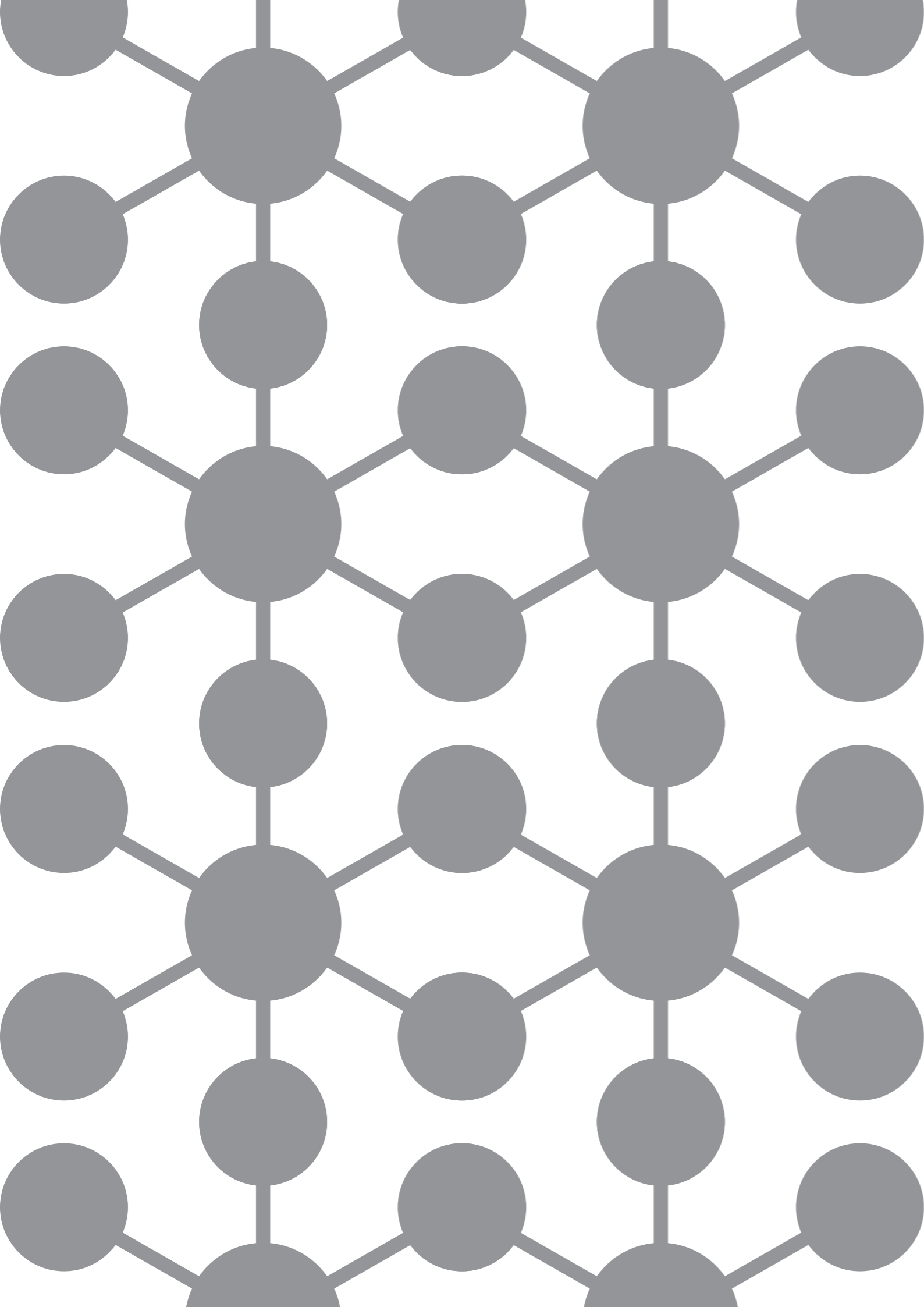




The European  
Anti-Poverty  
Network Ireland

# Rethinking a more Inclusive and Equal Ireland for 2020 and Beyond





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# Introduction

“The Government needs to think about what kind of society it wants to create - one where everyone can function and live together or one where crutches are snatched away and people are left to fall to the floor”<sup>1</sup>

On March 27th 2020 the Irish Government introduced a range of extensive and restrictive measures to combat the spread of the coronavirus. Irish society closed its doors and reverted to social distancing and isolation. Streets became empty, school and college attendance suspended, social outlets and businesses closed, hospitals came under unparalleled pressure and demand. The COVID-19 crisis represented an unprecedented emergency in the history of the Irish state, one through which we are still navigating and reeling from the impacts of. The response to COVID-19 and the resultant sense of national unity showed that Ireland is still a country that values a collective response in the name of the collective good.

Prior to the COVID-19 emergency, 2020 was an important year in the social policy landscape. Ireland was at a significant point of change, particularly regarding the impacts of and uncertainty surrounding Brexit. The Irish general election results represented a seismic shift in Irish politics, and revealed an electorate demanding action on issues such as health and housing. 2020 was also considered to be a pivotal 12 months for European social and economic policy, representing the final year of implementation of Europe 2020. The EU 2020 strategy includes a poverty

reduction target that was far from being achieved even before this current crisis (the [Europe 2020](#) target is a target to lift at least 20 million people out of poverty and social exclusion by 2020). What will emerge as the EU strategy for social policy over the next 10 years is still up for discussion, in light of the essential emergency response taking place within EU member states seeking to minimise the devastating consequences of COVID-19.

All over the world, across Europe, and throughout Ireland, the response to the ongoing pandemic has placed a spotlight on the importance of human rights and human dignity. Social structures and services have been tested like never before. It is clear, within any society, that progress can only truly be measured against how inclusive and responsive we are to the needs of those of us who are most at-risk and those who are furthest behind during a time of crisis. The impacts of COVID-19 have permeated throughout all areas of life, impacting people across all socio-economic backgrounds, yet it will disproportionately affect those who are marginalised and living in poverty. The question now remains, where do we go from here? It is clear that things cannot return to how they were before.

## The Three official ways of measuring Poverty

In Ireland poverty levels are officially measured using three main measurements: at-risk of poverty, material deprivation, and consistent poverty (see below)

### Relative Poverty/At Risk of Poverty

Anyone with an income which is less than 60% of the median (or middle) income is referred to as being either relatively poor or ‘at risk of poverty’. Incomes in households are weighted depending on the number of adults and children to arrive at the disposable income for each individual. This was €263 per week in 2018. The At-Risk-of-Poverty rate for 2018 was 14%.<sup>3</sup>

### Material Deprivation

Not being able to afford at least two of the eleven goods or services considered essential for a basic standard of living. 15.1% of the population experienced material deprivation in 2018.<sup>4</sup> The current 11 indicators are:

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

### Consistent poverty

This is the poverty measurement preferred by the Irish Government. This measure identifies the proportion of people who are both relatively poor (less than 60% of median income) and who are materially deprived because they cannot afford two of the eleven agreed items. The rate of consistent poverty in Ireland for 2018 was 5.6%.<sup>5</sup> The Government has set an ambition for 2025 to reduce the national consistent poverty rate to 2% or less of the population, to make Ireland one of the most socially inclusive States in the EU.

