

National One Parent Family Alliance

An alliance of civil society organisations concerned about the high levels of poverty experienced by lone parents and their children.



Opening statement from the National One Parent Family Alliance to the JOC on Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. Attendees on behalf of NOPFA are Karen Kiernan (Chair of NOPFA and CEO of One Family); and Dr Tricia Keilthy (Head of Social Justice and Policy at The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul).

Background information:

The National One Parent Family Alliance (NOPFA) was established in 2020 during the global pandemic and currently comprises ten national organisations who are concerned about issues that cause poverty in one-parent families - Barnardos, Children's Rights Alliance, FLAC, Focus Ireland, National Forum of Family Resource Centres, National Women's Council, One Family, Society of St. Vincent de Paul, SPARK, and Treoir.

Opening Statement:

Research

Since 2016, nine independent reports detailing the very poor living standards and inequalities experienced by one-parent families have been published.ⁱ Each of these reports paints a similar picture of children growing up in the grip of poverty, deprivation, and housing insecurity.

We know that the vast majority of children living in consistent poverty in Ireland live in one-parent families. We know that lone parents are more likely to have lower incomes from employment, higher poverty rates, less savings, higher reliance on social welfare, live in homeless accommodation and insecure housing, and to experience social isolation. All the data and evidence show that it is structural barriers, inappropriate policies, poor legislation and the cost of the living that means that one-parent families are poorer than two-parent families – not individual parental failings or poor choices.

Importantly, the published research not only identifies the many structural barriers faced by one-parent families, they also provide policymakers with the solutions needed to help move families out of poverty for good. The Programme for Government includes the commitment to fully implement the 2017 JOC Report on Lone Parents and it is imperative that government remove the barriers, promoting policies and laws that support children living in one-parent families to have a life free from daily poverty.

NOPFA Recommendations

Today the main solutions the National One Parent Family Alliance proposes are:

- Ensure our social protection system is based on evidence and benchmarked against the cost of a Minimum Essential Standard of Living.
- Extend Jobseekers Transition Payment (JST) to parents up until their children reach the end of secondary school in recognition of the additional caring responsibilities of lone parents and the extra costs associated with raising a teenager.
- End the discrimination against babies of lone parents by amending the Parent's Leave and Benefit Act to ensure one-parent families have the same level of support as two-parent families.
- Invest in publicly provided early years care and education with free childcare for children in one-parent families in line with the commitments under the EU Child Guarantee.

- Develop an independent system to assess and enforce child maintenance payments; and ensure these are not counted as parental income.
- Establish a specific taskforce in the Department of Housing to review the impact of housing insecurity on one-parent families and develop appropriate solutions including a specific family homelessness plan.
- Make SUSI available to parents wishing to study on a part-time basis.

In order to achieve these priorities, we strongly recommend that a new National Child Poverty Plan contains an ambitious poverty reduction target and supporting actions for one-parent families and that an interdepartmental senior officials group is established to coordinate supports to ensure a successful decrease in child poverty rates.

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