The scale of child poverty in Ireland is alarming and presents very serious policy challenges for us. Poverty Focus 2019 examines the nature and experience of poverty in Ireland, and the 2019 issue pays particular attention to children living in households whose income is below the poverty line.

Eliminating child poverty should be a top priority for Government. It can be done. It requires action on adequate adult welfare rates, decent pay and conditions for working parents, an increase in child benefit and access to quality services. More equality is better for everybody, including the economy.

Child poverty: the numbers and the reality

- Approximately 230,000 children are living in poverty in Ireland today – that is one in five children under 18. These children are living in families with incomes below the poverty line.
- 1 in 4 children are living in households experiencing deprivation of two or more basic necessities.
- Approximately 110,000 children are living in consistent poverty – which means they are living in households with incomes below the poverty line and also experiencing deprivation.

These stark figures present very serious policy implications for Ireland, not least for the success of these children within the education system, their job prospects in the future and for Ireland’s economic potential in the long-term. How long more can we afford to ignore these children and their living standards?

Policy solutions

Children cannot be lifted out of poverty unless their families are lifted out of poverty. Children depend on adults for their upbringing and support. Irrespective of how policy interventions are structured, it is through adults that any attempts to reduce the number of children in poverty must be directed. Child poverty solutions must be focussed on families and ensuring that families have adequate incomes and access to quality services in particular childcare, housing, and healthcare.

- Maintaining adequate adult welfare rates is vital to ensure that low income families do not fall below the poverty line.
- Child benefit remains a key route to tackling child poverty, especially for those families on the lowest incomes. It is also a very effect component in any strategy to improve equality and childcare.
- Decent rates of pay and conditions are extremely important to support working parent. Individuals working full time should be able to earn enough income to provide a decent standard of living for their families – a minimum acceptable standard of living.
- Many working families on low earnings struggle to achieve a basic standard of living. Making tax credits refundable is an efficient and cost-effective solution to help working families on low earnings.

Child poverty is essentially an issue of families struggling to survive on low incomes. Children cannot be lifted out of poverty unless their families are lifted out of poverty. The scale of child poverty presents very serious policy challenges for us. Government can support low income families by prioritising adequate adult welfare rates, decent pay and conditions for working parents, increased child benefit and access to quality services. Children are one of the most vulnerable groups in society. Despite good intentions, child poverty is an issue that Irish society and public policy has made little progress in addressing for a long time. Eliminating child poverty should be a top priority for Government. It can be done, but it requires action now.

Poverty Focus 2019 is available here. [1]