INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ERADICATION OF POVERTY
17 OCT.

ERADICATING POVERTY THROUGH LOCAL & NATIONAL STRATEGIES

IRELAND

POVERTY WATCH 2025

EUROPEAN ANTI POVERTY NETWORK

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EAPN
EUROPEAN ANTI POVERTY NETWORK

Poverty Watch 2025

Eliminating Poverty- Can we Afford Not To?

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Introduction

In 2024, Ireland's tax receipts hit a record €108 billion, the fourth record breaking year, and marking more than a doubling of the tax take over the past decade.[1] In the same period, the economy grew on average 7.78%, [2] almost at full employment, with an unemployment rate of 4.3%.[3] Yet during that time the numbers living in consistent poverty fluctuated between 8.5% and 3.6%, spiking to 5% in the last year.[4] This represents hundreds of thousands of people

[1] https://kpmg.com/ie/en/home/insights/2025/01/exchequer-returns-tax2.html
[2] https://www.focus-economics.com/country-indicator/ireland/gdp/
[3] https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-lfs/labourforcesurveyquarter12025/keyfindings/#:~:text=The%20employment%20rate%20for%20people,12%20months%20to%20Q1%202025.
[4] https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-silc/surveyonincomeandlivingconditionssilc2023/

whose lives have been scarred by poverty and marginalisation, often intergenerationally, with some groups disproportionately affected.

The evidence is clear, there is no automatic link between economic growth, greater levels of employment, and addressing poverty. It requires an intervention from the state to address the causes of poverty including ensuring that everyone has an adequate income and access to essential public services. It requires a targeted approach to address the structural reasons why some groups are more likely to experience poverty, and to overcome the multiple barriers that they face. The resources are there. All that is missing, is the political will to do so!

In this year's Poverty Watch we examine the approach of successive Irish governments to the reduction of poverty, and furtherance of social inclusion, with particular attention to the current strategy 'Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025'. We look at life for people experiencing poverty and the devastating impact of exclusion on their households and wellbeing. And in the context of the ongoing development of a new successor to the present Roadmap, we look at the steps that need to be taken to eliminate poverty in Ireland. Reduction alone, in one of the wealthiest countries in the world in not enough. Poverty can and must be eliminated.

Poverty Must be Eliminated!

But what do we mean by poverty in Ireland? The definition used since the first National Anti-Poverty Strategy states, '*People are living in poverty, if their income and resources (material, cultural and social) are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living which is acceptable by Irish society generally. As a result of inadequate income and resources, people may be excluded and marginalised from participating in activities considered the norm for other people in society.'*

***** CD – 3 categories in different colours or boxes*

There are three categories used to assess this. Firstly, 'at risk of poverty'. People are deemed to be at risk of poverty if they have an income that is less than 60% of the median disposable income.[5] This is generally referred to as the poverty line and in Ireland it presently stands at €344.92 per week in 2024.[6]This categorisation is limited, focusing to a great extent on equality of income and takes no account of living standards.

Enforced Deprivation,[7] updated in 2007, refers to those who cannot afford two of eleven necessities, as follows

1. Two pairs of strong shoes
2. A warm waterproof overcoat
3. Buy new not second-hand clothes
4. Eat meals with meat, chicken, fish (or vegetarian equivalent) every second day
5. Have a roast joint or its equivalent once a week
6. Had to go without heating during the last year through lack of money
7. Keep the home adequately warm
8. Buy presents for family or friends at least once a year
9. Replace any worn out furniture
10. Have family or friends for a drink or meal once a month
11. Have a morning, afternoon or evening out in the last fortnight, for entertainment

Consistent poverty refers to those who are both at risk of poverty <u>and</u> experience enforced deprivation. Based on the latest Survey Of Income & Living Conditions (SILC) 2024 this is 264,265 people, the highest number since 2019. The present Roadmap has patently failed to reduce, not to mind eliminate, these numbers.

To eliminate consistent poverty requires a whole of government, whole of society approach.

The generalised view that 'the poor will always be with us' or that poverty is some sort of personal failing, a burden on society which needs to be met with a charitable response, is unhelpful and inaccurate. Poverty is a societal problem and responsibility. Eliminating it is the vindication of the inalienable right of every human being to live a life of dignity. This was the vision outlined in the Programme of the First Dail - [8]

'*It shall be the first duty of the Government of the Republic to make provision for the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of the children, to secure that no child shall suffer hunger or cold from lack of food, clothing, or shelter, but that all shall be*

[5] http://www.socialinclusion.ie/poverty.html
[6] https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/socialconditions/surveyonincomeandlivingconditionssilc/
[7] http://www.socialinclusion.ie/poverty.html
[8] https://www.nootherlaw.com/archive/democratic-programme.html

provided with the means and facilities requisite for their proper education and training as Citizens of a Free and Gaelic Ireland."

This was the vision of our fledgling state, more than one hundred years ago. Its modern day equivalent refers to a standard of living that allows everyone to participate in society at a level which is acceptable to Irish society generally. It is this vision that we must make the cornerstone of our entire economic policy. It is this vision that we signed up to in the UN Sustainable Development Goals, in September 2015,[9] and the European Pillar of Social Rights in November 2017.[10] We are not doing anyone a favour by tackling poverty, we are fulfilling our human rights obligations.

Poverty affects everyone. It is not just about the avoidable damage it does to our fellow residents. The state wastes billions every year to pay for the cost of poverty on public services because of the way poverty impacts peoples' lives, from the health service, the criminal justice system, education, social protection and so on. A report published in 2022 by the Society of St. Vincent de Paul entitled The Hidden Cost of Poverty revealed that annually Ireland spends €4.5 billion for the public services cost of poverty, ranging from a low of €3 billion to a high of €7.26 billion.[11] Eliminating poverty is a valuable social investment that makes sound economic sense.

