



**Topic: Pre-Budget Submission 2007**  
**Submission to: Department of Social and Family Affairs**  
**Date: 11 September 2006**

---

## **Background**

Progressing the work of Cherish, established in 1972, **One Family** provides voice, support and action for one-parent families through membership, professional services and campaigning. Our aim is to affect positive change and achieve equality and social inclusion for all one-parent families in Ireland.

We work to achieve our aims through:

**Voice** we are the national membership organisation of one-parent families, supporting organisations and others concerned with the issues facing one-parent families.

**Support** we offer a comprehensive range of professional services to one-parent families, to those experiencing a crisis pregnancy and to those working with one-parent families.

**Action** we campaign with and on behalf of our members to affect positive change for one-parent families.

**One Family** works with all types and all members of one-parent families, respecting the realities of family life in Ireland.



## **Introduction**

One Family welcomes this opportunity to submit our pre-Budget submission to the Department of Social and Family Affairs. This year we are framing our submission around the ten areas that we believe are vital to addressing the inequalities experienced by one-parent families in Ireland today.

## **Ten Areas to be Addressed in Order to Achieve Equality for All One-Parent Families in Ireland**

1. Provide adequate incomes for one-parent families dependent on social welfare
2. Provide adequate supports to ensure that lone parents in work can access well paid and meaningful employment
3. Remove poverty traps that prevent one-parent families moving off social welfare dependency
4. Remove barriers that currently prevent one-parent families achieving equal access to housing and healthcare
5. Provide adequate supports to assist families experiencing family breakdown and new family formation
6. Give recognition and support for the role of parenting in one-parent families
7. Remove inequalities faced by migrant one-parent families
8. Provide equitable pregnancy services for all
9. Ensure the rights of non-marital one-parent families
10. Develop a coordinated strategy to achieve equality for all one-parent families



## **Action Required**

While many of these objectives can only be achieved over the medium to long-term, Budget 2007 represents a very real opportunity to begin to seriously address these issues, given the very healthy state of the public finances.

### **1. Adequate Incomes for One-Parent Families dependent on Social Welfare**

It is estimated that over 60 per cent of one-parent families depend either fully or in part for their income on the One Parent Family Payment (OPFP) (DSFA, 2006). It is also known that one-parent families are three times more likely to live in poverty than other family types (EU SILC 2005). Given that, regardless of the success of other measures to reduce social welfare dependency, many one-parent families will continue to rely on social welfare for at least part of the years when children are dependent on them, raising social welfare rates is a guaranteed way that the state can reduce poverty rates among such families.

#### **One Family Recommendations:**

- Increase the OPFP by €26 a week (as proposed by the Combat Poverty Agency [CPA, 2006]).
- Increase the Child Dependent Allowance (CDA) to €40.00 per week, equivalent to the proposed Child Benefit rate in a way that is employment neutral.
- Increase Child Benefit for the first and second child by €14 per month and by €16 for the third and subsequent child.



- Increase the Back to School Allowance to €150 for primary school children and €230 for secondary school children, with a one-off payment of €400 per child moving from primary to secondary school.
- Increase the fuel allowance by 30 per cent to reflect rising fuel costs.
- Carry out a comprehensive study on the real costs of going back to school to guide future progress in this area.

## **2. Adequate Supports to Ensure that Lone Parents can Access Well-paid and Meaningful Employment**

Current Government policy is to support lone parents to access and remain in employment. Therefore, such policies must reflect the current reality – over 60 per cent of parents on the OPFP are working but are trapped in low-paid, low-skilled, part-time employment, due to a combination of poverty traps, lack of education and training, and lack of accessible childcare. If such policies are to achieve their stated objectives of moving one-parent families out of poverty they must address these barriers.

### **One Family Recommendations:**

- A Participation Fund should be paid to lone parents moving from social welfare to work.
- A guarantee should be introduced that parents returning to work can access suitable and accessible education and training in order to raise their skills and educational levels, and increase their confidence.
- An initiative should be introduced to support lone parents on Community Employment (CE) to move on to skills-based education and training and into meaningful employment. This should include research and evaluation of the issues that result in such low progression rates from CE at the present time.



- The Family Income Supplement (FIS) needs to be reviewed to ensure that it meets the needs of one-parent families, including reducing the minimum hours for qualification to 17.5, and a widespread programme of information on FIS for lone parents.
- A standard childcare payment or provision of subsidised childcare, including after-school care, for parents returning to education, training or employment should be introduced. This should include testing innovative ways of addressing the additional childcare needs that may emerge from the review of state supports for lone parents.
- Early childhood education and development for the children of one-parent families needs to be provided, as well as other low-income families, to assist in breaking the cycle of long-term poverty, starting with a guarantee of one years provision for such children.
- Supports such as the Teen Parent Support Programme should be provided to encourage young parents to stay in school on a nationwide basis, including a stay-in-school payment, where required.
- The requirement for lone parents to be on benefits for considerable periods of time and to reach a certain age before they can access supports to return to education should be removed.
- Facilitators/mediators should be provided to work with new parents who are parenting alone in order to support them to maintain links with the labour market and to access family and parenting services during the early years of their children's lives.
- A combination of paid maternal, paternal and parental leave is needed to ensure that parents have a real option of staying at home with their child until the age of one year.



