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An Comhchoiste um Leanaí agus Comhionannas

Tuarascáil maidir le Bochtaineacht agus Díothacht Leanaí

Meitheamh 2026

Joint Committee on Children and Equality

Report on Child Poverty and Deprivation

June 2026

34/CE/05

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Related information

Publications

All publications for this committee are available on the [Oireachtas website](#).

Committee videos

Footage of Committee proceedings can be found on the [Committee videos page](#).

Committee debates

Transcripts of Committee debates can be found on the [Committee debates page](#).

Contact details

The contact details for the Committee can be found on the [Committee page](#).

Orders of Reference

Read the [Orders of Reference](#) for the Committee.

Committee Membership

Cathaoirleach

[Keira Keogh TD](#), Fine Gael

Leas-Chathaoirleach

[Aisling Dempsey TD](#), Fianna Fáil

Members

[Grace Boland TD](#), Fine Gael

[John Connolly TD](#), Fianna Fáil

[Emer Currie TD](#), Fine Gael

[Aidan Farrelly TD](#), Social Democrats

[Claire Kerrane TD](#), Sinn Féin

[Charles Ward TD](#), 100% RDR

[Ruairí Ó Murchú TD](#), Sinn Féin

[Senator Nikki Bradley](#), Fine Gael

[Senator Nessa Cosgrove](#), Labour Party

[Senator Mike Kennelly](#), Fine Gael

[Senator Sharon Keogan](#), Independent

[Senator Margaret Murphy O'Mahony](#), Fianna Fáil

Notes:

1. Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl discharged and Deputy John Connolly appointed to serve in his stead by the Seventh Report of the Dáil Committee of Selection as agreed by Dáil Éireann on 15 January 2026.

Abbreviations

AIM – Access and inclusion model

CRA – Children’s Rights Alliance

CYPSC – Children and Young People’s Services Committees

CSO – Central Statistics Office

DCDE – Department of Children, Disability and Equality

DFI – Disability Federation of Ireland

DRCDG – Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht

DSP – Department of Social Protection

ECCE – Early Childhood Care and Education

ESRI – Economic and Social Research Institute

FRCs – Family Resource Centres

HAP – Housing Assistance Payment

MESL – Minimum Essential Standard of Living

NCS – National Childcare Scheme

PHN – Public Health Nurse

SICAP – Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme

SILC - Survey on Income and Living Condition

SJI – Social Justice Ireland

UNCRC – United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

UNCRPD – United Nations Convention of the Right of Persons with Disabilities

Cathaoirleach's Foreword

The Joint Committee on Children and Equality identified 'Child Poverty and Deprivation' as a key policy priority for the work programme of the Committee and completed a programme of engagements with stakeholders in public and private session, as well as through written submissions.

As a Committee, we are concerned that children have the highest consistent poverty rate, enforced deprivation rate and at risk of poverty rate across all age cohorts with certain groups of children including those in lone-parent households, those living with someone with a disability and those in larger families particularly facing a higher risk of poverty.

Causes and drivers of child poverty and deprivation were identified along with the impacts of poverty on children and the adverse outcomes in almost all aspects of life were emphasised during these engagements

This Report offers a comprehensive set of findings and recommendations, grounded in evidence presented to the Committee, which aim to support Government in combatting the issue of child poverty and deprivation.

Members of the Committee wish to express their gratitude to all witnesses that appeared before the Joint Committee and those who made written submissions, as their contributions assisted Members in their deliberations and analysis. Members would like to especially recognise the engagement in private session with children and young people representing the National Participation Office.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to all the Members of the Committee for their collaboration and contributions towards this report. Members agreed the report on the 16 June 2026.



Keira Keogh TD
Cathaoirleach
16 June 2026

Executive Summary

Child poverty is a complex, multifaceted, multi-dimensional issue that encompasses issues relating to income adequacy, housing and living conditions, health, nutrition, education and care. The intersectional dimension of poverty was identified and that the risk of poverty can be compounded by the intersection of structural inequalities in society.

The Committee engaged with 19 stakeholders during meetings and also received 9 submissions from targeted stakeholders and one voluntary submission. The Committee engaged in private session with a group of children and young people from different areas and backgrounds to ensure that children's views were heard, respected and meaningfully considered in accordance with Article 12 of the UNCRC.

The report includes anti-poverty commitments at both international level, including UNCRC, UNCRPD, and SDGs, as well as national level including Ireland's National Action Plan for the European Children Guarantee and various government strategies and policies. The report outlines the activities and initiatives of the Child Poverty and Well-Being Programme Office.

Data published have identified that children have the highest consistent poverty rate, enforced deprivation rate and at risk of poverty rate across all age cohorts and that the at risk of poverty rate increased to 16.9 percent in 2025. Areas of deprivation have remained constant and there is also a strong spatial dimension to social mobility and economic opportunity. Certain groups of children were identified as facing higher risk of poverty including those in lone-parent households, those living with someone with a disability and those in larger families.

Causes and drivers of child poverty and deprivation were discussed and identified including:

- household income and the cost of living;
- child maintenance payments not being received consistently;
- housing costs and access to secure, stable and affordable housing;
- childcare costs and availability;
- cost of disability and the role disability can play in the risk of poverty;

- educational costs and associated barriers; and
- societal issues.

Consequences of poverty were outlined within the report including the profound and long-lasting effects linked to adverse outcomes in almost all aspects of life including physical and mental health, food poverty and its contribution to poor health, play deprivation and the associated impact on a child's development, and the economic barriers to participation.

The engagement with children and young people emphasised the impact of poverty and deprivation on their lives which included by their basic needs not being met, curtailing their participation in activities, and also impacts their well-being and self-esteem. The priority topics identified by the children and young people were healthcare, essentials and education with the concerns and recommendations being made to the Committee outlined within the report.

Details of strategies and initiatives that play a role in developing and delivering measures aimed at reducing disadvantage, supporting children living in poverty and deprivation, and enable positive childhood experiences were presented to the Committee and included in the report. Supports and services are a vital means of addressing adversity and poverty in childhood and the services brought to the Committee were described including supports and services provided by Tusla, Family Resource Centres, home visiting programmes, as well as other initiatives including play initiatives.

Pathways and responses to child poverty and deprivation were considered in both oral evidence and written submission to the Committee. Of particular importance was the view that child poverty cannot be effectively addressed without addressing the structural causes of poverty experienced by their families and communities. It was identified that the best way to protect a child is to strengthen the family's capabilities and support the family, including creating conditions to allow families to flourish.

Suggestions presented and discussed during the Committee's deliberations and outlined within the report include:

- additional data and indicators;
- strategic thinking;
- child rights budgeting;
- investment in public services;
- co-ordinated, multi-agency action and cross departmental approaches;
- multi-annual funding and the co-ordination of funding at the governance level nationally;
- integration within administrative processes;
- focused, targeted and strategic interventions;
- integrated and innovative responses including single point of access to supports;
- prevention and early intervention;
- in-kind benefits;
- health and developmental supports and a dedicated public health nurse for children and families;
- tackling inequality at pre-school level, and a universal legal entitlement to pre-school;
- funding for early years sector, the building of capacity and accessibility, and
- practical supports to assist with access to early childhood education and care;
- positive strengths-based approach to family and parenting supports;
- expansion of the family resource centres;
- narrowing the gap between educational attainment between those growing up in financially advantaged and disadvantaged households;
- targeted welfare payments to low-income families with children;
- secure employment with decent remuneration and working conditions for parents;
- expanded and extended school meals programme;

- access to play spaces and structure activities;
- retention of the Child Poverty and Well-Being Programme Office long-term; and
- a universal youth work model be embedded in community settings.

While Members wish to see the implementation of all 60 recommendations provided for in the report, they are of the view that the following six recommendations should be considered by the relevant Ministers for implementation by the end of 2026:

- Consideration be given to introducing an activities card which would allow every child and young person to choose for themselves a leisure or entertainment activity;
- Child rights budgeting be adopted to implement the recommendation of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and to ensure a sustained focus on child poverty;
- In areas of high level of intergenerational poverty and trauma that increased and targeted resources should be provided, and that a multifaceted, cross-departmental approach be taken;
- Availability of childcare places be increased to assist with addressing inequalities in children's socio-emotional development, and target expansion and investment in areas of high deprivation to support access for the most disadvantaged children and families;
- That the network of Family Resource Centres should continue to increase to provide supports and services to children and families, and that consideration should be given to including a full-time child, youth and family support worker(s) within each FRC; and
- That the implementation of the recommendations of the previous Department of Justice's Review of the Enforcement of Child Maintenance Orders be progressed.

Members would also welcome the prioritisation of the implementation of the following recommendations that:

- The UNCRC be fully incorporated into domestic legislation to promote and protect children's rights, and to ensure compliance with obligations including a childhood free from poverty.
- A socio-economic ground for discrimination be included in equality legislation as per the Committee's previous recommendation contained in its report on Pre-Legislative Scrutiny of the General Scheme of the Equality (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2024;
- The commitment to include a statutory duty for cooperation between agencies is fulfilled;
- The use of data be maximised, including integrated data and multiple data sources, to ensure that detailed insights into trends are provided to support evidence-based policy decisions;
- Consideration be given at Government level for the establishment a single Sector or Agency that would allow for a multi-annual funding model, greater sectoral investment, more stable and sustainable funding, and centralised commissioning;
- The need for Government Departments to collaborate regarding decisions that can affect criteria or thresholds for schemes and other payments;
- A commitment to integrate early intervention with multi-annual funding for community-led models that are evidence-based and delivered through co-ordinated, cross-sector approaches be adopted;
- Trauma-informed care training be provided for all front-facing services;
- That progress be made towards fulfilling the EU Child Guarantee call for free healthcare for children in need, and that access to health services including GP care, dental, and other health services be progressed;
- That the home visiting programme be expanded and continues to receive strong and increased investment, and that the programmes are expanded to additional departments with cross departmental co-ordination; and

- That consideration should be given to introducing a dedicated public health nurse (PHN) for children in areas with high levels of intergenerational trauma and poverty.

1. Introduction, witnesses, and transcripts

The Committee, in its Work Programme for [2025](#) and [2026](#), identified child poverty and deprivation as a key policy issue for examination. The structural drivers of child poverty, along with related policy measures, fall within the remit of multiple departments. As a result, it was important for the Committee to take account of the matters raised by stakeholders, in both written and oral evidence, even though some of these falls outside the remit of the Committee. The matters contained within this report will be brought to the attention of the relevant Ministers.

Poverty and Deprivation

Child poverty is a complex, multifaceted, and multi-dimensional issue, and is a daily lived reality for many children and families in Ireland. Child poverty deprives children of their basic needs and also of opportunity and reaching their potential.¹ It is driven by structural injustices rooted in the housing crisis, low income and inadequate provision of services for children,² and is a direct consequence of the poverty, social exclusion and inequality experienced by their families, guardians and communities.³ It was stated that child poverty cannot be separated from the poverty experienced by the families to which these children belong.⁴ Furthermore, in written submission it was highlighted that ‘child poverty is family poverty and family poverty is a systemic failure, not a personal one.’⁵ It was suggested that it will take four to five generations to break the cycle of poverty and bring those on lower incomes on par with the median income.⁶

The multi-dimensional and intersectional nature of child poverty and deprivation was highlighted to the Committee. The multi-dimensional aspects were outlined encompassing issues related to income adequacy, housing and living conditions, health, nutrition,

¹ Transcript, 22 January 2026, 2.

² Transcript, 22 January 2026, 2.

³ Community Platform Written Submission, 1.

⁴ SJI Written Submission, 4.

⁵ Family Resources Centre National Forum Written Submission, 4.

⁶ OECD *A Broken Social Elevator? How to Promote Social Mobility*, (OECD Publishing 2018) quoted in CRA Written Submission, 4.

education and care.⁷ The intersectional dimension outlined that the risk of poverty can be compounded by the intersection of structural inequalities in society, such as family status, race or ethnicity, disability, with socio-economic disadvantage and also with each other.⁸

The experience of Pobal, from a grant management and support service perspective, illustrated that children from minority ethnic communities, children with disabilities and children in lone-parent families are particularly likely to experience poverty and exclusion.⁹

Engagement with Stakeholders

The Committee engaged with 19 stakeholders during 5 public meetings and one group in private session; the details are provided Table 1 below.

Table 1: Stakeholders in attendance at public meetings

Date	Witnesses	Official record
9 October 2025	Children’s Rights Alliance (CRA) ▪ Dr Naomi Feely, Policy Director ▪ Dr Siobhan O’Reilly, Senior Education Officer Early Childhood Ireland ▪ Teresa Heeney, Chief Executive Officer ▪ Valerie McArdle, Policy Officer National One Parent Family Alliance ▪ Karen Kiernan, Chief Executive Officer, One Family ▪ Louise Bayliss, Head of Social Justice and Policy, Society of St Vincent de Paul	Transcript

⁷ Community Platform Written Submission, 1.
⁸ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 12; Community Platform Written Submission, 1.
⁹ Pobal Written Submission, 5.

Social Justice Ireland

- Susanne Rogers, Research and Policy Analyst

16 October 2025

**Officials from the Department of Children,
Disability and Equality (DCDE)**[Transcript](#)

- Kevin McCarthy, Secretary General
- Dr Anne-Marie Brooks, Assistant Secretary, Early Learning, Care and School-Age Childcare Division
- Lara Hynes, Assistant Secretary, Child Policy and Tusla Governance Division

**Officials from the Department of Rural and
Community Development and the Gaeltacht
(DRCDG)**

- Mary Hurley, Secretary General
- Deirdre Kelly, Principal Officer, Social Inclusion and Communities Unit

**Officials from the Department of Social
Protection (DSP)**

- Niall Egan, Assistant Secretary, Corporate
- John O'Toole, Principal Officer, Labour Market Policy / Social Inclusion

**Officials from the Child Poverty and Well-Being
Programme Office, Department of the Taoiseach**

- Elizabeth Canavan, Assistant Secretary, Social Policy and Public Sector Reform Division
- Anna Visser, Head of the Child Poverty and Well-being Programme Office

Central Statistics Office (CSO)

- Paul Morrin, Assistant Director General,
Statistical System Co-ordination Unit
- Fiona O’Riordan, Assistant Director
General, Social Statistics

Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI)

- Professor Karina Doorley, Research Area
Co-ordinator Tax, Welfare and Pensions
- Professor Helen Russell, Head of Social
Research Division

25 November
2025

Monaghan Children and Young People’s Services [Transcript](#)
Committee and Monaghan Local Community
Development Committee Local Area Child
Poverty Action Plan Pilot

- Packie Kelly, Manager of Teach na nDaoine
Family Resource Centre
- Collette Deeney, Co-ordinator, Monaghan
Children and Young People’s Services
Committee

Northside Partnership

- Paul Rogers, Chief Executive Officer
- Niall Sexton, Programme Manager,
Preparing for Life Programme

Archways

- Dr Sean McDonnell, Deputy Chief Executive
Officer
- Stephen Coughlan, Manager, Systemic
Family Support

Area Based Childhood (ABC) Programme

- Gavin McGee, Chairperson, ABC Programme Managers Forum
- Catriona Flood, Manager of the Early Learning Initiative

The House - Cox's Demesne Youth and Community Project

- Clodagh O'Mahony, Project Manager

The Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (ISPCC)

- Fiona Jennings, Head of Policy and Public Affairs
- Laura Power, Services Manager

04 December
2025

Minister for Children, Disability and Equality

[Transcript](#)

- Norma Foley T.D., Minister for Children, Disability and Equality

22 January 2026

Ombudsman for Children's Office

[Transcript](#)

- Nuala Ward, Director of Investigations
- Dr Tricia Keilthy, Head of Policy

Tusla, the Child and Family Agency

- Gerry Hone, National Director, Services and Integration
- Cormac Quinlan, Assistant National Director, Practice Reform
- Amy Mulvihill, National Manager for Prevention, Partnership and Family Support
- Eifion Williams, Service Director, Commissioning

- Áine O’Keeffe, Director, Tusla Education Support Service
- Lorna Kavanagh, Interim Service Director, Separated Children Seeking International Protection Service

14 May 2026

Children representing the National Participation Office (private session) n/a

Some organisations in addition to providing an opening statement also provided additional briefing document(s) to the Committee; these documents are referenced in [Appendix 1](#).

The Committee received written submissions from 9 targeted stakeholders. Additionally, one voluntary submission was received. [Appendix 1](#) provides details of the submissions received and considered by the Committee.

2. Commitments, strategy and policy

This section outlines commitments on an international and national level as well as national strategies and policies.

Anti-poverty Commitments

Stakeholders during public meetings and in written submissions to the Committee have referenced and highlighted a number of commitments on child poverty at both an international and national level.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

The [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (UNCRC) is an international human rights treaty that sets out the rights of children and young people under the age of 18. Ireland ratified the UNCRC in 1992 and the Department of Children, Disability and Equality (DCDE) is the co-ordinating department.

Articles from the UNCRC were referenced in testimony and submissions to the Committee and how these can address child poverty and deprivation. The articles cited included:

- [Article 6](#) which provides that the state parties recognise that every child has the inherent right to life and to ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child.
- [Article 12](#) which relates to the right for the child's voice to be heard and that the views of children and young people must be considered in all matters affecting them.¹⁰
- [Article 18](#) includes that both parents have common responsibilities for the upbringing and development of the child, and that parents or legal guardians have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child and that the best interest of the child will be their basic concern.

¹⁰ Article 12, UNCRC [Convention on the Rights of the Child | OHCHR](#)

- [Article 19](#) provides for a child's right to be protected from harm, including the harm caused by poverty and deprivation.¹¹
- [Article 23](#) provides that a disabled child should enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child's active participation in the community.¹²
- [Article 24](#) includes that children have the right to good health.¹³
- [Article 27](#), states are required to ensure that children have an adequate standard of living and have committed to take appropriate measures to assist parents and others responsible for the child to implement this right and shall in case of need provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing.¹⁴
- [Article 28](#) regarding children's right to education was referenced.¹⁵
- [Article 31](#) provides the rights of the child to rest, leisure, play, recreation activities, cultural life and the arts.

In submissions, it was highlighted that the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child in its [Concluding Observations](#) had noted a significant increase in the number of children living in consistent poverty.¹⁶ It recommended that measures to combat poverty comply with a child rights-based approach and include a particular focus on children from disadvantaged families, particularly children of single parents, refugee children, and children from ethnic minorities.¹⁷ Furthermore, it called for Ireland to strengthen its response to child poverty by increasing social benefits, expanding school meals, and addressing the root causes of homelessness.¹⁸

¹¹ Family Resource Centre National Forum Written Submission, 1.

¹² DFI Written Submission, 2.

¹³ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 3.

¹⁴ Article 27, UNCRC [Convention on the Rights of the Child | OHCHR](#)

¹⁵ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 5.

¹⁶ One Family Written Submission, 5.

¹⁷ National Traveller Women's Forum Written Submission, 1; Children's Right Alliance Written Submission, 3.

¹⁸ Children's Right Alliance Written Submission, 3.

It was suggested that incorporation of UNCRC into national legislation would establish a benchmark for how we view children and young people, encourage people to get involved at a grassroots level, introduce the idea of a child's voice having a part to play in how society runs and the approach taken, provide leverage in terms of advocating for the needs for children and young people, and in turn influence Government as it would have to be reflected in public and social policy.¹⁹

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) was described as a 'tool and a barometer' to address and measure progress on poverty for disabled children.²⁰ A number of articles were highlighted by the Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI) including:

- [Article 7](#) which states that children with disabilities should enjoy all the same rights and freedoms as other children; and
- [Article 28](#) which requires state parties to ensure an adequate standard of living of all people with disabilities, including 'adequate food, clothing, and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions'.²¹ The latter article also requires the state to assist with the cost of disabilities.²²

Sustainable Development Goals

The [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) contain 17 goals with a set of 169 targets built on three pillars of sustainable development, namely economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection. There are a number of SDGs that are of relevance in terms of context to this report with reference being made to the goals during the engagement with stakeholders including:

¹⁹ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 19 – 21.

²⁰ DFI Written Submission, 3.

²¹ DFI Written Submission, 3.

²² DFI Written Submission, 3.

- Goal 1 – End poverty in all its forms everywhere;²³
- Goal 2 – End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture;²⁴
- Goal 3 – Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all, at all ages;²⁵
- Goal 4 – Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all;²⁶
- Goal 5 – Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls;²⁷
- Goal 10 – Reduce inequality within and among countries;²⁸
- Goal 11 – Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable;²⁹ and
- Goal 16 - Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.³⁰

The Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment has overall responsibility for promotion and oversight of the implementation across government of the SDGs, including the development of the National Implementation Plans and reporting frameworks.³¹ The Joint Committee engages at least once a year with its line Department seeking an update on progression of the SDGs relevant to the Committee.

²³ Community Platform Written Submission, 1; DFI Written Submission, 3; Family Resource Centre National Forum Written Submission, 1.

²⁴ Family Resource Centre National Forum Written Submission, 1.

²⁵ Family Resource Centre National Forum Written Submission, 1.

²⁶ Family Resource Centre National Forum Written Submission, 1.

²⁷ Family Resource Centre National Forum Written Submission, 1.

²⁸ Family Resource Centre National Forum Written Submission, 1.

²⁹ Family Resource Centre National Forum Written Submission, 1.

³⁰ Family Resource Centre National Forum Written Submission, 1; Transcript, 20 November 2025, 6.

³¹ DCDE Briefing Note, 16 October 2025, 3; DCDE Briefing Note, 4 December 2025, 3.

EU Child Guarantee

The text of the Recommendation for a [European Child Guarantee](#) was adopted by the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO) on 14 June 2021. The objective of the European Child Guarantee is to prevent and combat social exclusion by guaranteeing effective access of children in need to a set of key services namely, free early childhood education and care, education, healthcare, healthy nutrition and adequate housing.³² Ireland's [National Action Plan](#) was published in 2022 which is considered an important initial step in the implementation of the EU Child Guarantee.

Government strategies and policy

It was stated that addressing child poverty is a whole-of-government priority, spotlighted in Young Ireland, the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2023-2028. This is also reflected in the establishment of the Child Poverty and Well-Being Programme Office in the Department of the Taoiseach.³³ Members of the Committee agree with this view and welcome the establishment of the Programme Office.

First Five: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families

[First 5](#) is Ireland's first ever cross-departmental strategy to support babies, young children and their families. The plan includes high level policy commitments and strategic actions to improve the lives of babies and children and their families, including measures to tackle early childhood poverty.

³² [European Child Guarantee - Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion](#)

³³ Transcript, 16 October 2025,3.

Young Ireland, National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2023 – 2028

[Young Ireland](#) identified child poverty as a key issue facing Ireland, with traveller children identified as a priority group.³⁴ The Child Poverty and Well-Being Programme Office was included as a spotlight within the framework.³⁵

Roadmap for Social Inclusion

The [Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020 - 2025](#) was a whole-of-Government strategy which aimed to reduce consistent poverty to 2 per cent or less, and to make Ireland one of the most socially inclusive countries in the EU.³⁶ The roadmap had seven goals with 81 commitments across areas such as income support, employment, disability, older people, education, childcare, housing, community development, and transport.³⁷ At the end of quarter two of 2025, 62 commitments were fully achieved or achieved with ongoing delivery, 3 commitments were in progress and on schedule with ongoing delivery, and 16 commitments were in progress.³⁸ This strategy included the previous child poverty target and a commitment to the development of a new target.

The Department of Social Protection (DSP) is developing a successor strategy, and publication is expected in the first half of 2026.³⁹ Public consultation took place in 2025, with additional consultation conducted prior to, and during the DSP's Social Inclusion Forum.⁴⁰ A series of regional workshops were held in advance of the Forum to ensure that the voices of those experiencing poverty and social exclusion were reflected.⁴¹

³⁴ National Traveller Women's Forum Written Submission, 2.

³⁵ Young Ireland, 42 – 44; Transcript, 4 December 2025, 2.

³⁶ DSP Written Submission, 16 October 2025, 1; One Family Written Submission, 4.

³⁷ DSP Written Submission, 16 October 2025, 1.

³⁸ DSP Written Submission, 16 October 2025, 1.

³⁹ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 6; DSP Written Submission, 1.

⁴⁰ DSP Written Submission, 16 October 2025, 1.

⁴¹ DSP Written Submission, 16 October 2025, 1.

National Policy Framework on Alternative Care

The consultation process for the new plan for children in the care system was recently announced with the aim of improving the experiences and outcomes of the children, young people and families known to the alternative care system.⁴² It was emphasised that the voices and views of children and young people will be at its core from development to delivery.⁴³

National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People

The [National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People](#) was also referenced during the Committee's consideration of the topic. It was stated that this strategy recognises some of the challenges that disabled people specifically have in terms of income deprivation and sets objectives to address those challenges.⁴⁴

National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy II

The [National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy II 2024 – 2028](#), led by the DCDE, is a whole-of-government approach to improving the lives of the Traveller and Roma communities in Ireland, including children, with a key focus on addressing inequalities experienced in terms of health, education, employment, and accommodation using a social determinant approach.⁴⁵ It was highlighted that a commitment to ensure that children and young people from the Traveller and Roma communities live in a safe and secure environment is included in the Strategy.⁴⁶

Child Poverty and Well-Being Programme Office

The establishment of the Child Poverty and Well-Being Programme Office in the Department of the Taoiseach reflects that child poverty is a whole-of-government priority.⁴⁷

⁴² Transcript, 4 December 2025, 3.

⁴³ Transcript, 4 December 2025, 3.

⁴⁴ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 33.

⁴⁵ Transcript, 4 December 2025, 4; DCDE Briefing Note, 16 October 2025, 20; DCDE Briefing Note, 4 December 2025, 36.

⁴⁶ National Traveller Women's Forum Written Submission, 2.

⁴⁷ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 3.

The role of the programme office is to monitor and support the implementation of relevant, existing, and future government strategies, and to co-ordinate and prioritise action across government in areas that have the greatest impact for children and families experiencing poverty.⁴⁸ An element of the creation of the programme office was for a whole-of-government view above individual departmental interests and to examine cross-government action on child poverty.⁴⁹ The Child Poverty and Well-Being Programme Office has worked with colleagues to identify where children in poverty are falling behind and to develop effective measures that can be prioritised during the estimates process.⁵⁰

The first programme plan was published in August 2023 and contained six priorities, including income support and joblessness, early learning and childcare, the cost of education, family homelessness, service integration, and participation in arts, culture, and sport, and identified a number of strategic initiatives.⁵¹ The programme plan also commits to four strategic initiatives including a focus on child poverty in the annual Budget, a change programme to support service integration, cross-government tools to enhance policy and implementation, and an initiative on child services workforce development.⁵² Benefits of this office outlined to the Committee included: the generation of space and context for new and innovative responses to emerge, enhancing the visibility of the impact of child poverty and the complexity of need, and has assisted in prioritising issues during the budgetary process.⁵³

A [dashboard of indicators](#) has been developed to support the new child poverty target with a focus on the multi-dimensional, outcome-focused view of children's well-being and will assist with understanding inequalities in outcomes for children living in poverty.⁵⁴ In written evidence, the creation of the dashboard was described as an important step towards understanding poverty in a holistic manner and it was noted that additional

⁴⁸ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 6; Child Poverty and Well Being Programme Office Written Submission, 1.

⁴⁹ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 23.

⁵⁰ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 18.

⁵¹ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 6; Child Poverty and Well Being Programme Office Written Submission, 1.

⁵² Child Poverty and Well Being Programme Office Written Submission, 1.

⁵³ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 23.

⁵⁴ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 6.

indicators with targets are particularly important.⁵⁵ It was highlighted that no single measure of child poverty will capture its multi-dimensional nature, and that there is a risk if the consistent poverty measure is relied upon that some children may not be identified, additional important determinants of poverty may not be fully recognised, and that the effectiveness of the policy response would be inhibited.⁵⁶

The dashboard is intended to capture in-kind supports and assess measures supporting families living in poverty, with a focus on children's participation across groups, areas, and cohorts.⁵⁷ It will include a range of indicators including income, early learning and care, education, housing and homelessness, health, and participation, including measures that reduce family costs and their impact on children's outcomes.⁵⁸ The analysis will compare outcomes for different cohorts, particularly children at risk of poverty versus those who are not across areas such as health, education, and participation in physical, sport, and leisure activities.⁵⁹

One of the key initiatives of the programme office highlighted to the Committee is an analysis of new and enhanced budget measures to monitor the focus on child poverty in each budget.⁶⁰ It was noted that in advance of Budgets, the programme office engages with all relevant departments to discuss their spending plans in relation to child poverty and well-being.⁶¹ Following each Budget the programme office publishes a report that outlines new or increased spending to address child poverty in the six priority areas, and tries to capture, in addition to income supports, the range of other measures and makes a distinction between measures to help families on a day-to-day basis and indirect measures such as the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP).⁶²

The programme office has established a cross-government network, comprising of all of the civil and public service organisations, to strengthen connections across the public service

⁵⁵ Pobal Written Submission, 3.

