

# More Than Just A Temporary Crisis:



The growing need for support with basic necessities and the impact on Low-Income Households and the Community and Voluntary Sector



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# About EAPN Ireland

**EAPN Ireland is a network of groups and individuals working against poverty. It is the Irish national network of the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN), which links groups fighting for the eradication of poverty across Europe.**

**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.’**

EAPN Ireland is made up of approximately 170 local, regional and national anti-poverty organisations and individuals. EAPN Ireland supports members to influence national and European policy through training, information, collective action and networking.

# About this report

**This report investigates the growing reliance on community organisations and charities for support with basic necessities (e.g. food, heating, hygiene products etc.), and the effects that this has on individuals, households, and on the Community and Voluntary sector itself.**

This research was funded by IHREC (Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission) and commissioned by EAPN Ireland (European Anti-Poverty Network Ireland). The research was completed by Alex O’Connor and Dr Sara Singleton of TASC (Think Tank for Action on Social Change).

We want to thank all participants from the Community and Voluntary sector who assisted with and engaged in this research by participating in a series of focus groups and also wish to highlight the efforts of staff who helped to facilitate interviews through their networks. We also want to recognise and thank the individuals who contributed to this report by being interviewed on their experiences engaging with community organisations and charities to meet their basic needs. We sincerely appreciate their openness and the goodwill shown towards us.

# Executive Summary

Research conducted for this report revealed a growing demand for support with basic necessities from the Community and Voluntary sector. Households are now facing increasing pressures and are being forced to make difficult and inequitable choices due to the rising cost of living. It is increasingly common that people find themselves unable to afford basic necessities due to inadequate incomes, and this requires a coordinated structural response from Government. Eurostat is predicting inflation will reach 9.8%<sup>1</sup> in Ireland and that this will have the most detrimental impact on rural, older, and low-income households, who spend a greater share of their income on energy and food.<sup>2</sup> The number of households in energy poverty in the State is at the highest it has ever been recorded, currently estimated at 29.4%.<sup>3</sup> The full impact of this will become clearer as we enter the winter months. It is in this context that the European Anti-Poverty Network Ireland (EAPN) commissioned the Think-tank for Action on Social Change (TASC) to analyse the increasing demand for support with basic necessities in Ireland.

This report is based on qualitative data collected between December 2021 and August 2022. Six in-depth interviews were carried out that explored the lived reality of material deprivation on individuals across a variety of circumstances. Four focus groups were conducted

with members of the Community and Voluntary sector: three with individuals working directly in service provision, and one with individuals working in policy focused organisations. In addition, this report draws on secondary survey data, in particular the CSO's Survey of Income and Living Conditions (SILC) that was published in May 2022 and provides important information on income, poverty, and inequality in Ireland.

This research is funded by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) and comes under the stream of Advancing Social and Economic Rights and Equality including the creation of a more just, inclusive, and sustainable society. The inability to afford basic necessities, therefore depending on provision from charities and community organisations, is a sign of deep and intersectional poverty, relevant to and experienced by a diverse number of marginalised groups in society. The fulfilment of basic needs is fundamental to human dignity, Human Rights, and social and economic equality.

This type of material poverty and the struggles many households face trying to purchase basic necessities is rarely discussed or highlighted on a policy or political level. Organisations with a social inclusion remit must be able to focus on this rather than responding to immediate emergency needs. This requires a coordinated approach from the Government that is underpinned by a commitment to tackling income inadequacy and investing in public services. We hope this report contributes to policy, practice and further research by providing insight into how this affects low-income households and the Community and Voluntary sector itself.

<sup>1</sup> See: <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/cpi/consumerpriceindexjuly2022/>

<sup>2</sup> Byrne, I. (2021). Addressing the Problem of Income Inadequacy and Meeting Basic Needs, European Anti Poverty Network Ireland. Retrieved from <https://policycommons.net/artifacts/2011952/addressing-the-problem-of-income-inadequacy-and-meeting-basic-needs/2764395>

<sup>3</sup> Barrett, M., Farrell, N., & Roantree, B. (2022). Energy poverty and deprivation in Ireland. Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) Research Series. <https://www.esri.ie/publications/energy-poverty-and-deprivation-in-ireland>

The purpose of this report is to:

- **Generate a clearer understanding of the demand for support with basic necessities and why this demand is growing.**
- **Highlight the kind of material poverty many households face at a political and policy level.**
- **Highlight the effects that providing support with basic necessities is having on the Community and Voluntary sector.**
- **Contribute to policy, practice, and research that addresses the root causes**

## Key Findings

### **1. Structural causes underpin the increasing numbers of people now seeking support with basic necessities.**

Community and Voluntary organisations involved in focus groups reported a steady rise in people relying on their services for basic necessities, in particular a large increase in demand for food vouchers. Current levels of inflation have greatly impacted this and affect lower-income households far more acutely.

However, focus groups identified this as a much longer-term problem, predating both the cost-of-living crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic and associated restrictions. Core structural reasons identified for the increasing need for supports included: inadequate incomes, lack of investment in long-term public service provision, increasing costs of food and basic necessities, increased cost of fuel, high rents and inadequate social housing.

### **2. Providing support with basic necessities fundamentally changes the work of the Community and Voluntary sector.**

Many organisations involved in focus groups reported that they have had to augment the services that they provide to instead provide an emergency response to service users in crisis. It was felt that support with basic necessities was becoming normalised and that this was detrimental to the missions and goals of their organisations. The increased demand has not been matched by sufficient government funding for the sector and organisations reported an inability to plan long-term, increased pressure on staff, and pressure to chase available funding instead of responding to the needs in their communities.

### **3. Poverty is increasingly complex**

This report collected primary data and examined secondary data which found that Irish citizens increasingly struggle to afford basic necessities. Particular groups are more likely to present for support, i.e., people with disabilities, migrants, Travellers, the unemployed, single parents and older people. Inflation has been felt unevenly across the population and is deepening poverty and eroding the living standards of lower-income households more than others, as they spend a larger percentage of their income on food and fuel. This research found that those struggling to afford basic necessities increasingly include those in employment with a number of interviewees seeking support with food vouchers despite working part-time, or full-time. Interviewees described the difficult choices they had to make to make ends meet and express fear for the future, especially in meeting fuel costs over the winter. Interviewees who were unemployed or retired reported being worried that they could no longer rely on family members that were in employment for support for 'bumps in the road' such as Christmas or the start of the school year, as those people were now also struggling.

# Summary recommendations

A full list of recommendations is presented at the end of this report; however, a summary of key recommendations is provided below. All recommendations call on the Government to directly intervene to address the underlying, long-term, structural causes of poverty by undertaking the following specific policy actions.

## 1. €13.85

Income adequacy needs to be examined as a core response to addressing poverty. A minimum wage for all workers of €13.85 is recommended, for the period 2022/2023, by the Living Wage Technical Group. This amount has been calculated to be the amount that is necessary to make a minimum acceptable standard of living possible. This is significantly higher than the €12.17 proposed by the Government based on 60% of the median hourly income.

## 2. MESL

Benchmark social welfare rates against the Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL).

## 3.



A reliance on the Community and Voluntary to provide basic necessities should not be normalised.

- Individuals should not need to rely on charitable organisations to meet their basic needs. Interacting with charities in this way is detrimental to self-esteem and human dignity
- Organisations with a social inclusion remit must be able to focus on this rather than responding to people's immediate emergency needs and mediating the failures of the state.