### **3. Poverty Traps that prevent One-Parent Families moving off Social Welfare Dependency**

The existence of poverty traps that make it financially non-viable for lone parents to move off social welfare on to well paid employment, particularly full-time employment, are widely known. Primary among these is rent supplement. Because of the difficulties one-parent families face obtaining local authority or private housing they have a high dependence on rent supplement. Added to this is the income disregard which, while encouraging employment to a certain income level, represents a major barrier in moving beyond that level.

#### **One Family Recommendations:**

- The income limit of €317 for the retention of secondary benefits needs to be increased in line with the income disregard level for the OPFP to €400 per week.
- The policy of tapered withdrawal of rent supplement should continue, with a considerably greater proportion of income being subject to such withdrawal in the 2007 budget.
- The specific housing needs of one-parent families need to be investigated and strategies set in place to meet them as part of the development of the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS).
- Social housing provision should include a specific allocation of housing for one-parent families, including the provision of housing suitable for non-resident parents with access rights.
- The earning disregard limit on the OPFP should be increased to €400, as proposed in the Lone Parent Review Discussion Paper.



#### **4. Barriers that Currently Prevent One-Parent Families Achieving Equality of Access to Housing and Healthcare**

As referred to above, one-parent families face particular difficulties in accessing housing services. One-parent families are much more likely to be in rented accommodation than other family types and to make up a high proportion of those on waiting lists for local authority housing (CPA, 2005, ESRI, 2002). One-parent families, along with other low-income families, also face inequality in relation to accessing health services. The right to both housing and healthcare are fundamental human rights and are recognised as such in the various UN Conventions that Ireland is a signatory of. Yet serious inequalities remain unaddressed.

In addition, the low income level for the full medical card, coupled with concerns over the complex process involved in reapplying for medical cards, means that many lone parents limit their employment choices for fear of losing the medical card.

#### **One Family Recommendations:**

- The points system for local authority housing needs to be reviewed to ensure that there is no discrimination against one-parent families.
- A policy within local authority housing is needed, with support from the Department of the Environment and Local Government, to ensure that the housing needs of one-parent families are met. This includes ensuring that a proportion of local authority houses are designed specifically to meet the needs of one-parent families, including non-resident parents with access rights.
- The medical card should be provided for all children, starting with those that are eligible for the proposed new employment-neutral CDA/second tier Child Benefit payment.



## **5. Adequate Supports to Assist Families Involved in Family Breakdown and New Family Formation**

An increasing numbers of marriages in Ireland are ending in separation and divorce. While numbers are still relatively low, they are likely to increase further in the future along international lines. There has also been a growth in the breakdown of non-marital families. Added to these factors, increasing mobility, due primarily to increasing worker mobility, means that such families will face growing complexities in dealing with such family breakdown.

As a result, growing numbers of people living in Ireland are likely to be in need of information and support in dealing with family law and related financial issues, as well as in dealing with the emotional and practical difficulties involved in such situations.

In tandem with these trends growing numbers of adults and children in Ireland are going to be members of step and blended families. Such families will also be in need of support in dealing with the resulting issues in a positive way that works in the best interests of the children involved.

### **One Family Recommendations:**

- Research should be commissioned on the key issues involved in family breakdown and new family formation, and following this, negotiations should take place with organisations working with such families to develop strategies and related actions to address any unmet needs identified.
- Funding should be provided for a number of pilot family law and children's centres which would provide information and support services to such families.



- The options available for non-adversarial negotiations in relation to separation and divorce should be expanded, including the provision of more resources for mediation and other forms of non-legal dispute resolution.

## **6. Recognition and Support for the Role of Parenting in One-Parent Families**

Increasing attention is being paid at both EU and UN level to the need to provide supports for parenting in increasingly complex and work-orientated societies. The current review of state supports for lone parents will present major new challenges for those parenting alone. The review recommends the introduction of new measures that will mean that, after the youngest child reaches eight years, parents in receipt of social welfare payments should be either in work, employment or training, or else sign on for unemployment assistance.

While clearly recognising the importance of paid employment as a route out of poverty and into a more socially inclusive position in society, we remain convinced that the availability of realistic options and choices around balancing paid work, caring and personal life is the key to a good quality of life for all families.