⁵⁶ Pobal Written Submission, 3.

⁵⁷ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 11.

⁵⁸ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 15.

⁵⁹ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 15; Transcript, 16 October 2025, 18; Transcript, 16 October 2025, 29.

⁶⁰ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 6.

⁶¹ Child Poverty and Well Being Programme Office Written Submission, 1.

⁶² Transcript, 16 October 2025, 15; Child Poverty and Well Being Programme Office Written Submission, 1.

and has resulted in greater cooperation across departments, agencies and service providers.⁶³ It was outlined that a wide range of topics have been considered at network meetings including children's services workforce, children's participation in arts, culture and sport, and service integration.⁶⁴ It was noted that the community and voluntary sector was invited to these events to raise matters of concern or to showcase work that could assist with the transformation of current models of practice or assist with the creation of new approaches.⁶⁵ A series of action learning sets have also been facilitated where policymakers and practitioners attempt to solve some of the more intractable problems they encounter in the course of their work.⁶⁶

An annual summit, hosted by the Taoiseach, provides a space for reflection, shared learning and forward planning.⁶⁷ It was highlighted that all of civil society has the opportunity to participate and that listening, comment, and critique is part of the event's open environment.⁶⁸ A youth advisory group, established through Hub na nÓg and the National Participation Office, was set up to inform the Child Poverty and Well-Being Summit held in 2025, and the group has been invited to support DCDE in creating opportunities for other young people to share their views.⁶⁹ The group were given the opportunity to put questions directly to four Ministers during a panel discussion.⁷⁰

Progress reports are also published, and it was highlighted that the first such report identified that cross-government collaborations had been strengthened, policy coherence was improved, and that focus on the six priorities had been sharpened.⁷¹

⁶³ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 6 – 7; Transcript, 16 October 2025, 23.

⁶⁴ Child Poverty and Well Being Programme Office Written Submission, 1.

⁶⁵ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 23.

⁶⁶ Child Poverty and Well Being Programme Office Written Submission, 1.

⁶⁷ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 7.

⁶⁸ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 23.

⁶⁹ DCDE Briefing Note, 16 October 2025, 15; DCDE Briefing Note, 4 December 2025, 29.

⁷⁰ Child Poverty and Well Being Programme Office Written Submission, 1.

⁷¹ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 7; Child Poverty and Well Being Programme Office Written Submission, 1.

3. Causes and drivers of child poverty and deprivation

This section provides a summary of the causes and drivers of child poverty and deprivation that were presented to the Committee in both oral and written evidence.

Scale of the problem

The Survey on Income and Living Condition (SILC) is an annual voluntary longitudinal survey of households conducted by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) and covers a broad range of issues including income and living conditions.⁷² This survey provides data on income, including gross income on a household and individual level,⁷³ and key indicators.⁷⁴ Every three years a module on children is included in the survey; the most recent was part of SILC 2024.⁷⁵ Data, including that of the SILC 2024, Census 2022, Pobal HP Deprivation Index, were provided by a number of stakeholders which indicated the scale of child poverty and deprivation in Ireland, and also the strong spatial dimension to social mobility and economic opportunity in Ireland.⁷⁶ [Appendix 2](#) contains an outline of the deprivation rates and differences between national and Eurostat data, as well as the data presented to the Committee in written submission and oral evidence. During the Committee's consideration of the topic [SILC 2025](#) was published and included the following analysis:

- Children (0 to 17 years old) have the highest consistent poverty rate, enforced deprivation rate, and at risk of poverty rate across all age cohorts;
- At risk of poverty rate increased from 15.3 per cent in 2024 to 16.9 per cent in 2025;
- Enforced deprivation rate reduced from 21.2 per cent in 2024 to 19.6 per cent in 2025; and
- Consistent poverty rate decreased from 8.5 per cent in 2024 to 7.8 per cent in 2025.

⁷² CSO Written Submission, 1; DSP Written Submission, 2. Transcript, 16 October 2025, 7.

⁷³ For further information on gross income see CSO Written Submission, 1 – 2.

⁷⁴ CSO Written Submission, 1.

⁷⁵ CSO Written Submission, 5.

⁷⁶ Transcript, 9 October 2025; Pobal written submission, 6

It was noted that SILC does not provide detail of rates of poverty or deprivation amongst members of the Traveller or Roma communities.⁷⁷ It was stated that the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights estimates that 31 per cent of traveller households experience severe material deprivation including 28 per cent of traveller households with children.⁷⁸

Consistent poverty has been designated as the national child poverty indicator.⁷⁹ It was stated that this metric identifies the number of people that face the most significant and prolonged hardship, poverty and social exclusion.⁸⁰ It was highlighted that this measure captures the proportion of children who are living in households experiencing both income inadequacy and material deprivation simultaneously.⁸¹ The view was expressed that this measure identifies the children experiencing the most extreme version of poverty.⁸² Although prolonged and persistent poverty is a serious concern, recent evidence from Growing Up in Ireland indicates that even one episode of poverty can have detrimental effects on children's developmental outcomes.⁸³

Findings from the SILC '[Module on the Impact of Childhood Poverty Experiences on Adult Life 2023](#)' gave insight into how financial hardships during adolescence can influence various aspects of adult life including:

- significant economic challenges, shown by adults aged 25 to 59 who perceived their teenage household financial situation as poor, or bad, are at a higher risk of living in poverty, than those who viewed their teenage finances as good (16 per cent compared to 8.3 per cent at risk of poverty and 34.9 per cent in contrast to 10.3 per cent experience enforced deprivation);

⁷⁷ CRA Written Submission, 3.

⁷⁸ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights quoted in Community Platform Written Submission, 3.

⁷⁹ CSO Written Submission, 4.

⁸⁰ One Family Written Submission, 4.

⁸¹ Pobal Written Submission, 4.

⁸² Pobal Written Submission, 4.

⁸³ Pobal Written Submission, 4.

- Educational attainment, illustrated by 38.7 per cent of those with financially strained teenage years achieving third-level education, in contrast to 64.1 per cent from better-off backgrounds;
- Impact of educational attainment on employment opportunities, with those from poorer teenage households more likely to be unemployed or unable to work due to long-standing health problems; and
- disparities in well-being and health, including overall life satisfaction, fair or bad health, and long-term health implications linked to childhood financial hardship.⁸⁴

The [Children and Young Persons Data Hub](#), developed by the CSO with support from DCDE and Department of the Taoiseach, will be a source of key information using latest data from all public service bodies.⁸⁵

Spatial Dimension

The [Pobal HP Deprivation Index](#) is Ireland's primary social gradient tool based on the latest Census data, Census 2022, and reveals the profile of communities throughout Ireland. It assesses levels of disadvantage across Ireland using ten key indicators. These indicators include educational attainment, employment status, and the proportion of people living in individual households. Almost 19,000 small areas (50-200 households) were indexed leading to the development of a [detailed map](#) of the relative affluence and disadvantage.

Data provided to the Committee highlighted that close to 200,000 people are currently living in areas which are very disadvantaged, 16 of whom 43,573 were under 18 (including 11,777 children within the First Five policy age range) as of April 2022.⁸⁶ In addition, there are 522,793 people living in areas classed as disadvantaged, of whom 113,844 were aged under 18 (including 32,595 under six).⁸⁷ It was noted that these areas are in both urban and rural settings and are characterised by concentrated unemployment, low education

⁸⁴ SJI Written Submission, 3; CRA Written Submission, 4.

⁸⁵ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 8.

⁸⁶ Pobal Written Submission, 6.

⁸⁷ Pobal Written Submission, 6.

attainment, higher rates of low-skilled work and greater numbers of single-parent families.⁸⁸

Using four waves of Census data, it has been found that areas of deprivation have stayed constant over time.⁸⁹ In evidence to the Committee, findings from an area profile of north Dundalk completed in September 2025, commissioned by community-based projects and Louth CYPSC, showed that 5 of the 15 areas remained the same as the 2016 census with 10 moving to a greater level of disadvantage.⁹⁰ Progress on measures such as access to third level, employment growth and expansion of professional managerial roles have not been shared equally across all communities and as a result contributes to entrenched deprivation.⁹¹

In Ireland, there is a strong spatial dimension to social mobility and economic opportunity although not all children who are income poor will be living in a disadvantaged area.⁹² In evidence to the Committee, the changing landscape of children living in poverty was noted along with a growing divide between affluent and disadvantaged areas.⁹³ Linked with entrenched deprivation areas, life for children has been relatively constant.⁹⁴ High concentration of poverty in some areas, combined with persistent intergenerational poverty, are causing these communities to become increasingly entrenched in chronic poverty.⁹⁵

Research has found that in the most disadvantaged areas:

- People are much less likely to rate their health positively;
- People are twice as likely to report having a disability compared to their peers in affluent areas;

⁸⁸ Pobal Written Submission, 6.

⁸⁹ Pobal Written Submission, 6.

⁹⁰ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 7.

⁹¹ Pobal Written Submission, 9.

⁹² Pobal Written Submission, 6.

⁹³ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 7.

⁹⁴ Pobal Written Submission, 9.

⁹⁵ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 7.

- Children are more likely to have disabilities than their peers growing up in the most affluent areas;
- The disability rate of children and young people in very disadvantaged areas is equivalent to that of older people in very affluent areas; and
- a heightened community health burden has been documented with an increase over time in poor health are most pronounced in the most deprived areas.⁹⁶

It was commented that this research gives an insight into the stark difference in quality of life for children in the most disadvantaged communities compared to the rest of the country.⁹⁷ Additionally, it was acknowledged that children and young people in Traveller and Roma families face extreme disadvantage, inequalities and intergenerational disadvantage across a range of indicators including health, education, employment and accommodation.⁹⁸

Risk of poverty

Certain groups of children face a much higher risk of poverty including those in lone-parent households, those living with someone with a disability and those in larger families.⁹⁹

One-parent families

Children in one-parent families are the most impacted by poverty and deprivation, and they are disproportionately affected by the housing crisis.¹⁰⁰

One-parent families have a heightened vulnerability to poverty due to the dual burden of caregiving and sole financial responsibility.¹⁰¹ Data presented to the Committee highlighted that children in one-parent households experience poverty and deprivation at higher rates than two parent families:

⁹⁶ Pobal (2024) Disability and Deprivation: Investigating the Relationship between Health Inequalities and Geographic Disadvantage using the Pobal HP Deprivation Index; 18Devlin, A., Whelan, A. and McGuinness, S. (2025) Barriers to social inclusion in Ireland: Change over time and space, 2016-2022, Pobal and ESRI both quoted in Pobal Written Submission, 9.

⁹⁷ Pobal Written Submission, 9.

⁹⁸ Transcript, 4 December 2025, 4. Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 11.

⁹⁹ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 9.

¹⁰⁰ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 6.

¹⁰¹ SPARK Written Submission, 1.

- Children living in one-parent households are almost three times more likely to experience deprivation as their peers living in two-parent households;¹⁰²
- The at risk of poverty rate for children in single-adult households is 24.2 per cent compared to 12.6 per cent in two-parent households;¹⁰³
- The Consistent poverty rate for children in one-parent families is 11 per cent compared to 6 per cent for two-parent families;¹⁰⁴
- The enforced deprivation rate of lone-parent households was 46.3 per cent in 2024 compared to 16.2 per cent for children in two-parent households;¹⁰⁵ and
- Lone parents with a disability have a significantly higher risk of economic vulnerability and lone mothers with disabilities are disproportionately affected by economic vulnerability.¹⁰⁶

Key drivers of poverty among one-parent families identified in evidence to the Committee include:

- Paying social housing rent and high landlord top-ups, as Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) limits do not reflect current market rents;¹⁰⁷
- Erosion of income supports as identified by the decrease in the income disregard for the one-parent family allowance, as a lone parent was permitted to work at the minimum wage 26.25 hours in 2000, in 2025 this had decreased to 12.22 hours, and has further decreased in Budget 2026 to 11.66 hours;¹⁰⁸
- Child maintenance payments not received regularly highlighted by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) Growing Up in Ireland survey found that 50 per cent of lone parents received no maintenance, 36 to 38 per cent received regular payments, and the remaining receive ad hoc payments;¹⁰⁹ and

¹⁰² Transcript, 9 October 2025, 4; CRA Written Submission, 5.

¹⁰³ SILC 2024 quoted in Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 10; CRA Written Submission, 3; One Parent Family Written Submission, 6.

¹⁰⁴ SILC 2024 quoted in Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 10; CRA Written Submission, 5.

¹⁰⁵ SILC 2024 quoted in: Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 11; CRA Written Submission, 5. Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 8; One Parent Family Written Submission, 5; SPARK Written Submission, 3.

¹⁰⁶ ESRI (2024) Lone parent transitions, employment transitions and poverty outcomes quoted in DFI Written Submission, 7.

¹⁰⁷ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 7.

¹⁰⁸ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 7. Transcript, 9 October 2025, 17; CRA Written Submission, 6; SPARK Written Submission, 5.

¹⁰⁹ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 7; Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 20; One Family Written Submission, 7; SPARK Written Submission, 3.

- Many lone parents are disproportionately employed in inflexible and low-paid sectors such as the hospitality, retail and care sectors, and work outside the core hours offered by most childcare providers.¹¹⁰

Other matters raised included that lone parents are not entitled to the living alone allowance or the household benefits package,¹¹¹ the treatment of child maintenance by Government Departments for secondary payments and its inclusion in relation to housing being specifically mentioned;¹¹² access and cost barriers to early years and school age children,¹¹³ the loss of access to jobseeker's transition payment when their children turn 14,¹¹⁴ and that full-time, well-paid employment is not within the reach of lone parents with lower educational attainment.¹¹⁵ A positive change identified was how the payment of child maintenance is treated by the DSP;¹¹⁶ it was described as a landmark reform.¹¹⁷

Lone parents often remain in-work poverty unless they can secure better-paid flexible roles or limit their employment or exit the workforce to meet childcare needs.¹¹⁸ The rate of in-work poverty among lone parents more than doubled from 9 per cent in 2012 to over 20 per cent in 2019.¹¹⁹

Disability

In written submission to the Committee, it was noted that children with disabilities are likely to experience significant poverty and exclusion.¹²⁰ From a recent report it was highlighted that seven per cent of children who are experiencing socio-economic disadvantage have a reported disability and that 7.2 per cent of all children receiving

¹¹⁰ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 7; SPARK Written Submission, 4.

¹¹¹ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 7; Transcript, 9 October 2025, 13.

¹¹² Transcript, 9 October 2025, 7; Transcript, 9 October 2025, 10; Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 21.

¹¹³ One Family Written Submission, 7.

¹¹⁴ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 13; Spark Written Submission, 6.

¹¹⁵ One Family Written Submission, 7.

¹¹⁶ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 7.

¹¹⁷ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 21.

¹¹⁸ SPARK Written Submission, 4.

¹¹⁹ SPARK Written Submission, 6.

¹²⁰ Pobal Written Submission, 5.

means-tested support on NCS are also receiving targeted disability supports through the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM).¹²¹

The cost of disability was emphasised by stakeholders during their engagement with the Committee. Reports including *The Cost of Disability in Ireland*,¹²² *Care at Home – Costs of Care Arising from Disability*,¹²³ and *Adjusting estimates of poverty for the cost of disability*¹²⁴ have highlighted the additional financial cost associated with having a disability. The latter report has found that:

- Disabled households are more likely than other household types to be at risk of poverty and have a lower standard of living;
- Disabled people face average weekly extra costs of €488 to €555;
- Disabled households require between 41 per cent to 93 per cent extra disposable income to achieve the same standard of living as a similar household with no disabled members;
- Disabled people's at risk of poverty rate is higher (24 per cent) than non-disabled people's (10 per cent); and
- When Cost of Disability is included the at risk of poverty rate increases from 65 per cent to 76 per cent.¹²⁵

Children in households where at least one person is classified as having a disability are at a much higher risk of poverty and higher material deprivation rate. Data supporting this includes:

- children in households with a member with a disability have a 7.1 percentage points higher risk of being income poor than those in households without a member with disabilities, and a 14.7 percentage points higher risk of deprivation compared to non-disabled households;¹²⁶

¹²¹ Pobal (2024) Disability and Deprivation: Investigating the Relationship between Health Inequalities and Geographic Disadvantage using the Pobal HP Deprivation Index quoted in Pobal Written Submission, 5.

¹²² Indecon (2021), *The Cost of Disability in Ireland* cited in DFI Written Submission, 3.

¹²³ Family Carers Ireland (2022), *Care at Home – Costs of Care Arising from Disability* cited in DFI Written Submission, 4.

¹²⁴ ESRI (2025), *Adjusting estimates of poverty for the cost of disability*, DFI Written Submission, 4.

¹²⁵ ESRI (2025), *Adjusting estimates of poverty for the cost of disability*, referenced in DFI Written Submission, 5.

¹²⁶ ESRI (2025), Child poverty on the island of Ireland, quoted in DFI Written Submission, 7.

- 39 per cent of children in the deprived not at risk of poverty group are living in households where at least one member over the age of 16 has a disability; this compares to 42 per cent of those in consistent poverty, 23 per cent at risk of poverty not deprived and 21 per cent neither deprived nor at risk of poverty;¹²⁷ and
- Households with an adult unable to work due to long standing health problem(s) had an at risk of poverty rate of about 32.5 per cent and a consistent poverty rate of 19 per cent.¹²⁸

A lack of services for children with disabilities, including early interventions and health services, was addressed in written submission to the Committee, highlighting that children with disabilities do not have the same experience of childhood.¹²⁹

In recent research, the link between disability and child poverty has been emphasised, including the role disability can play in the risk of poverty,¹³⁰ the extra costs disabled households live with, and the deprivation this can cause,¹³¹ and that for lone-parent households the effect is greater.¹³² Families caring for a person with a disability face extra costs and barriers to employment which increases the risk of poverty for children, and large families and those with special care needs often experiencing material deprivation.¹³³ In an EU context, Ireland has very low employment rates of people with disabilities.¹³⁴

Collectively, the evidence provided to the Committee highlights the cost of disability and that children who have a parent or guardian with a disability, children with disabilities, or children with a disability who have a parent or guardian also with a disability are more likely to live in deprivation and/or poverty.

¹²⁷ ESRI (2025), Deprived children in Ireland: Characterising those who are deprived but not income-poor, cited in DFI Written Submission, 8.

¹²⁸ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 11.

¹²⁹ DFI Written Submission, 5 – 6.

¹³⁰ ESRI (2024), *Lone parent transitions, employment transitions and poverty outcomes*, cited in DFI Written Submission, 7.

¹³¹ ESRI (2025), Deprived children in Ireland: Characterising those who are deprived but not income poor, x cited in DFI Written Submission, 8.

¹³² ESRI (2025), *Child poverty on the island of Ireland*, 47, 50, 52 cited in DFI Written Submission, 7.

¹³³ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 11.

¹³⁴ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 15.

Structural Drivers

Structural drivers of child poverty were identified including: inadequate household income, housing insecurity and high housing costs, childcare barriers, education inequality, health and wellbeing disparities, and unequal access to services and social participation.¹³⁵

Household Income

Adequate income was identified as fundamental to preventing poverty; however, many families with children do not have sufficient income to cover basic living costs regardless of whether their income comes from work, social welfare or both.¹³⁶ It was noted that the cost of essential goods and services has risen by approximately 17 per cent since 2020 which has eroded the real value of welfare supports.¹³⁷

Social Justice Ireland (SJI) expressed the view that adequate levels of social welfare are essential to addressing poverty and emphasised the need for sustainable solutions, over reliance on short-term interventions.¹³⁸ It was commented that social welfare rates fall short of living costs.¹³⁹

Data from DSP's Annual Statistics Report 2024 was cited in evidence to the committee which included that:

- Over 3.5 million people (approximately 66 per cent of the population) are in receipt of some form of social welfare payment;
- Child related payments totalled over €3.2 billion; and
- Child benefit was paid to over 675,000 families for 1.3 million children at a cost of over €2.5 billion.

In evidence to the Committee it was emphasised that the measures that work within the social welfare system are targeted measures; examples from Budget 2026 highlighted

¹³⁵ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 11 – 12.

¹³⁶ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 12.

¹³⁷ SVP report quoted in SPARK Written Submission, 4.

¹³⁸ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 3.

¹³⁹ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 12.

included child support payment and working family payment.¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, it was stated that since 2018, child support payment for over 12s has increased by 162 per cent, and core social welfare, weekly social welfare rates have increased by 33 per cent.¹⁴¹

Additionally, it was commented that the child-specific measures in Budget 2026 were quite well targeted but that a large decrease in the child at risk of poverty rates for 2026 was not predicted, due to the withdrawal of the package of supports for cost of living measures.¹⁴²

The predicted number of children that would be lifted out of poverty by Budget 2026 was estimated at 2,000.¹⁴³

Cost of Living

Barnardo's in its written submission to the committee highlighted the insights of the organisation's fourth cost of living report titled [*Cost of Living Crisis Impact on Children 2025*](#). The report included a survey of 1,000 parents and the findings include that a large proportion of families consistently went without essentials:

- More than half reduced or went without social activities;
- 18 per cent cut back or went without heating;
- 17 per cent cut back or went without electricity;
- 19 per cent cut back or went without food; and
- 41 per cent cut back or went without clothing.¹⁴⁴

Furthermore, it was noted that 78 per cent stated that cost of living issues negatively affected the children in their care, with almost one in five stating that it has significantly negatively affected them.¹⁴⁵ The groups identified as being at most risk of having to cut back, or go without essentials were young parents, lone parents, and families with more than two children.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁰ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 10.

¹⁴¹ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 26.

¹⁴² Transcript, 16 October 2025, 30.

¹⁴³ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 30.

¹⁴⁴ Cost of Living Crisis Impact on Children 2025 referenced in Barnardo's Written Submission, 1.

¹⁴⁵ Barnardo's Written Submission, 2.

¹⁴⁶ Barnardo's Written Submission, 2.

It was stated that the spike in energy and food prices had the greatest impact on poorer families as they spend a larger share of income on these basics.¹⁴⁷ The Commission for Regulation of Utilities reported in February 2026 that there were over 316,000 households in arrears on their electricity bills and approximately 179,500 in arrears on their gas bills; that equates to around 14% of all domestic electricity customers and 26% of domestic gas customers.¹⁴⁸ It was highlighted that based on data for 2024, one parent families are nearly four times as likely to be behind on utilities as two parent families.¹⁴⁹ CSO reported that 8.2 per cent went without heat on a cold day at some point in 2024 in contrast to one in five for one parent families.¹⁵⁰ One proposed solution was to reduce the cost of essential goods and services.¹⁵¹ Another highlighted the importance of targeting financial relief measures at families with children and especially one-parent families.¹⁵²

Minimum Essential Standard of Living

The Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) research, from the Vincentian partnership for Social Justice, represents the cost of a basket of goods and services that members of the public have agreed are essential for a decent minimum standard of living in Ireland.¹⁵³ The series captures changes on an annual basis; the most recent iteration is [MESL 2025](#).

It was highlighted to the Committee that the cost of raising a child increases significantly with age.¹⁵⁴ In 2025, the weekly cost of essential needs for children was reported as follows:

- €72 for a pre-school age child;
- €98 for a primary school age child; and
- €158 for a secondary school age child.¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁷ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 13.

¹⁴⁸ [CRU202654_Arrears_and_NPA_disconnection_update_February.pdf](#)

¹⁴⁹ SPARK Written Submission, 7.

¹⁵⁰ One Parent Family Written Submission, 6.

¹⁵¹ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 13.

¹⁵² SPARK Written Submission, 7.

¹⁵³ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 9.

¹⁵⁴ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 9.

¹⁵⁵ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 9 – 10.

It was argued that MESL research has consistently identified older children as having additional and distinct needs in comparison with younger children.¹⁵⁶ MESL report shows that social welfare supports covers 113 per cent of babies' needs, 115 per cent of preschool needs, 88 per cent for children in primary school, and 64 per cent of the minimum costs of children and young people attending second level.¹⁵⁷ Inadequacy of income available for families with older children and those headed by one adult was highlighted to the Committee.¹⁵⁸ An example cited was of a lone parent with one primary and one secondary child would need €555 per week to meet MESL costs and that welfare income at current rates would cover 82 per cent of their basic needs.¹⁵⁹ Deep income inadequacy, having less than 90 per cent of MESL needs, was noted as widespread with many welfare dependent families, especially those larger or one-parent families, affected.¹⁶⁰ Additionally, it was noted that current social welfare support does not fully account for the higher costs for older children.¹⁶¹

Budget 2026

It was highlighted to the Committee that Budget 2026 contained a comprehensive range of measures targeted at reducing child poverty amounting to a total investment of €320 million.¹⁶² The measures include:

- child support payment increased;
- €5 increase in fuel allowance;
- €60 increase in weekly income thresholds for the working family payment for all family sizes;
- Back-to-school clothing and footwear allowance extended to children aged two and three, if eligible for the allowance;
- Back-to-work family dividend scheme extended to people in receipt of disability allowance and the blind pension;

¹⁵⁶ CRA Written Submission, 5.

¹⁵⁷ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 4. Transcript, 9 October 2025, 7; Transcript, 9 October 2025, 22; Community Platform Written Submission, 4; St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 10; CRA Written Submission, 5.

¹⁵⁸ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 4.

¹⁵⁹ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 10.

¹⁶⁰ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 10.

¹⁶¹ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 10.

¹⁶² Transcript, 16 October 2025, 5; DSP Written Submission, 2.

- People in receipt of disability allowance, or the blind pension will be able to retain the fuel allowance payment for five years after they exit those payments and go into employment; and
- Enhanced wage subsidy scheme to encourage more employers to recruit people with disabilities to increase employment participation rates.¹⁶³

Housing

Solving child poverty will be impossible without solving housing poverty.¹⁶⁴

Children experiencing poverty and deprivation are far more likely to experience poor housing in Ireland.¹⁶⁵ As stated in written submission, few factors impact a child's well-being as profoundly as their housing situation and it was asserted that Ireland's housing crisis has left many children without this foundation.¹⁶⁶ The impact of homelessness on children includes limited space which impacts on children's development, lack of privacy, increased trauma, and fewer opportunities to stay connected with friends and family.¹⁶⁷ Furthermore, the longer that a person lives in poor accommodation the longer lasting the impact it has on their future.¹⁶⁸ Access to secure, stable and affordable housing was highlighted as key because it establishes a base for other aspects of life;¹⁶⁹ it allows parents to seek work, children can study and families can thrive.¹⁷⁰ It was emphasised that being homeless or living in insecure, poor-quality housing is both a cause and consequence of child poverty.¹⁷¹

The growth of family homelessness was highlighted to the Committee including:

- from approximately 200 families in 2013 to nearly 2,350 families in July 2025;

¹⁶³ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 5; Transcript, 16 October 2025, 34; DSP Written Submission, 2 – 3.

¹⁶⁴ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 15.

¹⁶⁵ Barnard's Written Submission, 4.

¹⁶⁶ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 13.

¹⁶⁷ Barnard's Written Submission, 4.

¹⁶⁸ Laurence, Russell and Smyth, Housing adequacy and child outcomes in early and middle childhood, ESRI 2023 quoted in Barnard's Written Submission, 4.

¹⁶⁹ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 16.

¹⁷⁰ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 15.

¹⁷¹ St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 9.

- an increase in child homelessness over the last four years of over 135 per cent affecting over 5,000 children;
- over 5,000 children are living in emergency homeless accommodation;
- a 14 per cent rise in child homelessness in July 2025 compared to a year earlier;
- between January and July 2025, that 411 children were included in the net increase of 772 people in homelessness; and
- year-on-year to June 2025 the number of one-parent families in emergency accommodation rose by 155 compared to 72 additional two parent families.¹⁷²

Also, almost six in ten homeless families are headed by a lone parent; 56 per cent since the beginning of 2025 and that this parent is predominately female.¹⁷³ It was emphasised that the increase in the number of families experiencing long-term homelessness is significantly greater than anticipated, as evidenced by the doubling of families homeless for more than two years in Dublin since 2023.¹⁷⁴

Data on the reasons indicates a range of contributing factors; including notices to quit in the private rental sector, insecure tenancies, landlords selling rental properties, rent arrears accruing because supports such as the HAP or rent supplement fall short, family breakdown and other complexities, and lack of social housing or affordable alternatives.¹⁷⁵ It was noted that local authorities report long waiting lists for social housing with over 57,000 households on waiting lists, many with children.¹⁷⁶ It was also recognised that local authorities are experiencing challenges when people who are ineligible for social housing assistance seek their help.¹⁷⁷

Reasons for the growth in child and family homelessness has been attributed to the significant decline in the number of families able to exit homelessness with contributing

¹⁷² Focus Ireland Written Submission, 1; Focus Ireland Written Submission, 2; St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 9; Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Monthly Homelessness Report August 2025 DHLGH 2025) quoted in CRA Written Submission, 6; SPARK Written Submission, 8.