<sup>1</sup> <https://communityplatform.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/nowyouseeus.pdf> p17

<sup>2</sup> Disposable income is based on income from work and welfare transfers minus taxes. To get the equalised disposable income per person the disposable income is divided by the equalised household size. The equalised household size is calculated by adding the total weighting given to every person in the household.

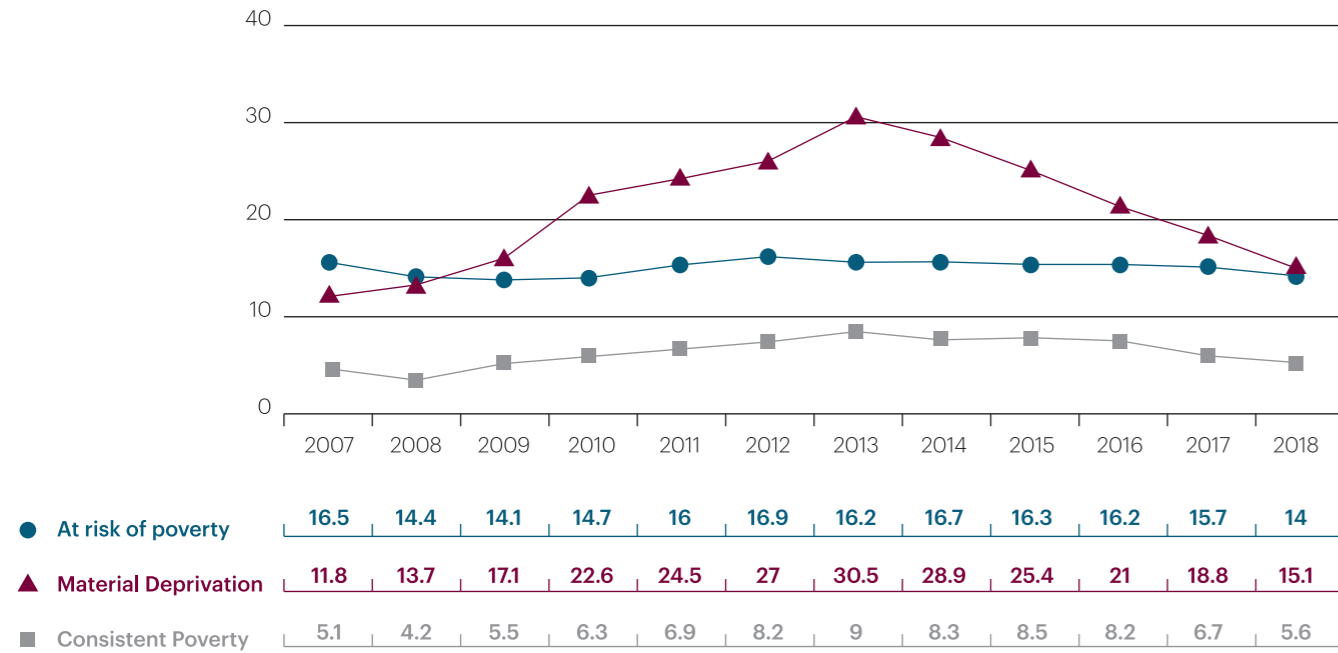
<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-silc/surveyonincomeandlivingconditionssilc2018/povertyanddeprivation/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-silc/surveyonincomeandlivingconditionssilc2018/povertyanddeprivation/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-silc/surveyonincomeandlivingconditionssilc2018/povertyanddeprivation/>

Prior to COVID-19, Ireland was in the midst of an ongoing poverty crisis. Whilst the [2018 Survey of Income and Living Conditions \(SILC\)](#) reported a drop in poverty levels across the board,

EAPN Ireland notes that rates of poverty have not returned to 2008 pre-crisis levels, with worrying trends of high poverty levels amongst specific groups relative to the general population.



According to SILC 2018 particular groups in society are more likely to experience consistent poverty; this includes single adult households under 65, with a consistent poverty rate of 13.6%, single parent households at 19.2%, those who are unemployed 27.6% and people not at work due to illness or disability at 21.3%. These figures lie well above average consistent poverty rate of 5.6% which amounts to almost 280,000 people. The SILC survey has its limitations, as poverty levels for some groups, such as members of the Travelling community, migrant communities, asylum seekers and people who are homeless, are not included within the scope of the survey. The Government is now facing a challenge to protect our public services, recover and sustain our economy. However, within these challenges lies an unprecedented opportunity for reform, a chance to reshape and reimagine Ireland, ensuring that dignity and social inclusion for all is viewed as an essential and core feature of the social and economic dimensions of Irish society. There can be no return to the

austerity measures of the economic crash in 2008 that disproportionately impacted the people and communities most in need of support. The Irish Government, in 2015 and 2017 respectively, signed up to a range of anti-poverty commitments, including the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) and the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#). In order to address the social, environmental, and economic challenges facing Ireland, an integrated approach to eliminating poverty is essential. This includes the implementation of an integrated anti-poverty strategy, as a means of addressing the structural causes of inequality, and is particularly pertinent to the increasingly urgent need for a policy driven response to climate change. The momentum of our response to the coronavirus pandemic must be built upon so we can honour these commitments and continue the sense of solidarity and progressive social measures we experienced in response to COVID-19, ensuring that those who are furthest behind are not left behind.

# 1.0 The Right to Access Affordable and Quality Public Services

In Ireland low income households are more likely to rely on public services almost exclusively and lack the economic means to engage with private sector service provision, for example, in the areas of health, housing, education, childcare, social and residential care. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the vital role that public services play as the structural backbone to a civilised society, which has the capacity to meet the needs of all those who require services and support. In light of recent events, the Irish Government

must recognise that in order to rebuild our economy and facilitate a return to employment, education, social, economic, and community participation, there must be sustained and direct investment across a range of public services. In the long term, this will involve an examination of Ireland's taxation system including the introduction of measures to broaden the tax base. Below [EAPN Ireland](#) focuses on what we believe are the key priorities for the Government post COVID-19 and beyond 2020.



## 1.1 The Right to Healthcare for All

“Healthcare should be available for anyone that wants it - not because you have millions or insurance or whatever but because you are sick. There should be a health service for everyone”<sup>7</sup>

The Coronavirus pandemic has exposed the inadequacies and inability of a two-tiered healthcare system to respond to a national and global medical emergency, in a manner that effectively manages and addresses a crisis, providing health care for all who require it and not just those who can afford it. The operation of a two-tiered health service in Ireland is an anomaly in Western Europe and has been found to exacerbate health inequalities, which sees people with health insurance receiving favorable treatment and access to health services and diagnostics.<sup>8</sup>

In contrast, those who cannot afford to obtain private insurance, find that limited and ineffective access to health services proves detrimental to health outcomes. We see that life expectancy at birth of males living in the most deprived areas in Ireland was 79.4 years in 2016/2017 compared with 84.4 years for those living in the most affluent areas. The corresponding figures for females were 83.2 and 87.7 years.<sup>9</sup> This links in with a wider context provided by the [Social Determinants of Health](#), which encompass a range of experiences intrinsic to the human lifecycle, and includes the environments in which people are born into, grow up within, live in, work and age in. These determinants are a reference point for many of the health inequalities between communities, regions, and different countries.