Additionally there is a Public Sector Equality & Human Rights Duty, outlined under Section 42 if the Irish Human Rights & Equality Act 2014, which places a positive duty on all public bodies to uphold human rights,[12] which by extension means a positive duty to eradicate poverty. This must be the goal as we prepare the latest anti-poverty strategy.

Poverty In Ireland

However, overall, the efforts in Ireland to reduce poverty have effectively plateaued. Life is very difficult for many people. The most recent SILC data shows an increase in the number of people at risk of poverty in 2024 standing at 11.7%, up from 10.6%, involving 618,000 people. Without the one off measures introduced by government to offset the cost of living crisis, it would have been a shocking 14.1%. Three in ten, (30.2%) of those at risk of poverty were children, despite only comprising 23% of the population. Those who are unemployed, (34.1%), those unable to work due to long-standing health problems(32.5%), and lone parents (24.2%) were among the categories with the highest risk of poverty.[13]

Meanwhile, although enforced deprivation decreased from 17.3% in 2023, to 15.7% in 2024, it increased for lone parent households with children under 18, from 41.4% in 2023, to 46.3% in 2024.[14] A report by Barnardos published on 8th July 2025 showed one third of parents went into arrears on energy bills due to insufficient income in the 12 months to April 2025, while

[9] https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals
[10] https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles_en
[11] https://www.svp.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/SVP-Report_Final.pdf
[12] https://www.ihrec.ie/our-work/public-sector-duty/
[13] https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-silc/surveyonincomeandlivingconditionssilc2024
[14] ibid

40% borrowed at least once to provide their children with essentials, the same percentage who skipped meals or reduced their portion size so their children could have enough to eat. The same report showed children going without activities and sport due to lack of money.[15] These figures reveal significant underlying problems for many due to the severe cost of living in Ireland.

In a recent report commissioned by the ESRI entitled ‘Deprived children in Ireland: Characterising those who are deprived but not income-poor’ it was suggested that adjusting income measures for housing costs would allow research to better capture the impact of the current housing crisis on the standard of living of Irish households.[16]

The latest Eurostat report published in July 2025 revealed that average rents in Ireland rose by 115% between 2010 and 2025, cumulatively more than 4 times the EU average.[17] Food prices have increased by 24% in the last 5 years according to the Central Statistics Office. Wages and social protection increases are skewed by these phenomenal increases. This is having a crippling impact. Those renting or living rent free make up three quarters (76%) of those in consistent poverty.[18] This is not an accident. If we want to tackle poverty, we need to tackle the housing crisis. We also need to change our social protection system so that it reflects the cost of living.

It is also very clear that some groups are more likely to experience poverty than the general population. This is highlighted in the graph below, with groups such as children, the unemployed, those unable to work due to a long standing health issue, lone parent households and households where someone is renting, being particularly vulnerable. It is also important to state that the SILC data does not include poverty levels among groups such as Travellers & Roma, migrants and other ethnic minorities, disabled people, or those who are homeless, even though these are the most marginalised and excluded. In the Travelling community for example, 73% of the population is under 35yrs with life expectancy 15 years less for men and 11 years less for women compared to the general population. Suicide is six times the national average accounting for 11% of all Traveller deaths. Over 2,000 families live in inadequate, and unsafe conditions, many without access to running water or a toilet and almost 1,000 families live in overcrowded / shared accommodation[19]

There has to be a targeted intervention directed towards all these groups if consistent poverty is to be eliminated.

[15] https://www.barnardos.ie/policy/the-issues/cost-of-living

[16] https://www.esri.ie/publications/deprived-children-in-ireland-characterising-those-who-are-deprived-but-not-income-poor

[17] https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20250704-4

[18] https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-silc/surveyonincomeandlivingconditionssilc2024

[19] https://itmtrav.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Irish-Traveller-Movement-Pre-Budget-24.pdf

Voices of those Experiencing Poverty

The statistics are stark! But they don't capture life for those experiencing poverty. Sometimes poverty is a temporary crisis, sometimes intergenerational marginalisation. Always help is needed, but often difficult to access. Many people feel viewed as 'undeserving', as 'chancers', made to feel embarrassed and demeaned by their situation. Groups which are identified as being more at risk of poverty often feel their situation is acknowledged, but little changes concretely. In the course of the last months we spoke to people living in homeless accommodation, Travellers, older people, disabled people and those with children about the difficulties they face. We engaged with those accessing Crosscare services, an organisation that supports people when they can't find support elsewhere.[20] It is their voices which MUST be listened to if we are to eradicate poverty.

CD *******That is intro paragraph to spanning 2 pages in different colours and bubble quotes, different fonts etc,

'Being here has had a negative impact on my life. I am trying so hard for myself and my children. Being here for so long has had a strain on my mental health and also has had an impact on my addiction recovery. With no sign of being housed in the last two and a half years, living here in homeless accommodation with my eldest son, 14 yrs., and my daughter, 10 yrs., it's a horrible feeling. I have been emailing and applying for private rental properties for two years, but I haven't received a single reply from any landlords. There's only so much a person can take. The housing situation is an absolute joke.' Mother in Homeless Hub Dublin

'Felt totally lost and desperate for help. As a granny left with 3 grandchildren, no money, hungry children, left dealing with people for hours on a never ending call or hours queuing. Kids crying and me feeling ashamed and no confidence to ask for help. It's a horrible, shameful place to be at my age after a lifetime of working, my small income did not meet their needs, took weeks to get sorted. People behind calls make you feel you are on the make all the time.' West Dublin

'Being a (single) mother of 6 is emotionally draining, trying to keep up with everything, with one thing an another it never ends, especially with kids, it is really difficult to manage'. Young mother

'When I first arrived in Ireland, the hardest part was the language barrier. I was also constantly worried about not being able to find a job. I was scared—scared of everything.