¹⁷³ Focus Ireland Written Submission, 9; Data from Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and Dublin Regional Homeless Executive quoted in One Family Written Submission, 6.

¹⁷⁴ Focus Ireland Written Submission, 3.

¹⁷⁵ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 28; Focus Ireland Written Submission, 4; Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 13; SPARK Written Submission, 8.

¹⁷⁶ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 14.

¹⁷⁷ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 27 – 28.

factors including a decline in exits to the private rental accommodation with the support of HAP, issues in the private rental sector, and more reliance on local authority allocations to social housing.¹⁷⁸ In June 2025, Simon Communities Locked Out of the Market Report found that 32 per cent of rental properties nationwide were within HAP limits.¹⁷⁹

The adverse impacts of homelessness on children have been researched and widely recognised.¹⁸⁰ It was outlined that housing instability and homelessness affects children's health, education and development; examples cited include children in emergency accommodation often fall ill more frequently, missing school, and/or frequent school changes, as well as a profound psychological impact including anxiety and behavioural issues.¹⁸¹ A report, utilising Growing Up in Ireland data, has identified that poor housing conditions have an impact on children's socio-emotional development.¹⁸² The onset of family homelessness and the experience of homelessness constitute distinct and compounding sources of trauma for children.¹⁸³ The experience of children was highlighted in the written submission of the Family Resource Centre National Forum which noted that children are living in emergency accommodation for 12 months and sometimes longer, and that families placed in IPAS centres are repeatedly moved.¹⁸⁴ Homelessness can also push families deeper into poverty due to the costs of living in temporary settings and the difficulty of maintaining employment.¹⁸⁵

Unsuitable housing was also brought to the attention of the Committee, and it was suggested that there are thousands of children in hidden homelessness or unsuitable housing with families doubled up with relatives in overcrowded conditions or living in substandard rentals with damp, mould, and unsafe conditions.¹⁸⁶ A family experience was described in submission to the Committee:

¹⁷⁸ Focus Ireland Written Submission, 2 – 3.

¹⁷⁹ SPARK Written Submission, 3.

¹⁸⁰ D'Sa, S., Foley, D., Hannon, J. et al. The psychological impact of childhood homelessness – a literature review. *Ir J Med Sci* 190, 411 – 417 (2021) quoted in Focus Ireland Written Submission, 5.

¹⁸¹ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 14.

¹⁸² DCDE Briefing Note, 16 October 2025, 16; DCDE Briefing Note, 4 December 2025, 40.

¹⁸³ Focus Ireland Written Submission, 4.

¹⁸⁴ Family Resource Centre National Forum Written Submission, 5.

¹⁸⁵ St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 9.

¹⁸⁶ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 14.

Five of us share one room . . . the younger kids can't sleep, the older ones have nowhere to study; it's driving us all to despair.¹⁸⁷

Traveller accommodation was identified as a key driver of poverty impacting Traveller children.¹⁸⁸ It was highlighted to the Committee that in 2021 approximately 1,700 traveller families were living in inadequate, unsafe and insecure accommodation, and that 350 out of 952 families living on halting sites having no electricity, no running water apart from an outdoor water tap and only shared access with other families to a port-a-loo or outside toilet.¹⁸⁹ An Ombudsman for Children report also found that a local authority failed in its obligations to uphold children's rights in its management of a Traveller accommodation site with issues including overcrowding, rodent infestations, insufficient sanitation facilities and electricity shortages.¹⁹⁰

Analysis, completed by the Rowntree Trust in the United Kingdom, found that while both structural factors, such as employment availability and housing costs, and individual factors contribute to homelessness, experiences of childhood poverty frequently precede and strongly predict homelessness in adulthood.¹⁹¹

Childcare

Access to affordable and quality childcare supports a child's development and is a work enabler for parents.¹⁹² Childcare in Ireland has been characterised by high costs and insufficient supply which has contributed to child poverty and women's unemployment or underemployment.¹⁹³ Furthermore, it was highlighted that childcare services are critical for employment opportunities and providing space to ensure gender equality in employment.¹⁹⁴ Data presented to the Committee has highlighted enrolment gaps in early years settings:

¹⁸⁷ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 14.

¹⁸⁸ National Traveller Women's Forum Written Submission, 2

¹⁸⁹ The Irish Traveller Movement (2021) 'Comments on the 18th National Report of Ireland on the implementation of the European Social Character' cited in National Traveller Women's Forum Written Submission, 2.

¹⁹⁰ Ombudsman for Children (2021) No End in Site: An investigation into the living conditions of children on a local authority halting site quote in National Traveller Women's Forum Written Submission, 2 – 3; Transcript, 22 January 2026, 8.

¹⁹¹ Focus Ireland Written Submission, 4.

¹⁹² Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 15.

¹⁹³ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 15.

¹⁹⁴ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 27.

- 54 per cent of children from birth to 2 years of age from high-income families compared to 7 per cent of lower income families were enrolled in formal early years setting.¹⁹⁵

Significant reforms were acknowledged along with remaining challenges.¹⁹⁶ The National Childcare Scheme (NCS) was introduced in 2019 and presently provides subsidies to all families based on income.¹⁹⁷ Details relating to national funding schemes are outlined below in subsection [Early Learning and Childcare](#). In written submission to the Committee, OECD analysis indicated that low-income households in Ireland now pay in line with, or even less than the OECD average for childcare, while two-parent households where both parents work and earn the average wage, childcare costs represent 29 per cent of the average income, well above the OECD average of 14 per cent.¹⁹⁸ It was stated that for low-income families reduced fees can be prohibitive especially if they have more than one young child.¹⁹⁹ People working irregular hours cannot avail of the NCS as they need to use childminders with many, including lone parents, finding it difficult to find childcare for early morning or late evening shifts forcing them to give up jobs.²⁰⁰ Average weekly costs, particularly for private childcare centres and those located in urban suburban areas, were stated as significant, especially for middle income families.²⁰¹ It was stated that continued expansion of universal and targeted subsidies will help significantly in making childcare more affordable.²⁰²

The [Programme for Government – Securing Ireland’s Future](#) includes commitments on childcare including to progressively reduce the cost of childcare to €200 per month per child through the NCS and explore options to cap costs for larger families. During the Committee’s consideration of the topic, the Minister for Children, Disability and Equality announced the state-led early learning and childcare capital programme.²⁰³ Funding of

¹⁹⁵ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 5.

¹⁹⁶ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 15.

¹⁹⁷ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 15.

¹⁹⁸ Pobal Written Submission, 5.

¹⁹⁹ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 15.

²⁰⁰ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 15.

²⁰¹ Pobal Written Submission, 5.

²⁰² Poabl Written Submission, 5.

²⁰³ [State led Early Learning and Childcare Capital Programme](#)

€135 million will be made available over the next five years. The aim of the capital programme is to deliver additional supply of high-quality and accessible early learning and childcare to address deficits in capacity, particularly for younger children and in disadvantaged/rural areas, in line with public management policy goals.²⁰⁴

Education

One of the key public services that enables participation in society, public life and the labour market is access to appropriate education and skills development from early years to adulthood.²⁰⁵ It was highlighted that a review has found that the Irish education system demonstrates strong performance and equity internationally across primary and post-primary levels and identified a culture and commitment across the education system which aims to support those at risk of educational disadvantage.²⁰⁶ Education is often seen as a great equaliser but for children in poverty it is not always the case.²⁰⁷ Hidden costs and barriers for families were identified to the Committee including voluntary contributions, exam fees, and extracurricular activities.²⁰⁸ The pressure on low-income parents with many reporting feelings of shame, stigma and fearing it may affect how their child is treated.²⁰⁹ This was highlighted by quotations contained in a written submission:

I dread the notes home about money – we just don't have it, and I feel like I'm failing my kids.

The children look for money for school trips... we often have to say no to even five euro... they are very good kids, and we hate that they feel different.²¹⁰

The introduction of free schoolbooks was acknowledged as a positive development.²¹¹

²⁰⁴ [State-led Early Learning and Childcare Capital Programme](#)

²⁰⁵ SJI Written Submission, 5.

²⁰⁶ OECD, Review of Resourcing Schools to Address Educational Disadvantage in Ireland, (OECD 2024) cited in CRA Written Submission, 11.

²⁰⁷ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 16.

²⁰⁸ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 16.

²⁰⁹ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 16.

²¹⁰ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 16.

²¹¹ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 16; Transcript, 22 January 2026, 4.

Disparities in educational outcomes and cognitive development highlight a significant performance gap between students from disadvantaged areas and their peers.²¹² Findings from the Growing Up in Ireland survey cited to the Committee include:

- significant differences in reading test scores by socio-economic background; and
- widening of gap during primary school with children from disadvantaged backgrounds who were early high performers being outperformed by children from more advantaged backgrounds by 9 years of age.²¹³

Food Poverty

Food poverty is ‘a social determinant of health and is associated with significant adverse health outcomes . . . [it] occurs when an individual or family has insufficient access to an adequate quantity and quality of food to maintain a nutritionally satisfactory and socially acceptable diet’.²¹⁴

The Children’s Rights Alliance (CRA) stated that it has noticed a growing concern regarding food poverty.²¹⁵ Figures from SILC 2024, have illustrated that those living in consistent poverty are significantly more likely to experience food related deprivation. Of the 95 per cent of the population not living in consistent poverty:

- 2.8 per cent were unable to afford a roast once a week
- 1.3 per cent were unable to afford a meal with chicken or fish every second day, in comparison with 20.8 per cent of individuals living in consistent poverty who were unable to afford a roast once a week; and
- 11.4 per cent were unable to afford a meal with chicken or fish every second day.²¹⁶

It was noted that a poor diet is both a consequence of poverty and a contributor to poor health and it has been reported that children can go to bed hungry or eat cheap, low-

²¹² SJI Written Submission, 6.

²¹³ [Growing Up in Ireland: National Longitudinal Study of Children](#) quoted in SJI Written Submission, 6.

²¹⁴ SafeFood, *Communicating food poverty on the island of Ireland* (SafeFood 2024) quoted in CRA Written Submission, 7.

²¹⁵ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 21.

²¹⁶ Central Statistics Office, ‘Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC): Enforced Deprivation 2024’ SIA80, (CSO 2025) referenced in CRA Written Submission, 7.

nutrient food.²¹⁷ This can lead to both malnutrition and obesity, which often coexist paradoxically in low-income settings.²¹⁸ The effect of food poverty was also presented to the Committee including negative impact on physical health and development, child's social and emotional development, education, ability to maintain relationships, and that high levels of hunger amongst children being associated with poor mental health.²¹⁹

The phenomenon of “holiday hunger” where economically disadvantaged households with school-aged children experience food insecurity during the school holidays was highlighted to the Committee.²²⁰ It was noted that this has been a persistent issue since the Covid 19 pandemic.²²¹ The Family Resource Centre National Forum's written submission highlighted that families are relying on FRCs for basic food support including breakfast and hot meals during school holidays, and that parents are regularly skipping meals to feed their children.²²² A report by Barnardos shows that 40 per cent of parents had skipped meals or reduced their portion size so their children could have enough to eat.²²³

Impact

Poverty during childhood has negative effects, both in the short and long term, on children's physical health, social and emotional development, psychological wellbeing and life chances.²²⁴

Harm and Effects

Stakeholders emphasised the impact and harm caused by poverty and its profound and long-lasting effects including links to adverse outcomes in almost all aspects of life. The longer a child lives in poverty, the greater the negative impact on their ability to access opportunities to realise their full potential.²²⁵ It was highlighted that research from the ESRI and the Growing Up in Ireland survey shows that growing up in poverty leads to poorer

²¹⁷ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 17.

²¹⁸ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 17.

²¹⁹ Several sources quoted in CRA Written Submission, 7.

²²⁰ RSM Ireland, *Evaluation of the School Meals Programme* (DSP 2022) quoted in CRA Written Submission, 8.

²²¹ CRA Written Submission, 8.

²²² Family Resource Centre National Forum Written Submission, 4.

²²³ Barnardos Report cited in Community Platform Written Submission, 3.

²²⁴ ESRI Report quoted in Community Platform Written Submission, 2.

²²⁵ Barnardo's Written Submission, 5.

outcomes across nearly every aspect of life.²²⁶ Additionally, it was emphasised that there is an expanding body of evidence on the detrimental effects of childhood poverty in both the short and long term.²²⁷ The impacts referenced from research included:

- Physical and mental health outcomes, including a poorer self-concept;²²⁸
- The wide range of ways poverty impacts on the lives of children and young people, including cognitive and socioemotional development, mental and physical health, and educational outcomes and opportunities;²²⁹
- Child's development can be impacted by short-term or one-off experiences;²³⁰
- Children who live in areas of high deprivation and poverty are more at risk of poor developmental outcomes;²³¹
- Lasting link between childhood poverty and poverty, poor health and employment status in adulthood;²³²
- Adults who experienced childhood poverty are more likely to experience income poverty, material deprivation, poor health and unemployment or inactivity;²³³
- Those who experienced poverty during childhood are three times more likely to be materially deprived and twice as likely to be income poor in adulthood compared with those who grew up in good or very good financial circumstances;²³⁴
- Economic cost of childhood socio-economic disadvantage through its long-term effects on employment, earnings, and health in adulthood, amounts to 3.9 per cent of GDP in Ireland and 3.6 per cent across the EU;²³⁵

²²⁶ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 6.

²²⁷ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 8.

²²⁸ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 4.

²²⁹ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 8.

²³⁰ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 3; [Even a brief experience of poverty enough to harm a child's development - News & Events | Trinity College Dublin](#) quote in SJI, Written Submission, 3.

²³¹ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 7.

²³² Transcript, 16 October 2025, 8.

²³³ ESRI Report, Transcript, 9 October 2025, 5.

²³⁴ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 9.

²³⁵ Clarke, C. et al (2022), 'The economic costs of childhood socio-economic disadvantage in European OECD countries', OECD Papers on Well-being and Inequalities, No. 9, OECD Publishing, Paris, quoted in Opening Statement, ESRI, 16 October 2025.

- That exposure to economic vulnerability is associated with poorer outcomes for children across cognitive and educational attainment, socio-emotional development, life satisfaction, self-concept, health and disability;²³⁶
- The impact of poverty is being compounded further by limited access to services and supports, including speech and language and assessments for children with additional needs, already under pressure in terms of resourcing and staffing;²³⁷ and
- Children's sense of social inclusion and self-esteem, as children are excluded from social activities not just because of financial barriers but due to feelings of shame and anxiety about not fitting in with their peers.²³⁸

Children in poverty experience poorer health outcomes and more barriers to healthcare with impacts that can last a lifetime including links to adult chronic conditions.²³⁹ It was noted that cold, damp living conditions cause respiratory illnesses, overcrowding increases the spread of infection with homeless children having higher rates of asthma and chest infections.²⁴⁰ It was highlighted that Traveller children face significant inequalities in health outcomes which have been linked to racial discrimination, socio-economic disadvantage and poor living conditions.²⁴¹ Health outcomes outlined include higher infant mortality rate and higher rates of mental health difficulties including self-harm, suicidal ideation, and depression.²⁴²

The impacts of poverty and deprivation on a child's mental health were discussed.²⁴³ It was stated that children present with anxiety and low self-esteem and that this in turn impacts on their daily lives including engagement with peers and school attendance.²⁴⁴ It was stated that between 15 and 20 per cent of the child and adolescent population experience

²³⁶ DCDE Briefing Note, 16 October 2025, 22; DCDE Briefing Note, 4 December 2025, 40; Bernard Maitre, Helen Russell and Emer Smyth, The dynamics of child poverty in Ireland: Evidence from the Growing Up in Ireland survey, (ESRI 2021) quote in CRA Written Submission, 4.

²³⁷ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 7.

²³⁸ Ridge, T. (2011). 'The everyday costs of poverty in childhood: A review of qualitative research exploring the lives and experiences of low-income children in the UK', Children & Society, (25) quoted in Barnardo's Written Submission, 5.

²³⁹ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 17; Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 18.

²⁴⁰ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 18.

²⁴¹ National Traveller Women's Forum, 4.

²⁴² National Traveller Women's Forum, 4.

²⁴³ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 13.

²⁴⁴ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 13.

anxiety, while 12 per cent experience depression.²⁴⁵ The issue of capacity in mental health services was referenced including an RTÉ Investigates report that found that 28,000 children and young people are on a waiting list for primary psychology care and that some have been waiting for up to 13 years.²⁴⁶

Play Deprivation and Participation

The significant impact of play deprivation on a child's development can include their social, emotional, cognitive and physical development.²⁴⁷ Barriers to accessing spaces to play include a lack of green space in housing complexes, recreational spaces in homeless accommodation, a lack of accessible playgrounds for children with disabilities, and Traveller children living on halting sites that may not have access to a safe space to play.²⁴⁸

Children living in emergency or homeless accommodation are missing opportunities to play, explore, and reach key developmental milestones as a result of living in long-term inappropriate accommodation including small spaces where they lack space to run, fall or explore.²⁴⁹ It was highlighted that this was regularly observed particularly through therapeutic support and family services.²⁵⁰ The impacts of this was referenced including children's ability to engage with their peers, access education, and the longer term effect into adulthood.²⁵¹

The importance of opportunities to speak directly and actively participate in the lives of their communities was emphasised to the Committee.²⁵² It was noted that disadvantaged areas often have fewer amenities, for instance, no library, few safe play areas, or no youth centre.²⁵³ A stakeholder noted that participation is really important to children and young people, as reflected in the following quote:

²⁴⁵ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 20.

²⁴⁶ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 18.

²⁴⁷ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 5.

²⁴⁸ Ombudsman for Children's Office, *No Place Like Home: Children's views and experiences of living in Family Hubs* (OCO 2019) quoted in CRA Written Submission, 17; Dr Catriona Moloney et al *Mind the Gap* (OCO and NUIG 2021) cited in CRA Written Submission, 17; Transcript, 9 October 2025, 5.

²⁴⁹ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 14; Transcript, 20 November 2025, 18; Transcript, 20 November 2025, 21.

²⁵⁰ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 14.

²⁵¹ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 21.

²⁵² Transcript, 20 November 2025, 21.

²⁵³ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 19.

Every time we talk to children and young people, they say they want to see more green spaces, they want to be able to go to more dance classes, they want to be able to go to more of the latest gym class or whatever it is they are engaging in.²⁵⁴

Economic barriers to participation were brought to the Committee's attention and the parent's feelings of shame were highlighted.²⁵⁵ A recent report published by Barnardos has shown that children are going without activities and sport due to a lack of money.²⁵⁶ The costs associated with clubs and activities was emphasised to the Committee and it was noted that when families face financial difficulty, that participation is often discontinued.²⁵⁷ Examples cited including not being able to afford a birthday party and unable to be able to go to the cinema with friends.²⁵⁸ The quote which follows highlights financial hardship as a barrier to participation, demonstrating how lack of economic resources can result in social exclusion for children and emotional distress for families:

"My eight-year-old daughter said 'Mummy I want a birthday party' and I had to say 'you're a big girl now; you don't need a party.' . . . It was very difficult to see the disappointment on her face... we just don't have [the money]".²⁵⁹

Societal Issues

Many individuals are affected by the impacts of childhood trauma and abuse, as well as ongoing experiences of domestic violence.²⁶⁰ It was noted that a large proportion of children who experience poverty also face adverse childhood experiences including domestic violence, addiction issues, and adversarial parental separation.²⁶¹

Poverty was identified as a significant driver in the demand for Tusla services; it was noted that child protection and welfare referrals have more than doubled since the establishment

²⁵⁴ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 25.

²⁵⁵ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 19.

²⁵⁶ [Cost of Living Crisis Impact on Children 2025](#) cited in Community Platform Written Submission, 3.

²⁵⁷ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 27.

²⁵⁸ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 19; Transcript, 22 January 2026, 16.

²⁵⁹ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 20.

²⁶⁰ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 16.

²⁶¹ Barnardo's Written Submission, 2.

of the organisation.²⁶² It was stated that children living in poverty and deprivation are disproportionately represented in child welfare and neglect referrals; accounting for 63 per cent of all referrals.²⁶³ During the first half of 2025, 22,500 (2 per cent of all children) received a family support service from Tusla or Tusla-funded providers.²⁶⁴ Referrals often illustrate how poverty intersects with children's exposure to domestic, sexual, and gender-based violence, parental addiction and mental health challenges, homelessness, and criminality and exploitation.²⁶⁵

From their experience in north inner-city Dublin, Archways identified that opportunities would be taken if provided:

we are working with a population in which it is criminogenic. The reality of this situation is that every one of those children, if given an opportunity, will take it and engage positively with the services that are being made available. It is just that the services are not being made available. That population has a level of anxiety and depression that is higher than the national level of anxiety and depression, yet we simply do not offer them solutions or clinical supports to help them to address the difficulties.²⁶⁶

It was outlined to the Committee that in demographically disadvantaged and severely deprived communities that there is a strong sense of hopelessness leading to families believing that available opportunities are not meant for them or that they will not succeed.²⁶⁷ It was stated that it must be recognised and addressed.²⁶⁸ Suggestions included lifting the sense of paralysis so that they can engage with, and benefit from, the opportunities available and building resilience so that children can lift their gaze and identify the priorities that will be most effective for them.²⁶⁹ It was highlighted that the

²⁶² Transcript, 22 January 2026, 21.

²⁶³ Transcript, 22 January 2026, 21.

²⁶⁴ Transcript, 22 January 2026, 21.

²⁶⁵ Transcript, 22 January 2026, 21; Transcript, 22 January 2026, 33.

²⁶⁶ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 21.

²⁶⁷ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 23.

²⁶⁸ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 23.

²⁶⁹ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 23.

community and voluntary sectors play a vital role in fostering hope within communities, helping people to envisage alternative futures and, in turn, build resilience.²⁷⁰

The importance of a more equal society where people are not stigmatised was highlighted to the committee.²⁷¹ Examples of the stigmatisation cited to the Committee included being a single parent, experiencing poverty, coming from a particular place, or belonging to an ethnic minority.²⁷² It was noted that stigma impacts people's ability to succeed.²⁷³

²⁷⁰ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 25.

²⁷¹ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 24.

²⁷² Transcript, 9 October 2025, 24.

²⁷³ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 24.

4. Strategies and Initiatives

Initiatives and programmes

During the Committee's engagement, it was emphasised that several government departments lead and contribute to initiatives and programmes that impact on disadvantage and ensure positive childhood experiences.

Children and Young People's Services Committees

Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSC) are a key structure identified by Government to plan and co-ordinate services for children and young people in every county in Ireland. Nationally, there are 27 CYPSC and it was highlighted that each committee plays a vital role in interagency and collaborative work to support children and young people up to the age of 24.²⁷⁴ It was highlighted that CYPSC are important and strong vehicles for bringing interagency oversight in a geographical location,²⁷⁵ and a good forum for strategic planning.²⁷⁶ CYPSC comprise of managerial representatives from the community, voluntary and statutory sectors with subgroups for each of the five national outcomes.²⁷⁷ It was highlighted that some issues may be more prevalent in some counties so there is flexibility to develop a workplan around the specific local issues.²⁷⁸ The DCDE provides strategic and policy direction for CYPSC, and national and local level operational leadership of CYPSC is provided by Tusla.²⁷⁹

Local Area Child Poverty Action Plans

The DCDE provided funding of €756,000 over two years through the Dormant Accounts funded What Works initiative.²⁸⁰ The scheme was designed by DCDE and the Department of

²⁷⁴ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 3.

²⁷⁵ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 16.

²⁷⁶ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 30.

²⁷⁷ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 30.

²⁷⁸ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 30.

²⁷⁹ [Children and Young People's Services Committees \(CYPSC\) - Interagency Working in Ireland](#)

²⁸⁰ 'Briefing Note for the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Children and Equality on the topic of Child Poverty and Deprivation', 16 October 2025, 25.

Rural and Community Development in consultation with the Child Poverty and Well-Being Programme Office, Department of the Taoiseach.²⁸¹

Four Local Area Child Poverty Action Plan pilots are part of Ireland's European Child Guarantee National Action Plan and are also part of the Young Ireland National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2023 – 2028.²⁸² CYPSC and their equivalent local community development committees (LCDCs) were invited to submit joint applications to design and implement a pilot project which would respond to their local need and contexts, while utilising existing co-ordination structures.²⁸³ The objective of these pilot plans is to test better service integration approaches and improve access to available services for disadvantaged children, young people and their families.²⁸⁴ The assumption underpinning these plans is that outcomes for children and families can be improved by gaining a understanding of child poverty in each area and then using the knowledge to promote experiences of enhanced service integration.²⁸⁵ The pilots will be evaluated by the Centre for Implementation Research at the University of Limerick (CIRcUL).²⁸⁶

Representatives from one pilot project appeared before the Committee which is discussed in detail below; the other three pilot projects are examining:

- Early childhood, pregnancy to age four, to improve service co-ordination and family support with the aim of addressing systemic and intergenerational factors contributing to child poverty;
- Access to services for disadvantaged families with neurodivergent children by piloting community-based occupational therapy in FRCs with flexible referral criteria,

²⁸¹ 'Briefing Note for the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Children and Equality on the topic of Child Poverty and Deprivation', 16 October 2025, 25.

²⁸² 'Briefing Note for the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Children and Equality on the topic of Child Poverty and Deprivation', 16 October 2025, 25; Transcript, 20 November 2025, 3.

²⁸³ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 3.

²⁸⁴ 'Briefing Note for the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Children and Equality on the topic of Child Poverty and Deprivation', 16 October 2025, 25.

²⁸⁵ 'Briefing Note for the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Children and Equality on the topic of Child Poverty and Deprivation', 16 October 2025, 25; Transcript, 20 November 2025, 3.

²⁸⁶ 'Briefing Note for the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Children and Equality on the topic of Child Poverty and Deprivation', 16 October 2025, 25; Transcript, 20 November 2025, 3.

providing simultaneous support for professionals, parents, and children, and utilising a plural practice model; and

- Enhance living conditions and reduce child poverty by improving energy efficiency and service integration.²⁸⁷

Monaghan Children and Young People's Services Committee and Monaghan Local Community Development Committee Local Area Child Poverty Action Plan Pilot

The 'Interagency Action for Families Project' is examining a Family Support Champion and Co-ordinator using a Meitheal approach focusing on the needs of individual families and how the family can be supported collaboratively.²⁸⁸ The project's champion is intended to act as a key link, mentoring and supporting individuals to access appropriate services.²⁸⁹ The pilot programme aims to ensure families can easily access the right supports at the right time, addressing immediate difficulties while helping them move towards long-term stability through employment, education and skills development.²⁹⁰ It also prioritises hearing children's voices, improving collaboration between services, and reshaping stakeholders' understanding of poverty and the opportunities for more joined-up, accessible support.²⁹¹

The project has examined a model, the human learning systems, which takes a human-focused, community-centred approach by understanding the drivers of poverty and then working to remove barriers people face in order to provide effective support.²⁹²

Area Based Childhood Programme

The [Area Based Childhood \(ABC\) Programme](#), formally launched as a pilot child poverty programme in 2015, is a national prevention and early intervention programme funded by DCDE, and delivered through the Prevention Partnership and Family Support Programme within Tusla. At present, there are 12 ABC programmes with eight based in the greater Dublin area and one each in Limerick City, Cork City, Bray, and County Louth. Locations selected at the time of development recorded the highest levels of deprivation and

²⁸⁷ DCDE Briefing Note, 16 October 2025, 26 – 27; DCDE Briefing Note, 4 December 2025, 48.

²⁸⁸ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 3.

²⁸⁹ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 16.

²⁹⁰ Monaghan CYPSC & LCDC Local Area Child Poverty Action Plan Pilot Written Submission 1 – 2.

²⁹¹ Monaghan CYPSC & LCDC Local Area Child Poverty Action Plan Pilot Written Submission 1 – 2.

