

ELECTION MANIFESTO 2020

1. Access to Justice

The Legal Aid Board and the Courts Service are statutory bodies, who as part of their remit are charged with the promotion of equality and human rights in all their functions. This involves access to legal aid and to the courts. Ireland's legal aid system is beset with problems resulting from a lack of resources and a failure to modernise. The problems include long delays, outdated means test contributions, and access to waiver certs.

The means test for legal aid has not been amended since 2008 and everyone with an income under €18,000 must make a financial contribution. Under the current system a person in receipt of Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) and living in poverty may not qualify for legal aid.

Treoir is calling for:

- The means test for Legal Aid to be poverty proofed on an on-going basis and for greater discretion to be available in exceptional cases.
- The means test criterion amended so that it is in keeping with the cost of living.

2. Reform of the Family Law System

The Legal Aid Board and the Courts Services need to be treated as critical to the administration of justice and resourced appropriately. Treoir is calling for the implementation of the recommendations of the Joint Committee on Justice and Equality Report on Reform of the Family Law System.

Treoir is calling for:

- Automatic guardianship rights for unmarried fathers
- The establishment of integrated Family Courts throughout the country and a dedicated Family Court to be built on the Hammond Lane site as a matter of urgency.
- The National Mediation Service to be properly resourced and a system of alternative dispute resolution introduced.

3. Childcare

The introduction of the National Childcare Scheme in October 2019 brought to the fore significant anomalies in Ireland's childcare system. These include an acute lack of state investment in the sector, poor pay and working conditions for staff, and disparities in terms of access and availability.

Treoir believes that childcare is a critical public service that is premised on the needs and rights of children to decent and professional childcare, and the needs and rights of childcare workers to a living wage, and decent conditions of employment.

Treoir is calling for:

- An investment in the community childcare sector with the long term aim of creating a public national childcare scheme.
- Double funding to ECCE services on an incremental basis over the lifetime of the next government, starting September 2020, with the aim of bringing Ireland closer to the EU average.
- Prioritisation of the needs of children at risk of poverty by using the National Childcare Scheme as a poverty intervention measure. Commit to reopening applications to the Community Employment and Training Scheme (CETS) and the Community Childcare Subvention Programme (CCSP) and to increasing their budgets.
- Childcare workers to have decent pay and working conditions and commit to resourcing the professionalisation of the sector. Provide state funding to ensure Early Year Educators receive a Living wage in 2020, and establish a streamlined inspection process with a graded compliance system.

4. Housing

It is well accepted that the housing and homelessness crisis has not been dealt with which has led to a growth in children in homeless accommodation, currently standing at over 4,000. More than one-third of families who present as homeless are headed by one parent, making this problem significant for vulnerable families.

Treoir is calling for:

- A major national public housing programme to alleviate the symptoms of the Housing Crisis which disproportionately impacts one-parent families.
- An extension of housing supports for both parents who are not living together so that they can both adequately house their children during access and custody leading to the promotion of shared parenting.

