

Election 2016 Briefing

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE



Policy Objective : To ensure that all children and young people are valued equally and enabled to reach their full potential and participate fully in society.

Poverty and social exclusion

Children are one of the most vulnerable groups in society. Over 213,000 children in Ireland are at risk of poverty (18.6%), over 414,000 of all children in Ireland are experiencing deprivation (36.1%) and 128,000 children are living in consistent poverty (11.2%)¹. This situation is unacceptable. In order to move these children out of poverty, they and their families must be supported through investment in universal services throughout the lifecycle and access to adequate income supports. With real commitment and adequate investment in services and supports for families Ireland could eliminate child poverty by 2021.

Childcare

It is important to make the distinction between Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) and quality, affordable and accessible childcare. ECCE is designed as an educational measure to better integrate the education experience of young people. In order to assist all families it is important that Government invests in an infrastructure to provide quality, accessible and affordable childcare for families in Ireland. At present childcare costs in Ireland are among the highest in the OECD: a situation that is completely unsustainable and places an incredible financial burden on families with young children.

¹ Based on CSO SILC 2014 and Census 2011.

The Inter-Departmental Working Group on Future Investment in Childcare in Ireland has made a number of recommendations in this area and these should be implemented as a matter of priority. Particular attention should be focussed on implementing the full recommendation on the introduction of paid parental leave for children aged under one. The childcare and after school care sector should be developed to ensure parents have access to quality and affordable services and that the sector itself can provide career paths and progression for those people working within it.

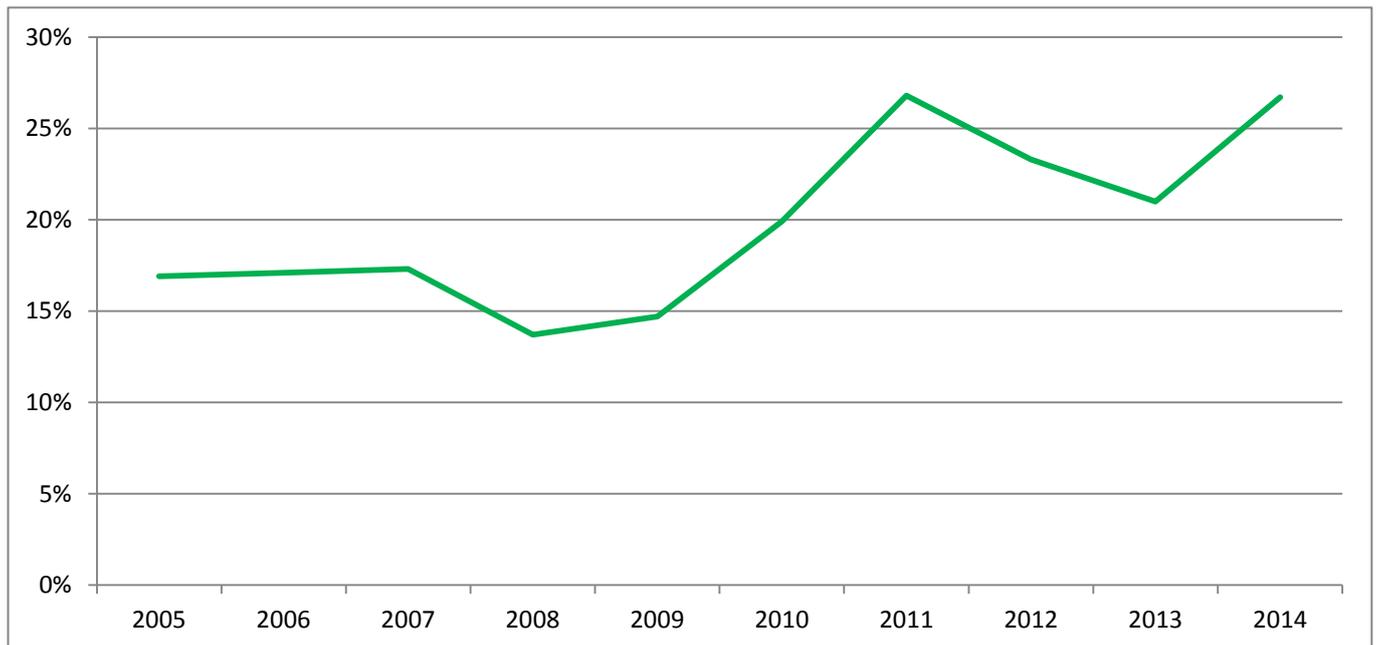
Early Childhood Education

Under investment in early childhood education and after school care is a significant infrastructural problem in Ireland today. Quality preschool education has been recognised as important to support children to succeed better in primary and secondary school, thus contributing to breaking the cycle of disadvantage. In Ireland the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme provides free pre-school provision for all children aged between 3 years and 5 ½ years² for 3 hours per day, 38 weeks of the year. We recommend that the ECCE scheme be extended to 48 weeks per year and that significant resources be invested to improve the quality and capacity of the sector and to enable it to meet current and future demands.

² Budget 2016 extended the ECCE to all children from 3 years until they start primary school or reach 5 ½ years.

Young People

Chart 1: At Risk of Poverty Rate persons aged 18-24 Ireland 2005-2014



Source: Eurostat

A very concerning trend that has emerged in Ireland since 2008 is the significant increase in the number of young people aged 18-24 who are at risk of poverty. Since 2008 this figure has increased by 13 percentage points. Of further concern is the number of young people in Ireland aged 20 – 24 who are not in employment, education or training (NEETS). Although there has been a welcome decrease in this figure in recent years it is still 20.9%³. Government should ensure the full implementation of the Youth Guarantee as a matter of priority in order to address the NEET problem in Ireland.

In order to address youth poverty, the unemployment benefit for under-25s should be immediately restored to the adult rate. Care must be taken to ensure that the employment available to young people can provide them with predictable working hours and a wage that can provide them with a minimum essential standard of living⁴.

³ Figure for 2014, Eurostat.

⁴ <http://misc.ie/home>

Seven things Government can do

1. Publish a detailed policy proposal with allocated resources to end child poverty by 2021.
2. Fully implement the recommendations of the Inter-Departmental Working Group on Future Investment in Childcare in Ireland.
3. A proportion of any windfall gains available to Government in the coming years should be used for the one-off infrastructural investments needed in childcare and ECCE.
4. Extend the ECCE scheme to 48 weeks per year.
5. Ensure children with a disability can access the ECCE scheme.
6. Ensure young people with a disability have access to the same training and labour market programmes as their peers.
7. Restore the unemployment benefit for young people under 25 to the adult rate.