²⁹² Transcript, 20 November 2025, 16.

disadvantage throughout Ireland.²⁹³ It was highlighted that County Louth has 111 areas of deprivation and disadvantage.²⁹⁴

Attention was brought to the vision of the programme which is ‘An Ireland where no child is impacted by poverty and all children are supported to reach their full potential’.²⁹⁵ The mission states that:

Through prevention and early intervention approaches ... work in partnership with families, practitioners, communities, and national stakeholders to deliver better outcomes for children and families living in areas where poverty is most deeply entrenched.²⁹⁶

The approach of the programme is three pronged in nature with direct delivery of prevention and early intervention supports for children and families, capacity-building training and support for services using evidence-based approaches and informing whole system changes with decision makers at local and national level.²⁹⁷

It was emphasised that this programme provides a vital interagency link between relevant services and helps prevent duplication, and that it works in partnership with services that support families in each local area including schools, early years services, community services, and statutory organisations.²⁹⁸ It was highlighted that the evidence base for the ABC programme suggests that prevention and early intervention is far more cost-effective and more efficient at producing better outcomes than trying to address complex issues later in a child’s life.²⁹⁹ A series of evidence-based supports, including home visiting support, parenting programmes, social and emotional development programmes or speech and language support, are delivered to improve developmental outcomes by engaging with families as early as possible.³⁰⁰

²⁹³ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 6.

²⁹⁴ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 24.

²⁹⁵ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 6.

²⁹⁶ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 6.

²⁹⁷ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 6.

²⁹⁸ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 6.

²⁹⁹ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 7.

³⁰⁰ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 6.

Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme

The Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht (DRCDG) delivers the SICAP with an aim of reducing poverty and promoting social inclusion and equality using community development approaches, engagement and collaboration.³⁰¹ The programme is managed locally by 33 local community development committees and delivered by local development companies.³⁰² In evidence to the Committee the range of supports to children and families was revealed including: community engagement activities such as family event days, services provided directly to targeted groups including one-parent families, and people experiencing education disadvantage, for example, lifelong learning courses.³⁰³ It was highlighted that in 2024 the programme delivered 854 children and family activities with 53,133 participants; the activities included after-school support, homework clubs, programme for parents and cultural and recreational activities.³⁰⁴ The programme also supports social enterprises including early learning, care and school aged children; in 2024, 21 social enterprises received support.³⁰⁵

Community Services Programme

The DRCDG delivers the Community Services Programme which supports 427 community-based organisations, primarily in disadvantaged areas, providing facilities and services.³⁰⁶ In 2023 a funding model was introduced that targets higher level of supports to organisations with the greatest funding needs.³⁰⁷ In evidence to the Committee it was noted that this programme provides a contribution to the wages of 2,908 employees, 352 managers, some on a part-time basis and 24 of the organisations supported provide childcare-related services.³⁰⁸

³⁰¹ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 4.

³⁰² Transcript, 16 October 2025, 4.

³⁰³ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 4.

³⁰⁴ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 4.

³⁰⁵ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 4.

³⁰⁶ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 5.

³⁰⁷ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 5.

³⁰⁸ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 5.

Scheme to Support National Organisations

The DRCDG provides multi-annual core funding through the Scheme to Support National Organisations to several national community and voluntary organisations that have a specific focus on addressing child poverty including Barnardos, CRA and the National Youth Council of Ireland.³⁰⁹

Early Learning and Childcare

The DCDE provides national funding schemes that help families experiencing disadvantage access affordable and high-quality early learning and childcare.³¹⁰

Early Childhood Care and Education

The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme provides two years of free preschool to all age-eligible children. It was highlighted that the programme, delivered by approximately 3,900 services nationwide, has achieved a 96 per cent participation rate and supports 105,250 children, plays a vital role in mitigating the risks associated with early developmental disadvantage, and according to a recent review, 70 per cent of low-income families stated they would be unable to send their child to preschool without it.³¹¹ However, the participation of children from the Traveller and Roma communities was outlined as 77 per cent and more than 70 per cent respectively.³¹²

National Childcare Scheme

The NCS provides universal subsidies towards early learning and childcare costs, from 24 weeks to 15 years, with an income-assessed subsidy ensuring that the greatest support goes to families that need it most.³¹³ Enhancements to the scheme have included the extension of the universal subsidy to all children under 15 and two increases to the

³⁰⁹ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 4.

³¹⁰ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 3.

³¹¹ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 3; Transcript, 16 October 2025, 19; Transcript, 4 December 2025, 3; Transcript, 4 December 2025, 4; Transcript, 4 December 2025, 6. DCDE Briefing Note, 16 October 2025, 12; DCDE Briefing Note, 4 December 2025, 22.

³¹² Transcript, 4 December 2025, 6; CRA Written Submission, 10; National Traveller Women's Forum Written Submission, 4.

³¹³ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 3; Transcript, 4 December 2025, 3; DCDE Briefing Note, 16 October 2025, 12; DCDE Briefing Note, 4 December 2025, 22.

minimum hourly subsidy, which has a minimum value of €96.30 per week for 45 hours.³¹⁴ In 2025, 245,000 children benefited from the scheme.³¹⁵

The NCS also includes a sponsor subsidy; under this arrangement, professionals working in a prescribed sponsor body, such as Tusla, can recommend full-time early learning and childcare that is provided free of charge to parents.³¹⁶

Equal Start Programme

The Equal Start Model, introduced in May 2024, was described as a ‘very welcome initiative in terms of tackling child poverty’ in early years.³¹⁷ It was noted that the model identifies where each child is in the setting as opposed to a geographical approach.³¹⁸ The Equal Start Programme assists access and participation for children and families facing disadvantage and places particular emphasis on supporting the most vulnerable groups in society.³¹⁹ It includes a suite of universal, child-targeted, and setting-targeted supports to ensure that every child and early learning and childcare setting benefits from a continuum of supports that reflects a continuum of need.³²⁰ Details of the Equal Start identification model and designation for settings is outlined in the [DCDE Briefing Note](#).³²¹ Since September 2024, 787 services in disadvantaged areas have supported 35,000 children (including 4,700 priority cohort children), with 427 community and 360 private providers.³²² However, it was commented that this is not yet at scale nationwide.³²³

The approach and benefit of this model was outlined to the Committee, which highlighted that it provides the time needed to engage and build relationships with families and the impact the model has had on retention in these settings.³²⁴ The Committee also heard that this model assists engagement with families, including those who do not speak English as a

³¹⁴ DCDE Briefing Note, 16 October 2025, 13; DCDE Briefing Note, 4 December 2025, 3.

³¹⁵ [Minister Foley welcomes the significant increase in the number of children benefitting from the National Childcare Scheme](#)

³¹⁶ DCDE Briefing Note, 16 October 2025, 13; DCDE Briefing Note, 4 December 2025, 23.

³¹⁷ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 4.

³¹⁸ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 14.

³¹⁹ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 3; Transcript, 4 December 2025, 5; DCDE Briefing Note, 16 October 2025, 13; DCDE Briefing Note, 4 December 2025, 24.

³²⁰ DCDE Briefing Note, 16 October 2025, 13; DCDE Briefing Note, 4 December 2025, 25.

³²¹ Information is also provided in the CRA Written Submission, 8 – 9.

³²² Transcript, 16 October 2025, 3; Transcript, 16 October 2025, 12; Transcript, 4 December 2025, 7; DCDE Briefing Note, 16 October 2025, 14; DCDE Briefing Note, 4 December 2025, 25.

³²³ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 16.

³²⁴ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 14.

first language, who may be new to communities and can build a sense of belonging for these families.³²⁵ Home visiting has provided opportunities for parents to hear in a safe environment about the service.³²⁶ The need for expansion of the model and the inclusion of more service providers was noted.³²⁷ In evidence to the Committee it was asserted that in order to break the cycle of poverty a significant increase in investment in this model is required.³²⁸

Another part of the programme is to ensure that under-represented cohorts are being targeted and encouraged to come into services; examples include identifying and reaching families from the Traveller and Roma communities, children availing of the NCS through a sponsor body, children in international protection settings, and children at risk of intergenerational poverty.³²⁹ Furthermore, the Equal Start model allows for a profile of each service based on the service users using the Pobal deprivation index data and other data sources to identify the target cohorts within each setting whether community crèche or private provider.³³⁰

Budget 2026 provides for a 30 per cent increase, from €17.2 million to €22.3 million, in funding for Equal Start and it is expected that 820 services, catering for 37,000 children, will be designated as priority services during 2026.³³¹ It was commented that the investment in the first two years was disappointingly low; a total of €25.2 million was allocated in the first two years of the programme.³³² Key supports identified include funding for additional staff which support outreach to families and access to the Bia Blasta preschool nutrition programme.³³³

The Bia Blasta programme provides funding for services offering the ECCE programme in Equal Start Tier 1 and Tier 2 settings, ensuring that children experiencing the most

³²⁵ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 18; Transcript, 9 October 2025, 20.

³²⁶ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 20.

³²⁷ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 18.

³²⁸ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 4.

³²⁹ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 17; DCDE Briefing Note, 16 October 2025, 14; DCDE Briefing Note, 4 December 2025, 25.

³³⁰ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 13; CRA Written Submission, 9.

³³¹ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 3; Transcript, 4 December 2025, 3.

³³² CRA Written Submission, 9.

³³³ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 3; Transcript, 4 December 2025, 3; Transcript, 4 December 2025, 6; Transcript, 4 December 2025, 7; DCDE Briefing Note, 16 October 2025, 14; DCDE Briefing Note, 4 December 2025, 26.

concentrated disadvantage received a nutritious meal each day they attend preschool.³³⁴ The importance of the programme was highlighted including the provision of nutritious food free of charge and the educational aspect which includes raising the awareness of the importance and benefits of healthy foods along with the experience of preparing, sharing and clearing up after meals.³³⁵ It was acknowledged that there was an underspend relating to the roll-out of Bia Blasta programme in 2025, as uptake was not as high as expected.³³⁶

Building Blocks

The Building Blocks Capital Programme allows for existing services to avail of a grant towards extensions to existing premises for private or community services and the purchase or building of a new premises for community services.³³⁷ In 2024, 50 applications were successful with 43 from community services.³³⁸ Regarding Budget 2026, it was announced that 1,500 additional places would be provided for from the Building Blocks programme.³³⁹ It was highlighted that new Building Blocks programmes would be designed using evidence from available data.³⁴⁰ Recently, the Minister for Children, Disability and Equality, Norma Foley T.D., announced Building Blocks Extension Scheme Phase 2, a €10 million capital funding scheme, with the purpose of delivering additional capacity by supporting existing early learning and childcare providers that participate in the Core Funding Scheme.³⁴¹ The scheme has placed an emphasis on places for 1 to 3 year olds and providers will be required to deliver net increases for this age cohort.³⁴² Two strands have been included:

- one for extensions to existing premises for community services with investment available up to €530,000 for project up to a total value of €650,000, and

³³⁴ DCDE Briefing Note, 16 October 2025, 14; DCDE Briefing Note, 4 December 2025, 26.

³³⁵ Transcript, 4 December 2025, 5; DCDE Briefing Note, 16 October 2025, 14; DCDE Briefing Note, 4 December 2025, 26.

³³⁶ Transcript, 4 December 2025, 5.

³³⁷ Press Release, Minister Foley announces €25 million in funding to deliver 1,500 additional early learning and childcare places.

³³⁸ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 28.

³³⁹ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 28.

³⁴⁰ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 14.

³⁴¹ [Minister Foley announces new €10 million capital scheme for early learning and childcare services](#)

³⁴² [Minister Foley announces new €10 million capital scheme for early learning and childcare services](#)

- one for extensions to existing private services with an investment of up to €265,000 for projects up to a total value of €650,000 and a minimum of 50 per cent of funding to come from the operator.³⁴³

Community and voluntary programmes

Northside Partnership

Northside Partnership works to improve the opportunities for people and communities in north-east Dublin to bring about positive change in their own lives and in their community.³⁴⁴

It was emphasised that an advantage thinking mindset is used which seeks to invest in people's abilities and strengths and encourage growth and development rather focusing on problems and deficits.³⁴⁵ The organisation's model is grounded in collaboration with parents, local community organisations and statutory services.³⁴⁶

Several aspects of the work across the whole-of-life cycle undertaken by Northside Partnership were highlighted to the Committee.³⁴⁷ These included the way in which early intervention work is complimented by a comprehensive suite of programmes that support children through school and into further education and employment, as well as from long-term unemployment into the labour market and into higher-paid employment.³⁴⁸ The organisation referenced the support it provides to many smaller organisations in the area, the base it provides for innovative action and programme development, its partnership approach which helps to bridge the gap between national policy and local leaders and volunteers, and the strong personal relationships and connections with social workers, youth officers, volunteers, parents, staff and managers in local services.³⁴⁹

The Preparing for Life Programme has a goal to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty by giving every child the best possible start in life by working with families from pregnancy

³⁴³ [Minister Foley announces new €10 million capital scheme for early learning and childcare services](#)

³⁴⁴ [Northside Partnership - Where Opportunity Meets Community](#)

³⁴⁵ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 4.

³⁴⁶ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 4.

³⁴⁷ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 4; Transcript, 20 November 2025, 24.

³⁴⁸ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 4; Transcript, 20 November 2025, 24.

³⁴⁹ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 4; Transcript, 20 November 2025, 10.

through to school entry.³⁵⁰ The programme includes evidence-based home visiting, parenting supports and strong partnership with school and local services.³⁵¹ Academic research has found that the home visiting programme improves school readiness, supports positive parenting and enhanced children's cognitive and social outcomes, and has been shown to have a measurable and long-lasting impact including after participation in the programme has ended.³⁵² The programme delivers outcomes in relation to child development issues, education issues and has shown results in health and community development improvements.³⁵³ It was noted that the core funding for the home visiting programme comes from Tusla.³⁵⁴ The return on investment was highlighted; programmes have a return of €1.60 for every €1 invested.³⁵⁵ It was emphasised that this programme has the potential to disrupt the cycle of intergenerational poverty for children growing up in areas experiencing high-level of social injustice.³⁵⁶

It was emphasised that multi-annual funding and a national commitment to integrated early intervention is required.³⁵⁷

Archways

Archways is a national organisation working in partnership with local and national agencies to develop, research and promote evidence-based and evidence-informed programmes for children, young people, parents and the professionals who support them.³⁵⁸ The organisation's vision is rooted in the belief that every child deserves the opportunity to thrive and flourish.³⁵⁹ Their goal is for children and families experiencing challenges to be empowered to create lasting change in their lives through services such as early intervention, prevention and evidence-based programmes that support psychological, emotional, behavioural and social development.³⁶⁰ Key aspects of the work of Archways

³⁵⁰ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 4.

³⁵¹ Transcript, 20 November 2024, 4.

³⁵² Transcript, 20 November 2025, 4; Northside Partnership Written Submission.

³⁵³ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 10.

³⁵⁴ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 10.

³⁵⁵ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 4.

³⁵⁶ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 4.

³⁵⁷ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 4; Transcript, 20 November 2025, 13.

³⁵⁸ [Archways | Centre of Excellence for Child and Family Programmes](#)

³⁵⁹ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 5.

³⁶⁰ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 5.

across the full developmental journey of a child and adolescent's life include building resilience, strengthening families and shaping systems that improve outcomes for individuals.³⁶¹ Examples of programmes highlighted include: [blue skies initiative](#), [family first](#), and the [changing lives initiative](#).

The implementation of Article 12 of the UNCRC, relating to the right of the child's voice to be heard, was emphasised through the actions:

Everything that we do is led by the children. We ask if this is working for them. We ask where they need to go in life. We are not giving them a service and doing it to them. We are doing it for and with them. We are already trying to cover up for society not implementing these changes. We go in and advocate with the councils for appropriate living standards all the time.³⁶²

In evidence to the Committee, it was highlighted that young people, families and communities have experienced a fundamental breach of trust which stems from not having their psychological and physiological needs met.³⁶³

The approach adopted by Archways establishes reliability through consistent support with immediate needs including accompanying families to housing appointments, advocating at school meetings and ensuring food security.³⁶⁴ It was noted that this rebuilds faith in adult systems and creates the condition for SDG goal 16.³⁶⁵ Sustained therapeutic intervention averaging 12 months in duration based on a bespoke evidence-based model is provided that allows families to develop new communication and behaviour patterns.³⁶⁶

The House - Cox's Demesne Youth and Community Project

The House - Cox's Demesne Youth and Community Project is a community based, not-for-profit organization with charitable status based in the equivalent of four local authority

³⁶¹ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 5.

³⁶² Transcript, 20 November 2025, 20.

³⁶³ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 5.

³⁶⁴ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 6.

³⁶⁵ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 6.

³⁶⁶ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 6.

houses in the centre of six extremely disadvantaged areas with a Pobal Index of -30.78 in County Louth.³⁶⁷

Wraparound services spanning the gamut of a young person's life are provided through programmes and interventions; these include an after-school service, youth diversion project, early school leavers project in partnership with Louth-Meath Education and Training Board, a north Dundalk family support hub funded through Tusla, and a young people's probation project.³⁶⁸

Intervention and Support Services

Supports and services are a vital means of helping to address adversity and poverty in childhood. This section outlines the services that are delivered and some of the initiatives that have been introduced.

Tusla - The Child and Family Agency

Tusla advised that it leads multi-agency collaboration through the CYPSCs, their 114 child and family support networks, the area-based childhood programme, and FRCs.³⁶⁹ Tusla funds over 460 organisations nationwide.³⁷⁰ Additionally, Tusla works closely with HSE, An Garda Síochána, and key Government Departments.³⁷¹ Funding has been secured by Tusla for targeted supports for young parents and disadvantaged families through funding streams such as the European Social Fund, ESF, the children's fund, and Equal Start funding.³⁷²

Tusla's reform programme was identified as an important aspect for reaching children and families as the organisation has transitioned from a structure based on 17 areas to one comprising of 30 networks.³⁷³ The networks have been formed based on a resource needs analysis.³⁷⁴ A resource allocation model is in place that examines needs and determines

³⁶⁷ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 7.

³⁶⁸ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 7.

³⁶⁹ Transcript, 22 January 2026, 21.

³⁷⁰ Transcript, 22 January 2026, 21.

³⁷¹ Transcript, 22 January 2026, 21.

³⁷² Transcript, 22 January 2026, 21.

³⁷³ Transcript, 22 January 2026, 22.

³⁷⁴ Transcript, 22 January 2026, 22.

the level of resources.³⁷⁵ It was noted that deprivation is a key part of looking at the resources required for different areas.³⁷⁶ It was highlighted that each network has an integrated front-door team with family support services and child welfare and protection services.³⁷⁷

Approximately 5,000 children are in the care of the state with almost 90 per cent in foster care. Other types of care include: kinship care where children living with relatives, care in residential facilities, care for separated children seeking asylum, and special care for children who are very vulnerable with complex needs.³⁷⁸

Tusla provides a range of early intervention supports and a parenting support service.³⁷⁹ In Budget 2026, funding for Tusla was increased by €165 million to €1.4 billion which will be used to provide vital front-line services to children and families who are experiencing adversity and poverty.³⁸⁰

Family Resource Centres

Family Resource Centres (FRCs) provide a comprehensive range of universal and targeted services with a particular focus on the needs of disadvantaged communities.³⁸¹ FRCs have been active in Ireland for over 20 years with a local, regional and national impact through their human rights-based approach to community development and family support.³⁸² The approach of these centres has been described as systemic and place-based, grounded in the understanding that people in communities live relational, inter-connected lives.³⁸³ A social ecological approach is taken by FRCs to child poverty and deprivation that requires an understanding of child poverty within the family, community and societal context.³⁸⁴ This is

³⁷⁵ Transcript, 22 January 2026, 22.

³⁷⁶ Transcript, 22 January 2026, 22.

³⁷⁷ Transcript, 22 January 2026, 22.

³⁷⁸ Transcript, 4 December 2025, 3.

³⁷⁹ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 3.

³⁸⁰ Transcript, 4 December 2025, 3.

³⁸¹ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 3; Transcript, 4 December 2025, 3.

³⁸² Family Resource Centre National Forum Written Submission, 1.

³⁸³ Family Resource Centre National Forum Written Submission, 1.

³⁸⁴ Family Resource Centre National Forum Written Submission, 1 – 2.

further advanced by a progressive universalist approach to prevention and early intervention.³⁸⁵

FRCs provide a range of supports to children and families, with a focus on those most in need and at risk of harm, some of these supports and services include:

- practical, occasional, counselling and therapeutic support;
- evidence-based and evidence-informed prevention and early intervention programmes, including home visiting programmes, for families experiencing domestic violence, mental health difficulties or addiction;
- parenting/family support;
- involvement in community health and wellbeing initiatives; and
- community education initiatives.³⁸⁶

Emphasising the vital role provided by FRCS is the services provided during 2024 which include:

- 49,110 parenting/family support sessions;
- 70,138 counselling and therapeutics support sessions; and
- pre and after-school activities for 63,250 children and young people.³⁸⁷

Through community development and national level advocacy, FRCs are committed to addressing the structural inequalities that cause poverty.³⁸⁸ Additionally, FRCs are members of Public Participation Networks and engage regularly with local and central Government.³⁸⁹ FRCs respond to specific forms of poverty, including financial, food and hygiene, through collaboration with the CRA, Food Cloud, the Hygiene Hub, supermarkets

³⁸⁵ Family Resource Centre National Forum Written Submission, 2.

³⁸⁶ Family Resource Centre National Forum Written Submission, 2; Family Resource Centre National Forum Written Submission, 6.

³⁸⁷ Family Resource Centre National Forum Written Submission, 2 – 3.

³⁸⁸ Family Resource Centre National Forum Written Submission, 2.

³⁸⁹ Family Resource Centre National Forum Written Submission, 3.

and local businesses.³⁹⁰ It was noted that FRCs work closely with Community Work Ireland and the All-Island Endorsement Body for Community Work Education and Training.³⁹¹

The network of family resources centres has been expended in recent years; including from 121 to 126 centres in 2025 and further expansion in 2026 to 136 centres.³⁹² The Programme for Government includes a commitment to ‘Work to increase funding and expand the capacity and network of Family Resource Centres’.³⁹³

Youth Work

Community based youth work services provide essential, informal-educational spaces for children and young people throughout Ireland. Funded by Department of Education and Youth via the UBU Your Place, Your Space scheme, youth workers engage with young people often in areas identified in the Pobal deprivation index as areas of significant disadvantage. These services focus on the personal and social development of young people in order to build and nurture capacity, empowerment and critical thinking.

Home Visiting

First 5 recognises the importance of the home environment and parenting supports in ensuring that children have positive early experiences and the best start in life.³⁹⁴ Home visiting involves working together, identifying what the parent(s) want, providing appropriate information, advice and support throughout the journey with a parent to ensure that the child arrives at school happy, ready and able to learn.³⁹⁵ The home visiting programmes were described as crucial, facilitate early intervention and the signposting to other available supports.³⁹⁶ Furthermore, early childhood home visiting helps children and families by connecting parents with a home visitor who guides them through the early stages of raising a family.³⁹⁷

³⁹⁰ Family Resource Centre National Forum Written Submission, 2.

³⁹¹ Family Resource Centre National Forum Written Submission, 7.

³⁹² DCDE Briefing Note, 16 October 2025, 23; DCDE Briefing Note, 4 December 2025, 43; [Minister Foley announces 10 new Family Resource Centres](#);

³⁹³ [Programme for Government 2025: Securing Ireland's Future](#), 64.

³⁹⁴ CRA Written Submission, 15.

³⁹⁵ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 14.

³⁹⁶ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 35.

³⁹⁷ National College of Ireland ‘Home Visiting Alliance’ quoted in CRA Written Submission, 15.

A national system of home visiting has been established with five core programmes, including Preparing for Life, with approximately 50 sites at present including urban and rural areas.³⁹⁸ The home visits under the community mother programme was acknowledged as welcomed by a stakeholder.³⁹⁹ An infrastructure has been developed including the training of home visitors, provision of appropriate supports, and supervision to ensure the programmes are delivered in accordance to the evidence-based model.⁴⁰⁰ It was highlighted that home visiting is recognised and supported by policy including First 5 and the Young Ireland policy framework.⁴⁰¹

The impact of the programme is evident from the following example presented to the Committee:

We had an experience where a parent just had a baby. It was a vulnerable situation and there were difficult circumstances at home. The child had a medical issue and stayed in hospital. We had the home visitor go to the hospital with the mother while the child was in NICU for a number of months. Tusla and public health were involved. Over a period of a couple of months, we were able to see a situation where the mother was able to go home with the baby. The other services were able to take a step back when they knew that the preparing for life and home visiting programme were in place. The mother said she was happy and secure and that she was happy Tusla and public health were stepping back. However, she wants to make sure the home visitor stays with her.⁴⁰²

The importance of having experienced, skilled staff with an understanding of the communities along with an effective working partnership between the parent and child and the home visitor working together were identified as essential.⁴⁰³ It was highlighted that a

³⁹⁸ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 14.

³⁹⁹ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 25.

⁴⁰⁰ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 14.

⁴⁰¹ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 14.

⁴⁰² Transcript, 20 November 2025, 14.

⁴⁰³ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 14.

home visitor enables the building of a trusted relationship, the making of connections, and access to services.⁴⁰⁴

It was noted that the Government has approved a home visiting programme which is being implemented by Tusla, since 2024, and aims to bring previous pilot initiatives into a framework of home visiting services.⁴⁰⁵ The importance of home visiting for preventing children and young people from having to be supported by Tusla's child protection and welfare services was noted.⁴⁰⁶ Strong investment in home visiting has been provided by Tusla and DCDE.⁴⁰⁷

Economic analysis has shown a good return on investment.⁴⁰⁸ A recent report titled *The Economic Case for Home Visiting in Ireland*, with the aim of evaluating the economic effectiveness of ten home visiting programmes across New Zealand and America and exploring the potential economic return on investment.⁴⁰⁹ Findings included that:

- eight of the ten programmes produced a positive monetary benefits per family ranging from €1,311 and €18,485;
- the benefit to cost ratio was 1.6:1;
- those with the highest benefit to cost ratio tended to be programmes that commenced at the prenatal stage, were delivered on a monthly basis, and ran for the first three years of a child's life; and
- the most cost-effective programmes targeted families experiencing residential instability, families on lower incomes, families with lower levels of education, and one-parent families.⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰⁴ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 22.

⁴⁰⁵ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 18.

⁴⁰⁶ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 4.

⁴⁰⁷ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 10.

⁴⁰⁸ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 20; Transcript, 20 November 2025, 4;

⁴⁰⁹ Orla Doyle *The Economic Case for Home visiting in Ireland* (DCEDIY 2024) cited in CRA Written Submission, 15.

⁴¹⁰ Orla Doyle *The Economic Case for Home visiting in Ireland* (DCEDIY 2024) cited in CRA Written Submission, 15 – 16.

Other initiatives

Play Initiatives

DCDE provides funding for the upgrading and maintenance of playground facilities for children and young people through the annual Capital Grant Scheme for Play and Recreation.⁴¹¹ This scheme funds the development of new playgrounds and recreation facilities, as well as enhancements to access and inclusivity for children and young people with additional needs.⁴¹² In 2025, €500,000 was made available to local authorities.⁴¹³ A pilot project, Making Spaces for and with Teenagers, utilised dormant accounts funding secured by DCDE for local authorities to submit projects for new recreational spaces for teenagers that were developed in consultation with teenagers.⁴¹⁴ Following an evaluation process, the funding of €500,000 was awarded in 2025 to 7 local authorities with two receiving €125,000 and five awarded €50,000.⁴¹⁵ Recently, Minister for Children, Disability and Equality, Norma Foley T.D., announced the recipients of this year's Capital Grant Scheme for Play and Recreation, with a total of €600,000 awarded to 30 Local Authorities across the country.⁴¹⁶

A National Play Day, supported by €100,000 annually from DCDE, aims to promote play and recreation opportunities for children and young people across the country.⁴¹⁷ This initiative allows local authorities to apply for funding to deliver a programme of activities.⁴¹⁸

Play packs provided by DCDE for children in emergency accommodation centres, international protection accommodation and IPAS centres are another initiative that was mentioned.⁴¹⁹ These consist of books or games and are suitable for indoor spaces.⁴²⁰

⁴¹¹ DCDE Briefing Note, 16 October 2025, 11; DCDE Briefing Note, 4 December 2025, 20.

⁴¹² DCDE Briefing Note, 16 October 2025, 11; DCDE Briefing Note, 4 December 2025, 20.

⁴¹³ DCDE Briefing Note, 16 October 2025, 11. DCDE Briefing Note, 4 December 2025, 20.

⁴¹⁴ DCDE Briefing Note, 16 October 2025, 12; DCDE Briefing Note, 4 December 2025, 21; [Minister Foley announces €500,000 in funding for new recreational spaces for teenagers.](#)

⁴¹⁵ [Minister Foley announces €500,000 in funding for new recreational spaces for teenagers.](#)

⁴¹⁶ [Minister Foley announces €600,000 in funding for the development and refurbishment of playgrounds and play areas nationwide.](#)

⁴¹⁷ DCDE Briefing Note, 16 October 2025, 11; DCDE Briefing Note, 4 December 2025, 20.

