



European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) Ireland

Submission to Budget 2021

EAPN Ireland's Recommendations

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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 2021. We believe the budget process plays an essential part in ensuring the Government upholds their commitment to social justice and equality. In 2015 and 2017, the Irish Government signed up to anti-poverty Commitments, the Sustainable Development Goals and the European Pillar of Social Rights respectively. As a means of honouring these commitments, the Government must focus on developing and implementing an integrated and whole-of-Government approach to eliminating poverty and social exclusion. The annual budget plays a vital role in responding to the needs people living in poverty and marginalised communities and therefore is at the forefront of enabling Ireland to meeting its anti-poverty commitments. The current COVID-19 crisis has proved to be an unprecedented emergency in recent Irish history and has tested the social and economic structures of Irish society like never before. This crisis provides the Government with an opportunity and incentive for meaningful reform, to ensure that those who are furthest behind are not left behind as part of the recovery period post pandemic.

Below are the recommendations EAPN Ireland is calling on the Government to undertake as part of Budget 2021.

1: Access to Affordable and Quality Public Services

Investment in public services is a remedy for and preventative measure against poverty, social exclusion, and inequality. This includes investment across areas such as health, housing, education and jobs creation. Low income families are more likely to engage with public services and do not have the economic means to access services within the private market.¹ Research recently published by St Vincent De Paul reveals to us that poverty and inequality is costing the Irish Government almost €4.5 bn. on an annual basis, a low estimate of the cost falls at about €3bn with the high estimate coming in at around €7bn per annum.²

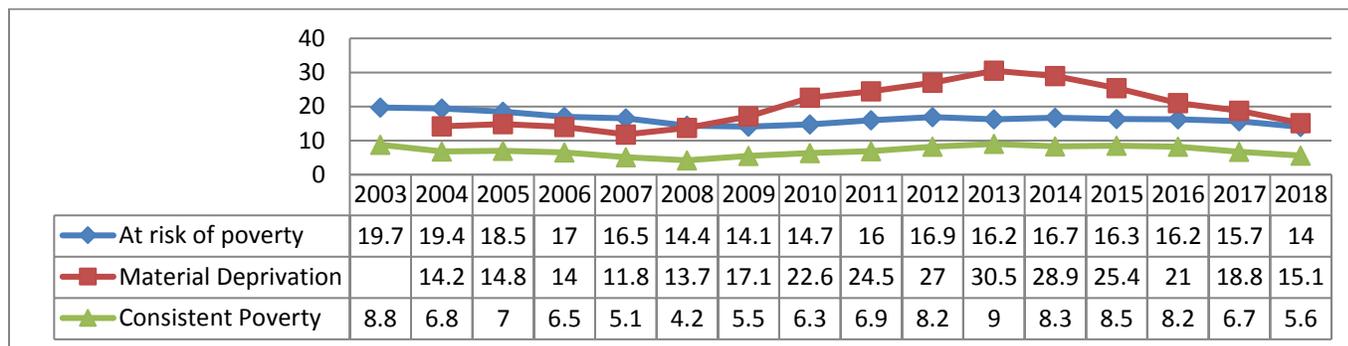
¹ <https://www.esri.ie/system/files?file=media/file-uploads/2018-10/CB201718.pdf> p85

² <https://www.svp.ie/getattachment/869467cb-2d60-4fe2-b612-a8c6e4357cdc/The-Hidden-Cost-of-Poverty.aspx> p6

The current COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the importance of effective and efficient public services that can support everyone on the basis of need and not just on the capacity to pay, and highlights that investment in public services protects society from the most negative and destructive impacts of a crisis situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic or the preceding poverty crisis.

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.

Below we can view the changes in poverty levels from the period 2008 up to 2018 based on SILC



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%, 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. It is important to note that in due course the poverty figures will likely be significantly higher in light of the fall-out from the economic shut down experienced in Ireland in response to the coronavirus pandemic.

The Government is now facing a challenge to protect our public services, recover and sustain our economy. Budget 2021 plays an important part in ensuring we do not 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, including the need for progressive measures as part of budget 2021. Budget 2021 provides the new Government with an opportunity to ensure those most impacted by the current pandemic, households that were furthest behind before the current crisis who will suffer the most negative consequences of any impending economic fallout, will be supported in the name of equality and decency and for the benefit of communities across Ireland

EAPN Ireland Recommendations

1. Introduce further measures to broaden the tax base in a progressive manner in order to increase taxation closer to the EU levels
2. Provide a statutory basis in order to achieve Irelands antipoverty commitments including the European Pillar of Social Rights and the sustainable development goals.

