

Child Poverty – an advocacy perspective

Irish Social Policy Association

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Overview



- Briefly introduce the work of the Children's Rights Alliance
- Developing a strong evidence base for child poverty advocacy work
- Building a campaign around policy asks
- But has it delivered change?

About the Children's Rights Alliance

- The **Children's Rights Alliance** unites over 140 **members** working together to make Ireland one of the best places in the world to be a child.
- We change the lives of all children in Ireland by making sure that their rights are respected and protected in our **laws, policies** and **services**.
 - We identify problems for children
 - We develop solutions
 - We educate and provide information on children's rights
 - We unite our members and put pressure on government to put children first



Ways in which we work



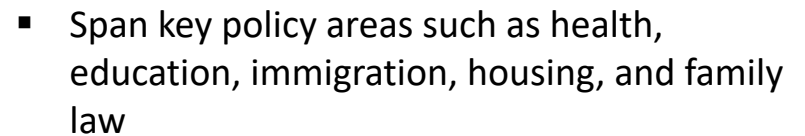
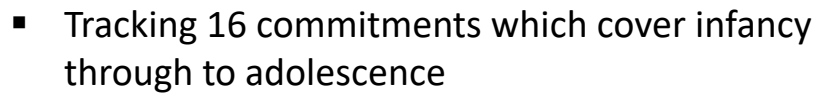
Gap Analysis

**Advocate for
legislative and
policy reform**

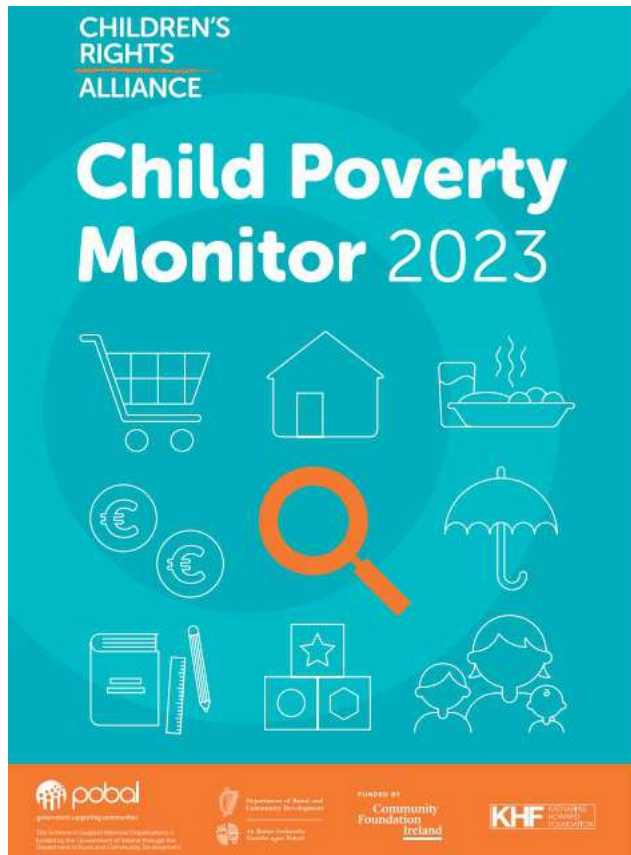
**Representative
and consultative
role**

**Access to Justice
Legal Service**

Developing a strong evidence base for advocacy work



Approach to the Child Poverty Monitor



- Informed by the European Commission's Recommendation *Investing in Children: Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage*.
- A common framework to ensure synergies across policy areas.
- A three-pillar approach - focused on adequate resources and affordable quality services and the right to participate.

Key sections in the Child Poverty Monitor

Income Adequacy



Food Poverty



Early Childhood Education and Care



Education



Health



Housing and Homelessness



Participation, Play, Culture and Recreation



Supporting Families and Youth Services



Building the case for policy change



- Children's Rights approach
 - Explicit connection with European policy
 - National data
 - Analysis of current policy responses
 - Review of research
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Building an advocacy campaign around policy asks

End Child Poverty Week 2023

Day 1: Educational Inequality

Register now!

End Child Poverty Week 2023

Monday 11 to Friday 15 September



Day 2: Child Welfare and Alternative Care

Day 3: National Action

Day 4: Income

Day 5: Early Years





'Eyes and ears of Tusla' in spotting child abuse taken away when schools closed during covid



'When you took the protective factor of the schools away during covid lockdowns, you took out the eyes and ears of Tusla and what is coming to Tusla are children who should have been picked up years ago' Picture: iStock

Politicians must continue to 'back' child poverty projects, forum hears



Children's Rights Alliance chief executive Tanya Ward said come election time, 'economic developments take over the debate, and it becomes less about something like child poverty'. Picture: Julian Behal

WRO, 13 SEP, 2023 - 17:46

THE IRISH TIMES
Tuesday, September 12, 2023

Pre-budget call for free books at second level

Children's Rights Alliance urges hiring of 90 additional education welfare officers

SHAUNA BOWERS

Investing in education is the "key" to breaking the cycle of poverty, the Children's Rights Alliance said as it called for free schoolbooks for secondary school students.