⁴¹⁸ DCDE Briefing Note, 16 October 2025, 11; DCDE Briefing Note, 4 December 2025, 20.

⁴¹⁹ Transcript, 4 December 2026, 20.

⁴²⁰ Transcript, 4 December 2026, 20.

Little Library Book Bag Initiative

The DCDE and DRCDG support the little library book bag initiative which is made available to all children before they start primary school with free books and invites them to join their local library.⁴²¹ In evidence to the Committee it was noted that DRCDG is active in ensuring that libraries are safe and supportive spaces for all members of communities and their important role as hubs for services and learning spaces was highlighted.⁴²² Additionally, it was highlighted that DRCDG is examining the provision of community-type services as part of the library capital programme; particular reference was made to libraries being active places where there are meetings, support groups and activities for children.⁴²³

⁴²¹ Transcript, 16 October 2025 4 – 5.

⁴²² Transcript, 16 October 2025, 4 – 5.

⁴²³ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 18.

5. Voice of the Child

Stakeholders including the community and voluntary sector cited engagement and experiences of children:

Our young participants have consistently told us they want family connections, safety and legitimate opportunities. One 17-year-old participant described feeling trapped by circumstances beyond his control.⁴²⁴

They have little food or access to a healthy diet. They live in overcrowded homes or homelessness accommodation. They often have no electricity or heating. They are often not in school, or no school will take them. They live in fear due to the level of criminality in the area. Numerous houses are boarded up in their community, while open drug dealing is rife and goes largely unchallenged. In the past few months, six state-of-the-art CCTV systems have been cut down or burned. This has demonstrated to the community and to our clients not simply that the area is unsafe, but that it is also beyond the State's capacity to make it so.⁴²⁵

Stakeholders also highlighted how child poverty and deprivation can reveal itself:

Home visits can tell a lot about a family. Some families are living in inadequate accommodation that has the bare minimum in relation to furniture and household goods. Social exclusion can start at a young age. Parents often avoid additional school activities as they cannot afford the additional costs, meaning the child misses out on activities their peers are engaged in. They can also experience such exclusion by their peers in the community and elsewhere. Children feel different and are treated as different. Child poverty often shows up in how children behave and express themselves. It can reveal itself with symptoms such as anxiety, withdrawal or acting-out behaviours that can be misread as being bold or difficult when really they are signs that something deeper is going on. They are often a sign that the child

⁴²⁴ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 6.

⁴²⁵ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 5.

is struggling to cope in these circumstances. In a society in which materialistic things are considered the gold standard, children are living in a world with online portrayal of lives that are perfect, and this can and does have an impact on children's views of themselves, their feelings of self-worth and pressure to hide their true circumstances. All these factors can lead to mental health issues. Sometimes it is in the way children talk about home with worry or embarrassment or dealing with constant financial stress. Higher school absenteeism and poor social skills are also a feature of child poverty we see. Parents are having to make difficult choices such as whether to buy food or clothes or fuel for their car, constantly making impossible decisions at times of huge strain. The rising cost of living is putting more families under pressure and bringing them into deprivation. Poverty is not just about not having enough money; it affects the child's confidence, sense of safety and belief in what is possible for their future. More can be done and ought to be done to ensure that children are better, happier and safer.⁴²⁶

The benefit of community based intensive family support with a wraparound service to break the cycle of poverty from a child's perspective was conveyed to the Committee.⁴²⁷ A stakeholder recounted the experience of an 18-year-old male who grew up in an extremely disadvantaged area:

At age seven, he became involved in summer youth project programmes. Relationships were built with key workers. He participated in a pilot early intervention programme with the youth diversion project from nine to 11 years. He was referred to an early school leavers project aged from 13 to 15. He returned to full-time education, sat his leaving certificate in June 2025 and is currently on a post-leaving certificate, PLC, course in youthwork.⁴²⁸

The benefits of interagency working in supporting children in poverty was exemplified to the Committee by a stakeholder, who shared the experience of a ten-year-old boy.

⁴²⁶ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 9.

⁴²⁷ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 8.

⁴²⁸ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 8.

His mother died from drug addiction when he was five. His father spent time in prison and has struggled with addiction. There has been an excellent wraparound service in the community, with community-based family support, home school liaison, school completion, an after-school service, an early intervention youth diversion project and a housing association. Father and son were in emergency accommodation for one year and were an open case with Tusla. They have been closed with Tusla. They have a two-bed apartment, which the child calls his forever home.⁴²⁹

Engagement with Children and Young People

The Committee engaged with children and young people from different areas and backgrounds in private session to ensure that children's views were heard, respected and meaningfully considered in accordance with Article 12 of the UNCRC, as referenced earlier in this report. The National Participation Office facilitated the Committee's engagement and provided support and guidance to the children and young people in preparation for their engagement. It was emphasised by the children and young people that poverty and deprivation affect their lives by their basic needs not being met, curtailing their participation in activities, and also impacts their well-being and self-esteem. In preparation for their engagement with the Committee, the young people identified three key topics namely healthcare, essentials and education. A key message from the engagement was that:

No child chooses to be born into poverty, and the children who need the most support are often getting the least.

Healthcare

No child should suffer pain or miss opportunities because healthcare is out of reach.

The following issues and concerns were raised by young people in relation to inadequate access to healthcare:

⁴²⁹ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 8.

- Waiting lists for healthcare, such as mental health support and dental treatment, is negatively impacting children and young people with their condition often worsening while waiting for appointments;
- Access to GP visits being impact by the financial burden on their family;
- Being unable to afford glasses and this impacting their ability to participate fully in classroom activities;
- Living with constant dental pain while waiting months for treatment; and
- Travel was identified as a barrier with some children travelling several hours to attend appointments.

The impacts of delayed care were also emphasised to the Committee including education where children and young people lose concentration, fall behind academically, and miss school. Emotional well-being is also impacted which includes isolation, low self-esteem and a feeling of difference to their peers.

The recommendations from the children and young people included:

- Reduced waiting lists;
- Improved access to services;
- Transport supports;
- Strengthened community care;
- Ensure families understand and access the services available; and
- Removal of barriers so that every child can access healthcare equally.

Essentials

Poverty is not just about money; it is about what children go without every single day.

The importance of children and young people having what they need was emphasised along with the chance to succeed when needs are fulfilled. It was stated that no child's future should be decided by what they can't afford. The absence of basic essentials was highlighted to the Committee in particular food, clothes, and a comfortable place to sleep. The impact of a lack of essentials is also referenced under education below.

Feminine hygiene products were described as a necessity. Children and young people identified that they may not have these products due to cost and also identified access to pain relief as an issue. The impact of not having these products include the feeling of embarrassment or being ashamed, affects confidence and mental health, and can lead to non-attendance at school. It was acknowledged that some schools assist by providing products but that this should be standard practice.

Access to a mobile phone for teenagers was raised particularly in relation to communication, connection and self-expression and some children were of the view they should be allowed access to their phones in cases of emergency during school hours.

Youth spaces and youth services were also raised by the children and young people. The important role of youth workers in the children's lives was emphasised. It was highlighted that youth services provide a meeting place, support, new insights and experiences, and open doors to opportunities.

Recommendations made by the children and young people included:

- Every school should provide essentials like meals and hygiene products;
- Investment should be made in youth services and safe spaces; and
- Teachers should receive training on addressing menstrual-related issues and discussing them appropriately.

Education

School was described as a positive experience by most of the children and young people, and it was highlighted that it allows you to see friends that you may not otherwise see.

Reference was also made to the vast opportunities that are missed. The children and young people highlighted that education can inadvertently worsen child poverty and deprivation when accessibility falters. Racism was another element highlighted to the Committee.

Barriers to education raised included:

- Financial costs and distance from school;
- Hidden costs and requirements can be obstacles to full participation and, or, attendance;

- Costs associated with school uniforms, physical education uniform, school specific coat, mandatory trips, everyday lunches, technology, and participation in school events;
- Mandatory transition year participation in some schools and the associated costs, including the annual school trip, places a significant financial burden on families;
- Child poverty and deprivation in terms of extracurricular activities means that access to sports, arts and clubs are out of reach which also prevents personal development and the development of skills such as social and teamwork.
- A lack of access to resources for learning and academic success, such as access to adequate study space, up-to-date textbooks, technology and basic stationery;
- The short-notice period provided by schools of monies being required and how this adds to financial pressure;

The translation of economic hardship into impossible choices for families with respect to necessities and requirements for participation and attendance in educational settings was outlined. As a result, families coped by skipping meals, cutting back on essentials, and experiencing financial strain.

The impacts identified include:

- a child's ability to learn because of the stress and anxiety associated with their families' hardship;
- concentration difficulties and reduced engagement in the classroom; and
- challenges are exacerbated by a lack of support systems within schools including counsellors, and spaces for quiet and relaxation.

Resources for schools was another matter raised. It was acknowledged that some schools provide breakfast clubs, and the children and young people advocated for this service to be provided more widely along with greater choice. The young people identified that their subject choices had been impacted with access to science and language options being limited.

Suggestions included:

- Comprehensive review and substantial increase in funding for schools;
- Targeting of resources to reduce all associated costs with school including making school uniforms affordable and subsidising costs for school activities;
- Introducing the option of paying for costs associated with education in instalments;
- Allow parents and guardians to pay by instalment and introduce supports for large cost items in particular;
- Breakfast clubs and school meals programmes being provided by more schools and that healthy and diverse options should be provided;
- Provision of adequate support systems within schools including counsellors;
- Delivery of safe spaces including quiet areas for relaxation;
- Designated spaces in libraries for students to study with laptops available for the completion of homework or coursework; and
- Talks and presentations on racism should be included in school settings.

Other matters

Accommodation

Accommodation was another issue raised by the group. The conditions of some traveller accommodation was highlighted and the fact that some are living in small caravans with no running water. The effects of homelessness on well-being, education and health, both physical and mental, as well as the effect on adult life was raised.

Restrictions around emergency accommodation centres were also raised including the prohibition of visitors and curfews. Sport and recreation spaces were also identified, and it was suggested that appropriate spaces should be provided to engage children and young people. For centres that provide food, it was suggested that a card with a budget could be provided to allow children and young people access to food and snack choices for themselves. Training for staff working in these settings was also suggested including how best to respond in difficult situations.

Courses

It was suggested that courses or classes for other aspects of a young person's life should be provided. Examples included hair, make-up, beauty, and nails. Also courses towards career pathways such as nursing.

Transport

The children and young people raised issues regarding transport including that school bus services can be costly; difficulty accessing public transport in rural areas; non-transferability of school bus ticket to a later or different service(s); lack of frequency and later evening transport services; and lack of access to transport a barrier for activities and interests.

Recreational activities

The pressure from friends to participate in recreational activities. It was suggested that multi-sport facilities should be prioritised.

A clear question put by children to the Members of the Committee was when will changes be introduced following their engagement and suggested recommendations. The young people also emphasised the need for immediate action.

6. Pathways to progress

This section intends to give an account of the responses to child poverty and deprivation.

Child poverty cannot be effectively addressed without addressing the structural causes of poverty experienced by their families and communities.⁴³⁰ It was emphasised to the Committee that the best way to protect a child is to strengthen the family's capabilities and support the family including creating the conditions for families to flourish.⁴³¹ It was commented that what is required is investment and a reorientation to understand that poor children live in poor families, and if you want to support children, the single most important impactful way is to support their parents to do their best.⁴³² It was highlighted that if the basic quality of life is not established then it is very challenging to achieve better outcomes.⁴³³ It was outlined that the ways to reduce material deprivation and income poverty risk are different; with in-kind benefit, improved labour market participation and cash transfers.⁴³⁴

Child Poverty Target

A new child poverty target was announced by Government in September 2025 to be achieved by the end of 2030; the target is 3 per cent or less consistent child poverty which measures children both at risk of poverty and experiencing deprivation.⁴³⁵ This target represents a reduction from the current consistent child poverty rate of 8.5 per cent.⁴³⁶ It was highlighted to the Committee, that no level of child poverty is acceptable and that the target provides a pathway for progress.⁴³⁷ Also, it was recognised that no one measure adequately captures all facets of poverty.⁴³⁸ The dual approach of consistent poverty, provides for the combination of at risk of income based poverty and those facing

⁴³⁰ Community Platform Written Submission, 1.

⁴³¹ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 15 – 16.

⁴³² Transcript, 9 October 2025, 24.

⁴³³ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 15.

⁴³⁴ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 25.

⁴³⁵ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 5.

⁴³⁶ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 5; DSP Written Submission, 4; CSO Written Submission, 4.

⁴³⁷ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 5; Transcript, 16 October 2025, 6.

⁴³⁸ DSP Written Submission, 3.

deprivation, was noted as offering valuable insight and which explains why it has severed as the national poverty benchmark.⁴³⁹

The inherently problematic nature of such targets was outlined as such targets imply accepting a level of child poverty as inevitable.⁴⁴⁰ It was suggested that the target should be to seek the elimination of consistent poverty among children.⁴⁴¹

Data and Dashboard of Indicators

Deficits in the collection of comprehensive disaggregated data on marginalised groups of children was raised.⁴⁴² Children from certain groups, including those with a disability, children who live in a household where someone has a disability, are less likely to be accurately assessed using econometric measures.⁴⁴³ It was highlighted that certain groups are not included in sufficient numbers in datasets including traveller children, those living in direct provision or emergency accommodation.⁴⁴⁴ The integration of administrative data was also discussed, and it was highlighted that this data provides greater opportunity as it covers all different population groups, in comparison with sample-based data, and can provide insights at the community level and how people's situations change overtime.⁴⁴⁵ It was suggested that efforts should be made to include data on the living standards of Traveller and Roma children, children seeking asylum, and children in emergency accommodation should also be made to ensure those not counted in official poverty statistics are represented.⁴⁴⁶

It was suggested that the dashboard of indicators could ensure that monetary-based targets are accompanied by social and cultural measures to give a holistic view.⁴⁴⁷ It was commented that a multi-dimensional approach can assist with placing child poverty

⁴³⁹ DSP Written Submission, 4.

⁴⁴⁰ Community Platform Written Submission, 2.

⁴⁴¹ Community Platform Written Submission, 2.

⁴⁴² Transcript, 22 January 2026, 3.

⁴⁴³ Banks, LM (date missing) Are current approaches to poverty measurement disability-inclusive? Considerations for measuring poverty amongst people with disabilities, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. PENDA (Programme for Evidence to Inform Disability Action) quoted in Pobal Written Submission, 3.

⁴⁴⁴ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 9; Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 11.

⁴⁴⁵ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 19.

⁴⁴⁶ Transcript, 22 January 2026, 3.

⁴⁴⁷ Pobal Written Submission, 3.

reduction within a children's rights framework and aligns with SDGs broader poverty definition.⁴⁴⁸

In written submission, it was suggested that work undertaken at European level as well as guidelines developed by UNICEF may inform initiatives for dashboard indicators. It was noted that a child deprivation indicator has been adopted and integrated into monitoring frameworks at a European level.⁴⁴⁹ It was noted that the items proposed for measurement capture the multifaceted ways in which poverty impacts children including being able to invite friends home and participation in leisure activities.⁴⁵⁰ It was outlined that UNICEF has developed guidelines for selecting poverty and deprivation indicators that are child centred using the UNCRC.⁴⁵¹

Further suggestions included the inclusion of a target relating to the 'at risk of poverty rate' and adopting a broader income-related measure which could assist with the identification of children experiencing relative poverty.⁴⁵² The latter measure was observed as better-equipped to identify disability than an absolute measure on account of its heightened sensitivity to social exclusion.⁴⁵³ Additionally, it was suggested that data should be classified for policy makers by groups economically vulnerable to poverty including one parent families.⁴⁵⁴

An indicator based on household consumption was proposed in written submission to the Committee.⁴⁵⁵ The approach taken by New Zealand was cited and it was highlighted that their metric focuses on housing.⁴⁵⁶ It was stated that the CSO Household Survey, which is

⁴⁴⁸ Nolan, A. and Pells, K. (2020) Children's Economic and Social Rights and Child Poverty: The State of Play International Journal of Children's Rights quote in Pobal Written Submission, 3.

⁴⁴⁹ Daly, M. (2019) Fighting Child Poverty: The Child Guarantee, Briefing provided to European Parliament's Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL) quoted in Pobal Written Submission, 3.

⁴⁵⁰ Eurostat. Guio, Anne-Catherine and Marlier, Eric and Vandenbroucke, Frank and Verbunt, Pim (2020) Micro- and macro-drivers of child deprivation in 31 European countries – 2020 edition. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union quoted in Pobal Written Submission, 3 – 4.

⁴⁵¹ de Neubourg C., Chai J., de Milliano M., Plavgo I. and Wei Z., "Step-by-Step Guidelines to the Multiple Overlapping Deprivation Analysis (moda)", Working Paper 2012–10 (UNICEF Office of Research, Florence: UNICEF, 2012) quoted in Pobal Written Submission.

⁴⁵² Pobal Written Submission, 4.

⁴⁵³ Banks, LM (date missing) Are current approaches to poverty measurement disability-inclusive? Considerations for measuring poverty amongst people with disabilities, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. PENDA (Programme for Evidence to Inform Disability Action) cited in Pobal Written Submission, 4.

⁴⁵⁴ One Parent Family Written Submission, 5.

⁴⁵⁵ Pobal Written Submission, 4.

⁴⁵⁶ Pobal Written Submission, 4 – 5.

moving to an annual release, could be a useful starting point in developing the indicator.⁴⁵⁷ It was suggested that a metric that tracks the impact of childcare costs, housing, and day-to-day expenditure would be valuable as these outgoings can impact the standard of living available to a family, and that families not technically experiencing income inadequacy may struggle to make ends meet.⁴⁵⁸ Another aspect of this metric identified was that it would improve understanding of the children affected by poverty and its social determinants.⁴⁵⁹

Nested targets within indicators were proposed so that overarching progress in relation to poverty reduction to ensure that progress reaches marginalised groups of children.⁴⁶⁰

Benefits to including sub-targets outlined to the Committee included ensuring that diverse children's experiences of poverty are visible, ensuring that poverty measurement is sensitive to intersectionality, and could provide an impetus for those at the intersection of policy and practice to consider how interagency working and community based supports could be strengthened.⁴⁶¹

Strategic thinking and action

It was emphasised that strategic thinking is required to develop and deploy approaches that rebuild trust, engage hard to reach families and create a sense of being part of and included in the community.⁴⁶² It was highlighted that effective services and interventions are understood; however, persistent intergenerational problems have shown that existing approaches have not addressed a breach of trust between services and families with complex, long-term needs.⁴⁶³ It was acknowledged that the number of families in each area who are experiencing difficulties and are giving rise to difficulties within communities are known.⁴⁶⁴ It was acknowledged that the same problems will continue for future

⁴⁵⁷ Pobal Written Submission, 4.

⁴⁵⁸ Pobal Written Submission, 5.

⁴⁵⁹ Pobal Written Submission, 5.

⁴⁶⁰ Pobal Written Submission, 5.

⁴⁶¹ Pobal Written Submission, 5.

⁴⁶² Transcript, 20 November 2025, 17.

⁴⁶³ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 17.

⁴⁶⁴ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 17.

generations without a targeted, long-term strategic approach that focuses on engagement, trust, and integration.⁴⁶⁵

Child rights budgeting

Child rights budgeting was identified as a starting point for a sustained focus on child poverty in order to make a meaningful difference.⁴⁶⁶ It was noted that this was a recommendation of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2016 and 2023, and a lack of progress in respect of the recommendation was identified.⁴⁶⁷ There is also a commitment for this included in the Young Ireland policy framework.⁴⁶⁸ It was emphasised that until we have a full understanding of the budgets being made available for, and being spent on, children, we cannot adequately plan and resource children's services and supports.⁴⁶⁹ Furthermore, it was stated the child rights impact assessments need to be integrated into the budget process to ensure that fiscal decisions are compliant with obligations under the UNCRC.⁴⁷⁰ The importance of 'focused, joined up thinking and poverty proofing' during the budgetary process was also highlighted.⁴⁷¹

Adequate, Available and Integrated Services

The importance of prioritising investment in public services,⁴⁷² co-ordinated, multi-agency action,⁴⁷³ and multifaceted and cross departmental approaches were highlighted.⁴⁷⁴ It was acknowledged that cash transfers have a significant protective impact but that a policy and service-based response by providing more free services or in-kind benefits, including provision of early childhood education and care, play a very important role in poverty

⁴⁶⁵ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 17.

⁴⁶⁶ Transcript, 22 January 2026, 3.

⁴⁶⁷ Transcript, 22 January 2026, 3.

⁴⁶⁸ Transcript, 22 January 2026, 7.

⁴⁶⁹ Transcript, 22 January 2026, 3; Transcript, 22 January 2026, 6.

⁴⁷⁰ Transcript, 22 January 2026, 3; Transcript, 22 January 2026, 9.

⁴⁷¹ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 12; SPARK Written Submission, 5.

⁴⁷² Transcript 9 October 2025, 3.

⁴⁷³ Transcript, 22 January 2026, 21.

⁴⁷⁴ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 9.

alleviation.⁴⁷⁵ For areas with high-levels of intergenerational trauma and poverty, the need to provide increased resources was emphasised.⁴⁷⁶

Funding

Funding and investment matters were raised. A challenge emphasised to the Committee is the lack of co-ordination at the governance level nationally, as each programme is funded through different funding streams, each with its own requirements and data reporting obligations.⁴⁷⁷ It was outlined how the community and voluntary sector can receive funding from multiple sources.⁴⁷⁸ The balance between advocacy and challenge while managing concerns about potential impacts on funding was also mentioned.⁴⁷⁹

The need for multi-annual funding was emphasised to the Committee.⁴⁸⁰ It was highlighted that the yearly cycle of funding leads to uncertainty regarding the funding for a service for the following year and that it is worse to establish a service, and then remove it the following year.⁴⁸¹ Multi-annual funding would allow for the development of long-term services, and these long-term services can tackle intergenerational poverty.⁴⁸² It is also needed for people to be secure and build lasting relationships with families.⁴⁸³

Greater sectoral investment and a more stable and sustainable funding model were suggested.⁴⁸⁴ This would create and enable an environment that recognises the trust these services have in challenging communities.⁴⁸⁵ It was emphasised that a shift from an output driven to outcome-focused model was needed, and the importance of investing in families and their capabilities was recognised.⁴⁸⁶

⁴⁷⁵ Nygård, M., Lindberg, M., Nyqvist, F. et al. (2019) The Role of Cash Benefit and In-Kind Benefit Spending for Child Poverty in Times of Austerity: An Analysis of 22 European Countries 2006–2015. *Social Indicators Research* 146, 533–552 quoted in Pobal Written Submission, 11; Transcript, 16 October 2025, 9.

⁴⁷⁶ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 4.

⁴⁷⁷ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 10.

⁴⁷⁸ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 12.

⁴⁷⁹ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 12.

⁴⁸⁰ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 11.

⁴⁸¹ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 11.

⁴⁸² Transcript, 20 November 2025, 11.

⁴⁸³ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 16.

⁴⁸⁴ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 35.

⁴⁸⁵ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 35.

⁴⁸⁶ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 35.

The importance of investing in community and intensive programmes was raised, along with long-term funding to ensure that complex problems can be solved and to ensure that the services and supports are available to support families and young people to avoid the need for alternative care.⁴⁸⁷ Trust with communities and organisations was described as an essential ingredient and it was outlined that it is difficult to build and sustain trust when services are poorly funded, staff are lost to statutory organisations due to higher pay rates, and communities perceive that services will be withdrawn after a period.⁴⁸⁸

At national level, commissioning could be centralised within a single agency for the community and voluntary sector, mitigating the conflicts of interest inherent in departmental structures, where tertiary services are unavoidably funded more generously than community, voluntary, and prevention and early-intervention services.⁴⁸⁹ It was suggested that an opportunity for joint commissioning of services and a pooling of resources could be achieved through LCDs and CYPSCs developing their plans so that they can operate alongside one another.⁴⁹⁰ An example from Glasgow City Council was cited which highlighted that a percentage of the budget was assigned for the community and voluntary sector to guarantee that demands were met and it was noted that it was more effective in terms of outputs and cost.⁴⁹¹ As part of the commissioning system of early intervention and prevention, a financial analyst examined the percentage of council funding that was required to sustain the community, voluntary and third sector to work within the community in a way that ensures it was not impacted by the statutory services.⁴⁹² It was noted that this was an unpopular political decision but that it guaranteed multi-annual funding for each of the different services and had a tangible impact.⁴⁹³

The corporatisation and privatisation of services was highlighted to the Committee.⁴⁹⁴ It was noted that statutory agencies are increasingly contracting private companies to deliver

⁴⁸⁷ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 31.

⁴⁸⁸ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 11 - 12

⁴⁸⁹ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 31.

⁴⁹⁰ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 30.

⁴⁹¹ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 31.

⁴⁹² Transcript, 20 November 2025, 34.

⁴⁹³ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 34.

⁴⁹⁴ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 8; Transcript, 20 November 2025, 21.

services that were formerly provided by the community voluntary sector which is eroding the community voluntary sector.⁴⁹⁵ It was suggested that this is at a higher cost to the state.⁴⁹⁶ It was highlighted that it is becoming more difficult to sustain the bottom-up community development approach due to pressure on the voluntary community groups.⁴⁹⁷ Concern was also expressed about the privatisation of emergency accommodation including the use of hotels and other private accommodation and the provision of adequate amenities for children.⁴⁹⁸ In concluding remarks to the Committee it was emphasised that community development and the voluntary sector is being eroded through reduced funding, a shift from grants to output-based procurement, increased administrative burdens, and the stifling of advocacy.⁴⁹⁹

A progressive, universal approach was recommended with additional funding, resources and allocation into the areas that need them more.⁵⁰⁰ It was suggested that applying area-based data in resource allocation models and policy design, supplemented with individual data on disadvantage, can support delivery of targeting and interagency cohesion in practice.⁵⁰¹ It was emphasised that there is an ongoing need to invest in place-based supports in disadvantaged communities, including through public health interventions and enhanced health and social services, as well as local amenities such as playgrounds, transportation and green spaces.⁵⁰²

Co-ordination and Integration of Administrative Systems

Ireland's system of government and public administration is organised along sectoral lines.⁵⁰³ Children and their lives do not fit neatly into these silos⁵⁰⁴ and reference was made to a number of reports that identified that the approach of separating a child's needs into different services is not working.⁵⁰⁵ Multiple public systems including social protection,

⁴⁹⁵ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 8.

⁴⁹⁶ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 8.

⁴⁹⁷ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 21.

⁴⁹⁸ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 21.

⁴⁹⁹ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 36.

⁵⁰⁰ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 25.

⁵⁰¹ Pobal Written Submission, 10.

⁵⁰² Pobal Written Submission, 10.

⁵⁰³ Transcript, 22 January 2026, 3.

⁵⁰⁴ Transcript, 22 January 2026, 3.

⁵⁰⁵ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 20.

health, and housing, interact with families in poverty; it was noted complexity or lack of information can result in families not receiving eligible supports.⁵⁰⁶ Co-ordination was identified as crucial in the context of child poverty, where measures sit across the remit of several departments.⁵⁰⁷

Integration should be embedded within administrative processes and incorporated into decision-making to ensure that a positive impact of one measure does not diminish the effectiveness of another.⁵⁰⁸ This was exemplified during discussions with the Committee regarding income disregards and allowances.⁵⁰⁹ It is vital that all Departments, particularly in advance of budgets, ensure that increases in social welfare payments or the national minimum wage are not offset by people losing access to other supports, such as the NCS or medical cards, due to eligibility thresholds failing to keep pace with rising incomes.⁵¹⁰ Similarly, the same view was expressed regarding service provision with emphasis on the disparities in services, including public health nurses and FRCs, between different areas.⁵¹¹ Additionally, it was noted that the fragmented service delivery between Tusla, HSE and schools impacts children and families in poverty and deprivation.⁵¹²

It was commented that the activities of Government Departments need to be examined to ensure they are aligned to address child poverty and deprivation.⁵¹³ The importance of collaboration, information sharing and crisis-management of situations to support better-informed decision making was outlined.⁵¹⁴

Focused, Targeted and Strategic Interventions

The need to ensure that interventions are focused, targeted and strategic, was emphasised to the Committee.⁵¹⁵ It was noted that the community and voluntary sector have provided evidence-based programmes within organisations including the HSE, CAMHS and Tusla, and

⁵⁰⁷ Transcript, 22 January 2026, 3.

⁵⁰⁸ Transcript, 9 October 2025.

