



Canvas Card for Families **GENERAL ELECTION 2024**



FRIDAY 29TH NOVEMBER

THE POWER OF YOUR VOTE



It's understandable to feel uncertain about whether speaking up to politicians will lead to change, or to think, "What's the point?". Many feel that politicians don't listen or truly understand the issues facing families today. But remember—your vote is powerful, and the upcoming general election is a crucial opportunity to make sure that the needs of families like yours are front and centre.

ENGAGING WITH POLITICIANS

Talking to politicians at your door is a valuable opportunity—not only to make your voice heard but to understand what they truly stand for and what they'll prioritize if elected. Use this time to find out whether their plans will genuinely benefit you and your family. Let them know that acting on behalf of families like yours, not just during the campaign but for the next five years, is essential if they want your vote.



KEY QUESTIONS FOR CANVASSERS

To help you make the most of these conversations, we've put together a list of important questions to ask canvassing politicians. These questions are designed to highlight the specific issues affecting modern families in Ireland, from affordable childcare to housing and social supports.

SHARE YOUR STORY TO MAKE AN IMPACT

Sharing your personal story or experiences with policies that aren't working for you and your children leaves a lasting impact. When politicians hear that real people in their own communities are struggling with the same issues, they're more likely to take action. Encourage your friends and family to raise these concerns too. Together, we can amplify the issues that matter to us and make sure that those in power take meaningful steps to address them.

MAKE YOUR VOICE MATTER

**REGISTER TO VOTE BY TUESDAY 14TH NOVEMBER
ON [CHECKTHEREGISTER.IE](https://www.checktheregister.ie)**

Canvas Card for Families



1. REDUCING POVERTY AND SOCIAL WELFARE



Welfare Payments and Cost of Living

Many one-parent families struggle financially. In fact, recent research by the ESRI finds that becoming a lone parent significantly increases the risk of economic vulnerability.

Q. How will you ensure welfare payments are sufficient to meet the rising cost of living?

Q. Will you commit to keeping welfare payments tied to inflation as other countries do?

Q. Will you support the benchmarking of all social welfare rates so that they lift people above the poverty line and provide them with a Minimum Essential Standard of Living?

Income Thresholds and Benefits:

Families often lose essential benefits when their income increases slightly.

Q. What will you do to help families improve their financial situation without losing necessary support?

Shared Parenting and Welfare

Shared Parenting needs to be promoted, not penalised

Q. How will you work with the Department of Social Protection to ensure that families who share parenting and caregiving responsibilities are not penalized or disincentivized from doing so?

CHILD MAINTENANCE



Excluding Maintenance from Assessments:

Right now, child maintenance payments are excluded from welfare assessments, but they're still counted as income for things like housing and medical cards

Q. Will you work to exclude maintenance from all government assessments to avoid reducing family support?

Enforcement of Child Maintenance:

Many lone parents do not receive adequate, consistent child maintenance. Additionally, court orders for maintenance are poorly enforced.

Q. What steps will you take to improve the enforcement of child maintenance orders, so that children can receive the financial support they're owed without increasing conflict between the parents?

Q. How will you ensure maintenance payments are enforced, and do you support the creation of a separate maintenance enforcement agency?

AFFORDABLE CHILDCARE AND EARLY YEARS EDUCATION



Publicly Funded Childcare:

Affordable childcare is a gender equality issue and is a key barrier to one parent families access to education and employment, often locking them into poverty.

Q. What will you do to make childcare affordable for all families, and do you plan to push for a publicly funded childcare system?

Access to Early Years Education

High-quality early education is critical for children's development, yet it is out of reach for many, particularly children with additional needs

Q. What steps will you take to establish publicly funded early education?

Q. Will you commit to more school places for children with additional needs.

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HOUSING CRISIS



Homelessness and Emergency Housing

Homelessness continues to rise. In 2024, there is a Record 14,429 people now in emergency accommodation as number of homeless children rises 15% to now over 4500 children.

Q. What will you do to expand emergency housing and provide sustainable pathways out of homelessness?

Q. How will you address the rising number of children in emergency accommodation?

Rental Protection

Rising rents and limited protections are a real concern for too many families.