The organisation said in its pre-budget submission that the Desi programme, which supports pupils from deprived backgrounds, has been " hugely successful" but that "too many children aren't reaching their full potential in education".

Alliance chief executive Tanya Ward said half of all children living in poverty are not in Desi schools and that services aimed at early school leavers are struggling to cope.

"Children from low-income families should have the same opportunities as their peers," she said. "They shouldn't have to fight every step of the way to get the education so many of us take for granted."

"The Government has started to grapple with the cost of education, but addressing inequality will require thinking beyond cost to the care and support we can provide children facing a multitude of challenges."

Average cost

Ahead of Budget 2024, the alliance has called for free schoolbooks at second level, noting that the average cost of basic needs for a fourth-class pupil is €220 but that this rises to €972 for those in free year.

"Last year's budget went further than any before in education, providing free schoolbooks to all primary school students. This momentum needs

to continue this year, with an investment to expand the scheme to second level students (at a cost of €70 million)," the alliance said.

Increased staffing

It also called for increased staffing for the education welfare service (TESS), which ensures every child attends school regularly or is otherwise able to maintain their right to a minimum education. However, the alliance pointed out that the service has just 120 education welfare officers working across more than 3,000 schools, which it described as an "unacceptable" number.

It called for a further 90 such posts to be established so that every child who needs access "can get an adequate service."

"We pride ourselves on our education system in Ireland but an under-resourced education welfare service leaves behind the very child who needs support the most. This simply isn't good enough in a country pledging to end child poverty," the submission adds.

Ms Ward said education can be the key to unlocking "a world of opportunity and potential".

"However, for children and young people in poverty, they often face barrier after barrier when it comes to accessing education. Persistent inequality can trap children in a cycle of poverty that can follow them into adulthood," she said.

Government can choose to end poverty for children: Fintan O'Toole, page 14

Advocates call for 'children's budget' at Cork event

Conor O'Mahony, lecturer and deputy dean of the School of Law and Vice-Dean for Student Welfare and Student Affairs at UCC, said the budget is a critical time to invest in services.



Dr Sharon Lambert of the School of Applied Psychology at UCC said supporting children is a good investment, as it saves the State money in the long term.

Media Coverage

Other Levers for Change



- Programme for Government /change of Taoiseach
- Alternative education
- Food Poverty Working Group
- Stakeholder engagement on early years
- EU Child Guarantee

But has it delivered change?

Spotlight Solution:

THE NEW CHILD POVERTY AND WELLBEING UNIT

Introduction

Child poverty is a multi-faceted problem that is now trapping over 180,000 children and young people, denying them opportunities to reach their full potential.

In December 2022, Taoiseach Leo Varadkar announced the establishment of a Child Poverty and Wellbeing Unit, that would be located in the Department of the Taoiseach. It follows the successful track record of other child poverty offices in Scotland and New Zealand that have delivered positive outcomes for children and young people. The Child Poverty and Wellbeing Unit has the potential to be a gamechanger for Ireland's child poverty rates. It can drive cross-government work and foster cross-departmental engagement to ensure a multi-layered response to the multi-faceted nature of child poverty.

Alongside the work of the Unit, there is a need to build a coherent cross-government plan to tackle child poverty. Drawing on international best practices, a commitment in legislation through a Child Poverty Reduction Act would provide a sharp policy focus and political accountability. It is welcome the Government is planning a spotlight on child poverty in the next National Children's Strategy, and we need to see the Child Poverty and Wellbeing Unit retained by the next Government to deliver the sustained, long-term effort required to turn the tide of child poverty.

The Child Poverty and Wellbeing Unit

The Child Poverty and Wellbeing Unit is a prime vehicle to drive cross-governmental working to end child poverty. In April 2023, a senior civil servant was appointed as Head of the Unit to oversee the development and implementation of its work plan. The Unit will be resourced with a team of six officials to carry out this work.

The Child Poverty and Wellbeing Unit will develop its programme of work based on the following priority areas:

- Income support and joblessness
- Early learning and childcare
- Reducing the cost of education
- Family homelessness
- Consolidating and integration public health, family & parental support, and wellbeing services
- Enhancing participation in culture, arts and sport for children and young people affected by poverty

"Our focus must be on reducing child poverty and improving well-being. Our vision is to make Ireland the best country in which to be a child. We must give everyone the best start in life, empowering them to make the most of that start through education, equal opportunities and good jobs to work towards a better future."

—Taoiseach Leo Varadkar, Dail Debates 17 December 2022

Budget 2023 and Budget 2024

Tackled the cost of education by introducing free school books to primary schools and junior cycle

Reached a milestone investment of €1bn in early years (delivered 5 years early) and commitment to initial phase of EPM.

Significant social protection allocation to tackle cost of living.

Budget 2023 contained no child benefit payment for children in Direct Provision, but funding committed in Budget 2024.

Inadequate increases to qualified child allowance.

Final comments