



The National Federation of Services for
Unmarried Parents and their Children

Pre-Budget Submission 2017

Supporting Financially Vulnerable Families

July 2016

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About Treoir

Founded in 1976, Treoir is the national federation of agencies which provide services to unmarried parents and their children. Membership of Treoir is open to professional agencies providing services to unmarried parents. They are a combination of statutory and non-statutory bodies, including specialist agencies, the HSE, maternity hospitals, adoption societies and self-help groups.

Treoir, in partnership with its member agencies, promotes the rights and best interests of unmarried parents and their children through providing specialist information and advocating for their rights.

Treoir works to achieve this aim by:

- providing a National Information Service to unmarried parents, their extended families and those working with them through answering queries, information website, publications and outreach workshops
- Co-ordinating the Teen Parents Support Programme
- promoting change at every level to achieve constitutional and legal equality for unmarried parents, and to improve services and attitudes to unmarried parents
- promoting/undertaking research to better understand the situation of unmarried parents and their children in Ireland
- Collaborating with other agencies to promote our aim through the federation of Treoir and agencies outside Treoir

Treoir principles:

- recognises the diversity of family life in Ireland
- recognises that all families, including unmarried families, have the same rights to respect, care, support, protection and recognition
- supports and promotes the rights of all children as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
- believes that all children have a right to know, be loved and cared for by both *parents*.



DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL PROTECTION

Treoir welcomed features of Budget 2016 such as the return of social welfare supports including Christmas Bonus; a modest increased income disregard for lone parents on Jobseekers Transition Allowance (JSTA); increases in child benefit; Family Income Supplement and Fuel Allowance as well as changes in Child Care, Universal Social Charge and Pay-Related Social Insurance.

Nevertheless, these measures did not stretch enough to address the hardship of lone parent families. A subsequent analysis of Budget 2016 by experts at The Economic and Social Research Institute confirmed that the changes would have little impact on the poorest in society¹ with child poverty in one-parent families increasing dramatically.

The most recent '*Survey on Income and Income Conditions 2014*' by the Central Statistics Office showed that in 2014 those most at risk of poverty continues to include households with one adult with one or more children aged under 18. Further analysis of consistent poverty rates by household composition showed that individuals living in households where there was one adult and one or more children aged under 18 had the highest consistent poverty rate at 22.1%².

Recommendation:

- **Reinstate the supports for one-parent families in order to address the current high rates of child poverty.**
- **At a minimum, social welfare payments and the associated secondary payments should not be cut or reduced.**

¹ <http://www.irishtimes.com/business/budget-2016-changes-will-have-little-impact-on-poorest-in-society-1.2392064>

² <http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/silc/surveyonincomeandlivingconditions2014/>



Income Adequacy

Family Income Supplement

Changes on the eligibility criteria of the One Parent Family payment (OPF) has resulted in the reduction of income for lone parents in employment. A lone parent whose youngest child reaches the age of 7 loses OPF and may qualify for Jobseekers Transitional Payment (JST) - if the youngest child is aged between 7 and 13 - or Jobseekers Allowance (JA) - if the child is age 14 years or over.

The support available to lone parents who are progressing to sustainable employment is not appropriate. While Family Income Supplement (FIS) is available to OPF recipients who work a minimum of less than 19 hours a week, subject to certain conditions, it is not payable with JST or JA. A JST recipient working 19 hours a week on the minimum wage experiences significant hardship if the employer is not in the position to offer extra hours employment. Moreover, the FIS working hours threshold may not reflect adequately current working trends. For instance, an OPF recipient who can only secure 18 hours work a week would fall short to qualify for FIS.

Recommendations:

- **Extend FIS to lone parents in receipt of Jobseekers Transitional Payment subject to certain criteria.**
- **Review working hours eligibility of FIS to align it with current trends on part-time working arrangements.**
- **Introduce additional interim measures for lone parents in part-time employment who cannot increase their hours to avail of FIS.**
- **Allow for flexibility in the payment of FIS in the event of changes of income or working hours for short periods.**



Back to School and Footwear Allowance

The current income limits for the Back to School and Footwear Allowance (BSFA) do not make sufficient allowance for lone parents. The Back to School and Footwear Allowance (BSFA) sets out different limits of average weekly family income for couples and for lone parents. On the contrary, the income limits for the calculation of the Family Income Supplement (FIS) are based on the number of children in the family and it does not differentiate between families with two adults potential combined income and lone parent families. For instance, the BSFA income limit for a family with one child is €563 (for a couple) and €410 (for a lone parent). In contrast, the FIS income limit for a family with one child (whether a couple or a lone parent) is €506.

Recommendations:

- **Apply the same Income Limits for the Back to School and Footwear Allowance to lone parents or couples (similar to FIS).**

Widowed or Surviving Civil Partner Grant

This grant is a once-off payment of €6000 available to widows, widowers or surviving civil partners who have one or more dependent children living with them or a widow or surviving civil partner whose child is born within ten months of the date of death of her spouse or civil partner. Social Workers employed in hospices have alerted Treoir that cohabitant parents and single parents do not qualify for this payment effectively putting children at risk of poverty as a result of their parents marital status.