[20] https://crosscare.ie/

But somehow, I managed to push through. What frightened me the most was having to go out and handle things, not knowing how to communicate at all. Even just seeing the police made me panic. I was so afraid I couldn't even understand what they were saying. During the most difficult times, I had no job. I couldn't find work, and I struggled to afford food and rent—everything became a challenge'. Female migrant

'I'm one of the most unfortunate workers to come to Ireland. I spent all the money I had just to get here, but then I had a serious workplace injury and nearly lost my life. Now I'm unable to work—my body is disabled. I'm relying on borrowed money to survive and pay rent. I don't know when I'll be able to get out of this hardship'. Male migrant

'When I couldn't afford my rent because it was very high I was helped with food supplies. When I had health issues, I received help filling out some forms for Department of Social Protection payment. Later when I was given a new home, again I got help. The food at the canteen is tasty and affordable. All the staff speak kindly. Thank you from the bottom of my heart!' Woman accessing Crosscare services

'We went through some rough weeks, when my mother, the main breadwinner had gotten a life altering brain injury, making us go through a lot of financial and administrative upheaval. Me and my sister were both students and unemployed at the time and we had to access food support to not go hungry'. Young student

"*Post Covid, many older people have experienced a drop off in visitors to their homes adding to their sense of isolation"* Care worker

"On the offshore islands, there is a serious problem accessing health care services. On one island there was no nursing service available recently" Older Island resident

"Less than a third of job applicants with a disability disclose their disability at the interview stage" Disabled Jobseeker

"There is a regular problem for people with a disability who have to prove that they still have a disability - they are not believed and sometimes they are seen as a con-artist" Disability advocate

"There are no services for migrants with disabilities while living in direct provision. People are not connected to services" Disabled migrant

"There are huge difficulties in accessing work when a child turns seven due to lack of affordable childcare" Working parent

"We need for more targeted supports for lone parents. The system needs to recognise the logistical issues - transport, childcare costs etc. of taking up employment when a child turns 7. This is often impractical" Lone parent

"I'm conscious that we are just a couple of months away from the 10-year anniversary from the Carrickmines tragedy that many of us, or all of us, had expected would be a bit of a catalyst, but it wasn't. Nothing has really changed in the ten years". Traveller speaking about continued accommodation crisis, since the Carrickmines tragedy. [21]

Anti-Poverty Strategies

As the EU prepares its first Anti-Poverty Strategy, Ireland can pride itself that while more than half the EU member states still do not have an Anti-Poverty Strategy, Ireland has had one since 1997, almost 30 years ago. This demonstrates the serious and consistent regard at the highest levels of Irish society to target the eradication of poverty. This is very positive and is an excellent starting point, but on its own it is not enough. An effective strategy is one which monitors impact, which has the flexibility to change in response to barriers or challenges, and critically one which succeeds in reducing and eliminating poverty.

Ireland's first *National Anti-Poverty Strategy* was launched in 1997 following the Governments participation in the United Nations Social Summit in Copenhagen in 1995. It was the result of an extensive consultation process. The original strategy was ambitious and broad ranging. It looked at a number of different approaches, crucially, the intersectional nature of poverty, which requires a whole of government approach. It also looked at tackling deep seated structural inequality and targeting particular policy areas. These approaches generally get insufficient attention and yet they are key to the success or otherwise of an anti-poverty strategy. [22]

It was a ten year strategy. In the initial 5 years there was a target to reduce consistent poverty to between 5 and 10%. A key focus of the strategy was the idea of income adequacy and improved access to quality public services. Specific targets were set for women, children, older people, disabled people, Travellers and disadvantaged communities, with targets in relation to health, education and a goal of eliminating long term unemployment. Between 1997 and 2001, long term unemployment did fall from 5.6% to 1.2%.[23]

The poverty target was achieved half way through the strategy. Consistent Poverty declined from 15.1% in 1994 to 5.2% in 2001.[24]

[21] Ten Travellers burned to death in halting site blaze. Despite budgets being available, racism is preventing Traveller specific accommodation being developed – EAPN Ireland
[22] http://www.socialinclusion.ie/NationalAnti-PovertyStrategy-SharinginProgress1997.pdf.pdf
[23] ibid
[24] http://www.socialinclusion.ie/documents/WhatisPoverty.pdf

The strategy was reviewed in 2002, under the heading *Building an Inclusive Society 2002*, with new targets to be achieved by 2007.[25] The key target in the review was " to reduce the numbers of those who are 'consistently' poor, below 2% and if possible eliminate consistent poverty under the current definition of consistent poverty. Special Attention will be paid to particularly vulnerable groups in the pursuit of this objective." These targets were not met although it was the high point of the 'Celtic Tiger".[26]

This period of the 'Celtic Tiger' saw phenomenal levels of growth in the Irish economy. It was followed by a severe economic crash, and the imposition of austerity, which saw welfare rates reduced, major cuts to public services and many of the gains overturned. The community and voluntary sector was decimated, with a cut in funding of between 35-41% (2008-2015)[27] and which still has not returned to pre-crash level funding in 2025. Against this backdrop poverty levels again began to rise.

