland.

Groups not counted include Traveller children, homeless children (either in temporary accommodation or sleeping rough on the streets), children living in institutional care and children of asylum seeking families.

Groups of children particularly at risk of experiencing poverty and social exclusion include:

- Children living in welfare dependent or low income households
- Children living in lone parent households
- Children in families of four or more children
- Children with disabilities
- Children from the Traveller community
- Children from asylum seeking families
- Children from migrant and refugee families
- Children who leave school early
- Children who leave the youth justice system or health board care

Two particularly vulnerable groups are children living in lone parent households and in asylum seeking families.

Children living in lone parent households

The EU-SILC survey identified 14.6% of children as being in consistent poverty. However the percentage of children in poverty varies depending on their household composition.

One parent households have the highest consistent poverty rate at 32.6% and are three and a half times more likely to live in consistent poverty.

Children in lone parent families also face a disproportionate risk of being in relative poverty. Households with one adult with children face a 42.3% at risk of poverty rate compared to 15.3% of households with two adults and one to three children.

Lone parent families reported the highest deprivation levels for each of the eight deprivation indicators:

- 33% said they could not afford to buy new clothes

- 31% experienced debt problems arising from ordinary living expenses
- 24% said they had to go without heating at some stage in the past 12 months due to a lack of money

Recent studies have highlighted the level of poverty and indebtedness experienced by lone parent families. Seventy per cent of Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) clients are in receipt of social welfare and of those nearly one third are in receipt of the One Parent Family Payment.

Support to increase parental earnings among lone parents is vital. However, since the introduction of the One Parent Family Payment in 1997, its earnings disregard element has remained at the same level while childcare and other costs have escalated. As things stand, most lone parents cannot afford to work while remaining on the payment and due to low educational attainment will not get work which pays enough to get them off the payment.

In times of restricted finances parents speak of how they prioritise their children's needs.

I'm affording swimming at the moment, because I think it's important for [child]. So we go twice a week. But it's something that I can't exactly afford either, but it has to be done because he needs that... (Working lone parent not receiving OPFP)¹⁰

Children from asylum seeking families

The introduction in May 2004 of a two year Habitual Residency Test for Child Benefit ended the policy of a universal Child Benefit payment to all children resident in Ireland. No review was undertaken to assess the impact of this decision on the children affected. Children of asylum seekers and migrants who arrived in the country after May 1st 2004 are no longer entitled to receive Child Benefit.

The denial of Child Benefit to incoming asylum seekers with children, living in 'direct provision' accommodation,¹¹ is particularly concerning as it reduces their cash income by at least 40%, and possibly by as much as 70% (depending on family structure). This leaves them with virtually no money to pay for their children's clothing and supplementary food needs and basic day-to-day expenses.

The reduction in cash to families in direct provision is concerning given the findings of the 2001 Irish Refugee Council's report *Beyond the Pale*. This report details the deprivation experienced by asylum-seeking children living in direct provision, prior to the introduction of the Habitual Residency Condition (HRC).

It is important to note that unlike others who are affected by the HRC, asylum seekers are not allowed to work and are thereby entirely dependent on state assistance, with no legitimate way of making up the shortfall in their incomes to provide for their families.

No mechanism has been put in place to assist such families if their income is insufficient to lift their children out of poverty. This policy seriously undermines the Government's commitment to end child poverty by 2007. The Government appears to be saying that migrant and asylum seeker children do not merit inclusion in its plan to fight poverty.

4 Policy Approaches

The Government views employment as the key route out of poverty.¹² However, one third of children in relative income poverty in 2001 were living in households headed by a person in employment.¹³

While parental employment has to date successfully lifted many children out of poverty, there are limitations to this approach. Some parents cannot work, or are only able to obtain low waged employment which does not yield sufficient income to adequately support their families.¹⁴

Research clearly shows that Government intervention to combat child poverty can make a major difference.¹⁵ Societies which do most to 'look after' people will, over time improve the capacity of people to 'look after' themselves. The countries with the lowest child poverty rates in the OECD are those which allocate the highest proportions of GNP to social expenditures.¹⁶

Ireland is currently lagging behind the OECD average in its expenditure on key services such as education, housing and health care. For example in relation to expenditure on early childhood education and care, Ireland invests less than 0.2% compared to the OECD average of 0.4%.

