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**Submission to CSO**

**Census 2021 Public Consultation**

**November 2017**

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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.*

**Central Statistics Office Public Consultation Census 2021 Questionnaire**

Treoir welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the CSO's Public Consultation on the 2021 Census questionnaire.

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| **UNMARRIED FAMILIES** |

 Treoir's advocacy and policy work relies on our ability to access or generate reliable data on issues affecting unmarried parents and their children. The CSO began gathering data on place of residents of unmarried parents in 2007. This information has been extremely helpful to Treoir's work.

However, the census does provide us with an opportunity to enhance our data collection and provide a greater understanding to the social, cultural and economic issues facing unmarried families in Ireland today.

Treoir believes that all children, were possible, should have the opportunity to know their parents and both parents should have an active role, when in the child's best interest, in parenting their children.

Key legislative developments which have been enacted or should be fully commenced by 2021 have altered the landscape since the last census particularly the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015.

This Act sets out the States policy in relation to Guardianship of Children and when an unmarried father can become a guardian of his child.

Treoir has been dealing with guardianship queries on our information services and particularly since the commencement of the legislation in 2016.

Treoir is requesting the information be included in the census that reflects the many types of family formations, whether parents are living together or not. Particularly for parents who are parenting a child but who are not living with the child.

This information will help identify the particular issues and challenges that this group face as a parent and trying to provide a home for their children when they are not living with them.

**Person's Present on Census Night**

Question 5 What is your current marital status?

This question could include family status and an additional drop down box would allow us to determine whether the responder was a parent who lives with her or his child.

This question is particularly relevant for fathers who are not living with their children. By referencing this data with other answers we could determine a number of key factors about the issues facing families when the parents live separately from each other.

Other Potential Questions

The issue of guardianship for parents who are not married and do not live together can be complex and often parents have to use the court system to clarify their guardianship status.

Treoir believes that is important for society, the courts and various government Departments to know how many unmarried and non-cohabiting couples, particularly fathers, have formal guardianship in place. There is no National data of guardians in Ireland.

Married fathers have automatic guardianship rights but unmarried fathers must fulfil certain criteria specified in the Children and Family Relationships Act before guardianship is granted or with the consent of the mother.

Guardianship rights provide for both parents to take an active role in the parenting of their children especially when not living together. This issue is linked to the principle of shared parenting, an agreement between both parents to work together to raise their child in the best interests of the child. A practice that is promoted by Treoir and the courts. It is difficult to ascertain and quantify the numbers of families who are participating in formal shared parenting arrangements.

A question on guardianship could be asked of those respondents who indicate they have children. This question could appear after question 5 or in the section about health (16, 17 &18 in last census).

This question could be extended to ask if formal shared parenting arrangements are in place for unmarried parents.

hank you for considering our submission and we would welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues in greater detail with the CSO.