The strategy in place at that time was the *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016*, again a ten year plan which had the aim to " reduce the number of those experiencing consistent poverty to between 2-4% by 2012, with the aim to eliminate consistent poverty by 2016"[28] Consistent poverty stood at 7% when the target was set using 2005 information. It had reduced to 4.2% two years later.[29]

However in response to the global financial crisis, the EU's efforts to ensure greater governance and co-ordination between member states, and Ireland undertaking reforms as part a of a programme with the Troika, poverty levels increased.

In 2012 the Government carried out a review of the poverty target and published a new National Social Target for Poverty Reduction.[30]This was the less ambitious target of reducing consistent poverty to 4% by 2016 and 2% by 2020,[31] and ended the Government's commitment to the elimination of poverty. This target was set against a baseline of consistent poverty having increased to 6.3%. By 2013 Consistent poverty was the highest ever reported at 9%. Deprivation had peaked the year before at 30.5%.

While reducing somewhat in the intervening years, by 2018, when the present Anti-poverty Strategy was being prepared, the level of consistent poverty stood at 5.6%, higher than in 2001. The present anti-poverty strategy, the *Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025*, again set the target to "reduce consistent poverty to 2% or less" and added a target "to make Ireland one of the most socially inclusive countries in the EU".[32] This is the ambition to be achieved by 2025.

[25] http://www.socialinclusion.ie/publications/building_an_inclusive_society.pdf
[26] ibid
[27] https://comhlamh.org/blog/the-destruction-of-the-community-development-sector-in-ireland/
[28] http://www.socialinclusion.ie/documents/NAPinclusionReportPDF.pdf
[29] https://www.cso.ie/en/csolatestnews/pressreleases/2006pressreleases/.
[30] http://www.socialinclusion.ie/documents/PublishedNPTBriefing_003.pdf
[31]https://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/economic_governance/sgp/pdf/20_scps/2011/01_programme/ie_2011-04-29_nrp_en.pdf
[32] https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/roadmap-for-social-inclusion-2020-2025-ambition-goals-commitments.pdf

As the Roadmap nears its completion, and as the public consultation for its successor is underway, consistent poverty in Ireland stands at 5% for 2024, almost at the same level it was at when the strategy commenced![33]

This strategy is weak in its approach to income adequacy, and on the goal of eliminating poverty. Many of its commitments are based on inputs such as establishing structures or producing strategies rather than the impact on reducing poverty, and it overly relies on employment as a route out of poverty, failing to address other solutions for those unable to work, or unable to secure adequate income from work. It is very important that the lessons are learned from this strategy when developing its successor.

An Examination of the present Strategy

The present *Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025*, adopted a different approach than its predecessors. Emphasis was placed on acknowledging sectoral plans already in place in areas such as education, health, children, childcare, community development and housing, and strategies for specific groups in society, which they stated all aimed to put social inclusion at the core of public policy across all government departments and services.[34]

CD****High Level Goals in a Box

The strategy itself was based on 7 High level Goals, as follows: To extend employment opportunities to all who can work; to ensure work pays -fair pay, fair conditions for workers; to provide income security for older people; to support families -reduce child poverty; to reduce poverty among people with disabilities- help them to maximise their ability; to build inclusive communities – encourage active citizenship; and to ensure that all people have access to public services.[35]

These goals were accompanied by targets and commitments, which following a mid-term review in 2023, were increased to 25 targets and 81 commitments. There are annual progress reports and report cards dealing with progress on the commitments. As the new plan is being prepared, it is claimed that of the 81 commitments, 58 have been achieved, 19 are in progress and on schedule, with the remaining 4 in progress.[36] Yet not only has the overall aim of reducing consistent poverty to 2% or less, not been achieved, but there has been no reduction at all when looking at the figures before and the levels of consistent poverty in 2024 as we approach the end of the plan..

It is clearly problematic to have a strategy claiming almost total success, when the reality on

the ground tells a very different story. The root of the problem, is twofold, firstly, a plan is

33 https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/socialconditions/surveyonincomeandlivingconditionssilc/
34 https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-social-protection/publications/roadmap-for-social-inclusion-2020-2025/
35 ibid
36 ibid

more than the summary of its parts, and secondly, a plan based on inputs will not achieve the overall aim. The only accurate measure of success is whether consistent poverty is reduced including for the most marginalised groups and communities. This can only happen by dealing with the multi-dimensional nature of poverty and the fact that different groups in society experience higher levels of poverty, and need to be treated differently. Goals, targets and commitments can only be meaningful on that basis.

Focus on Impact, Not Input!

Part of the problem with the present Roadmap lies with the fact that many of the 81 commitments involve publishing strategies or reports, such as;
No. 2: Develop and publish a new Further Education and Training Strategy.
No 3: Develop and publish a successor employment services strategy to Pathways to Work.
No. 9: Undertake a Carers Needs Assessment within a community healthcare organisation.
No. 15: Commission, with the support of the Labour Market Advisory Council, a study of trends in employment arrangements in Ireland.
No. 19: Establish and report on a new target in respect of Child Poverty
No. 47: Finalise and publish the successor to the Action Plan for Rural Development
No 48: Finalise and publish a National Volunteering Strategy

No doubt these are worthy initiatives, but they could not be considered as combatting poverty in and of themselves. If we look at **Commitment No. 19**, in more detail, the problem of such an indicator is even clearer. It states, '*Establish and Report on a New Child Poverty target, in order to improve Ireland's ranking from 20th, to at least 5th for the EU SILC reporting year of 2025, amounting to an equivalent of reducing the percentage of children under 18 at risk of poverty & social exclusion from 23.9% to 16%.* The status of this commitment was highlighted as **Achieved,** yet the same section revealed that the Eurostat EU SILC data for Ireland for 2023 for those under 18 stood at 24.3%, with a ranking of 17th*!'*[37]

In fact consistent poverty among children rose dramatically to 8.5% in 2024 from 4.8%.[38] Children account for almost four in ten of all those in consistent poverty. So the situation for children in Ireland deteriorated significantly, yet the objective of establishing and reporting on a child poverty target, was classified as achieved.