Q. What steps will you take to make renting more secure and protect families from eviction?

Lone Parents Disadvantage in Housing System:

Lone parents in Ireland face severe housing challenges—such as low rates of homeownership, higher affordability issues, and increased exposure to poor housing conditions.

Q. What steps will you take to make renting more secure and protect families from eviction?

WIDOW'S/WIDOWER'S PENSION



New Legislation for Cohabiting Couples

The Supreme Court mandated legislation for cohabiting couples to access the Widow's Pension in January 2024, but we are still waiting for action and no new legislation has been published let alone introduced. This is leaving countless cohabiting couples and their children without vital financial support after the death of their partner/parent.

Q. We want to see action now. Will you commit to introducing the legislation for cohabiting couples Widow's Pension in your first year in government?

REFORM OF THE FAMILY LAW SYSTEM



Family Law Reform

The family law system is often inconsistent and backlogged, increasing stress for families.

Q. What are your plans to reform it?

Alternative Dispute Resolution Support:

Government should adequately finance and incentivise Mediation and Shared Parenting courses when appropriate and safe to do so

Q. Will you support increased funding for mediation and other non-court resolutions for families where appropriate?

Legal Aid Access

Many families cannot access legal aid due to income thresholds that are far too low.

Q. Will you work to ensure fair access to legal representation in family court for those needing legal aid?

Expert Reports

Going to the district court is supposed to be free. Yet parents in high-conflict situations are regularly ordered to pay approx. €3,000 for court expert reports that they often don't get to read

Q. These court expert reports are not currently regulated and are extremely expensive. What is your solution to this?

Transparency

Currently the Courts Service doesn't publish statistics of what happens in the family courts so it's hard to even know what reforms are needed.

Q. Would you commit to changing that and improving transparency?

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NATIONAL GUARDIANSHIP REGISTER



Unmarried parents, kinship carers, stepparents, and LGBT parents, who are legal guardians of their children should be able to easily find out or prove their guardianship status.

Q. Will you commit to creating a National Guardianship Register to help guardians demonstrate their legal status and protect children's interests?

KINSHIP CARE



Kinship Carer Support

There are an estimated 10-12,000 children in kinship care in Ireland, double the amount of children than is in formal foster or State care, yet these families remain hidden and their invaluable care unsupported.

Q. Will you ensure that all kinship carers qualify for the Guardian's Payment to help them support the children in their care?

Local Authority Succession Rules

When a kinship carer steps up after a parent's death, children can face homelessness if their guardian isn't recognised in local authority succession rules, risking further disruption and the loss of their family home.

Q. What will you do to ensure that all local authorities streamline their policy to recognise kinship carers in their succession rules.

Removal of Medical Card Means Testing

Children in kinship care should be eligible to a medical card without means-testing, in the same way that children in foster care are eligible to a medical card.

Q: What actions will you take to work alongside the Department of Health & Children to ensure the means-test is removed for medical card access for children in kinship care?

YOUNG PARENTS SUPPORT



Education, and barriers to education

Many young parents face significant barriers to re-entering education or advancing their education.

Q. How do you plan to expand and fund family support programs specifically for young parents to help them access community resources and job opportunities?

Mental Health Support

In 2023, 70% of young parents accessing support from the Teen Parents Support Programme disclosed severe mental health issues

Q. What will you do to increase support for young people with severe mental health issues

Homelessness among Young Parents

Between 20-25% of homeless parents are 18-24 years old.

Q. What will you do to ensure young parents have safe and stable housing options?

Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (DSGBV)

In 2023, we saw a 6% increase in young mothers disclosing DSGBV in their current or past relationship, which is 1 in 4 in that year.

Q. What will you do to increase awareness among young people about DSGBV and to ensure that schools provide education on these issues?

Nutritional Health During Pregnancy

Many young young mothers cannot afford to pay for important essential nutritional supplements during their pregnancy

Q. Will you support a campaign to supply FREE nutritional supplements for mothers during pregnancy?