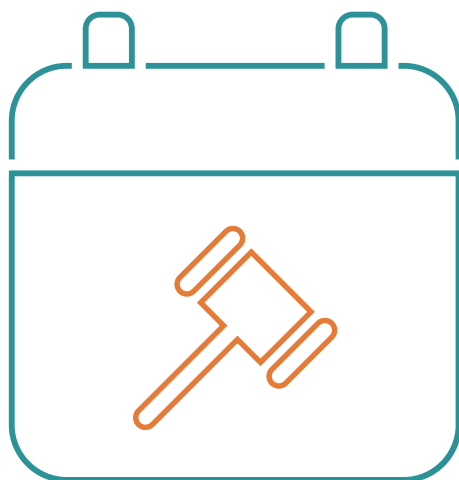


Strategic Plan

2019 –
2023



Introduction

Treoir, the National Federation of Services for Unmarried Parents and their Children, was founded in 1976 and is a national representative organisation advocating for equal rights for unmarried parents and their children. Its primary role is to provide specialist information and advice to unmarried parents concerning legal, economic and social issues. Central to Treoir's work is ensuring that policy decisions that impact the lives of unmarried families are influenced and informed by the experience of those directly affected.

Established at a time when birth outside of marriage was not socially acceptable, Treoir has witnessed a dramatic transformation in Irish society in the intervening decades. Today, around 37 per cent of children are born to non-marital families in Ireland and the traditional definition of 'the family' has undergone significant change which in turn has been reflected in legislation enacted over this period. In spite of these important and positive changes, inequalities still exist and Treoir continues to deal with the serious challenges and problems created by these for unmarried parents and their children. Through its direct engagement with unmarried parents, Treoir has first-hand knowledge of the legal, economic and psychological ramifications of these inequalities which are particularly evident when it comes to the issues of adoption and guardianship and the right of every child to have information about both parents and where possible be cared for by both parents.

With over forty years of accumulated experience and direct engagement with unmarried families, Treoir is uniquely well-placed to advocate on behalf of unmarried parents and their children in terms of both legislative reform and service provision. This Strategic Plan (the Plan) sets down the priorities for Treoir for the next five years so that it can effectively contribute to eliminating the remaining inequalities and adapt its services to support the changing needs and circumstances of unmarried parents and their children in Ireland.

Vision



Treoir's vision is of an Ireland where unmarried parents and their children enjoy full equality under the law, and where their legal, civil and economic rights are vindicated both in practice and in legislation.

Mission



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

Guiding values

Values are important for our organisation as they inform and define our purpose, priorities, processes and practices. Our vision of a more equal, inclusive and just society is motivated by our values that are shaped by our concern for equality and human rights. These are:



Dignity: we will build relationships based on respect, empathy, care and solidarity.



Participation: we will support participation of unmarried families with a focus on empowerment and involvement in decision-making.



Autonomy: we will be an independent voice for change working in partnership with members and stakeholders.



Integrity: our work will be evidence-based and underpinned by honesty, accountability and consistency.



Inclusion: we will promote inclusion and recognise and adjust for diversity.



Social justice: we will work to ensure greater distribution of resources, power and status.

We will generate and sustain an internal dialogue that reminds us of and engages everyone in the organisation with our core values. We will use the values as the template to assess plans developed, decisions made, services provided, advocacy pursued, and our communications.

The following statements of principle underpin and inform all of Treoir's work:



unmarried parents and their children should enjoy the same rights as married families and they should be supported, recognised and treated equally;

the rights of all children as set down in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) should be respected;



all children have a right to information about their parents and where ever possible be loved, and cared for by them;

all unmarried families, such as, LGBTI+ parents, ethnic minorities including members of the Traveller community should be supported;