When Can Commitments be Called Achieved?

Commitment No. 20, was '*to set and report on a new target to further improve Ireland's EU ranking for 'in-work poverty' from 3rd, to 2nd by reducing the rate of 'in-work poverty' to 3.5%.* This was classified as having being ***Achieved*** even though Ireland fell to 4th place and

[37] https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/roadmap-for-social-inclusion-2020-2025-ambition-goals-commitments-fourth-report-card-j.pdf
[38] https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/socialconditions/surveyonincomeandlivingconditionssilc/

our 'in-work poverty figures' increased considerably to 5.6%.[39] Even worse, is the fact that 'in-work poverty' percentages only include those who work at least 7 months of the year, entirely excluding many of the most vulnerable workers engaged in seasonal or precarious employment.[40]

Similar scenarios exist throughout the report cards of the Roadmap. Housing is one of the key drivers of exclusion and poverty. **Commitment No. 59** states *Under Housing for All provide more than 12,000 social homes each year, with an average 10,000 new-build social housing homes to 2030.* This is deemed to have been ***Achieved*** in 2023, when the Housing for All target for that year of 13,130 was not met. While in 2024 the numbers fell further to 10,595.[41] Exacerbating this situation is the fact that the Housing for All strategy targets are widely acknowledged as being well below what is necessary to meet housing demand. Clinging on to discredited targets is not a credible strategy. There has to be a flexibility between different sectoral plans and an ability to respond to developments in another sector.

It should be recognised across the strategy , that while acknowledging the importance of access to social services in reducing poverty and exclusion, stand-alone targets cannot be evaluated in isolation. Consider **Commitment No.39** *Continue with the implementation of the DEIS Plan 2017 in order to improve educational outcomes for children from disadvantaged communities by providing additional supports and resources to schools in these areas*. Undoubtedly the Department of Education has provided much needed extra resources in this area, but the ability of schools to capitalise on this has been hampered by staff shortages with 2767 teacher shortages for 2024/2025 year, resulting in 724 unqualified individuals employed to cover absences and 59% of schools reallocating special education teachers to mainstream classes.[42] Clearly the housing crisis has impacted on teachers abilities to take up posts, undermining the outcome of an important commitment for addressing educational disadvantage.

How Can Marginalised Voices be Heard?

There is a particular irony in the fact that the most marginalised groups, are those that are excluded from the poverty statistics. On the basis that their numbers are, (for example) too small, Travellers and Roma, homeless people, migrants, ethnic minorities and disabled people are not calculated in the annual SILC data. This is a glaring anomaly. There has to be a targeted intervention directed towards all these groups if consistent poverty is to be eliminated, yet their particular disadvantage is not acknowledged in the official statistics. This anomaly has to be rectified as an important and necessary change if we are to really get to grips with tackling poverty in Ireland.

[39] https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/roadmap-for-social-inclusion-2020-2025-ambition-goals-commitments-fourth-report-card-j.pdf
[40] https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/roadmap-for-social-inclusion-mid-term-review-esri-technical-paper.pdf
[41] https://www.thejournal.ie/minister-says-local-authorities-need-to-step-up-as-government-misses-social-housing-target-6685168-Apr2025/
[42] https://www.into.ie/2024/10/21/another-year-of-crisis-in-recruitment-and-retention/

The new strategy cannot be a repeat of this process. EAPN Ireland and many voices from across civil society have highlighted these shortcomings throughout the implementation of the present strategy.

Oversight & Monitoring Implementation

On paper there is an impressive monitoring mechanism for the present strategy. The EAPN Ireland Director is one of 3 civil society representatives who are members of the Social Inclusion Roadmap Steering Group which meets biannually, to oversee the strategy. The other members represent each of the Government Departments which have a role in implementing elements of the Roadmap. The involvement of the Minister is a very important and welcome addition, which must be maintained to give the strategy the seriousness it needs, and the required weight for implementation. This group has the potential to be a powerful tool in identifying and addressing barriers to the implementation of the strategy, but this cannot happen unless it is used effectively and treated as much more than just a reporting space.

Every year the Department of Social Protection hosts a Social Inclusion Forum which is open to representatives across the community and voluntary sector, to engage with the Minister for Social Protection and departmental officials to discuss various themes from the Roadmap and assess its progress. As part of this process, EAPN Ireland along with Community Work Ireland run preparatory workshops around the country open to any interested individuals or organisations in advance of the Forum, with a focus on supporting the engagement of those with a direct experience of poverty and social exclusion. Attendees at these workshops often proceed to attend the Forum itself, but critically their input forms the basis of a report which is presented to the Forum, as the starting point for discussions at the event. This process is important and has an encouraging level of involvement, but it has to be improved. It is totally undermined by people feeling they are not being listened to, that they are given a platform to air their views but that their input is not subsequently taken on board. Insufficient Departmental staff attend the event and few have a formal role in engaging in discussions, missing out on a valuable opportunity to absorb at first hand the problems being experienced in homes and communities and working together collaboratively to overcome the barriers to implementing solutions, many of which are well known.

The Annual Progress Reports and Report Cards present a picture that is not matched by reality on the ground. Suggestions repeated time and again about what needs to be done, are not pursued. So, while the strategy includes the production of annual progress reports to cabinet, and a mid-term review of the plan, this has not translated into results in reducing consistent poverty as the strategy itself does not have the flexibility to change course, and is not measuring progress in terms of impact.

