



European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) Ireland

Submission to the Consultation on the National Recovery and Resilience Plan

EAPN Ireland, 100 North King St. Smithfield Dublin 7, www.eapn.ie

[EAPN Ireland](http://www.eapn.ie) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the consultation process for the National Recovery and Resilience Plan.

The National Recovery and Resilience Plan presents the Irish Government with an opportunity to reinvigorate the Irish economy post-pandemic alongside the development of progressive social policy reforms and investment in public services. The National Recovery and Resilience Plans across Europe will focus on the Green and Digital Transition processes, but also provides an opportunity for Governments to focus on addressing the inequality, social exclusion and poverty, which pre-existed and has been greatly exacerbated by the current coronavirus crisis. EU Members states are being asked to ensure that each National Recovery and Resilience Plan strengthens economic and social resilience and mitigates the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis. Members are also being asked to structure their National Resilience Plans around the European Pillar of Social Rights, adopting measures to ensure equal opportunities, inclusive education, fair working conditions and adequate social protection.¹ Ireland's plan must adopt an integrative approach in recognition that the Irish Government has signed up to a range of anti-poverty commitments, including the European Pillar of Social Rights, The Global Goals for Sustainable Development as well as the Road Map for social inclusion, which seeks to achieve a consistent poverty rate of 2% in Ireland by 2025.

The COVID-19 pandemic has served to augment inequality in Ireland and all across Europe. Those who were living below the poverty line prior to the pandemic are experiencing greater negative impacts from the pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the experiences of those living in consistent poverty and those within marginalised communities, those experiencing income inadequacy, educational inequality, the homelessness crisis, the place of low paid worker in providing front line supports and services during a pandemic, (putting themselves and their families at risk), members of the Travelling Community and Migrant communities, as well as people living in Direct Provision.

As part of the need for smart sustainable and inclusive growth, the National Recovery and Resilience Plans should address the needs of these communities, who are most likely to be living in poverty, including people with disabilities, single parent households, (as highlighted by the country report for Ireland 2020) as well as communities experiencing high levels of socio-economic disadvantage and people from minority ethnic communities. It also provides the Government with the chance to address the employment needs of groups and communities marginalised from the work force, alongside regional disparities in Ireland which are amongst the highest in the EU. Regional disparities contribute to poverty and inequality due to an intense focus on economic activity in particular areas such as Dublin and Cork, which also impacts on the availability of disposable income in particular

¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?qid=1600708827568&uri=CELEX:52020DC0575>

regions of Ireland². The need to proceed with the inclusion of socio-economic status as part of equality legislation is an important aspect to Irelands recovery and resilience plan, as part of providing legislative protection to marginalised groups, ensuring that all people can partake in and contribute to Irelands societal and economic recovery post-pandemic.

The importance of EU policy maintaining a focus on poverty and inequality as we move past COVID-19 cannot be overestimated. The EU 2020 Strategy has come to an end; however, the pandemic and subsequent global response provides an opportunity for the EU to introduce specific targets for the next decade that will seek to address poverty, promote social inclusion, and ensure a fair and just recovery from the COVID 19 crisis. There will not be long-term recovery, or a building of societal and economic resilience, without investment in people and communities. For it is people and communities that have carried Ireland through the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic, and people and communities that fuel economic growth and social progress.

Below we will examine the areas that Ireland must prioritise for investment and reform as part of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan.

1.0 Universal Healthcare

EU Country Report for Ireland in 2020 states that Ireland must *“improve accessibility of the health system and strengthen its resilience, including by responding to health workforce’s needs and ensuring universal coverage to primary care.”*³

The Coronavirus pandemic has exposed the healthcare 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 favourable treatment and access to health services and diagnostics.⁴ 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.⁵

EAPN Ireland believes that everyone has a right to universal health care. In Ireland there is no explicit right to healthcare enshrined in our constitution or in Irish legislation. However, the European Pillar of Social Rights, which Ireland has signed up to, contains the right to Healthcare, stating *“Everyone has the right to timely access to affordable, preventive and curative health care of good quality”*.⁶ Given that health inequalities are perpetrated by a two-tiered health care system, it is not possible to honour this principle within the Pillar of Social Rights without ensuring access to a universal health care system. In 2003 Ireland brought the European Convention on Human Rights into law. Previous to this date the UN Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) was ratified in 1989. This covenant recognises the right to health defined in relation to availability, access to, acceptability and quality of health facilities, goods and services. Article 12 provides the most comprehensive article on the right to health in international human rights law. It recognises *“the*

² https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2020-european_semester_country-report-ireland_en.pdf p8.

³ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2020-european-semester-csr-comm-recommendation-ireland_en.pdf p9

⁴ <https://www.feps-europe.eu/attachments/publications/1845-6%20health%20inequalities%20inner-hr.pdf> P46

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

⁶ <https://www.eapn.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/EAPN-Ireland-Briefing-on-European-Pillar-of-Social-Rights.pdf>

right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.”⁷

Accessing public health care services on the basis of need as opposed to ability to pay is essential to Ireland’s implementation of EU Recommendations for Ireland in 2020 and to a reduction in health inequality. Universal health care is part of Ireland crisis response to managing and mitigating the most negative impacts of the COVID 19 pandemic but also ensuring a sustainable recovery and enabling people from all communities to partake in Irish society to the fullest capacity.

EAPN Ireland Recommendation

- Accelerate 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.

2.0 Investment and Reform in the Provision of Social and Affordable Housing

The European Pillar of Social Rights guarantees the right to access social housing or housing assistance of good quality for those in need. The Pillar also states that vulnerable people have the right to appropriate assistance and protection against forced eviction as well as the provision of adequate shelter and services for the homeless in order to promote their social inclusion.⁸ The Country Report for Ireland 2020 recommends that Ireland must move to increase the provision of social and affordable housing with the report acknowledging that *“Policy measures to increase the supply of social housing are in place but their effectiveness is still limited.”* In the past number of years Ireland has experienced a housing and homelessness crisis, which saw the number of homeless families in Ireland increase from 232% between 2014 to 2019.⁹ In the past 12 months we have seen some welcome reductions in family homelessness in Ireland during 2020, part of this is due to the moratorium on evictions, first introduced in 2020, as a preventative measure against further homelessness occurring during the pandemic lockdown.¹⁰ Housing reform under the National Recovery and Resilience Plan must examine the precarious position of private sector rental tenants, especially during times of crisis, and recognise the pathway between homelessness and the tenuous security provided by the private rental sector, a contributing factor to Ireland homelessness crisis.¹¹

Ireland is one of the most expensive places in Europe in which to rent¹². New measures proposed under the Affordable Housing Bill 2020 have been announced to increase the supply of affordable rental accommodation. The introduction of a Cost Rental Scheme, which charges a rent to cover the costs of construction, property management and maintenance, is a welcome addition as a tenure option within the Irish housing market. However, it must be recognised the Cost Rental Scheme, will benefit moderate income earners as opposed to those living on low incomes. The need for an increased in differential rent options should not be overlooked. In line with this the Government must examine the discrepancy between the level of HAP payments and market rents, as well as the need for an increase in social housing as provided by Local Authorities and Approved Housing Bodies. The

⁷ <https://www.eapn.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Giving-Health-Inequality-a-Voice-Final.pdf> p12

⁸ <https://www.eapn.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/EAPN-Ireland-Briefing-on-European-Pillar-of-Social-Rights.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.focusireland.ie/resource-hub/about-homelessness/>

¹⁰ <https://www.focusireland.ie/resource-hub/about-homelessness/>

¹¹ <https://www.focusireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Long-et-al-2019-Insights-Vol-2-No-1-Family-Homelessness-in-Dublin-%E2%80%93-Full-Report.pdf>

¹² <https://www.eca-international.com/news/april-2020/london-retains-its-position-as-the-most-expensive>

need for direct capital investment, alongside public loans, in social housing provision specifically towards groups most likely to live in consistent poverty such as people with disabilities, Travellers, single parent households (predominantly led by women), single person households and long term unemployed. If Ireland is going to reach its target for consistent poverty of 2% by 2025 then an increase in provision of social housing specifically targeting those living in consistent poverty, including housing support payments alongside a differential rent, must also be part of housing reform and investment in Ireland. An overinflated focus the percentages relative to market value prices or rents is not representative of affordability, especially given the speculative nature of Irelands housing market and our high rental prices relative to other European countries.