## 4.



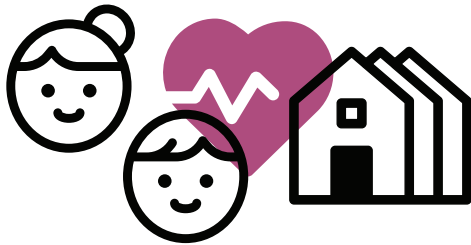
Means-testing and thresholds for services should be examined in line with the cost of living, this is particularly important for the low-income households struggling with a reduction in disposable income because of increasing costs in other areas.



## 5.

Tackling energy poverty is key to ensuring people can afford basic necessities. Resources could be targeted in a number of ways:

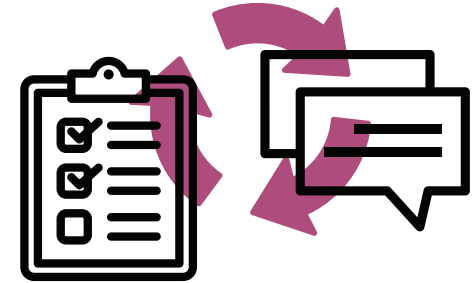
- Widen eligibility for the Fuel Allowance
- Increase the weekly Fuel Allowance rate
- Introduce a partial-rate Fuel Allowance payment for those on lower rates of income who do not currently qualify
- Increase investment in public transport options, particularly in rural areas



## 6.

Address inadequacies in service provision that contribute to poverty, including.

- Increase supply of housing through new build, social and affordable housing
- Move towards a public childcare model in order to make childcare accessible to all families
- Increase funding for healthcare and expedite the move to Sláintecare



## 7.

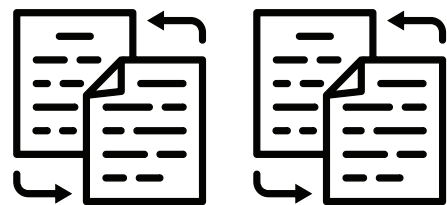
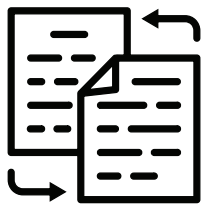
Evaluate how the Community and Voluntary sector could be better resourced and involved in informing policy.

- The Government should consider introducing more multi-year funding cycles to allow organisations to plan long term
- The Government should examine the consultation mechanisms that are currently in place with the Community and Voluntary sector to ensure an effective and meaningful voice is given to those impacted by all forms of poverty in how policies are developed and implemented.

# Section 1: Literature and Context



**“If basic necessities are unaffordable or inaccessible, poverty can indirectly limit a person’s ability to exercise other basic human rights, including their civil and political rights.”**



**The following section frames poverty as a human rights issue and contextualises the complexities of poverty and deprivation in the Irish context. This section outlines the current approach to public service provision by the Irish government, food and energy poverty, and the role of the Community and Voluntary Sector in Ireland.**

## **Access to basic necessities as a human rights issue**

A human rights perspective underpins this report. Poverty is a social and economic rights issue because a state of poverty often manifests as a denial of basic rights such as food, housing, and health. Human rights approaches have the potential to address the structural causes, not just the symptoms of food or material deprivation and if the guarantees outlined by international human rights bodies were fulfilled, a large amount of people would be lifted out of poverty.<sup>4</sup> If basic necessities are unaffordable or inaccessible, poverty can indirectly limit a person’s ability to exercise other basic human rights, including their civil and political rights.<sup>5</sup> If an increasing amount of people do not have an adequate income to fulfill their basic needs it is impossible for Ireland to meet the various anti-poverty commitments it has signed up to, in particular the European Pillar of Social Rights, the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and the Roadmap for Social Inclusion<sup>6</sup> that are outlined below.

The European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) is about better delivering on rights for citizens by building on key principles that fall under the categories of equal opportunity and access to the labour market, fair working conditions, and social protection and inclusion.

<sup>4</sup> Cahill-Ripley, A. & Graham, L. D. (2022) Using Community-Based Truth Commissions to Address Poverty and Related Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Violations: The UK Poverty Truth Commissions as Transformative Justice. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jhuman/huab021>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, (2022) Comments on Ireland’s 19th National Report on the implementation of the European Social Charter. <https://www.ihrec.ie/app/uploads/2022/07/Comments-on-Irelands-19th-National-Report-on-the-implementation-of-the-European-Social-Charter.pdf>



# Poverty in Ireland

When addressing poverty, each of these main pillars address the probability of one falling into poverty. The EPSR recognises the role of states to legislate for policy in that will benefit citizens in these areas.<sup>7</sup>

In 2015 all countries, including Ireland, signed up to deliver the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030. The SDGs replaced the Millennium Development Goals and apply to all countries, rich and poor. There are 17 Goals which all form part of an integrated approach to a more sustainable social, environmental and economic future for everyone. Goal No1 is 'No Poverty' and the SDGs recognize that ending poverty must go hand-in-hand with strategies that build economic growth and addresses a range of social needs including education, health, social protection, and job opportunities, while tackling climate change.<sup>8</sup>

The Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025 is the Irish national strategy for poverty reduction and improved social inclusion. It aims to reduce consistent poverty to 2% or less and to make Ireland one of the most socially inclusive countries in the EU. The Roadmap uses a number of metrics to measure poverty, social inclusion and wellbeing. Although income poverty measured in relative terms can be a strong indicator of a person's welfare, education, health, housing, employment, and social integration (i.e., a person's sense of "connectedness" with their community) are all factors that contribute to a person's overall sense of well-being or welfare and are considered in the strategy. For example, moderate levels of income "may not be associated with higher welfare if these are accompanied by poor quality or high-cost services, low levels of social integration, or a diminution in the sense or value of community."<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> European Commission (2022) The European Pillar of Social Rights in 20 principles. [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles_en)  
<sup>8</sup> Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (2022) Sustainable Development Goals. <https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/ff4201-17-sustainable-development-goals/>  
<sup>9</sup> Roadmap for Social Inclusion (2020 – 2025) Ambition, Goals, Commitments. Downloads/233496\_fe39bcc4-1151-4d24-b8ca-f9385d548cd5.pdf, p. 11

**“With inflation continuing to rise, the gap between the lowest income households and highest income households is predicted to grow.”**

In May 2022 the Central Statistics Office published the Survey of Income and Living Conditions (SILC) for 2021.<sup>10</sup> Although the survey does not capture the complexity of poverty and social exclusion for certain groups such as Travellers, Migrants and the homeless, it provides us with important information on income, poverty, and inequality in Ireland and helps to identify the parts of the population most impacted. It also helps us to see how Ireland is progressing towards its poverty targets set out in the Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025. According to the CSO SILC data, in 2021, 11.6% of the population were living below the poverty line (or were at risk-of poverty) as they had an income that was less than 60% of the median disposable income, so €15,158 per annum or €290.49 per week, an increase of €18.26 from 2020. This covers over 581,000 people. By household composition, the at risk of poverty rate was highest for persons living in households comprised of one adult aged less than 65 years (28.8%). Those who were renting were at greater risk of poverty (19.8%) than those who owned their own homes (8.2%). The SILC data allows for the examination of 'enforced deprivation', which refers to those who cannot afford two or more of the eleven items considered essential.<sup>11</sup> In 2021 13.8% of the population or over 691,000 people experienced enforced deprivation. 44.9% of lone parent households were in deprivation.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> CSO (2021) Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-silc/surveyonincomeandlivingconditionssilc2021/keyfindings/>  
<sup>11</sup> The eleven items examined are: Two pairs of strong shoes; A warm waterproof overcoat; Buy new (not second-hand) clothes; Eat meal with meat, chicken, fish (or vegetarian equivalent) every second day; Have a roast joint or its equivalent once a week; Had to go without heating during the last year through lack of money; Keep the home adequately warm; Buy presents for family or friends at least once a year; Replace any worn out furniture; Have family or friends for a drink or meal once a month; Have a morning, afternoon or evening out in the last fortnight for entertainment  
<sup>12</sup> CSO (2021) Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC)