2: Healthcare

Ireland is an anomaly in Western Europe with the operation of a two tiered welfare system.³ In response to the COVID-19 crisis the Irish Government integrated the public and private health care system in order to ensure that people could access medical treatment based upon need rather than ability to pay. It is increasingly apparent that a two tiered health care system is not fit for purpose during a time of crisis. It is estimated that the cost of the integrating the public and private health care system is approximately €115 million per month.⁴ A more efficient and sustainable response to universal healthcare is required to ensure that health inequalities in Ireland are addressed and eliminated. Research shows that males living in the most deprived areas have a life expectancy of 79.4 years in 2016/2017 at birth of males 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.⁵ The implementation of *Sláintecare* plays an important part in addressing the disparities and inequalities of a two tiered health care system.

The current pandemic and ongoing poverty crisis has impacted particular groups disproportionately, including older people and people with disabilities, groups who are more likely to reside in congregated setting. 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).⁶ Travellers and people residing in direct provision are living in overcrowded and inappropriate accommodation, where the lack sufficient personal space and sanitary facilities leaves these groups vulnerable and exposed to ongoing health issues and less likely to have access to dedicated health care provision around their needs. This further highlights the importance of a health system that responds to the diverse needs of marginalised and disadvantage communities throughout Ireland. A universal healthcare system is an essential aspect of an integrated response to addressing the current COVID-19 crisis and the ongoing poverty crisis in Ireland.

EAPN Ireland Recommendation

3. A commitment as part of budget 2021 to adequate resources for the full implementation of *Sláintecare* as part of ensuring a single tiered universal health care system, which 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.

³ <https://www.feps-europe.eu/attachments/publications/1845-6%20health%20inequalities%20inner-hr.pdf> P46

⁴ <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/2020-04-16/3/>

⁵ <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/in/mdi/mortalitydifferentialsinireland2016-2017/>

⁶ https://merriestreet.ie/en/NewsRoom/News/Statement_from_the_National_Public_Health_Emergency_Team_22nd_April.html

3: Housing

Ireland is in the midst of a housing and homelessness crisis. As of May 2020 there are 1217 homeless families in Ireland, including 2787 children⁷. The over reliance on the private sector market has perpetrated the housing crisis. 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.⁸

In budget 2020, an annual investment of 80 million Euro in the Housing Assessment Payment was announced, this continued the destructive relationship between the provision of housing for those with a social need from within the private rented sector, a dynamic that has seen rising homeless figures and a rental market whereby, as of 2019, research showed Dublin to be the 5th most expensive city in Europe in which to rent.⁹ The new Programme for Government recognises the need to move away from a dependency on HAP, this is a welcome acknowledgment that relationship the private sector has in providing accommodation for low income households is at odds with the culture of housing provision in Ireland. The role of the state in directly providing housing as a means to address poverty and for the benefit of social inclusion has long been established across Ireland. This is reflected in housing legislation in Ireland including the Housing Act 1966 and Housing Act 1998, which recognises the role of Local Authorities and Approved Housing Bodies in the provision of low income housing.

The new government must place the state's role in housing provision for those with a social need at the forefront of housing policy as we move forward. This also includes a focus on non-profit housing provision for the purposes of dismantling the current system of Direct Provision, as stated within the Programme for Government. Addressing the housing and homelessness crisis in Ireland involves facilitating and investing in a social and affordable housing programme via local Authorities and Approved Housing Bodies as well as utilising public lands for the purposes of non-profit low income housing. This is in line with the commitments the Government has signed up to within the European pillar of Social Rights, principles that recognise the right to adequate shelter and housing for all who need it. The role the private market plays in the provision of low income housing should only be viewed as an accompaniment and addition to a non-profit public housing programme, which should be placed at the core of housing policy for households with a social need.

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4. Investment in a non-profit social and affordable housing programme aimed at middle and low income earners, via Local Authorities and Approved Housing Bodies.

⁷ https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/homelessness_report_-_may_2020.pdf

⁸ <https://www.rcpi.ie/news/publication/the-impact-of-homelessness-and-inadequate-housing-on-childrens-health/>

⁹ <https://www.eca-international.com/news/april-2020/dublin-remains-the-fifth-most-expensive-for-rental>

5. 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 and affordable housing units via Local Authorities and Approved Housing Bodies.
6. Ensure that Housing Assistance Payments and rent supplement payments are aligned with any increases to market rents on a national basis.
7. 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.
8. Expand access to the Better Energy Warmer Homes scheme to the private rental sector, to ensure that low income families can benefit from the scheme.
9. Extend the rental and eviction moratorium to ensure that the COVID-19 pandemic does not result in further increases in households presenting as homeless.