In recognition of the severity of the threat of COVID-19 to the lives, livelihoods, and wellbeing of people living in Ireland, the Irish Government chose to integrate the private and public health care system in order to ensure access to health services, on the basis of need as opposed to the ability to pay. This endeavour, whilst welcome and an essential part of the national efforts against COVID-19, has proven costly, resulting in a spend of approximately €115 million per month.<sup>10</sup> It is clear that in the long-term, a more sustainable approach to a single-tiered health system must be taken in order to provide universal health care for all. EAPN Ireland believes that the implementation of Sláintecare is an important part of addressing the inequalities perpetrated by public/private health care provision. There also needs to be recognition and action on a Government level, to address the specific and diverse needs of communities who are most vulnerable to health inequalities and groups who are most affected by deficiencies within health care provision in Ireland.

The emergence of a COVID-19 crisis within our care and nursing homes serves to remind us that health care is only as effective as its response to those who are most at risk in an emergency situation, including older people and people with disabilities, who often live within congregated settings. Nursing homes and other long-term residential facilities account for almost 59% of virus-related deaths, according to the figures released by the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE).<sup>11</sup> Across Europe, members of the Travelling and Roma communities have also been greatly impacted by COVID-19. The Council of Europe issued a press statement calling on Governments to ensure equal protection and care for Roma and Travellers during the pandemic.<sup>12</sup> The dysfunction

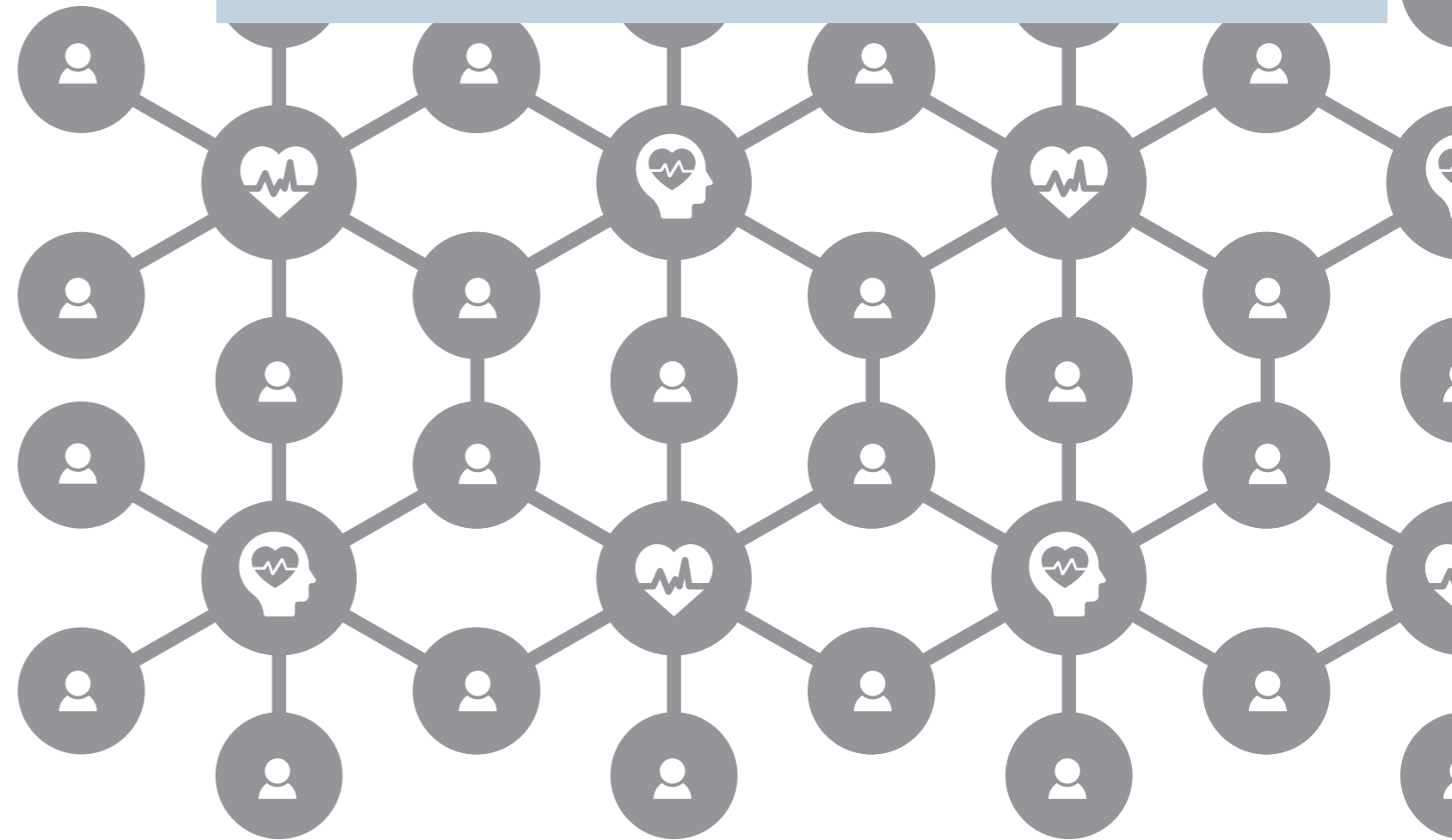
and inherent racism of the Direct Provision system in Ireland has been laid bare in recent times, with the most basic aspects of social distancing unable to be sufficiently implemented due to unsuitable and cramped living conditions. The health risks to these groups are compounded by the ongoing social and economic deprivation and discrimination they experience on

an ongoing basis. The coronavirus has brought to light the depths of the structural inequality that exists in Ireland. The Government must provide a health service that responds to and accommodates the needs of all, especially those who are experiencing ongoing marginalisation and social exclusion.



### EAPN Ireland recommendations

- The implementation of Sláintecare as part of ensuring a single tiered universal health care system that aims to facilitate affordable, quality, and efficient access to health services, with a focus on reducing health inequalities for those on low incomes and within marginalised communities.