# Food poverty

The Covid-19 pandemic played a distinctive role in uncovering the many underlying social determinants of poverty and heightened the importance of services and community innovation.<sup>13</sup> A St. Vincent de Paul report conducted in March 2021 showed that people struggling before the crisis were more likely to have lost income, report an increase in household expenditure on basics, and experience more adverse financial impacts than those who lived comfortably before the pandemic.<sup>14</sup> 9% of those surveyed found it difficult to manage financially before the pandemic, which then doubled to 18% when asked about their current situation.<sup>15</sup> With inflation continuing to rise, the gap between the lowest income households and highest income households is predicted to grow.<sup>16</sup>

In the St. Vincent de Paul report in 2022, it recorded that 1 in 3 said their household income decreased. This report followed their 2021 report that found a significant part of the population is worried about their ability to meet their essential living costs such as rent, mortgages, utilities, and transport costs.<sup>17</sup> Over 1/3 of participants said they cut back on essential heating and electricity to reduce the amount on their bills. They cut back on other essentials like food, and 1 in 3 said they were going into debt or using savings to pay their common bills making them vulnerable to poverty.<sup>18</sup> The below sections elaborate on food poverty and energy poverty as these are two areas where prices have most notably increased with inflation.<sup>19</sup> However, it is important to note that any element of poverty should not be understood in isolation. These two areas are interconnected, as people are forced to make choices to spend what income they have between food, energy and other essential services.

<sup>13</sup> National Economic & Social Council. (2020). The Future of the Irish Social Welfare System: Participation and Protection (No. 151).

<sup>14</sup> Society of St. Vincent de Paul. (2022, February). The Cost of Surviving? An analysis of the financial impact of Covid-19 and rising cost of living. <https://www.svp.ie/getattachment/9567466b-599f-4e1e-a33d-b03adae7d4fc/Red-C-2022-Report-The-Cost-of-Surviving.aspx>

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> St. Vincent de Paul, 2022

<sup>17</sup> Society of St. Vincent de Paul. (2021, March). Cutting Back and Falling Behind?: An analysis of the financial impact of Covid-19. <https://www.svp.ie/getattachment/a116ab93-1ba9-4f04-b5a2-bbad59dab050/Cutting-Back-and-Falling-Behind-Red-C-Report-March.aspx>

<sup>18</sup> St. Vincent de Paul (2022)

<sup>19</sup> Barrett, Farrell & Roantree (2022)

**“Foodbanks have been described as a mechanism for alleviating key failings of the state, and once established, they appear to persist indefinitely.”**

Household food insecurity (i.e., the limited or uncertain access to adequate food) is a serious public health concern in richer economies closely associated with inequality. The prevalence of household food insecurity is relatively high in developed countries, ranging from 8 to 20% of the population.<sup>20</sup> During the pandemic, food poverty became an increasingly visible issue in Irish society but is yet under researched. The percentage of people experiencing food insecurity, too, is found to be directly related to income per week.<sup>21</sup> In February 2022 Aldi, Barnardos, and Amárach releases a report titled ‘Food Poverty: Impact on Vulnerable Children and Families’, this report involved a survey of 1,130 participants that align with the national population and highlighted how food poverty is an issue in Irish society. This research identifies that 1 in 3 people spends 21-50% of their income on food and 43% have cut down on spending in other areas to afford food.<sup>22</sup>

Looking at the more extensive research on food insecurity and the use of Foodbanks coming from the UK, in the six months following March 2020, 14% households experienced moderate to severe food insecurity,

<sup>20</sup> Pollard, C. M., & Booth, S. (2019). Food insecurity and hunger in rich countries—it is time for action against inequality. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 16(10), 1804.

<sup>21</sup> Pirie, C., Weakley, S., Smith, K., Third Sector partners, Heath Improvement Teams, & Glasgow City Council. (2021, December). Glasgow, Tackling Food Poverty with a City Plan - Pathways to a Just Recovery. Glasgow Community Food Network. [https://glasgowfood.net/assets/documents/GCFN\\_FoodPoverty\\_16122021-1.pdf](https://glasgowfood.net/assets/documents/GCFN_FoodPoverty_16122021-1.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> Aldi, Barnardos, & Amárach. (2022, February). Food Poverty: Impact on Vulnerable Children and Families. Amárach Research. [https://www.barnardos.ie/media/14808/amarach-barnardos-aldi-food-poverty-research\\_embargoed-until-0001am-220222.pdf](https://www.barnardos.ie/media/14808/amarach-barnardos-aldi-food-poverty-research_embargoed-until-0001am-220222.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> Lasko-Skinner, R., & Sweetland, J. (2021). Food in a Pandemic: From Renew Normal: The People's Commission on life after Covid-19

compared to the 11.5% who experienced it before the pandemic.<sup>23</sup> Most foodbanks in the UK are coordinated by The Trussell Trust, a Christian-based charity that had just two foodbanks in 2004, but now supports a vast network of foodbanks throughout the UK. There are currently more than 1,200 food bank centres in The Trussell Trust's network across the UK.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, there has been a steady rise in the demand for food banks which peaked during the pandemic year. In 2020/2021 2.5 million food parcels were distributed by food banks in the Trussell Trust Network alone, compared to the 1.9 million parcels distributed in 2019/2020. Since then, demand has decreased again, but it is still higher than at any point before the pandemic.<sup>25</sup> This rise in demand was found to not only be connected to the pandemic, inflation, and the general increase in the cost of living, but also a lack of government support. For example, benefit payments increase at rates below inflation, putting more pressure on already vulnerable households and individuals.<sup>26</sup>

There are fewer statistics available for the Republic of Ireland related to the use of food banks, but despite Ireland scoring second on the Global Food Security Index<sup>27</sup> Irish food support services also report an increase in demand over the last few years. Foodcloud noted that in June 2020 it worked with charities that in total provided more than 59,000 people with food and that 70% of these charities experienced a surge in demand, especially among older people, single parents, and people with mental health problems.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Lawson, L., & Kearns, A. (2022). Foodbanks as paradoxes of policy and society. *Voluntary Sector Review*, 12(3), 439-457.