4: Education

The COVID-19 pandemic has meant that access to education and learning has moved away from the class-room and is now dependent upon access to technology and efficient broadband. This serves to accentuate existing inequalities whereby education currently depends upon availability of a laptop and regular internet access, items which are not easily purchased by households living on or below the poverty line and are already struggling with rental and utility costs. The current digital divide has the potential to leave many groups and communities with lower education outcomes and related opportunities in life. Education costs place a significant burden on low income households on an annual basis, 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 St Vincent De Paul.¹⁰

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. The Government has, as part of the Programme for Government, committed to new 10-year strategy for adult literacy, numeracy, and digital skills. The Programme for Government has a commitment to develop and implement a strategy within the first year of Government, it is vital that this strategy adopts a whole of Government approach to literacy, digital and numeracy skills over the next 10 years and is informed by ongoing consultation with relevant education and literacy bodies, those in need of literacy supports and service users.

The European Council Recommendations for Ireland 2020-2021 has called on Ireland to address digital inequality including within the education sector.¹¹ It is clear that educational inequality is a part of the ongoing poverty crisis in Ireland and budget 2021 provides an opportunity for the Government to announce measures that will provide response to this.

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¹⁰<https://svp.ie/news-media/news/calls-for-help-with-education-costs-to-svp-increas.aspx>

¹¹https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2020-european-semester-csr-comm-recommendation-ireland_en.pdf p9

10. Expand on existing government measures to address the digital divide, on a longer term basis, providing all low-income households with access to online teaching and pre-printed resources.
11. Introduce a targeted paid learning leave programme for employees in work with unmet literacy, numeracy and digital needs and or less than a QQ Level 4 qualification to develop these skills if they wish to do so.
12. Develop a Whole-of-Government Strategy for literacy, numeracy and digital skills over the next 10 years with a National Literacy and Numeracy implementation group and budget
13. Provide high quality and relevant literacy learning programmes including intensive and flexible options; appropriate supports as required (income, transport, child and elder care), work placement where appropriate and progression opportunities.
14. Equalise the income thresholds for the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance (BSCFA) for one and two-parent households¹². Introduce 'tapering' for the BSCFA to provide greater access to support with school costs for working poor households.
15. Make child benefit payable to families with children over the age of 18 enrolled in secondary school in recognition of the higher cost of education for secondary school student
16. Extend the free school-books pilot scheme to all non-fee paying primary and secondary schools.

5: Decent work and Adequate income

The recent COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the essential work being done by employees who are often on or close to minimum wage. Yes despite the essential nature of this work, for example in retail, transport, factories, care and nursing homes, this is not reflected by the wages paid to employees. The MESL research from the Vincentian Partnership for social Justice shows us that households earning minimum wage cannot meet the Minimum Essential Standard of Living, unless in receipt of an range of social welfare and social supports, such as access to social housing.¹³

Decent work encompasses adequate wages, consistent hours and job security. There is an opportunity for the Government to utilise a revised Pathways to Work Strategy in order to respond to the changed economic circumstances Ireland finds itself in due to the pandemic, as well as recognising the place the strategy has in addressing the employment needs of groups that were furthest behind prior to the pandemic, including those most distant from the labour market. It is important that the Government ensures the strategy maintains a strong focus is on access to decent work and an adequate income for groups most likely to be living in consistent poverty. This is particularly important for groups such as women, people with disabilities, older people, people from migrant backgrounds, and Roma and Traveller communities.

¹² Currently, a couple with one child can earn up to €603.70 per week and qualify for the BSCFA but a one parent family with one child will not qualify if they earn more than €438.30 per week

¹³ https://www.budgeting.ie/download/pdf/mesl_2019_update_report.pdf p29

Removing barriers to decent quality employment will require investment and innovation across Government Departments and budget 2021 provides the new Government with an opportunity to reflect this in a meaningful capacity. This is particularly important to groups such as people with disabilities and Lone parent households, and will involve a combination of access to dedicated public services, social welfare supports and holistic person centred activation measures. A starting point also includes a tangible commitment to decent work by the Government via a legislative basis for the Living Wage.¹⁴ Decent work and adequate wages work in tandem as a response to poverty, alongside investment in quality affordable public services and adequate social welfare rates, to ensure a long-term and sustainable response to social exclusion and inequality.