⁵⁰⁹ Transcript, 9 October 2025.

⁵¹⁰ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 7; Transcript, 9 October 2025, 12.

⁵¹¹ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 24.

⁵¹² Family Resource Centre National Forum Written Submission, 5.

⁵¹³ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 16.

⁵¹⁴ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 23.

⁵¹⁵ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 35.

have identified emerging need, identified programmes and examined whether those programmes are suitable in an Irish context.⁵¹⁶ It was suggested that an adequate amount of time should be given to embedding the successful programmes so that they can be mainstreamed by statutory services.⁵¹⁷ A project using therapeutic models to address criminogenic and psychodynamic concerns was referenced.⁵¹⁸ It was outlined that the foundation of the model is a team that have built trust within the community and it was acknowledged that there is an extremely vulnerable population that also poses significant challenges for their communities.⁵¹⁹ Addressing the needs effectively requires targeted psychotherapeutic interventions delivered by trained professionals.⁵²⁰ The importance of a trauma-informed care training for all front-facing services to ensure that trust with families who have had a negative experience in the past is rebuilt.⁵²¹

Integrated and Innovative Responses

Integrated responses, single point of access, and the supports required to access services were described as very important.⁵²² The consolidation and integration of family and parental support, health and well-being was highlighted to the Committee with reference made to organisations providing smaller scale interventions such as the Lynn Clinic, Dublin that provides specialist social inclusion to parents.⁵²³ It was noted that there are moves to have elements of that type of model at regional level.⁵²⁴ Furthermore, findings from end of year reports from Local Development Companies of the SICAP initiatives suggest that it is difficult to disentangle community-based family supports from broader social policy, and that to achieve progress on poverty targets, actions which widen access to high-quality housing, education and domestic, sexual and gender-based violence services will be required.⁵²⁵

⁵¹⁶ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 35 – 36.

⁵¹⁷ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 36.

⁵¹⁸ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 34.

⁵¹⁹ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 34.

⁵²⁰ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 34.

⁵²¹ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 8; Transcript, 20 November 2025, 22; Transcript, 20 November 2025, 35.

⁵²² Transcript, 16 October 2025, 31.

⁵²³ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 21.

⁵²⁴ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 21.

⁵²⁵ Pobal Written Submission, 11.

The importance of innovation, the need for further innovation,⁵²⁶ as well as the benefits and success of service models were presented to the Committee. An e-support pilot was cited as an example of face-to-face services being delivered online during Covid.⁵²⁷ The success of mobile therapeutic support services, in particular for rural areas, was emphasised to the Committee.⁵²⁸ The ISPCC outlined that one of their services is a mobile therapeutic support that works directly with children and families in a setting that is comfortable for them, such as homes, schools and community spaces.⁵²⁹ The benefits have included meaningful change and building and enhancing of resilience.⁵³⁰ [Planet Youth](#) was presented to the Committee as an example of after-school activities.⁵³¹ It is an international evidence-based primary prevention model, developed by the Icelandic Centre for Social Research and Analysis (ICSRA) at Reykjavik University.⁵³² The stakeholders from Monaghan CYPSC and LCDC Local Area Child Poverty Action Plan Pilot highlighted that local schools provide the premises, that Cavan and Monaghan Education and Training Board has provided a panel of local youth facilitators to provide the activities, that carpooling is used sometimes due to a lack of transportation which has benefits for interfamilial connections.⁵³³ The need for innovation to engage with children, reach isolated rural families and address intergenerational poverty was emphasised as well as interagency approaches.⁵³⁴ The benefits of a holistic administrative system centred on individuals and families was outlined to the Committee including integrated records from prenatal through to education, and strong gender equality approaches to parental leave.⁵³⁵

Prevention and Early Intervention

Prevention and early intervention are not the responsibility of a single agency or department but that it is a shared responsibility across all agencies and departments.⁵³⁶ It was stated

⁵²⁶ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 34.

⁵²⁷ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 34.

⁵²⁸ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 33.

⁵²⁹ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 33.

⁵³⁰ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 33.

⁵³¹ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 27.

⁵³² [Planet Youth](#)

⁵³³ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 27.

⁵³⁴ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 34; Transcript, 22 January 2026, 7.

⁵³⁵ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 24.

⁵³⁶ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 36.

that early intervention has been extraordinarily effective once it is evidence-based and informed.⁵³⁷ It was outlined that statutory services are operating under significant pressure and as a result prevention and early intervention services are not being delivered as intended.⁵³⁸ Concern was expressed about the significant child protection risk being borne by the community and voluntary organisations because of pressures, including high staff turnover rates in the statutory services.⁵³⁹ Significant pressure on the community and voluntary sector was also emphasised, arising from constrained funding and resources alongside the complexity of families seeking support.⁵⁴⁰ It was stated that community and voluntary sector are in constant crisis response mode on the ground and within services which is having an impact on the ability to carry out prevention work.⁵⁴¹ It was emphasised that there is an increase in referrals from statutory organisations versus community settings.⁵⁴² The ABC programme is becoming an important referral pathway for statutory services; it was highlighted that a huge amount of referrals come from the HSE and Tusla.⁵⁴³ Similarly, it was stated that Tusla are the primary referrer to the ISPCC,⁵⁴⁴ and also account for 37 per cent of Archway's referrals.⁵⁴⁵

The importance of core meetings between funded services and social workers which enable co-ordinated, wraparound support for children and families was highlighted to the Committee.⁵⁴⁶ It was emphasised that approach takes a holistic view of the family, prevents children slipping through the cracks, prevents duplication, and improves overall effectiveness of the support.⁵⁴⁷

In-kind Benefits

A number of in-kind benefits that have been introduced were highlighted to the Committee; including: introduction of Equal Start, reduction of the cost of education by the extension of

⁵³⁷ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 23.

⁵³⁸ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 12.

⁵³⁹ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 13.

⁵⁴⁰ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 13.

⁵⁴¹ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 12.

⁵⁴² Transcript, 20 November 2025, 33.

⁵⁴³ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 12.

⁵⁴⁴ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 13.

⁵⁴⁵ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 5.

⁵⁴⁶ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 33.

⁵⁴⁷ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 33.

the free school meals, free school books programmes, back-to-school clothing and footwear allowance.⁵⁴⁸ It was commented that cash supports would be vital until in-kind supports are implemented.⁵⁴⁹ It was also stated that the six priorities of the Child Poverty and Well-Being Programme Office are largely focused on in-kind benefits.⁵⁵⁰ It was noted that some of the impacts of in-kind benefits are difficult to measure and that while a monetary value can be attached it does not fully reflect their overall effect.⁵⁵¹ An example cited was the school meals programme with a contribution for each primary school child has been calculated at €576 over the academic year; however, the monetary value is not the total value as other considerations include children's health and participation and concentration in school.⁵⁵²

Health and Developmental Supports

It was suggested that addressing child poverty will reduce health system burdens long-term, and that key to this is to strengthen the social determinants of health, including good housing, nutrition and education, and to ensure that health services are truly accessible to low income families.⁵⁵³ It was highlighted that the EU Child Guarantee calls for free healthcare for children in need and it was suggested that Ireland should aim to fulfil both in GP care and other health services.⁵⁵⁴

A lack of availability of universal services, assessments of need, and therapeutic supports for families was emphasised to the Committee.⁵⁵⁵ The necessity for proper and sustainable resourcing was highlighted along with supports within the prevention area throughout the statutory sector.⁵⁵⁶ It was recommended that improved access and co-ordinated services are required to address the long waiting lists for public services and to ensure that children have access to services at the required level when they are needed.⁵⁵⁷ The inability of many

⁵⁴⁸ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 20; Transcript, 22 January 2026, 21.

⁵⁴⁹ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 21.

⁵⁵⁰ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 20.

⁵⁵¹ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 33.

⁵⁵² Transcript, 16 October 2025, 15.

⁵⁵³ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 18.

⁵⁵⁴ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 18.

⁵⁵⁵ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 12.

⁵⁵⁶ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 12.

⁵⁵⁷ ISPC Opening Statement, 4.

children to access developmental services in a timely fashion was identified as a significant issue.⁵⁵⁸ It was noted that the long waiting lists across key services, including child and adolescent mental health services, occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, psychology and dental services, have a disproportionate impact on children living in poverty due to families' inability to access private assessments or interventions.⁵⁵⁹ Many parents try to pay privately for assessments and supports, but this has an impact on their ability to afford other day to day essentials and forces families into debt and significant financial arrears.⁵⁶⁰ Media reports that highlighted the current waiting lists and times for an appointment with a primary care psychologist were brought to the Committee's attention.⁵⁶¹ It was emphasised that capacity in mental health services needs to be built for youth and adolescent mental health as well as addressing the waiting lists and the duration of the wait.⁵⁶² Self-esteem, self-regulation and social supports are key building block to resilience and that when living in poverty for long periods that this resilience can be challenged.⁵⁶³ It was stated that community programmes like those funded by Tusla's Prevention and Early Intervention programme have shown good results for vulnerable families but that more investment is needed.⁵⁶⁴

Home Visiting

It was highlighted that home visiting is currently reaching less than one per cent of the potential population of children.⁵⁶⁵ Funding was identified as the main issue, and sustained national investment was recommended.⁵⁶⁶ At present funding is provided through the ABC programme, the early childhood programme and the children's fund.⁵⁶⁷ A suggestion made to the Committee was that investment in home visiting should be implemented across Departments where the benefits of these programmes have been identified including

⁵⁵⁸ Barnardo's Written Submission, 4.

⁵⁵⁹ Family Resource Centre National Forum Written Submission, 5; Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 17.

⁵⁶⁰ Barnardo's Written Submission, 4; Transcript, 22 January 2026, 5.

⁵⁶¹ ISPC Open Statement, 5.

⁵⁶² Transcript, 20 November 2025, 18.

⁵⁶³ ISPC Open Statment, 4.

⁵⁶⁴ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 18.

⁵⁶⁵ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 11.

⁵⁶⁶ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 14.

⁵⁶⁷ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 14.

health, education, justice and community development.⁵⁶⁸ It was noted that home visiting should be provided alongside a dedicated public health nurse service for children and families.⁵⁶⁹

Dedicated Public Health Nurse

A dedicated public health nurse (PHN) for children and families was suggested as an initiative for areas with high levels of intergenerational trauma and poverty.⁵⁷⁰ PHNs provide one-to-one support for parents, have a key role in ensuring that babies and young children have access to primary, preventative, and specialist healthcare, and are an important link to early childhood education and care services, in particular prevention and early intervention services.⁵⁷¹ A systematic review of international models, from Norway, Italy, United States and the United Kingdom, of public health, highlighted the important role that PHNs play in providing child-specific health support to address early childhood development milestones and early intervention.⁵⁷² In evidence to the Committee it was noted that there is a geographical disparity in relation to children receiving checks,⁵⁷³ and that due to a lower number of PHNs that some areas need to prioritise patients with the greatest needs.⁵⁷⁴

In the [Child Poverty Monitor 2025](#) the potential of a dedicated PHN service for children in terms of early intervention and improved outcomes was outlined.⁵⁷⁵ The impact of such a service was exemplified by the role of the PHN within Kidscope, a consultant-led, multi-stakeholder paediatric clinic located in northwest of Cork City.⁵⁷⁶ The PHN plays a key role including:

- the development, delivery, clinical review and sustainability of the initiative;

⁵⁶⁸ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 10.

⁵⁶⁹ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 20.

⁵⁷⁰ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 4.

⁵⁷¹ CRA Written Submission, 12 – 13.

⁵⁷² CRA Written Submission, 14.

⁵⁷³ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 20.

⁵⁷⁴ CRA Written Submission, 13.

⁵⁷⁵ Child Poverty Monitor 2025, 89.

⁵⁷⁶ Child Poverty Monitor 2025, 89.

- acts as the main referral agency to the wider health services including early intervention; and
- supporting the family when the child is attending appointments.⁵⁷⁷

The difference in approach was also identified with the PHN providing a more specialist early years focus, in contrast to the current generalist approach.⁵⁷⁸

Child Health Workforce

The Committee was made aware of a report in preparation on the child health workforce, led by the Department of Health, which focuses on the supply and structure of the workforce across the public service including public health nursing.⁵⁷⁹

Furthermore, the critical importance of the professionals working with children and families in the most difficult of circumstances was emphasised. Two matters in particular were referenced; (i) that the pipeline of the types of professionals is sufficient for the challenges and demographics, and (ii) the need to support professionals to work across professional practice, services and sectors.⁵⁸⁰

Early Childhood Education and Care

The most effective investment the Government can make to reduce child poverty is to provide a strong start in a child's earliest years.⁵⁸¹

Under-investment in early childhood education is one of the features of Ireland's investment in education relative to other OECD countries.⁵⁸² It was noted that Ireland spends less than 0.2 per cent of its GDP on early childhood education in contrast to on average 0.9 per cent of GDP across OECD countries.⁵⁸³ Furthermore, it was stated that Ireland has one of the lowest levels of expenditure in pre-primary education in the OECD.⁵⁸⁴

⁵⁷⁷ Child Poverty Monitor 2025, 89.

⁵⁷⁸ Child Poverty Monitor 2025, 89.

⁵⁷⁹ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 17.

⁵⁸⁰ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 35.

⁵⁸¹ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 6.

⁵⁸² SJI Written Submission, 5.

⁵⁸³ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 6.

⁵⁸⁴ SJI Written Submission, 5.

Data quoted in relation to early childhood education and care for three to five year olds showed that Ireland had the third lowest amount of expenditure in the OECD at 0.3 per cent of GDP despite a trebling of public investment in childcare programmes between 2011 and 2016.⁵⁸⁵ In comparison, Iceland, Norway and Sweden spent between 1.4 and 1.7 per cent of GDP.⁵⁸⁶ It was suggested that an increased funding allocation of €50 million per programme year needs to be delivered to ensure the greatest impact in the early lives of children experiencing poverty and disadvantage.⁵⁸⁷ It was highlighted that the EU Child Guarantee explicitly calls for free or affordable early childhood care for children in need and it was noted that Ireland's action plan aims to expand subsidised childcare, but a gap remains to reach low or no-cost childcare for low-income families.⁵⁸⁸

The importance of investing in quality service for children's early years was emphasised to the Committee with benefits outlined including:

- narrowing of developmental and socioeconomic gaps;
- enable children to develop skills vital for success in life, education and work;
- a lower chance of engagement in crime;
- the protective role of early years services in the same way as school;
- putting children on a path to lifelong learning and education;
- one of the most effective methods to break the cycle of poverty; and
- facilitate parents participate in the labour market, education and training.⁵⁸⁹

It was highlighted that one of the biggest returns on investment in early intervention is through good quality early education.⁵⁹⁰ Early childhood is the stage where education can most effectively influence the development of children and help reverse disadvantage, with

⁵⁸⁵ SJI Written Submission, 5.

⁵⁸⁶ [Retaining Talent at All Ages | OECD](#) quoted in SJI Written Submission, 5.

⁵⁸⁷ CRA Written Submission, 10.

⁵⁸⁸ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 16.

⁵⁸⁹ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 20; Transcript, 9 October 2025, 23; Transcript, 20 November 2025, 28; SJI Written Submission, 6; Conor Cashman, Margaret Buckley and Grainne Mulcahy, *Briefing Document on Early Interventions and Public Childcare Approaches*, (CRA and UCC 2023) quoted in CRA Written Submission, 8; Starting Strong, OECD Report cited in CRA Written Submission, 8; Transcript, 9 October 2025, 4; Transcript 9 October 2025, 5; Transcript, 9 October 2025, 5.

⁵⁹⁰ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 28.

pupils who had access to quality early childhood education performing better on standardised testing even allowing for socio-economic difference.⁵⁹¹

Research has found that tackling inequality at pre-school level before a child attends primary school was found to have a significant impact on educational disadvantage if certain conditions are met including: the pre-school is of a high quality, is adequately funded, has low adult-child ratios, highly-qualified staff with quality continued professional development, positive adult-child interactions, effective collaboration with parents, appropriate curricula, adequate oversight, monitoring and evaluation, and inclusivity and diversity.⁵⁹² It was recommended that Government must ensure that all early years settings meet these conditions.⁵⁹³ It was emphasised that childcare should be viewed as high-quality early education and that appropriate resources, well designed learning environments, and a system that is led by the child and supported by highly-trained and well-supported educators should be adopted.⁵⁹⁴

The introduction of a universal legal entitlement to pre-school was included as a commitment in *First 5* and it was highlighted to the Committee that this has yet to be delivered.⁵⁹⁵ Benefits of a legislative basis for early years include knowledge that children are attending services,⁵⁹⁶ allows the state to be more protective of all children from as early as two years and eight months,⁵⁹⁷ and a more universal application of the Equal Start programme.⁵⁹⁸

Funding for the early years sector, capacity and accessibility, costs for parents or guardians, and issues with recruiting and retaining staff were emphasised to the Committee. One of the key challenges identified in the provision of universal early childcare is the market driven approach being taken at present.⁵⁹⁹

⁵⁹¹ [PISA 2015 Results \(Volume II\) | OECD](#) quoted in SJI Written Submission, 5.

⁵⁹² SJI Written Submission, 6.

⁵⁹³ SJI Written Submission, 6.

⁵⁹⁴ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 28.

⁵⁹⁵ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 6.

⁵⁹⁶ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 20.

⁵⁹⁷ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 20.

⁵⁹⁸ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 18.

⁵⁹⁹ SJI Written Submission, 5.

The existence of childcare deserts throughout the country was emphasised to the Committee.⁶⁰⁰ It was noted that many areas, particularly rural counties and disadvantaged urban communities, have a shortage of places.⁶⁰¹ Additionally, community childcare centres have long waiting lists and it was stated that private providers may not prioritise places for families on subsidy, such as sponsorship schemes, if they can fill places with higher paying parents.⁶⁰² It was suggested that another model of funding is required so that new services can access such schemes and so that greenfield sites can be utilised to provide additional places and to deal with the capacity challenges.⁶⁰³ The waiting lists for an early years place was also brought to the attention of the Committee with 62,000 children on a waiting list of which 40,000 are under 3 years of age.⁶⁰⁴ It was highlighted that nationally 48 per cent of services have a waiting list and that this has been consistent for the last three years.⁶⁰⁵ An anticipated shortfall by 2030 of approximately 14,000 early years places for children under the age of five has been anticipated by Government.⁶⁰⁶ It was suggested that a substantial scaling up of all the schemes is required to ensure sufficient places are available by 2030.⁶⁰⁷

The costs to parents and guardians were highlighted to the Committee with fees in Ireland among the highest in OECD countries.⁶⁰⁸ Also, it was emphasised that 87 childminders in the country are eligible for NCS.⁶⁰⁹ It was suggested that faster registration of childminders would assist with access to the NCS.⁶¹⁰ International research has shown that high childcare costs without subsidies act as a “tax on motherhood” and leads to higher child poverty as parents, typically mothers, either leave the workforce or reduce hours which lowers family income.⁶¹¹ It was noted that a lack of sufficient, affordable and flexible childcare, including after-school care, is disproportionately pushing lone mothers out of the

⁶⁰⁰ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 9; Transcript, 9 October 2025, 17.

⁶⁰¹ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 15.

⁶⁰² Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 15.

⁶⁰³ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 9; Transcript, 9 October 2025, 19.

⁶⁰⁴ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 6.

⁶⁰⁵ Pobal Written Submission, 12.

⁶⁰⁶ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 23.

⁶⁰⁷ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 23.

⁶⁰⁸ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 6. Transcript, 9 October 2025, 7;

⁶⁰⁹ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 7; Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 15; SPARK Written Submission, 2.

⁶¹⁰ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 18.

⁶¹¹ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 16.

workforce.⁶¹² The importance of increasing the NCS threshold was outlined to the Committee.⁶¹³ The vital importance of collaboration between Government Departments was evident from the discussion. It was noted that parents would experience less access to childcare supports as a result of national minimum wage or social welfare payment increases and the income disregard and income allowance not being amended to correspond to the increase.⁶¹⁴ Members acknowledge that the threshold is increasing as part of Budget 2026.

High staff turnover, a 25 per cent annual staff turnover across the country and 52 per cent in parts of Dublin, and poor pay and conditions were identified as features of the sector.⁶¹⁵ The retention of staff within the early years sector was highlighted to the Committee and it was noted that graduates of early years courses from level 5 to level 8 courses inclusive are not being recruited and retained within the sector.⁶¹⁶ Another aspect highlighted to the Committee was the number of qualified staff in early years education that are choosing to work as SNAs; supporting this is a report by the Department of Education which noted that 38 per cent of the SNA workforce is qualified in early years education.⁶¹⁷ Correlation between the gap in capacity and struggles with staff retention and recruitment was highlighted by City and County Childcare Committees.⁶¹⁸ Capacity and expansion plans for providers and operators have been delayed while others have experienced a reduction in services due to problems recruiting and retaining staff.⁶¹⁹ The pay for the childcare workforce needs to be addressed, as it impacts supply, with many providers finding it difficult to recruit and retain staff.⁶²⁰ It was suggested that public sector pay and conditions would have a transformative effect on the early years sector.⁶²¹

⁶¹² SPARK Written Submission, 2.

⁶¹³ Transcript, 9 October 8 – 9.

⁶¹⁴ Transcript, 9 October 9.

⁶¹⁵ [Pathways to Better prospects: Delivering Proper Terms and Conditions for the Early Years Workforce in Ireland: A literature review](#) quoted in SJI Written Submission, 5; Transcript, 9 October 2025, 8.

⁶¹⁶ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 23.

⁶¹⁷ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 10.

⁶¹⁸ Pobal Written Submission, 12.

⁶¹⁹ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 6.

⁶²⁰ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 16.

⁶²¹ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 14.

Regular attendance was highlighted as a challenge for children from disadvantaged groups due to a myriad of problems including housing conditions, parental capacity, transport, disability, attendance at hospital appointments and others.⁶²² Linked to this is the difficulty that settings have in supporting vulnerable families, as payments from the NCS, ECCE programme and AIM require the recording and reporting of children's attendance.⁶²³ The financial impact for families and service providers of the attendance rules was also brought to the attention of the Committee.⁶²⁴ The Committee heard that the AIM remains limited to children who participate in the ECCE programme.⁶²⁵

The vulnerability of early years settings that are currently accommodated within a school premises was highlighted to the Committee. It was noted that the Department of Education and Youth's circular does not deem early years as education and therefore the setting can be asked to vacate the school premises, and the sourcing of another space can be exceptionally challenging.⁶²⁶

Provider and service types also formed part of the discussion. Regarding community crèches, it was noted that in areas of fast growth where community infrastructure has not built up, there is likelihood of a reliance on private providers.⁶²⁷ Sessional services and all type of services that parents need was mentioned during the Committee's consideration.⁶²⁸ It was noted a scoping exercise would examine childcare services from both a geographical and nature of supply perspective and that the State would intervene where there is a market failure or a market gap in meeting demand.⁶²⁹

Practical supports were suggested to assist marginalised families such as those from the Traveller community access to early childhood education and care.⁶³⁰ Organisations supporting these families have identified a number of issues that inhibit access such as lack

⁶²² Transcript, 9 October 2025, 6. Transcript, 9 October 2025, 17.

⁶²³ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 6.

⁶²⁴ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 17.

⁶²⁵ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 6.

⁶²⁶ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 10.

⁶²⁷ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 13.

⁶²⁸ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 14.

⁶²⁹ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 14.

⁶³⁰ CRA Written Submission, 10.

of awareness of the subsidies available, and barriers such as low levels of literacy, difficulty completing required paperwork, and a lack of flexibility regarding hours of provision.⁶³¹

Under Equal Start, Traveller and Roma children are a key priority group with specific actions to support parents and families including inclusive information campaigns on how ethnic information will be utilised, review of guidance materials on inclusion policies, and tailored responses including Family Link Workers to support Traveller parents of young children to attend early childhood education and care.⁶³²

The impact of a lack of accessible childcare supports for families experiencing homelessness was identified in written submission to the Committee; these included: barriers to paid employment, particularly for those with irregular shift patterns; obstacle to accessing education; hindering attendance at property viewings and other housing-related appointments; and prevents informal childcare arrangements as a result of rules in many emergency accommodation settings.⁶³³

The Committee was informed that:

- a review of ECCE is planned,
- that evaluation was considered as part of the programme design for Equal Start to ensure that the scheme is delivering with respect to the programme objectives, including participation of the cohorts who are at risk of lower participation rates,
- that DCDE are in the process of commissioning an evaluation of the NCS, and that the performance of the scheme and the identification of potential enhancements will be included;⁶³⁴
- that the forward planning unit within DCDE had been established and that supply and demand for childcare places would be examined particularly in relation to the roll-out of public provision and the design of the Building Blocks Capital Programme;⁶³⁵ and

⁶³¹ Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, *First 5: Implementation Plan 2023-2025*, (DCEDIY 2023) quoted in CRA Written Submission, 10.

⁶³² *Equal Start*, (DCEDIY 2024) cited in CRA Written Submission, 11.

⁶³³ Focus Ireland Written Submission, 9.

⁶³⁴ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 19; DCDE Briefing Note, 16 October 2025, 13; DCDE Briefing Note, 4 December 2025, 24.

⁶³⁵ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 11.

- that the latest First 5 Implementation plan includes a target to increase the participation rates of Traveller and Roma children, and that an ethnic identifier has been introduced for applications to the NCS and ECCE schemes since September 2023.⁶³⁶

The discussion included evaluations including long-term impacts of programmes, impact on reducing intergenerational poverty, examination of education outcomes, and further improvements.⁶³⁷ A number of suggestions were made for improvements including:

- a lower staff-to-child ratio in early years education and care settings for communities experiencing poverty and disadvantage is required;⁶³⁸
- a rolling window for applications for Building Blocks may assist services to make applications as the current application windows are often short, and substantial preparatory work is required before a service may be ready to apply;⁶³⁹
- that pre-school could provide an important avenue for identification of children who may need additional support, and that enhanced data could be of value;⁶⁴⁰
- a ring-fenced approach to target particular areas without any service was emphasised along with the continuation of the problem if it is not addressed;⁶⁴¹
- that universal childcare should be provided;⁶⁴² and
- that funding for additional measures including access to transport, and additional wraparound supports such as family and parenting programmes be provided, and these would be of importance for those children experiencing multiple disadvantages, or where the family is dealing with challenges such as addiction.⁶⁴³

⁶³⁶ CRA Written Submission, 10.

⁶³⁷ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 19.

⁶³⁸ Family Resource Centre National Forum Written Submission, 6.

⁶³⁹ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 19.

⁶⁴⁰ Pobal Written Submission, 13.

⁶⁴¹ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 10.

⁶⁴² Transcript, 20 November 2025, 25.

⁶⁴³ CRA Written Submission, 9.

Family and Parenting Supports

The impact that poverty has on parents and their ability to parent was identified as a driver for the negative outcomes related to children and poverty.⁶⁴⁴ Research has shown that poverty harms parents' mental and physical health, increasing stress, conflict, and difficulties with parenting, which in turn negatively affects children's wellbeing, development, educational outcomes, health, relationships, and future life chances.⁶⁴⁵ The significant difference between parenting while poor, and poor parenting was highlighted to the Committee.⁶⁴⁶ It was recognised that wraparound family support services are an important lever for meeting poverty targets, while also mitigating day-to-day experiences of poverty and/or social exclusion for children.⁶⁴⁷

The importance of a positive strengths-based approach to family and parenting support was emphasised to the Committee.⁶⁴⁸ The delivery of parenting supports within community settings was highlighted to the Committee; the supports included: budgeting, nutrition, physical and mental health, digital and media literacy.⁶⁴⁹ The importance of looking at the family and identifying the family supports that are needed,⁶⁵⁰ and providing a connection via a one-to-one support or a mentor to ease pathways to access services and supports was highlighted.⁶⁵¹ Early interventions and support work identifies and supports vulnerable families and ensure that additional supports are made available at a community level.⁶⁵² The importance of intensive family support service for preventing children and young people from having to be supported by Tusla's child protection and welfare services was noted.⁶⁵³ Furthermore, it was highlighted that if there are families that have particular needs, they should be referred to Tusla services available within communities, and that it is the role and responsibility of community-based services to identify need within their

⁶⁴⁴ Barnardo's Written Submission, 6.

⁶⁴⁵ Barnardo's Written Submission, 6.

⁶⁴⁶ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 22.

⁶⁴⁷ Pobal Written Submission, 11.

⁶⁴⁸ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 16 - 17.

⁶⁴⁹ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 22.

⁶⁵⁰ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 22.

⁶⁵¹ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 16.

⁶⁵² Transcript, 16 October 2025, 17.