<sup>6</sup> <https://www.esri.ie/system/files?file=media/file-uploads/2018-10/CB201718.pdf> p85

<sup>7</sup> <https://communityplatform.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/nowyouseeus.pdf> p14

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.feeps-europe.eu/attachments/publications/1845-6%20health%20inequalities%20inner-hr.pdf> p46

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/in/mdi/mortalitydifferentialsinireland2016-2017/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/2020-04-16/3/>

<sup>11</sup> [https://merriionstreet.ie/en/NewsRoom/News/Statement\\_from\\_the\\_National\\_Public\\_Health\\_Emergency\\_Team\\_22nd\\_April.html](https://merriionstreet.ie/en/NewsRoom/News/Statement_from_the_National_Public_Health_Emergency_Team_22nd_April.html)

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/governments-must-ensure-equal-protection-and-care-for-roma-and-travellers-during-the-covid-19-crisis>

## 1.2 The Right to Housing for All

“I am a good person, but nobody knows me as I have been living in a kind of hidden place. I believe if I had been given a chance to live within the local community, I could have made friends and those would vouch for me now and I would get a place to live.”<sup>13</sup>

The lack of Government investment in the construction of dedicated public housing to meet the demands of the social housing list and the pivotal role the private sector now plays in response to the housing needs of low-income households, has perpetrated a housing and homelessness crisis in Ireland. A recent report indicates that between June 2014 and December 2019 there was an increase of 349% in the number of families in emergency accommodation in Ireland, from just over 300 families to a total of 1,548 families. As of March 2020, there were 1,488 families accessing emergency accommodation, this includes 3,355 children.<sup>14</sup> Research indicates that use of hotels as emergency accommodation is having a detrimental impact on the ability of infants and young children to meet developmental milestones, with children not having enough space to learn to crawl or walk; not being able to properly chew due to lack of cooking facilities; as well as mental health difficulties in children and adult.<sup>15</sup> These findings will be exacerbated by recent lockdown measures that further restricted families already living in overcrowded and inappropriate accommodation.

The lack of certainty and security within the private rental market, especially for families with children, has been demonstrated by the Government response to the COVID-19 crisis through amendments introduced

within the [Emergency Measures in the Public Interest \(Covid-19\) Act 2020](#). These amendments placed a moratorium on rent increases and evictions for a three-month period. While these measures have been welcomed, it serves to expose the high risk posed for those who have formed their home, by choice or otherwise, within the private sector market. Concerns have also been raised around the build-up of rent arrears during the pandemic and a possible increase in evictions when the moratorium is lifted. It has become increasingly clear that the availability of affordable housing, for the benefit of social inclusion and as a response to poverty, can no longer remain at the behest of for-profit private sector provision.

Ireland has a history of state funded social and affordable housing programmes and public housing supply. This is clearly stated and reflected within Irish housing legislation (such as the Housing Act 1966, Housing Act 1988) which places Local Authorities and Approved Housing Bodies at the forefront of providing secure accommodation for those with a social housing need. The current over reliance on the private market is at odds with the long-established culture of housing provision in Ireland, one that has historically recognised the duty of the State to provide public housing as a means of preventing homelessness and as a response to poverty. The European Commission has recommended, in the aftermath of the current emergency, that the Irish Government must aim to increase the provision of social and affordable housing as a matter of primary concern for the period 2020-2021.<sup>16</sup>

Based on the European Commission recommendation, there is an option for the statutory role Local Authorities and Approved Housing Bodies have in the provision of accommodation units for

those with a social need to be further facilitated by the transfer of public land, via the [Land Development Agency](#), as a priority for the construction of social and affordable housing. The Land Development Agency has an essential part to play in responding to the housing and homeless crisis in Ireland and it is important that this is recognised within legislation enacted around the Land Development Agency. The current climate of uncertainty provides

the government with an opportunity to urgently address the housing crisis by reclaiming the state’s role in directly providing long term secure quality accommodation. This is congruent with commitments within the European Pillar of Social Rights, principles to which the Irish Government has signed up for, which recognise the right to adequate housing and shelter for all who need it.



### EAPN Ireland recommendations

- Enshrine the right to housing in the constitution (as per Portugal, Spain and the Netherlands)
- Place a statutory responsibility upon the Land Developments Agency to facilitate the construction of Social and Affordable Housing, with priority given to the provision of social housing units via Local Authorities and Approved Housing Bodies.
- Ensure that Housing Assistance Payments are aligned with any increases to market rents on a national basis.
- Facilitate Approved Housing Bodies and Local Authorities to capitalise on any increase in the availability of accommodation units, due to the collapse of short term rental models, therefore moving short term units with license agreements into long term leasing agreements with tenancy agreements for the purposes of social housing.



<sup>13</sup> Irish delegation submission re refugee status and access to housing for [People Experiencing Poverty 2019](#)

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.focusireland.ie/resource-hub/about-homelessness/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.rcpi.ie/news/publication/the-impact-of-homelessness-and-inadequate-housing-on-childrens-health/>

<sup>16</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2020-european-semester-csr-comm-recommendation-ireland\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2020-european-semester-csr-comm-recommendation-ireland_en.pdf)



### 1.3 The Right to Education for All

The restrictions introduced to curb the spread of COVID-19 have accentuated issues around pre-existing education and digital inequality in Ireland, which leaves some groups and communities with much lower educational outcomes and related opportunities in life.

A divide has emerged between those who can engage with work, online learning and supports, and those who cannot. Some of the obstacles contributing to the digital divide include access to regular and efficient internet access, a lack of economic means, and issues around digital literacy. The lockdown and the need for home schooling has reinforced existing inequalities and increased pressure on households and individuals already living in challenging circumstances, such as children living in homeless accommodation, within the Travelling community, and in direct provision centres, who are often trying to learn and study without separate space and a lack of appropriate facilities. The importance of being able to physically attend school cannot be underestimated, particularly for students who benefit from the extra supports, services, and activities provided by schools, as well as the direct contact between students, teachers and their peers, which is an important part of educational and personal development. In a time where internet access is presumed

to be readily available to all, for many low-income families, struggling with the high cost of utilities and rent, access to a laptop and broadband represent luxury items. It is important to note that educational costs are one of the main reasons people seek out support from Community and Voluntary sector organisations such as [SVP](#).<sup>17</sup>

Families and communities have been bombarded with new information and messaging from many different sources to help stop the spread of COVID-19. For people with unmet literacy, numeracy and digital skills needs, this has been a particularly challenging time. For example, parents with literacy issues may struggle to engage with the education curriculum. People in need of literacy supports may experience difficulties in accessing services online, including the COVID -19 services and supports operated by the Department of Employment and Social Protection (which under the new government will be referred to as the Department of Social Protection, Community, Rural Development and the Islands). The European Council Recommendations for Ireland 2020-2021 has called on Ireland to address digital inequality including within the education sector.<sup>18</sup> It is clear that educational inequality is a part of the ongoing poverty crisis in Ireland and must be addressed over the course of the lifetime of the newly formed Government.



#### EAPN Ireland recommendations

- Short term: Establish a properly resourced taskforce to identify measures to support children and young people in DEIS and non-DEIS schools negatively impacted by Covid-19 with the aim of introducing measures to prevent educational disadvantage, including a focus on digital literacy across the life cycle and ensuring all learners in direct provision and emergency homeless accommodation are equipped with the necessary IT tools to continue learning.
- Longer term: An increased investment of €200 million to provide all children with free primary and secondary education.

