

# END CHILD POVERTY COALITION

February 2009

## 1. Increase basic social welfare payments for families

Poor children do not exist in isolation; they grow up in poor households, with poor parents. Child income support alone is not enough to tackle child poverty, but must be combined with measures that ensure an adequate income for parents.

ECPC calls on the Government to:

- Ensure that the value of basic social welfare payments to poor families (e.g. One-parent Family Payment, Jobseekers' Allowance etc) is above the 'at risk' of poverty threshold<sup>1</sup>.
- Increase the Qualified Child Increase, a targeted child income support for the poorest families in the State, so that it can contribute in a real way to lifting the incomes of poor families above the 'at risk' of poverty threshold.

## 2. Provide access to quality, affordable and flexible Early Childhood Care and Education

The first few years of a child's life are the most critical in terms of learning and development. Remedial action at a later date is both difficult and costly. For children living in poverty, pre-school could be the first step that sets them on a path out of poverty. The current lack of affordable, flexible and quality Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) and afterschool care also restricts parental employment options thereby keeping the family locked into a cycle of poverty.

ECPC calls on the Government to:

- Provide universal, free, quality pre-school places for all children aged 3 to 4 years by implementing the NESF's blueprint for universal access to ECCE. The roll-out of these places should begin with children who are disadvantaged.
- Introduce a subsidised ECCE system for children aged 1 to 4 years, and afterschool care for children between 4 and 14 years based on family income, to facilitate parents to participate in full time employment, training or education.

## 3. Tackle educational disadvantage

Education is a proven route out of poverty, however, for children in poor families full participation in school can be a luxury they cannot afford. Many children feel excluded from a system that is not able to meet their needs. A truly inclusive and responsive education system is required to lift the poorest and most marginalised children out of poverty.

ECPC calls on the Government to:

- Provide resources to fully implement the *DEIS Strategy (2005)* and the *Traveller Education Strategy (2006)*, two Action Plans for educational inclusion.
- Reduce class sizes in accordance with commitments in "*Towards 2016*" and the *Programme for Government 2007-2012*<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Being 'at risk of poverty' means having an income that is below 60% of median income (the mid-point on the scale of incomes in Ireland). [www.combatpoverty.ie](http://www.combatpoverty.ie)

<sup>2</sup> Ireland currently has the second largest class sizes in the European Union. Currently there are 100,000 children in primary schools and 35,000 young people in secondary schools being taught in class sizes of 30 or more.

#### 4. Increase medical card eligibility for families

The chances of a long and healthy life are not the same for everyone. Children that live in poorer families are likely to experience more illness during their lifetimes, and die younger, than their financially better off peers. Medical card holders are entitled to free GP services, prescription medicines and hospital visits. Increasing access to medical cards is a way to close the gap between rich and poor children in relation to healthcare.

ECPC calls on the Government to:

- Double the income threshold for the full medical card for families with children under 6 years of age.
- Commit to extend the medical card scheme to cover all children under 18 years.

#### 5. Ensure every family has prompt access to a secure, affordable and appropriate home

Access to secure, affordable and appropriate accommodation is central to family life and a happy childhood. The high cost of housing can cripple families on low incomes. The most recent Assessment of Housing Need (2005) recorded over 22,300 families, with almost 36,000 children, in need of housing; 75% of these were one parent families.

ECPC calls on the Government to:

- Build or acquire an additional 10,000 social housing units per annum for the next three years
- Make Rent Supplement more employment friendly by bringing the means assessment into line with differential rent schemes and enhance families' access to the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS)<sup>3</sup>. For those awaiting transfer to RAS accommodation, use the relevant differential rent formula, rather than the Rent Supplement assessment, to determine rent.

#### 6. Support families in low paid work by enhancing the Family Income Supplement (FIS) scheme

A growing proportion of children experiencing poverty are living in households where parents are working. The Family Income Supplement is a weekly payment designed to support such families. To qualify the recipient must be working at least 19 hours per week, family income must be below a certain threshold and the recipient must be supporting at least one child. To date there has been very low take up of the FIS scheme, despite its key role in tackling poverty. In addition, many families face lengthy waits to receive the payment after they apply.

ECPC calls on the Government to:

- Increase the income thresholds for the Family Income Supplement (FIS).
- Raise the payment rate of FIS, and make its payment automatic to eligible families.

---

**The End Child Poverty Coalition is a partnership of seven national non-governmental organisations:** Barnardos, the Children's Rights Alliance, Focus Ireland, the National Youth Council of Ireland, OPEN - One Parent Exchange and Network, Pavee Point, and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

For further information please contact: James Doorley, Assistant Director, National Youth Council of Ireland.

Email: [policy@nyci.ie](mailto:policy@nyci.ie), Phone 087 6483282.

---

<sup>3</sup> By extending eligibility to families with long term housing need, but who have not been in receipt of RS for at least 18 months