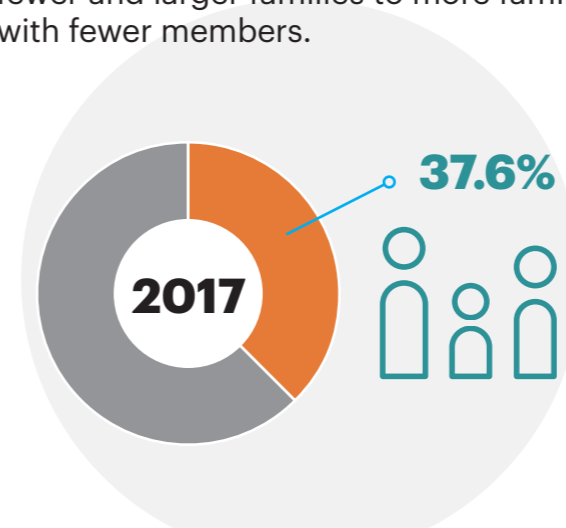
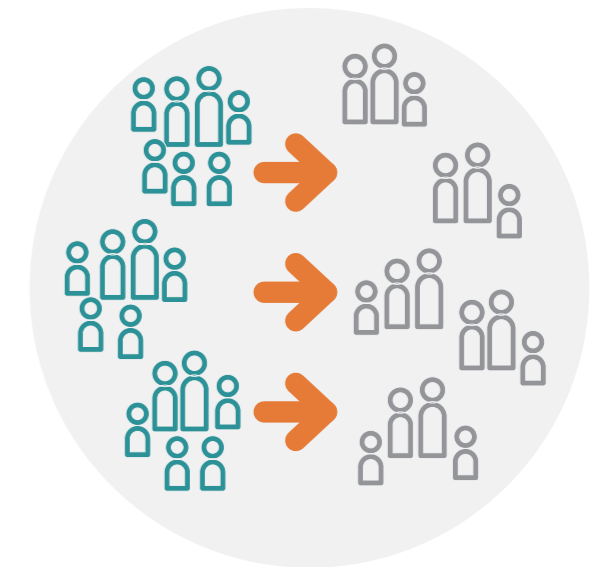


unmarried parents should enjoy the same rights as other families in accessing housing, health, education, training and employment.

National context

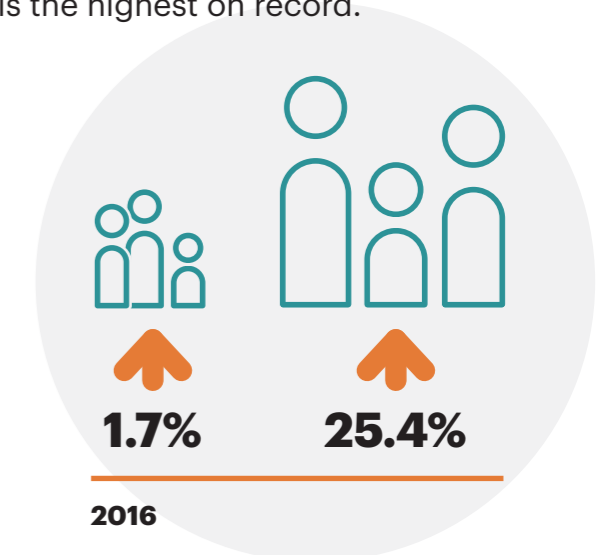
Ireland's demographic and socio-economic landscape has changed dramatically over the last forty years. These changes have had implications for the nature of Irish families both in terms of composition, and the issues they face. The following statistics, taken from Census data, CSO Annual Reports and Treoir's own records, illustrate the scale of these changes:

Declining birth rates and an increase in the number of families: A family is defined, for the purpose of census data, as a couple with or without children, or a lone parent with one child or more. According to the 2016 Census, there were 1,218,370 families in Ireland. This is an increase of 3.3% since 2011, and an increase of 51% since 1996. Combined with falling birth rates, this shows a trend in Irish society away from fewer and larger families to more families with fewer members.