In the case of one-parent families such options are particularly limited due to the low incomes of many such families and also because those parenting alone do not have the option of depending on the other parent to support their work–life balance options. Given this particular situation One Family believes that the state can play an important role in helping one-parent families to achieve a desirable balance between work, caring and recreation, and can support parents to parent well.



## **One Family Recommendations:**

- The Government to develop a wide range of work–life balance options that do not result in a loss of income. For example, extended paid maternity, paternity and parental leave, the ability to engage in home working etc.
- Provide widely accessible facilities for those parenting alone to attend parenting courses and to network with others involved in parenting on their own.
- Provide community education and family support programmes that promote positive shared parenting after break-up/separation so that parents can develop the necessary skills to communicate effectively about their children’s needs and to manage cooperative parenting.
- Provide affordable and accessible services that encourage parental cooperation and promote stability in the life of the child, including mediation, counselling, education and therapeutic groups for parents and for children.
- Provide education and training for resource workers in organisations that work with one-parent families in order that they can provide appropriate parenting skills programmes to support those parenting alone.

## **7. Inequalities faced by Migrant One-Parent Families**

Growing numbers of one-parent families are coming from new communities. Such families are often extremely isolated and face additional pressures in coping with parenthood and in surviving financially.



One-parent families from new communities include asylum seekers, parents with humanitarian leave to remain, foreign workers on visas who become pregnant, spouse/partners of workers from new EU member states who are now parenting alone. Increasing numbers of such families are coming to One Family for support, advice, counselling and training.

While the needs of such families are multifaceted and wide-ranging, we would focus on the following recommendations aimed at addressing some of their most urgent needs.

### **One Family Recommendations:**

- Reinstatement of Child Benefit as a universal payment.
- Provide specialist accommodation for asylum seekers families living in direct provision.
- Provide culturally sensitive medical and pregnancy-related services.
- Provide relevant information in key languages.
- Remove the requirement for those parenting alone with humanitarian leave to remain to demonstrate their contribution to Irish society in terms of paid employment at least when their children are very young or when they have large families.
- Provide greater support for migrant women experiencing crisis pregnancies, including access to information on all options.



## **8. Equitable Pregnancy-related Services for All**

One Family has long been campaigning for equal rights for all those requiring pregnancy-related services.

### **One Family Recommendations:**

- Ensure access to free, confidential non-directive counselling services for all women and couples experiencing crisis pregnancy.
- Provide specialist accommodation for pregnant women and women experiencing crisis pregnancies at risk of homelessness due to pregnancy in conjunction with supportive specialist agencies.
- Produce a comprehensive inter-departmental information pack for expectant parents on the full range of benefits, services and legislative provision regarding pregnancy, maternity and family services.
- Provide culturally appropriate and needs-based pregnancy services for women from minority ethnic groups.
- Carry out research on the impact and effectiveness of such services in meeting the needs of their clients.

## **9. The Rights of Non-Marital One-Parent Families**

The current Constitutional position, reinforced in the recent APOCC Report on the Family is that the family based on marriage has a special position in Irish society. This leads to a situation in which both adults and children in non-marital families, including one-parent families, have less right than other family types. This is reflected in differences in adoption rights, guardianship rights and succession rights between non-marital families, including one-parent families and marital families. Such a situation is inequitable and is in



breach of UN Conventions on the Rights of the Child and on Economic, Social and Cultural rights.

If non-marital families are to receive equality of treatment before the law and within society generally we would recommend the following.

**One Family Recommendations:**

- Commission research on the impact of the current Constitutional position on the rights of children in non-marital families under the auspices of the Family Support Agency.
- Consider changing the Constitution on the rights of the family when the proposed amendment on the rights of the child is being introduced.

**10. A Coordinated Strategy to Support Equality for All One-Parent Families**

As referred to at the beginning of our submission, a coordinated range of actions is required to remove inequalities experienced by one-parent families. Only by taking action in a number of different but mutually reinforcing areas will one-parent families achieve economic, social and cultural equality.

**One Family Recommendations:**

- Progress the proposed reform of lone parent state supports in a way that supports choice, positive engagement, the introduction of incentives and the removal of barriers to progression within the labour



market by lone parents. Such reforms should also specifically address the needs of one-parent families from new communities.

- Ensure that the revised National Anti-Poverty Strategy clearly addresses the needs of one-parent families and has as a key target the reduction of poverty rates among one-parent families to the overall average rates.
- Ensure that services are widely available to support one-parent families in meeting their need in terms of employment and work–life balance options, as well as in terms of the provision of family and child services, supports in marital break up and new family formation situations, and support for positive parenting in one-parent families.

ENDS

**This submission is made on behalf of One Family – voice, support and action for one-parent families. Queries should be directed to Candy Murphy, Policy & Campaigns Manager, and Tel: 01 662 9212 Fax: 01 662 9096 Email: [policy@onefamily.ie](mailto:policy@onefamily.ie)**