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About Rise Up

Rise Up for Children Economic Research
To inform Barnardos’ Rise Up campaign, we commissioned Indecon International Economic Consultants to examine the scale and depth of inequality in Ireland and its impact on children. Particular attention was paid to the themes of economic inequality, child development, education, health and the environment. The Indecon research team examined and analysed a broad range of data from a variety of sources. The key findings are presented in this report and provide an independent, evidence-based assessment of childhood inequality in Ireland.

Young People’s Voices and Opinions
To coincide with and inform our economic research Barnardos spoke directly with young people. Adults can be guilty of assuming they know what it is like to be a teenager today just because they were one years ago; but times have changed so it is vital to listen to young people to hear about their expectations, realities and priorities. We commissioned research consultants Millward Brown to carry out quantitative and qualitative research with young people across the country. Millward Brown researchers held in-depth discussions with a number of young people and surveyed a sample of 500 nationally representative 11-17 year olds. The findings of this research show young people are starting to think more deeply about life and have a strong sense of personal optimism. They told us structure, physical activity and more social and family engagement are both desired and key to their happiness. But we also found clear evidence of polarisation between young people from different backgrounds, with those from poorer backgrounds faring worse in many areas. For the majority money is still a key currency to success. Money is also seen as central to feeling secure and reducing family stress at home. Below are some key things young people told us:

Aspirations and Expectations

- Children from well-off households are more likely to feel lucky compared with children from less well-off households

- Nearly nine in 10 children from well off households think they will attend 3rd level education but this drops to just three-quarters of children in less well-off households

- Children from well-off households are around a fifth more likely to be happy with the way they look compared with children from less well-off households
Nearly two-thirds of young people living in Dublin believe they will definitely achieve their life goals and dreams compared with just under half young people in the Munster region.

Children from more well off backgrounds are 25% more likely to have parents with strong expectations for their future compared with those from less well-off households.

More than three-quarters of young people in the Connacht / Ulster region believe that all children do not have the same opportunities compared to just three in five young people in Dublin.

More than half of the whole sample picked a family member as their hero, with two in five girls choosing their mother.

Children in less well-off households are 25% less likely to feel teachers understand them than those from well-off households.

Children in less well-off households are a fifth less happy to ask questions in school compared with children from well-off households.

Boys are more confident asking questions in school, with more than two-thirds of them happy to ask questions in school compared to just over half of girls.

More than two-thirds of children from well-off households receive parental help with homework compared with about half children from less well-off households (which can often be because parents don’t have sufficient education themselves or because they simply don’t have the time as they are holding down jobs and caring for other family members).

Young people living in Leinster Area (excluding Dublin) are a third less likely to like where they live compared with young people in Connacht / Ulster.

**Rise Up Campaign**

Inspired by the centenary of the 1916 Easter Rising and the Proclamation calling on us to ‘cherish all children equally’, Rise Up is Barnardos’ pre-election campaign calling for political action. Rise Up seeks to challenge the pervasive inequality that lives in Irish society today and demand a better future for Irish children. For more information about the campaign please visit www.barnardos.ie/RiseUp or follow #RiseUp4Children on Twitter.
Executive Summary

When Ireland was declared a republic almost 100 years ago the authors of the Proclamation of Independence enshrined equality as the core principle upon which the new nation would be built. A century on has Ireland successfully become a sovereign independent state committed to cherishing all of the children of the nation equally, as was envisioned by the signatories of the Proclamation? As we approach the 1916 Easter Rising commemorations and look forward to the next century of the Irish Republic, this report takes a detailed look at the scale of inequality faced by Irish children today and examines what changes we, as a nation and a society, can make to ensure that the next 100 years hold a more equitable promise for our children.

Unfortunately the reality is inequality is pervasive in modern Ireland. Its effects are evident all around us, but are often hidden. This is particularly true for children. It may be apparent that poverty is making a child go hungry when they hoard food from their school breakfast club, but the long-term emotional and cognitive impacts of that inequality are hidden. There are different kinds of inequality; inequality of income, resources, respect and social standing, power, health and education. These inequalities are layered and interrelated. Where one type of inequality is allowed to flourish others will thrive. The child who experiences a health inequality because of poor access to speech and language therapy is likely to fall behind in their education and find they have fewer opportunities upon leaving school. Likewise the child who lives in inappropriate accommodation may find their mental and physical health suffers as a result. Inequality is not just bad for an unlucky few; it affects the whole of society by undermining economic growth and destroying social cohesion. We know that more equal societies are safer, happier and healthier places to live for everyone – even those at the top.¹

Child: “I don’t think all children in Ireland have the same opportunities. Some people live in mansions and some people live on the side of the road.”

All children deserve the same opportunities in life, yet in Ireland children are born unequal. Their futures are determined by a lottery that sees some born with the opportunity to thrive and others forced to fight just to survive. The mistaken belief that Irish society is inherently fair has led to a dominant narrative that those who succeed do so because they are decent and hardworking, whereas those less fortunate are to blame for their ‘personal failure’. Yet in most instances people who have more power,

resources, respect, health, safety and education have it because they were born with it, and those who are born with less rarely catch up. During the last decade Ireland has experienced an economic rollercoaster which has brought unprecedented levels of insecurity and hardship. We know that children were disproportionately affected. The most recent child poverty figures show the number of children living in consistent poverty jumped by 2% or 23,000 children in one year from 2012 to 2013, bringing the total number to almost one in eight (138,000).² We can all agree this isn’t good enough; but what can be done to reduce inequality for children in Ireland?

**Choosing to make Ireland a better place for children**

We have big choices to make. As we approach the next General Election we have the opportunity to make the changes which would mean Ireland would become a much safer, happier and healthier place for children to grow up in. Continuing with the status quo is not an option if we want to realise the Government’s own target of lifting 110,000 children out of consistent poverty. To achieve this we need large scale investment in public services. We invest in infrastructure - €27 billion recently announced for capital projects to span 2016-2021 - so why not in children?³ A programme of enhanced investment in public services and human capital, comparable to the Capital Investment Programme, would reduce inequality by providing greater security and support for all.

But how can we achieve this? How can we afford it?

The issue is not can we afford to invest in broad scale enhancements to public services-it is will we choose to do so? Choosing to forgo tax cuts across the board for the term of the next Government would allow us to invest more in early years care, education, health and housing supports. Improving tax efficiency across the entire tax spectrum at a time when our economy is growing would allow us to exploit untapped and underutilised sources of revenue for investment in public services. For example if we choose to increase revenue from corporate taxation, introduce greater progressivity at the top of the income stream and reduce the inequitable impact of indirect taxation for those on low incomes we could see real differences that would last more than a lifetime. Choosing to create a centralised, ring-fenced funding stream managed by the Department of An Taoiseach would give targeted funding for key departments to invest in prevention and early intervention programmes.

Making these political choices is not easy but it can be done. Doing so, would allow us to:

- Give Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, the authority and resources it requires to fulfil its remit and to ensure a comprehensive, streamlined spectrum of services for families throughout a child’s first year of life and beyond.

³ Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, (2015) Capital Investment Plan 2016-2021
• Raise spending on early years care and education from our current 0.2% GDP level to match the OECD average of 0.8% of GDP during the five year programme of the next government and commit to invest the 1% of GDP recognised as international best practice thereafter.

