



COMMUNITY PLATFORM - CHALLENGING POVERTY AND INEQUALITY

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

Four Tests for Budget 2021

The Covid-19 pandemic has provided major social and economic challenges for Ireland and globally. It came at a time when some sectors and sections of our economy and society were recovering from the previous crisis. However, that recovery was uneven and unfair to many, resulting in a more fractured society. Reasons for this include inadequate investment in quality public services and for many the lack of an adequate income for a decent life, whether they were in or out of work. There was also failure to change structures that result in the marginalisation and exclusion of many groups and communities in our society and excludes them from participation in the decisions that impact on their lives. The arrival of Covid-19 has served to highlight and in many cases reinforce these inequalities in our society.

The Community Platform has published its 'Values for a Just Recovery' calling for the values of Community, Participation and Decency to be put at the heart of the plan for Ireland's recovery from Covid-19. These values must now inform the decisions taken by the Government in Budget 2021 that must lead us towards a more just and fair society.

Community Platform members will judge Budget 2021 in terms of the following four tests.

Test 1: Will Budget 2021 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. As part of this task the **proposed Commission on Taxation and Social Welfare will:**
 - Carry out a review of all individual and sectoral tax expenditures, assessing their cost and gender and equality impacts.
 - Examine how employers PRSI can be increased.
- **Bring the benchmark of social welfare to a point of adequacy**, ensuring a Minimum Essential Standard of Living and lifting people above the poverty line. To make progress on this issue, increase social welfare rates by €10; and adjust related supports so that people do not lose this increase through, for example, an increase in their differential rent.
- **Adopt the flexibility and administering of payments shown throughout the COVID-19 pandemic so far, as permanent features of the rent supplement and Housing Assistance Payment schemes.**
- **Provide individualised access to payments and supports.** The administration of Covid-19 income supports has demonstrated that this is possible.
- **Restore Jobseekers allowance for all young people under 25 regardless of their living arrangements.**
- **Make child benefit payable to families with children over the age of 18 enrolled in secondary school** in recognition of the higher cost of education for secondary school students.
- **Introduce a universal, fair State Pension system** that will guarantee income adequacy in older age, paid for by ending tax relief on private pensions and investing the savings in a first-tier state pension.
- **Increase the Disability Allowance and other disability payments** of a non-means tested €20 a week as a temporary measure until the Cost of Disability study is completed and can be used as the basis for a proper cost of disability provision.

- **Increase the earnings disregard for Carer's Allowance** from €332.50 to €450 (single) and €665 to €900 (couple) so that all those on average industrial incomes can qualify.
- **Increase the qualified allowance for children over 12 by €10 and children under 12 by €3.**
- **Equalise the income thresholds for the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance (BSCFA) for one and two-parent households** and introduce 'tapering' for the BSCFA to provide greater access to support with school costs for working poor households.
- **Reduce the Working Family Payment weekly hours threshold** from 19 hours to 15 hours for lone parents.
- **Increase the value of the current €38.80 Direct Provision Allowance introduced in Budget 2019 in line with ordinary costs of living increases and extend child benefit to all families irrespective of the status of the parents**
- **Bring the weekly allowance for children living in Direct Provision in line with the rate for a Qualified Child, including the higher rate for over 12s.**

Test 2: Will Budget 2021 strengthen access to quality employment?

The Community Platform believes the Government should:

