



**Topic: Social Partnership Discussions**  
**Submission to: Department of the Taoiseach**  
**Date: 12 May 2006**

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### **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.

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### **Introduction**

One Family welcomes this opportunity to submit our proposals to the social partnership process.

Given the importance of the current social partnership discussions in terms of framing economic and social policy in Ireland over the next possibly ten year period, One Family is keen to ensure that the issues affecting our clients, one-



parent families, are adequately addressed in the discussions and that the current proposals for changing state supports for lone parents are clearly linked in with other major strategic developments and related funding sources.

We have therefore prepared this submission for the discussions. The submission is structured as follows:

- Description of the Wider context
- One Family's Principles and Policy
- Current Situation of One-Parent Families
- Placing policy in the Development Welfare state Framework
- Recommendations
- A Ten Year Plan
- Achieving the Objectives
- Role of One Family
- Summary of our Recommendations using Life Cycle approach

We would be happy to provide further supporting documentation if required.

## **Context**

This submission coincides with a time of very significant planned changes in policy towards one parent families. A range of actions to increase the labour market participation of lone parents and to reduce their dependence on social welfare are currently being considered. While this is being done within the context of plans to address the very high level of child and lone parent poverty, in our view such policy changes and related actions will only be successful in achieving these objectives if they fully take into account the realities of parenting alone and if they are introduced in a co-ordinated and supportive manner.

## **Wider Policy Arena**

The Minister for Social and Family Affairs has recently published a Discussion document on 'Proposals for Supporting Lone Parents'. This report proposes major changes in the way that the state supports lone parents. The success of these proposals if implemented will, it is generally agreed, depend very largely on the supports that are put in place in relation to the provision of flexible education and training provision and related supports, including childcare, for this group.

As this work relates strongly to a key policy area in the social partnership discussions - activation and participation of a group removed in part at least from the labour market, One Family is keen to ensure that the decisions made



in the negotiations reflect and compliment the actions currently being considered in other for a to implement policy changes for one-parent families.

We are also keen to ensure that all key policy decisions guiding Irish economic and social policy over the next possibly ten years e.g. NDP, ESF and other OPs, NAPS, Childcare strategy are co-ordinated to ensure that the resources required to provide effective, accessible support services and to develop, implement and monitor new innovatory programmes to support lone parents entering, remaining in and progressing within the labour market, are in place.

In addition it is important to be aware in your deliberations in this area that many lone parents are working -60% of those on the one parent family payment are working - but many are trapped in low paid, low skilled part-time employment for a variety of reasons.

## **One Family's Principles**

All of our policy positions are guided by our core principles:

- The needs of children must be at the centre of all relevant policy developments and the needs of children in one-parent families must be overtly addressed.
- The need to ensure real choice for lone parents in terms of participation in the paid labour market and in terms of their parenting role.
- Recognition that many lone parents are involved in a range of caring roles, including childcare, eldercare and care of family members with disabilities and these roles must be recognised and supported.
- Recognition that individual lone parents have different needs and requirements at different stages of the lifecycle and that supports must be in place to effectively manage transitions in and out of the labour market, as well as to access a wide range of options to pursue viable part-time employment, education and training.
- The need to ensure that actions to move more lone parents into employment do not result in lower incomes for one-parent families and are geared towards broadening career options and related developmental opportunities
- The need to work to ensure that planned policy changes and related funding are focussed on those most at risk of poverty and social exclusion i.e. those on low income and other disadvantaged groups, including families and children living in poverty.



## **Need for a Coherent Policy Framework**

Overall, One Family believes that there is an urgent need to develop and implement a coherent policy framework for one-parent families that reflects the realities of their lives and those of their children.

The key objectives of this framework in our view should be:

- Reduced child and family poverty;
- Reduced dependence on social welfare;
- Increased access to early childhood development and education;
- Improved access to services: education and training, childcare, including after school care, health services and accommodation;
- Innovative and positive engagement with one-parent families in relation to increasing their role in the labour market
- Recognition for the important role that parenting plays in Irish society and development of realistic work life balance options for those parenting alone; and
- Co-ordination of services and supports, including information.

This in turn necessitates the co-ordination of policy development across Departments and cooperation in implementation across Departments and agencies, as well as, in our view, the active involvement of the target group and of those that represent them.