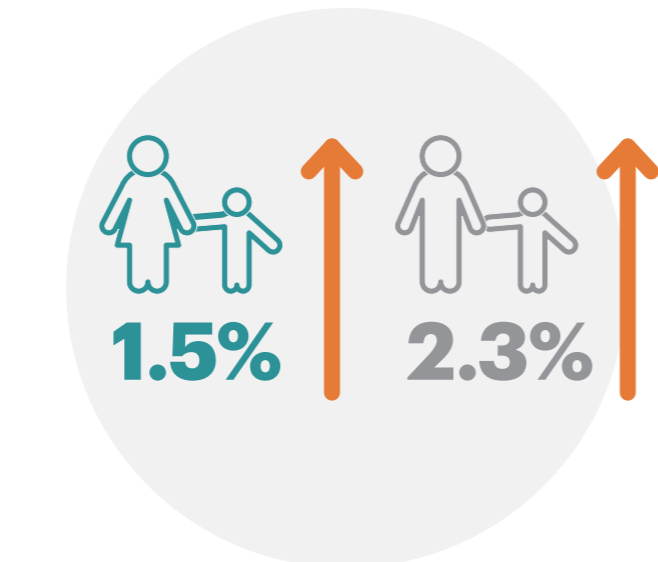
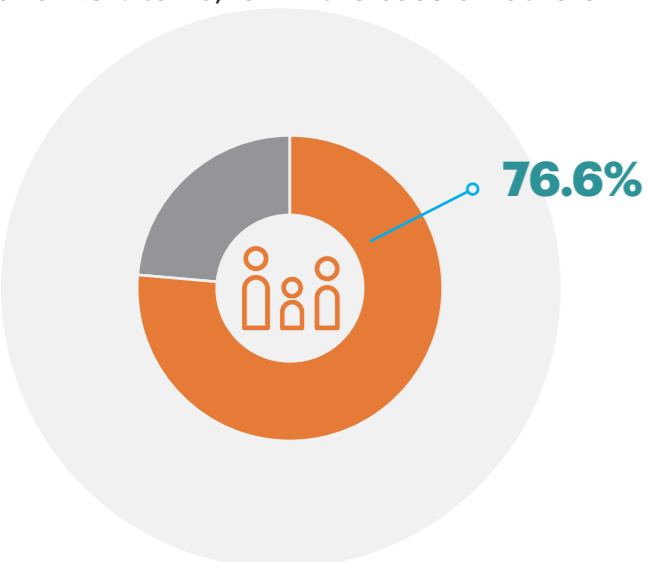


More children born into non-marital families: In 2017, 62,053 new births were registered in Ireland. Of these, 23,340 children were born into non-marital families, making up 37.6% of the total number which is the highest on record.

Increase in cohabiting couples with children: Cohabiting couples with children are the fastest growing family type. In the 2016 Census, married couples with children increased by 1.7% while the number of co-habiting couples with children increased by 25.4%



One parent families with children increased by 1.5% to 189,112 in the case of mothers and 2.3% to 29,707 in the case of fathers



Children of co-habiting couples had a younger profile with 76.6% of children under 15 living in this family type.



The rights of unmarried fathers: As the number of children born in non-marital families continues to grow, so do the numbers of unmarried fathers. Important issues of equality remain to be addressed in relation to guardianship rights for unmarried fathers. This inequality is exacerbated by the lack of a central register for guardians of children.



The implications of all of these changes need to be taken into account in defining Treoir's strategic priorities and also need to be reflected in its services and advocacy.

The Strategic Plan

This five year Strategic Plan was adopted by the Council in March 2019 following consultation with members, staff, funders, policy-makers and other stakeholders. It sets out Treoir's strategic priorities for the next five years (2019-23) and broadly defines how they will be achieved. The strategic priorities have been selected on the basis of their importance to addressing the challenges and problems faced by unmarried parents and their children in Ireland and the potential of Treoir to make a real contribution to addressing and resolving these challenges and problems over the period of the Plan.

The Plan incorporates the principles of results-based management (RBM) and provides the framework for the development of an annual work programme built around outcome-based work plans focused on the delivery, measurement and monitoring of results under each of the strategic priorities. The Plan is a living document and implementation will be overseen, and regularly reviewed, by the Council, and updated as required.

The Plan recognises that success requires not only working on the right issues but also working on them in the right way. As a relatively small organisation, Treoir can only have a real impact on major policy issues by focusing on a limited number of priorities and working on them in partnership with its members and other organisations that share its values and goals. More effective communication with stakeholders and increased engagement of membership organisations at national and local level are essential to achieving results.

