



European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) Ireland

Submission to Budget 2019

EAPN Ireland's Proposals in summary

The European Anti-Poverty Network Ireland is made up of 200 local and national organisations representing and working with people experiencing poverty. EAPN Ireland welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the budget process for 2019. We support the commitments made in the Programme for Partnership Government “*to a more inclusive prosperity that uses economic growth to create a more just and fair society*” and believe the budget plays a vital part in ensuring the Government upholds their commitment to social justice.

Below are the areas and measures we are calling on the Government to address and undertake in budget 2019.

Taxation and Investment

1. Broaden the tax base in a progressive manner closer to the EU average to ensure the revenue stream necessary to fund the provision of adequate quality services and social protection.
2. Application of the “Polluter pays” principal helps protect the environment but also raises revenue from corporations who may be profiting at the expense of the environment.
3. Ensure that those furthest away from poverty and who benefit the most contribute the highest level of tax this includes the corporate sector based in Ireland.

Poverty and Equality Proofing

4. Expand the learning from Gender Budgeting to the wider equality goals. This includes equality under the grounds covered by Irish equality legislation and to socio-economic status.
5. Expanding poverty impact assessments outside of budget time, for example SIA social impact assessment expansion- to expand social impact assessments to specifically measure the poverty impacts/ alleviation of poverty.

Ensuring Adequate Social Welfare for All

6. Benchmark social welfare payments at a level which lifts people above the poverty line and provides them with a Minimum Essential Standard of Living.
7. Raise the base rate *Qualified Child Increase* (QCI) from €31.80 to €35.00 per week for one-parent families most at risk of poverty and raise the QCI for children over the age of 12 to €37.80 per week, in recognition of the higher costs faced by families with older children.
8. Restoration of payments to adult rates for under 26s on Jobseekers allowance over next three budgets.

Welfare to Decent Work

9. The National Minimum Wage needs to be incrementally increased towards Living Wage level agreed by the Living Wage Technical Group. This was €11.70 per hour in 2017.
10. Change the criteria for access to Jobseekers payments from one based on days to one based on hours.
11. Implement the proposals in the report to Make Work Pay for People with Disabilities.
12. Allow lone parents in employment whose children are aged between 7 and 14 to receive both the Jobseekers Transition Payment and Working Family Payment.
13. Increase the earning disregard for the One Parent Family Payment (OFP)/ Jobseekers Transition Payment (JST) to €161 per week to allow lone-parents to take up and increase working hours.
14. Address the anomaly by which lone parents in receipt of Rent Supplement and OFP/JST, who want to take up education or training, are not eligible for SUSI maintenance.

Housing

15. Move towards fully resuming public housing programme, reducing reliance on private sector, ensuring adequate resources to deliver on the social and affordable housing as per Rebuilding Ireland and addressing blockages to this delivery
16. Increase resources to PRTB to further protect tenants.
17. Increase the Housing Assistant Payment to reflect the markets rents.
18. Revisit current proposals for vacant site levy of 7% in light of increasing property prices.
19. Traveller independent Accommodation agency to support the delivery of Traveller accommodation.

Asylum seekers

20. Increase the level of the Direct Provision Allowance for those asylum seekers who are not in work to €38.80 as recommended by Working Group on the Protection Process.
21. Grant Child Benefit to all children irrespective of the status of the parents.

Disability related payment

20. Develop a measure of minimum adequate income that is responsive to the extra costs associated with living with a disability, and ensure that people with disabilities have supports that ensure they are not living in poverty and can have the Essential Minimum Standard of Living.

Part 1: Context

The 2019 Budget provides an opportunity for the Irish Government to reaffirm and realise its commitment to a range of anti-poverty and social inclusion goals and strategies which have been officially signed up to by the Government.

Including:

- Europe 2020 Strategy
- UN Sustainable Development Goals
- European Pillar for Social Rights

The Budget process plays a significant role in reiterating the government commitment towards reducing consistent poverty to 2% or less by 2020. We believe it is vital that the government maintains this target in line with its commitment to ensure that the benefits of our recovering economy are reaped by all sections of society.