It is a good initiative to have a senior officials group across all government Departments to monitor the plan, and that there are poverty impact assessments, equality and gender proofing, and social impact assessments of budgets, but again, these have not been used effectively. The main lens through which success can be evaluated is in terms of the impact on the actual reduction of consistent poverty, an impact which sadly has not been the outcome of the present strategy.

Some Positive Steps

This is the backdrop to the new Roadmap. During its timeframe, some worthy steps were taken by government which had an impact. One off payments in response to the Covid 19 pandemic and the recent cost of living crisis undoubtedly succeeded in preventing more people ending up experiencing enforced deprivation. The percentage of people living in enforced deprivation decreased from 17.3% in 2023 to 15.7% in 2024.[43] However, there is great concern as to how the Government will address the continued increase in prices as they plan to end one off payments.

Initiatives such as the New Baby Grant introduced in December 2024, an extra payment of €280 to the first month of child benefit, has had a positive impact on raising infants to a minimum essential standard of living. The extension of the Early Childcare Education and Care has been important in addressing one of the key barriers to employment, the lack of childcare. This scheme provides 2 years free pre-school for 3 hours a day, for children aged 3 up to minimum schooling age. However as it is almost exclusively provided by the private sector, there are serious issues around the low enrolment levels outside the state supported hours, and phenomenal costs. The introduction of the Hot School Meals programme will extend to all 3200 primary schools this year, covering 550,000 children and a school books scheme was delivered.[44]

Important steps forward have been taken regarding benchmarking pension payments with a smoothed earnings index linking the pension rate to 34% of average earnings, and allows for variation in periods where inflation exceeds earnings growth. While a better benchmark should be considered, this is a step in the right direction. In fact the target of consistent poverty of 2% or less was achieved for older people over 65, reversing a recent trend, but not sufficiently back to pre-covid levels.[45]

What is to be Done?

All experience shows, that eliminating poverty can be done, but it requires more than economic growth! Specific policies aimed at ensuring income adequacy for those in work, and those reliant on social protection must be developed, along with access to public services and specific targeted measures for marginalised groups, as part of the creation of a more equal society.

To do this effectively, requires full engagement and collaboration with people experiencing poverty and their organisations in developing and implementing the new policy. It requires the eradication of discrimination for all, including based on disadvantaged socio-economic background which inhibits the ability of so many to participate fully at all levels of society.

[43] https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-silc/surveyonincomeandlivingconditionssilc2024
[44] https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-social-protection/publications/school-meals-scheme-your-questions-answered/
[45] https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-silc/surveyonincomeandlivingconditionssilc2024

We should take confidence from the fact that Ireland took significant steps forward towards the eradication of poverty in earlier Anti-Poverty Strategies. These can be the launching pad of a successful future strategy.

Back to the Future

It is worth restating the fundamental basis of the 1997 National Anti-Poverty Strategy: "Firstly, addressing poverty needs to be based on an understanding of the multidimensional nature of poverty. This means involving a wide range of policy areas covering the social and cultural as well as the economic dimensions of people's lives.. Secondly, addressing poverty involves tackling the deep-seated underlying structural inequalities that create and perpetuate it." [46]

To achieve this, they stated that responsibility for tackling poverty had to be built into the strategic objectives of all government departments, which had to set targets to ensure that their policies achieved a fairer distribution of resources and opportunities. They also identified key areas which needed special attention if there was to be a significant advancement on tackling poverty, such as educational disadvantage, unemployment, income adequacy, disadvantaged urban areas and rural poverty, indicating that addressing the first three would help in addressing the problems in the last two areas.

In many ways we need to go back to this approach in order to move forward. Important steps have been taken to deal with educational disadvantage, and the economy is almost at full employment, and yet one in ten of those in work experienced enforced deprivation in 2024, 5.4% of workers were at risk of poverty, and 1.7% in consistent poverty.[47]

Income Adequacy

We need to reinstate the importance of income adequacy in tackling poverty, a level of income below which nobody is expected to live. The minimum amount a person needs, changes depending on their circumstances. To achieve income adequacy these differences must be fully acknowledged and catered for. Income is only meaningful in the context of its purchasing power.

The MESL (Minimum Essential Standard of Living) is the most reliable standard which provides for an income that represents the purchasing power for the basic goods and services that meet a household's basic physical social and psychological needs and their ability to take part in society. The MESL is used by the Insolvency Service of Ireland to calculate a households reasonable living expenses.

Social Protection

[46] http://www.socialinclusion.ie/NationalAnti-PovertyStrategy-SharinginProgress1997.pdf.pdf
[47] https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-silc/surveyonincomeandlivingconditionssilc2024

The social protection system must be a vehicle to ensure the vindication of everyone's human right to live in dignity, rather than a mechanism for labour activation. Yet our present system is not linked to the cost of living! It is welcome that the necessity of benchmarking social welfare payments has been acknowledged with the introduction of benchmarking for pension payments. However, benchmarking against average wages will not ensure that people can live with dignity, as it is not linked to the cost of living. By annually updating the cost of over 2,000 essential goods and services, the MESL standard calculates the income needed for a broad range of different family types to afford a decent standard of living. It is therefore the most accurate and up-to-date measure of income adequacy for social welfare recipients. Benchmarking all working age payments in line with this standard, would radically and permanently transform consistent poverty levels.

