




Cost of Living Crisis Impact on Children 2023

Executive Summary



“ Bills, food, roof over their head. That’s the priority. Struggle to look beyond on. Learning how to manage and to prioritise what you can pay out so you’re not sinking. We’re not living, we are surviving.”

Introduction

Barnardos is concerned that cost of living increases is pulling more children in Ireland into deprivation and negatively affecting their health, wellbeing and development.

We have produced a report highlighting the growing impact that cost of living increases are having on children across the country. It sets out findings of a nationally representative survey of parents (315) conducted by Amarach Research and also includes the voices of 30 parents currently supported through Barnardos services who participated in 1 to 1 interviews, both carried out in April this year.



“ He has no lunch going to school, he can't afford to go places with his friends, he is sitting in a cold room trying to do his homework.”

“ I cannot afford to keep my house warm throughout the day. We have had to cut back on our food shopping, as it is too expensive.”

Impact on children

Survey findings show that parents have had to cut back considerably on essentials over the past 6 months due to cost of living. Almost one quarter had gone without or cut back on electricity (23%), more than one third heating (37%, up from 28% in 2022), one fifth food (20%, up from 16% in 2022) and almost half clothing (43%, up from 34% in 2022). Over half of parents (53%) said they had gone without or cut down on one or more of heat, electricity, medical and food.

Over the past 6 months, have you and/or your children/children had to go without or cut down on any of the following due to cost of living increases?	April 2023	April 2022
Heat	37%	28%
Electricity	23%	23%
Food	20%	16%
Clothing	43%	34%
Medical appointments/medicines/dentist/assessments	28%	17%
Social activities	57%	50%
Participating in local sports groups/clubs	20%	n/a
School supplies	12%	8%
School trips/activities	23%	n/a
Transport	14%	10%
Rent	5%	2%
None of the above	26%	37%

The survey also found that almost three-quarters of parents (73%) stated that cost of living increases has negatively affected the children in their care over the past 6 months, with almost two in ten (17%) saying it has significantly affected them.

Do you think the cost of living crisis has negatively affected your child?

Significantly	17%
Moderately	24%
Slightly	32%
Not at all	25%
Not applicable	2%



Heating and Electricity

Thirty-seven percent of parents said that they had had to cut back on heating and 23% on electricity. Many parents we interviewed stated that they are living hand to mouth when it comes to income and paying essential bills such as heating and electricity. Due to increasing costs, many can no longer be guaranteed to afford their electricity and heating bills. Parents are taking measures to combat this, cutting out non-essentials and in more severe circumstances at times simply going without either heat or electricity.



“ I’m afraid to do the washing because of the price of electricity. ”

“ We’ve had no heating for the past two months. Trying to decide between heating and the drier. Warmer outside at times than inside because of it. ”

“ I will only heat one part of the house, my child’s bedroom and only then until my son falls asleep and then turns it off again. At around 7 we go to bed to keep the lights off. I use my mobile phone to light the house when my son is asleep. ”



Food¹

Survey results found that 20% of parents and their children had had to cut back or go without food over the past six months due to cost of living increases. Many of the parents that we spoke to stated that they are cutting back on the amount of food they are buying, and/or cutting back in other areas, and/or shopping in different ways now in order to be able to afford sufficient food. For example, parents said they are shopping more frequently for food, as they could not afford to do bigger shops/money did not stretch for as many days as it did in the past. Many mentioned going to multiple shops to take advantage of discounts whilst some stated taking more extreme measures, including using a calculator when going around the supermarket.

“ Some weeks no money for groceries. No lunch for children. ”

“ I cannot afford to keep my house warm throughout the day. We have had to cut back on our food shopping, as it is too expensive. ”

“ When you go to the till, you have to put some back. Tell person at the till I have €100, stop at that. ”

“ Going back to using my calculator when I’m walking around the supermarket, just out of fear. ”

1. Barnardos produce a report specifically focused on food poverty in February this year [Cost-of-living crisis continuing to impact families as new survey* reveals increase in numbers struggling with food poverty – Barnardos](#)



Health

The survey results show that 28% of parents had cut back on or gone without medical care, medicines, therapy or health assessments over the past 6 months due to cost of living increases. Some parents we interviewed said the financial pressures they are under meant that they do not always have the money to cover direct medical costs such as bringing their children to the GP or cover prescriptions.



“ Can't bring my child to the doctor this week. Brought her to A&E because you don't have to pay straight away. Get a bill a month later. Horrible feeling. ”

“ He needs therapy, I just can't pay for it. Not doing anything, just going to school and coming home. He needs speech therapy to be able to communicate better when he is outside. ”



Clothes

The survey results show that 43% of parents and children had cut back on or gone without getting new clothes over the past six months due to cost of living increase. Parents we interviewed spoke about the struggles to keep their children in decent clothes. They felt that the price of clothing had gone up substantially and that the knock on impact of increases in energy and food prices has meant there is less money left over for clothing. Numerous parents stated they just do not have the money for new footwear and clothing, meaning some children are going without sufficient clothing and wearing inappropriate footwear.

“ Child needs new runners for school. He has holes in his but can't afford to buy new one. Feet are getting wet every day when he comes home from school also get slagged in school. ”

“ Daughter has 3 outfits and one pair of shoes that fits her, can't afford to get her more. It's not right. ”

“ Buying clothes is sacrificed a lot now. Can't go out and buy clothes proactively anymore, need to react to children needing clothes. It's tough. ”



Social activities

The survey found that almost two thirds of parents (57%) had they cut back on their children's social activities/entertainment or they had to go without, almost one quarter (23%) had cut back on school trips/activities, and one-fifth (20%) participating in local sports. Nearly every parents we spoke to discussed struggling to afford extra-curricular activities or days out for their children. Money that was spent on it in the past is now directed to pay for food or energy. Parents understand the importance of these activities, appreciating that they are not just a nicety, but it is a vital part of a decent childhood.