• Provide an extra investment to Department of Education of just over €103m per annum to ensure that all of Ireland’s children enjoy free primary education. Once implemented, expand this investment to include secondary education.

• Invest in targeted educational supports for children who need them and make such interventions available early enough so that all children have equitable opportunity to achieve their educational potential.

• Provide a fully operational primary care team for every 1,500 children in the country. This equates to approximately 800 teams nationwide at a ratio of one team to every 5,625 people – well within the targets set out in the Primary Care Strategy.4

• Guarantee families fair rent and security of tenure by linking rent rates to Consumer Price Index while also raising Rent Supplement rates to realistic levels in all areas, enabling those availing of the payment to compete in an increasingly heated market.

• Increase State provision of social housing beyond what is contained in the Social Housing Strategy, moving away from an over reliance on the private rented sector for supply of social housing.

Inequality in Ireland exists because of the way our social, economic and political systems are set up. Inequality is perpetuated and entrenched because of the political decisions made at every level of Government. It doesn’t have to be this way. This report offers solutions that, if implemented by the next government, have the power to make Ireland a fairer and more equal place for children for the next 100 years.

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4 Central Statistics Office (2011) Census
Economic Inequality

Economic inequality is the most visible form of inequality. Its widespread existence in Ireland is indisputable. Economic inequality is rooted in the way Irish economic and taxation systems are set up and operate. Material deprivation, exploitation and exclusion are, sadly, all large scale, everyday occurrences in Ireland. Economic inequality includes inequalities of wealth, ownership, employment, taxation and disposable income. The rise of inequality globally has been charted by many commentators, and its complex causes identified in research journals and international bestsellers alike. Recent publications such as Thomas Picketty’s *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* and social activism such as the Occupy Movement have contributed to a growing public discourse on economic inequality both nationally and globally. Although an increased focus on economic inequality has arisen since the global financial crisis began in 2007, it is not a new phenomenon. The current trend in economic inequality in Europe and beyond has its roots in the late 1970s. The rise in neo-liberal policies which are dependent on the free market to regulate the economy and provide social goods is heavily linked to the rise in inequality. The last three decades in Ireland witnessed a period of strong economic growth in the 1990s followed by a falsely inflated boom period and then the worst economic recession in the history of the State. As we approach the 2016 General Election with public discourse shifted wholeheartedly from bust to recovery what should be expected from the next phase in Irish economic history; a continued rise in the number of children living in poverty and a further entrenchment of economic inequality? Or a comprehensive, strategic and joined up plan to make Ireland one of the fairest countries in the world for children to grow up?

Income and Employment

While income and employment don’t directly affect children, children are the beneficiaries of a substantial proportion of the income of their parents. Children’s lives and outcomes are deeply linked to family income. Income has obvious effects on a child’s life— at the most basic level it determines whether they will be fed, clothed or sheltered; however as we will see in later sections, income has many more subtle ways of affecting children. In Ireland parental income influences a child’s health, education, emotional well-being and security. As a result a child’s ability to grow up to be a successful, happy and financially secure adult is inextricably linked to their parent’s income. Yet children have no power to determine the level of income of the household they are born into. Children are truly at the mercy of luck and circumstance. Income inequality has been typified over the last number of decades by the ever expanding gulf between those at the top of the income and wealth scale compared to everyone else. It’s estimated that just 10% of people in Ireland hold half the total wealth in the

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5 Atkinson, A., (2015) Inequality: What can be done?
country. As has happened internationally, this rise in wealth and income inequality
been slowly progressing in Ireland. Between 1975 and 2006 the income share of the
top 10% of earners in Ireland tripled, while the income share of the top 1% increased
a staggering fivefold. As a result the income share of everyone not in the top 10%- the
bottom 90%- shrank from 71.4% in 1975 to 63.9% by the end of the last decade.6 As
the gulf between the very rich and the rest of Ireland widens, the gap between those
at the top of the scale and those at the bottom is expanding exponentially. Barnardos’
research found the average disposable income of the top 1% of households is now 100
times more than the bottom 1%. Those at the top increasingly benefit from their ability
to invest in financial assets, such as equity in private businesses. When the value of
these financial assets increases relative to real assets, as has taken place since 2008,
wealth inequality rises.

Parent: “This recession the rich have got richer and
the poor have got poorer.”

Just as the income and wealth of those at the top has sky rocketed the fortunes of
those at the bottom has plummeted. The recession in Ireland saw a massive increase
in unemployment which rose from 6.4% in 2008 to a peak of 14.7% in 2012.7 As a result
many more people rely on social welfare payments as their sole income. As numbers
relying on social welfare payments rose, the supports available reduced during the
same period. In 2012 Ireland spent 16.4% of GDP on social protection, below the
EU average of 19.9% of GDP and substantially less than other north-west European
countries.8 Research carried out in 2015 by the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice
(VPSJ) demonstrates that social welfare payments alone do not meet what is required
for a minimum essential standard of living and in many cases the National Minimum
Wage (NMW) is also insufficient.9 Unsurprisingly families in receipt of social welfare or in
low paid jobs are most at risk of experiencing consistent poverty.

The unemployment rate has shown a marked improvement in the last two years,
dropping just below 10% this year. Some households, particularly households with
no one working, those with children and lone parent families, face greater difficulty
in accessing work than others. A recent ESRI report into the effect of joblessness on
transitioning to employment found households with children significantly hindered
in returning to work and identified childcare as a barrier. The report emphasised the
need to consider more than simply employment status when developing policies and
mechanisms for lowering the unemployment rate and argued other considerations such

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6 TASC, (2015) Cherishing All Equally: Economic Inequality in Ireland
as household make up and care responsibilities should be taken into account. Recent Government policy in relation to lone parents is an example of how not to ‘activate’ people to work. This group traditionally experience a high rate of poverty. Reform of the One Parent Family Payment has been widely criticised and is likely to push more lone parent families into poverty. Having a job plays an important role in avoiding or transitioning out of poverty; however this is only true if the job pays a sufficient amount to survive on. The Government announced an increase in the NMW as part of Budget 2016. The change, which comes into effect in January, will see the minimum hourly wage move from €8.65 to €9.15. This development, while welcome, will see no change to the number of people (400,000) earning less than the EU low pay threshold of €12.20 per hour. It is wholly unfair that children’s outcomes in life are so linked to their family income, but it is an even greater injustice when one considers how many children are living in families earning insufficient amounts to meet their basic needs such as food, clothing, heat and shelter.

**Recommendation:** Invest in public services on a large scale to achieve the Government target of lifting 110,000 children out of consistent poverty. A programme of enhanced investment in public services and human capital, comparable to the Capital Investment Programme for infrastructure, will reduce inequality by providing greater security and support for all.