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17. Progressively move towards the introduction of the Living Wage on a statutory basis as set by the Living Wage Technical Group
18. 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.
19. Provide top-up payments to make sure no parents are worse off when transferring from existing childcare subsidies to the National Childcare Scheme.

5.1 Making work Pay for People with disabilities

Ireland has one of the lowest rates of rates of employment for people with disabilities in Europe. (32.2%, well below the EU average of 50.6%).¹⁵ In order to address the low rates of employment for people with disabilities across Ireland, the Government must ensure the full implementation of *The Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities* alongside effective measures for making work pay for people with disabilities. People incur additional living costs as a result of living with a disability, these costs are not adequately or sufficiently reflected in the rates of social welfare available. It is important that the Government publishes, as soon as possible, research from the Department of Social Protection around the cost of living with a disability and that this research informs relevant policy development pertaining to the full integration of people with disabilities into Irish society.

Alongside income adequacy, the Government must facilitate access to services that enable Independent Living for people with disabilities. This enables people the freedom to make their own choices in life, many disabled people achieve this through a Personal Assistance Service (PAS). Currently there is no legal right to a PAS in Ireland. This limits the choices available to disabled people, including access to employment, which leads to high levels of poverty for disabled people in Ireland. In order to remove the many obstacles faced by people with disabilities, it is clear that the Personal Assistance Service must be placed on a statutory basis, including a clear ring-fenced annual budget solely for the PAS, separate from home care and home help supports. This would ensure that Independent Living can become a viable option and lived reality for people with disabilities, allowing for the full engagement with all aspects of society.

¹⁴ Currently set at €12.30 per hour. https://www.livingwage.ie/download/pdf/living_wage_2019_-_4_page_document.pdf

¹⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2020-european_semester_country-report-ireland_en.pdfp38

EAPN Ireland Recommendations

20. Ensure the full implementation of recommendations within *The Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities*
21. An increase of €20 a week to Disability Allowance and other disability payments as a temporary measure, until the Cost of Disability study is completed and can be used as the basis for a proper cost of disability provision
22. Place the Personal Assistance Service on a statutory basis, alongside ring-fenced funding, separate of home care and home help supports.

6.0 Adequate and Accessible Social Welfare Support

EAPN Ireland has consistently called for the introduction of benchmarking social welfare rates to adequacy in order to provide people with a life of dignity. The right to an income that enables people to participate fully in society is enshrined in international human rights and within the Global Goals for Sustainable Development. This right does not differentiate regarding the sources of income, whether through employment or social welfare. The European Pillar for Social Rights, (which the Irish Government has also signed up to) states that *'everyone lacking sufficient resources has the right to adequate minimum income benefits ensuring a life in dignity at all stages of life'*

Income adequacy therefore plays a huge part in ensuring Ireland will meet its anti-poverty targets and commitments. EAPN Ireland believes that an adequate income should:

- Provide the Minimum Essential Standard of living, (MESL), that is the standard below which nobody should have to live.
- Lift people above the poverty line.

The MESL research reflects the goods and services households require in order meeting their physical, psychological and social needs and includes a variety of household types, including those in receipt of social welfare. The Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice updates the MESL research annually and VPSJ recently released provisional figures for 2020. Below we see a sample of updated figures for urban households on social welfare for 2020. The full report for 2020 will be available soon.

Minimum Essential Standard of Living 2020 for selected social welfare dependent households

Household Type	Urban EUR		
	Needed	Actual	Gap
2 parents 2 children 1 pre- school, 1 primary	484.01	477.20	-6.81
2 parents 2 children one primary one secondary	570.44	486.49	-83.95
1 parent 1 child primary	315.35	287.38	-27.97
1 parent 2 children 1 primary 1 secondary	452.67	364.98	-87.69
Single adult working age living alone	249.90	203.00	-46.90
Single Pensioner Living Alone (non-contributory)	257.75	266.69	8.95
Pensioner Couple (non-contributory)	326.74	487.19	160.45

The results for MESL 2020 indicate once again that households in receipt of social welfare with children are amongst those who are furthest away from achieving income adequacy. These findings are congruent with 2019 MESL results, which revealed that households on social welfare with children and single adult households are more likely to be living in “*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.*”¹⁶ The MESL research revealed that deep inadequacy is exclusively found in households

¹⁶https://www.budgeting.ie/download/pdf/mesl_2019_update_report.pdf p16.