## **The Current Situation**

In developing policy in relation to one-parent families it is important to be aware of current realities. While statistics and research are patchy, we know that:

- The majority of one-parent families are widowed, separated or divorced. Almost a quarter are single. (CSO)
- Births to unmarried women under 20 are only 3% of total births (CSO)
- The majority of lone parents are in the labour market, including those on the OPFP (CSO, DSFA)
- The majority of mothers including lone parents at work are working part time (CSO)
- OPF dependent on social welfare are generally concentrated in low paid, part-time and insecure employment (DSFA)



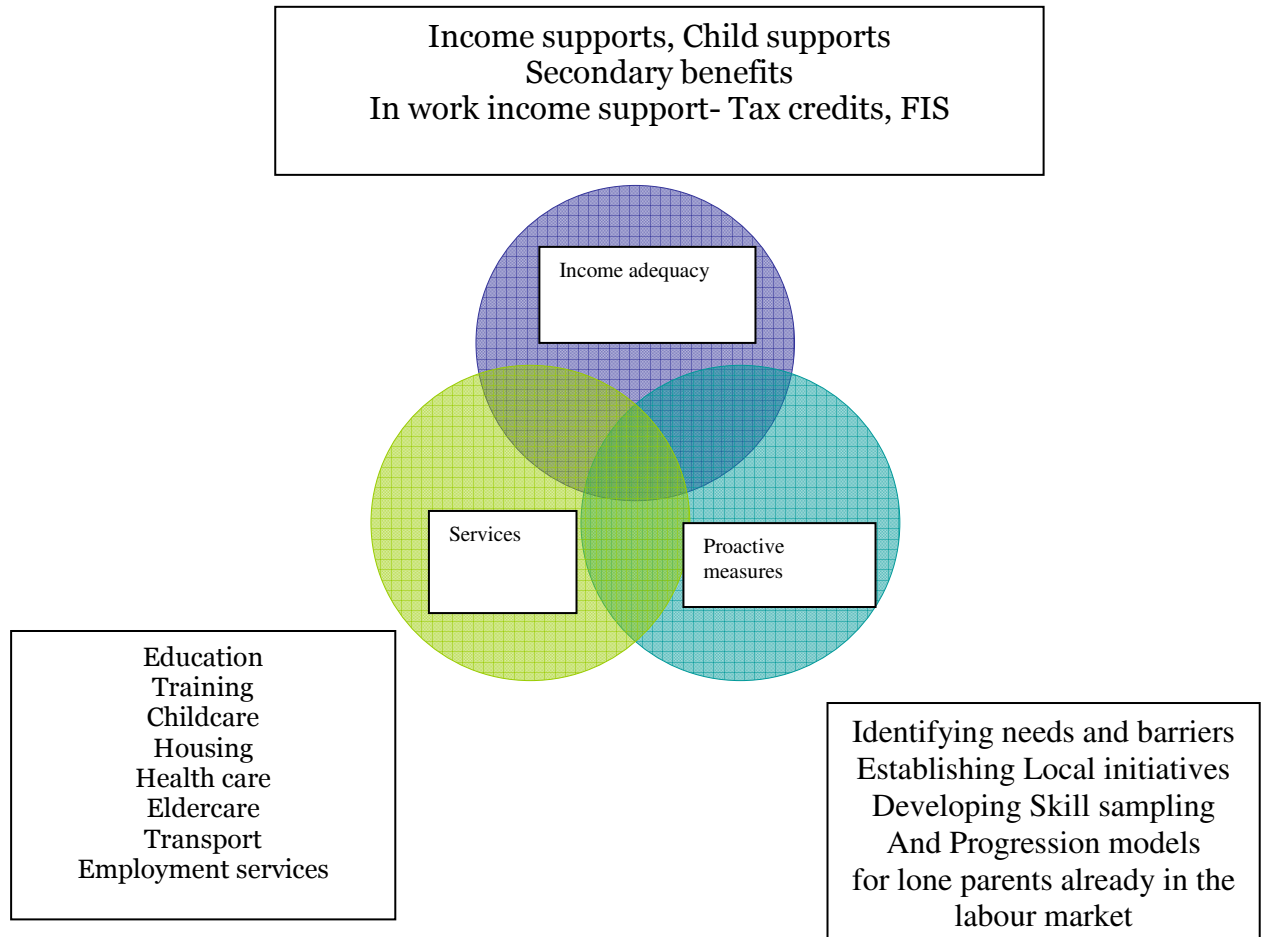
- OPF face some of the highest levels of poverty and deprivation in the country (EU-SILC)
- Lone parents face very significant poverty traps when going into full time employment (EAPN/OPEN research shows that such working arrangements currently result in a lower net income for OPF.)
- Many developmental opportunities are inaccessible to lone parents because they are only provided and supported on a full-time basis (NESF)
- Progression from CE and other initiatives, that take into account OPFs needs, into mainstream training and education , that do not, is very low (FAS)
- Participation in skills based training results in much higher placement rates than participation in employment schemes (ESRI)
- Almost half of lone parents only have primary education(NESF, 1996)
- Most lone parents are not in a financial position to avail of work life balance options that lead to a reduction in income (e.g. unpaid parental leave) (DTI, UK)
- A high proportion of lone parents are located in sectors where availability of work life balance options is low ( DTI,UK)
- Childcare and child development supports, particularly after school care is not in place to provide the necessary level of support to address childcare, child development or child poverty issues among one parent families. (NWCI, CPA, End Child Poverty Coalition)

Before going on to present our recommendations we look at the issues raised above in the context of the NESC proposal for a developmental welfare state.