Employment

Of course employment is often the most effective and persistent route to achieve income adequacy, but it is contingent on secure hours and decent pay, along with in-work supports where necessary. To meet the minimum income standard, in Ireland in 2025, a single person in private rented accommodation without housing support would have to be on a wage of €712.50 per week, or €19 per hour,[48] substantially above the minimum wage. The National Minimum Wage must be based on the Living Wage as recommended by the Living Wage Technical Group[49]

It must also be recognised that employment is not possible for everyone because of the structural barriers which exist for some of the most marginalised groups in our society. Groups such as Travellers & Roma, who experience widespread discrimination and bias, or people with disabilities, people with low skills, and single parents face multiple barriers in accessing the labour market. Targeted supports are also necessary to enable people to overcome these barriers, both in terms of employment and access to services to meet their particular needs. The cost of disability for example has been calculated by the ESRI in 2025 in a report commissioned by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, as ranging between €488 -€555 per week.[50]

All of these points need to be taken on board if we are to substantially address poverty levels in an ongoing, sustainable manner,

Recommendations:

- **Link social welfare payments to the cost of living**
- **Introduce benchmarking of social welfare payments against the MESL standard**
- **Move towards introducing a living wage based on the cost of living as calculated by the Living Wage Technical Group**
- **Targeted supports and measures for marginalised groups to assist them in overcoming multiple barriers to employment and income adequacy including immediately introducing substantial payments to cover the extra costs associated with disability.**

[48] https://www.budgeting.ie/publications/mesl-2025/
[49] https://www.livingwage.ie/documents/technical-document.html
[50] https://www.ihrec.ie/documents/adjusting-estimates-of-poverty-for-the-cost-of-disability/

Access to Affordable Public Services

Privatisation and the failure to develop essential public services in areas such as housing, healthcare, childcare, energy and transport is one of the key drivers of poverty in Ireland. It has resulted in uneven development and a massive cost burden to the state. This is the reason that housing costs in Ireland are over 112% of the EU average[51] and that the state pays over €537 million every year in Housing Assistance Payments,[52] often to companies and investment funds. Similarly no steps were taken to deal with the massive profiteering by energy companies, while the state paid €1.3billion in 2023 to offset rising household energy costs. [53] This makes no economic sense. We need a fundamental shift in our approach, ending the subsidisation of the private sector and reverting to state provision in all areas.

Housing

The lack of social and affordable housing has resulted in prohibitive housing costs everywhere in Ireland, affecting every part of the economy. A recent report by the ESRI examining child deprivation revealed a sharp rise in deprived children to 17% in 2023 compared to 12% in 2020. Significantly half of these were in households not deemed to be at risk of poverty as their income was above the poverty line, between 60% and 80% of median earnings.[54] The CSO Enforced Deprivation report 2024 also showed that almost 30% of households found housing costs a heavy financial burden.[55] The cost of housing is distorting the income levels which are necessary to enable people to achieve a minimum standard of living. Income must be adjusted to take account of housing costs, but the real solution is to address the adject failure of successive governments to deliver social and affordable housing.

Housing must be undertaken directly by the state, on state land, delegated to local authorities to provide at least 20% of the annual housing stock, as proposed by the Housing Commission[56]. Combined with rent controls and greater protection for tenants, this is the only way to deal with our housing crisis. This is particularly important for those on lower incomes for whom spending such a large proportion of their income on housing, means leaving little for other essentials. There needs to be a specific focus on housing units offering tenants at a differential rent as

[51] https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/interactive-publications/housing-2023
[52] https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/press-centre/press-releases/20241009-committee-of-public-accounts-pac-finds-spending-on-housing-schemes-do-not-provide-value-for-money-for-taxpayer-and-are-not-long-term-solutions-to-social-housing-needs/
[53] https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2023-07-25/2/
[54] https://www.esri.ie/news/new-esri-research-finds-more-children-experiencing-deprivation-despite-being-above-the
[55] https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-silced/surveyonincomeandlivingconditionssilcenforceddeprivation2024/financialburdens/
[56] https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-housing-local-government-and-heritage/publications/report-of-the-housing-commission/

opposed to market-based rent, particularly for those on low incomes and those requiring accessible housing.

Healthcare

The same process of the state paying massively over the odds to the private sector for essential services is evidenced in the health service. The latest Draft European Semester Spring Package raised concerns about the cost effectiveness of our healthcare system.[57] They highlight that Ireland spends 1.5% pp GDP on healthcare, compared to 0.4% the EU average. This might be argued as evidence of how much our state values healthcare but the recent ESRI report Barriers to Social Inclusion in Ireland – Change over Time & Space 2016-2022, reveals a sharp increase in poor health and disability, highlighting emerging risks, including the worsening health outcomes at the area level, particularly in already disadvantaged areas.[58] We are paying more, for less, again in part because of our subsidisation of the private sector. The full implementation of Sláintecare the creation of a one tier health system to reduce the dramatic health inequality.

Childcare

One of the key barriers to employment is the lack of access to affordable childcare, which has a greater impact on women, and is a serious contributor to the high levels of poverty among lone parents in particular. The extension of the Early Childhood Education & Care of 2 years free pre-school for 3 hours a day for children from age 3 to minimum schooling age, is welcome and has had an impact. But it is almost totally reliant on the private sector and comes at a phenomenal cost to the state, and to parents outside of those hours. A complete change of direction is required. Only a public system of early childhood education and care, guaranteeing a place for all children through legislation like our primary school system, can have the necessary impact.

Other Essentials

The lack of affordable, reliable public transport in all areas has resulted in exclusion, an extra burden on the rural community, and over-reliance on private transport, which is costly and damaging to the environment. Accessing essential public services is a pre-condition to participation in the green transition. Already many people are excluded and enduring energy poverty as a result of the global rise in energy prices. Renovation and renewable programmes must be made available to all households. To assist in these tasks the Just Transition Commission must be developed with an anti-poverty, pro-equality focus, to ensure that no worker or community is left behind.