**Taxation and Prices**

The goal of an efficient tax system is to adequately fund public services and social protection through fair, progressive and proportional taxation which reduces inequality. Fairness, progressivity and proportionality should be gauged not only on income tax, but on all taxes and tax reliefs which make up the tax regime. There are a number of key features of the Irish tax system which influence the level of inequality; therefore taxation must be included in a comprehensive suite of measures to combat and reduce inequality. Ireland’s corporate tax rate of 12.5% is considerably lower than the EU-28 average of 22.9%. In 2012 Eurostat estimated the average effective rate of tax for corporations in Ireland was as low as 6%. Ireland’s controversial corporate tax regime is rigorously defended by the Government as an important source of revenue and creator of jobs; however recent and highly publicised investigations by the European Commission highlight dubious tax practices favouring a small number of large transnational organisations at the expense of Irish taxpayers. The United Nations General Assembly recommended Ireland increase tax revenue in order to reduce cuts to

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13 Minister for Finance (Michael Noonan), Dáil Éireann, 28 April 2015
public services and social protection as means to protect those at risk of or experiencing poverty. It warned austerity measures such as tax cuts, exemptions and waivers can disproportionately benefit the wealthy and discriminate against people living in poverty.\textsuperscript{15}

Ireland has the highest gross income inequality rate in the EU. The GINI Index measures how equally income is distributed within an economy. The lower the score or ‘coefficient’, the more equal the income. Measuring gross income, Ireland’s GINI coefficient is 46.0 while the EU average is 36.0. Irish net income inequality is slightly below the EU average (GINI coefficient 29.9, EU average 30.4).\textsuperscript{16} Ireland’s tax system is often promoted as one of the most progressive in Europe. The Irish claim to tax progressivity is based on the OECD’s measurement of taxation; however this measurement doesn’t take into account the effect of tax credits and other social transfers. The amount of tax paid increases as incomes rise; but the progressivity declines as incomes increase beyond twice average wages (roughly above €75,000).\textsuperscript{17} International research suggests that tax progressivity has a significantly smaller effect on actual inequality. Furthermore, greater progressivity at the top of the tax scale is found to be more effective in reducing inequality than similar changes at the bottom of the income scale.\textsuperscript{18}

While income tax at the lower end is progressive, the impact of this is mitigated by the high level of indirect taxes that characterise the Irish taxation system. Lower earners in Ireland pay a significantly higher proportion of their income in indirect taxation such as VAT than in other countries. Ireland’s standard rate of VAT at 23% is one of the highest in the world. Our research found families in the lowest income bracket spend a fifth of their disposable income on VAT, while those in the highest earning households pay just 6.4%. This is significant when assessing the progressivity of taxation in Ireland. Adding to this is the fact that, although people on low to average incomes pay less in taxation and social insurance than people in other EU countries, Irish people pay significantly more for basic public services. These services such as healthcare, childcare and education are often free or heavily subsidised in most European countries; however, as we will discuss further, meeting basic material need takes up the vast majority of disposable income for many families in Ireland.

\textsuperscript{15} UN General Assembly, (2011) Report of the independent expert on the question of human rights and extreme poverty, Magdalena Sepúlveda Carmona
\textsuperscript{17} TASC, (2015) Cherishing All Equally: Economic Inequality in Ireland
\textsuperscript{18} Duncan, D. & Sabirianova Peter, K, (2012) Unequal Inequalities: Do Progressive Taxes Reduce Income Inequality?
**Young Person:** “My mam, she does everything for me.... She works so hard and always managed to give us anything we want. She’s amazing and I look up to her so so much.”

Prices have fluctuated in Ireland over the last decade. The overall cost of a few items have decreased (communications, clothing and footwear); however the general trend for the majority of items that constitute people’s expenditure has been upward overall. The cost of living in Ireland is 20% higher than the EU 28 average.\(^{19}\) Food makes up a considerably larger proportion of people on lower income’s weekly expenses. Barnardos’ research shows for children in the lowest income households €3 in every €10 out of the family budget is spent on food. Food poverty is on the rise and children are particularly vulnerable experiencing higher levels of hunger and malnourishment due to food poverty than adults. Barnardos’ research found that one child in six is now living in a household experiencing food poverty. This figure has almost doubled since 2009 illustrating the harsh effect of the recession on children. Obesity is another growing problem in Ireland that is also common in children and linked to lack of affordable healthy food. It is estimated obesity costs Ireland €1.3bn per year.\(^{20}\)

Fuel is another substantial cost in the weekly budget of lower income families. Our research found the lowest earning households pay seven times more of their available budget on fuel and light than those in the highest earning households. One in five households experience energy poverty (energy expenditure makes up 10% of disposable income). More than one in 20 households (5.4%) experienced extreme energy poverty (energy expenditure makes up 20% of disposable income).\(^{21}\) Childcare is an expense solely affecting households with children. Along with the cost of private rent it makes up a massive proportion of the household budget of lower income families. The cost of private childcare and private rented accommodation drive up the gross salary required by families to make ends meet to a figure significantly higher than minimum wage. Both childcare and housing costs will be revisited in more detail in later sections.

**Recommendation:** Improve tax efficiency across the entire tax spectrum to exploit untapped and underutilised sources of revenue for investment in public services. For example increase revenue from corporate taxation, introduce greater progressivity at the top of the income stream and reduce the inequitable impact of indirect taxation for those on low incomes.

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\(^{19}\) Eurostat, (2015) Comparative price levels of consumer goods and services


\(^{21}\) Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, (2011) A Strategy for Affordable Energy in Ireland
Deprivation and Poverty

Much of the public discourse on equality in recent years has focused on the top 10 or one percent. To tackle inequality we undoubtedly need to address the great inequality associated with the top end of private wealth in Ireland; however it is important also to examine how this accumulation of wealth, power and resources at the top affects those at the other end of the income scale. We know that children are more vulnerable to experiencing all kinds of poverty and deprivation than adults. This is evident in the high proportion of children living in consistent poverty- one in eight children versus one in 12 adults. Ireland was recently ranked just 22nd out of EU-28 countries for poverty prevention. Barnardos’ research found households with children are 56% more likely to experience food poverty than households without children, again highlighting children’s particular vulnerability to inequality. Debt has been a defining feature of the last decade in Ireland. Both public and private indebtedness have been responsible for bringing about greater inequality. Our research shows a striking and worrying link between children and indebtedness. One in four households with children has gone into debt in the last 12 months- that’s 64% higher than the number of households without children.

Young Person: “Give parents enough money to buy food and clothes for their children.”

The impact of the recession on children is also strongly evident from our research. The number of families reporting they had fallen into debt in the past year almost doubled between 2003 and 2013. Starker still is the massive rise in the number of people experiencing deprivation in recent years- an increase of 158% from 2007 to 2013. Around one in three people are now experiencing some form of material deprivation in Ireland, with a higher proportion of households with children experiencing deprivation (37%). Of the main deprivation indicators, food poverty, debt and fuel poverty are the most common. The number of people experiencing heating deprivation doubled between 2003 and 2013. Again, households with children are more likely to experience heating deprivation. One in ten families with children was unable to keep their house adequately warm in 2013- three times more than 2003. The poverty and deprivation figures paint a very bleak picture of childhood in Ireland for some children. With this in mind, the vast amount of wealth being hoarded by a small minority of citizens is nothing short of grotesque. Reducing child poverty and deprivation should be the top priority of the next Government. What we are doing and have been doing is simply not working.