The Combat Poverty Agency concludes in its 2005 *Ending Child Poverty* policy statement that

- Ireland invests relatively little in subsidised services for families with children
- Ireland's comparative ranking on child support plummets after services are factored in, and
- Housing costs are disproportionately burdensome for families with children

The Agency calls for improved services for families with children in the area of early childhood education and development, healthcare, housing and family services.

Concerns that cash transfers to households on behalf of children may create work disincentives for parents and/or be 'siphoned off' by adult members for their own use are not substantiated by research. Income support measures which protect people from poverty appear to empower people to get back into the workforce rather than create a disincentive to their doing so.¹⁷

Targeted Child Income Support

Key decisions are currently being made regarding the future of child income support. Following a *Sustaining Progress* commitment, the National Economic and Social Council is developing a new targeted child income support measure for children in low income families, both in work and out of work.

We urge Government to prioritise the introduction of a new mechanism to support these most vulnerable children. As an interim measure, supporting children through the Child Dependent Allowance (CDA) must become a key focus. The targeted nature of CDA means that it provides invaluable, practical support to children and families who rely on social welfare due to illness, disability, unemployment or whose families engaged in caring responsibilities. CDA rates have not increased since 1994 and failure to make any increases has hit the poorest children particularly hard.

5 Impact of Poverty on Children's Lives

Child poverty is a multi-dimensional problem, centred on inadequate income, but with knock-on exclusionary effects in terms of access to resources and participation in everyday activities such as education and play. It can be exacerbated by other social inequalities such as race, ethnicity, disability and geographical location. Child poverty is also an intergenerational phenomenon.

Poor children who have been poor a long time are likely to be worse off than children who are newly poor, because the capacities of families to 'get by' are eroded over time.¹⁸

Child poverty has a fundamental influence on the life-chances of the next generation. The longer a child is poor, the greater the subsequent deprivation in later life. Poor children are more likely to have a low birth weight, to leave school early, to spend time in the state care and youth justice systems and to experience unemployment.

Exclusion from Activities

Children living in poverty can be excluded from activities considered to be the norm by wider society and by their peers. For example, in the Living in Ireland 1999 study families noted that they were not able to afford certain goods for their children:

- 13% of families were unable to afford birthday parties
- 11% of families were unable to afford school trips
- 10% of families were unable to afford friends to play
- 13% of families were unable to afford extra lessons or sports
- 14% of families were unable to afford pocket money.

Deprivation levels were substantially higher for children in lone-parent families, with one in four children doing without extra lessons or sports, pocket money or a bike. Deprivation levels were also much higher in families where parents were unemployed, ill or disabled and in families with three or more children.

Children and Young People's Views on the Impact of Poverty on their Lives

Living in poverty is stressful and upsetting. Children can come under enormous pressure if they cannot afford to conform to the expectations of their peer group. This pressure may even manifest itself in bullying and stigmatisation. Being stigmatised can have a negative impact not only on the child's ability to make and sustain a circle of friends but on their education and emotional well-being.

The worst thing [about being poor] is being bullied and being frightened of being beaten up. (child)¹⁹

Being poor: that's what I would change. All the kids have brand names... we haven't. We stick out and we're picked on. Look at what I'm wearing, these crap runners. You get picked on for wearing these. (girl who left school because of bullying)²⁰

Poverty also places burdens on family home life as parents struggle to balance the family budget or to earn sufficient money to make ends meet.

I rarely seen much of her, there was no security there...I became a very insecure person... My mother was out working all the hours God sent. We were going to the neighbours, my sister and myself, looking to get fed and washed. (young homeless man)²¹

Falling out of the Education System

Educational disadvantage affects children's life chances and their chance to fulfil their potential. Research has repeatedly demonstrated that poverty and social disadvantage can inhibit children's participation in education and their chances of achieving success in their schooling.