<sup>25</sup> Trussell Trust (2022) Trussell Trust data briefing on end-of-year statistics relating to use of food banks: April 2021 – March 2022. <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2022/04/EOY-Stats-2022-Data-Briefing.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> Ibid

<sup>27</sup> Economist Impact (2022) Global Food Security Index 2022. <https://impact.economist.com/sustainability/project/food-security-index/>

<sup>28</sup> Holland, K. (2020) Food bank in Dublin's working-class Bluebell feeding hungry hundreds. <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/food-bank-in-dublin-s-working-class-bluebell-feeding-hungry-hundreds-1.4368658>

<sup>29</sup> St Vincent de Paul, 2021

<sup>30</sup> St Vincent de Paul, 2022

Furthermore, a St Vincent de Paul report shows that 15% of survey respondents had to cut back on food expenses in January 2021.<sup>29</sup> That number increased to 18% in January 2022.<sup>30</sup> An article for RTE in May 2022 covered a number of St Vincent De Paul food bank in Dublin and reported the demand was at all time high due to more and more households becoming affected by food and energy costs.<sup>31</sup>

Foodbanks have been described as a mechanism for alleviating key failings of the state, and once established, they appear to persist indefinitely.<sup>32</sup> Research on Foodbanks and other forms of charitable food provision in the UK has found that Foodbanks have de facto become part of the welfare landscape and this voluntary sector-state relationship has had profound and detrimental consequences for both the voluntary sector, communities, and citizens.<sup>33</sup> Research on receiving food assistance internationally has found that it places citizens in interactions of charitable giving that are often harmful to the self-esteem of receivers and can induce a range of emotions including shame, gratitude, and anger.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Conneely, A. (2022) Dublin food bank experiencing increased demand <https://www.rte.ie/news/dublin/2022/0519/1300024-food-bank/>

<sup>32</sup> Ronson, D., & Caraher, M. (2016). Food banks: big society or shunting yards? Successful failures. In *Food poverty and insecurity: International food inequalities* (pp. 79-88). [https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-23859-3\\_8](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-23859-3_8).

<sup>33</sup> Lambie-Mumford, H. (2019). The growth of food banks in Britain and what they mean for social policy. *Critical Social Policy*, 39(1), 3-22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0261018318765855>

<sup>34</sup> Van der Horst, H., Pascucci, S., & Bol, W. (2014). The "dark side" of food banks? Exploring emotional responses of food bank receivers in the Netherlands. *British Food Journal*. <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/BFJ-02-2014-0081/full/html>

# Energy poverty

The number of households in energy poverty in the State is currently estimated to be 29%.<sup>35</sup> This leaves the share of households in energy poverty, defined as spending more than a tenth of their net income on energy (including electricity but excluding motor fuel) is above its previously recorded high of 23% in 1994/95. The estimate is based on energy inflation observed from January 2021 to April 2022, with a further 25% rise in energy prices increasing this share to 43%. Lower-income households have been disproportionately affected by rising inflation as they spend a larger proportion of their budget on energy, particularly electricity.<sup>36</sup>

A 2022 report completed by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) on energy poverty makes an important distinction between expenditure-based energy poverty and self-reported energy deprivation. Energy expenditures drive fuel poverty status for many households according to expenditure-based metrics, while much of the difference in expenditure and self-reported energy poverty statistics arise from expenditures on mostly electricity.<sup>37</sup> Households may respond to a high energy cost by spending a disproportionate share of their income on energy, resulting in fewer resources available for other goods or services. This may be considered as energy poverty. Alternatively, a household may be forced to reduce their consumption of energy in the home. This may lead to energy deprivation. The report also highlights the important socio-economic differences between groups identified as vulnerable to rising fuel prices, these include lower-income, older and rural households.

<sup>35</sup> Barrett, M., Farrell, N., & Roantree, B. (2022).

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

# Public service provision in Ireland

The privatization, or marketization of public services has been found to have had a regressive impact on the distribution of income and wealth in Ireland.<sup>38</sup> Ireland ranks poorly compared to other EU in terms of service provision in the key areas of housing, childcare and healthcare.<sup>39</sup>

The lack of affordable housing and insufficient social housing is a major driver of poverty in Ireland. The majority of rental housing available is tied to market conditions, this is a serious issue for those living in poverty and on lower incomes as they are less able to respond to and mitigate increases in rent. According to St. Vincent de Paul, 1 in 5 people are at risk of poverty when housing costs are included.<sup>40</sup> In the same report it was found that over half the population is worried about paying their rent, with 9% already being late and 29% fearing eviction.<sup>41</sup> The cost of housing continues to escalate and constitutes a long-standing and ongoing policy failure. While prices have been rising for over a decade since the economic crash, price growth had abated prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. The cost-of-living crisis, however, has seen a return to extraordinary price growth. As of June, the year-on-year price increase for housing was 14.1% nationally.<sup>42</sup> The social implications of such growth have been serious. As the price of accommodation has risen faster than income, affordability has deteriorated. This has led to many households being unable to afford market-based housing, pushing them into social and public housing, when available, and emergency accommodation when not.

<sup>38</sup> Sweeney, R & Storrie, D. Think-Tank on Action for Social Change. (2022) The state we are in: inequality in Ireland 2022 [https://www.tasc.ie/assets/files/pdf/2205-4\\_tasc\\_inequality\\_in\\_ire\\_2022.pdf](https://www.tasc.ie/assets/files/pdf/2205-4_tasc_inequality_in_ire_2022.pdf)

<sup>39</sup> Maître, B., Privalko, I., & Watson, D. (2020). Social Transfers and Deprivation in Ireland: A study of cash and non-cash payments tied to housing, childcare, and primary health care services. ESRI Report November 2020. <http://hdl.handle.net/2262/94294>

<sup>40</sup> St. Vincent de Paul, 2022

<sup>41</sup> Ibid

<sup>42</sup> See: <https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/prices/residentialpropertypriceindex/>

Ireland is the only Western European country that does not offer universal coverage of primary care<sup>43</sup>, with 60% of the population paying out of pocket on for GP care and two thirds of the population paying up to €144 per month for drugs as well as paying for other primary care services.<sup>44</sup> Although all Irish residents are eligible for some level of public healthcare, there are significant variations in cost, coverage and access depending on one's income, geographic location and the length of time it takes to receive care.<sup>45</sup> Those who are eligible for medical cards on the basis of low income (providing primary and hospital care without charge) often have to wait a long time for hospital diagnosis and treatment.<sup>46</sup>

Arguably the major cause of poverty in Ireland today is the interaction between expensive services, high transfers, and low pay.<sup>47</sup> This is a multifaceted phenomenon, with the high cost of childcare being a major cause for many families. Though public spending on childcare has increased in recent years through the ECCE scheme, Ireland spends less than all of its EU neighbours on childcare.<sup>48</sup> Currently, Ireland spends under 0.3% of national income on funding the early years sector, this is well below the UNICEF target of 1% of national income on the early years sector. Low levels of public spending on care mean that Ireland has perhaps the most expensive childcare in the EU for families. For example, net costs of childcare in 2020 for those parents earning average wages per country accounted for 11% of a household's income in Denmark, whereas childcare expenditures accounted for 28% of an average household's income in Ireland.<sup>49</sup> The formal sector

<sup>43</sup> OECD and European observatory on health systems and policies, Ireland: country health profile 2017 OECD and European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies, Paris/Brussels (2017)

<sup>44</sup> Thomson, S., Jowett, M., Mladovsky, P., & World Health Organization. (2014). Health system responses to financial pressures in Ireland: policy options in an international context.

<sup>45</sup> Burke, S. A., Normand, C., Barry, S., & Thomas, S. (2016). From universal health insurance to universal healthcare? The shifting health policy landscape in Ireland since the economic crisis. *Health Policy*, 120(3), 235-240. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26777302>

<sup>46</sup> OECD and European Observatory on Health Systems and (2017)

<sup>47</sup> Sweeney, R. Starrie, D. Think-Tank on Action for Social Change. (2022)

<sup>48</sup> OECD (2019). *Providing Quality Early Childhood Education and Care: Results from the Starting Strong Survey 2018*, TALIS, Paris: OECD Publishing

<sup>49</sup> Authors calculations based on calculations data extract, accessed 1/2022: <https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=FAMILY>



currently relies on the private sector for provision and on the state for funding. According to the latest figures, 74% of all services are for-profit, while only 26% are community services operating on a not-for-profit basis.<sup>50</sup>

### Barely managing before

Martin is 46 and living in South Dublin. He has been out of work for the last four years and receives disability benefit and the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP). He has two teenage children and is separated and lives alone. He has found that his weekly food shop costs a lot more than in the past. What he could get for about €60 a week now costs him at least €90, even though he feels he is doing a lot more shopping around and looking for deals and bargains. This increase has had a big impact on him, and he has needed to ask St Vincent de Paul for support with food vouchers. In the past he had family support when unforeseen or irregular expenses came up, for example at Christmas or when one of his children needed money for a school trip. He feels he has nobody to ask now because “everyone is struggling”.