Unable to afford two pairs of strong shoes;

Unable to afford a warm, waterproof overcoat;

Unable to afford new (not second hand) clothes;

Unable to afford a meal with meat, chicken or fish (or vegetarian equivalent) ever second day;

Unable to afford a roast joint or its equivalent once a week;

Without heating at some stage in the last year through lack of money;

Unable to afford to keep the home adequately warm;

Unable to afford to buy presents for family or friends at least once a year;

Unable to afford to replace any worn-out furniture;

Unable to afford to have family or friends for a drink or meal once a month; and

Unable to afford a morning, afternoon or evening out in the last fortnight for entertainment.

*If two or more apply, this is classified as “experiencing deprivation”
Parent: “Everyone knows that the Government give out loads of money before an election. They put money into everything and then a few months later they take it all back and say ‘We need cuts here, we need cuts there.’”

A sustained, joined up strategy that focuses on investment in services is required. An improving economy and falling unemployment figures alone will not solve the child poverty crisis. Universally available, affordable public services are a great leveller ensuring everyone in society is equally taken care of by the state regardless of their income. Children have a right to such services. Investment in public services is especially important in addressing the inequality of vulnerable groups like children. Economic inequality is not fated or inevitable; it is a social construct resulting from how we choose to order Irish society. It can be challenged; but it requires decisive, inspired leadership and a long-term, joined up and all-encompassing approach which tackles both the unequal amount of wealth at the top of the income scale and the inequalities and poverty experienced by those at the bottom.
Child Development and Education

Our future success in adulthood is largely determined during childhood. The care and learning a child gains in the earliest years and throughout childhood largely shape their subsequent life chances. Experiences in early childhood (prenatal to eight years of age), and in early and later education, lay critical foundations for their entire life. A child who is given the care, affection, stability, stimulation, consistency, social and emotional supports they need in early life have a much better chance of developing successfully and happily into young adulthood and beyond. Equally a child’s chances of flourishing in later life- both personally and financially- are greatly influenced by the education they obtain. Investing in child development and education is a great leveller benefiting all children, but has the greatest impact on the most disadvantaged children. We know care, development and education are critical for children; but how does inequality change a child’s experience of education? What power does inequality exert over a child’s access to the care and support they need in their early years? Social and economic policies have a decisive influence on whether a child can grow and develop to their full potential or whether their development will be hampered. Below we outline the argument for state investment in children’s development, care and education and identify some key areas where exchequer resources should be to reap the most benefit for children and society.

Why Invest in a Child’s Development?

The physical, social, emotional and cognitive development a child gains in early childhood draws the blueprint for their adult life, directly influencing their future mental and physical health and well-being. Supporting development in a child’s early years is proven to reduce their risk of chronic disease, mental illness, criminality and obesity. Subsequently the opposite is also the case; children whose development is hampered in those crucial early years are likely to have greater difficulty learning, behaving and adjusting emotionally. In the long term these issues are compounded and multiplied so that these children are at greater risk of developing chronic illnesses, underperforming educationally, suffering from mental illness and entering into criminality. Giving all children a positive start vastly reduces the need for remedial actions later on. Interventions to repair the damage caused by lack of appropriate support in early childhood are expensive and often arrive too late to be effective. They include increased need for resources in the penal service, the judicial system, the health service and a greater demand for care and aftercare services.

The World Health Organisation says investment in a child’s early years provides one of the greatest potentials- in rich and poor countries alike- to reduce health inequities within a generation.23 Links between poor early childhood development and increased

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chance of chronic illness are proven. The burden of chronic disease is estimated at 87% of all health expenditure.\textsuperscript{24} The annual cost of residential care for a child or young person is estimated at €220,000, while the cost of keeping a child in a care setting is €500,000.\textsuperscript{25} The cost of detaining an adult in prison averages at nearly €70,000 per year. The number of prison detainees increased 100% between 1997 and 2011 and currently there are 3,673 people in prison custody (September 2015).\textsuperscript{26} Yet the cost of an effective family support programme which enhances parenting capacity and improves children’s outcomes is €3,000–€5,000 per year.\textsuperscript{27} There are other negative results of poor investment in child development and education which are less easy to quantify, such as the social, emotional and psychological impact on the individual and on society as a whole. Added to this are the economic implications of the loss of potential productive, healthy, taxpaying members of society who without the right early supports go on to cost the State vast amounts of money.

Resourcing child development offers an enormous return on investment; however unfortunately the economic benefits are often overlooked or discounted as the long-term effects are not immediately apparent or measurable within the lifetime of a government. It is clear the lack of investment by successive governments has caused detrimental effects that last a lifetime. Given the rewards society as a whole stands to gain we simply cannot afford not to invest. Barnardos proposes that just as all of society will benefit, so too all of society should pay. This is particularly true of those departmental budgets which stand to reap the greatest benefit. Investment now will mean a greater tax take for the Department of Finance down the line and reduced expenditure for the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. But when looking at investing in a child’s early development where should the State focus its investment?

**Recommendation:** Create a centralised, ring-fenced funding stream to be managed by the Department of An Taoiseach for use by key departments to invest in prevention and early intervention programmes.

**Supporting the First Year of Life**

Parenting has the greatest impact on a child’s early development. Positive relationships born from forging strong attachments with an adult or adults during a child’s earliest years are critically important. Relationships which are validating, personal, loving, respectful and accepting promote good social, cognitive and emotional development. Conversely relationships which involve unreliable, inappropriate or simply absent adult responses are detrimental. Lack or insufficient positive parenting results in a young

\begin{itemize}
\item [26] Irish Reform Penal Trust, (2012) \url{http://www.iprt.ie/prison-facts-2}
\item [27] Barnardos, (2015)
\end{itemize}
child’s cognitive, social and emotional development being disrupted and subsequent learning, behaviour and health can be impaired. The relationship between parent and child is often viewed as a private matter and left out of discussions on inequality; however it is important to acknowledge the strain that inequality places on the relationships from which children depend on so heavily in order to flourish. Inadequate financial, housing, educational and other resources can greatly diminish a parent’s ability to nourish the vital relationship with their child. Many public institutions directly affect our relationships. Studies on child development show, in general, there are little differences in babies’ abilities across the socio-economic spectrum at birth; however, by the age of three some worrying differences emerge as a child’s life experiences are shaped by their parents and environment. The foundations of a child’s health are established very early on, beginning to be laid before they are even conceived. The experiences of a child in their first year provide the blueprint upon which their life will develop. It is important, therefore, that all parents and children receive the support and care they need during this time.

All parents need support, particularly during a child’s first year of life. Many receive this support from their network of family and friends. The State also provides some supports to assist parents during their child’s first year, including public health nurse visits for all parents and other more targeted services such as family support; however constrained by lack of coherent leadership and adequate resources these supports are currently underdeveloped. The Child and Family Agency, Tusla, was established in 2014 to improve the well-being and outcomes of children by combining all services to children and families into one entity. Unfortunately, from the outset Tusla has been insufficiently funded leaving it unable to fulfil its full remit. Tusla presented a business case to Government in October 2015 which stated that an additional €42.1 million would be required to maintain services at their current level in 2016. The Government responded in Budget 2016 by allocating €38 million of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs’ budget to increase Tusla’s funding. This much-needed funding will provide additional resources which, it is hoped, will allow the Agency to continue carrying out its current activities. Yet, currently Tusla is forced to focus largely on crisis intervention, rather than supporting families early before a crisis develops. This is a problem arising from insufficient funding and resources.