In a recent landmark ruling in Northern Ireland, the High Court held that an unmarried Co. Antrim mother whose partner of 23 years died was discriminated against on the grounds of her marital status when she was refused a widowed parent's allowance. In his judgment Mr Justice Treacy said: "It may seem somewhat strange to rely, as a justification for the restriction, on the contention that it promotes



the institution of marriage and civil partnership when parents, whatever the status of the relationship, owe the same financial or legal duties towards their children. This decision could have a persuasive authority in Irish Courts particularly considering children's rights recently enshrined in the Irish Constitution.

Recommendations:

- **Extend the eligibility of the Widowed or Surviving Civil Partner Grant to cohabitants and to other surviving guardian who have one or more dependent children living with them.**

HOUSING

The current rental market shortage has resulted in very high levels of homelessness affecting vulnerable families on low incomes particularly lone parents. Frequently Treoir come across cases where single fathers who shared custody arrangements are not awarded Rent Supplement at family rates.

A single father may not qualify to obtain housing suitable for his child/children to stay in. In October 2014, the High Court ruled that the wrong test was applied when considering a father's accommodation needs given the joint custody arrangements in respect of his four children. Ms Justice Baker stated that they could not be viewed as living primarily with one parent or having one "primary carer" and found the department's decision-making process when assessing the man's application was flawed.

In addition, the withdrawal of the Bin Waiver Schemes by Local Authorities for recipients of One Parent Family Payment in recent years has placed additional financial pressure on lone parents living in independent accommodation. With the proposed introduction of the "Pay By Weight Scheme" in 2017 this will be an



additional expense for parents particularly as they have very young children in nappies and will have additional household weight.

Recommendations:

- **Monitor rent supplement allowance limits every six months in areas of high demand and adjust accordingly.**
- **Allow people who transfer from Rent Supplement to the Housing Assistance Payment to remain in the social housing list, which is a disincentive if there are concerns about longer-term security of tenure.**
- **Reinstate Bin Waiver Schemes for One Parent Family Payment recipients.**

EDUCATION

Back to Education and SUSI

Students experiencing a crisis pregnancy or their partners in third level education have limited options. They can opt for One Parent Family payment (if choosing to live separately) or Family Income Supplement (if cohabiting). However many students do not meet the criteria to qualify and are left to rely on college funding (if available) and struggle managing college duties and weekend work. A minority of students may obtain the exceptional needs social welfare payment, depending on the Community Welfare Officer. However, the reality is that there is a significant gap in support for this cohort.

A lone parent returning to education and getting a social welfare payment may qualify for the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) or the student grant depending on the circumstances. However, it is no longer possible to get the Back to Education Allowance and a full student grant at the same time. BTEA recipients are no longer eligible to receive the Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) maintenance grant. Without this financial support, many lone parents in full time education are forced to drop out of education.

**Recommendations:**

- **Grant lone parents in full-time education the Back to Education Allowance without discretion**
- **Review the eligibility rules of the SUSi grant to better facilitate lone parents' care duties.**

CHILDCARE

The introduction of Jobseekers Transition Payment aimed to support lone parents - whose youngest child is seven years of age and who are not already working or working to their full potential - to return to the workforce. In order for lone parents to work or to take up training and education it is essential that affordable childcare and after school supports are available. This is particularly important considering that childcare in Ireland is one of the most expensive in Europe.

In addition, there are several schemes providing childcare in Ireland with different levels of subsidies and conditions. For instance Community Employment Childcare (CEC) is available to CE schemes participants only. In addition, the provision of childcare may not always be available depending. A single parent in education with entitlement to childcare support under the Community Childcare Subvention Programme may not have access to this support because there are no vacancies in the area or any area nearby.

Recommendations:

- **Introduce a single childcare subvention scheme for single parents who need childcare for children aged up to 12 years in order to participate in education, training and work.**
- **Introduce additional good quality after-school childcare to support lone parents.**



SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Reinstate the supports for one-parent families in order to address the current high rates of child poverty.**
- **At a minimum, social welfare payments and the associated secondary payments should not be cut or reduced.**
- **Extend FIS to lone parents in receipt of Jobseekers Transitional Payment subject to certain criteria.**
- **Review working hours eligibility of FIS to align it with current trends on part-time working arrangements.**
- **Introduce additional interim measures for lone parents in part-time employment who cannot increase their hours to avail of FIS.**
- **Allow for flexibility in the payment of FIS in the event of changes of income or working hours for short periods.**
- **Apply the same Income Limits for the Back to School and Footwear Allowance to lone parents or couples (similar to FIS).**
- **Extend the eligibility of the Widowed or Surviving Civil Partner Grant to cohabitants and to other surviving guardian who have one or more dependent children living with them.**
- **Monitor rent supplement allowance limits every six months in areas of high demand and adjust accordingly.**



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- **Allow people who transfer from Rent Supplement to the Housing Assistance Payment to remain in the social housing list, which is a disincentive if there are concerns about longer-term security of tenure.**
 - **Reinstate Bin Waiver Schemes for One Parent Family Payment recipients**
 - **Grant lone parents in full-time education the Back to Education Allowance without discretion**
 - **Review the eligibility rules of the SUSI grant to better facilitate lone parents' care duties.**
 - **Introduce a single childcare subvention scheme for single parents who need childcare for children aged up to 12 years in order to participate in education, training and work.**
 - **Introduce additional good quality after-school childcare to support lone parents.**