



COMMUNITY PLATFORM - *CHALLENGING POVERTY & INEQUALITY*

a network of 30 national organisations working to address poverty, social exclusion, and inequality

Four Tests for Budget 2020

The economic recovery has continued with employment reaching record levels, unemployment almost returning to pre-crisis levels and average incomes increasing. **However, many are still not benefitting from this recovery and there are ongoing challenges to ensure people have access to adequate income, quality services and decent jobs.**

The Community Platform is calling for **Budget 2020 to have a progressive impact with all the resources available to the Government being used to invest in providing adequate welfare supports, critical public services and infrastructure.** The Budget should contribute to achieving commitments under the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the poverty target under our new National Action Plan for Social Inclusion. **Community Platform members will judge Budget 2020 in terms of the following four tests.**

Test 1: Will Budget 2020 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 social welfare to a point of adequacy, that is, ensuring a Minimum Essential Standard of Living, as well as lifting people above the poverty line.**
- **Restore under 26's welfare payments to full adult rates over successive budgets.**
- **Grant Child Benefit to all children irrespective of the status of the parents** and extend free travel to those in the protection process.
- **Not erode the value of the current €38.80 Direct Provision Allowance secured in Budget 2019 by ordinary costs of living increases.**
- **Develop a measure of adequate minimum income that is responsive to the extra costs associated with living with a disability, minimum €20 a week 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 2020 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 €12.30 per hour in 2019.

- **Introduce an individual right of four months paid parental leave that is non-transferable between partners** and paid paternity leave to one month as per the proposed EU Directive on Work-Life Balance.
- **Introduce an hours-based Social Welfare system** and re-design the earnings disregard accordingly.
- **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 and transport 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.** Extend the cut off for the Jobseekers Transition Payment until their youngest child reaches the age of 18.
- **Increase the value of the weekly earnings disregard for all lone parents receiving the One Parent Family Payment, Jobseekers Transitional Payment and Jobseekers Allowance to €165.62 to restore 2011 levels.**
- **Equalise the income thresholds for the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance** for one and two parent families.
- **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.**
- **Make 15 hours per week the threshold for the Working Family Payment,** current threshold of 19 hours for this payment can be shared between two working adults in two-parent families, while one-parent families must reach this alone.
- **Exclude the Working Family Payment from the income assessment for the Differential Rent Scheme** across Local Authorities
- Implement the proposals in the report to **Make Work Pay for People with Disabilities.**

Test 3: Will Budget 2020 restore and strengthen public services which are of particular importance to people on low income?

The Community Platform believes the Government should:

- **Make long-term strategic investment in services and supports in order to address the barriers to higher labour market participation and achieving the Minimum Essential Standard of Living for those on lower incomes.** For example, quality affordable childcare, housing, secure regular employment.
- Provide adequate **funding in 2020 for the roll-out of the Sláintecare** reforms.
- Guarantee a **quality, flexible and relevant learning programme with a local education and training provider** for adults with unmet literacy, numeracy and basic ICT needs and or less than a Leaving Certificate (QQI Level 4).
- **Restore Social Insurance maternity benefit to pre-crisis levels** and encourage employers to top up maternity benefit.
- Put in place measures to **ensure no parent is worse off** when transferring from the Community Childcare Subvention Scheme to the new National Childcare Scheme. To ensure equality of access, remove the link between principal economic status and eligibility for childcare subsidies.
- **DEASP and DCYA must work together to ensure the National Childcare Scheme supports women to return to learning, training and work with a particular focus on the needs of lone parents.**

- **Increase investment in the public housing building programme by Local Authorities and Approved Housing Bodies** as the predominant source of social and affordable housing provision and rolling out affordable cost rental housing at scale across the country.
- **Increase the Capital Assistance Scheme funding** to ensure the construction of special needs and supported housing is not diminished over the long-term.
- **Establish an independent Statutory Traveller Accommodation Agency** to support the delivery of Traveller accommodation.

Test 4: Will the impact of Budget 2020 be assessed to ensure that all provisions reduce poverty and inequality?

The Community Platform believes the Government should:

- **Provide opportunities for regular engagement with members of Community and voluntary sector** with expertise on poverty, socio-economic status, gender and disability, for the purposes of informing pilot initiatives of equality budgeting.
- **Expand 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 2020** and include a comprehensive gender analysis.
- **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.
- **Re-introduce a multi-annual programme to support local autonomous community development organisations.**

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

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