<sup>17</sup> <https://svp.ie/news-media/news/calls-for-help-with-education-costs-to-svp-increas.aspx>

<sup>18</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2020-european-semester-csr-comm-recommendation-ireland\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2020-european-semester-csr-comm-recommendation-ireland_en.pdf) p9



## 2.0 The Right to Adequate and Accessible Social Welfare Supports

We're just about alright for this month. I don't know what we'll do next month. It's massive stress, but that's our life."<sup>19</sup>

The social welfare system in Ireland plays a critical role in providing support to households with inadequate incomes. This has become even more apparent in the past few months with over 530,000 people accessing the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) in April 2020.<sup>20</sup> In order to address and respond to the poverty crisis in Ireland, one that existed in advance of and will continue to exist post-pandemic, the Government must actively recognise that adequate and accessible social welfare supports are an important aspect of societal equality. In order to ensure adequacy of social welfare, EAPN Ireland has consistently called for welfare payments to be benchmarked at a level that lifts people above the poverty line and provides them with a Minimum Essential Standard of Living. [The Minimum Essential Standard of Living](#) (MESL) is based upon annual research conducted by the [Vincenzian Partnership for](#)

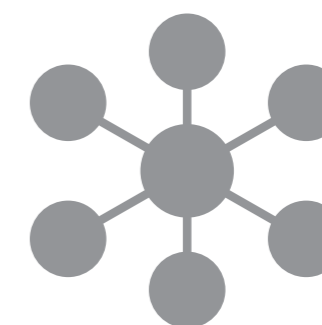
[Social Justice](#) and represents the income required to purchase the basic goods and services that meet a household's minimum physical, social, and psychological needs. The MESL research for 2019 revealed that despite social welfare payments gradually moving closer to adequacy in the past number of years, payments are still inadequate for many, with specific households experiencing long term "deep inadequacy", meaning, "consistently inadequate income doing without what is required to meet basic needs, to take part in normal activities, and to participate in society."<sup>21</sup> The MESL research revealed that deep inadequacy is exclusively found in households headed by one adult (such as single working-age adults and lone parent households, the vast majority of which are led by women) and households with older children.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> <https://communityplatform.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/nowyouseeus.pdf> p1

<sup>20</sup> [https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/parliamentaryBudgetOffice/2020/2020-04-26\\_the-covid-19-pandemic-employment-and-unemployment-supports\\_en.pdf](https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/parliamentaryBudgetOffice/2020/2020-04-26_the-covid-19-pandemic-employment-and-unemployment-supports_en.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> [https://www.budgeting.ie/download/pdf/mesl\\_2019\\_update\\_report.pdf](https://www.budgeting.ie/download/pdf/mesl_2019_update_report.pdf) p16

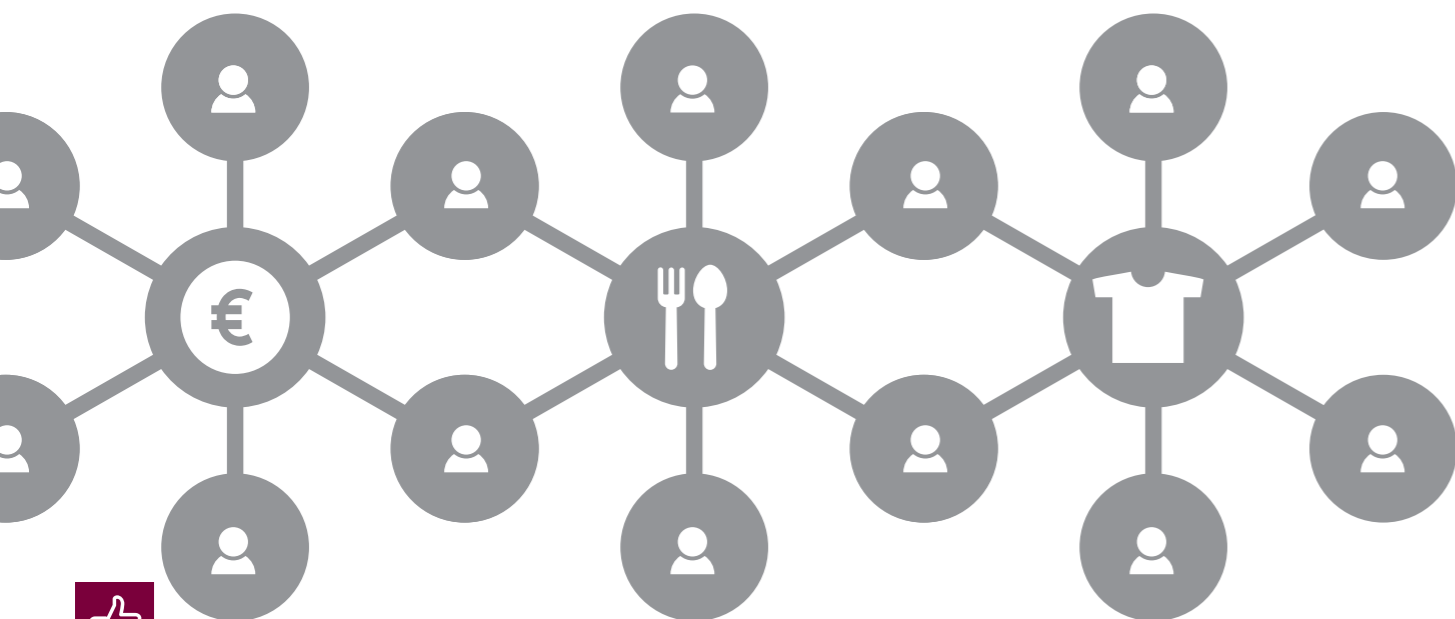
<sup>22</sup> [https://www.budgeting.ie/download/pdf/mesl\\_2019\\_update\\_report.pdf](https://www.budgeting.ie/download/pdf/mesl_2019_update_report.pdf) p15



The findings of the 2019 MESL research are in contrast to the announcement of a non-means tested Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) in response to the economic fall-out of COVID-19. The initial COVID-19 Pandemic Payment, set at flat rate of €203 per week, equivalent to a Jobseeker's main claimant, received extensive criticism due to the inadequacy of the payment versus the cost of living. In response, on March 26th, the Government announced that the PUP payment would increase to €350 per week. This u-turn by the Government essentially introduced the operation of a two-tiered welfare system in Ireland, with a higher rate of payment available to those made unemployed during the pandemic, but not for those accessing social welfare prior to the pandemic. Many people, such as people who experience higher living costs as a result of having a disability, are

expected to survive on inadequate social welfare payments for the rest of their lives, and struggle with poverty and social exclusion as a result. The experience of COVID-19 has highlighted this inequality.

Though the PUP payment is deemed to be an emergency response measure and temporary in nature, those who are unable to return to work in the immediate future will find themselves eventually moving on to the lower rates of means tested welfare payments. It is vital that the Government introduces benchmarking social welfare to adequacy as an aim and ambition for progressive realisation. This will ensure equity for all within Ireland's welfare system regardless of whether people accessed social welfare payments prior to, during, or after the COVID-19 pandemic.

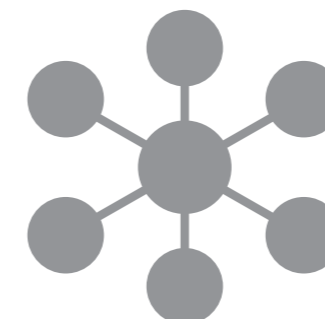


#### EAPN Ireland recommendations

- Progressively realise the benchmarking of social welfare rates to adequacy, in order to lift people above the poverty line and provide them with a Minimum Essential Standard of Living.
- Ensure that social welfare payments are accessible to all who need them, without any unnecessary restrictions or conditions.



