

Opening Statement from the National One Parent Family Alliance to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Children & Equality on Child Poverty and Deprivation

9 October 2025

Thank you for the invitation to speak about child poverty on behalf of the National One Parent Family Alliance.

At the outset, we are clear: children in one-parent families are the most impacted by poverty and deprivation, and they are disproportionately affected by the housing crisis.

Today, 5,145 children are living in emergency accommodation, and we know the majority are from one-parent families. In the first eight months of this year, there was a net increase of 299 families in homelessness - 213 of these were one-parent families.

The SILC data from March highlighted a rise in consistent poverty from 4.8% to 8.5%, but a more detailed analysis reveals the children behind the statistics:

- Consistent poverty in the general population is 5%.
- Among two-parent households with up to three children, it is 6%.
- Among children in one parent households, it is 11%.

This increase from 4.8% to 8.5% was driven primarily by the rise in poverty among one-parent families, where the rate jumped from 7.1% to 11%, compared to a smaller increase of 1.5% among children in two-parent households.

This is not an accident. It is the inevitable result of policies that are failing children in one parent households.

We know the solutions:

- Affordable, quality childcare
- Affordable housing
- Adequate social protection income that supports an education-first pathway out of poverty and social welfare into paid employment.
- Well-paid, family-friendly work
- Robust enforcement of child maintenance orders

We know that if we get it right for one-parent families the structures will work for all families.

There is a childcare crisis affecting all families, children, and workers. While the National Childcare Scheme (NCS) has increased investment, significant costs remain for parents, and supply is limited. Many lone parents work in hospitality, retail,

and care sectors—outside the core hours offered by most childcare providers. The most recent figures show that only 87 childminders in the country are eligible for NCS subsidies.

In housing, many one-parent households rely on HAP (Housing Assistance Payment). However, HAP limits do not reflect current market rents, and many lone parents who should be paying a social housing rent are instead paying that plus high landlord top-ups. This is a key driver of poverty among one parent families.

Despite positive changes around flexible working, we are seeing a return to an increase to office-based workdays. The current legislation on remote work does not robustly protect a worker's right to work from home, and many challenges at the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) have failed. Meanwhile, income supports for working lone parents have eroded. In 2000, the income disregard allowed a lone parent to work 26.25 hours at minimum wage and retain their full social welfare payment. In 2025, that has dropped to just 12.22 hours.

Our social protection system also fails to meet the Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) for children. According to MESL 2025:

- Only 88% of the needs of a primary school-age child are met.
- Only 64% of the needs of a second-level child are met.

Despite this shortfall, lone parents—unlike other long-term social welfare recipients living alone—are not entitled to the Living Alone Allowance or the Household Benefits Package.

There have been positive changes by the Department of Social Protection in how child maintenance payments are treated but unfortunately not by other departments for secondary payments so many children are still losing out. However, the core issue remains: Ireland still lacks a statutory child maintenance system that could help lift children out of poverty. The ESRI's Growing Up in Ireland survey (October 2024) found that only 36–38% of lone parents receive regular child maintenance.

We call for the immediate implementation of the Department of Justice's Review of the Enforcement of Child Maintenance Orders (January 2024).

We are happy to answer any questions you may have

On Behalf of the following members of NOPFA

Barnardos, Focus Ireland, National Family Resource Centres, National Women's Council, One Family, SPARK, Society of St. Vincent De Paul, Treoir.