28 Barnardos, (2014), Quality Adult Child Interactions in Early Years Services, Dublin
29 Harvey, B. (2014), The Case for Prevention and Early Intervention
Tusla received 43,630 child welfare and protection referrals in 2014. That's a 40% increase on 2011 referral numbers. The volume of referrals is likely to further increase once the Children First Bill and other legislative plans are enacted, pushing these already stretched services to breaking point. Also key services (such as those provided by public health nurses) remain outside its remit, which makes it more challenging to deliver joined up support to families. A review of Tusla referrals in April 2015 found around 6,000 child protection and welfare cases were awaiting allocation of a social worker. It also showed resources being taken from foster care recruitment and family support in an attempt to manage need assessments and deliver interventions and supports in crisis situations.\footnote{Tusla, (2015)} Focusing on crisis intervention, at the expense of adequately resourcing prevention and early intervention, results in greater need for crisis mediation later on. It's a vicious cycle in which children suffer.

The State has a clear choice in how it interacts with children. It can engage all parents and families early on with a light touch, supporting them through the first year of their child's life. For most families this will provide the excellent start their child needs and deserves. Some families may need additional supports; however by intervening in the first year their needs will be identified and supported earlier leading to better outcomes for the child and family. Alternatively the State can carry on with its current approach of intervening heavily when crises arise. This approach requires the State's involvement with fewer families but in a much more intensive way. Apart from the obvious increased risk to children this latter approach allows, it is also likely to be much less effective. It's far more difficult to change behaviour later on and too often these interventions come too late for the child and family involved. Of the two approaches, the first is the most cost effective, reaping the highest rewards for both children and society. The second approach is more expensive and will likely lead to an increased number of children being taken into care, causing further public mistrust of the system. This is not what children need or deserve. Barnardos believes providing a holistic range of services to families in those important first 12 months can have a transformative effect on all children, giving them a fair start in life. Empowering Tusla to take leadership as provider of the country's family support services, antenatal and public health service, parental advice and support services is the obvious answer to safeguarding a child's first year and beyond. Tusla must be given the necessary resources to fulfil its current remit and allow it to develop and expand services to intervene in the first year.

**Barnardos’ Recommendation:** Give Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, the authority and resources it requires to fulfil its remit and to ensure a comprehensive, streamlined spectrum of services for families throughout a child’s first year of life and beyond.
Early Childhood Education and Care

The positive influence of quality early childhood care and education (ECEC) on a child’s outcomes is well documented, benefitting children’s social, emotional, physical and educational development. Participation in ECEC is particularly beneficial for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. In research examining the effect of ECEC in EU-28 countries the 2011 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study found the reading achievement of children from families with low educational attainment improved twice as much when compared with children from highly educated families. Barnardos’ analysis of Growing Up in Ireland data found no difference in Irish children’s developmental scores at eight months of age. Children from all backgrounds do equally well at this stage of life, no matter what their family income level. By age three, however, our research highlighted a clear effect of inequality on children’s development, with children from lower income families demonstrating weaker vocabulary and picture skills. This inequality stretches across all income brackets, with the correlation between developmental test scores and family income at its most apparent at upper and lower ends of the income scale.

33 PIRLS, (2011) *International Results in Reading*
It is a national scandal that we allow inequality to hold a child back in such a fundamental way from such a young age when we know it will affect them throughout childhood and adulthood.

Recognition of the importance of investing in ECEC has been growing among governments across Europe for some time. High quality ECEC that is accessible to all children requires a substantial investment. Private provision limits the burden on the public purse, but this is a costly option for parents and puts ECEC beyond the means for low-income families, thereby excluding their families. Early years systems in countries where there is a reliance on the private market for the provision of services are characterised by variable quality, inequitable access and an undervalued profession. Many EU countries regard ECEC as an essential public service and provide substantial amounts of public funding for it. Conversely, Ireland’s model of ECEC provision has traditionally been almost exclusively reliant on the private market with little State intervention. State involvement has focused mainly on setting minimum standards and providing subsidies for a small number of disadvantaged families or services in a limited number of disadvantaged areas. Ireland lags far behind internationally when it comes to state childcare provision. A 2014 report by Eurostat found that Irish families pay amongst the highest ECEC fees in the EU, second only to parts of the UK. Once social transfers are taken into account, typical childcare fees in Ireland are 27.4% of family net income- more than twice as high as EU and OECD averages.

As well as the benefits of ECEC for children the availability of affordable, quality childcare allows parents to take up employment and helps keep families out of poverty. It is often said that work is the best tool against poverty, yet state reliance on the private market for childcare in Ireland has priced many parents out of work. The cost of childcare can help explain why Ireland’s employment rate (73% or men, 61.7% of women) is lower than the EU average (75% of men, 63.5% of women). The true scale of the crisis in childcare is hidden with parents increasingly relying on grandparents and other family members to step into the breach left by lack of alternative solutions. Our research shows just 4% of low income families use crèches compared with 29% of high income families. A large proportion of parents use unregulated childminders meaning varying quality and insufficient vetting. The lack of affordable childcare options in Ireland has a much greater impact on low income families. Our research found the lack of affordable childcare is six times more likely to prevent poorer parents seeking work than those who are better off. We also found those on the lowest incomes are three times less likely to have access to childcare compared to middle income families.

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35 Eurydice & Eurostat, (2014) Key Data on Early childhood Education and Care in Europe
37 Growing Up in Ireland, (2013)
times as likely to have to turn down, leave a job or unable to take up study or training because of the cost of childcare than those with the highest incomes.

There have been some developments in state funded ECEC in recent years. The most notable being the introduction in 2010 of the Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme (ECCE) which provides 15 hours free pre-school education for one year prior to joining primary school. The ECCE scheme is available to all children and has proved very popular with around 68,000 or 95% of eligible children taking up places.\textsuperscript{38} Additional funding to expand the scheme was announced in Budget 2016. The changes, which come into effect in September 2016, mean children can access the ECCE scheme for longer (from three years until five years or when the child enters primary school). This is a welcome development; however some concerns have been raised about the ability to provide sufficient places by April 2017 when the number of children eligible is expected to peak at around 127,000. Barriers have been identified preventing children with disabilities accessing the ECCE scheme. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs has recently allocated funding to ensure greater equity of access for these children. The Department has also committed to extending the Childcare Education and Training Support Scheme to private providers resulting in an increase of 13,000 places in 2016, as well as streamlining all targeted supports into one programme. In addition to these subsidies the Department of Children and Youth Affairs has undertaken a number of initiatives designed to improve quality and consistency in the ECEC services available, such as a learner fund for ECEC professionals, and the Síolta National Quality Framework. These recent developments are the first steps Ireland has taken towards quality, affordable, subsidised early years care and education and as such have been welcomed by families and the sector alike. However despite these changes Ireland lags far behind its international counterparts and is still a long way off providing the kind of ECEC system children and families deserve.

\textbf{Parent:} “I tried to get childcare for my daughter but it was €70 a week for an hour and half a day. I couldn't afford that – it would mean I was working for nothing.”