## 3.0 The Right to Decent Work for All



Prior to the close down of economic activity in March 2020, Ireland was looking at a 13-year low unemployment rate. As of January 2020, unemployment in Ireland has dropped to 4.8%, considered to be a 13-year low (from a high of 16% February 2012).<sup>23</sup> The current Covid-19 crisis has seen unemployment levels across Ireland sky rocket. In April 2020 the rate of unemployment would have been 28.2% if people receiving the Pandemic Unemployment Payment were considered to be part of official unemployment figures.<sup>24</sup> The low levels of unemployment that were reported in the first quarter of 2020 are not indicative of the quality of work available to those seeking or accessing employment, (including decent work, adequate wages, consistent hours, job security) nor the labour market participation of marginalised groups.

The Economic and Social Research Institute (ERSI) has predicted that Ireland will fall into recession this year, shrinking by as much as 7.1% as a result of the Coronavirus crisis.<sup>25</sup> The Government has a responsibility to maintain focus on those who were living on or below the poverty line prior to COVID-19 and as a result will experience the greatest negative impacts from any impending economic recession. The new Pathways to Work strategy work must reflect the needs of those seeking to access the labour market as it emerges from the current emergency, alongside the gradual resumption of economic activity. This new economic and social backdrop, requires a reconfiguring of the strategy including employment supports and services and should be utilised as a means to inform the work of the Labour Market Advisory Council, which will now also advise on the

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/mue/monthlyunemploymentjanuary2020/>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.cso.ie/en/csolatestnews/pressreleases/2020pressreleases/presstatementmonthlyunemploymentapril2020/>

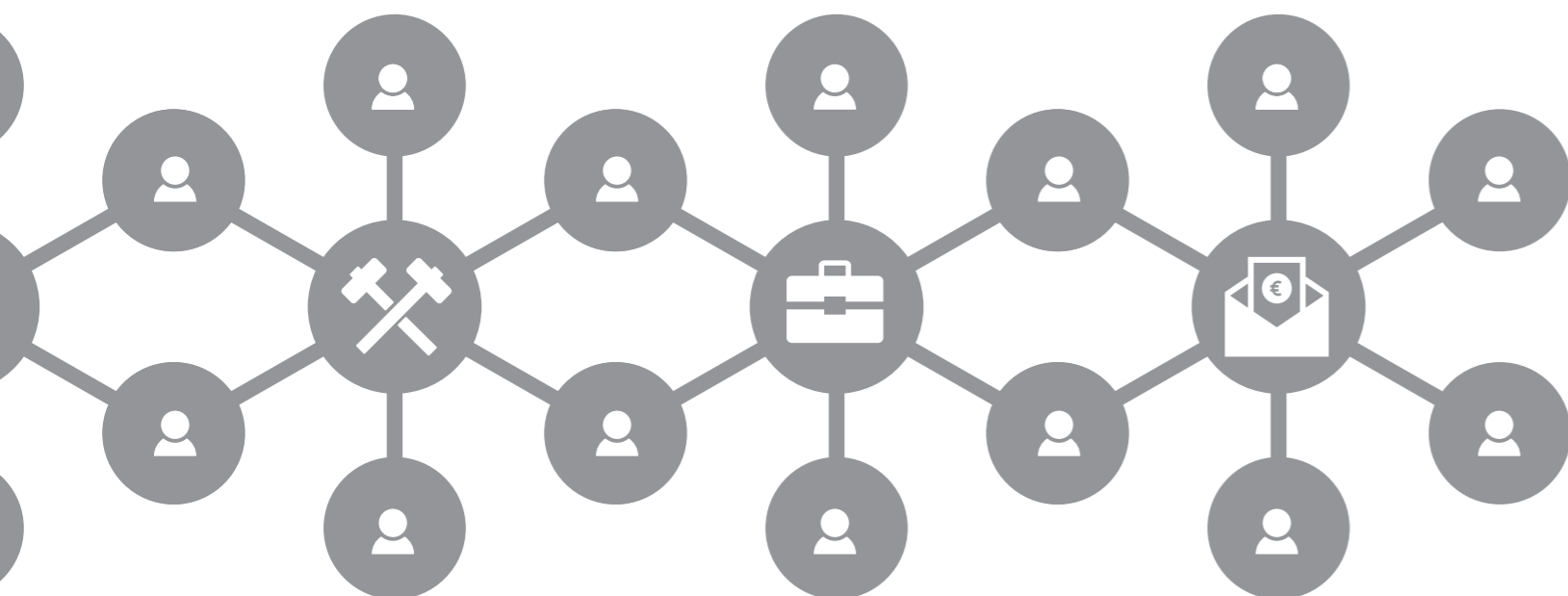
<sup>25</sup> <https://www.esri.ie/system/files/publications/QECSPRING2020.pdf> p2



wider labour market and employment policy challenges that face the Irish economy due to the COVID-19 emergency.<sup>26</sup>

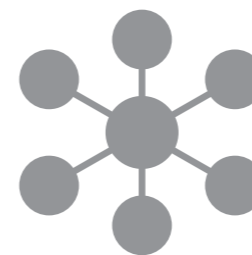
It is essential that the new Pathways strategy maintains its original aim to address and respond to the needs of households who have been long term unemployed and those distant from the labour market. This is particularly important for groups such as women, people with disabilities, older people, people from migrant backgrounds, Roma and Traveller communities. It is also important that the

Government supports people to obtain basic skills as a matter of urgency. The most recent international skills survey shows that one in six Irish adults (521,550 people aged 16 to 64) find reading and understanding everyday texts difficult: for example, bus time-tables or medicine instructions.<sup>27</sup> The new Pathways strategy provides an opportunity for the Government to instigate employment activation measures that adopt an holistic approach, which promotes values that lead people to decent secure work with adequate earnings.



#### EAPN Ireland recommendations

- Implement an holistic, person-centred approach to the provision of employment services and supports via a revised Pathways to Work strategy, which leads people to access decent work, recognising the implications of the COVID-19 emergency, while maintaining focus on those who were distant from the labour market prior to the pandemic.
- All adults with literacy, numeracy and digital needs and or less than a QQI Level 4 qualification should have access to a tailored high quality and relevant learning programme with a local education and training provider that meets the persons literacy development needs. This would include intensive and flexible options; appropriate supports as required (income, transport, child and elder care), work placement where appropriate and progression opportunities.



### 3.1 The Right to Access Adequate Wages

*“I find life very hard, not being able to pay all my bills, always putting some on the long finger. The stress makes me sick. I’m always worrying knowing that my kids have to go without”<sup>28</sup>*

a Minimum Essential Standard of Living on minimum wage earnings is extremely limited and relies upon the availability of numerous in-work supports and services, this includes welfare supports, access to a secure tenancy with a differential rent, as well as access to the Community Childcare Subvention Scheme.<sup>30</sup> These findings for minimum wage households represent a “best case scenario” outcome, which is dependent upon full-time steady employment and the availability of a range public supports, such as social housing. This is unachievable across the board for minimum wage households within the current climate.

