



Joint Submission to the Department of Social and Family Affairs Value for Money Review of Child Income Supports

Principles

In setting out these principles we the undersigned organisations support an approach which places Child Income Support within a broader strategy which aims to reduce poverty for all; and which focuses on coordinated policy development and implementation designed to achieve positive outcomes for children and their families.

These principles are based on values which have been identified in other jurisdictions and we believe are examples of international best practice in underpinning an agreed joined-up strategy.

- Child poverty is seen as a multi-faceted phenomenon, of which household income poverty is but one element.
- Child poverty is understood as family poverty.
- Tackling this form of poverty (by specific rate reductions within an agreed timeframe) is a primary public policy objective.
- A dynamic and multidimensional response is required comprising access to quality services (social, health, housing, childcare, education, transport) which work together in the interests of families.
- Robust indicators are developed and monitored in a fully accountable manner.
- Full harmonization of tax and welfare data systems is required to support the implementation of policy.

- The response takes account of the diversity of family forms and is developed in a manner which supports all families in a clear and understandable universal-targeted social support mix.
- Children, young people, families and groups representing their interests are centrally involved (and are therefore resourced to do so) in the development, implementation and evaluation of policy approaches.
- Child poverty is tackled within the framework of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Wider Context

As Child Income supports serve a range of policy objectives, this review must assess value for money within a wider policy context. Based on the principles outlined above we believe that children cannot be viewed in isolation of the status of their mothers, families and communities.

It is well documented that the best outcomes for children in terms of child poverty can be seen in countries with high level of universal supports for children and families combined with high quality, accessible services in health, childcare and education. In our view the Scandinavian model represents clear value for money in term of outcomes for children from all families.

The policy context in Ireland is shaped predominately by the commitments in National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016 and the social partnership agreement ‘Towards 2016’.

The National Action Plan for Social Inclusion aims to:

- Reduce the number of those experiencing consistent poverty to between 2% and 4% by 2012, with the aim of eliminating consistent poverty by 2016.
- Maintain the combined value of child income support measures at 33-35% of the minimum adult social welfare payment rate and review child income supports aimed at supporting children in families on low income.

Towards 2016 sets out a vision: “Every child should grow up in a family with access to sufficient resources, supports and services, to nurture and care for the child, and foster the child’s development and full and equal participation in society.”

We believe that the model set out in the NESC Framework of the Developmental Welfare State provides the context in order to reach the vision set out in T16 and achieve the objectives set out in NAPSI. The DWS model comprises three spheres of income supports, services and activist/innovation measures and emphasises that the ‘radical development of services as the single most important route to improving social protection’.

From a purely income support perspective Ireland already has the basis for such a model in its universal Child Benefit provision which accounts for 80% of the child income support in Ireland. The focus needs to shift now to the provision of universal services. Further targeted income support may lead in the short term to alleviate immediate hardship for poor families, however it is not a long term solution nor will it provide value for money in the long term in terms of the outcomes for children in Ireland.

Options

Any review of child income supports must take place as stated above in the context of a much wider agenda around reducing and eliminating child and family poverty, ensuring that all children can exercise their rights to quality services such as education, healthcare etc and that parents and children have access to innovative supports based on individual and family need. We have also outlined above how such a comprehensive and integrated approach fits with government's policy around the life cycle approach, the Developmental Welfare state and the national anti-poverty strategy, as well as supporting EU level commitments reduce poverty in the EU 2020 agenda.

The option now is whether to take a short term pragmatic approach to this issue by looking at child income supports in isolation or in placing such a review within a wider coordinated strategy to reduce child and family poverty and improve outcomes for children across a range of internationally recognised parameters (UNICEF).

We, the undersigned organisations strongly believe that the broader more strategic approach will produce better outcomes for children and will in the long term represent better value for money.

To foster this long-term approach we are calling for the preparation of a cross-departmental discussion paper on '*Achieving Positive Outcomes for Children through Reducing Poverty and Social Exclusion*' which would form the basis of wide ranging discussions with social partners, NGOs and civil society about where Ireland wants to go in ensuring positive futures for all its children. This would mean looking at family and children's policy, labour market, health and other policies in a coordinated way and would be based on the type of principles outlined above. It would be informed by international best practice on what works to achieve high levels of children's well being.

It would address issues such as:

- What are the objectives of child income and other supports for children?
- What are the targets to be achieved by government policy in this area?
- What policies and programmes will best support the achievement of these objectives and targets?
- How can the tax and welfare system better work together to allocate resources for children in an efficient and effective manner?

- What is the optimal role to be played by universal payments and services in supporting children and what is the optimal role of additional targeted supports, both financial and services, for children in greater need?
- How can service provision be better integrated nationally and locally to achieve positive outcomes for children building on the existing infrastructure?
- What are the options around allocating both existing and additional funds for children in the most effective manner?

Short- Term Response

We recognise that the wide-ranging debate and resulting policy changes proposed above will take time and that in the meantime existing government policy to reduce consistent poverty rates to 4% by 2012 must be rigorously pursued.

We therefore recommend that in the short term the following actions be taken:

- Introduce a 2nd tier payment as recommended by NESC for all low income families which is automatically accessed at agreed income levels, regardless of whether such income is for employment or welfare supports.
- Maintain child benefit at its current level pending our proposed review with a commitment to reinstate it to 2009 levels if other reforms are not introduced.
- Expand pre-school provision to cover those aged 3 and above.
- Address the poverty traps, childcare and other barriers that prevent many lone parents moving off welfare and into sustainable employment; and do not introduce compulsory activation of lone parents at least until such barriers are removed and employment opportunities are greatly expanded.
- Ensure that adequate training, retraining and educational places are available to support those currently unemployed to access the relevant skills that will help them to access sustainable employment.

Organisations

The *INO* is a federation of unemployed people, unemployed centres/groups, community organisations and Trade Unions. The *INO* works at local and national levels on issues affecting unemployed people. We promote and campaign for policies to achieve full employment for all. We also campaign for an acceptable standard of living for unemployed people and their dependents.

The *National Women's Council of Ireland* (NWCI) is a non-governmental organisation and a company limited by guarantee. Set up in 1973, it is the national representative organisation for women in Ireland, with over 165 member organisations. The NWCI promotes equality, human rights and empowerment for all women.

One Family is Ireland's leading organisation providing family supports to people parenting alone and sharing parenting. We have been supporting one-parent families for 38 years and our vision is an Ireland where every family will be cherished equally and enjoys the social, financial and legal equality to create their own positive future.

OPEN is the national network of one-parent families; our membership is made up of local groups based in communities across Ireland. We provide capacity building: training, development supports and information to member groups and represent their policy voice and interests nationally. Our Board is entirely made up of lone parents from among our member groups.

Treoir operates the National Specialist Information Service for parents who are not married to each other, their extended families and professionals, and operates the National Resource Centre for Workers with Young Parents. It is responsible for co-ordinating the Teen Parent Support Programme and is the federation of professional agencies working with unmarried families. The objective of *Treoir* is to promote the rights and welfare of these families. This is achieved through provision of information and publications, policy development, education, and promoting research.