- Young people who leave school early with few or no qualifications have significantly higher unemployment rates than the average and considerably lower earnings.²² Compared to people with primary level education only, on average those with Junior Certificate or equivalent earn about 10% more, those with a Leaving Certificate, about a quarter more, and those with a degree, about three quarters more.²³
- Nearly one in five young people leave school early - 15% of young people leave school without a Leaving Certificate and 3% with no qualification at all.²⁴
- Up to 1,000 children annually do not transfer from primary to secondary level school.
- One in ten children leaves primary school with serious literacy problems.²⁵
- Almost one in three 3rd class pupils in disadvantaged areas suffer severe literacy difficulties.²⁶

Investment in education is a powerful tool to break the cycle of poverty and disadvantage. The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) calculated that if young people could be prevented from dropping out of school before their Junior Certificate savings of at least €14 million a year could be made on social costs associated with early school leaving.²⁷

Children's Views on Education and Poverty

The lack of adequate accommodation and a supportive home environment can greatly hinder the chances of children to get the most out of their education.

It's hard to do homework in this house. I go to my room but the kids would be playing and shouting and making noise. It's hard to study. I would like my own room.²⁸

...Like, the other kids that I hung around with when I was younger were sort of in the same boat as meself, like. Their das were missing, and most of them had big families and their families were struggling as well, you know what I mean. So they were sort of...like school wasn't, like [for them], they had no time for school, they had no discipline at all, like. (homeless young man)²⁹

The lack of facilities and poor quality buildings in disadvantaged schools make an already difficult situation even more so for young people who are in danger of leaving school early or not achieving their full potential.

It's a crap school really...not enough facilities...They need to have more subjects to choose from, like computers or music or something...and they need teachers who think about the kids more than their wages. (young person in residential care)³⁰

Child Health and Poverty

It is now well recognised that poverty affects not only the health status of children but their access to health care. Under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, every child has a right to health and to have access to health services.

In theory, the lowest income groups are entitled to a medical card which provides free access to General Practitioner (GP) and hospital services. However, the means test for this entitlement is extremely stringent. The *Health Strategy* commitment to expand full Medical Card eligibility, made in 2001 is still outstanding. In fact, not only have additional Medical Cards still not been issued but the overall numbers in receipt of full medical cards have reduced.

Families who are just above the means test income limit but are still on low incomes are required to pay the full cost of GP services. The cost of a visit to a doctor for a child and the obtaining of prescription medicine could eat away as much as 40% of the weekly income of a low income family without a medical card³¹.

Citing the connection between poverty and ill-health and the importance of eliminating financial obstacles to medical treatment for children, the Chief Medical Officer of the Department of Health and Children has called for the provision of free primary health care for all children.

In relation to hospital care, Ireland's two-tier system means that children reliant on the public system experience much longer delays in accessing out-patient and in-patient care than those covered by private health insurance.

- The rate of low birth weight among unskilled manual groups is twice that of professional groups.
- Perinatal mortality (five months before and one month after birth) is three times higher in poorer families than in rich families.³²
- Infant mortality amongst Traveller children is two and a half times that for the settled population.³³ Traveller children also have significantly lower birth weights than for the settled community.³⁴ A large majority of Traveller children live in conditions that are far below the minimum required for healthy child development.
- Significantly higher mortality rates for newborn babies of asylum-seeking and refugee mothers were recorded compared to infants born to Irish mothers.³⁵

- Weight loss among children and ill health among babies was found among children of asylum seekers living in direct provision centres, where inadequate and inappropriate diet coupled with a lack of resource to supplement the diet was highlighted.³⁶
- One in 6 of girls aged between 10 and 11 years from the lower social classes report never having breakfast during the week. In the highest social classes this falls to one in 20.

Children and Parent's Views on Children's Health

Children themselves identify the range of factors that cause poor health for them, such as their accommodation and their diet.

*If you're [living] in poverty, you can't get better. You can't get better if you've not got a good diet to build you up...or if you can't pay for heating to keep you warm if you're getting over pneumonia or whatever. Health and poverty are really closely linked.*³⁸

Sometimes the food goes pretty low. I won't let them go to school if they've had no breakfast. (parent)³⁹

You're paying a fortune for basic food. The vegetables are crap...Like I got this book from the Health Board, a recipe book, and there's great things in it but to make a meal from the book costs a fortune. (parent)⁴⁰

Inadequate Accommodation and Poverty

All children have a right to suitable and secure accommodation. The current figures paint a grim picture for children who have no home or those who live in accommodation that is overcrowded, damp, in disrepair or in poor neighbourhoods.