Increasing the membership of Treoir



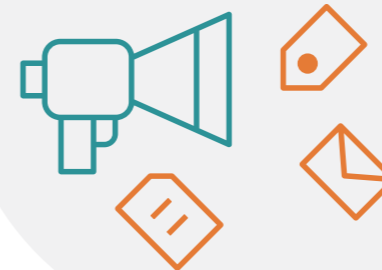
Treoir values the active involvement of member organisations that support the objectives and share the values of Treoir. Treoir will work to increase the membership and the participation of members in policy formation, awareness-raising events and the overall development of the organisation. Opportunities will be created at regional and national level for members to engage with the organisation, to discuss and exchange ideas, and shape policy. More active membership engagement will also be facilitated through face-to-face group meetings and the use of technology. Efforts will be made to expand membership through outreach, education and information-sharing with non-traditional groups including sporting organisations, youth and women community-based groups.

Funding Strategy



As a voluntary organisation, it is essential that Treoir has a funding strategy in place to secure the sustainability of the organisation. Treoir will seek to ensure that it has the necessary resources to undertake the work and related activities to achieve the results expected under this Plan. This will be achieved through diversifying our funding streams over the life of this plan. This will include seeking funding from the State, EU Funds, philanthropic and commercial bodies; and fundraising including, donations, legacies and contributions from members.

Communications



Effective communication is key to the delivery of each of the five priorities set out in the Plan. Accordingly, one of the first steps to implement the strategy will be the development of a Communications Plan to increase the visibility of the issues affecting unmarried parents and their children in all forms of media. Up-dated annually, the Communications Plan will promote the work and services of Treoir and will include awareness-raising events on key issues affecting unmarried families, direct engagement with the media, and the preparation and provision of relevant and accurate material to ensure publicity on issues affecting unmarried parents and their children. Greater use of social media and the website to highlight and raise awareness of these issues will be an important component of the Communications Plan.

The following are the five strategic priorities set down in the Plan:

Strategic Priority 1:

Provide unmarried parents with relevant, timely, easily accessible and up-to-date information on their rights and entitlements.



Strategic Priority 2:

Eliminate direct and indirect discrimination against unmarried parents and their children in relation to legal, economic and social rights and entitlements.

Strategic Priority 3:

Co-ordinate Teen Parent Support Programme.



Strategic Priority 4:

Develop and pilot the delivery of Mediation and Shared-Parenting Services for unmarried parents.

Strategic Priority 5:

Improve governance, transparency and accountability for results.



Strategic Priority 1:

Provide unmarried parents with relevant, timely, easily accessible and up-to-date information on their rights and entitlements

Treoir will continue to provide an expert information service to unmarried parents and professionals working with unmarried families through the provision of a specialist phone service, the production of information and the delivery of training. It will ensure that the information service meets the needs of families from diverse ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds and generate evidence for policies based on the lived experience of unmarried families.

A review will be undertaken of the range of current hard copy Treoir publications to assess their effectiveness in terms of target audience reach as well as the cost-efficiency of continuing to produce a wide range of hard copy publications at a time of growing access to digital and electronic communication. More effective and cost efficient methods of communicating and disseminating information to Treoir's target users will be examined with a view to reducing the number of hard copy publications, enhancing access to digital/electronic information, and achieving cost efficiencies.



The outcome-based work plan under this strategic priority will focus on achieving the following results:

- develop further and expand the operational hours of the phone service;
- complete a review of the effectiveness and cost efficiency of Treoir's hard copy publications and transition to more digital and electronic forms of publications;
- prepare policy briefs and fact sheets based on the lived experience of unmarried families;
- research and source information to ensure the service is accurate and up-to-date;
- provide information to unmarried parents on access to third-level education and housing provision;
- increase on-line access and use of social media;
- maintain an up-to-date user-friendly website;
- design and deliver a comprehensive outreach programme for parents and professionals working with unmarried parents.
- ensure that Treoir's website keeps abreast of new technology to enhance the transmission of information

Strategic Priority 2:

Eliminate direct and indirect discrimination against unmarried parents and their children in relation to legal, economic and social rights and entitlements

Treoir will develop evidence-based policies and proposals, informed by research, member organisations and unmarried families, to address the remaining key inequalities in relation to legal rights, taxation, and social welfare entitlements which affect unmarried parents and their children. This will require targeted and sustained outreach to relevant government departments, spokespersons of political parties, NGO's and other organisations to support the implementation of legislative change and policies to ensure the best outcomes for unmarried parents and their children.

