

# FLAC Pre-Budget Submission 2009

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**The restoration of Child Benefit to its former status as a universal payment is imperative if the Government wishes to realise its goal of eliminating child poverty in Ireland.**

**Even with the downturn in the economy, the Government cannot afford to ignore its duty to ensure that all children living in Ireland are treated equally.**

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In view of the upcoming budget, FLAC calls on the Irish government to consider its obligations and commitment to upholding the rights of all children living in Ireland by restoring Child Benefit as a universal payment.

Ireland ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1992. This requires the State to adhere to certain principles including Article 2, which obliges the State to “respect and ensure the rights... to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind”. This includes any discrimination based on the status of their parents. Article 3(1) also states that:

*In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.*

In addition, the government has made its own commitments to eliminating child poverty in Objective G of the National Children’s Strategy 2000 – 2010 (NCS) which states that “Children will be provided with the financial supports necessary to eliminate child poverty”.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore Child Benefit is seen as a significant tool in achieving this goal, as it is considered to be an “important means of reducing child poverty and supporting the welfare of children, given its universal coverage...”<sup>2</sup>

Statistics from the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) from the end of July 2008 show that there are approximately 2240 children under the age of 18 currently living in Direct Provision, i.e. where the state provides board/food to them directly as opposed to a payment. These are all children of asylum seekers. A small number are already in receipt of Child Benefit but the majority are not, therefore inequalities exist within the system as well as in wider society. According to the above figures, the cost to the Exchequer of providing

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<sup>1</sup> The National Children’s Strategy, page 63

<sup>2</sup> The National Children’s Strategy, page 63

Child Benefit to this relatively small but very marginalised group would be less than €5 million in total.<sup>3</sup>

Currently a child living with his/her parents in Direct Provision is entitled to a mere €9.60 per week. The State provides basic food and lodging but parents find that they are supplementing their children's diets as well as having to pay for school-related items and extracurricular activities out of this small allowance. The monthly Child Benefit payment of €166, while it come nowhere near to covering all the expenses of a baby or child living in Ireland today, will surely assist a family living on such a low income. FLAC also endorses the recommendations made by the Irish Refugee Council (IRC) and related organisations to increase the Direct Provision allowance to €65 per week for adults and €38 per week for children so residents in Direct Provision can live by a standard acceptable to all.

The restoration of Child Benefit to its former status as a universal payment is imperative if the Government wishes to realise its goal of eliminating child poverty in Ireland. Even with the downturn in the economy, the Government cannot afford to ignore its duty to ensure that all children living in Ireland are treated equally.

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<sup>3</sup> Based on the total number of children in Direct Provision at the end of July 2008 receiving Child Benefit at €166 per month which would cost €4,462,080