

Oireachtas group told of childcare workers on 'poverty wages' ^[1]

Committee briefed on working conditions in sector – 'numerous staff working second jobs'

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EXCERPTS

The Government has been urged to boost the pay of childcare workers in Budget 2022 next week, after an Oireachtas committee heard that many of them have taken on second or even third jobs because they can't make ends meet.

Siptu, which represents 6,000 childcare workers, told the committee that a funding gap in the sector has left workers on "poverty wages" and service providers struggling with sustainability despite parents paying some of the highest fees in Europe.

The demand for better pay came as campaigners separately said thousands of children from disadvantaged and marginalised families were being discriminated against because unemployed parents were entitled to fewer or no subsidised hours of childcare.

Mick Kenny, a national council member of Association of Childhood Professionals, said the National Childcare Scheme had pushed disadvantaged children into a "more vulnerable situation" because childcare support was being withheld from jobless parents. "Children should not be used as pawns in a wider Government policy," he told the Oireachtas committee on children.

"The State is intentionally discriminating against children in a bid to motivate their parent/guardian(s) to undertake employment, education, or training. Equal access to care and education supports are being withheld from the child because of their parents."

On the question of working conditions, Darragh O'Connor, Siptu's head of campaigns, said one member reported colleagues "taking jobs as waitresses or bartenders as the pay is much better" while numerous staff worked a second job in the evenings and weekend.

Deborah Reynolds, a Siptu activist who works in the sector, said staff were in a desperate situation, left scrimping and saving and contemplating leaving their jobs.

"I'm constantly talking to colleagues around the country and I heard of an early years professional who does 39 hours a week in a full daycare creche and then goes and does two 10-hour shifts in a restaurant at the weekend. She gets paid more in the restaurant and she gets tips so that's how people are surviving," Ms Reynolds said.

What are the pay rates?

He added that 55 per cent of all staff working with children received €11.91 per hour on average, 99 cent below the "living wage" for Ireland. Managers and owner managers received an average of €15.28 per hour.

The committee also heard from adoption rights campaign group Aitheantas that existing agencies for supporting adult adoptees are not fit for purpose.

Maree Ryan-O'Brien of Aitheantas said very few respondents to a recent survey had a "positive experience" interacting with any agency tasked with supporting adult adoptees.

"We have recommended that these existing agencies are no longer fit for purpose and should be replaced by a new agency with overall responsibility for these matters on the grounds of constitutional principles of fair procedures and centralisation of the different facets of the same issue in one agency," she said.

"A new agency with a new social work model, is a vital component of the legislative process from closed adoption, the Clean Break/Clean Slate model, into a more transparent, Clean Access model.

Region: Europe ^[3]

Tags: workforce ^[4]

budget ^[5]

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