The official estimate of early years spending in Ireland is 0.5% of GDP; but a sizeable portion of this is spent on junior and senior infant classes in primary school. In reality Ireland invests just 0.2% of GDP in ECEC services – a staggering 75% below the OECD

\textsuperscript{38} Department of Children and Youth Affairs, (2015) Interdepartmental Group Childcare and Early Years Briefing Document
average of 0.8%. In 2015 the European Commission urged Ireland to take action on childcare as a means to reduce the substantial increase in Ireland’s child poverty rate and prevent more children from living in poverty. To break this downward spiral and challenge inequality at its root, Ireland must invest in a subsidised quality early years care and education system to increase access for all children. It is welcome to see the Government taking some progressive action on its Interdepartmental Working Group report; however given our record of chronic underinvestment in this area the post-election Programme for Government must demonstrate decisive commitment to improve this sector. Investment now will create future benefits for children, parents and society as a whole. We cannot afford to continue to invest so little in children’s start in life.

**Recommendation:** Raise spending on early years care and education from our current 0.2% level to match the OECD average of 0.8% of GDP during the five year programme of the next government and a commitment to invest the 1% of GDP recognised as international best practice thereafter.

**Education**

Education is the key to opening the door which leads out of poverty, disadvantage and inequality. Children have a right to education. This right is enshrined in the Irish Constitution, which guarantees the State provide for free primary education for all children. Under the Education Act (1998) the State commits to providing education for every child in the State and recognises economic and social disadvantage prevent students gaining an education. Education is one of the most important tools in tackling inequality and any barrier placed in the way of a child’s education can drastically limit their future opportunities.

**Young Person:** “All of us should be treated equally no matter who we are. All children should get a good education.”

Educational disadvantage is closely linked to income inequality. The profile of workers on low incomes in Ireland reflects this fact, with nearly a quarter not having finished secondary education. The risk of a child growing up to have a low income decreases the higher the educational attainment they achieve- 53% of low paid adults have only a primary education while the risk is less than 20% for those who complete some third level
education. In Ireland your earning power is tied more closely tied to whether or not you have attended 3rd level in comparison to other OECD countries. Barnardos research shows children’s maths and reading scores increase by 4% for every 1% more their parents earn, demonstrating the deep rooted influence of inequality on a child’s life.

Table 1: Effect of income on children’s education at ages 3 years, 9 years and 13 years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>3 years vocab scores</th>
<th>3 years picture scores</th>
<th>9 years maths scores</th>
<th>9 years reading scores</th>
<th>13 years verbal reasoning scores</th>
<th>13 years numerical ability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Impact of 1% difference in household income</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This inequality stretches across all income levels but is most destructive for those children whose lives are blighted by poverty and deprivation. It also stretches throughout a child’s education; seven in 10 children from disadvantaged backgrounds will go on to some form of 3rd level education, compared with nine in 10 from more affluent backgrounds. This is not because young people from poorer backgrounds don’t want to study at 3rd level. When we asked young people about their hopes for their education and dreams for the future there was little difference in their aspirations, no matter what background they came from. More than eight in 10 young people Barnardos spoke with understood the importance of school to achieve goals. Yet, children in less well-off households are a quarter less likely to feel teachers understand them and a fifth less likely to ask a question in class compared with children from well-off households. Although their aspirations might be similar, our research shows that children from lower income families have different expectations of what opportunities will be available to them compared with children from higher income families. Barnardos’ market research found that nearly nine in 10 young people from well off households think they will attend 3rd level education; but the proportion expecting to go on to further study after secondary school drops to just three-quarters in less well off households.

A recent report measuring social inclusion indicators in Europe showed Ireland to be 22 out of 28 European Union countries in terms of equitable access to education. Barriers to accessing education and thriving in an educational setting are often hidden or not straightforward. The power of social status and networks in perpetuating inequality in Ireland is as strong as ever. A recent report measuring social inclusion indicators in Europe showed Ireland to be 22nd out of 28 European Union countries.

The Department of Education’s recently published Admission to Schools Bill 2015 is an attempt to address the kind of prejudice that exists within the Irish education system; but snobbish discrimination is visible across all levels of education. Who you know, the school you went to and the area you’re from can all play a positive or negative role in your future opportunities. Environment is another key factor. Those children living in direct provision, Traveller accommodation, emergency housing or overcrowded accommodation have nowhere to do homework, study or play.

**Young Person:** “When I’m in my homework club right, I fly through my homework, because when I’m at home there’s too many distractions.”

More than two thirds of the young people Barnardos spoke to from well-off households receive help with their homework from parents compared with around half of children from less well-off households. This can often be because parents don’t have sufficient education themselves or are simply too busy working or caring for other family members. Sadly the most common barrier to education remains cost. Education is not free and access is often hampered by a parent’s ability to pay. Those who can afford to pay more do better. Despite accounting for just 7% of secondary schools in the country fee paying schools account for more than two thirds of the top ranked boys schools and half of the top ranked girls schools in Ireland. Yet many parents struggle to meet the basic cost of sending their child to school. Each year parents must plug the funding gaps to ensure their child can access education by picking up the cost of school books, classroom resources and much else. Education costs affect children from disadvantaged backgrounds hardest. Parents want their child to have all the advantages in life that education brings and so many are forced into debt in order to give their child equal access to what should be a freely available, human right. Investment in education not only helps children and families but it’s also beneficial to society as a whole. Education is a key policy in promoting social inclusion, improving health and reducing crime.

Children who receive a good education can command

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50 OECD, (2013) Education Indicators in Focus- 2013/01 (January)
higher incomes, pay more tax and contribute more to society. In short, an investment in a free education is an investment in a better society for everyone.

**Parent:** "I don't want my daughter to leave school because I can't afford to pay for it. I want her to be able to go to college if she wants to go to college. All children should have the opportunity to go to college, it shouldn't be down to whether their parents can pay for it or not."

It's said a person without education is like a building without foundations; without the basic building blocks provided by free access to education Ireland is short-changing its children. All children deserve a solid foundation from which to progress into adulthood with the same opportunities as their peers, regardless of their parents' ability to pay. Barnardos has calculated the total cost of guaranteeing free access to primary education (including school books, transport for those who need it, classroom resources, removing the need for voluntary contributions and increasing school capitation) and found it a comparatively small price to pay, even before the potential economic dividends from a better educated population are considered. Just €103.2 million will afford every child in Ireland a free education and a level start in life. Once free primary education has been achieved, the provision of free secondary education for all must follow.

**Recommendation:** Provide an extra investment to the Department of Education of just over €103m per annum to ensure that all of Ireland’s children enjoy free primary education. Once implemented, expand this investment to include secondary education.