<sup>50</sup> Pobal (2022) Annual Early Years Sector Profile Report 2020/21: 41. <https://www.pobal.ie/app/uploads/2021/05/Annual-Early-Years-Sector-Profile-Report-201920.pdf>

# The role of the community and voluntary sector in Ireland

The Community and Voluntary sector play an integral role in most areas of Irish society. They provide many supports and services that would otherwise be unavailable or come at a higher price for the state. In total, charitable organisations registered with the Charities Regulator have an estimated 189,000 employees and around 300,536 volunteers whose work is valued from €648.8 million to €1.5 billion per year when estimated in 2021.<sup>51</sup>

The sector has an important role in implementing social inclusion and community development programmes as well as addressing the barriers to people's participation in society. Older people, people with disabilities and physical illnesses, and people going through housing, food, and energy insecurity are among the groups who engage with the community and voluntary sector the most. These organisations provide a number of vital services for society. For example, volunteer organisations are integral to health and social care services, such as hospice care and disability support.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, areas like education, mental health services, and minority rights organisations strongly rely on the community and volunteer sector.<sup>53</sup> The sector provides resources to empower individuals and communities, encourage community ownership and provides care and support to some of the most vulnerable members of society.

The 2008 recession brought significant funding cuts to the sector that proceeded into the 2010s. Organisations were experiencing funding cuts of up to 20% and at first had to compensate for it by laying off staff or reducing their pay and working hours, but, as more cuts were implemented, organisations had to suspend services<sup>54</sup> and the sector remains under funded to this day.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of community-based support organisations to support many vulnerable people who rely on them for basic necessities and vital supports. In recent years many organisations, such as Family Resource Centres (FRCs) and organisations and projects funded under the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) increasingly been required to meet the basic needs of people and are consequently less able to carry out their core social inclusion and community development role. The provision of basic necessities is taking away from what community organisations were founded to do which is long-term and sustainable social inclusion initiatives and this should not be normalised.<sup>56</sup>

**“Older people, people with disabilities and physical illnesses, and people going through housing, food, and energy insecurity are among the groups who engage with the community and voluntary sector the most.”**

<sup>51</sup> Social Justice Ireland (2021) Thriving Community and Voluntary sector is key to vibrant communities. <https://www.socialjustice.ie/content/policy-issues/thriving-community-and-voluntary-sector-key-vibrant-communities>

<sup>52</sup> MacNeela, P. (2008) The Give and Take of Volunteering: Motives, Benefits, and Personal Connections among Irish Volunteers. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27928112>

<sup>53</sup> Cooper, I. Irish Research Council (2016) Researching and valuing the community and voluntary approach. <https://research.ie/what-we-do/loveirishresearch/blog/loveirishresearch-blog-researching-and-valuing-the-community-and-voluntary-approach/>

<sup>54</sup> Rogers, S. (2011) Funding cuts of up to 20% hurting voluntary organisations. <https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-20154332.html>

<sup>55</sup> Forde, C. (2020). Community Development, Policy Change, and Austerity in Ireland. *Community Practice and Social Development in Social Work*, 345-361.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid



# Methodology

The following sections in this report present findings from data collected between December 2021 and August 2022.

- **Six Interviews** with two men and four women. These interviews explored the lived reality of material deprivation on individuals and families and included individuals who were unemployed and working and individuals living in both rural and urban areas. Interviews focused on lived experiences of engaging with the community/voluntary sector for support with basic necessities and how the material deprivation that led to that need affected their day to day lives. A number of short case studies based on these interviews appear in this report.
- **Four focus groups**, three with staff from community/voluntary organisations providing services and one focus group with staff from organisations with a focus on policy. The participation in focus groups was kept anonymous, including names, positions and organisations. This was so that participants could speak openly and candidly. Focus groups concentrated on the capacity of organisations to meet demand, the experience of providing basic necessities as part of their activities and how it affected their organisations, and, the impact of this provision on their relationship with service users, other charities, local government and other public sector institutions.

Preliminary findings from this report were presented at a roundtable discussion in July 2022 attended by Minister Joe O'Brien Teachta Dála Minister of State with responsibility for Community Development and Charities, staff members from EAPN Ireland and EAPN France, and a group of practitioners from the Community and Voluntary sector.

A full interview guide and focus group schedules can be found in Appendices 1, 2 and 3.



## Working but struggling to make ends meet

Catherine is in her late 30s and living in Dublin. She is a single parent and works fulltime. One of her children is in secondary school and the other is looked after in a creche while she works. She has had extensive contact with the Community and Voluntary sector in the past getting support from domestic abuse organisations and mental health supports for her older child. Even though she works fulltime she finds herself increasingly worried every month that she will not be able to cover living costs: rent, petrol, childcare and food, if there are further increases in prices. Catherine felt that she was missing out on the threshold for some benefits because of her income despite having less and less disposable income every month and sometimes felt that “it’s not worth my while working”.

# Section 2:

## Challenges for households



The following is based on the analysis of six in-depth interviews with individuals from households struggling to meet living costs. These interviews included four women and two men; four interviewees lived in urban areas, two in rural areas. One person was working full-time and two part-time, two people were currently unemployed and one interviewee was retired.

### Incomes increasingly inadequate to cover living costs

Despite all interviewees being from different backgrounds and in different situations financially, their ability to comfortably meet their living costs had deteriorated in the last year. Interviewees recognised this as a situation facing many people in their social circle and that it had a major impact on their day to day lives. As one interview described:

**“You’re talking to people who when they get their money, literally it’s like a calculator. Like for one euro yeah can be a big deal you know what I mean? That’s incredible in this 21 st century or whatever and you’re kind of ‘do I have enough to get into the week?’ Every single time”**

The increasing costs of basic necessities was felt acutely by interviewees, who were all on lower incomes. One interviewee, who was working fulltime and a single parent, describes how the increase in the cost of food has impacted how she shopped. She describes how she now needs to extensively plan, budget and shop around in order to afford a weekly food shop:



**“It’s all the major things that really hit the whole family: milk, bread, potatoes, just the basics, eggs. I would go to maybe three different shops again because the cost in one shop today for a big box of tea is good and in a different place washing powder is on offer, checking where its cheapest. And it’s just maybe a couple of quid but at the end of the day it all adds up when you pull it together. You are literally on the breadline, everything has to be planned now.”**

An interviewee on social welfare describes how even moderate increases in the cost of food impact those on social welfare particularly harshly:

**“All they [the government] do is tinker a bit with the wages and the social, I think they forget like if everyone’s shopping is 30 quid more expensive this week, this month its 120 more expensive but if you had only like 800 quid for the month that’s massive, if you take home pay is three grand a month or something like that’s not going to impact you the same.”**

An issue discussed by a couple of interviewees was missing out on certain benefits due to being above the income threshold. This was happening despite having a lot less income in real terms because of increases in the cost of basic necessities:

