



COMMUNITY PLATFORM - CHALLENGING POVERTY AND INEQUALITY

a network of 31 national organisations working to address poverty, social exclusion, and inequality

Four Tests for Budget 2024

High levels of inflation over the past number of years has resulted in a deepening of the cost-of-living crisis, particularly for those on the lowest incomes who were already in poverty and struggling to make ends meet. This latest crisis has again highlighted the weaknesses in our social protection system which should ensure everyone can afford a decent life, while also highlighting the impact of a historic underinvestment in public services such as housing, care and health. Many more people have now been pushed into poverty with levels of consistent poverty rising to 5.3% of the population in 2022, an increase from 4% in 2021. This is at a time when our economy is doing very well, with record high employment and low unemployment, alongside record exchequer receipts.

Budget 2024 needs to urgently address the cumulative impact of the very high cost of living crisis on people, while also addressing ongoing structural weaknesses that create the conditions that enable inequality and poverty to become ingrained and grow in our society. Budgetary measures must prioritise adequate long-term investment in quality public services over tax cuts and once off measures and ensure that everyone has an adequate income for a decent life, whether they are in or out of work. It must also focus on addressing the structures that marginalise and exclude many groups and communities from participating fully in our society, including from having a say in the decisions that impact on their lives.

Community Platform members will judge Budget 2024 in terms of the following four tests.

Test 1: Will Budget 2024 redistribute income towards the poorest 20%?

The Community Platform believes the Government should:

- Increase **core social welfare** rates by a minimum of €27.50 in order to prevent individuals and families being pulled deeper into poverty.
- Increase the **Qualified Child Payment** by €10 per week for children under 12 and €15 per week for children 12 years of age and over.
- **Benchmark all social protection rates and pensions** against a level that is adequate to lift people above the poverty line and provide them with a Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL).
- Ensure that the **extra living costs associated with being disabled** are adequately reflected in any changes to social welfare rates in order to ensure income adequacy.
- Extend the **Fuel Allowance** to 32 weeks, increase the weekly rate and widen eligibility, including to all households in receipt of the Working Family Payment and earlier access for people on a Jobseeker's Allowance payment. Also introduce a partial-rate Fuel Allowance /payment for those on lower rates of income who do not currently qualify.
- Exclude the One Parent Family Payment and the Jobseeker's Transitional Payment as means for the **Medical Card**, and adjust the income limits so that no-one on a welfare payment is excluded.
- Make concrete steps to **move towards a Universal State Pension system for all**, benchmarked to adequacy and a level that maintains the relative value of the State Pension compared to earnings growth and price inflation.

Test 2: Will Budget 2024 strengthen access to quality employment?

The Community Platform believes the Government should:

- Move toward introducing a **living wage** based on the cost of living, as calculated by the Living Wage Technical Group.
- Introduce targeted measures to **support under-represented and marginalised groups**, particularly women, single parents, disabled people, Travellers, Roma and other ethnic minorities, people excluded because of their socio-economic status. These measures should include integration into the labour market where appropriate, and address the multiple barriers to participation, inclusion and employment, such as discrimination and bias.
- Adequately resource and fund **effective public employment services and supports** to ensure the provision of enabling services, which can identify the specific needs of individuals to develop person-centred pathways with meaningful opportunities and towards quality employment.

Test 3: Will Budget 2024 invest in and strengthen public services which are of particular importance to people on low income?

The Community Platform believes the Government should:

- **Broaden the tax base in a progressive and sustainable manner** to a level closer to the EU average, so as to redistribute income, wealth and resources and address the current under investment in quality public services and supports, and adequate social protection for all.
- Commit to adequate investment in and **ensure the public delivery of quality public services and supports**, such as health, housing, education, childcare and social care.
- Ensure **universal access to essential quality services and supports, combined with additional targeted measures** to achieve effective access for vulnerable groups along with anti-discrimination measures.
- Deliver a **universal publicly funded model for Early Years Care and Education and School Age Childcare** including a significant increase in investment in the interim to reduce costs to families by a further 25% and address low pay for workers.
- Prioritise and accelerate the **implementation of Sláintecare** by providing adequate funding while ensuring a focus on reducing health inequalities.
- **Significantly increase investment in State-led housing** for the provision of public, affordable and cost-rental homes.
- Introduce measures to **effectively address rental price increases** and improve **protection for tenants at risk of eviction** particularly for lone parent families, Traveller and Roma communities and people from a migrant background, including due to unaffordable rents or the retrofitting of properties by landlords.
- Urgently address barriers to the **adequate provision of Traveller specific accommodation**.
- Ensure all new housing developments are underpinned by the **concept of Life-time housing**.
- Prioritise **targeted public investments for energy-poor households and those living in rented houses and social housing**. Target and increase investment in retrofitting schemes and measures, prioritising those vulnerable to energy poverty.
- **Invest in the Personal Assistance Services** so that disabled people can participate in their community, live where they choose, take up employment, go to college etc, and enjoy the same level of choice and control over their lives as their non-disabled peers.
- Prioritise and **increase investment in public transport and active travel infrastructure**, with emphasis on rural transport and making transport safer, more accessible and low-carbon.

Test 4: Will the impact of Budget 2024 be assessed to ensure that all provisions reduce poverty and inequality?

The Community Platform believes the Government should:

- Fully resource work to implement the **White Paper on Ending Direct Provision**.
- Ensure that the full inclusion of socio-economic status and poverty are prioritised 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**.
- **Gender, equality and poverty-proof all climate policies and investment**.
- Significantly increase investment in and resourcing of **autonomous community development** including further expanding and mainstreaming the Community Development Pilot Programme.
- Evaluate how the **Community and Voluntary sector** could be more adequately resourced and introduce more multi-year funding cycles to allow organisations to effectively plan long term.
- Examine the **consultation and collaborative governance 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.

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 an alliance of 31 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 | ● Focus Ireland | ● Irish Traveller Movement | ● Safe Ireland |
| ● All Together in Dignity (ATD) Ireland | ● Immigrant Council of Ireland | ● Migrant Rights Centre Ireland | ● Sign Language Interpreting Service |
| ● Community Action Network | ● Independent Living Movement Ireland | ● National Adult Literacy Agency | ● Simon Communities of Ireland |
| ● Community Work Ireland | ● Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed | ● National Traveller Women's Forum | ● TASC |
| ● Cairde | ● Irish Penal Reform Trust | ● National Women's Council | ● Threshold |
| ● European Anti-Poverty Network Ireland | ● Irish Refugee Council | ● One Family | ● Treoir |
| ● Family Resource Centre National Forum | ● Irish Rural Link | ● Pavee Point | ● Women's Aid |
| ● Financial Justice Ireland | | ● Rape Crisis Network Ireland | ● Women's Collective Ireland |