[57] https://commission.europa.eu/business-economy-euro/european-semester/european-semester-timeline/european-semester-spring-package_en
[58] https://www.esri.ie/system/files/publications/RS212.pdf

All of these examples indicate the cost to society from our failure to deliver essential public services. They are one of the key reasons why income levels need to be higher in Ireland to meet the essentials for living a life with some element of dignity and inclusion. The longer we delay in changing direction, the greater the financial costs, and poor outcomes for citizens

Recommendations:

- **State provision of social & affordable housing, delegated to local authorities to build at least 20% of the annual housing stock**
- **Rent controls & improved protection for tenants, including differential, rather than market based rents**
- **Address barriers to housing for Travellers and those requiring accessible accommodation**
- **Hold a referendum to enshrine the right to housing in the Constitution, including a stand-alone amendment which includes a recognition of a directly enforceable right**
- **Make significant progress in the full implementation of Sláintecare**
- **Move towards a pubic system of Early Childhood Education & Care with a guaranteed place for all children**
- **Pilot free public transport & address extra transport costs for rural dwellers**
- **Develop the Just Transition Commission with an anti-poverty, pro-equality focus**

How Can It Be Done?

Delivering social inclusion and combatting poverty requires having strong autonomous community development organisations. It is these organisations which are rooted in the community that have to ability to enable every member of society to take part and live a dignified life. Without them, the safety valve for many disappears and the consequences affect everyone. It is well known that it was this sector which experienced a disproportionate cut in funding during the austerity years (2008-2015).[59] While there was some restoration of funding in the subsequent years it is nowhere near the pre-austerity levels and very far from what is necessary.

We recognise that considerable sums of money are spent on this sector, but much of it is spent on oversight and administration, curtailing the amounts that those on the ground have access to. Organisations find themselves caught in a quagmire of bureaucracy and compliance, undermining their ability to carry out their core functions, endlessly filling out forms to chase available funding, unable to plan long term.

Employment across the sector is very often part time and insecure. Funding and resources are not being targeted to re-establish vibrant community development in the areas of most need. There is a lack of serious engagement at grassroots level about what is happening in communities fuelling a deep seated alienation and hopelessness which is being exploited by

[59] https://comhlamh.org/blog/the-destruction-of-the-community-development-sector-in-ireland/

those determined to stir up division and racism. Society will pay a heavy price if steps are not taken to deal with this situation.

We need to start from the communities themselves, and empower them with their own voice. This requires the space for training and capacity building to overcome many of the barriers that marginalised groups and communities experience. Collaborative governance is often spoken about, but making it a reality requires commitment and funding. It requires the will to listen and take on board what is being said, rather than just giving people a platform to be heard and then ignored. It requires ongoing engagement and co-operation. We would particularly refer to the Community Platform's Proposals on Collaborative Governance as a good starting point.[60] If there was a commitment to its implementation then it would represent a radical transformation of the situation.

Can we Afford Not To?

Poverty is destroying lives and communities and costing the state billions every year.[61] The crippling inequality in Ireland must be addressed. It is scandalous that a worker earning under €44,000 per annum pays tax at 20%, while corporations are levied at 12.5% with wholesale opportunity for tax avoidance.

Ireland's tax base has long been problematic, with an over-reliance on multi-nationals many of whom locate their headquarters in Ireland to benefit from extremely low levels of corporation tax, and to avoid paying tax at home. The loopholes must be closed and corporation tax raised to at least the same rate as that levied on workers. The recent Draft European Semester Spring Package has again highlighted the need for a broadening of the tax base.[62] We support this call. However, the only way such a move will have the desired affect is if it progressive and redistributive.

Those who earn more, should pay more, and the extra resources collected, targeted to develop public services. There is enormous untaxed wealth in Ireland from which there are significant options to raise revenue. In 2024 Ireland had 1,600 people who were worth more than €20 million according to the Revenue Commissioners. While the number of billionaires jumped by 2 to 11. Their combined wealth increased that year by €13 billion, to €50 billion, that is the equivalent of €35.6 million a day as indicated in the Oxfam Ireland Report 2025.[63] They have wealth of almost twice the annual budget of the Department of Social Protection.[64]

A progressive wealth tax is long overdue. Starting at 1% for individuals with wealth of over €3 million, and graduated as the wealth gets higher would be an important start. Other measures such as 100% taxation on rezoning profits, overcoming the loopholes in the

[60] https://communityplatform.ie/publication/towards-a-progressive-model-of-collaborative-governance-a-community-platform-discussion-paper/
[61] https://www.svp.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/SVP-Report_Final.pdf
[62] https://commission.europa.eu/business-economy-euro/european-semester/european-semester-timeline/european-semester-spring-package_en
[63] https://www.oxfamireland.org/press/billionaire-wealth-surges-by-2-trillion-in-2024-three-times-faster-than-the-year-before-irish
[64] https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/press-office/press-releases/2024/pr-042524-annual-report.aspx

domicile tax, and supporting the need for a Financial Transactions Tax, should be targeted to raise the resources needed. These resources must be ringfenced for redistributive purposes, and developing public services which in turn save money by ending the massive subsidisation of the private sector.

Conclusion

We have the opportunity to make 2026 a decisive year for the development of a Social Europe, with significant strides forward in the eradication of poverty. This will not happen automatically. It requires an effective Anti-poverty strategy championed by a whole of government, whole of society commitment to seeing the fight against poverty as a campaign for justice, and for the vindication of economic and social rights, as the core of all human rights. Its achievement will not just benefit those lives currently blighted by marginalisation and exclusion, but will transform society for all. It is a goal worth placing centre stage. We have the resources and the solutions - Poverty can and must be eliminated!