The inequality concerning guardianship rights for unmarried fathers remains one of the most serious forms of legal discrimination. An unmarried father of a child may sign the birth certificate of his new born child but this does not give him any rights in respect of that child. By contrast, a father who is married to the mother of a child, is a guardian of that child as of right. From the beginning of a child's life, this creates inequality in terms of parental rights and responsibilities for unmarried fathers, which often results in the parents going to Court. The adversarial route leads to tension and conflict between the parents and clogs up the Courts with cases that could be prevented by changes in the law and mediation. The child is caught in this maelstrom with the result that their right to have a relationship with both parents is put under pressure.

The current maintenance recovery system requires review. Treoir will explore the establishment of a State-led central maintenance recovery system that would remove the obligation currently placed on an applicant to seek maintenance from a liable relative. The current system tends to be adversarial by the nature of court order applications which can lead to conflict between liable relatives and is not conducive to shared parenting.

A State-led system ensures maintenance is paid, and removes the responsibility of the applicant from continually seeking maintenance where liable relatives fail to make court ordered payments. Non-payment is not currently adequately governed, with again, the responsibility placed on the applicant of sourcing information on the liable relatives address in order to have a bench warrant issued in the event that payments are continually withheld by the liable relative.



Revenue assess cohabiting couples as single individuals and cohabitants cannot claim tax relief in respect of each other.

The significance of this is that through its taxation policies the State is supporting the married family and essentially discriminating against families headed by cohabiting couples.

Apart from different tax bands, in the case of a married couple where one parent decides to stay at home with the children, the other parent can claim tax relief. However in the case of a cohabiting couple with children, no such tax relief exists.

On the other hand, when it comes to social welfare entitlements, cohabitants are treated in the same way as married families. Thus both incomes are taken into account when assessing household income for the purpose of means testing.

Unlike married couples, cohabitants do not have the benefit of the Family Home Protection Act 1976.

Cohabiting partners do not have automatic inheritance rights from each other.

The outcome-based workplan under this strategic priority will focus on achieving the following results:

- legislative change to improve guardianship rights for unmarried fathers;
- the establishment of a Central Register for Guardians;
- the implementation of the Civil Registration (Amendment) Act, 2014;
- Implementation of Section 97 (part 9), Section 177, Parts 2 and 3 of the Children and Family Relationships Act, 2015;
- implementation of the right to identity for children in unmarried families and the right to have a relationship with both parents, where possible;
- improvements in the procedures for maintenance recovery;
- equal treatment of unmarried parents in relation to social security entitlements and taxation.

Strategic Priority 3:

Co-ordinate Teen Parent Support Programme

The Teen Parents Support Programme (TPSP) was established in 1999 by the Department of Health and Children under the 'Children at Risk' strand of the National Child Care Investment Strategy (1998) and its co-ordination is an integral part of the support services provided by Treoir. TPSP was set up with the aim of supporting teen parents in their parenting role, helping them achieve other life goals (such as completing education) and to also have a child protection role. Interventions to achieve these aims are delivered on a one-to-one basis, through group work, through interagency work (such as Meitheal) and through advocacy.

Over the lifetime of Treoir's last Strategic Plan, there was a significant and welcome reduction in births to teen mothers. Nonetheless, an increasing proportion of referrals to the TPSP are presenting with more complex needs including younger parents, care leavers, those experiencing repeat crisis pregnancies, those affected by the housing crisis and young migrant parents. Most pregnant/parenting teenagers have no contact with other social services. Although many of them have high levels of need and live in challenging home environments, they may not be identified as being at the level of ongoing risk of abuse and neglect required to meet the threshold for Tusla Child Protection Services. This applies to young parents who have never been part of Tusla Child Protection Services as well as those who are being 'stepped down' from those services.

Young parents under the age of 18 are protected under national child protection policies, as are their children. Because of their ongoing contact with the young family, TPSP staff are in a position to be vigilant of the child protection, welfare and developmental needs of both parents and children, to support them when problems arise and refer them to other family support services when required. TPSP endeavours to engage with both parents. In the case of young fathers, the majority have no contact with any other social service or any other agency or institution that acknowledges and promotes their identity as parents. TPSP staff work to get both mother and father to understand the importance for a child of having both parents in his/her life. Where it is safe, TPSP staff encourage shared-parenting.