Questions have arisen around the introduction of a shared equity scheme as part of the Affordable housing Bill 2020. While the scheme has been introduced in order to facilitate borrowing for households under financial constraints, the Economic and Social Research Institute has expressed concerns that it will lead to an increase in house prices due to an increase in demand but not necessarily in supply.¹³ This perspective is backed up by research conducted by UK Controller and Auditor General on the impact of the scheme on the UK housing market and how it has led to an increase in profits for private developers.¹⁴ The role of Private Developers in the provision of social and affordable housing must also be scrutinised due to the recent publication of the Land Development Agency. The acquisition of public land by private developers as facilitated under the Bill has been criticised, as well as concerns around the percentage of housing constructed that will be dedicated to social and affordable housing as built on public land. The notion of affordability being tied to market level prices, which could still be above the average earnings of households seeking to enter into home ownership, must also be questioned. The Government must ensure that this legislation, and other measures introduced in order to reform the housing market, do not result in unintended consequences, such as increases to housing prices and pushing those living below the poverty line deep into poverty due to a lack of affordable rental options for those with inadequate incomes. Investment in affordable and social housing can be a key part of the solution as countries chart a path towards economic recovery¹⁵ however it must be done in a manner that will assist in the direct provision of social and affordable housing on public lands for the purposes of reducing social housing waiting lists, as well as contributing to affordability in the rental markets for households most likely to be living in poverty. Finally, the Governments must also review and revisit the current classification of housing providers as within the general government sector (contrary to other European providers). This means that their borrowing adds to the general government deficit and debt and restricts the capacity of housing providers to access finance and deliver social housing to those who need it most.

EAPN Ireland Recommendations

¹³ <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/esri-claims-shared-equity-schemes-risk-driving-up-prices-1.4485786>

¹⁴ [Help to Buy: Equity Loan scheme – progress review - National Audit Office \(NAO\) Report](#)

¹⁵ https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=1060_1060075-0eijk3l4uil&title=ENG_OECD-affordable-housing-policies-brief P20

- Investment in social and affordable housing for the benefit of those assessed as being in need of social housing, recognising the importance of a differential rent for households more likely to experience poverty.
- Review and revisit the current classification of housing providers as within the general government sector which currently restricts the capacity of providers to access finance and deliver social housing.
- Reform of Housing Assistance Payment to ensure alignment with current market rental prices.
- The Land Development Agency Bill must ensure that 100% of the homes built on public land should be affordable and social.

3.0 A Just Transition for all

“The challenge is to produce policy measures which enable workers and sectors to be the arrow of change rather than the battered target of random initiatives”¹⁶ - President Michael Higgins

The National Reform and Resilience Plan must address the need for Ireland to move to a Green economy as a matter of urgency, recognising the crisis that is unfolding in real time around the world as a result of climate change. A Just Transition must empower and enable the communities most impacted by the introduction of environmental sustainability measures, in the name of protecting our eco systems and the move away from solid and fossil fuel industries, to drive the development of a green economy in Ireland. The same communities must be utilised and included in the move to meet the Climate Change targets set within the Programme for Government (including 7% annual emissions cuts this decade), the national Climate Action Plan, the commitments within the 2015 Paris Agreement on Climate Change, as well as Ireland’s role in helping to implement and realise the EU’s Green New Deal. The social ramifications for those most in need must be at the fore front and a prime consideration as part of Irelands transition to a green economy and a carbon neutral society.

The Annual Growth surveys for 2020 and 2021 promotes the idea of economies based upon “green growth” and the expansion of environmentally sustainable industries however it is essential that this growth is inclusive to a more just and fair economy that addresses poverty and inequality as part of a Just Transition. The EU Green New Deal must represent social and sustainable reform in addition to economic reform. It should be accompanied by a new post-2020 EU strategy that commits to targets around income adequacy, decent work, social rights, social protection and the reduction of poverty and social exclusion. A just transition must not alone focus on mitigating the social and economic impacts of Climate Change policy but must directly seek to address poverty and social inequality, as such a Green deal for Ireland must also represent a social deal that promotes social progress and inclusion alongside environmental sustainability.

