



COMMUNITY PLATFORM - CHALLENGING POVERTY AND INEQUALITY

FOUR TESTS FOR BUDGET 2025

September 2024

INTRODUCTION

Despite suggestions that the worst of the cost-of-living crisis is behind us, many people have seen no real improvements, their incomes remain inadequate, and they risk falling even further behind. The number of people living in deprivation has continued to rise. In 2023, 17.3% of the population or over 913,700 people experienced enforced deprivation, up significantly from 16.6% in 2022 and 13.7% in 2021. Additionally, the proportion of people at risk of poverty increased between 2022 and 2023 when incomes are adjusted for inflation – 13.6% in 2023 compared with 12.5% in 2022. Poverty rates remain disproportionately high across all measures for many of the most marginalised groups, who were already in poverty and struggling to make ends meet before the cost-of-living crisis.

Budget 2025 will be the last budget of the current Government, and its final chance to leave a positive legacy for people experiencing poverty, social exclusion and inequality. It is imperative that the Government seizes this opportunity to deliver sustainable changes that contribute to building a stronger, fairer, and more resilient society, in which everyone can live with dignity.

COMMUNITY PLATFORM MEMBERS WILL JUDGE BUDGET 2025 IN TERMS OF THE FOLLOWING FOUR TESTS:

TEST 1: WILL BUDGET 2025 REDISTRIBUTE INCOME TOWARD THE POOREST 20%?

THE COMMUNITY PLATFORM BELIEVES THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD:

- Increase **core social welfare** rates by a minimum of €20 in order to restore their purchasing power to 2020 levels and to make progress toward providing people with income adequacy.
- Increase the **Qualified Child Payment** by €6 per week for children under 12 and €15 per week for children 12 years of age and over, in order to make progress on reducing child poverty.
- **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).

- Introduce a recurring €50 weekly **Cost of Disability Payment** as an interim measure pending the introduction of a longer term mechanism to adequately reflect the additional costs incurred by disabled people.
- 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 from the means test 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.
- Implement the **International Protection Child Payment** for children living in Direct Provision, at the same rate as the Child Benefit payment.
- Increase the rate of the **Daily Expenses Allowance** (DEA) for adults living in Direct Provision in line with inflation.

TEST 2: WILL BUDGET 2025 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.
- Ensure Living Wage/National Minimum Wage increases do not affect **eligibility for social protection supports**, by altering means-tests and disregards as necessary.
- Bring **sub-minimum rates of minimum wage** for people aged under 20 in line with the full Living Wage/National Minimum Wage rate for those aged over 20.
- Introduce targeted measures to **support under-represented and marginalised groups**, particularly women, single parents, disabled people, Deaf people, Travellers, Roma and other ethnic minorities, people with convictions histories, and 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 2025 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**, which is fair, redistributes income, wealth and resources, and addresses 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, accessible publicly funded model for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)**, including through increased investment in ECEC to 1% of national income by 2030 – with an additional €300m in Budget 2025, and €1.6bn by 2030.
- Prioritise and accelerate the **implementation of Sláintecare** by providing adequate funding while ensuring a focus on reducing health inequalities. so that everyone can access the care they need, when they need it, in their own communities.
- Invest in the necessary and effective resources to **prevent further families, children and individuals entering homelessness** and to **end homelessness by 2030**.
- **Significantly increase investment in State-led housing and accommodation** for the provision of public, affordable, secure 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, disabled people, Traveller and Roma communities and people from a migrant background, victim-survivors of all forms of violence against women 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.
- **Provide a statutory right to Personal Assistance** to ensure the necessary support for the full, active participation of disabled people in society.
- Prioritise and **increase investment in expansion of public transport and active travel infrastructure**, with emphasis on rural transport, reducing costs, and making transport safer, more accessible and low carbon.

TEST 4: WILL THE IMPACT OF BUDGET 2025 BE ASSESSED TO ENSURE THAT ALL PROVISIONS REDUCE POVERTY AND INEQUALITY?

THE COMMUNITY PLATFORM BELIEVES THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD:

- Ensure that the full inclusion of socio-economic status and poverty are prioritised as part of the remit for **equality budgeting**.
- Fully resource work to implement the **White Paper on Ending Direct Provision**.
- 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 Programme, and expedite the establishment of a network of autonomous community development projects in and with marginalised communities.
- 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** currently in place with the Community and Voluntary sector to ensure an effective and meaningful voice is given to affected communities in how policies are developed and implemented.
- Allocate additional **funding to grassroots, community and voluntary groups promoting social cohesion at local level**, particularly for cultural exchange programmes, awareness raising, and training to address social cohesion along with social inclusion, and to tackle misinformation, disinformation and scapegoating.

NOTE: DETAILS OF COMMUNITY PLATFORM PROPOSALS ARE IN THE PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION 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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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Age Action Ireland● All Together in Dignity (ATD) Ireland● Community Action Network● Community Work Ireland● Cairde● European Anti-Poverty Network Ireland● Family Resource Centre National Forum● Financial Justice Ireland | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Focus Ireland● Immigrant Council of Ireland● Independent Living Movement Ireland● Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed● Irish Penal Reform Trust● Irish Refugee Council● Irish Rural Link● Irish Traveller Movement | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Migrant Rights Centre Ireland● National Adult Literacy Agency● National Traveller Women's Forum● National Women's Council● One Family● Pavee Point● Rape Crisis Network Ireland | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Sate Ireland● Sign Language Interpreting Service● Simon Communities of Ireland● TASC● Threshold● Treoir● Women's Aid● Women's Collective Ireland |
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