The upcoming new National Action Plan for Social Inclusion further provides an important opportunity for the government to implement a range of anti-poverty measures around public services, infrastructure, adequate and accessible social welfare supports, and quality secure employment with a liveable wage. We believe the upcoming plan needs to be adequately resourced with the adequate funding necessary for its implementation.

The commitments made by the government in its programme for Government cannot be realised unless the annual budgetary process shows an ongoing commitment to implementing socially progressive measures that lift people out of poverty, enabling them to have the Minimum Essential Standard of Living.

Poverty in Ireland in 2018

Inequality is the root cause of poverty and social exclusion, impacting not just the lowest earners but permeating throughout society.

Though the current narrative around Ireland is of a country emerging from economic crisis with a growing economy and reduced unemployment, statistics show that in 2016,ⁱⁱ 8.3% of the population (around 394,900 people) was in consistent poverty because they were both at-risk of poverty and experienced material deprivation. This is double the level in 2008 when the financial crisis hit. This shows us that many of the poorest in Ireland continue to feel the impacts of austerity.

In 2016 almost 16.5% of the population, or more than 785,000 people, were at risk of poverty (or relatively poor) because their disposable income was below the poverty line of 60% of the middle (median) income of all people in the country. This had grown from 14.4% in 2008.

The CSO Survey of Income and Living Conditions 2016 revealed that:

- Single parent households, people not at work through illness or disability, unemployed people and people renting at below the market rate or rent free have the highest poverty levels.
- Despite a small decrease in the level of the overall population below the poverty line between 2014 and 2016, around four in ten households headed by someone who is unemployed, not at work due to

an illness or a disability and households with one adult and children were at-risk of poverty and one quarter of them were in consistent poverty.

20% of the population, including half of those with incomes below the poverty line, are experiencing deprivation, (13.8% in 2008). This is 25.2% for children, 42.6% for those who are unemployed and 50.1% for single adult households with children.

It must also be recognised that while the overall unemployment rate has decreased in recent years, almost 1 in 4 of those experiencing material deprivation is in employment and 1 in 10 of those are living in consistent poverty.

We must note that while statistics are very important indicator regarding poverty levels in Ireland there are other groups, such as travellers, homeless people and migrants (including asylum seekers) who experience high levels of poverty but are not captured by official statistics. We must also recognise that research has shown ongoing unemployment to be more common for women, older adults, and those with lower levels of education. Therefore we see that whilst the government policy of targeting households distant from the job market is an important part of addressing the issue of poverty in Ireland, it is not the sole solution. A multi-faceted, holistic, and nuanced approach must be adopted in order to address on the ongoing root causes of social exclusion.

The impact of rising rents, lack of housing supply, unaffordable child care, access to relevant social supports and medical care, as well as the specific form poverty takes depending on location i.e. urban poverty versus poverty in remote locations, all contribute to trapping people into a cycle of poverty. We believe that the link between poverty and adequate investment in public services has not been sufficiently addressed by the Irish government.

Ireland's contribution to the Europe 2020 poverty target is to reduce by a minimum of 200,000 the population in combined poverty (either at-risk-of poverty or basic deprivation). The European Commission's 2018 Country Reportⁱⁱⁱ for Ireland concludes that achieving the Europe 2020 poverty target 'remains ambitious' for Ireland.

In order for these targets to be achieved the Irish Government must align its policies and budget spending with the range of commitments it has made to eradicate poverty and promote social inclusion.

Part 2: Budget proposals

This submission includes proposals on the following areas:

1. Taxation and investment
2. Poverty and Equality Impact Assessment
3. Ensuring adequate social welfare for all
4. Welfare to decent work
5. Housing
6. Asylum seekers
7. Disability related payment

1. Taxation and Investment

Budget 2019 must commit to broadening the tax base in order to protect tax revenue from the economic fluctuations associated with over reliance on steams such as transaction based taxation. Any change to the taxation system must be socially progressive and provide additional resources to invest in adequate social welfare supports, public services and infrastructure.

Ireland's total general government revenue of 24.4% of GDP is the lowest in the EU. These ties in with Ireland having the lowest percentage of total government expenditure at 27.1% in comparison to the EU average of 46.3%.^{iv} There is currently no indication of change in Irish Government policy regarding our taxation system despite the increasing evidence of the need for the contrary. The Departments of Finance Fiscal and Economic Outlook 2018 projects total revenue and expenditure to be 25.9 % and 26 % respectively in 2019.

We welcome the National Development Plan 2018-2027 and Project Ireland 2040, it is essential that resources are provided to implement them, beginning with budget 2019. Public expenditure has been greatly restricted in the past decade. It is clear there is a need to gradually increase the Irish tax revenue over the next decade in order to fund the countries essential services such as health care, housing, education, infrastructure and all related social supports. The fractures in our public investment can be seen in increased numbers living in consistent poverty and the homelessness and housing crisis and underfunded educations system and crisis level HSE waiting lists. Evidence for the need for increased revenue from taxation can also be found in Irelands aging demographics and the lack of adequate resources to address the needs of an increasing older population.

The 2018 European Semester Country Report for Ireland once again highlights the need for Ireland to broaden the tax base. Any changes to Irelands taxation system, must focus on gradually bringing Ireland closer to the average EU level of GDP income and expenditure, it is important that the broadening of the tax base is done in a manner that will have the greatest social economic and environmental benefits, removing any tax expenditures that provide little social or environmental benefits to Ireland.

1. Broaden the tax base in a progressive manner closer to the EU average to ensure the revenue stream necessary to fund the provision of adequate quality services and social protection.
2. Application of the “Polluter pays” principal helps protect the environment but also raises revenue from corporations who may be profiting at the expense of the environment.
3. Ensure that those furthest away from poverty and who benefit the most contribute the highest level of tax this includes the corporate sector based in Ireland.

2. Poverty Impact Assessment and Equality Proofing

The application of poverty proofing/impact assessment at design stage has been part of Irish policy since 1997. While this is an important development with great potential we believe this process has lacked effective implementation and transparency. The implementation of poverty impact assessment therefore needs to be strengthened to make it a more effective tool for preventing the negative impact of policy and supporting the introduction of policy which reduces poverty and its causes. EAPN Ireland would like to reiterate the importance of fully assessing the poverty impact of budget measures, including for 2019.

Following a commitment in the Programme for Government to poverty and equality proofing the Government published a report on Equality Proofing as part of Budget 2018. This report highlighted the need for gender budgeting, stating that without such a process the budget was not a gender neutral process but was in fact gender blind. The report outlined the methodology the Government will take in relation to implementing the commitment to equality budgeting. We welcome the introduction of equality budgeting, which has begun with a focus on gender budgeting and developing learning from this approach. We welcome a commitment to expanding equality to other grounds, including to socio-economic status, which relates directly to poverty and needs to be a key part in any evolving equality budgeting process. As learning and capacity grows, ask that the process of equality budgeting be expanded as soon as possible to include budgeting based on socio-economic status.

4. Expand the learning from Gender Budgeting to the wider equality goals. This includes equality under the grounds covered by Irish equality legislation and to socio-economic status.
5. Expanding poverty impact assessments outside of budget time, for example SIA social impact assessment expansion- to expand social impact assessments to specifically measure the poverty impacts/ alleviation of poverty.

3. Adequate Social Welfare for All

EAPN Ireland believes that it is vital that everyone in Ireland has an adequate and accessible and minimum income that lifts them above the 60% poverty line and enables them to meet the Minimum Essential Standard of Living.^v EAPN Ireland supports and participates in the ongoing European Minimum Income Network Europe wide campaign for adequate and accessible minimum income schemes and social welfare supports for all who need them.

Research shows that social welfare plays an important part in preventing people from falling into destitution and lifting people out of poverty. In 2016 social transfers reduced at-risk of poverty from 44.9% to 16.3%.^{vi} However current rates of social welfare are not sufficient to lift people out of poverty and provide the Minimum Essential Standard of Living.

The below table provides an insight into the gap between what specific social welfare rates versus the amount required to live above the poverty line, based on updated 2018 figures from the Vincentian Partnership.^{vii}

Social Welfare Rates and Minimum Essential Standard of Living 2018

Payment	Rate	MESL	Gap
Jobseekers Allowance, Disability Allowance, and One Parent Family Payment	€198.00	€245.38	-€47.38
Jobseekers Allowance age 18-24	€107.70	€245.38	-€137.68
Jobseekers Allowance age 25	€152.80	€245.38	-€92.58
Old Age Pension (Non-contributory) Living Alone Rural	€255.18	€310.89	-€55.71
Old Age Pension (Non-contributory) Couple Urban	€417.08	€310.90	€106.80

The gap between income and need means those receiving social welfare are often caught in a cycle of poverty which hinders the opportunity for social inclusion, meeting basic needs, accessing the jobs markets, or living their lives in dignity. The 2018 figures reveal that young people on Jobseekers Allowance still have an extensive gap between income and the Minimum Essential Standard of Living. We also see for an older age pensioner living alone in a rural area, there is a deep inadequacy caused by the additional costs of running a car.

Minimum incomes schemes and social welfare supports are particularly important for families and those with children. The below table provides an example of some of the financial gaps for families with children on welfare in urban and rural areas.

Minimum Essential Standard of Living 2018

Family Type	Urban Family			Rural Family		
	Need	Actual	Gap	Need	Actual	Gap
Two parents with 2 children, primary and second level	€539.13	€464.13.	-74.30	€591.33	€464.83	€-126.50
One Parent with 2 children primary and second level	€425.30	€345.11	-80.19	€498.19	€354.11	€-153.08

The Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice research shows us that while progress has been made and more family types can meet MESL in 2018, there is still a long way to go. Social welfare supports do not provide a Minimum Essential Standard of Living for the majority family types, with particular expenses existing for those in rural areas. The research also shows that older children are more likely to live in poverty than younger children, incurring 63% more cost than those of primary school age.^{viii} Older children, from the age of 12, are more likely to be living in consistent poverty.

It has been consistently shown that the need for adequate and accessible social welfare supports stem from the cost of living and personal circumstances surrounding those most in need in society. EAPN Ireland is calling for the benchmarking of social welfare supports at a level that provides adequacy and a restoration to pre-cut levels, as a starting point.

Jobseekers Allowance for U26s

Budget 2018 saw a minimal increase for those under 26 years on Jobseekers Allowance. However those under 26 years on lower payments face particular challenges in meeting their cost of living, often depending on other family members to make ends meet. Despite slight increases over consecutive budgets we believe the imposition of lower rates on young jobseekers is contrary to the provisions of Article 40.1 of the Irish Constitution^{ix} which dictates that all citizens should be treated equally and must be addressed. Under 26s social welfare rates impact the ability of this group to obtain a minimum essential standard of living.

The impact of these reduced payments is confirmed by the statistics on the rate of consistent poverty among young people aged 15-24^x In 2014 42% of young people aged 16-24 in Ireland were at risk of poverty or social exclusion compared to an EU average of 31.6% in the EU 28 and the third highest after Greece and Romania. The consistent poverty rate for young people aged 15-24 years in 2015 was 15.6%, which is almost double the overall rate of 8.7% and the highest of all age cohorts.^{xi}

In order to address the unfair discrimination against younger people and move toward addressing the high level of consistent poverty for this age group, EAPN Ireland is calling for the full restoration of payments to adult rates for under 26s on Jobseeker allowance over the next three budgets.

6. Benchmark social welfare payments at a level which lifts people above the poverty line and provides them with a Minimum Essential Standard of Living.

7. Raise the base rate *Qualified Child Increase (QCI)* from €31.80 to €35.00 per week for one-parent families most at risk of poverty and raise the QCI for children over the age of 12 to €37.80 per week, in recognition of the higher costs faced by families with older children.

8. Restoration of payments to adult rates for under 26s on Jobseeker allowance over the next three budgets.

4. Welfare to Decent Work

In-work poverty and ensuring the smooth transition from welfare supports to decent work continues to be a key concern for EAPN Ireland members.

Ensuring adequacy of the national minimum wage and agreeing wage levels under Joint Labour Committee agreements are essential baselines in terms of decent pay. The National Minimum Wage should be increased to a living wage which in 2016 was calculated at €11.70 per hour

While it is important that workers have an adequate hourly rate of pay it is critical that they can provide themselves, and their families if they have them, with a secure, regular and adequate weekly income. This involves addressing the issue of decent work in a holistic manner.