In order to ensure a Just Transition across Ireland, the Government must actively engage with reform and investment in workforce development, mitigating the impacts of job loss by facilitating pre-emptive and ongoing training and upskilling, and targeted funding directed towards communities most impact by the transition. In line with this, investment in Ireland’s Just Transition must be

¹⁶ <https://www.socialjustice.ie/content/policy-issues/president-higgins-delivering-just-transition-all>

underpinned by the anti-poverty commitments the Irish Government has agreed to. The National Economic and Social Council research report, “Addressing Employment Vulnerability as Part of a Just Transition in Ireland”¹⁷ supports “*the focus on quality work and good jobs*” and in particular views this as “*critical in tackling vulnerability in transitions*”¹⁸ The report also highlights good practice via the Scottish Just Transition Commission, (which is underpinned by designated legislation), tasked with considering a transition beyond fossil fuels, on a national basis, bringing together all sectors and regions. The Scottish legislation has ensured a broad societal approach to a Just Transition, including an emphasis on consultation, a focus on high- quality work, whilst also seeking to address inequality and poverty.

It is important to note, that in contrast to the present advocacy by the Community and Voluntary Sector around a Just Transition for Ireland, it was in fact Government policy that led to the foundation of Bord na Mona and the Electricity Supply Board (ESB) in Ireland in the mid-20th Century, which alongside the creation of secure jobs with decent pay, placed an emphasis on community development, building local infrastructures and investment in affordable housing, education, and social outlets. It is clear that the State’s role in aligning social and economic policy for the common good in response to industry developments has precedent, it is essential that the next phase as Ireland moves to a greener economy, builds upon the ambition of the past, expanding even further in order to address poverty and social exclusion.

EAPN Ireland recommendations:

- A just transition requires a social protection system – along with appropriate services and infrastructure – that prevents poverty and social exclusion for those that lose employment or income due to the effects or mitigation of climate change. Social protection can also help people deal with the direct impacts of climate change and adaptation, such as floods and droughts.
- An increase in Irelands retrofitting schemes across all housing tenures to address historical failures in energy efficient housing infrastructure.
- Link the levels of retrofitting measures on offer to private rental landlords to a binding commitment from landlords to offer long term tenancies to HAP recipients.
- Income supports, such as a fuel allowance, that are adequate to meet the genuine costs of home heating and related cost increases due to climate action measures.
- Enact legislation to ensure the European Green Deal is social – that low-income households equally benefit and don’t pay for “just transition”: Carry out transparent ex-ante poverty or distributional impact assessments for all green transition policies, taxes and subsidies.
- An expansion and increase just transition funding for specific communities and regions across Ireland. Support “just transition” ensuring funds benefit poorer people as well as poorer regions, for example by investing in energy efficient social housing, by ensuring higher energy costs are not passed on in rents or bills/, by delivering affordable green transport and by supporting those furthest from the labour market into new green jobs.

¹⁷ <https://www.nesc.ie/publications/addressing-employment-vulnerability-as-part-of-a-just-transition-in-ireland-2/>

¹⁸ [149_Transition.pdf \(nesc.ie\)](#) p31

4.0 A Digital Transition for all

The Recovery and Resilience Facility will designate 20% of total funding for supporting a digital transition throughout the EU. A digital transformation can only be successful if it entails addressing, as a main priority, digital inequality and educational disadvantage. There is concern that the increased digitalisation of society, will reinforce or even increase social inequality, research into this area proves the existence of digital inequalities which result in higher social inequalities¹⁹ The European Council Recommendations for Ireland 2020-2021 has called on Ireland to address digital inequality including within the education sector.²⁰