- At least 50,000 children are in housing need (registered on the 2002 Local Authority Assessment of Housing Need)⁴¹
- Almost 70% of the households on the waiting list contain children
- The total number of children in housing need doubled between 1991 and 2002
- Over a fifth of all lone-parent households with children were registered with their local authority and therefore living in unsatisfactory housing⁴²
- There are a total of 1,405 children who are homeless with their families in Ireland⁴³
- 1,140 children are homeless with their families in the Dublin area alone. The majority of these children are under the age of 12 years, and over half of these children are under the age of 5 years
- 588 unattached homeless children were dealt with by health boards in 2000⁴⁴
- Approximately 2,000 children within 750 Traveller families are living on the roadside without piped water or electricity

Children's Views on Inadequate Accommodation and Poverty

It is clear, from the children's comments below, that living in poor housing in disadvantaged areas has an immense impact on their wellbeing, resulting in depression, anxiety and boredom.

When I was young, I was a bit stupid...I thought that maybe life was nice but now that I am older and I am out in the world, I know that that is not right.

We don't have radiators in my house at all, it's freezin'. (girl, aged 13)³⁷

I have seen some terrible things, people over-dosing, people getting beat up, things being stolen. They do it during the day and you just stand there and watch. Two of my friends have killed themselves. It just got to them. That's what it's like here. (girl, aged 14)⁴⁵

The houses in our estate are all rotten. The walls are like, all 'off' in them. (boy, aged 15)⁴⁶

I'd rather live somewhere else. There's fights around here. I'd like to live somewhere where there are no robbed cars.⁴⁷

It's just awful...we sit on the walls after school or watch the TV. There's nothing only houses around here. (boy, aged 14)⁴⁸

Where I was living..., there wasn't anything for kids to do. No playgrounds. No groups. They have projects now, but there was nothing when I was younger. I'd say that plays a big part in people going on drugs out there. There's just nothing to do. (girl)⁴⁹

Parent's Views on the Impact of Homelessness on their Children

Research has shown the negative impact that living in overcrowded and confined space with little or no access to play and recreational facilities has on children's schooling, health, ability to maintain friendships, and overall well-being. Children affected include homeless children living in bed and breakfast accommodation and emergency hostels and children of asylum seeking families living in 'direct provision' accommodation.

I can see it in their little faces, like, in other words, they do be depressed and sometimes very sad. I find it hard to explain to you...the expressions on their faces. And then the questions that they keep throwing towards me like, 'Mummy would you try and sort another house out for us, to get us out of here'. You can see the children are under the pressure of living in that room, so small of a room like. (mother with 3 children, living in emergency accommodation)⁵⁰

[It affects them] more mentally than physically...like their heads are a bit confused and muddled up from moving from here to here and not knowing what's going on. (father with 5 children living in emergency accommodation) ⁵¹

When you're put in B&Bs you have to be out at certain times of the morning and my ma does not have that much money and she can't really go anywhere and on Sunday and Saturday mornings almost everything's closed and you just wander around on your own, or sit in parks. And wait until it's time to go back in... (young woman) ⁵²

He's no friends here. He's basically just sitting around here. That's what he does all day. He's totally mixed up. His health is very poor. He's a lot of psychological problems and all. It's just totally mixed up altogether. He doesn't know whether he's coming or going. (mother with five children living in emergency accommodation) ⁵³

6. Case Studies

Áine's Story

Áine lives on a local authority housing estate in a rural town in Ireland. She has six children and has been separated from her partner for the last five months. She is a full time mother working at home with her family. In this rural community, part-time work opportunities for women are limited, so the family's only income is Child Benefit and the One Parent Family Payment.

The local authority estate is at the opposite end of the town to where the schools and shopping facilities are, and there are no playground facilities or community centre. A solid fuel cooker is the only means that Áine has of heating her home; this causes great difficulty in the winter. The cooker is also the only way to heat the water, so the children wash in cold water in the morning.

There are various grant schemes that Áine has applied to for help for occasions such as Confirmation and First Holy Communion. She found the process of applying difficult; it meant many trips to the social welfare office and to the school.