The coronavirus pandemic saw the term “essential worker” immediately entering into the national vernacular. It has become apparent that many of our essential workers are individuals working on or close to minimum wage, yet the services and supports they are providing represent the fundamentals of a functioning and civilized society. Despite the important work currently being done by low paid employees across Ireland, where they are operating on the front line of a pandemic, exposing themselves and their families to the risk of infection, many of them are doing so for approximately €10.10 per hour. This is the minimum wage as it has been set in Ireland for 2020, in contrast [The Living Wage](#) in Ireland is currently set at €12.30 per hour.<sup>29</sup> The Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) research findings for 2019 revealed that the ability of a households to meet

The current emergency has served to highlight that inadequate wages do a grave disservice to the essential role low paid employees have in ensuring our social and economic structures, supports and services, remain intact and in operation for the benefit of us all. Income adequacy must play fundamental part in ensuring Ireland can move forward in a progressive manner post COVID-19 and must be deemed as a priority for Government for 2020 and beyond.



#### EAPN Ireland recommendations

- Progressively move towards the introduction of the Living Wage on a statutory basis as set by the Living Wage Technical Group.

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/a2f298-minister-doherty-meets-with-new-labour-market-advisory-council-to-co/>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/education/2012/piaac2012.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> [https://www.svp.ie/storiesofstruggle\\_p48](https://www.svp.ie/storiesofstruggle_p48)

<sup>29</sup> [https://www.livingwage.ie/download/pdf/living\\_wage\\_2019\\_-\\_4\\_page\\_document.pdf](https://www.livingwage.ie/download/pdf/living_wage_2019_-_4_page_document.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> [https://www.budgeting.ie/download/pdf/mesl\\_2019\\_update\\_report.pdf](https://www.budgeting.ie/download/pdf/mesl_2019_update_report.pdf) p29



## 4.0 The Right to Legislative Protection from Discrimination: Socio-economic Status

The coronavirus pandemic has been touted as the great equaliser, whereby race, culture, income, and social status, become irrelevant to the risks posed by and health implications of the virus. In reality this is not the case, the virus serves to augment existing inequality for many, including those experiencing unemployment or homelessness, those with under-lying physical and mental health conditions, people with disabilities, lone-parents, older people, women, people suffering from addiction, people experiencing domestic violence, people in need of literacy and learning supports, and members of marginalised and disadvantaged communities. The crisis reveals to us the disparities between households with the capacity, for example, to work and engage with education from home, to provide for a standard of living that continues to meet all basic household needs, and the households falling deeper into poverty, trying to mitigate what it means to experience a

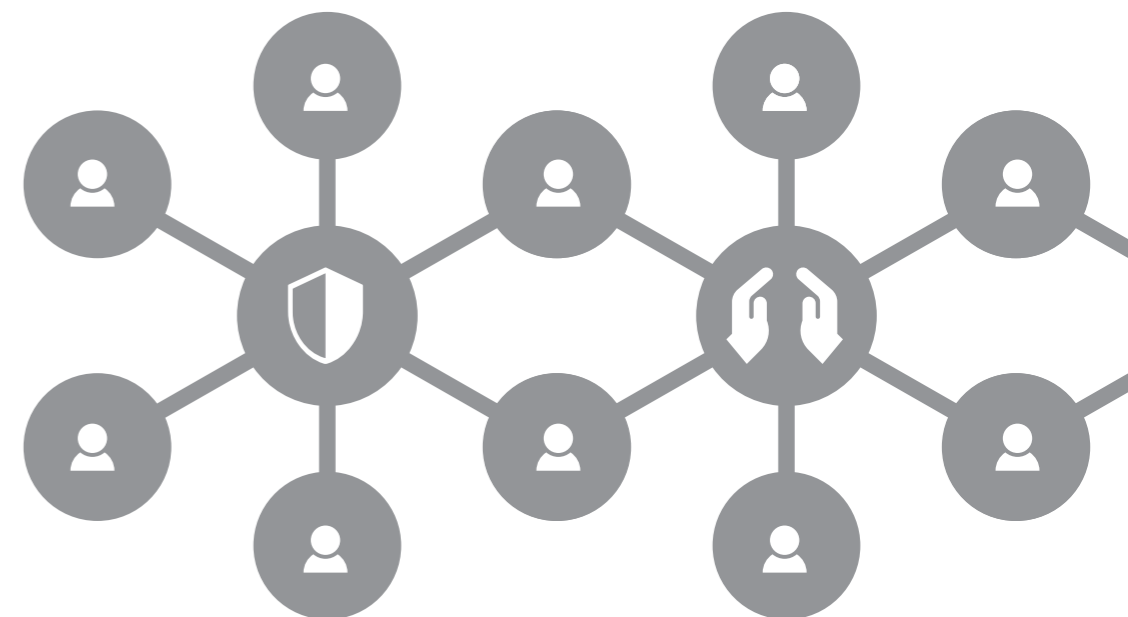
pandemic alongside stigma, disadvantage and discrimination. In a post-pandemic society, it is important to recognise and address the role that discriminatory attitudes and practices play in perpetrating the cycle of poverty and social exclusion.

Many groups in society have protection against discrimination under law, but those who experience discrimination due to their socio-economic status do not. EAPN Ireland is calling for socio-economic discrimination to be included as a ground for discrimination within Irish equality legislation. Individuals and communities experience socio-economic discrimination, on the basis of 'a socially identifiable status of social or economic disadvantage resulting from poverty, level or source of income, homelessness, place of residence, or family background.'<sup>31</sup> The 2019 research report on socio economic discrimination by [Altogether in Dignity Ireland](#) entitled "[Does it Only Happen to Me](#)" describes

participants experiencing socio-economic discrimination due to their address, their appearance, their race and ethnicity, the fact that they were unemployed or suffered from addiction. The discrimination was wide ranging, from difficulties accessing public services to profiling when entering a shop or restaurant. One participant described how, based upon hearing his accent, others immediately make assumptions about his level of education and therefore automatically think, "I can treat this person how I want because no one's going to listen to their complaints."<sup>32</sup>

In order to address socio economic discrimination, it is necessary for the Employment Equality Acts 1998 to 2015 and the Equal Status Acts 2000 to 2015 to include a 10th ground of discrimination on the basis of a person's socio-economic background so as to provide protection

for the many people who experience socio discrimination. EAPN Ireland notes the significant move in other European countries towards extending the mandate of equality bodies to cover socio-economic status grounds. An overview of equality legislation, revealed that legislation in 20 of the 35 European countries, covered as part of a European Commission study, provide protection against discrimination on a ground related to socio-economic status.<sup>33</sup> Removing the discriminatory obstacles that exist for specific communities seeking to access employment, education, supports and services, through appropriate legislative amendments and legal remedy, will assist in the collective effort to move towards a more equal and inclusive society, which encourages and supports the participation of all for the benefit of everyone.



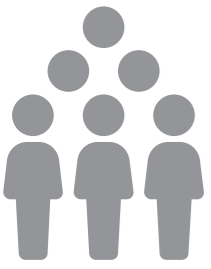
### EAPN Ireland recommendations

- Include socio-economic status as a ground for discrimination within Irish equality Legislation.