Covid-19 has exposed educational and digital inequalities across Ireland and Europe. Despite the narrative that COVID-19 is the great equaliser, it is clear that those from disadvantaged backgrounds will disproportionately suffer the negative impacts of COVID-19. The pandemic has seen a myriad of activities move online-employment, education, social services, banking and retail. While this has opened up markets for many retailers, it also isolates those that are considered to be “digitally disengaged”. According to research at least 25% of the Irish population is excluded from an increasingly digital society because of socio-economic reasons.²¹ The 'digitally disengaged' risk further isolation as communication and social interaction continue to move online. Government services, internet banking, and online shopping have been welcomed by many - but people with low digital skills are alienated and left behind.²² In order to avoid the further marginalisation of particular group, the Irish Government must enact a ‘policy response to review, update and enact policies that will cushion and facilitate this [digital] transition, especially for those least equipped to navigate the changes.²³ Digital transformation must be inter departmental and cross sectoral, and adopt a whole-of-Government approach. It must align with Government strategies that are designed to target by those most likely to be living in consistent poverty, such as the upcoming National Strategy for Adult, Numeracy and Digital literacy, as well as the aims and target within of the Roadmap for Social Inclusion. The Government must recognise and address the inequalities that have been exposed during the past 12 months, including lack of access to broadband, the incapacity of low-income households to afford laptops, digital devices and consistent internet access. We have seen that marginalised groups have not been in a position to engage with the educational, digital, and online, transformation that has occurred during the past 12 months, including Travellers and those living in overcrowded condition in Direct Provision centres. The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul has recently conducted research amongst conference members and found that 49% of the Conferences have had direct requests for help with digital devices since March 2020. 75% of these Conferences also provided help for food to help free up resources for online learning costs. The research found that the most

¹⁹ The Digital Divide: The Internet and Social Inequality in The Digital Divide: The Internet and Social Inequality in International Perspective, by Massimo Ragnedda and Glenn W. Muschert, 2013

²⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2020-european-semester-csr-comm-recommendation-ireland_en.pdf p99

²¹ <https://www.accenture.com/acnmedia/PDF-128/Accenture-RO-Bridging-The-Gap.pdf#zoom=40> p5

²² <https://www.accenture.com/acnmedia/PDF-128/Accenture-RO-Bridging-The-Gap.pdf#zoom=40> p5

²³ (OECD, 2019e).

common type of support provided was help with the cost of laptops/tablets, followed by broadband.²⁴ It is essential that a move towards a digitalised society does not result in the further marginalisation of particular groups, based on income, address, social class, educational attainment or age.

EAPN Ireland Recommendations

- Dedicated multi annual funding for the digital skills training and education, targeting marginalised groups and those with low level digital skills as well as a learning guarantee for adults with unmet literacy and digital needs. These recommendations from EAPN Ireland and more regarding the National Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy can be viewed [here](#).
- A national campaign aimed at all citizens highlighting the increased digitalisation of society, how people can benefit from it, partake in it, and what the services and supports are available to ensure that nobody is left behind.
- Proofing of all policy on digitalisation of services to ensure no one is excluded and that this form of delivery is appropriate to the aims of the service and the needs of the service users.

Address educational disadvantage:

- Expand on existing government measures to address the digital divide, basis, providing all low-income households with access to online teaching and pre-printed resources.
- Longer term: An annual increased investment of €200 million to provide all children with free primary and secondary education.

5.0 Access to Adequate Income for all

5.1 The Right to Adequate and Accessible Social Welfare Supports

The social welfare system in Ireland plays a critical role in providing support to households with inadequate incomes. The Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy 2021 emphasises the importance of social protection systems and the essential role social protection plays in reducing inequalities.²⁵

This has become even more apparent in the past few months with over 530,000 people accessing the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) in April 2020.²⁶ In order to address and respond to the poverty crisis in Ireland, one that existed in advance of and will continue to exist post-Coronavirus, EAPN Ireland believes that access to adequate and accessible social welfare supports is 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](#)

²⁴ <https://www.svp.ie/schoolclosuresit>

²⁵ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0575> p8

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

[Standard of Living](#) (MESL) is based upon annual research conducted by the Vincentian 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.*"²⁷ 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.²⁸

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. While we welcome this higher level of support, 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.