**“You have less disposable income, but the threshold to get support, say you got like fuel allowance or anything, they stay the same, they only go up a tiny bit. So, you can’t qualify for support but you actually have no money to pay for things all the same.”**

## **Negative effects on well-being**

There were different examples of how people had sacrificed socialising and small luxuries that had made their lives more enjoyable because of increases in the costs of basic necessities. This included, no longer getting a takeaway as a treat, going to the cinema, or days out with their families:

**“My sister rang me on the Friday, and she said that after dealing out the budgets, we’re gonna have to leave the zoo for maybe a month. These are people working in good paying jobs, maybe a 50 quid trip they couldn’t afford because of the school costs.”**

Another negative effect on individuals living with the pressure of worrying if they can cover their basic living costs, is that it bred resentment and misdirected anger towards other groups within society. One interviewee, who worked full-time, believed they she missed out on many benefits that she would receive if she was unemployed:

**“I go to work 40 hours a week and I’m still counting the pennies every week, having to go to the credit union for money for uniforms, the cost of them. Why bother? There are no rights for people who work. The only thing I do is pay my taxes. And that goes towards probably two or three people to stay in bed every day and do nothing.”**

Another interviewee describes this as a common attitude in people around him, towards people in receipt of social welfare, migrants and now, refugees from Ukraine:

**“that’s where a lot of resentment comes, that’s always the way. People think the ‘oh if I was unemployed, I’d have everything what’s the point, if I came from the Ukraine, I’d have everything given to me.”**

## **Increased stress**

There was a sense of despondency and panic expressed in the interviews about what the future would bring particularly coming into winter and needing to cover increasing fuel costs:

**“But you need to have some kind of backup in this area you know, so yeah, we’ll be up to Christmas soon. Yeah, I don’t think people even want to think about that this year you know, it’s gonna be a very different Christmas in terms of what you can do.”**

This worry about the future often centred around an inability to absorb any unforeseen costs. One interviewee who was unemployed described how he would have relied on other family members who were working to give him a lend of money but didn’t feel like he would be able to that now:

**“That’s the thing, I could have asked my sister or my other sister to spot me something for a rainy day but there’s none of that now because I know they’re struggling so I wouldn’t ask”**

## **Loss of dignity**

There was a sense of stigmatisation and shame around poverty noted in both the interviews, and in focus groups with staff from organisations that provided support with basic necessities. The experience of having to get support in the form of food vouchers was a new experience for the majority of those interviewed. Needing support with basic necessities was described by interviewees as ‘embarrassing’, ‘unfair’, and ‘shocking’.

**“You know, I know that there are people, very proud people, who will have no choice but to ask for help during the winter. It’s not easy to do that. You feel pathetic, like such a failed human.”**

It was described as a situation where many people were in a situation where they needed support in this way but were too embarrassed to ask for it:

**“I have had to go down and get support from the St. Vincent DePaul with the Tesco cards and I know others who have had to do the same. But there is a lot of ego there and I know others who really need it but they couldn’t go because of being that embarrassed to admit it.”**

An interviewee described the feeling of unfairness that it could affect even someone working:

**“I shouldn’t be doing this. It’s shocking and unfair that it affects even people in work. I shouldn’t have to borrow money so I can buy uniforms in August because I have to spend so much just on what I need every week. That should be for big things and emergencies only”**

# Section 3: Challenges for the Community and Voluntary Sector



**Section 3 presents findings from focus groups, both from the three focus groups with organisations who work directly with service users and the one focus group with organisations with a focus on policy.**

## **Increase in demand for support with basic necessities**

Participants across the four focus groups reported an increase in demand for support with basic necessities. What was also noted was an increase in anxiety or stress service users experienced due to the inability to keep up with increases in the cost of living.

**“You hear more and more of that saying, ‘Well, maybe if I pay my fuel, or my heating bills, I’m a bit short for food. If I put enough food on the table, I have to compromise with heat’. So those are the stark choices people are making”**

What was described was that many people lived week to week, and that people had become increasingly sensitive to unexpected costs, or during ‘pressure points’ like Christmas or the new school year:

**“It’s very difficult to get the state to acknowledge that, you know, that the pay some people receive is just not adequate. And that if people get any bump in the road, like Christmas even, they can’t handle it”.**

There was a number of reasons cited for this, one of the most common being inadequate incomes coupled with an increase in cost of fuel, food and basic necessities:

**“So, if you’re looking at an adequate income, it has to be matched to what it costs to live in this society, and just saying, Oh, we put an extra fiver on the social welfare, that doesn’t reflect what you need to live, to be able to meet your basic necessities with dignity and participate”.**

High rents and inadequate housing provision were also frequently mentioned as driving poverty and an increased demand for support with basic necessities:

**“There’s huge pressure on low-income families, low-income families particularly, because of rental. So, the huge push down is high rents. Because that’s so out of control, the pushback is obviously your disposable income, for starters, is greatly reduced, but your other income to pay bills, for food bills, all the stuff we’ve been listening to, basically is limited. So, there are choices being made”**

Participants described an increase in how this struggle appeared to be impacting more and more people, including those who were working full-time:

**“The working poor have always been there, families have worked all their lives, with mortgages and whatever else, it’s a choice of is it heating, is it uniforms, whatever, for their children. so, at the end of the day or at the end of the week when they get their wages, they were left with very little to buy food. So, they had to depend on the service that we were providing. So, it hasn’t got any better, to me it’s actually getting worse.”**

Inability to address complex systemic poverty  
Something that arose in focus groups was a frustration at the inability of a single organisation with a specific remit to address poverty. Poverty was described as a systemic and structural issue that encompassed many aspects including income and social welfare rates, housing and access to public services:

**“What is poverty?’ It needs to be properly defined now. It’s an awful state of affairs if we’re saying that poverty is when you haven’t got food on your table. But it’s actually about not having access to a dental service, or a doctor, or mental health services.”**

Something that was described was increasing problems with access to services and supports, even when people were entitled to them. This was described as being a result of people often not knowing exactly what they were entitled to and in rural areas in particular a lack of people being able to access services because of having to travel long distances without access to public transport or resources to pay for transport:

**“And it looks like now that anybody who has a medical card will have to go to Limerick to go to a dentist. Do you realize how long that takes if you haven’t got transport, and the cost? To go over and back to Ennis is ten euros.”**

There was anxiety about the growing normalisation in the role of charities providing support with basic necessities that was made more visible during the Covid-19 pandemic:

**And I’ve a fear that we’re switching back now into a kind of a normal, however, expecting community organizations to provide supports and services which should be supplied on a statutory basis. That there is going to be a more of an onus put on community organizations, and that is unsustainable, and it’s wrong.”**

There was also a feeling that some are quick to romanticise the role of charities in providing support with basic necessities. However, it was stressed that this has a negative effect on human dignity and that the provision of the most basic necessities should not be the responsibility of charities in a wealthy country like Ireland:

**“The food partnership is not a charity, we’re unfortunately very much needed supports and services that are required within communities, often in disadvantaged communities. And the notion, sometimes, it pleases government to see us as charities, because ‘Isn’t it lovely?’ You know, ‘We’re charitable, oh, gosh, we’re very good’. We’re actually so needed. So, I think there is something coming out of this, that is really, really, truly needed. But it’s not happening, it’s not going to be recognised.**”

### **Impact on core mission and values**

The increase in demand for support with basic necessities has led to an inability for organisations to plan in the long-term and is causing a drift in the mission and values of many organisations.