- **Progressively move towards the introduction of the Living Wage on a statutory basis** as set by the Living Wage Technical Group. This was €12.30 per hour in 2019.
- **Ensure adequate funding to implement a holistic person-centred approach to the provision of employment services and supports** through a revised Pathways to Work (PTW) strategy, which leads people to access decent work, recognising the implications of the Covid-19 emergency, while maintaining focus on those who were distanced from the labour market prior to the pandemic.
- **Develop a fully gender proofed national Traveller employment strategy as part of the Pathways to Work (PTW)** to take account of barriers to participation of Traveller women, such as access to culturally competent affordable childcare.
- **Equality and gender proof new labour activation initiatives and review their gender impact** before scaling up to ensure reasonable offers of work and acknowledgement of care responsibilities.
- **Provide targeted supports to those furthest from the jobs market**, for example carers, Travellers, migrants, people who are long-term unemployed, people with disabilities, disabled women and people experiencing homelessness. One support could be to embed Job Coaches in all Intreo offices to support disabled people to get and keep work.
- **Increase the length of paid parental leave to 26 weeks per parent on a phased basis.** Increase to 12 weeks in Budget 2021 at an increased rate of €295 per week. Allow lone parents to take 52 weeks.
- **Advocate for collective bargaining as a state strategy to tackle the gender pay gap and adequate working income** for people in employment with uncertain or irregular hours.
- **Provide top-up payments** to make sure no parents are worse off when transferring from existing childcare subsidies to the National Childcare Scheme.
- **Ensure the full implementation of recommendations within The Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities.**
- **Introduce a targeted paid learning leave programme** for employees in work with unmet literacy, numeracy and digital needs and or less than a QQ Level 4 qualification.
- **Establish an All Party Oireachtas Committee to make recommendations on the reorganisation of work, reduced working time and the 4-day week.**

Test 3: Will Budget 2021 restore and strengthen public services that are of particular importance to people on low income?

The Community Platform believes the Government should:

- Provide **adequate funding in 2021 for the rollout of Sláintecare.**
- **Expand homelessness-specific healthcare quickly**, including mental health and addiction supports.
- **Increase the rate of maternity, paternity and parental benefit to €295 per week** to bring more in line with EU norms.
- **Increase investment in early years to 1% of GDP** over the next decade.
- Provide a **statutory right to home care and a budget for a person-centred home care scheme** with equality of access and availability across the country.
- **Provide a range of public care options for older people** to enable people to live their older years with dignity.
- **Place the Personal Assistance Service on a statutory basis, alongside ring-fenced funding**, separate of home care and home help supports.
- **Invest in a non-profit social and affordable housing programme aimed at middle and low-income earners**, through the Local Authorities and Approved Housing Bodies and expedite the development of cost-rental model of social housing.
- **Adequately fund homelessness emergency accommodation services** to meet the higher costs associated with public health requirements.
- **Ring-fence 20% of the homeless budget allocation for homeless prevention.**
- **Increase funding for the expansion of Housing First**, a model proven to work in ending long-term homelessness for people with more complex needs.
- **Expand access to the Better Energy Warmer Homes scheme to the private rental sector**, to ensure that low-income families can benefit from the scheme.
- **Develop and implement a 10-year whole-of-Government strategy for literacy, numeracy and digital skills** with a National Literacy and Numeracy implementation group and budget.

Test 4: Will the impact of Budget 2021 be assessed to ensure that all provisions reduce poverty and inequality?

The Community Platform believes the Government should:

- **Commit to the full inclusion of socio-economic status and poverty as part of the remit for equality budgeting.**
- **Provide opportunities for regular engagement with members of the community and voluntary sector** with expertise on poverty, socio-economic status, gender and disability, for the purposes of informing pilot initiatives of equality budgeting.
- **Improve the implementation of effective and transparent ex-ante Poverty Impact Assessment.**
- Department of Social Protection should **publish a gender equality impact statement with Budget 2021** with disaggregated data on Traveller women, disabled women and other equality and social exclusion grounds.
- **Financial supports to businesses must be conditional on social clause conditions** including addressing the Gender Pay Gap, commitment to the living wage and support for collective bargaining.
- **End direct provision**, through the development of an action plan for the overhaul of the direct provision system based on human rights standards and international best practice.

- **Re-introduce a multi-annual programme to support local autonomous community development organisations.**
- **Undertake comprehensive research into the scale of hidden homelessness in Ireland,** to understand the levels of people living in overcrowded, precarious, insecure or unfit accommodation.

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 |