The children's diet is poor and a more varied one would be healthier. There is little competition among the shops in the town so the cost of food is high. If there was public transport available, Áine could go to a neighbouring town to the larger shops.

Áine feels that there is no free education system. The hidden costs of books and school trips make life difficult for her and her children. The children are very perceptive. Often they will not tell her about a school trip because they do not want to offend her if they could not afford it. Or they would tell their friends that they did not want to go anyway.

John's Story

John, aged 12, was living with his mum and his three pre-school age siblings in a Bed and Breakfast in Dublin's south inner city. The family had been moved a number of times, disrupting his attendance at school leading to learning and literacy difficulties. John came to Focus Ireland's school support services as he had dropped out of school.

John's mum is deaf. As John is the eldest, it was clear that he had become used to acting as 'his mother's ears', and had become a solitary, isolated child, old beyond his years.

John began attending Focus Ireland's after school programme. After repeated encouragement from staff, he made significant progress and began playing and interacting with other children; this was very much a new step for him. Under another Focus Ireland programme, a volunteer tutor was provided for John and he made great strides with his literacy problems and general schooling.

When all of his records from his previous schools were gathered, John was enrolled in an appropriate school, which he is still attending and is doing well. The school support programme also helped his little brother, aged 6, start at his first school. The family now have a new apartment, which they obtained with the support of a Focus Ireland family support programme.

Michael and Aoife's Story

Michael and Aoife have five children. The family has mostly been dependent on social welfare. Michael had a job for six months but left it as the job was low paid and working conditions were very poor.

The main problem was that when Michael was working, the family lost their medical card. The family was better off on social welfare as they were entitled to a medical card again. The children constantly get infections and the flu, and miss school as a result. When the family lost their medical card, their GP was seriously concerned that they might not seek medical treatment because of the cost.

The family spends about €110 a week on food. This averages about €15 per day to feed 7 people. This amounts to €2.55 per person per day on food, or about 75 cent per person per meal. Their diet is poor and the food they eat is basic. The children receive second hand clothes from other families in their neighbourhood. But the children's shoes are often in a very poor state and they sometimes have no socks or underwear.

The family often struggle to pay regular bills, and have fallen into rent arrears with their local authority. Eviction was threatened, as they owed over €1,000. Aoife now pays €100 off the rent arrears when she collects the child benefit each month. Their three-bedroomed house is overcrowded and they have applied to the local authority for an extension; but were turned down due to rent arrears. The Child Benefit is stretched to cover debts and is entirely spoken for before they ever get it into their hands.

Mary's Story

Mary lives with her children on a low income in a provincial Irish town. Mary has a large family and works full-time as the sole carer for her children. As Mary works in the home caring for her children, she and her children are reliant on payments from the State in order to survive.

As a result of the fact that her income is inadequate to live on, Mary has difficulty paying for food, clothing and household bills such as gas and electricity. This situation has put Mary in debt and she has appeared in court for non-payment of one particular bill.

Mary also, in the same way as many of us, supports her wider family in their times of need. A close relative of Mary's died recently, and it was up to her to organise and pay for her relative's funeral. The amount of money received by Mary to care for her family does not take into account the big events that life throws up. So in order to pay the funeral costs, Mary had to borrow a substantial sum of money. Saving for a rainy day is not an option for those whose incomes can barely cover basic necessities.

Mary borrowed money from illegal moneylenders in order to pay off some of her bills. The moneylenders are very aggressive, and are now seeking a large sum of money from her in order to clear the debt. In the current circumstances she does not know how to remedy this situation, and is frightened.

A Traveller Family's Story⁵⁴

In Co Mayo, a Traveller family of eleven people living on the side of the road have been moved on numerous occasions. The family is from the area and their children attend local schools.

We want to settle here, near where our other children are buried and near our own family. We want to be able to get our children's health seen to when they need it. We need a home that is safe and clean where the children stop getting sick.

One school going child added:

I will crack up if I have to move again. I want to be able to do my exams so that I can get a job.

