



COMMUNITY PLATFORM - CHALLENGING POVERTY AND INEQUALITY

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

Four Tests for Budget 2026

Ireland is one of the richest countries in the world and the economy is doing very well with record high levels of employment and economic growth. Despite this, many in our society cannot afford the cost of living and poverty rates remain disproportionately high, particularly for some groups in society. Almost 830,000 people were in material deprivation in 2024 and consistent poverty levels increased from 3.6% in 2023 to 5% or 264,000 people in 2024. The Government looks very unlikely to meet the target of having 2% or less of the population in consistent poverty by the end of 2025.

The cost-of-living crisis continued into 2025. In the year to March 2025, the cost of a Minimum Essential Standard of Living increased by an average of 1.8% with a cumulative increase of 18.8% since 2020, and social protection measures have failed to keep pace. The removal of once-off, cost of living measures must be replaced with permanent increases to core social welfare rates; without this poverty, particularly childhood poverty, is guaranteed to increase.

Budget 2026 will be the first Budget of the current Government. It must make any commitment to reducing poverty and inequality clear through decisive and structural measures that tackle their root causes and contribute to building a stronger, fairer, and more resilient society, in which everyone can live with dignity.

Budget 2026 is being prepared against a backdrop of a very uncertain global economic reality. It is crucial for the government to ensure that vulnerable and marginalised social groups are protected from any readjustments in public finances.

Community Platform members will judge Budget 2026 in terms of the following four tests.

Test 1: Will Budget 2026 redistribute income towards the poorest 20%?

The Community Platform believes the Government should:

- Introduce the **benchmarking of social welfare payments** against the Minimum Essential Standard of Living.
- Increase **core social welfare** rates by a minimum of €16 to €260 per week in order to restore their purchasing power and begin to make progress toward providing people with income adequacy.
- Increase the **Child Support Payment** by €35 per week for children aged 12 and over and €6 for children under 12.
- Target **supports and measures for marginalised groups** to assist them in overcoming multiple barriers to education, employment and income adequacy.
- Immediately introducing substantial payments to cover the extra **costs of disability**.
- Introduce a **proactive social protection service**, with timely information and advice to improve access and reduce administrative burdens to entitlements.

Test 2: Will Budget 2026 strengthen access to quality employment?

The Community Platform believes the Government should:

- Recommit to introducing a **living wage** based on the cost of living, as calculated by the Living Wage Technical Group.
- Strengthen Ireland's **lifelong learning infrastructure** so that people in work and in unemployment services can access appropriate education and training opportunities, particularly at less than Level 5 on the National Framework of Qualifications.
- Introduce automatic provision of the **Working Family Payment** for eligible families.
- Ensure the **Public Employment Service** can support all people of working age to access career development opportunities, regardless of their employment or social welfare status.
- Design and implement effective **disability employment schemes** to tackle the stubbornly high disability employment gap in Ireland.
- Develop, resource and implement a comprehensive **national Traveller and Roma employment, training and enterprise action plan**.
- Update the **thresholds** for medical cards, and adequately increase the **income disregards** of means tests for one parent families, the Disability Allowance and the Jobseeker's Allowance.
- Ensure that **means testing and loss of secondary benefits** do not disincentivise particularly marginalised groups from accessing the labour market.

Test 3: Will Budget 2026 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 reduce inequality by expanding social protection and developing public services, moving away from reliance on multi-nationals, while addressing our low rate of corporation tax, and closing the multiple opportunities for tax avoidance in this sector.
- Implement a **Financial Transactions Tax** and support its implementation across the EU.
- Commit to adequate investment in and ensure the **public delivery of quality public services and supports**, such as health, housing, education (for children and adults), 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)** with a guaranteed place for all children, including through increased investment in ECEC to 1% of national income by 2030.
- 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 and accommodation** for the provision of public, affordable, secure and cost-rental homes, including substantially increasing the delivery of culturally appropriate Traveller accommodation, and move towards the goal of 20% of all housing in the state being social and affordable housing as recommended by the Housing Commission.
- Accelerate the **renovation and retrofitting of the housing stock**, prioritising energy poor households, but available to all.

Test 4: Will the impact of Budget 2026 be assessed to ensure that all provisions reduce poverty and inequality?

The Community Platform believes the Government should:

- Ensure that socio-economic status, poverty and ethnic minority status are prioritised as part of the remit for **equality budgeting, and with intersecting monitoring**.
- Provide opportunities for **regular engagement with members of the community and voluntary sector** with expertise on poverty, socio-economic status, gender, disability and the Traveller community etc, for the purposes of informing **pilot initiatives of equality budgeting**.
- Improve the design and implementation of **effective and transparent ex-ante Poverty Impact Assessment**, including addressing data gaps for Travellers and other groups by implementing a general ethnic identifier across data collection using a voluntary approach in line with human rights principles
- 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.
- Significantly increase investment in and resourcing of **autonomous community development** including further expanding and resourcing the Community Development Programme, and expediting the establishment of a network of autonomous community development projects in and with marginalised communities and groups.
- Allocate additional **funding to grassroots community and voluntary groups promoting social cohesion at local level** to support awareness raising, training and social inclusion, and to tackle misinformation, disinformation and the scapegoating of groups in society.
- 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, implemented and monitored.
- Fully resource work to **implement existing policy commitments**, including the White Paper on Ending Direct Provision, the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy II 2024-2028, the Traveller and Roma Education Strategy, The National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People 2025-2030 and the upcoming National Strategy for Women and Girls due to be published by the end of 2025.
- Develop the **Just Transition Commission** with an anti-poverty, pro-equality focus.

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 |
| • Aontas | • Immigrant Council of Ireland | • Migrant Rights Centre Ireland | • Sign Language Interpreting Service |
| • All Together in Dignity (ATD) Ireland | • 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 |