While teen parents are a discrete group with additional specific needs, they are an important subset of Treoir's service users. Although access to supports provided by the TPSP is not dependent on marital status, most teen parents are unmarried. In 2017, when new births to teen mothers were registered, only 124 mothers (12 per cent) were described by the CSO as married or in a civil partnership. Most teen parents are lone parents dependent on social welfare and experience the same problems regarding poverty, housing and childcare (among other issues) as older lone parents.

The outcome-based work plan under this strategic priority will focus on achieving the following results:

- a strong working partnership with the Health Service Executive in managing the national co-ordination and the development of the Teen Parents Support Programme;
- the wider policy and advocacy agenda of Treoir is informed by issues specific to teen parents;
- advocacy on behalf of teen parents is expanded;
- accessible information is prepared and provided in response to identified needs of teen parents.

Strategic Priority 4:

Shared-Parenting and Services Mediation

Through its direct engagement with unmarried parents, Treoir has identified a need for non-conflictual service models that seek to put children's needs at the centre of family relationships. Treoir will work in partnership with those organisations already providing shared parenting support services to expand the delivery of models of good practice in this area.

The challenge to establishing and sustaining shared parenting relationships between parents who are unmarried can be greater than for other family forms. Treoir will explore how shared parenting between unmarried parents can be supported and sustained when it is assessed as being in the best interest of the children. Treoir believes that there is scope for a stronger legislative, policy and practice infrastructure in Ireland, which is conducive to the normalisation of shared parenting arrangements in unmarried families.

Increasingly, mediation is being seen as an alternative to Court in relation to family law matters and is becoming an increasingly popular method of conflict resolution. It is believed that mediation can help alleviate the costs, time and stresses associated with protracted court processes. This change has been officially recognised by the Mediation Act 2017, which gives the process a statutory footing in civil proceedings, and therefore in family law.

Outcome-based work plan under this strategic priority will focus on achieving the following results:

- develop a strategy to mainstream both the concept and the practice of shared-parenting for unmarried parents, linking with any existing services where possible.
- promote the concept of shared-parenting nationally;
- develop and pilot a model of shared-parenting;
- scope out new service opportunities in consultation with stakeholders in pre-court mediation, mediation and shared-parenting;
- implement new supports for access for unmarried parents to pre-court mediation and accessible mediation;



Strategic Priority 5:

Governance, Accountability and Transparency



Treoir is committed to maintaining the highest standards of governance, accountability and transparency vis-a-vis members, funders and the public. Governance, accountability and transparency are shared responsibilities between the Council and the CEO. The Council has overall responsibility for ensuring compliance with applicable governance standards and best practices and the CEO is responsible for ensuring that the necessary procedures, practices and protocols are in place and followed at all operational levels of the organisation.

Under this strategic priority, the following results will be achieved:

- work plans focused on the results to be achieved (outcome-based) will be developed under each of the five strategic priorities to ensure the implementation of the Plan;
- implementation of the Plan will be monitored and progress evaluated by the Council on a regular basis;
- all legal obligations will be fulfilled by Treoir as a company limited by guarantee and as a registered charity;
- Treoir will adhere to the Charities Governance Code established by the Charities Regulator;
- training and advice will be provided, as needed, to Council members to meet all legal, financial and HR requirements;
- support and training will be provided to staff;
- the annual report and audited accounts will be presented to members at an Annual General Meeting and published on the Treoir website;
- a Risk Register will be established, regularly reviewed and updated, as necessary;
- Treoir will comply with all conditions of Service Level Agreements with funders.

Review of Progress

The Council of Treoir will oversee the implementation of this Strategic Plan through regular reports from the CEO. Treoir is committed to reviewing this plan annually to ensure that it is meeting the needs of unmarried families within an ever changing context.



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Treoir is a company limited by guarantee; company number 823231, Charity number; CHY 8877. Treoir is also registered with the Charities Regulatory Authority; Charity Registration Number: 20022211