The health of some members of the family has been adversely affected as a direct result of their living conditions. These illnesses go untreated because of having to move so frequently. The family also added that they want their children to have consistency in school, and said:

We need a chance to stay in one place where we can have regular access to the health and education services especially in relation to our children who are sick. We can't keep running any more.

In July 2002, the Government criminalised trespass on public and private land, at a time when over 1,000 Traveller families were camped on public land due to the lack of provision of accommodation. Gardaí can direct families to move on without need for formal documentation such as a court order or summons. If families do not move immediately they may be arrested and their homes impounded.

7 Government Commitments

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (ratified by Ireland in 1992)	Guarantees every child the right 'to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development'. Require States Parties to ensure that children are enabled to fully develop their human potential ⁵⁵ .
National Anti-Poverty Strategy 2002-2007 & National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2003-2005	Commits to eliminate child poverty and to move towards greater equality for all children in terms of access to education, health and housing. Made a commitment to reduce the incidence of consistent child poverty to below 2%, and, if possible, to eliminate consistent child poverty by 2007.
National Children's Strategy, 2000	Promises to provide children 'with the financial supports necessary to eliminate child poverty'.
Programme for Government, 2002	States that the effort to end child poverty would be 'a core element' of the Government's work.
Sustaining Progress, 2003-2005	Reiterates the NAPS commitment and established 'Ending Child Poverty' as one of the Ten Special Initiatives to be undertaken over the lifetime of the Agreement.
Health Strategy, 2001	Commits to substantially expand Medical Card eligibility so as to include an additional 200,000 low income people, taking particular account of the needs of families with children.
Education (Welfare) Act, 2000	Provides for Education Welfare Officers to encourage regular school attendance and develop strategies to reduce absenteeism and early school leaving.
Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act, 1998	Obliges local authorities to provide accommodation for Traveller families.
Homelessness: An Integrated Strategy, 2000	Prioritises the elimination of the use of Bed and Breakfast Accommodation for families other than in emergencies and then only for short-term use.
National Play Policy, 2004	Promises to maximise the range of public play opportunities available to children, particularly children who are marginalised, disadvantaged or who have a disability.
National Action Plan Against Racism 2005-2008	Requires bodies implementing anti-poverty programmes to outline how they will combat racism and make reasonable accommodation of cultural diversity.
Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) 2005	Promises a standardised system for identifying and reviewing levels of disadvantage and a new integrated School Support Programme.

8. The Way Forward

The number of children and young people still living in poverty after a period of unprecedented prosperity shows the scale of the challenge which Irish society faces if it is to eliminate child poverty.

Tackling child poverty requires the development of a comprehensive, fully-resourced and sustained programme of action that can address the multi-dimensional nature of child poverty. This programme of action should, among other things:

- Ensure that child income support provides an adequate income that meets the costs of childrearing
- Implement the provisions of the National Children's Strategy that relate to poverty and social exclusion
- Ensure equal access to medical care for all children regardless of income
- Provide accessible, good quality and appropriate accommodation for all children
- Invest in education, particularly at pre-school and primary level, to ensure that all children can benefit equally from educational opportunities and to reduce early school-leaving
- Recognise and safeguard the rights of children with disabilities
- Promote and protect the rights of all children experiencing poverty or social exclusion, including children from minority ethnic and racial backgrounds
- Take steps to ensure the voices of children who are experiencing poverty are heard by those who are developing policies that impact on their lives, in line with the National Children's Strategy and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Budget 2006

The Budget presents us with an opportunity to make decisions that could impact positively on the lives of children living in poverty and experiencing deprivation.

Children, particularly disadvantaged children, are extremely vulnerable to the impact of the Government's spending and taxation decisions. They are also directly affected by changes in child income support policy and changes in the provision of and access to services.

None of the Government's strategies, initiatives and commitments on child poverty will come to fruition without adequate funding. The following recommendations for Budget 2006 represent vital investment in social infrastructure necessary to provide positive outcomes for all children in Ireland.