There was a feeling that the cost-of-living crisis was resulting in a level of deprivation that had not been widespread since the previous recession. The sense that things were regressing and has led to pessimism within the sector:

**“I think one of the key differences is something more insidious, it’s that there was hope, and aspiration even, prior to the pandemic, we had a lot of people coming out of addiction coming into our services, we had people who were engaging for the first time in many years because other things around them had become slightly more positive. Our services are now completely focused on people who are much further from the support that they need than they were previously.”**

Responding to service users more basic and fundamental needs is altering the core work that organisations do and how they responded to service users:

**“We all want to work with where people are at, but what we’re finding is people are at a much harder space to where our services were. So, our service design is changing, to have to match where they’re at now. Whereas over the previous 10 years, maybe since the last recession, we’ve moved with the clients, but now we’re back to the start again”**

### **Inadequate resources**

This increase in demand for support has led to an increased workload for much of the sector while at the same time funding has not been sufficiently increased:

**Funding was made available initially, was thrown at us, at the beginning of COVID. It’s gone now. Now we’re seeing people actually in very dire straits, and there isn’t a penny to be got anywhere.”**

The tendering process and the need to compete not only with other community/voluntary organisations but now also with the private sector, who often have a lot more time to dedicate toward putting together tenders and proposals, was also putting a strain on organisations:

**“But there’s the whole thing of the privatisation of the work that’s done by the community and voluntary sector, putting stuff out to competitive tender. SICAP itself is an example of that, the provision of local employment service and job clubs is now going out to tender competing with the private sector. Home Help... the government are saying this is due to EU procurement law, there’s another view on that. I think there are threats to our sector, on the one hand, they say ‘We respect what you do and your agility and how well you’ve done during COVID’, and on the other hand, they’re working against us. So I think our big threats to what we do as well if we’re to get any sort of funding, or are we just going to operate on a shoestring?”**

There was a frustration at the lack of focus on long-term solutions and the necessity to respond to funding calls instead of being able to design supports based on community needs. There was also frustration expressed at measuring and reporting impact against targets instead of quality or depth of support:

**“We are adhering to funder requirements rather than the need of communities. And I would find I’d be able to do a lot more, and have a lot more positive outcomes, with the money I currently have available to us and the partnership as a whole if we were allowed to do what was needed rather than what was asked for, or what we had to tender for. So, I think that’s the key thing, yes, more money is always good, but being able to spend it on what’s needed is probably actually a stronger issue I have right now”**

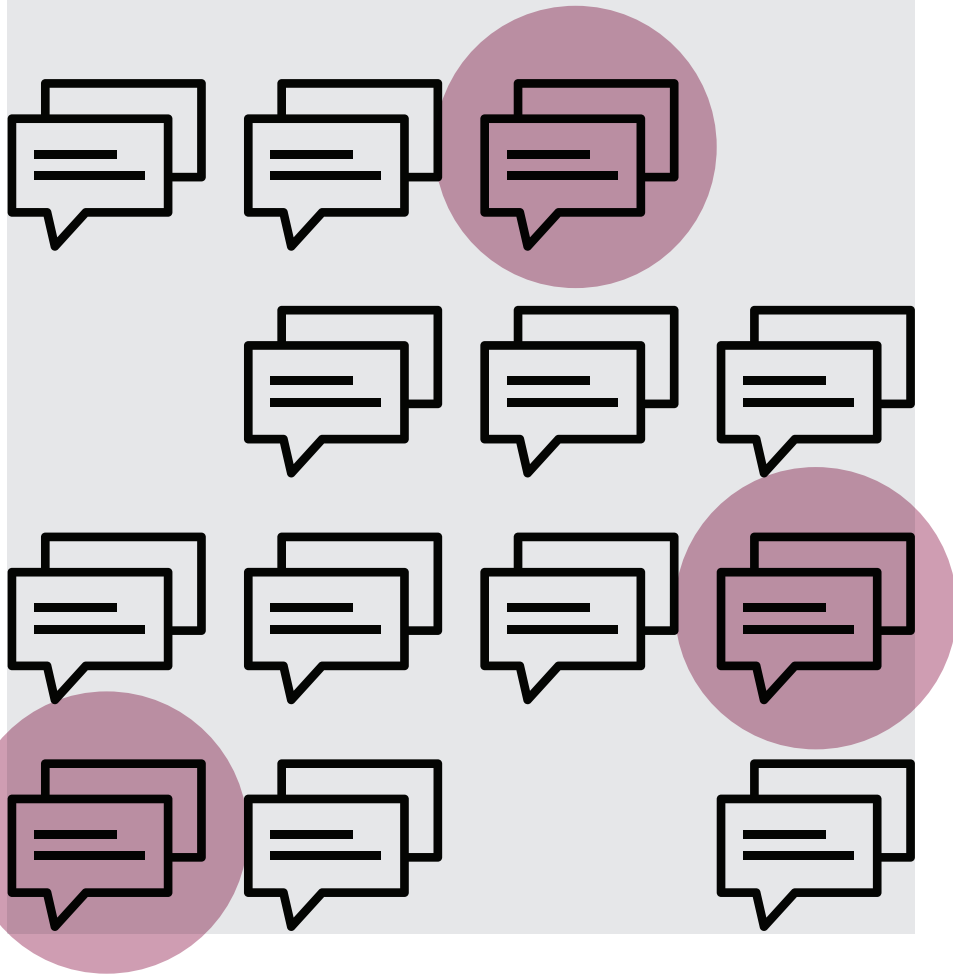


### **Knock-on effects of the increasing costs of food and fuel**

Jennifer is in her mid-twenties and lives by herself a fifteen drive from Tralee. Jennifer has both physical and mental health needs and needs to take taxis regularly to appointments as she does not drive and there is no public transport available. She receives disability allowance and has a medical card. She is worried by increasing food costs and particularly worried about the cost of heating her home over the winter. Jennifer has noticed that the cost of taxis has increased a lot in the last six months or so. She was offered a place on a course in social care but was unable to take it because of the costs of transport getting to and from Tralee.

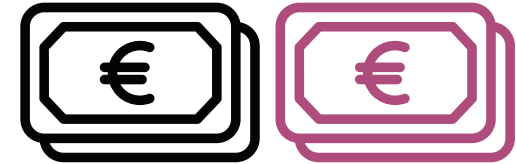
# Section 4:

## Recommendations



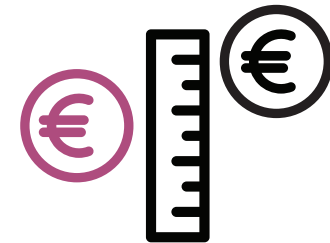
Budget 2023 proposed mostly temporary relief without tackling structural causes of poverty or providing adequate investment in quality public service provision. All of the below recommendations call on the Government to directly intervene to address the underlying, long-term, structural causes of poverty by undertaking the following specific policy actions.

1.



**Income adequacy** needs to be examined as a core response to addressing poverty. A minimum wage for all workers of €13.85 is recommended by the Living Wage Technical Group. This amount has been calculated to be the amount that is necessary to make a minimum acceptable standard of living possible. This is significantly higher than the National Minimum Wage for 2023 and what it would be if the Government's proposed approach based on 60% of the median wage was fully implemented i.e. €13.10.

2.



**Benchmark social welfare rates against the Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL).** The increase in weekly social welfare payments and pension payments of €12 announced as part of the 2023 budget measures fell below inflation levels and will not prevent families and individuals falling further into poverty.

