



**Action on**

**Child Poverty**

## Our commitments:

- Provide the poorest schools with extra staffing and funding to tackle educational disadvantage
- Continue to expand the School Meals Programme so that no child goes hungry at school
- Continue to implement early intervention initiatives aimed at children and families in disadvantaged communities
- Establish a new National Action Plan for Social Inclusion and an End Child Poverty Commission to halve child poverty by 2021
- Increase Child Benefit by €15 a month by 2021

## Introduction

Tackling disadvantage has always been at the heart of Labour's vision for a fairer society. There is no form of disadvantage more insidious than that which affects our children.

And there can be no greater priority than protecting those children. No child should ever go hungry or cold, but, despite enormous progress over recent years, one in nine children in Ireland still live in consistent poverty.

Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to have difficulty with education and are more likely to drop out of school early. This has a major impact on their future opportunities and potential.

In Government, Labour has embarked upon an unprecedented range of legal and constitutional reforms to protect our children. The passage of the Children's Rights referendum will have implications for all future legislation and will ensure every child has constitutional rights separate to those of the family unit alone. The creation of TUSLA and passage of the Children and Family Relationships Act were both designed to put the interests of children first.

Labour is committed to increasing funding to the essential programmes that tackle childhood educational and social disadvantages in our communities. Over the coming years, re-investing the proceeds of a growing economy will make it possible to move towards the full elimination of childhood poverty.

That's why any Government containing the Labour Party has to continue to make eradicating childhood disadvantage a core social objective.



### **Prioritising Ending Child Poverty**

Effectively tackling child poverty will require coordinated Government action across a range of Government Departments. Leaving this to one Department will never deliver change on the scale that we need.

Labour's plan is to produce a new National Action Plan for Social Inclusion in 2017, with the eradication of child poverty the primary objective of that action plan.

We will establish a new body known as the End Child Poverty Commission. This body will use the expertise of bodies working to eradicate child poverty. Its central goal will be to make sure that we at least halve child poverty by 2021.

We will also continue to invest in Child Benefit, as the most direct way to help parents struggling with the costs of raising a child.

Over the last two budgets, we have increased Child Benefit by €10 per child per month, benefitting 623,000 families and helping those in real need to meet the expenses of raising a child.

Our plan is to continually increase Child Benefit payments, aiming for a €15 increase in the monthly payment by 2021.

### **Tackling Educational Disadvantage**

Labour understands the value of a good education to breaking out of cycles of poverty. That's why we have worked hard to ensure that early school leaving has fallen below 10% for the first time.

We have reformed the Junior Cert and provided State funding for the iScoil programme. Both of these measures are aimed at putting an end to students, mostly young disadvantaged boys, disengaging from school. We will increase the school leaving age to 17 to get the numbers of young boys dropping out before getting a Leaving Cert to below one in 10.

We will continue funding iScoil and restore funding of School Completion Programmes to 2011 levels, and bring their governance under the control of local Education and Training Boards.

We will identify the poorest schools in the country, in both urban and rural areas, and provide them with the funding, staffing and supports necessary to tackle deeply entrenched levels of disadvantage.



### **Supporting Area-Based Childcare Programmes**

Concentrated disadvantage leads to much greater inequality in society. Tackling that inequality means tackling the root causes of inequality, which start in the earliest years.

Labour in Government has also funded the introduction of Area-Based Childcare (ABC) programmes in areas of concentrated disadvantage such as Limerick, Ballymun and Tallaght. These programmes have provided vital support to children and parents in some of the least well-off areas of the country.

## **“WE ARE COMMITTED TO A STRATEGY OF CAPACITY BUILDING AND INVESTING IN THE QUALITY OF OUR PUBLIC SERVICES TO CHILDREN AND FAMILIES”**

We are committed to a strategy of capacity building and investing in the quality of our public services to children and families. This will include primary care, early years, primary schools, family and community support services. To support this, we are committed to mainstreaming youngballymun, an evidence-based model prioritising children and families in communities impacted by socio-economic disadvantage.

We will continue to implement prevention and early intervention initiatives aimed at children

and families, while maintaining a particular focus on areas of concentrated disadvantage.

### **Child Protection**

Early intervention and well integrated care and support between TUSLA, education and mental health services is critical to ensuring a well-functioning child protection service.

Labour is committed to bringing about greater integration of these services with TUSLA to make sure the interests of children in need always come first.

We will also review the high staff turnover ratios within child protection services and explore ways to overcome worker burnout in terms of better supervision, manageable caseloads and a greater experience mix amongst colleagues in services.

To ensure that children of all family types are properly catered for and protected, Labour in Government will fully commence all sections of the Children and Family Relationships Act.

### **School meals**

No child should ever go to school hungry. We recognise that hungry children have difficulty paying attention and benefitting from education. This year, we increased the funding available for school meals by €3m, with over 1,430 schools and community groups now providing meals in schools, pre-schools and community groups.

We will increase the funding available for school meals by €5m each year, to expand school meals to at least a third of all school and pre-school settings, with a particular focus on the promotion of breakfast clubs. This will include funding for minor capital work required in some schools.

Responsibility for management of the school meals programme will be transferred to the education sector, so that we develop a coherent approach to tackling poverty and disadvantage in schools.



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