- Implement the last phase of the 2001 promised increase in Child Benefit, to provide a monthly payment of €155.92 for the 1st and 2nd child, and €192.85 for 3rd and subsequent children
- Introduce a new child income support measure for children in low income families, both in work and out of work. As an interim measure, equalise and increase Child Dependant Allowances to €33 per week
- Reinstate the universal entitlement of all children resident in Ireland to receive the Child Benefit payment, regardless of the status of the child's parents
- Roll out the commitment contained in the 2001 *Health Strategy* to substantially expand FULL Medical Card eligibility to 200,000 persons, taking into account the particular needs of families with children
- Provide sufficient funding to acquire, enable and provide an additional 10,000 social housing units in 2006 in line with the 2004 NESC *Housing in Ireland* report, which recommended that an additional 73,000 units of new social housing be provided between 2005 and 2012
- Adequately resource the National Educational Welfare Board to ensure the full implementation of the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000, which seeks to prevent absenteeism and early school leaving
- Raise the annual Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance for primary school children from €80 to €165 and for secondary school children from €150 to €220 per child. The increase should reflect the actual costs of returning children to school and take into account that no increase was given in last year's budget, which when cost of living increases are factored in represents an effective cut.
- Substantially increase the earnings disregard of One Parent Family Payment to a lower limit of €190 per week with an upper cut-off point of €325

Endnotes

- ¹ Child/ren refers to all children and young people under the age of eighteen years - Census 2002 recorded 1,013,031 children.
- ² Central Statistics Office (2005) *EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) – First results 2003*, Dublin: Central Statistics Office
- ³ The EU-SILC records a child to be up to the age of 14 years.
- ⁴ Combat Poverty Agency (2005) *Ending Child Poverty*, Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency
- ⁵ Sweeney, J. (2002) *Ending Child Poverty in Rich Countries: What Works?* Dublin: Children's Rights Alliance. Available at: www.childrensrightrights.ie
- ⁶ The last results for the LIIS related to the reference year 2001. The LIIS was also known as the European Community Household Panel (ECHP).
- ⁷ Eurostat (2004) *Living Conditions in Europe Statistical Pocketbook (Data 1998-2002)*, Brussels: European Commission.
- ⁸ The *UN Human Development Index 2005* is available at <http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2005/>
- ⁹ Combat Poverty Agency (2005) *Ending Child Poverty*, Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency
- ¹⁰ OPEN (2004) *Living on the Book* Dublin: OPEN
- ¹¹ Under the 'direct provision' system, introduced in April 2000, asylum seekers are housed in shared, hostel-type accommodation centres across the country. Residents of direct provision centres are provided with food and lodging and a cash payment of €19.10 per adult and €9.60 per child per week.
- ¹² Department of Social and Family Affairs (16th September 2004) Press Release, 'Mary Coughlan Welcomes ESRI Report on Relative Income Poverty'.
- ¹³ Combat Poverty Agency, (Summer 2004) *Poverty in Ireland – the Facts (2001)* Policy Briefing. Comparable figures are not available from the first results of the EU-SILC.
- ¹⁴ Sweeney, J. (2002) *Ending Child Poverty in Rich Countries: What Works?* Dublin: Children's Rights Alliance. Available at: www.childrensrightrights.ie
- ¹⁵ The impact of Government measures on poverty is also clear from the EU-SILC 'risk of poverty before and after social transfers' measure.
- ¹⁶ Sweeney, J. (2002) *Ending Child Poverty in Rich Countries: What Works?* Dublin: CRA.
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- ¹⁸ p. 10.
- ¹⁹ Daly, M. and Leonard. M. (2002) *Against All Odds: Family Life on a low income in Ireland*, Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency.
- ²⁰ p. 123
- ²¹ Cleary, A., Corbett M., Galvin M. & Wall, J. (2004) *Young Men on the Margins*, Dublin: Katherine Howard Foundation p. 60.
- ²² Fitzgerald. E (2004) *Counting Our Children: An Analysis of Official Data Sources on Children and Childhood in Ireland*, Dublin: Children's Research Centre.
- ²³ ESRI (2003) *Mid-Term Evaluation of the National Development Plan 2000-2006*.
- ²⁴ www.newb.ie
- ²⁵ Combat Poverty Agency, (2004) *Child Poverty in Ireland factsheet - ref: 1998 National Assessment of English Reading*.
- ²⁶ Educational Research Centre (2004) *Reading Literacy in Disadvantaged Primary School*
- ²⁷ www.newb.ie ref: ESRI, 2003
- ²⁸ Daly, M. and Leonard. M. (2002) *Against All Odds: Family Life on a low income in Ireland*, p. 131
- ²⁹ Cleary, A. et al. (2004) *Young Men on the Margins*, Dublin: Katherine Howard Foundation, p. 75
- ³⁰ Edmond, R. (2002) *Learning from their lessons: A study of young people in residential care and their experiences of education*, Dublin: Children's Research Centre, p. 20.

