



COMMUNITY PLATFORM - *CHALLENGING POVERTY & INEQUALITY*

a network of 27 national organisations working to address poverty, social exclusion, and inequality

Four Tests for Budget 2018

While the economy seems to be recovering, with jobs increasing and unemployment falling, many people and groups in society are still not experiencing the benefits. Poverty levels remain extremely high and many struggle to have a decent life because of inadequate income from jobs or social welfare supports and lack of access to affordable, quality services.

Budget 2018 must have a progressive impact and the additional resources available to the Government must all be used to invest in providing adequate social welfare supports and critical public services and infrastructure. The Budget should contribute to achieving the poverty target under our National Action Plan for Social Inclusion and to our commitments under the Sustainable Development Goals. To do so it must prioritise those hardest hit by recession and austerity and signal the beginning of a delivery on this Government's commitment to social repair and the building of an inclusive recovery. Community Platform members will judge Budget 2018 in terms of the following four tests.

Test 1: Will Budget 2018 redistribute income towards the poorest 20%

The Community Platform believes the Government should:

- **Make the tax system more progressive** and equitable by closing tax loopholes and ending all tax-breaks which cannot demonstrate a social benefit.
- **Immediately restore the social welfare rate to pre-cuts level of €204 per week** and in future budgets benchmark all social welfare rates at a level which is sufficient to both lift people above the poverty line and provide them with a Minimum Essential Standard of Living. Increase carers allowance and carers benefit towards 2009 rates of €220.50 and €221.
- **Restore the full social welfare payments for those under 26 years**, as a first of three steps to increase the Jobseekers allowance for all young people on the lower rate by €30 per week in this budget.
- **Recognise the additional minimum needs of older children** with the introduction of a higher rate of Qualified Child Increase (QCI) for children in second level education.
- **Grant Child Benefit to all children irrespective of the status of the parents.** For anyone resident in Direct Provision for 6 months or more, grant the right to work and replace direct provision accommodation with Housing Assistance Payment and a cash allowance that will ensure a minimum essential standard of living.
- **Develop a measure of minimum adequate income** that is responsive to the extra costs associated with living with a disability, and ensure that people with disabilities are allowed to live with dignity.
- **Introduce measures to close the gender pension gap which currently stands at 37%.** Reverse 2012 changes to State Pension; apply the Homemaker's Scheme retrospectively; initiate the introduction of a universal pension and begin the progressive end to marginal rate tax reliefs on private pensions.

Test 2: Will Budget 2018 strengthen access to quality employment?

The Community Platform believes the Government should:

- **Increase the National Minimum Wage incrementally towards Living Wage level** agreed by the Living Wage Technical Group. This is €11.60 per hour in 2017.
- **Change the criteria for access to Jobseekers payments** from one based on days to one based on hours.
- **Maintain the adequacy of the Family Income Supplement (FIS)** and reform FIS and the Back to Work Family Dividend (BTWFD) so that those who qualify for them automatically receive them.
- **Implement the proposals in the report to Make Work Pay for People with Disabilities.**
- **Introduce 6 months paid parental leave and Benefit to commence after maternity leave**, on a phased basis so that parents can have greater choices in the first year of a child's life.
- **Give lone parents who are in employment and whose children are aged between 7 and 14** both the Jobseekers Transitional payment and the Family Income Supplement if they meet the qualifying criteria and the income disregard should be fully reinstated.
- **Guarantee a quality and flexible learning programme with a local education and training provider** for every adult with literacy, numeracy and basic ICT needs and less than a Leaving Certificate (QQI Level 4).
- **Review and invest in Youth Guarantee** and commit to halving long term youth unemployment by end of 2018.

Test 3: Will Budget 2018 restore and strengthen public services which are of particular importance to people on low income?

The Community Platform believes the Government should:

- **Recognise that the provision of quality services** as part achieving the goal of an adequate minimum essential standard of living for all.
- **Move towards a 'Living Rent' system**, ensuring access to adequate housing, security of tenure, and a rent which is based on a household's income and ability to pay, applying a consistent differential rent scheme across the country.
- **Support a high quality childcare and early year's sector** by increasing investment in the Affordable Childcare Scheme to ensure continued roll out and expanding the universal aspect of the scheme. Professional development & equitable pay & conditions for Childcare workers.
- **Eliminate violence against women through** investing in and establishing appropriate data collection technology, ring-fencing resources to provide mandatory training; establish a National Network of Child Contact Centres; Abolish financial contributions to civil legal aid, ensure frontline services can meet the needs of women and their families and address the link between domestic violence and homelessness.

Test 4: Will the impact of Budget 2018 be assessed to ensure that all provisions reduce poverty and inequality?

The Community Platform believes the Government should:

- **Ensure that policy measures** to improve the position of those on the lowest incomes do not have adverse unintended consequence and review all means tests and income thresholds for vital public services and income supports as a matter of course following any measures which may change household income.
- **Carry out comprehensive and transparent poverty, gender and equality impact assessments** of all relevant taxation and spending decisions, including but not confined to welfare and public services, and take action on the findings.
- **Embed gender budgeting into the budgetary process** and publish a Gender Equality Statement alongside Budget 2018, setting out its equality objectives for the coming year. Resource training and capacity building on gender equality and gender budgeting within the civil and public service.
- **Set aside funding for pilot projects** with the aim of developing long-term participatory processes in which people with experience of poverty and their organisations could contribute to the assessment and monitoring of policy.
- **Restoration of pre-austerity funding to local community organisations, including to women's community organisations.** Introduce a specific national multi-annual grant-aid scheme for women's community organisations whose main target group are women experiencing disadvantage.
- **Designate a specific budget line within each department for delivery of gender equality commitments**
- **Assess the budgetary implications of introducing a regularisation scheme for undocumented migrants** in the State, taking into consideration that a lack of legal status is a key factor pushing families into poverty.

NOTE: Details of Community Platform proposals are in the Pre-Budget submissions of the Platform members.

The Community Platform

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The Community Platform is a network of 27 national networks and organisations in the community and voluntary sector working to address poverty, social exclusion and inequality.

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| • Age Action Ireland | • Irish Penal Reform Trust | • Pavee Point |
| • All Together in Dignity (ATD) Ireland | • Irish Refugee Council | • Rape Crisis Network Ireland |
| • Community Action Network | • Irish Rural Link | • Safe Ireland |
| • Community Work Ireland | • Irish Traveller Movement | • Sign Language Interpreting Service |
| • Cairde | • Migrant Rights Centre Ireland | • Simon Communities of Ireland |
| • Debt and Development Coalition | • National Adult Literacy Agency | • Threshold |
| • European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) Ireland | • National Collective of Community-based Women's Networks | • Vincentian Partnership for Justice |
| • Focus Ireland | • National Traveller Women's Forum | • Women's Aid |
| • Immigrant Council of Ireland | • National Women's Council of Ireland | |
| • Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed | | |