

End poverty, support human rights, dignity, social inclusion



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## EAPN Ireland Manifesto for Election 2020

As part of our manifesto for Election 2020, we are asking for the following:

- Implementation of the Roadmap to Social Inclusion and introduction of a Poverty Reduction Act
- Benchmarking social welfare to adequacy
- Access to adequate wages and decent work
- Inclusion of socio-economic status as grounds for discrimination
- Investment in Public Services
- Funding for autonomous Community Development organisations

### Welcome to the European Anti-Poverty Network Ireland manifesto for the general election 2020.

EAPN Ireland believes poverty is a fundamental breach of human rights. Within this manifesto, EAPN Ireland focuses on 6 specific areas, which we advocate are an essential part of forming a programme for government in order to address the crisis of poverty that Ireland is currently experiencing.

Despite persistent talk of Ireland's economic growth, statistics reveal to us that Ireland has more people at-risk-of-poverty now than in 2008 pre-recession. We believe Ireland is in the midst of a poverty crisis, which particularly impacts on the most marginalised groups and communities within society and manifests itself through inadequate incomes for those in and out of work -in tandem with rising living costs, as well as serious deficits in services, in particular an unprecedented housing and homeless crisis.

The poverty crisis is the result of serious structural inequalities and we believe that an integrated response to addressing poverty is essential. This must recognise the anti-poverty commitments the Irish Government has signed up to, including the national target for poverty reduction, the European Pillar of Social Rights, and the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The Government formed post-election 2020 must recognise that economic, social, and environmental policies inevitably impact upon each other and therefore must be consistent and operate in support of and in tandem with one another other. We believe poverty and equality impact assessments must be effective, with a focus on reducing poverty and social exclusion for all, leaving no-one behind.

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We also believe, as a basis of good Government, that effective policy to address poverty and inequality cannot be achieved without the meaningful participation of those groups and communities which experience it.

Finally, we believe that all candidates seeking election and political parties must reject language and policies that create division and lead to exclusion, we ask that they promote values of community, decency, participation, and respect for all in society.

Our election manifesto outlines 6 key priorities for the next Government to adopt if we are to achieve a more equal and inclusive society, free of poverty:

## **1. Implementation of the Roadmap for Social Inclusion and the introduction of a Poverty Reduction Act.**

**We are calling for the implementation of the Roadmap to Social Inclusion involving an inter-departmental Government approach to poverty reduction.** An anti-poverty strategy for Ireland must address the structural causes of poverty and its impact upon specific groups and communities within society. The recent publication of the Government Strategy “Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025” contains the current Government’s aims and commitments for ensuring a socially inclusive society up to 2025. Given the current poverty crisis the Programme for the next Government must explicitly commit to honouring its national and international commitments for ending poverty, and put in place the resources necessary to implement the new Roadmap. Within this a commitment must be given to the mid-term review of the Strategy in 2022, with a view to addressing existing weaknesses in the Strategy and its implementation.

**EAPN Ireland is also calling on the Government to introduce a Poverty Reduction Act.** This would place on a statutory basis the aims for the reduction and eradication of poverty in Ireland, based upon the national and international anti-poverty commitments Ireland has signed up to, such as the Sustainable Development Goals and the European Pillar of Social Rights. This would involve setting long-term and intermediate targets on a defined set of poverty measures, as well as the development of a delivery plan in order to measure progress regarding the implementation of anti-poverty measures.

## **2. Benchmarking social welfare to adequacy**

**We are calling for the benchmarking of social welfare to a level that is adequate to lift people above the poverty line and provide them with a Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL).** The Minimum Essential Standard of Living represents the standard below which nobody should have to live. Based upon the rigorous research conducted by the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice, MESL is updated on an annual basis to reflect real changes in the cost of living, including the goods and services which everyone needs. It is currently utilised by the Insolvency Service of Ireland in order to establish reasonable living expenses for service users. We view benchmarking social welfare a vital part of ensuring low income households have an adequate income to live with dignity.

### **3. Access to adequate wages and decent work**

**We are calling for a commitment to decent work and adequate wages and specifically for the National Minimum Wage to be set at the level of the Living Wage.** In 2019 “The living Wage” in Ireland was €12.30 per hour, as agreed by the Living Wage Technical Group. This is the rate necessary for a single person working full-time to have an adequate income in order to afford a socially acceptable standard of living.

We are calling for the publication of the upcoming Pathways to Work Strategy for the period 2020-2024, which should include a holistic and integrated approach, along with tailored supports, for those distant from the labour market. This includes groups such as long term unemployed, young people, lone parents, older people, people with literacy needs, people with illness/disability, a history of addiction or time in prison, migrant communities and members of the Roma and Traveller communities. The upcoming Pathways to Work Strategy for the period 2020-2024 must have a wider focus than activation and should spell out how public employment services, employment, education and training policies will deliver an inclusive labour market. The provision of enabling local supports and services should be non-profit and give priority to adequate income (whether in or out of work), access to quality services (such as employment services), housing, care, transport, training, and education, and access to decent employment. We believe that adequate income and secure employment is significantly more representative of economic and social progress, than the basic measurement of employment and unemployment, which does not necessarily capture everyone distanced from the labour market.

### **4. Inclusion of socio-economic status as grounds for discrimination**

**We are calling for the inclusion of socio-economic status as a ground for discrimination within Irish equality legislation.** This is long overdue and impacting on many people in Irish society resulting in a denial of their basic rights. This ground will ensure that those who have experienced discrimination, due to social or economic disadvantage resulting from poverty, housing status, address income level or source, and family background, will have necessary redress under equality legislation. EAPN Ireland notes the significant move in European countries towards extending the mandate of equality bodies to cover socio-economic status grounds. An overview of equality legislation revealed that in 20 out of 35 countries, as represented in a European Commission report, provides protection against discrimination on a ground related to socio-economic status. EAPN Ireland hopes that the advancement of the 2019 research project contracted by the Department of Justice and Equality (DJE) “to create a more precise definition of any potential equality ground” will also help to ensure forward momentum on the issue of socio economic discrimination.

### **5. Investment in Public Services**

**We are calling for investment in essential public services such as housing, health care, childcare and lifelong learning, is fundamental to ensuring Ireland honours its anti-poverty commitments.** The provision of affordable public services ensures that households require less income in order to access the necessary supports and services they require.

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- We believe quality and affordable childcare is a critical element for many women who wish to enter, re-enter or stay in the work force, as well as ensuring access to early year's education and care for all children. We also believe that Child Maintenance should be a direct untaxed and non-means-tested payment for children, as with Child Benefit, to support children out of poverty. Measures which helps to contribute to a reduction in child poverty includes investment in the establishment of an independent Child Maintenance Service in order to help reduce child poverty, reduce conflict and abuse within families, and support shared parenting.
- Literacy is a barometer of equality and can help to change lives – individually, in families and in our society. We must invest in lifelong learning and in particular adult literacy, numeracy and digital skills.
- Prioritising a publicly funded health care service, over a two-tiered service provision, will reduce waiting lists and ensure that access to health services is treated as a human right and not solely on the basis of household income levels. We believe the full implementation of “Sláintecare” and addressing health inequality is a core part of achieving an effective health service provision in Ireland.
- Ireland is currently in the midst of a housing and homelessness crisis, including an unprecedented crisis in childhood homelessness. This crisis cannot remain at the mercy of private sector provision and a speculative housing market. For an adequate response to the housing need in Ireland we need to invest in direct build of social and affordable housing provision via Local Authorities and Approved Housing Bodies for low income families and special needs households

We recognise that in order to fund essential public services, the Irish Government must seek to broaden the country's tax base, and progressively increase tax levels closer to the EU average.

### 6. Funding for autonomous Community Development organisations

**We are calling for calling for a dedicated programme to fund autonomous community development organisations.** This is in line with the aims of the recently published “Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities, a five-year strategy for the community and voluntary sector 2019-2024.” Community Development organisations play a crucial role in ensuring that marginalised communities have a say in decisions and policies that impact on their lives. This is crucial to good governance and the successful implementation of an anti-poverty strategy. The Community Development sector was decimated by funding cuts and changes to programmes during the economic crisis, including the impact of the closure of the Community Development Programme, with disadvantaged communities bearing the greatest burden on a national basis. Therefore, adequate resourcing is essential to enable autonomous community development, and community led, organisations to represent their communities at both local and national level.