- ³¹ Wren, M.A., (2003) "*Medical Card Extension and Child Health*", Presentation to End Child Poverty Coalition conference, Dublin Castle, November 4th 2003
- ³² Public Health Alliance (2004) *Health in Ireland – An Unequal State*, Dublin: Public Health Alliance
- ³³ Combat Poverty Agency (2004) *Poverty Briefing 15, Poverty and Health*, Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency
- ³⁴ Department of Health (2002) *Traveller Health – A National Strategy 2002-2005*, Dublin: Department of Health and Children.
- ³⁵ Lalchandani et al. (2001) quoted in Fanning, B., Veale, A. and O'Connor, D. (2001) *Beyond the Pale: Asylum-Seeking Children and Social Exclusion in Ireland*, Dublin: Irish Refugee Council.
- ³⁶ Fanning, B., Veale, A. and O'Connor, D. (2001) *Beyond the Pale: Asylum-Seeking Children and Social Exclusion in Ireland*, Dublin: Irish Refugee Council.
- ³⁷ Offaly County Development Board (December 2003) *Equally Cherished? A Study of Child Poverty in County Offaly (unpublished)*, p. 67
- ³⁸ A. Ritchie. *Our Lives Consultation: Final Report* (Edinburgh: Save the Children Scotland, 1999) p. 27 quoted in McAuley, K & Brattman, M. (2002) *Hearing Young Voices: Consulting Children and Young People*, Dublin: Children's Rights Alliance and the National Youth Council of Ireland, p. 11. available at www.childrensrights.ie
- ³⁹ Daly, M. and Leonard. M. (2002) *Against All Odds: Family Life on a low income in Ireland*, p. 94.
- ⁴⁰ p. 94.
- ⁴¹ Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. *Assessment of Housing Need 2002*. Current trends indicate a welcome reduction in the number of homeless children, especially in the Greater Dublin Area. Nonetheless, the AHN 2005 is expected to re-confirm a high rate of child homelessness overall.
- ⁴² Brooke, S. (2004) *Housing Problems and Irish Children*, Dublin: Children's Research Centre p. 16
- ⁴³ Department of the Environment and Local Government, *Assessment of Homelessness*, 2002.
- ⁴⁴ Department of the Environment and Local Government, *The Youth Homelessness Strategy*, 2001
- ⁴⁵ Daly, M. and Leonard. M. (2002) *Against All Odds: Family Life on a low income in Ireland*, p. 135.
- ⁴⁶ Offaly County Development Board (2003) *Equally Cherished? A Study of Child Poverty in County Offaly*, p. 67
- ⁴⁷ Daly, M. and Leonard. M. (2002) *Against All Odds: Family Life on a low income in Ireland*, p. 143.
- ⁴⁸ Offaly County Development Board (2003) *Equally Cherished? A Study of Child Poverty in County Offaly*, p. 82
- ⁴⁹ Northern Area Health Board (Spring 2004) *Hyper*, p. 4 (Bernie)
- ⁵⁰ Halpenny, AM., Keogh, AF, & Gilligan, R. (2002) *A Place for Children? Children in Families Living in Emergency Accommodation*, Dublin: Children's Research Centre and the Homeless Agency, p. 45.
- ⁵¹ p. 45.
- ⁵² p. 33.
- ⁵³ p. 45.
- ⁵⁴ This case study is adapted from 'An Analysis of the use of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2002' published by the Irish Traveller Movement in November 2003.
- ⁵⁵ The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, when monitoring Ireland's implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1998, noted that it was 'particularly concerned about the incidence of child poverty and homeless children...'. It recommended that Ireland 'take immediate steps to tackle the problem of child poverty and to make all possible efforts to ensure that all families have adequate resources and facilities.'