



COMMUNITY PLATFORM - CHALLENGING POVERTY & INEQUALITY

a network of 28 national organisations working to address poverty, social exclusion, and inequality

Four Tests for Budget 2019

The economic recovery has continued with employment reaching record levels and average incomes increasing. We also have a positive migration situation with more Irish people entering Ireland than leaving. What is also clear however is that many are not yet benefitting from this recovery. Poverty levels are still very high, particularly for many groups in society, with one in five experiencing deprivation. Almost 10,000 people across the country are homeless.

The Community Platform is calling for Budget 2019 to have a progressive impact with all the resources available to the Government being used to invest in providing adequate welfare supports and critical public services and infrastructure. The Budget should contribute to achieving commitments under the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the poverty target under our National Action Plan for Social Inclusion, which is due for renewal this year. Community Platform members will judge Budget 2019 in terms of the following four tests.

Test 1: Will Budget 2019 redistribute income towards the poorest 20%?

The Community Platform believes the Government should:

- **Expand the tax base in a progressive and sustainable manner** closer to the EU average to ensure the fiscal capacity necessary to fund social investment including adequate quality services and social protection.
- **Benchmark primary social welfare payments at a level of adequacy** which lifts people above the poverty line and provides them with a Minimum Essential Standard of Living. To make progress towards this target, increase the personal rate of primary working-age social welfare supports by €5.00, to €203 per week.
- **Increase the Qualified Child rate by €2.90 to €34.70.** As a first step towards adequately meeting the minimum needs of older children, **increase the Qualified Child Increase (QCI) by €5.00 per week to €36.80 for children aged 12 and over.**
- **Re-instate the full rate of Jobseeker's Allowance for 25 year olds. Set a timescale for the restoration of the full rate for those aged 18 to 24.** As an interim step increase the current rate to €149 per week to ensure the rate for this age-group enables an adequate income when living in the family home.
- **Grant Child Benefit to all children irrespective of the status of the parents.**
- **Increase the level of the Direct Provision Allowance for those asylum seekers** who are not in work to €38.80 as recommended by Working Group on the Protection Process.
- **Develop a measure of adequate minimum income that is responsive to the extra costs associated with living with a disability,** and ensure that people with disabilities have supports that ensure they are not living in poverty and achieve a Minimum Essential Standard of Living.

Test 2: Will Budget 2019 strengthen access to quality employment?

The Community Platform believes the Government should:

- **Increase the National Minimum Wage incrementally towards the Living Wage level** agreed by the Living Wage Technical Group. This was €11.90 per hour in 2018.
- Commit to the **introduction of an individual right of four months' paid parental leave that is non-transferable between partners** as per the proposed EU Directive on Work-Life Balance.
- **Introduce an hours-based Social Welfare system** and re-design the earnings disregard accordingly.
- To better support participation costs **increase the top-up payment on employment programmes by €7.50.**
- **Increase the earnings disregard for Jobseekers Allowance to €25 per day.**
- **Widen access to the Jobseekers Transitional Payment for qualified adults** to enable access to quality part time education, training and employment opportunities as well as childcare supports.
- Allow **lone parents in employment whose children are aged between 7 and 14 to receive both the Jobseekers Transition Payment and Working Family Payment.**
- **Increase the earning disregard for the One Parent Family Payment (OFP)/ Jobseekers Transition Payment (JST) to €161 per week** to allow lone-parents to take up and increase working hours.
- **Address the anomaly by which lone parents in receipt of Rent Supplement and OFP/JST, who want to take up education or training, are not eligible for SUSI maintenance.**
- **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).
- Implement the proposals in the report to **Make Work Pay for People with Disabilities.**
- As part of Pathways to Work **develop a fully gendered national Traveller employment strategy.**

Test 3: Will Budget 2019 restore and strengthen public services which are of particular importance to people on low income?

The Community Platform believes the Government should:

- **Recognise the provision of quality services as part achieving the goal of an adequate minimum essential standard of living for all.**
- Provide adequate **funding in 2019 to begin the roll-out of the Sláintecare** reforms in the health system.
- Abolish the Habitual Residence Condition for victims of domestic violence seeking benefits and review for migrants.
- **Restore Social Insurance maternity benefit to pre-crisis levels.**
- **Incrementally increase investment in early years** to bring Ireland's overall expenditure in line with the UNICEF recommendation of 1% of GDP. Accelerate the implementation of the Affordable Childcare Scheme, as outlined in 2016.
- **Move towards fully resuming the public housing programme,** reducing reliance on private sector, ensuring adequate resources to deliver on the social and affordable housing as per Rebuilding Ireland and addressing blockages to this delivery.
- **Increase resources to Private Residential Tenancies Board** to further protect tenants.
- **Increase the Housing Assistant Payment and Rent Supplement** to reflect markets rents.
- **Revisit current proposals for the vacant site levy of 7%** in light of increasing property prices.
- **Establish an independent Traveller Accommodation Agency** to support the delivery of Traveller accommodation.

Test 4: Will the impact of Budget 2019 be assessed to ensure that all provisions reduce poverty and inequality?

The Community Platform believes the Government should:

- **Expand the learning from Gender Budgeting to the wider equality goals.** This should include equality under the grounds covered by Irish equality legislation and socio-economic status.
- **Expanding poverty impact assessments outside of budget time** to specifically measure the poverty impact of policy at design stage.
- **Publish an equality impact statement as expected as part of Budget 2019** and include a comprehensive gender analysis of the €2.6 million which is already committed as well as the remaining Budget day expenditures and the overall fiscal strategy.
- **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 (as in 2018 budget tests).
- **Re-introduce a multi-annual programme to support local autonomous community development organisations.**
- **Introduce a funding line of €250,000 per year for a national pilot project** that would support the meaningful participation for members of marginalised and vulnerable groups in the new Irish Sustainable Development Goals Stakeholder Forum.

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 28 national networks and organisations in the community and voluntary sector working to address poverty, social exclusion and inequality.

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