<sup>31</sup> <https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/bill/2017/87/eng@initiated/b8717d.pdf> p5

<sup>32</sup> <http://17october.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/SES-Discrimination-Report-ATD-Ireland-Sept-19.pdf> p26

<sup>33</sup> <http://17october.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Analysis-of-socio-economic-status-as-discrimination-final.pdf> p33



## 5.0 The Right to Empowered and Active Community Development Organisations

“Community development and community empowerment no longer meant building cohesion and solidarity and responding to community needs. The meaning of these words was replaced to describe the “self-activation of individuals” de-contextualised from their economic and community context.”<sup>34</sup>

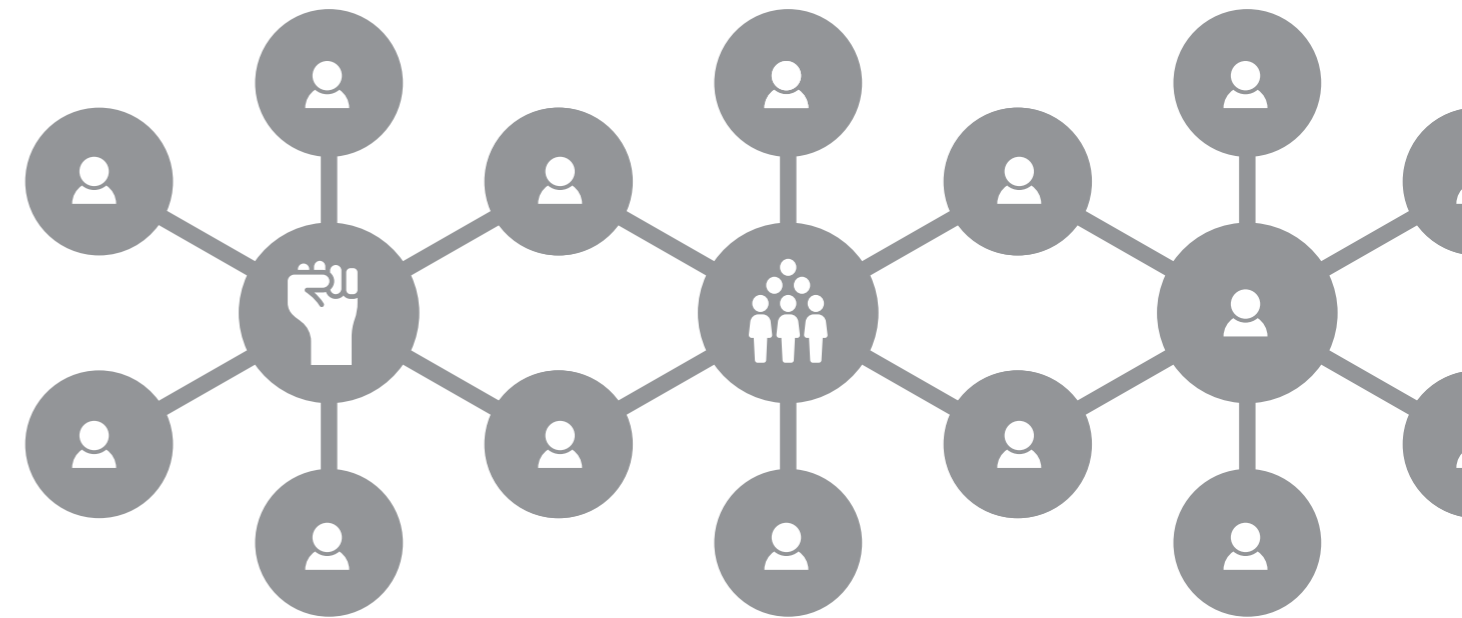
The need for resilient and empowered communities is more important than ever. The community spirit and solidarity on display throughout Ireland is one of the positive aspects to these challenging times. The response to COVID-19 recognised the place a localised response had in assisting and protecting those most in need of support within our communities. These initiatives nationwide have inspired an increased sense of social solidarity and emphasised the importance of a strong community fabric and local

participation. However, it is important to recognise that many communities experienced the pandemic from a position of disadvantage. As the crisis point passes, the Government must seek to put in place sustainable and long-term structures around our communities that will ensure those most in need are not left behind during the inevitable recovery period. This must involve a firm commitment to properly funded community development programmes within disadvantaged communities.



It is estimated that between 2008 and 2011 disproportionate cuts were made to the community and voluntary sector by the Government, estimated at between 35 to 41%, far higher than cuts made to other sectors, (of approximately 7%)<sup>35</sup>. Budget cuts were accompanied by changes in how community development programmes were funded. A top-down individualized service delivery approach replaced more collective forms of engaging communities, in identifying their own priorities, and working as key actors with others to bring about the changes that are needed to improve the lives of people in their communities. A Government commitment has been made in the five-year strategy to support the Community and Voluntary sector in Ireland for the period 2019-2024, including a sustainable funding model for

‘core funding for autonomous community development and local development at local level, including employment of professional community workers’.<sup>36</sup> A well-funded and resourced Community Development Sector ensures that the most socially excluded communities can take an active part in the process of policy development and implementation and ensuring it is effective in addressing their needs and the issues they face. The reduction and elimination of poverty and social exclusion should represent the core element of the social policy process in Ireland, as a means of honoring Ireland’s anti-poverty commitments, by supporting all communities in Ireland in the name of decency and equality.



### EAPN Ireland recommendations

- Introduce a dedicated programme to fund autonomous community development as per the aims of the 2019 Government strategy [“Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities”](#)- a 5 year strategy to support the Community and Voluntary Sector.

<sup>34</sup> [http://irc-equality.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Kelleher\\_O'Neill\\_2018\\_Paper-on-the-Destruction-of-Community-Development.pdf](http://irc-equality.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Kelleher_O'Neill_2018_Paper-on-the-Destruction-of-Community-Development.pdf) p7  
<sup>35</sup> [http://irc-equality.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Kelleher\\_O'Neill\\_2018\\_Paper-on-the-Destruction-of-Community-Development.pdf](http://irc-equality.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Kelleher_O'Neill_2018_Paper-on-the-Destruction-of-Community-Development.pdf) p23  
<sup>36</sup> <https://assets.gov.ie/26890/ff380490589a4f9ab9cd9bb3f53b5493.pdf> p29





EAPN Ireland is made up of over 170 local, regional, and national anti-poverty organisations and individuals. Established in 1990, the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) Ireland is a network of groups and individuals working against poverty. The Mission of EAPN Ireland is 'To put the eradication of poverty at the top of the Irish and European policy agenda and empower groups working to end poverty to understand and influence policy-making'.

This publication contains input from members of the EAPN Ireland Policy group. The following organisations are members of the policy group:

**Altogether in Dignity**

**Disability Federation of Ireland**

**Independent Living Movement Ireland**

**Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed**

**Irish Traveller Movement**

**Migrant Rights Centre Ireland**

**National Adult Literacy Agency**

**National Traveller Mabs**

**National Youth Council of Ireland**

**St. Vincent De Paul**

**Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice**

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