EAPN Ireland has concerns around precarious work practices, which undermine employee rights, job security and make life choices such as buying a house or having children increasingly difficult in an already challenging economic environment. The Government “Action Plan for Jobs 2019” should provide a focus for and response to issues around in work poverty and precarious work practices.

In-work welfare supports

The primary source of an adequate wage should be the employer. However, in the absence of adequate take home pay many low paid workers depend on social welfare supports to supplement their income. It is therefore essential that these welfare supports are accessible and adequate to bridge the gap for workers and their families.

Currently those working less than four days per working week can qualify for Jobseekers Benefit or Jobseekers’ Allowance if they are actively seeking work and meet the conditions for these supports. However, because of the design of these supports a large number of very low paid workers do not receive them.

Part time workers can only qualify for jobseekers’ payments (Jobseekers Benefit and Jobseekers’ Allowance) if their hours are worked within three days or less a week. Many low paid part-time workers, even if working only a small number of hours, have their hours spread over more than three days. This creates hardship and poverty traps.

Making work pay for people with disabilities

The 2018 European Semester Country Report for Ireland highlights that Ireland has one of the lowest rates of employment in the EU for people with disabilities (29.1 % vs EU 47.4%)^{xii}.

The Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities must be implemented alongside effective measures for making work pay for people with disabilities. People with disabilities do incur extra costs and these require special measures to guarantee an adequate income. The recommendations from the report to Make Work Pay for People with Disabilities are therefore most welcome and need to be implemented.

Anomalies in schemes such as the Partial Capacity Benefit must also be addressed and the availability of the Wage Subsidy Scheme and Job Retention Grant must be communicated more effectively to ensure better take up of supports.

Making work pay for lone-parents

Lone parent families have a consistent poverty rate of 24.6%, while 40.2% are at risk of poverty. Census 2016 shows that there are 356,203 children living in one parent families.

Recent reforms to the One Parent Family Payment have exacerbated the prevalence of poverty experienced by lone parents. These include the abolition of features that enabled lone parents to take up part time work and education. A review of the reforms published in 2017 around the One Parent Family Parent indicated that despite a slight increase in full-time employment, 50% of lone-parents were worse off financially.^{xiii}

Those on the Jobseeker Transitional (JST) payment should be seen as a distinct group with a specific set of needs. The time spent on JST is a unique opportunity to invest in a package of supports and services which ensure that parents have the best chance of transition into the labour market. The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection can offer JST recipients flexibilities in acknowledgment of these needs and/or widen access to JST for other lone parents who are currently excluded. Those lone parents whose youngest child is between 7 and 14 years cannot retain the JST if they are in work. This poses challenges for many lone parents, many of whom still incur childcare and after school care costs.

9. The National Minimum Wage needs to be incrementally increased towards Living Wage level agreed by the Living Wage Technical Group. This was €11.70 per hour in 2017.

10. Change the criteria for access to Jobseekers payments from one based on days to one based on hours

11. Implement the proposals in the report to Make Work Pay for People with Disabilities.

12. Allow lone parents in employment whose children are aged between 7 and 14 to receive both the Jobseekers Transition Payment and Working Family Payment.

13. Increase the earning disregard for the One Parent Family Payment (OFP)/ Jobseekers Transition Payment (JST) to €161 per week to allow lone-parents to take up and increase working hours.

14. Address the anomaly by which lone parents in receipt of Rent Supplement and OFP/JST, who want to take up education or training, are not eligible for SUSI maintenance.

5. Housing

The ongoing housing crisis sees house prices 50% higher than in 2013 and rents at an all-time high with an increase in Dublin of 30% since 2008. Chronic pressure in urban centres and the undersupply of housing units has forced house and rental prices to unprecedented levels.

The Rebuilding Ireland strategy is in place and includes a plan for building social housing (as well as looking at affordable housing) and the resources allocated in the National Development Plan are meant to achieve this. Despite the increase in the targets for building social houses in the past year there is still an over reliance on the private rental market. With 85,799 people assessed as being in housing need, (with the majority of those qualifying for housing support being unemployed)^{xiv} it is clear that remaining obstacles and blockages to housing construction need to be fully addressed. We recognise the difficulties in providing specialised housing in the current housing market and call for a designated response for those who require specific housing needs, with 1,472 households with a specific need for traveller accommodation; we believe there is a need for a Traveller Independent Accommodation Agency.