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.¹⁷

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 2020.¹⁸ However the findings of the MESL research, which consistently reveal that many household types on social welfare are not in receipt of an income that allows them to meet basic household needs, 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, was revised upwards to €350 per week in light of extensive criticism received due to the inadequacy of the original amount versus the cost of living. Whilst the u-turn was a welcome response, it serves to highlight awareness on a Government level of the need for social welfare payments to reflect a realistic amount in line with living costs. The decision to raise the PUP payment to €350 per week 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.

In order for Ireland address the ongoing poverty crisis, to mitigate the negative impacts of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic , income adequacy must be considered as a priority ambition across Government departments. This includes benchmarking social welfare rates to adequacy, moving to a liveable wage for lower paid workers, as well as recognising the importance of the positive interaction between access to affordable quality services and adequate income as a response to poverty and social exclusion. The notion that benchmarking social welfare to meet the Minimum Essential Standard of Living will act as a deterrent to work is an overly simplistic perspective and lacks the insight and nuance required to recognise the long term benefits received by households that can engage with employment, including a consistent income, the ability to plan for the future and engage with society. The 2001 Report of the Social Welfare Benchmarking and Indexation Group states that replacement rates above 70% can have a negative impact on employment participation. This finding however is further explored within the ESRI Making Work Pay report 2015 which concludes that in reality the 70% replacement rate should not be interpreted in this context, emphasising the complexity and diversity of reasons people take up employment , “that dynamic gains over the longer term in employment, and nonfinancial rewards from working life are two such reasons.”¹⁹ The same report also finds that almost 80 percent of unemployed individuals have a replacement rate of less than 70 percent and that majority those who are facing high or very high replacement rates are in fact in employment.²⁰

It is essential that the Government introduces benchmarking social welfare to adequacy as an aim and ambition for progressive realisation, starting with budget 2021. This will ensure equity for all within

¹⁷ https://www.budgeting.ie/download/pdf/mesl_2019_update_report.pdf p15

¹⁸ https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/parliamentaryBudgetOffice/2020/2020-04-26_the-covid-19-pandemic-employment-and-unemployment-supports_en.pdf

¹⁹ <https://www.esri.ie/publications/making-work-pay-more-recent-initiatives> p16

²⁰ <https://www.esri.ie/system/files/media/file-uploads/2015-07/BP201602.pdf> p35

Ireland's welfare system in the long-term and is a fundamental part of ensuring Ireland can honour its anti-poverty commitments going forward.

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23. 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.
24. Restore Jobseekers allowance for all young people under 25 regardless of living arrangements.
25. Tackle child poverty and prevent more children from experiencing poverty by increasing the qualified allowance for children over 12 by €10 and children under 12 by €3.
26. Bring the weekly allowance for children living in Direct Provision in line with the rate for a Qualified Child, including the higher rate for over 12s.²¹ Increase the adult rate of payment in line with the real costs faced by individuals living in Direct Provision.
27. To help one parent families get back on their feet post-COVID, reduce the Working Family Payment weekly hours threshold from 19 hours to 15 hours for lone parents.

7.0 Equality Proofing

EAPN Ireland has consistently highlighted the importance of poverty proofing as part of policy development in order to ensure all relevant policies, including economic policy, are consistent with commitments to reducing poverty, social exclusion and inequality. As part of Budget 2018 the Government published a report on Equality Budgeting outlining the process it wished to undertake in relation to Equality Budgeting. Budget 2019 expanded pilots on equality budgeting, beyond the initial pilots on gender budgeting, to also include disability and socio-economic status. EAPN Ireland has concerns that the recently announced Programme for Government does not outline a specific commitment to the development and expansion of equality budgeting, beyond the expansion of equality budgeting to other Departments as well as the examination of expenditure outcomes relating to people with disabilities. EAPN Ireland believes that equality budgeting must also encompass a wider remit, including impacts around socio economic status and poverty. The Government also needs to more effectively carry out ex-ante poverty impact assessment of all budget measures to ensure they do not have a negative impact on poverty levels and support the delivery of the national poverty reduction target. This is already a requirement as part of Regulatory Impact Assessment. This would be congruent with the anti-poverty commitments the Government has signed up to including the Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025, the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the European Pillar of Social Rights. This would also include the full implementation of Poverty Impact Assessment Guideline across the Government.

EAPN Ireland Recommendation

28. Commit to the full inclusion of socio economic status and poverty as part of the remit for equality budgeting

²¹ This measure would cost an estimated €2 million. (SVP)

29. Provide opportunities for regular engagement with members of Community and voluntary sector with expertise on poverty, socio-economic status, gender and disability, for the purposes of informing pilot initiatives of equality budgeting.
30. Improve the implementation of effective and transparent ex-anti Poverty Impact Assessment