## **The Developmental Welfare State**

The recent NESC document provides a useful framework for identifying and agreeing on the range of complimentary actions that are required to assist specific groups to move away from social welfare dependency. See Figure 1.

**Figure 1 the Developmental Welfare State: One-Parent Families**



Adapted from NESC Report No.113

While we support this approach we do caution against a response to lone parents, the vast majority of whom are women, which underestimates their unique support needs and the responsibilities involved in parenting alone and which does not adequately take into account the specific needs and current situation of particular sub groups e.g. teen parents, parents with humanitarian leave to remain, parents with additional caring responsibilities, those with literacy and health difficulties, etc.

## Recommendations

Below we spell out the specific issues we would like to see addressed in the social partnership negotiations:



## **1. Income Adequacy**

As is well known poverty levels are particularly high among lone parents, largely due to high levels of social welfare dependency and barriers experienced by lone parents in accessing the labour market, and particularly, in progressing to higher skilled, better paying jobs with good career progression opportunities.

We recommend that:

1. The OPFP/PA be increased to a level equivalent to 30% of gross average industrial earnings and be maintained at that level.
2. Direct action be taken to address child poverty levels through either significant increase in CDAs or the introduction of a second tier child benefit payment. Such a payment should be labour market status neutral so as not to create another poverty trap.
3. Adequate income supports be in place to provide those on low incomes and in part-time employment with an incentive to work through reforms of FIS administrative systems and through a review of FIS and its role in supporting small families. Consideration should also be given to the introduction of refundable tax credits.
4. Introduction of, with the active engagement of the social partners, specific programmes to support lone parents to remain in employment and to assist them to progress into more meaningful, better paid employment.

## **2. Services**

As referred to above many lone parents have a wide range of support needs in fulfilling both their parenting and labour market roles. These include:

- Access to flexible education and training;
- Access to affordable quality childcare, including after school care; and
- Access to housing.

Specifically we recommend that:

1. Extended paid maternity, paternity and parental leave be introduced over the period of the programme with the objective of achieving a year's paid leave.
2. Provision of state funded early childhood development and education



3. The development and implementation of a strategy to address the after school needs of lone parents returning to work or extending their working hours.
4. Development of flexible education and training provision, with childcare support which lead to recognised qualifications and which offer a wide variety of time options, part-time, term time etc.
5. Consideration be given by the social partners to the introduction of a lone parent guarantee and to the provision of customised programmes of supports, including supports when moving on to employment or facing job loss.
6. Development and implementation of supports for lone parents when they are engaging initially with labour market services, including facilitation, mentoring, and provision of pre-development programmes on a customised basis.
7. Review of the requirements that those granted leave to remain must demonstrate their contribution to Irish society only through participating in paid work, education and training.
8. A 10 year strategy to address the housing needs of lone parents on low income be developed and implemented in conjunction with the Rental Allowance Scheme with the aim of improving housing options and reducing dependence on rent supplement,

### **3. Social Innovation**

Overall we recommend that resources be allocated within the new social partnership agreement for the development, implementation and evaluation of pilot innovative and relevant models of labour market engagement for lone parents that take into account their parenting roles and responsibilities and are aimed at building up the required supports over time. Such models should be based on sound research on the needs of particularly vulnerable sub-groups of lone parents for whom labour market participation may only be a very long term aim e.g. those with additional caring needs that make regular employment very difficult , recovering drug addicts, those with very low educational levels and related problems e.g. literacy.

Such innovatory approaches can, we believe play a key role in ensuring the effectiveness of the new lone parent proposals and thus could lead to a reduction in social welfare dependency and poverty among this group.



Such models and innovatory approaches should be fully evaluated and where impacts are positive they should be mainstreamed.

All proposals and plans should be poverty proofed to ensure that they do not create new poverty traps for lone parents.

As very significant changes are occurring in society and in how Irish society and the labour market recognises and supports parenting it will be essential that such plans are fully researched and that good practice in other EU countries is identified and built on.

## **A Ten Year Plan**

If a ten year programme is agreed we believe that in relation to our areas of concern the following key objectives and related targets should be adopted:

1. Reduce poverty among one parent families to the overall national average.
2. Eliminate child poverty.
3. Have in place a wide range of well tested options to support lone parent's progress in the labour market and balance their work and parenting roles, as outlined above.