**Recommendation:** Invest in targeted educational supports for children who need them and make such interventions available early enough so that all children have equitable opportunity to achieve their educational aspirations.
## Cost of Free Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Free School Books</th>
<th>Removing Voluntary Contribution</th>
<th>Free Classroom Resources</th>
<th>Free School Transport</th>
<th>Restoring Capitation Grant Level</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014/2015 Current Exchequer Funding</td>
<td>€20m</td>
<td>€0</td>
<td>€0</td>
<td>€163.5m</td>
<td>€287m</td>
<td>€470.5m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional cost to make Primary Education free</td>
<td>€20m</td>
<td>€42m</td>
<td>€19.5m</td>
<td>€5m</td>
<td>€16.7m</td>
<td>€103.2m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional cost to make Secondary Education free</td>
<td>€20m</td>
<td>€47m</td>
<td>€19m</td>
<td>€22.4m</td>
<td>€18.5</td>
<td>€126.9m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional cost to make education free for all children</td>
<td>€40m</td>
<td>€89m</td>
<td>€38.5m</td>
<td>€27.4m</td>
<td>€35.2m</td>
<td>€230.1m</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Health and Environmental Inequalities

Children’s well-being and outcomes are greatly influenced by their health and environment. A child’s health determines their internal well-being just as their environment determines their external well-being. Children should have the same chance of the best possible health regardless of their parent’s income. Yet it is an accepted fact in Ireland that a child whose family can afford to pay will receive care and treatment quicker than those who can’t. A child’s health is determined by a range of factors— including the place where they live. Poor housing has detrimental effects on a child’s physical health, for example damp conditions cause and exacerbate respiratory problems. Living in substandard, unsuitable, overcrowded or insecure housing also negatively affects children’s mental and emotional well-being. Stress, anxiety and feelings of low self-worth are all common. This section will examine health and environmental inequality, paying particular attention to primary care and housing.

Health

Good physical and mental health is essential for all children to thrive. Health, development and access to healthcare are not just basic needs of children; they are their fundamental rights as set out in the UN Conventions on the Rights of the Child.51 A child’s health is not merely determined by medicine and genetics; health and inequality are inextricably linked. People who have poor health often face greater inequality. People who experience inequality often have poorer health. In Ireland poorer people have worse health and die younger than those who are better off.52 Yet the impact of inequality on health is not as straightforward as it would first appear. While it’s true to say the poorest in society have the worst health, ill health is not confined to the worst off.53 Globally some of the wealthiest countries have worse health outcomes and higher mortality rates than some poorer countries. The overall population health of a country is linked not to how wealthy that country is, but to how equally resources are distributed across the whole population. The more unequal the society the worse the overall health of its citizens will be.54

A report recently published into the effect of the recession on Irish families found that stress caused by financial hardship and uncertainty led to an increased risk of clinical depression of 84% in mothers and 61% in fathers. The result of this was worsening parent-child relationships and higher levels of anxiety and unhappiness in children. Looking at the health data of Irish nine and 13 year olds Barnardos found links between greater incidence of chronic illness and general ill-health. Children from the highest

income households have an 82% chance of being healthy overall, compared with 77% for those from the lowest income households; however a significant increase in ill health occurs when low income is combined with incidence of deprivation. This correlation is charted below.

Figure 4: Effect of deprivation on health for children in the lowest income households

The effect of inequality on Irish children’s health begins before birth and carries on throughout their life cycle. Barnardos examined data on Irish children’s health from a number of sources to measure the effect of family income and inequality. We found the influence of inequality present in children’s health outcomes from the earliest stages in a child’s life. Children from the poorest households are twice as likely to have low birthweight as those in the wealthiest households. As discussed earlier food poverty is a growing issue in Ireland and is strongly linked to the burgeoning obesity epidemic taking hold in childhood. Our research suggests prevalence of overweight and obesity in children increases as household income decreases, with three year olds in the poorest households twice as likely to be obese than those in the most affluent households. A decrease in household income is also linked to a rise in the likelihood of children suffering from heart, bone or muscle problems. The prevalence of such conditions is twice as high in three year olds from the lowest income households as it is in the
highest income households. Barnardos also found children from poorer households more likely to suffer learning difficulties such as dyslexia, ADHD or speech and language problems. Tobacco use is one of the strongest behavioural predictors of future health and the largest cause of preventable ill health and mortality in Ireland. Three out of four Irish smokers begin smoking tobacco before the age of 17 years.55 Smoking prevalence is thankfully reducing in young people as it has been in the wider population over the last 10 years; however there is still a strong link between smoking and socioeconomic status. In examining data from 2002-2010 we found a higher smoking prevalence in 10-18 year olds from lower income households - often around twice as high as in more well off households.

In Ireland the health system is two-tier. Those who can afford it can guarantee more timely, better quality care, while those who can't are often consigned to the back of the queue. Unsurprisingly Barnardos’ research found cost is much more likely to be a barrier to healthcare for children in lower income families than others. The Irish health services have been in crisis on an ongoing basis for many years. Access to affordable, quality healthcare is a human right and ability to pay should never be a barrier.56 Yet in reality children’s access to healthcare is restricted by more than just their parent’s ability to pay. Children are barred every day from accessing basic health services that are essential for their well-being due to chronic delays and an under-resourced system. Thousands of children are forced to wait months, and in some cases over a year, for primary care services. In 2014 it was reported that 3,000 children were waiting more than 12 months for speech and language therapy with a further 1,940 children waiting more than 12 months for their initial assessment.57 The latest HSE figures from July 2015 indicate that 1,497 children were waiting longer than three months for mental health services, with 300 or 20% of these children waiting 12 months or more.58 Barnardos’ research found children in the poorest households have a 62% higher risk of not getting treatment due to waiting list delays than children from the wealthiest households. Proximity and ease of transport to a primary care team can also be a barrier to good health for children. Parents may have difficulty accessing their nearest primary care service with their children for a variety of reasons; for example if they live in a remote area, an underdeveloped urban area, a direct provision centre or either they or their child have a disability.

55 Department of Health, (2013) Tobacco Free Ireland
57 Social Inclusion Ireland, (2014) The Case for Speech and Language Therapy
Parent: “The health system in this country is a joke. My daughter was told she’d have to wait nine months for dental surgery. Then after waiting that time they told us it would be another four months.”

*Future Health* sets out a vision for healthcare in Ireland and states that 90-95% of children’s healthcare needs should be met in the community by primary care services.\(^{59}\) *Primary Care - A New Direction*, published in 2001, promised three month maximum waiting times for primary care services. To achieve this, a commitment was made to create 530 primary care teams by 2011, with an eventual full complement of one team per 3,000 to 7,000 people; however to date only 425 teams are in place with a target of 485 to the end of 2015.\(^{60}\) As the HSE simply defines a primary care team as one where clinical team meetings have commenced, some of these teams are not yet fully functioning.\(^{61}\) There is a planned roll out of 90 networks of allied health and social care professionals to support these teams, with one network per 50,000 people; however these networks are not yet operational and are currently being re-mapped as part of the new HSE structure of Community Healthcare Organisations. It is imperative the planned 90 primary care networks are rolled out as a priority, as planned in the HSE Service Plan 2015, to provide vital support services such as speech and language therapy.\(^ {62}\) Lack of consistency in implementing the primary care strategy means resources and waiting times vary throughout the country causing inequitable access which is arbitrarily determined by geographical location. By giving children access to the primary care services they need, when they need it the Government can ensure all children’s health is protected equally. In its Budget 2016 announcement the Government committed to expanding the provision of free GP care to all children under 12 years old. However, following the implementation challenges the Government faced introducing free GP care for children under six years and the opposition to this measure by medical unions,\(^ {63}\) we will have to wait to see how soon this is implemented.