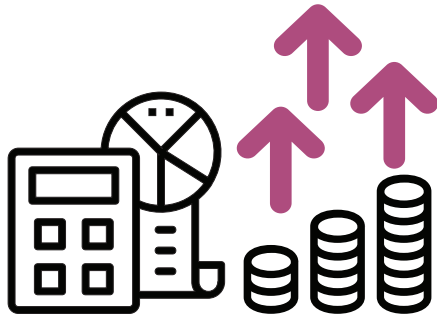
3.



**A reliance on the Community and Voluntary to provide basic necessities should not be normalised.**

- Individuals should not need to rely on charitable organisations to meet their basic needs. Interacting with charities in this way is detrimental to self-esteem and human dignity.
- Organisations with a social inclusion remit must be able to focus on this rather than responding to people's immediate emergency needs and mediating the failures of the state.

4.



**Means-testing and thresholds for services should be examined in line with the cost of living,** this is particularly important for the low-income households struggling with the effects of inflation and a steep reduction in disposable income because of increasing costs in other areas.

5.

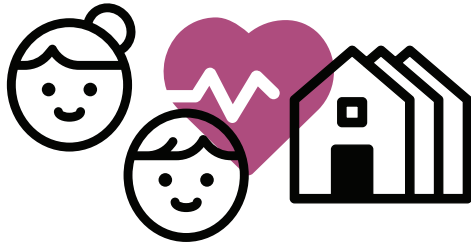


**Tackling energy poverty is key to ensuring people can afford basic necessities.** The €600 once off energy credits promised in the 2023 budget covers less than 20% of the rise in energy prices for an average household.

Resources could be targeted in a number of ways:

- Widen eligibility for the Fuel Allowance by including those receiving Working Family Payment, removing the waiting period for those on Jobseekers and making it available to people on modest incomes in poorly insulated homes.
- Increase the weekly Fuel Allowance rate to €48 and reinstate the 32-week season as per MESL findings for 2022.
- A partial-rate Fuel Allowance payment should be available for those on a low income who do not currently qualify, so it is not an all-or-nothing for people just outside the eligibility criteria.
- Increase investment in public transport options, particularly in rural areas, to offset the additional transport costs faced by those in rural locations, a factor placing rural households at greater risk of income inadequacy, isolation and poverty





6.

**Address inadequacies in service provision that contribute to poverty.**

- Increase supply of housing through new build, social and affordable housing. In addition, introduce an eviction moratorium for specific scenarios, where households are at risk homelessness.
- Move towards a public childcare model in order to make childcare accessible to all families: The move toward 1% of national income spending on childcare by 2025 recommended by UNICEF will require significant investment in non-profit and public provision of care.
- Funding healthcare: expedite the move to Sláintecare.



7.

**Evaluate how the Community and Voluntary sector could be better resourced and involved in informing policy.**

- The Government should consider introducing more multi-year funding cycles to allow organisations to plan long term.
- The Government should examine the consultation mechanisms that are currently in place with the Community and Voluntary sector to ensure an effective and meaningful voice is given to those impacted by all forms of poverty in how policies are developed and implemented.

# Section 5: Conclusion



**The inability to afford basic necessities, therefore depending on provision from charities and community organisations, is a sign of deep and intersectional poverty, that is now relevant to and experienced by people from across a diverse number of marginalised communities and groups in Ireland. The fulfilment of basic needs is fundamental to human dignity, human rights, and social and economic equality. For individuals and households, an inability to afford basic necessities causes significant stress and forces them to make inequitable choices.**

Many in society now have an income that is not adequate to meet the cost of living or to enable them to live with dignity. As a priority the Government needs to ensure that everyone has access to an adequate income, whether this is from work or social welfare, or a mix of both. The Government must also tackle the long-term drivers of the cost of living, including the cost of services such as housing, health, and childcare, alongside tackling the current immediate drivers such as energy and fuel costs. This is necessary to ensure that everyone has access to an adequate income, quality services and the opportunity to access a decent job as per the European Pillar of Social Rights (ESPR). There needs to be investment in public services and supports, i.e., investment in direct build social and affordable housing, the adequate funding of a public childcare system, investment in health and in public transport across Ireland, particularly in rural areas.

The reliance on the Community and Voluntary sector for support with basic necessities has detrimental impacts on the sector itself, changing the nature of services that are provided and putting further strain on often already under-resourced organisations. The Government must not rely on the Community and Voluntary to alleviate key failings of the state in relation to income adequacy or essential service provision. The sector must be adequately resourced and organised in such a way that it can continue to support the social inclusion of marginalised people and facilitate communities to have a voice through autonomous community development.

Relying on charitable organisations for basic necessities, including food vouchers, is damaging to people's sense of dignity, is unsustainable, and should be not normalised.

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## Appendix 1

### Focus Group Schedule: Service Providers

1. What would you say are some of the key drivers behind the increase in demand for supports from your perspective?
2. Has the change in service provision type required you to change how your service operates?
3. Has providing support with basic necessities impacted on the organisation's work or resources?
4. Are there increasing demands on staff time? Have you had to hire new staff or train new volunteers?
5. Have you seen increased turnover in staff or volunteers?
6. Have there been additional training needs for staff and volunteers?
7. Has your relationship changed with other organisations who are working in the same locality? If so, how?
8. Have you seen a change in the service users attending your services, did your services attract different demographics?
9. How do you interact with service users? Do they need a referral to access your service? How do people come to you?
10. Have there been patterns around the timing of increased need? (For example, around school holidays/Christmas?)
11. How do services users talk about needing support with basic necessities? Do service users feel comfortable talking about their circumstances?
12. Do you see any differences in this type of provision between more rural and more urban areas?
13. What kind of supports or policies do you think would help households seeking support with basic necessities?
14. What are the supports do you need as an organisation? What are the actions the government need to take to manage the types of need your service is experiencing?

## Appendix 2

### Focus Group Schedule: Policy Organisations

1. What would you say are some of the long term, medium term, and short term needs behind the increasing demand for emergency support?
2. What types of need are the most prominent? Is it for food, particular goods, clothes, energy, or others?
3. Have you found within the context of your work that the inability to meet basic needs has increased, decreased, or remained the same for households in the past few years?
4. Are there any aspects of employment that you think increase poverty or reliance on emergency support?
5. Are there any aspects of the welfare system that you think increase poverty or reliance on emergency aid?
6. What actions can the government take around employment to increase household incomes?
7. How can the government change the provision of social welfare to increase household incomes?
8. What can the government do to make services more accessible to households experiencing a lack of access to basic goods?
9. What policies need to be in place to help particular low-income groups, such as people with disabilities; unemployed people; lone parents; and Travellers?
10. Are there any particular policies that the government should implement to help households with the rising costs of living, for example around fuel or food?
11. What policies can the government implement to assist charities and community organisations to manage the increasing demand for services?
12. Are there any other actions or policies that could be implemented to help households who need access to emergency aid?

## Appendix 3

### Interview Schedule

1. Do you think meeting your household's basic needs has become more difficult or remained the same in the past few years?
2. What types of things have you needed support with? Would it be with food, clothes, energy, or other things?
3. Have these pressures always been there? Have they gotten better or worse over time?
4. Do you feel comfortable talking about your circumstances with staff or volunteers? How could this be made easier?
5. Do you see any differences between more rural and more urban services and supports?
6. What kind of supports or policies does the government need to provide that would help households like yours?
7. Do you think that charities and community organisations have a different role in the community since the beginning of the pandemic?
8. Are there any areas of the welfare system that you think make people reliant on emergency supports?
9. Are there any other points you would like to make, or anything we haven't covered?



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