## **Achieving the Objectives**

To achieve these aims we call on the social partners to include in their agreement:

1. Explicit recognition of the need to provide a coherent range of supports for lone parents aimed at increasing their income and reducing their social welfare dependency,
2. Support for a co-ordinated range of supports for children in poverty including increased targeted income supports, action to address educational disadvantage, provision of early and later child and teenage development options.
3. In a rapidly changing society recognition of the importance of parenting and of supporting positive parenting for the benefit of individual children and families and for society as a whole, and of the particular needs of some lone parents with additional parenting support needs as a key means of supporting and enhancing the rights and needs of children, particularly disadvantaged children.



4. A strong commitment and related plans for integrated state and EU supports to achieve these aims covering the NAPS, The Childcare strategy the ESF, the NDP and the Regional Operational Programmes.

## **Role of One Family**

Finally we wish to emphasise that One Family are willing and able to play a role in achieving these objectives. We in One Family have significant experience of the issues involved in developing and testing such innovatory approaches on a small scale and would be happy to contribute such experience to any large scale initiatives that might result from our proposals.

One Family can:

1. Provide advise, training and support in the development of the proposed models of engagement and in their implementation.
2. We can provide information on the needs of the client group and on the effectiveness of the services provided.
3. We can advocate and field build in the NGO sector in pursuit of these aims through our strong links with other organisation and networks.
4. Participate in the research, monitoring and evaluation process based on our wide ranging experience in this area.

## **Summary of Recommendations using a Life Cycle Approach**

In recognition of our understanding that the social partnership negotiations in relation to social policy are being structured along a life cycle model we summarise our recommendations below, highlighting which stage of the life cycle they relate to.

<b>Income Adequacy</b>	
The OPFP/PA be increased to a level equivalent to 30% of gross average industrial earnings and be maintained at that level.	Working Age
Direct action be taken to address child poverty levels through either significant increase in CDAs or the introduction of a second tier child benefit payment. Such a payment should be labour market status neutral so as not to create another poverty trap.	Children
Adequate income supports be in place to provide those on	Working

low incomes and in part-time employment with an incentive to work through reforms of FIS administrative systems and through a review of FIS and its role in supporting small families. Consideration should also be given to the introduction of refundable tax credits.	Age
Introduction of, with the active engagement of the social partners, specific programmes to support lone parents to remain in employment and to assist them to progress into more meaningful, better paid employment.	Working age

<b>Services</b>	
Extended paid maternity, paternity and parental leave be introduced over the period of the programme with the objective of achieving a year's paid leave.	Working life
Provision of state funded early childhood development and education	Children
The development and implementation of a strategy to address the after school needs of lone parents returning to work or extending their working hours.	Children/Working Age
Development of flexible education and training provision, with childcare support which leads to recognised qualifications and offers a wide variety of time options, part-time, term time etc.	Working Age
Consideration to be given by the social partners to the introduction of a lone parent guarantee and to the provision of customised programmes of supports, including supports when moving on to employment or facing job loss.	Working Age
Development and implementation of supports for lone parents when they are engaging with labour market services, including facilitation, mentoring, and provision of pre-development programmes on a customised basis.	Working Age
Review of the requirements that those granted leave to remain must demonstrate their contribution to Irish society only through participating in paid work, education and training.	Working Age



## Social Innovation

<p>Overall we recommend that resources be allocated within the new social partnership agreement for the development, implementation and evaluation of pilot innovative and relevant models of labour market engagement for lone parents that take into account their parenting roles and responsibilities and are aimed at building up the required supports over time. Such models should be based on sound research on the needs of particularly vulnerable sub-groups of lone parents for whom labour market participation may only be a very long term aim e.g. those with additional caring needs that make regular employment very difficult , recovering drug addicts, teen parents, those with very low educational levels and related problems e.g. literacy.</p>	<p>Working Age</p>
<p>Such models and innovatory approaches should be fully evaluated and where impacts are positive they should be mainstreamed</p>	<p>Working Age</p>
<p>All proposals and plans should be poverty proofed to ensure that they do not create new poverty traps for lone parents.</p>	<p>Working Age/Children</p>
<p>As very significant changes are occurring in society and in how Irish society and the labour market recognises and supports parenting it will be essential that such plans are fully researched and that good practice in other EU countries is identified and built on.</p>	<p>Working Age/Children</p>

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**ENDS**

<p><b>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 &amp; Campaigns Manager, T: 01 662 9212 F: 01 662 9096 E: <a href="mailto:policy@onefamily.ie">policy@onefamily.ie</a></b></p>
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