⁶⁵³ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 4.

communities and to engage with those families.⁶⁵⁴ Tusla's provision of family support services, parenting support services and home visiting services was recognised as a significant part of Tusla's work at community level in identifying at risk children, or children who are at risk of poverty and deprivation.⁶⁵⁵ One of the commitments of the Child Poverty and Well-Being Programme Office is to map family support and prevention services to identify gaps and ensure that families who need extra support have access in a timely manner.⁶⁵⁶

Barnardos' family support service was outlined to the Committee and it was stated that the service assess each family's circumstances and needs, any welfare concerns are identified and discussed with Tusla, and a safety plan made and agreed.⁶⁵⁷ Barnardos intensive family support works one-to-one with parents and their children in their home; further details of services provided can found in the written submission.⁶⁵⁸

The importance of parenting courses was highlighted to the Committee with an example from Sweden being highlighted where everyone who is pregnant, irrespective of number of previous pregnancies, participates in a parenting course.⁶⁵⁹

Under supporting parents, a national model of parenting support services, DCDE has raised awareness of evidenced based parenting support services.⁶⁶⁰ The Committee was made aware that DCDE is conducting a national mapping of parenting support services with the intention of producing a geospatial map for parents and practitioners of parenting support services around the country.⁶⁶¹

Family Resource Centres

It was suggested that full-time child, youth and family support workers are needed in FRCs as well as funding for evidence-based programmes including parenting and home visiting.⁶⁶²

⁶⁵⁴ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 24.

⁶⁵⁵ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 17.

⁶⁵⁶ Transcript, 22 January 2026, 11.

⁶⁵⁷ Barnardo's Written Submission, 3.

⁶⁵⁸ Barnardo's Written Submission, 3.

⁶⁵⁹ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 24.

⁶⁶⁰ DCDE Briefing Note, 16 October 2025, 28; DCDE Briefing Note, 4 December 2025, 51.

⁶⁶¹ DCDE Briefing Note, 16 October 2025, 28; DCDE Briefing Note, 4 December 2025, 51.

⁶⁶² Family Resource Centre National Forum Written Submission, 6.

It was emphasised that FRCs have the capacity to offer early years education and care services as part of a wraparound approach including parenting and adult education initiatives.⁶⁶³

Education

Differences in outcomes for Traveller and Roma Students and students from areas of intergenerational poverty in comparison to students from outside those contexts were identified.⁶⁶⁴ Data from the Department of Education has shown lower average leaving certificate scores and college progression for DEIS schools.⁶⁶⁵ “Education poverty” was also highlighted with students learning affected by a lack of resources including a quiet place to study, internet access or private tuition if needed.⁶⁶⁶ The importance of narrowing the gap between educational attainment between those growing up in financially advantaged and disadvantaged households was emphasised to the Committee.⁶⁶⁷

Staying longer in education increases a person’s chances of employment, while high-quality education delivers lasting benefits not only for individuals throughout their lives but also for the wider economy and society.⁶⁶⁸ It was highlighted that those who leave school without an upper secondary qualification are at risk of earning low wages, with 43 per cent of 25 to 64 years olds earning below half of the median income compared to 26 per cent of workers who have an upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary educational attainment and 15 per cent of workers with a tertiary qualification.⁶⁶⁹ It was highlighted that 13 per cent of Travellers have completed secondary education compared to 92 per cent of the general population.⁶⁷⁰ Furthermore, rate of progression to third level education remains low with

⁶⁶³ Family Resource Centre National Forum Written Submission, 6.

⁶⁶⁴ OECD, *Review of Resourcing Schools to Address Educational Disadvantage in Ireland*, (OECD 2024) quoted in CRA Written Submission, 11.

⁶⁶⁵ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 16.

⁶⁶⁶ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 16.

⁶⁶⁷ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 9.

⁶⁶⁸ SJI Written Submission, 6.

⁶⁶⁹ https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/education-at-a-glance-2024-country-notes_fab77ef0-en/ireland_962b6c53-en.html quoted in SJI Written Submission, 6.

⁶⁷⁰ National Traveller Women’s Forum Written Submission, 5.

4.7 per cent of Travellers having an undergraduate degree compared to 47.7 per cent of the total population.⁶⁷¹

It was recommended to the Committee that:

- targets, with a particular focus on DEIS school, contained in Ireland's [Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy 2024 – 2033: Every Learner from Birth to Young Adulthood](#) should be resourced;⁶⁷²
- reduction in pupil teacher ratios, keeping class sizes low and ensuring sufficient resources for DEIS band 1 and 2 schools to ensure implementation of strategies to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes;⁶⁷³ and
- innovative approach be adopted regarding access to education such as community-based or online options as it was noted that barriers include transport and cost.⁶⁷⁴

DEIS Plus Programme

Children and young people in communities experiencing persistent, intergenerational poverty and those that experience adverse childhood experiences often require supports beyond the existing provision under the DEIS model.⁶⁷⁵ It was highlighted that school principals had called for enhanced DEIS-type model of supports to deal with the impact of these experiences.⁶⁷⁶ A survey had estimated that 48 per cent of children had experienced a direct trauma and the number of children with special educational needs was four times higher than non-DEIS schools.⁶⁷⁷ It was recognised that the Programme for Government contained a commitment to establish a DEIS Plus Scheme.⁶⁷⁸ During the Committee's consideration of this topic, the details of the [DEIS Plus model](#) were announced.

⁶⁷¹ National Traveller Women's Forum Written Submission, 5

⁶⁷² SJI Written Submission, 6.

⁶⁷³ SJI Written Submission, 6.

⁶⁷⁴ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 34.

⁶⁷⁵ CRA Written Submission, 11.

⁶⁷⁶ PEIN *Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs): Holding the child's hand in prevention and early intervention for children and families* (PEIN 2019) quoted in CRA Written Submission, 11.

⁶⁷⁷ DEIS+ Cluster Advocacy Group 'Snapshot Survey reveals 48% of children attending primary schools in most disadvantaged areas of Dublin may have experienced a trauma in their lives' (Press Release 3 June 2024) quoted in CRA Written Submission, 11.

⁶⁷⁸ [Programme for Government: Securing Ireland's Future](#), 68.

The importance of the additional supports provided by the DEIS Plus programme for children and young people in schools located in communities experiencing persistent intergenerational poverty was welcomed, along with the commitments to funding the programme.⁶⁷⁹ It was suggested that multidisciplinary teams should be prioritised, and that the composition of the teams should be context-specific and based on the needs within the community.⁶⁸⁰ The teams could include occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, family outreach and support workers, social care workers, counsellors and psychologists, would work every day with children on site in schools to address the impact of childhood poverty and intergenerational trauma. The experience of many European school systems was cited, and it was stated that multi-disciplinary teams, including family outreach support, emotional support services, and school attendance services, are key to addressing complex needs of children and their families.⁶⁸¹ Other supports suggested included increased teacher allocation, funding and spaces to provide trauma informed practices.⁶⁸²

Increased educational welfare provision was suggested as it was highlighted that vulnerable young people, particularly between the age of 17 and 25, are left with little or no support or direction once compulsory school attendance and engagement with education welfare officers ends at the age of 16.⁶⁸³ Supports such as Youthreach were identified; however, it was stated that there are insufficient services nationally to address the needs of this age cohort, and provision is not delivered through a universal national programme.⁶⁸⁴ It was suggested that a universal pathway be established to support young people in exploring alternative opportunities and options when mainstream education is no longer an option due to mental health or other barriers including poverty.⁶⁸⁵ It was highlighted to the

⁶⁷⁹ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 5.

⁶⁸⁰ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 14; CRA Written Submission, 12.

⁶⁸¹ Multiple referenced cited in CRA Written Submission, 12.

⁶⁸² CRA Written Submission, 12.

⁶⁸³ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 18.

⁶⁸⁴ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 18.

⁶⁸⁵ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 19.

Committee that many children and young people due to poverty-related pressures leave education in order to enter the workforce and earn an income.⁶⁸⁶

Early school leavers are very vulnerable to criminality and being groomed into criminality.⁶⁸⁷ The Garda youth diversion programme was acknowledged; however, it was suggested that more gardaí are required in supporting community-based roles to build rapport and trust with young people and to try to prevent their involvement in criminality.⁶⁸⁸ Investment by the Department of Justice in youth diversion and early intervention was recognised.⁶⁸⁹ The impact and importance of early intervention, prior to the age of 12, was outlined by an example;

there were families where everybody had consistently fallen into crime and in some cases the next generation had not because the issue was dealt with earlier.⁶⁹⁰

The need for additional funding and resources for harder to reach cases within youth diversion was highlighted.⁶⁹¹

The potential of a justice network was brought to the Committee's attention. It was outlined that a network including Tusla, education welfare officers, garda diversion programme and the community and voluntary sector, was set up as each were working with the same young people.⁶⁹² The benefits included the sharing of information and practice.⁶⁹³ However, it was acknowledged that there was a ceiling to the work that could be achieved due to bureaucracy.⁶⁹⁴ A similar subgroup of CYPSC for adolescents at risk, comprising the key actors with the community including Tusla, the Probation Service, An Garda Síochána, education welfare officers, was also referenced.⁶⁹⁵

⁶⁸⁶ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 19.

⁶⁸⁷ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 19.

⁶⁸⁸ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 19.

⁶⁸⁹ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 32.

⁶⁹⁰ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 32.

⁶⁹¹ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 33.

⁶⁹² Transcript, 20 November 2025, 32.

⁶⁹³ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 32.

⁶⁹⁴ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 32.

⁶⁹⁵ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 33.

Adequate resources

Housing

A report has suggested that some households are classed as deprived but not income poor, as these households are faced with housing costs that are not captured by equivalised income measures.⁶⁹⁶ The impact of the cost of housing on families was also brought to the attention of the Committee. Housing costs often comprise the largest proportion of expenditure in household budgets and can impact on a household's consumption of other goods and services.⁶⁹⁷ Challenges with affordability are faced by households including those renting privately and on low incomes; those on low incomes pay between two-fifths and a half of their income on housing.⁶⁹⁸ It was noted that families with children tend to have the highest housing costs; with a much higher proportion of families with children living in the private rental sector compared with other cohorts which contributes to material deprivation.⁶⁹⁹

SILC 2025 examined the at risk of poverty rate after deducting rent and mortgage interest to help analyse inequalities in housing costs and their impact on poverty risk.⁷⁰⁰ It has found that 19.7 per cent of people were at risk of poverty after deducting rent and mortgage interest from income in 2025.⁷⁰¹ The at risk of poverty rate for a couple with at least one child aged less than 25 is 12.7 per cent which increases to 19.5 per cent after rent and mortgage interest; in contrast with lone parents of at least one child aged less than 25 the at risk of poverty rate is 18.9 per cent which increases to 40.6 per cent after rent and mortgage interest.⁷⁰² For those that stated they rent from a local authority, 40.6 per cent would have been at risk of poverty after deducting rent paid.⁷⁰³ The at risk of poverty rate for those living in accommodation rented with other forms of social housing supports was

⁶⁹⁶ DCDE, Briefing Note, 16 October 2025, 19.

⁶⁹⁷ CRA Written Submission, 6; Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 13.

⁶⁹⁸ 32Eoin Corrigan et al 'Exploring Affordability in the Irish Housing Market' (2019) *Economic and Social Review*, 50 (1), pp. 119-157 quoted in CRA Written Submission, 6.

⁶⁹⁹ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 24.

⁷⁰⁰ At Risk of Poverty Rate after Deducting Rent and Mortgage Interest, CSO SILC 2025.

⁷⁰¹ At Risk of Poverty Rate after Deducting Rent and Mortgage Interest, CSO SILC 2025.

⁷⁰² At Risk of Poverty Rate after Deducting Rent and Mortgage Interest, CSO SILC 2025.

⁷⁰³ At Risk of Poverty Rate after Deducting Rent and Mortgage Interest, CSO SILC 2025.

58 per cent when rent was deducted from disposable income.⁷⁰⁴ For persons living in accommodation rented without housing supports, the at risk of poverty rate was 42.6 per cent after deducting rent paid.⁷⁰⁵

Suggestions from Stakeholders included that the introduction of targeted efforts should be directed to ensure those experiencing poverty have access to safe, secure and stable accommodation,⁷⁰⁶ adoption of the European Typology on Homelessness definition of homelessness, expedite the establishment of the National Traveller Accommodation Authority, address planning barriers to the provision of Traveller-specific accommodation, and develop a national Traveller homelessness strategy with specific focus on addressing and preventing homelessness among Traveller children.⁷⁰⁷

The [Programme for Government](#) contains commitments in relation to housing and homelessness including to provide emergency accommodation for everyone who needs it with special supports for children impacted by homelessness; to focus social housing allocations on getting families out of long-term homelessness.⁷⁰⁸ Family homelessness is an issue that the Child Poverty and Well-Being Programme Office has been working on with colleagues from across government including the Department of Housing.⁷⁰⁹ Measures being considered that were highlighted to the Committee include the capital programme, private rental, tenant in situ scheme and housing acquisition scheme.⁷¹⁰ Furthermore, it was stated that one of the most important pieces are the capital infrastructure and the building of more houses in the first instance.⁷¹¹ It was recognised that other measures that can support families in emergency accommodation or homelessness are being examined; including wraparound supports such as travel to school.⁷¹²

⁷⁰⁴ At Risk of Poverty Rate after Deducting Rent and Mortgage Interest, CSO SILC 2025.

⁷⁰⁵ At Risk of Poverty Rate after Deducting Rent and Mortgage Interest, CSO SILC 2025.

⁷⁰⁶ ISPC Open Statement, 4.

⁷⁰⁷ National Traveller Women's Forum Written Submission, 3.

⁷⁰⁸ [Programme for Government](#), 44.

⁷⁰⁹ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 28.

⁷¹⁰ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 28.

⁷¹¹ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 20.

⁷¹² Transcript, 16 October 2025, 21.

It was highlighted that the Housing Act (1988) has not been updated to reflect the Thirty-first Amendment of the Constitution (Children) Act (2012) which emphasises children's rights and the State's duty to protect them.⁷¹³ Additionally, it was noted that local authorities are not required to assess children's individual needs as part of a Housing Needs Assessment for the parent or guardian which includes counting the number of children in a household.⁷¹⁴ Attention was also brought to the [Housing \(Homeless Families\) Bill](#) which aims to recognise families as units, prioritise children's best interests, and provide appropriate accommodation to support family functioning and child welfare.⁷¹⁵ It was outlined that this legislation would provide guidance regarding the priorities which local authorities should apply when dealing with vulnerable families.⁷¹⁶

It was highlighted that for families that are homeless, the routes out of poverty become virtually impossible.⁷¹⁷ The need to address the specific drivers of family homelessness, to take every feasible action to protect children from experiencing the trauma of losing their home and to introduce dedicated supports to minimise the harm done to children who experience homelessness was emphasised.⁷¹⁸

Suggestions presented to the Committee included:

- The reinstatement of the Tenant-in-Situ scheme as a key homeless prevention tool;⁷¹⁹
- That a fair proportion of social housing is allocated to families living in emergency accommodation to address long-term family homelessness;⁷²⁰
- Reform of the HAP scheme including increasing rates in line with rising rents;⁷²¹
- Increased investment in state-led housing and accommodation for the provision of public, affordable, secure and cost-rental homes;⁷²²

⁷¹³ Focus Ireland Written Submission, 8.

⁷¹⁴ Focus Ireland Written Submission, 8.

⁷¹⁵ Focus Ireland Written Submission, 8.

⁷¹⁶ Focus Ireland Written Submission, 8.

⁷¹⁷ Focus Ireland Written Submission, 5.

⁷¹⁸ Focus Ireland Written Submission, 1; Focus Ireland Written Submission, 4.

⁷¹⁹ Focus Ireland Written Submission, 5.

⁷²⁰ Focus Ireland Written Submission, 6.

⁷²¹ Focus Ireland Written Submission, 7.

⁷²² Community Platform Written Submission, 10.

- Progress towards the Housing Commission’s recommendation of 20 per cent of all housing in the state being social and affordable;⁷²³
- Re-examine allocation policies to prioritise those living in consistent poverty;⁷²⁴
- Children should have their needs individually assessed and factors such as access to education, medical support and maintenance of relationship with wider family network should be considered;⁷²⁵
- Introduce legislation that would ensure children’s needs are central to decision-making and that families have access to safe accommodation;⁷²⁶ and
- Working families should be supported to remain in employment with a focus on lone-parent families.⁷²⁷

It was argued that adopting a ‘Best interest of the child’ approach, in line with the core principals of the UNCRC, would lead to better outcomes for children experiencing homelessness.⁷²⁸

Family Income and Adequate Level of Social Protection

Ireland’s tax and social welfare system plays a crucial role in reducing poverty and has an effective social transfer system which mitigates poverty through targeted supports.⁷²⁹ It was acknowledge the DSP provides support through social transfers to people at risk of poverty.⁷³⁰ It was commented that Ireland’s social protection has several strong features that include universal child benefit but that rates are too low relative to living costs for many families including those with older children.⁷³¹

It was suggested that policy could reduce the child poverty rates by increasing targeted welfare payments to low-income families with children including an increase to child benefit, child support payment and the working family payment as well as the introduction

⁷²³ Community Platform Written Submission, 10.

⁷²⁴ Community Platform Written Submission, 10.

⁷²⁵ Focus Ireland Written Submission, 8.

⁷²⁶ Focus Ireland Written Submission, 8.

⁷²⁷ Focus Ireland Written Submission, 8 – 9.

⁷²⁸ Focus Ireland Written Submission, 8.

⁷²⁹ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 32.

⁷³⁰ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 16.

⁷³¹ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 13.

of a means-tested second tier of child benefit.⁷³² Furthermore, it was highlighted that the MESL analysis has highlighted the importance of targeted supports to lift households to income adequacy.⁷³³ Another suggestion was to implement an evidence-based approach, such as indexing child supports to MESL benchmarks, to prevent children from living in hardship due to income shortfalls,⁷³⁴ and benchmarking welfare rates against MESL.⁷³⁵

One-parent families

A number of suggestions were made regarding policy changes that could assist one-parent families including:

- Extend jobseeker's transition to when a child leaves second level education;⁷³⁶
- Access to the living alone allowance;⁷³⁷ and
- Access to the household benefits package.⁷³⁸

Benefits of allowing parents who are working or in education or training to remain on jobseeker's transition payment were outlined. These include providing support to remain in part-time employment if they do not qualify for working family payment, allow the completion of education courses without having to be accepted for a Back to Education Allowance payment, and incentivise lone parents to enter employment, education or training.⁷³⁹

It was highlighted that lone parents who received maintenance have a lower risk of economic vulnerability and can reduce poverty.⁷⁴⁰ Consequently, improving compliance with child maintenance could directly improve children's living standards.⁷⁴¹ A Review of the Enforcement of Child Maintenance Orders, published by the previous Department of Justice, was brought to the attention of the Committee which includes proposals for

⁷³² Transcript 16 October 2025, 9.

⁷³³ St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 10.

⁷³⁴ St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 13.

⁷³⁵ SPARK Written Submission, 5.

⁷³⁶ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 13.

⁷³⁷ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 13.

⁷³⁸ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 13.

⁷³⁹ SPARK Written Submission, 6.

⁷⁴⁰ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 20.

⁷⁴¹ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 20.

strengthening enforcement.⁷⁴² It was commented that child maintenance reform is a key lever in reducing child poverty for children in one parent families. It was emphasised that the focus should be on swiftly implementing the enforcement improvements from the Department of Justice's 2024 plan, and ensuring a joined-up approach across government so that every euro of child maintenance received goes towards improving a child's well-being and reducing poverty.⁷⁴³

Cost of Disability

A cost of disability payment was discussed with such a payment helping to cover the additional expenses associated with living with a disability.⁷⁴⁴ It was noted that the Minister for Social Protection has invited views and perspectives on a cost of disability payment.⁷⁴⁵

It was suggested that children living in households with a disability should be explicitly targeted with supports to reduce poverty.⁷⁴⁶ The need for supports for families with disabilities to be able to access employment and reduce the cost of accessing employment.⁷⁴⁷

Child Benefit

The impact of Ireland's current system of child-related benefits, including cash and in-kind benefits, on child poverty and deprivation have been investigated using the SWITCH tax-benefit model. It has been found that the benefits significantly reduced child poverty rates; emphasised that without these benefits, consistent child poverty rates would rise from 5.6 per cent to 13.6 per cent.⁷⁴⁸

Some discussion took place regarding a two-tier child benefit system with stakeholders. Positive aspects include a move away from cliff edges where people lose money,⁷⁴⁹ that it would be the most cost effective option,⁷⁵⁰ and that it would reduce the child at risk of

⁷⁴² Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 21; SPARK Written Submission, 3.

⁷⁴³ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 21.

⁷⁴⁴ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 11; Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 18.

⁷⁴⁵ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 16.

⁷⁴⁶ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 11.

⁷⁴⁷ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 15.

⁷⁴⁸ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 9.

⁷⁴⁹ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 11.

⁷⁵⁰ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 9.

poverty rate by 4.6 percentage points, the child deprivation rate by 0.7 percentage points and the child consistent poverty rate by 2.1 percentage points for an annual cost of €773 million.⁷⁵¹ It was noted that this approach would integrate child support payments with a modified working family payment allowing all households with children to receive an amount determined by their means.⁷⁵²

Context was provided by the following data:

- 1.2 million children in receipt of child benefit;
- 330,000 in receipt of the child support payments; and
- Working family payment is provided on behalf of 100,000 children.⁷⁵³

However, concern were also expressed including a viewpoint from the ESRI reports, and the work and tax strategy paper that while 40,000 children would be lifted out of poverty at a cost of €772 million, 100,000 children would lose income, some of whom are in the lowest three income deciles.⁷⁵⁴ A stakeholder articulated the need to ensure that no child is worse off.⁷⁵⁵ It was emphasised that an analysis would need to be conducted to identify the children that would be impacted, the income deciles, and their circumstances.⁷⁵⁶

Another aspect highlighted was the importance of taking into account the age of the child and the higher costs of older children;⁷⁵⁷ it was noted that the proposed second-tier approach, providing identical support regardless of a child's age, is contrary to the evidence that indicates that children's needs vary by age.⁷⁵⁸ It was noted that recognition of the higher costs associated with older children were recognised by the introduction in 2019 of a higher rate of increase for a qualified child, now known as Child Support Payment, in respect of children aged 12 and over.⁷⁵⁹

⁷⁵¹ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 9.

⁷⁵² Transcript, 16 October 2025, 9.

⁷⁵³ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 25 – 26.

⁷⁵⁴ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 11; Transcript, 9 October 2025, 22;

⁷⁵⁵ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 22.

⁷⁵⁶ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 26.

⁷⁵⁷ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 12.

⁷⁵⁸ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 22 – 23.

⁷⁵⁹ DSP Written Submission, 3.

It was highlighted that such reforms should be carefully designed to avoid income losses for some households and that the impacts on work incentives and transition into employment would also need to be examined.⁷⁶⁰

Pay and Conditions for working parents

In evidence to the Committee, it was highlighted that gainful employment does not guarantee an escape from poverty.⁷⁶¹ CSO figures quoted reveal that 5.4 per cent of all people with a job are living in poverty, and it was stated that this equates to more than 140,000 people in employment living below the poverty line.⁷⁶² The view was expressed that many working families on low earnings struggle to achieve a basic standard of living.⁷⁶³

Secure employment with decent remuneration and working conditions for parents was described as a mechanism for the eradication of child poverty.⁷⁶⁴ It was suggested that policy can reduce child poverty rates by increasing the earnings of families with children, by reducing the barriers to work.⁷⁶⁵ It was commented that joblessness is highly correlated with poverty, as demonstrated by SILC 2024, which showed that 34.1 per cent at risk of poverty rate among adults who are unemployed.⁷⁶⁶ The need for increasing employment participation rates of parents was highlighted alongside the building of supports and enabling parents.⁷⁶⁷

It was emphasised that to reduce child poverty that consideration is given to the number of adults in a household who are working, capable of work, and working enough hours to escape poverty.⁷⁶⁸

A higher rate of unemployment rate is experienced by Travellers, with 61 per cent unemployed according to Census 2022, with higher rates experienced by Traveller women

⁷⁶⁰ Transcript 16 October 2025, 9; Transcript, 16 October 2025, 25; Transcript, 16 October 2025, 26.

⁷⁶¹ SJI Written Submission, 5; Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 12; SPARK Written Submission, 4.

⁷⁶² SJI Written Submission, 5.

⁷⁶³ SJI Written Submission, 5.

⁷⁶⁴ Pobal Written Submission, 13.

⁷⁶⁵ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 9.

⁷⁶⁶ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 13.

⁷⁶⁷ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 11.

⁷⁶⁸ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 24.

including those who are single parents.⁷⁶⁹ Key barriers identified include racism and discrimination.⁷⁷⁰

It was argued that the current labour market model based on activation with sanctions for people who do not engage can disadvantage people who struggle to engage due to issues such as addiction or mental health challenges.⁷⁷¹ It was suggested that a system that would encourage and invest in developing people's potential and build the capabilities of individuals and families should be adopted.⁷⁷² It was suggested that continued investment in high-quality tailored employment support programmes for those distant from the labour market will be central to achieving the child poverty target.⁷⁷³

Food Poverty

Supports for direct food costs were referenced including an emergency scheme delivered by the CRA in May 2020.⁷⁷⁴ The scheme was designed to target food provision to families with children under the age of six who were not already benefiting through other organisations and programmes.⁷⁷⁵ Eight initiatives have distributed €1 million in funding from the CRA to support organisations in the provision of supermarket vouchers or food hampers.⁷⁷⁶

The school meals programme was highlighted as an initiative to tackle food poverty and that this had been extended into the summer programme for children from disadvantaged families.⁷⁷⁷ However, the gap in provision of meals outside of school term, particularly with regard to exam time and holiday periods, and the compounding of this by other factors, including cost of living was brought to the attention of the Committee.⁷⁷⁸ A holiday-hunger pilot programme, funded by the Government, was highlighted as a beneficial in-kind

⁷⁶⁹ National Traveller Women's Forum, 3.

⁷⁷⁰ National Traveller Women's Forum, 3.

⁷⁷¹ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 16.

⁷⁷² Transcript, 20 November 2025, 16.

⁷⁷³ Pobal Written Submission, 13.

⁷⁷⁴ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 21; CRA Written Submission, 8.

⁷⁷⁵ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 21; CRA Written Submission, 8.

⁷⁷⁶ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 21; CRA Written Submission, 8.

⁷⁷⁷ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 21.

⁷⁷⁸ CRA Written Submission, 8.

support.⁷⁷⁹ The allocation in Budget 2025 included €1.3 million in funding for a summer pilot programme, and €500,000 to address food poverty of an older cohort of young people aged 10 to 18 years at risk of not having access to a hot or substantial meal during the school holiday.⁷⁸⁰ However, concern was expressed that funding for this programme had not been increased for 2026.⁷⁸¹ The Evaluation of the Schools Meals Programme has recommended that the programme is extended beyond term time to address holiday hunger.⁷⁸²

It was noted that the DCDE had been involved in examining how youth services could bridge the gap in terms of food supports for families and children living in poverty particularly during the summer months.⁷⁸³ A stakeholder described the pilot project, to continue the school meals programme, through youth organisation as very effective.⁷⁸⁴

It was suggested that targeted measures should be directed to ensure those experiencing poverty have access to nutritious food.⁷⁸⁵

Hygiene poverty

Healthy Ireland measures in relation to period poverty were described as a positive.⁷⁸⁶

However, it was noted that period poverty and its effects are not discussed often enough, including its impact on young girls' participation in sport and their mental health.⁷⁸⁷

Access to Play and Participation in Culture, Arts and Sports

The commitment to establish a national play policy as part of the First 5 Strategy was welcomed by stakeholders and the need to include cross-government actions to ensure that the unmet play needs of certain groups of children was recommended.⁷⁸⁸ It was noted that the DCDE has developed a play and recreation strategy and that support is provided for

⁷⁷⁹ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 21; Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 18.

⁷⁸⁰ CRA Written Submission, 8.

⁷⁸¹ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 21.

⁷⁸² RSM Ireland, *Evaluation of the School Meals Programme* (DSP 2022) quoted in CRA Written Submission, 8.

⁷⁸³ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 21.

⁷⁸⁴ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 25.

⁷⁸⁵ ISPC Open Statement, 4.

⁷⁸⁶ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 36.

⁷⁸⁷ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 36.