“ Children shouldn't be left behind, out of activities, because there's a gas bill to pay. Schools have big role to play. More potential there, make sure children aren't left behind. ”

“ Can't afford extra curricular. Just don't have it. End of. ”

“ I don't have any money to put them into sports. That's them losing out on a hobby and having something to do them later in life and have something behind them. It's not fair on them. All because the cost of living. ”

“ Can't even get bus to the beach to get an ice cream. Can't even afford the bus. It's quite depressing. ”



Impact on parents



1.

Mental Health & Worry

Seven in ten (70%) parents said they sometimes or always worry about not being able to provide their children with daily essentials such as food, heat or electricity. Only one in ten (11%) said they never worry.

How often do you worry about being able to provide your children with daily essentials?

Always	28%
Sometimes	42%
Rarely	19%
Never	11%

Parents reported increased feelings of stress and poor mental health due to financial struggles, with little to no respite from cost of living pressures. Parents stated that they are fearful of bills, feel guilty about having to almost constantly say no to their children and are depressed at times because life has gotten so much harder.

“ I’m owing money everywhere. Its constant. Never not thinking about it. ”

“ I have anxiety. Thinking about things being cut off and not having enough money. ”



2.

Personal Sacrifices

Parents described routinely putting their children first, having to go without clothes and other essentials so that their children would not go without. Parents appreciate that its part of the job of parents to make sacrifices. However, they suggested this has increased substantially over the past year and generally made their lives harder and cut their standard of living.



“ Mammy doesn't get anything, she's just happy if the bills are paid. ”

“ Bills, food, roof over our head. That's the priority. Struggle to look beyond on. Learning how to manage and to prioritise what you can pay out so you're not sinking. We're not living, we are surviving. ”

— Parent

“ Life has gone harder, not easier, it's constant. We don't go out anymore, just can't go out because we can't afford it. ”



3.

Planning for the future and unexpected expenses

Over four in ten (43%) parents are moderately/very worried about having enough money over the next 6 months to meet the needs of their children. Only 20% said they were not worried at all. Parents repeatedly stated how financially precarious they feel. If something goes wrong or there's an unexpected expense, such as a washing machine or car breaking down, it will 'cripple' them.

How worried are you about being able to afford to meet your children's needs over the next 6 months

Very worried	24%
Moderately worried	18%
Slightly worried	37%
Not worried	20%

“ There's no safety net at all. If I put money away to save, my electricity will go off. When it was allowance week in the past I would have tried to save a bit of it. Can't do that now. Everything goes into minus. ”



Conclusion

As a society, it is unacceptable that children are going without absolute minimal necessities. All children across Ireland should be entitled to a standard of living that supports their emotional, social and physical development.

Although parents suggested that some measures introduced over the past year have helped it was clear from parents surveyed that they didn't feel that they had gone far enough, appreciating they were only temporary in nature, and calling for more permanent supports.

“ The money is a great help that we are getting, but we know it's not going to last, and we know we won't stay afloat or be able to manage when they come to an end. ”

As the cost of living crisis continues there is a risk that more and more children will be pulled into deprivation and spend longer and longer without sufficient food, heat and electricity. It is vital that the Government introduces proactive immediate and long-term targeted policies, to ensure that all children in Ireland, at an absolute minimum, live in homes that have sufficient food and can provide regular meals, live in appropriately heated accommodation and don't go without electricity. Below we outline immediate steps that would go same way to begin to help make that a reality.

Recommendations

1. Increase Income Supports

Low-income families have clearly demonstrated they are struggling to provide children with necessities. For the vast majority of parents we spoke to they are budgeting as much as possible. It is simply a matter of not having sufficient income to meet costs. The government must increase welfare supports in order to make sure that families have enough to provide their children with all their basic essentials.

- Benchmark social welfare payments in line with minimum essential standard of living measurements.
- Increase the Qualified Child Increase in line with inflation.
- Set maximum waiting times for parents seeking Additional Needs Payments where children are at risk of going without essentials.

2. Food

No child should live in households at risk of having insufficient nutritious food. As per recent announcements the Government should:

- Further expand the hot school meals programme to secondary schools and more non-DEIS schools. Pilot expansion of school meals during holiday time.
- Publish an Action Plan on Food Poverty informed by research carried out by the food poverty Working Group led by Joe O'Brien. This should set out specific targets for reducing the number children and families experiencing food poverty and the actions to achieve those reductions.

3. Heating & Electricity

In order to guarantee children live in homes with adequate heating and electricity the Government should:

- Ensure that families on low incomes using pre-paid meters with children living in the house are automatically placed on providers lowest tariffs.
- Extend fuel allowance to families receiving the working family payment.
- Provide an additional once off targeted lump sum to families most at risk of going without heating this coming winter to cover the continued exceptionally high price of heating.

4. Social Activities

- The newly established Child Poverty and Wellbeing Unit should introduce measures to guarantee children living in low-income families can engage equitably in after school sporting and cultural activities. This might take the form of a grant or subsidised rates for families to use with local holiday camps and extra-curricular activities and free public transport for children during holiday periods.

About Barnardos

As Ireland's leading children's charity, helping vulnerable children since the 1960's, Barnardos' work with vulnerable children and families to provide practical, social and emotional support. Barnardos supports children and families all across Ireland who have been affected by traumatic life events such as abuse, parental mental health, neglect, separation, bereavement and addiction. Our core purpose remains the same; 'to help the most vulnerable children in society achieve their full potential – regardless of their family circumstances, their gender, race or disability' – **Because Childhood Lasts a Lifetime.**



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