**Recommendation:** Provide a fully operational primary care team for every 1,500 children in the country. This equates to approximately 800 teams nationwide at a ratio of one team to every 5,625 people – well within the targets set out in the Primary Care Strategy.\(^ {64}\)

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59 Department of Health, (2012) *Future Health*
60 HSE Performance Assurance Report April 2015
64 Central Statistics Office, (2011) Census
Environment - Housing

In 1916 Ireland children weren’t guaranteed a warm, safe and secure home and many were housed in appalling conditions in tenements. One hundred years later the tenements are gone but children face the same inequitable access to a warm, safe and secure home. A child’s cognitive, physical and emotional development is extremely sensitive to external influences in early years. Where a child lives can determine their chances of leading a healthy, flourishing life. When housing is done well the effect is positive, not just for the individual child or family, but for the whole community. When housing is inadequate the adverse effects for families and communities can be catastrophic.

Young Person: “A lot more funding for under privileged rural areas where children live... more parks more footpaths and street lighting.”

There is a clear link between inequality and inability to access appropriate accommodation at a reasonable cost. Inequality means many people in Ireland have poor housing or unsuitable environments and communities which lack the services and amenities afforded to more fortunate areas. One UK study found children living with multiple housing problems were 25% more likely to experience ill health and disability during childhood and early adulthood. In Ireland there has been an ideological shift from the notion of housing as a social good and public service to private ownership as the answer to housing need. This shift coincided with and is linked to the rise in inequality during the same time period. This neo-liberal market driven strategy is characterised by a move from the provision of social housing by the State to an overreliance on private landlords to meet social housing needs and an emphasis on home ownership as the source of financial security. This ideology has led to and is perpetuating the current housing crisis taking place in Ireland. Families in private rented accommodation today must earn substantially more to meet their costs than those living in social housing.

Barnardos’ research found for children in the lowest income households, €1 in every €5 of disposable income is spent on rent. The poorest families spend over 30 times more of their income on rent than those in the wealthiest families. Our research also found households with children were 89% more likely to be in rent or mortgage arrears than those without children. Department of Environment figures for September 2015 show 1,571 children are now homeless in Ireland. A severe housing shortage means many

more families are facing rising rents and fear of losing their home. The private rented sector is absorbing the brunt of the pressure from a combination of a hyper-competitive housing market and severe undersupply of social housing. There was a 93% decline in the number of social housing built from 8,673 in 2007 to 642 in 2014.69 The most recent figure for social housing need from 2013 indicates that 89,872 households qualified for social housing. More than half of those on the waiting list were families and three out of five had been waiting for more than two years.70

Parent: “There are nine of us plus a baby in a three bedroom house but the corporation told us we’d be years waiting for less overcrowded accommodation.”

Children have a right to adequate housing.71 Due to underinvestment and poor planning Ireland is in the midst of a housing crisis that has seen an unprecedented number of families becoming homeless and being housed in inappropriate emergency accommodation or living in unstable and overcrowded situations. The reality of the housing crisis was apparent when we spoke to young people with more than two in five large households (six or more family members) living in a three bed house. Rising rents and supply shortage means there is little security in the private rented sector. This insecurity is heightened when rent supplement rates are at least 30% less than market value and landlords frequently favouring letting to tenants who don’t require State assistance.

A recent review of available private rental properties found just 7% were available at rent supplement levels; clear evidence of the need to revise the rent supplement payment to realistic levels.72 Those families who are able to find a property to rent live in constant fear of rent increases which have been coming in quick succession in recent years and months. Rents are now at 2007 levels, yet as discussed earlier deprivation levels are almost three times what they were in 2007 with around one in three households experiencing material deprivation. The Government recently announced some new measures aimed at easing the crisis in the private rented sector. The Government’s plan includes restricting rent increases to every two years, extending the notification period of rent increases from 28 days to 90 days and compelling landlords to justify any rent increases by comparing similar properties.73 It remains to be seen if these measures will have the desired effect in slowing down the rate of rent hikes. However it is clear without linking rent to an index, such as the Consumer Price

72  Simon Communities of Ireland, (2015)
73  Department of Environment, (2015) A New Deal for tenants and greater supports for families facing homelessness
Index and increasing the rent supplement levels, rent prices are likely to continue to rise due to lack of supply. New social housing is desperately needed. Almost 70% of the social housing promised in the Social Housing Strategy is to be provided by the private rental sector. This demonstrates a refusal to let go of the market led approach that created this problem in the first place. If there is to be any chance of realising the Social Housing Strategy target at the same time as the crisis in the private rented sector is to be alleviated then a sustainable model of affordable, quality private rented accommodation with supply at levels that match demand must be implemented.

Providing families experiencing or at risk of homelessness with family support services must be prioritised if we are to minimise the long term damage to children. Immediate action must be taken to alleviate the pressure on the private rental sector, provide greater security to families and ensure that no more children are forced into homelessness. The housing crisis is a complex problem which requires a range of solutions at every level of the housing market and infrastructure. Security of tenure is key if we are to achieve the kind of European model of private renting. Under Section 34 of the Residential Tenancies Act landlords can evict a tenant if they or a family member are in need of housing; however this regulation is open to abuse. It is not possible to sell properties in Ireland with sitting tenants. Currently around a third of ‘Buy-to-Let’ mortgages are in arrears, leaving tenants in these properties in limbo. We need to attract landlords to the sector, particularly large scale landlords; however any incentives offered to landlords must be combined with conditionality which guarantees quality and secure occupancy for tenants at a reasonable price. Long-term reform should be supported by other swiftly implementable changes such as introducing open ended leases, allowing properties to be sold with sitting tenants intact and incentivising landlords to take up the Housing Assistance Payment Scheme.

The current crisis didn’t occur overnight and nor will it be solved quickly. Measures are needed, therefore, to offer immediate relief to families experiencing or facing homelessness. Just as security of tenure is essential, so too is ensuring rent affordability and minimising price fluctuations. Rent prices must be stabilised and not regulated by supply shortages. Linking rent rates to the Consumer Price Index would give families the much needed security and stability their children require. Stabilising rents in the private rented sector would also increase Ireland’s competitiveness and help attract large investors into the rental market giving them certainty of income. Denying so many children a safe, secure home is an indictment of modern Ireland and a scandal that cannot be allowed to continue. These children and families are some of the most vulnerable in our society and they desperately need help.
**Recommendation:** Guarantee families fair rent and security of tenure by linking rent rates to Consumer Price Index while also raising Rent Supplement rates to realistic levels in all areas, enabling those availing of the payment to compete in an increasingly heated market.

**Recommendation:** Increase State provision of social housing beyond what is contained in the Social Housing Strategy, moving away from an over reliance on the private rented sector for supply of social housing.
Conclusion

The 1916 Proclamation was visionary by guaranteeing religious and civil liberty, equal rights, equal opportunity, and the pursuit of happiness and prosperity for everyone in the Republic. Barnardos believes each child in Ireland should enjoy these freedoms, not just a privileged few.

There is nothing inevitable or insurmountable about the inequality children face in Ireland. We must maintain a spirit of optimism and not let our expectations and aspirations be dampened by recession and years of inequality. Collectively we can challenge things; but we must act now. Irish children cannot and should not have to wait another 100 years to be treated equally. Barnardos is calling on the next Government to take decisive leadership in ending child inequality. Successful strides have been made toward economic recovery during the lifetime of the current Government. Taking steps to meaningfully address the root causes of child inequality must be the priority of the next Government—there is no more timely moment to do it.
“All of us should be treated equally no matter who we are.”
All of us should be treated equally no matter who we are.