It is vital that the Government introduces benchmarking social welfare to adequacy as an aim and ambition for progressive realization. Benching social welfare to adequacy ensures that households can afford to purchase the basic goods and services they require, it is a socially progressive measure and also an investment in Ireland's economy, particularly the economies within disadvantaged areas.

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.

5.2 The Right to Access Adequate Wages

The Programme for Government commits to moving towards a living wage across the course of the life-time of this Government. 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

²⁷ https://www.budgeting.ie/download/pdf/mesl_2019_update_report.pdf p16.

²⁸ https://www.budgeting.ie/download/pdf/mesl_2019_update_report.pdf p15

per hour.²⁹ The Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) research findings for 2019 revealed that the ability of a households to meet 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.³⁰ 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 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 as part of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan.

EAPN Ireland Recommendation

- Moving from statutory minimum wage to the statutory living wage at a minimum, as recommended by the Living Wage Technical Group.

6.0 Equality Proofing

The EU Guidance document for member states on developing the National Recovery and Resilience Plans highlights the importance of developing policies for the next generation, children and youth, including education and skills.³¹ Part of developing policies for the benefit of upcoming generations must entail an impact assessment on the implementation of the National Recovery Plan and the measures within the plan.

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 and promoting equality and equality opportunities for all. EAPN Ireland believes that equality budgeting should encompass a wider remit, including measuring impacts around socio economic status and poverty and environmental impact. The National Recovery and Resilience Plans provides the Government with an opportunity to more effectively carry out ex-ante poverty impact assessment of all policies developed as part of the Plan to ensure they do not have a negative impact on poverty levels and support the delivery of the current 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 Guidelines across the Government. This expansion of equality proofing would tie with in the “Do no significant harm” principle which EU members states are being asked to adhere to in order to ensure that economic measure within any of the National Recovery and Resilience

²⁹https://www.livingwage.ie/download/pdf/living_wage_2020_4_page_annual_paper.pdf

³⁰https://www.budgeting.ie/download/pdf/mesl_2019_update_report.pdf p29

³¹<https://eurovent.eu/sites/default/files/field/file/GEN%20-%201203.00%20-%20National%20Recovery%20and%20Resilience%20Plans.pdf>

Plan will not have significant negative impacts on the environment, as per the classification system (or 'taxonomy') for environmentally sustainable economic activities.³²

EAPN Ireland Recommendation

- Commit to the full inclusion of socio- economic status and poverty as part of the remit for equality budgeting and an impact assessment of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan

7.0 Community Development

In the interests of appropriately designating areas for investment and reform as part of developing Ireland's Recovery and Resilience Plan, it is important to recognise that many communities have 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%,³³ far higher than cuts made to other sectors, (of approximately 7%). 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*'.³⁴ EAPN Ireland welcomes the commitment in the Programme for Government to introducing a number of projects similar in approach to Community Development Projects and the initial allocation of €1 million in Budget 2021. This is an important first step to build on.

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 of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan 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 honouring Ireland's anti-poverty commitments, by supporting all communities in Ireland in the name of decency and equality.

³² https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/c2021_1054_en.pdf p2

³³ http://irc-equality.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Kelleher_O'Neill_2018_Paper-on-the-Destruction-of-Community-Development.pdf p7

³⁴ <https://assets.gov.ie/26890/ff380490589a4f9ab9cd9bb3f53b5493.pdf> p29

EAPN Ireland recommendations

- Put in place 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

Conclusion

The National Recovery and Resilience Plan provides Ireland with an opportunity for investment and reforms that will assist in meeting the range of anti-poverty commitments that the Irish Government has agreed to. The world-wide 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 has disproportionately affected those who are marginalised and living in poverty. The National Recovery and Resilience Plan provides the Irish Government with the chance to move beyond the current crisis in a manner that addresses inequality, to ensure we do not return to or reenforce the poverty and injustice that existed prior to the COVID-19 crisis, but instead seek to ensure that Irelands recovery is one that will include and address the needs of those who are furthest behind in society.

EAPN Ireland receives core funding from the Scheme to Support National Organisations (SSNO) which is funded by the Government of Ireland through the Department of Rural and Community Development



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