⁷⁸⁸ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 5.

local-based play and recreation plans in each local authority area.⁷⁸⁹ Equity of access was highlighted as an important issue and that providing public infrastructure, supporting local authorities, and developing play and recreation plans can help address some of the components of deprivation at a local level.⁷⁹⁰ It was highlighted that a national play strategy should address the participation of children and young people in activities in which they are interested.⁷⁹¹

The importance and need of play spaces and structured activities in emergency accommodation was highlighted to the Committee.⁷⁹² The delivery of organised play groups, as part of the ABC programme, was highlighted within emergency accommodation services.⁷⁹³ Aspects emphasised included co-ordination by a trained early childhood professional, the impact on the families and how they view their lives and quality of life, and the enabling of connections with the community.⁷⁹⁴

A number of initiatives to support participation include:

- Creative Ireland's local creative youth partnerships support children and young people who are at a disadvantage, or marginalised to engage with culture, arts and sports;⁷⁹⁵ and
- Gaeltacht grants for children who might not otherwise get the opportunity to participate.⁷⁹⁶

The role of sports officers in local authorities was emphasised and it was noted that they engage with groups who are least likely to access programmes.⁷⁹⁷ The extremely important role that youth work plays in supporting children and young people's participation in sports and arts activities was acknowledged.⁷⁹⁸

⁷⁸⁹ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 33.

⁷⁹⁰ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 33.

⁷⁹¹ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 25.

⁷⁹² Transcript, 20 November 2025, 21.

⁷⁹³ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 22.

⁷⁹⁴ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 22.

⁷⁹⁵ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 21; Transcript, 16 October 2025, 29.

⁷⁹⁶ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 21; Transcript, 16 October 2025, 34.

⁷⁹⁷ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 29.

⁷⁹⁸ Transcript, 16 October 2026, 29.

Regarding access to museums and galleries, it was noted that the barriers are not cost-related in Ireland but relate to people's confidence, parental encouragement, and exposure.⁷⁹⁹

A suggestion during the meetings of the Committee was a membership card or voucher system that would entitle children and young people to one sporting club or one year's worth of music lessons.⁸⁰⁰ It was noted that some local partnerships and charities, such as Big Brother Big Sister and communities arts programmes, do this on a small scale.⁸⁰¹ In response it was noted that the kind of measure, whether broad or specific, had not yet been identified and that these policy matters are for the Department of Culture, Communications and Sport.⁸⁰² An Icelandic initiative provides all young people with a leisure time card and they choose the best way to use the scheme.⁸⁰³

Other suggestions include:

- Funding for creative programmes during out of school periods should be provided;⁸⁰⁴ and
- Targeted efforts should be directed to ensure those experiencing poverty have access to play and extra-curricular activities.⁸⁰⁵

Child Poverty and Well-Being Programme Office

Many stakeholders welcomed the establishment of the Child Poverty and Well-Being Programme Office,⁸⁰⁶ and the need for this office to be long-term was highlighted.⁸⁰⁷

⁷⁹⁹ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 29.

⁸⁰⁰ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 29.

⁸⁰¹ Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 19.

⁸⁰² Transcript, 16 October 2025, 29.

⁸⁰³ Transcript, 20 November 2025, 27.

⁸⁰⁴ Family Resource Centre National Forum Written Submission, 6.

⁸⁰⁵ ISPC Open Statement, 4.

⁸⁰⁶ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 15; SJI Written Submission, 3; Transcript, 22 January 2026, 21.

⁸⁰⁷ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 15.

Youth Work

It was noted that there is a dearth of youth clubs and youth work programmes.⁸⁰⁸ It was suggested that a universal youth work model embedded in FRCs or a similar local community organisation should be funded.⁸⁰⁹

⁸⁰⁸ Family Resource Centre National Forum Written Submission, 5.

⁸⁰⁹ Family Resource Centre National Forum Written Submission, 7.

7. Recommendations

The Committee makes the following recommendations contained in Table 3 below which arise from the evidence presented in submissions and during public hearings. Recommendations are grouped into thematic areas.

Table 2: Recommendations

Recommendation Number	Subject	Recommendation
The Committee recommends that:		
Theme: Legislative Requirements		
1	UNCRC	The UNCRC be fully incorporated into domestic legislation to promote and protect children’s rights, and to ensure compliance with obligations including a childhood free from poverty.
2	Socio-economic ground for discrimination	A socio-economic ground for discrimination be included in equality legislation as per the Committee’s previous recommendation contained with its report on Pre-Legislative Scrutiny of the General Scheme of the Equality (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2024.

3	Child Care Act	The commitment to include a statutory duty for cooperation between agencies is fulfilled.
4	Legal entitlement to pre-school	The commitment in First 5 to introduce a universal legal entitlement to pre-school is progressed.
Theme: Policy, Strategy and Approach		
5	Child Poverty and Well-Being Programme Office	The Child Poverty and Well-Being Programme Office be continued on a long-term basis to ensure that the spotlight remains on this issue until it is eradicated.
6	Successor strategy to Roadmap for Social Inclusion	The strategy includes child poverty specific actions that prioritises the achievement of the new child poverty target with specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound goals.
7	Child rights budgeting	Child rights budgeting be adopted, to implement the recommendation of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, and to ensure a sustained focus on child poverty.
8	Cross-departmental approach	A cross-departmental approach with good working relationships between the various

agencies and community and voluntary sector is essential to tackling child poverty.

9	Strategic approach	A targeted long-term strategic approach that focuses on engagement, trust, and integration be adopted to ensure that hard to reach families and communities are supported.
10	Integration within administrative processes and decision-making	Integration should be embedded within administrative process and incorporated into decision-making to ensure that a positive impact of one measure does not diminish the effectiveness of another, particularly in advance of Budgets.
11	Holistic administrative system	A holistic administrative system should be implemented with integrated records.
12	Collaboration between Departments	The need for Government Departments to collaborate regarding decisions that can affect criteria or thresholds for schemes and other payments. It is also suggested that a mapping exercise is conducted to identify all schemes and payments that have a threshold, and that any proposed increases in social welfare rates or

the national minimum wage are analysed for consequences for each payment and scheme.

13	Intersectionality	Intersectionality is proactively considered when examining and implementing measures to reduce and eradicate child poverty and deprivation.
14	National play policy	A national play policy, in line with the commitment included in First 5, be developed and that cross-government actions are included to ensure that the unmet play needs of children are addressed.

Theme: Data and Indicators

15	Child Poverty Target include subdimensions	Child poverty targets should include subdimensions including: • poverty of disabled children and households; • targets for additional indicators contained in the Dashboard; and • at risk of poverty rate. That these targets along with aligned actions should be included in the successor strategy to the Roadmap for Social Inclusion.
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Improved data

Data relating to child poverty and deprivation is enhanced by considering the following items:

- comprehensive disaggregated data to ensure that all groups are included, especially those not counted in official poverty statistics, as well as intersectionality;
 - integration of administrative data is continuously developed and reviewed to ensure that opportunities to include all different population groups are taken;
 - maximise the use of data, including integrated data and multiple data sources, to ensure that detailed insights into trends are provided to support evidence-based policy decisions;
 - a general ethnic identifier is used for data collected by Departments, state agencies and local authorities using a voluntary and human-rights approach to ensure the availability of statistics on child poverty and deprivation; and
 - support is given to the Central Statistics Office to continue to provide insights into key trends in this important policy area.
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17	Forward planning unit	The capacity of the forward planning unit is developed and that all data sources across government can be utilised in a timely manner to provide the necessary future planning.
18	Dashboard of indicators expanded	The dashboard of indicators is reviewed regularly and expanded to ensure that cohorts and the full range of measures being included to tackle child poverty are reflected in the available data.
19	Dashboard of indicators	Consideration be given to the inclusion of the following to augment and enhance the dashboard of indicators: • the continuous development of targets for the indicators contained within the dashboard; • the child deprivation indicators developed at a European level and the guidelines developed by UNICEF for selecting poverty and deprivation indicators; • the inclusion of a target relating to the at risk of poverty rate and a broad income related measure to assist with capturing children who may be experiencing relative poverty; • the inclusion of an indicator based on household consumption including

childcare costs, housing and day-to-day expenditure; and

- nested targets within indicators to ensure that progress reaches marginalised groups of children.

20	Engagement with ECCE programme	An examination and analysis of the 4 per cent of children who are not participating in the ECCE programme be undertaken to determine the most effective ways to engage them and ensure timely and early intervention and best possible start in life. Also to include initiatives that build the confidence of families and parents in the value of the programme.
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Theme: Resources and Funding

21	Review of capacity and resources	A review be conducted to analyse the capacity and resource needs of services, including community and voluntary services, statutory services, and other providers, to adequately address child poverty and deprivation.
22	Targeted resources for Intergenerational poverty	In areas with high levels of intergenerational poverty and trauma that increased and targeted resources should be provided, and that a multifaceted, cross-departmental approach be taken.

23	Funding	Consideration be given to the following matters: • The challenges at the governance level caused by the different criteria and data required, and that the various funding streams work in a more co-ordinated way at national level, by providing centralised funding; • The establishment of a single Sector or Agency that would allow for a multi-annual funding model, greater sectoral investment, more stable and sustainable funding, and centralised commissioning; and • Funding of services on a multi-annual basis so that long-term services are developed, and that there is certainty around the funding to deliver and continue with services. This would aid with ensuring that services can tackle intergenerational poverty.
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Theme: Prerequisites for interventions

24	Prerequisites	Housing stability and food security should be prioritised as prerequisites for other interventions.
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25	Housing and family homelessness	Consideration be given to the following: • That a multi-agency approach be applied with child centred policies and initiatives to respond to the causes and challenges of family homelessness and deprivation; • measures that could address the specific drivers of family homelessness; • dedicated supports to minimise the harm done to children who experience homelessness are made available to all children affected; and • that children should have their needs individually assessed and factors such as access to education, medical support and maintenance of relationship with their wider family network should be considered.
26	Food poverty	Targeted measures, including emergency measures, food provision, and extensions to the school meals programme, be resourced to ensure that children, in particular those experiencing poverty and/or deprivation, have access to nutritious food.

Theme: Programmes, Interventions and integrated services

27	Interventions	An analysis of interventions be conducted to ensure that they are focused and strategic.
28	Delivery of community and intensive programmes	Funding is provided to ensure the delivery of community and intensive programmes, and that a progressive universal approach is adopted with place-based supports.
29	Social inclusion programmes	Holistic and targeted social inclusion programmes are available to ensure that children and families experiencing poverty, deprivation, adversity or marginalisation receive wraparound supports in their localities.
30	Early intervention models	• A commitment to integrated early intervention with multi-annual funding for community-led models that are evidence-based and delivered through co-ordinated, cross-sector approaches be adopted; and • Research should be undertaken to show the true value of return on investment relating to early intervention on child poverty.
31	Evidenced-based programmes	An adequate amount of time be given to embed programmes that are identified as suitable for

an Irish context so that they can be mainstreamed by statutory services.

32	Trauma-informed care training	Trauma-informed care training be provided for all front-facing services.
33	Integrated services	Integrated services are funded to address both immediate needs and therapeutic supports, and that sustained investment is provided to respond to complex trauma.
34	Access and co-ordinated services	Improved access and co-ordinated services be provided to address the long waiting lists for public services, and to ensure that children have access to services at the required level when they are needed.
35	Innovative and interagency approaches	Innovative and interagency approaches are deployed to engage with children, reach isolated rural families, and address intergenerational poverty, as well as deploying mobile therapeutic services to all areas where services are not provided to ensure that children and families receive the supports to make meaningful change, build resilience and enhance their lives, irrespective of the area in which they live.

36	Local partnerships	Local partnerships should be established on an interagency basis to support children and adolescents at risk, and to provide an effective pathway for case management and provision of services.
37	Core meetings	Core meetings be scheduled, including with funded services and social workers, to discuss requirements for children and families and are extended to all counties.
Theme: Focused, Targeted and Strategic Interventions		
38	Activities Card	Consideration be given to introducing an activities card which would allow every child and young person to avail of a leisure or entertainment activity of their own choosing.
39	In-kind benefits	Cash supports be provided until in-kind supports are implemented, and that in-kind benefits are developed and deployed.
40	Family income	The Committee recommends that the following matters raised surrounding family income and adequate levels of social protection be considered: • That income thresholds for working family payment, one-parent family allowance and Jobseeker's Transitional

Payment be examined and reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that the income disregards are keeping pace with increases in national minimum wage;

- That the disregard for lone parents be increased in respect of the one-parent family allowance given the decrease in the number of hours that can be worked as a result of successive increases in the minimum wage;
 - That targeted supports be prioritised to ensure that families, irrespective of composition, are provided with adequate income;
 - That the cost of disability should be included in any policy or strategy that aims to reduce and eradicate child poverty, and the impact on children and families should be addressed and considered by measures implemented, including a cost of disability payment, to reduce and eradicate child poverty and deprivation.
 - That policy measures that assist with increasing the earnings of families with children be prioritised by reducing barriers to work along with measures that increase employment rates of parents; and
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- That prior to any amendments to the child benefit payments, an analysis be conducted to ensure that no child is worse off, that impact assessments including income deciles and circumstances be included for each cohort, and the increasing financial demands of older children be considered.

41	Child Maintenance System	The implementation of the recommendations of the previous Department of Justice's Review of the Enforcement of Child Maintenance Orders be progressed.
42	Public Health Nurse	Consideration should be given to introducing a dedicated public health nurse (PHN) for children in areas with high levels of intergenerational trauma and poverty.
43	Health services	That: • progress be made towards fulfilling the EU Child Guarantee call for free healthcare for children in need, and that access to health services including GP care, dental, and other health services be progressed; • capacity be built in mental health services and include targeted supports

for children living in poverty and deprivation; and

- the National Traveller Health Action Plan (2022-2027) should be fully resourced and implemented.

44	Home Visiting	The home visiting programme be expanded and continue to receive strong and increased investment, and that the programmes are expanded to additional departments with cross departmental co-ordination.
45	Early Childhood Education and Care	• Increased investment to bring Ireland's spending on high-quality and inclusive early years education and care in line with the OECD average be implemented; • Comprehensive strategies be developed to address barriers faced by disadvantaged households and groups for enrolment and participation in early years settings; • Availability of childcare places be increased to assist with addressing inequalities in children's socio-emotional development, and target expansion and investment in areas of high deprivation to support access for the most disadvantaged children and families;

- Substantial scaling up of all schemes be delivered to ensure sufficient places are available by 2030;
- To evaluate the roll-out of the Bia Blasta programme to ensure that any barriers to settings participating in the programme be addressed, and that any additional supports required be provided;
- The National Childcare Scheme threshold be updated in line with any increase in national minimum wage;
- A lower staff-to-child ratio in early years education and care settings be implemented for communities experiencing poverty and disadvantage;
- Consideration be given to funding additional measures including access to transport and wraparound supports such as family and parenting programmes, and that these would be of importance for those children experiencing multiple disadvantages, or where the family is dealing with challenges such as addiction;
- The attendance rules for the National Childcare Scheme, ECCE programme and AIM, be reviewed to ensure that the most vulnerable families are supported by these schemes;

- The variance between county councils and the differences in supports provided for community crèches be examined to assist with identifying interventions in communities, and to ensure that community services are developed and delivered;
- Consideration be given to introducing a funding model to support new providers into childcare and early years education and care, and for the development of facilities on green field sites; and
- A rolling window for the Building Blocks Grant applications be considered to allow services to access the available funding.

46	Early years settings	All early years settings meet the following conditions: pre-school is of a high quality, is adequately funded, has low adult-child ratios, highly-qualified staff with quality continued professional development, positive adult-child interactions, effective collaboration with parents, appropriate curricula, adequate oversight, monitoring and evaluation, and inclusivity and diversity.
47	Review and Evaluation	Any review or evaluation of childcare and early learning provision should include the long-term

impact of the programmes and also examine the impact of the provision on intergenerational poverty.

48	Family and parenting supports	• A model at the regional level is developed for the delivery of social inclusion units to support parents to access services; • A positive strengths-based approach to family and parenting supports be adopted; • Consideration be given to providing parenting courses on a national level in line with the model in operation in Sweden; and • Information campaigns are run continuously to ensure that families are aware of the supports available.
49	Family Resource Centres	The network of Family Resource Centres should continue to increase to provide supports and services to children and families, and that consideration should be given to including a full-time child, youth and family support worker(s) within each FRC.
50	Youth work budgeting and service provision	Youth work services are appropriately funded and youth workers fairly remunerated to ensure greater access to community-based services across a multi-annual basis.

51	Increase in youth work services	An analysis of the Pobal Deprivation Index is used to highlight gaps in youth work services and funding is allocated via the UBU scheme for the provision of youth work services in these communities.
52	DEIS / DEIS Plus	Multidisciplinary teams be prioritised, and that the composition of each team is context-specific, that targets contained in Ireland's Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy are resourced, and that sufficient resources are provided to ensure implementation of strategies to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes.
53	School Resources	Adequate resources be provided to schools to ensure that: • costs associated with school are reduced; • options of paying in instalments for costs associated with education are available; • adequate support systems within schools including counsellors are provided; • safe spaces including quiet areas for relaxation are available; and • talks and presentations are presented on various topics.

54	Hygiene products	Schools ensure that all young people have access to essential hygiene products and that teachers receive training on addressing menstrual-related issues and discussing them appropriately.
55	School Meal Programmes	Consideration be given to providing: • breakfast clubs and school meals programmes to more schools and that healthy and diverse options should be expanded; and • the pilot project that continued the delivery of the school meals programme through youth organisations over the summer months be extended.
56	Educational welfare provision	Increased educational welfare provision be provided to support young people in exploring alternative opportunities when mainstream education is no longer an option due to mental health or other barriers including poverty.
57	Educational opportunities	Consideration be given to developing courses or classes designed to the specific needs and the potential of the young person.

58	Building and developing capabilities	Opportunities to encourage and invest in developing the potential and capabilities of individuals and families should be examined and implemented with adequate resources provided.
59	Employment supports	Consideration be given to: • high-quality tailored employment support programmes for those distant from the labour market, and that as part of the mechanisms to alleviate child poverty these programmes be developed and implemented; and • that a comprehensive national Traveller and Roma employment, training and enterprise action plan be developed, resourced, and implemented.
60	Access to play and participation in culture, arts and sports	Consideration be given to: • measure(s) that would embed initiatives, such as sports partnerships and music generation, in the long-term by facilitating access to clubs or tuition; • the provision of safe spaces for children in emergency accommodation to allow children to explore the world around them and play with their peers, and develop structured activities and supports for parents to create an

awareness of the importance of play;

and

- the development of minimum standards for recreation and play spaces in direct provision centres, emergency accommodation and IPAS centres.
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Appendix 1 – Opening Statements and Written Submissions

Opening Statements

Date	Stakeholder	Link to Opening Statement
09 October 2025	Social Justice Ireland	Opening Statement Submission
09 October 2025	Children's Rights Alliance	Opening Statement Submission
09 October 2025	Early Childhood Ireland	Opening Statement
09 October 2025	National One Parent Family Alliance	Opening Statement
16 October 2025	Department of Children, Disability and Equality	Opening Statement Submission
16 October 2025	Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht	Opening Statement
16 October 2025	Department of Social Protection	Opening Statement Submission

16 October 2025	Child Poverty and Well-Being Programme Office, Department of the Taoiseach	Opening Statement Submission
16 October 2025	Central Statistics Office	Opening Statement Submission
16 October 2025	Economic and Social Research Institute	Opening Statement
20 November 2025	Monaghan Children and Young People's Services Committee and Monaghan Local Community Development Committee	Opening Statement Submission
20 November 2025	Northside Partnership	Opening Statement Submission
20 November 2025	Archways	Opening Statement
20 November 2025	Area Based Childhood Programme	Opening Statement
20 November 2025	The House - Cox's Demesne Youth and Community Project	Opening Statement
20 November 2025	The Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (ISPCC)	Opening Statement
04 December 2025	Minister for Children, Disability and Equality	Opening Statement Submission

22 January 2026	Ombudsman for Children's Office	Opening Statement
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22 January 2026	Tusla	Opening Statement
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[Submission](#)

Requested Written Submissions

Stakeholder	Link to Submission
Barnardos	Submission
Community Platform	Submission
Disability Federation of Ireland	Submission
Family Resource Centre National Forum	Submission
Focus Ireland	Submission
One Family	Submission
Pobal	Submission
Society of St Vincent de Paul	Submission
SPARK Ireland	Submission

Voluntary Written Submission

Stakeholder	Link to Submission
National Traveller Women's Forum	Submission

Appendix 2 – Poverty Measures and Data

The data provided by SILC allows for the calculation of key policy indicators:

- At risk of poverty rate is a relative income poverty measure (60 per cent of the national equivalent median income) tracking the national equivalised median income as it rises and falls.⁸¹⁰
- Enforced deprivation rate is defined as the percentage of people who experience two or more of the eleven basic deprivation indicators listed below:
 - Without heating at some stage in the last year;
 - Unable to afford a morning, afternoon, or evening out in last fortnight;
 - Unable to afford two pairs of properly fitting shoes in good condition that are suitable for daily activities;
 - Unable to afford a roast once a week;
 - Unable to afford a meal with meat, chicken, fish, or vegetarian equivalent every second day;
 - Unable to afford new (not second-hand) clothes;
 - Unable to afford a warm waterproof coat;
 - Unable to afford to keep the home adequately warm;
 - Unable to afford to replace any worn out furniture;
 - Unable to afford to have family or friends for a drink or a meal once a month; and
 - Unable to afford to buy presents for family or friends at least once a year.⁸¹¹
- Consistent Poverty is where a person is identified as being at risk of poverty and experiencing enforced deprivation.⁸¹²

⁸¹⁰ CSO Written Submission, 3; Transcript, 16 October 2025, 16; DSP Written Submission, 16 October 2025, 2; CRA Written Submission, 5.

⁸¹¹ DSP Written Submission, 16 October 2025, 2. CSO Written Submission, 3 – 4.

⁸¹² CSO Written Submission, 4; Transcript, 16 October 2025, 16; DSP Written Submission, 16 October 2025, 2; CRA Written Submission, 3.

- At risk of poverty or social exclusion corresponds to the sum of people who are at risk of poverty, or experiencing severe material deprivation, or living in households with very low work intensity.⁸¹³

For further information on these indicators, please find a link to the CSO's Guide [here](#).

Analysis of available data presented to the Committee highlighted that:

- Children have one of the highest rates of poverty when poverty across all age groups is considered;⁸¹⁴ 629,495 people are living in poverty in Ireland of which more than 190,000 are children under the age of 18;⁸¹⁵
- 1 in 7 children is affected by poverty or 1 in 5 (225,000 children) when housing costs are factored in;⁸¹⁶
- Consistent poverty rate for children ranges from 10.9 per cent in 2015 to 4.8 per cent in 2023 and 8.5 per cent in 2024;⁸¹⁷
- At risk of poverty or social exclusion rate for children in Ireland ranged from 29.2 per cent in 2015 to 24.3 per cent in 2023 and 20.9 per cent in 2024.⁸¹⁸
- One-parent and larger families have the highest rate of persistent at risk of poverty and deprivation alongside households with a working-age adult with a disability;⁸¹⁹
- On average a third of one-parent families experienced persistent deprivation between 2016 and 2023;⁸²⁰
- The number of children defined as deprived but not at risk of poverty has increased from 12 per cent in 2020 to 17 per cent in 2023;⁸²¹
- Rates of income poverty and material deprivation are significantly higher for children than for adults under 65 and the older population;⁸²² and

⁸¹³ CSO Written Submission, 6; Transcript, 16 October 2025, 16.

⁸¹⁴ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 3; CRA Written Submission, 3.

⁸¹⁵ SJI Written Submission, 3.

⁸¹⁶ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 3; Transcript, 16 October 2025, 8; SJI Written Submission, 4.

⁸¹⁷ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 7.

⁸¹⁸ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 7; CSO Written Submission, 6.

⁸¹⁹ ESRI report quoted in Focus Ireland Written Submission, 9.

⁸²⁰ Focus Ireland Written Submission, 9.

⁸²¹ DCDE Briefing Note, 16 October 2025, 16; DCDE Briefing Note, 4 December 2025, 31.

⁸²² Transcript, 16 October 2025, 8.

- Ireland is mid-table when using the at risk of poverty or social exclusion measure.⁸²³

SILC 2024 analysis provided to the Committee emphasised that:

- Between 2023 and 2024 a rise was evident in the consistent poverty rate for the population from 3.6 per cent to 5 per cent, as well as a rise in relation to the child-specific rate from 4.8 per cent to 8.5 per cent (equates to an additional 45, 107 children);⁸²⁴
- The consistent poverty rate in one-parent households was 11 per cent, compared to 6 per cent in two-parent households with up to three children;⁸²⁵
- Between 2023 and 2024 the at risk of poverty rate increased from 10.6 per cent to 11.7 per cent for the population and from 14.3 per cent to 15.3 per cent for children (equates to an extra 12,995 children);⁸²⁶
- The enforced deprivation rate for the population decreased from 17.3 per cent to 15.7 per cent, and for children decreased from 21.4 per cent to 21.2 per cent;⁸²⁷
- Over one-fifth (21.2 per cent) of children, or 256,698 children, were in enforced deprivation in 2024, with children accounting for 3 in ten of all those affected;⁸²⁸ and
- In 2024, one in ten (11 per cent) of lone parents were in consistent poverty and almost half (46.3 per cent) were in enforced deprivation.⁸²⁹

SILC collects information on child-specific deprivation and the following is a list of the child-specific deprivation indicators for children under 16:

- Unable to afford some new (not second-hand) clothes;

⁸²³ Transcript, 16 October 2025, 16.

⁸²⁴ DSP Written Submission, 4; CSO Written Submission, 4; Children Right's Alliance Written Submission, 3; Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 8; One Family Written Submission, 4; SPARK Written Submission, 1.

⁸²⁵ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 6; Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 8; Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 12; One Family Written Submission, 4; SPARK Written Submission, 1.

⁸²⁶ Transcript, 9 October 2025, 3; Transcript, 9 October 2025, 6; DSP Written Submission, 4; CRA Written Submission, 3, 5; Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 8.

⁸²⁷ DSP Written Submission, 4; Society of St Vincent de Paul Written Submission, 8.

⁸²⁸ CSO Report quoted in Community Platform Written Submission, 3; CRA Written Submission, 3.

⁸²⁹ SILC Report quoted in Community Platform Written Submission, 3.

- Unable to afford two pairs of properly fitting shoes in good condition that are suitable for daily activities;
- Unable to afford a meal with meat, chicken, or fish (or vegetarian equivalent) at least once a day;
- Unable to afford fruits and vegetables once a day;
- Unable to afford a one-week holiday away from home;
- Unable to afford age-appropriate books;
- Unable to afford indoor games (educational baby toys, building blocks, board games, computer games);
- Unable to afford outdoor leisure equipment (e.g. bicycle, roller skates);
- Unable to afford regular leisure activity (e.g. swimming, playing an instrument, youth organisations);
- Unable to afford celebrations on special occasions;
- Unable to afford to invite friends of children round to play or eat from time to time;
- Unable to afford suitable place to study or do homework; and
- Unable to afford school trips and school events.⁸³⁰

In 2024, the child-specific material deprivation rate for children under the age of 16 years was 13.8 per cent an increase from 12.6 per cent in 2021.⁸³¹

Important considerations when examining data were brought to the attention of the Committee including (i) the inherent sample limitations of SILC which the CSO review to ensure the collection of quality data; (ii) to view poverty indicators as trends over several years rather than relying on a single data point; and (iii) to utilise all available data sources to provide deeper insights into the lived experience of children.⁸³²

⁸³⁰ CSO Written Submission, Table 1, 5 – 6.

⁸³¹ CSO Report quoted in Community Platform Written Submission, 3.

⁸³² Transcript, 16 October 2025, 7; Transcript, 16 October 2025, 8.

Differences between national and Eurostat data were noted and can be explained by differences in definitions,⁸³³ equivalence scales,⁸³⁴ and methodologies.⁸³⁵ Eurostat data takes a wider view by reporting those living in households experiencing at least one of three poverty and social exclusion risks, namely risk of poverty, severe material and social deprivation, living in a household with low work intensity.⁸³⁶

⁸³³ For example, household disposable income calculation at a national level deducts personal pension contributions to private and occupational pensions whereas Eurostat does not make the deduction. CSO Written Submission, 2.

⁸³⁴ Equivalence scales adjust household income to allow for comparison of households of different sizes. For example, national scale places a weight of 1 for the first adult, 0.66 to each subsequent adult (aged over 14 in the household), and 0.33 for each child less than 14 whereas Eurostat assigns a weight of 1, 0.5, and 0.3 respectively. CSO Written Submission, 2.

⁸³⁵ Eurostat uses a different method to calculate material deprivation. Severe material and social deprivation (SMSD) rate is used and is defined as the proportion of the population experiencing an enforced lack of at least 7 of 13 deprivation items. For further details on SMSD see CSO Written Submission, 4.

⁸³⁶ Pobal Written Submission, 4.