We also note the incentives to reduce land hoarding and mitigate speculation such as the current vacant site levy, maybe be insufficient. With the vacant site levy due for implementation in 2019 at a rate of 7%, we believe this rate should be revisited in the context of inflation within the current property market to ensure it is fit for purpose.

EAPN Ireland is also calling on practical measures to protect tenants and those in needs from the volatility of the housing and rental market in Ireland, this includes increased resources for the Residential Tenancies Board, and lifting the Housing Assistance Payment to market rents to minimise the negative impacts of the volatile property markets on those most in need.

15. Move towards fully resuming public housing programme reducing reliance on private sector, ensuring adequate resources to deliver on the social and affordable housing as per Rebuilding Ireland and addressing blockages to this delivery

16. Increase resources to PRTB to further protect tenants

17. Increase the Housing Assistant Payment to reflect the markets rents.

19. Revisit current proposals for a vacant site levy of 7% in light of increasing property prices.

20. Traveller independent Accommodation agency to support the delivery of Traveller accommodation.

6. Asylum Seekers

EAPN Ireland welcomes the move to allow people seeking asylum to access the labour market, without restrictions around occupation or an application fee.

We also welcome the Irish Governments opt in to the EU (Recast) Reception Conditions Directive which will bring Ireland line with EU minimum standards for reception centres for asylum seekers.

We query why the Government has restricted access to the labour market to people who have waited more than 9 months for a first instance decision from the International Protection Office, meaning this scheme excludes who have already received such a decision, have an outstanding appeal or have received a deportation order, are not eligible to work. We also request that given the high costs of living and difficulties accessing suitable accommodation that the Direct provision allowance is not reduced or withdrawn from those eligible for work, to provide them with the time to build financial resources in order to meet their basic needs.

The level of the allowance is still an ongoing issue as at €21.60 per week is it nowhere near adequate to meet the most basic needs. We also call for Child Benefit to be granted to all children irrespective of the status of parents.

21. Increase the level of the Direct Provision Allowance for those asylum seekers who are not in work to €38.80 as recommended by Working Group on the Protection Process

22. Grant Child Benefit to all children irrespective of the status of the parents

7. Disability Related Payment

People with disabilities are one of the groups most likely to be living in jobless households, and to be at risk of consistent poverty. They have extra costs related to their disability, such as heating, clothing, aids and appliance costs and medical costs, and for this reason their income is comparatively less compared to other groups in receipt of income supports. They also experience the double hit, when cuts are implemented in mainstream services, as well as disability specific services. It has been estimated that the long-run cost of disability can be about one third of an average weekly income.

23. Develop a measure of minimum adequate income that is responsive to the extra costs associated with living with a disability, and ensure that people with disabilities are granted an income that allows them to live with dignity.

EAPN Ireland Policy Group

Established in 1990, the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) Ireland is a network of groups and individuals working against poverty. It is the Irish national network of the European Anti-Poverty Network ([EAPN Europe](#)), which has two decades of experience in lobbying for progressive social change at European level.

EAPN Ireland supports a network of over two hundred local, regional and national organisations and individuals' committed to tackling poverty through a range of actions including community development, policy analysis and lobbying, campaigning and participation. EAPN Ireland aims to build the capacity of its membership to engage with national and European policy making through training, information dissemination, collective action and networking.

EAPN Ireland has a Policy Group of its members. This group brings together interested EAPN Ireland members to coordinate our efforts in the fight against poverty and to connect this to EU policy development and their implementation in Ireland, including the Europe 2020 strategy. It is made up of representatives of the following organisations:

- Age Action Ireland
- Congress Centres Network
- Disability Federation of Ireland
- EAPN Ireland
- Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed
- Irish Traveller Movement
- Migrant Rights Centre Ireland
- National Adult Literacy Agency
- National Youth Council of Ireland
- National Women's Council of Ireland
- One Family
- Simon Communities of Ireland
- SIPTU.

For information, please contact Irene Byrne, irene@eapn.ie

EAPN Ireland: 100 North King Street, Smithfield, Dublin 7. Tel:01-8745737

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