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**2022**

# Social Justice Matters

2022 guide to a fairer Irish society



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# Social Justice Matters

## 2022 guide to a fairer Irish society

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**Social Justice Ireland**





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## Chapter one

# 1.

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## A TIME TO TRANSITION

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The financial crisis of 2008 revealed an unsustainable financial and economic system, both here in Ireland, in the European Union (EU) and globally. In the decade following that crisis, more often than not policy measures were aimed at restoring the status quo, reconstructing the economic system as it existed pre-crisis and, in a phrase too frequently used, 'returning to business as usual'. Yet, the Covid-19 pandemic, the climate crisis and, now, the geoeconomics crisis caused by the Russian aggression against Ukraine, revealed a fossil-fuel based economic system that remains fundamentally unsustainable and incapable of adequately meeting the needs of all peoples.

However, unlike in the years after 2008, there is now a dawning and widespread recognition that our economy and society, both here in Ireland and more broadly, must change to become more equal, more just, and more sustainable if we are to meet the needs of the people and the challenges of the future. This requires some fundamental transitions in how we organise ourselves: an energy transition, to rapidly remove our dependence on fossil fuels and eliminate our greenhouse gas emissions; a political-economic transition, to use more diverse and effective mechanisms to organise consumption, production and exchange; and a social transition, to create a society which can and will meet the needs of all the people, including those who come here fleeing war, oppression and climate catastrophe.

We will need to create new, and to repurpose old, institutions to manage and implement this transition. First, we will need to forge a new social contract to replace the outdated neo-liberal consensus of the 1980s. Second, we will need effective governance mechanisms to forge a consensus on the detailed steps ahead. Finally, we will need to find the means to finance the transition, recognising that any short-term cost will be far outweighed by the consequences of failure. In the very short-term, we must protect the most vulnerable from the effects of the war in Ukraine and on-going re-organisation of global supply chains.

### **Cost of living crisis**

€27 per week. That is the increase required to core social welfare rates and pensions in the next Budget if current trends are maintained. This is simply to bring these payments back to the benchmark set in 2007. Otherwise, the value of social welfare

payments will fall and the gap between the most vulnerable and the rest of society will continue to widen.

Government's initiatives to tackle the cost of living crisis are welcome but deeply inadequate and not sufficiently targeted to those in greatest need. Increases in the fuel allowance, for example, ignore the fact that many of Ireland's poorest people cannot access this payment. Reducing the cost of fuels means the better off will gain much more than poorer citizens.

Increases in the cost of living impact hardest on those who have no additional disposable income, those who are already struggling to make ends meet. Even after the provision of social welfare payments, in 2020 (the latest data available at time of writing) more than 660,000 people were living below the poverty line. Of these, over 210,000 were children aged under 18. This level of poverty is a scandal in one of the world's richer countries.

*Social Justice Ireland* recognises that poverty is never just about income, but it is always about income. The same can be said of the rising cost of living. There are other huge challenges that Ireland faces in related areas such as low pay, housing, healthcare, energy, public transport, climate and childcare, all of which impact on people's wellbeing and on their capacity to cope with inflation and its related consequences.

### **The Broader Context**

There is a broader context in which these developments in Ireland have been taking place. In the decades after the Second World War, a new social contract was forged based on a commitment to the collective provision of decent accommodation, relevant education, free healthcare and to full employment. This commitment, known as the welfare state, was underpinned by the economic ideas of John Maynard Keynes, which set out the means by which states could, working together through international institutions, moderate and control the business cycle through effective and co-ordinated fiscal and monetary policy. From the 1940s to the 1970s, full employment and the reduction of poverty were common goals in the US and much of western Europe; top rates of tax were high and governments sought social outcomes without embarrassment, developing new public services and safety nets. Society and the economy were organised to deliver these outcomes.

In response to the economic crisis of the mid-1970s, the political theory of neo-liberalism was gradually accepted by Governments, becoming, to varying degrees, the foundation of a new social contract. Neoliberalism made two primary claims about human nature: that human nature was wholly 'economic', guided by the desire to maximise one's own utility, no matter the effect on others; and that people should be allowed to do what they will, when they will. Neoliberals believed that prices, determined by competition and competitive exchange, would enable people to make decisions and allocate resources in society effectively.

The new neoliberal consensus was based on extending market mechanisms to all parts of human lives, large tax cuts for the rich, the reduction in the power of trade unions, deregulation, privatisation, outsourcing and competition in public services. More than anything, there was a distrust of the concept of the common good, as neoliberal Governments feared that policies decided through deliberation in the name of the common good would disrupt individual decision making.

The financial crisis of 2008 and the Great Recession that followed raised many questions about the neoliberal approach. For many people, the neoliberal consensus led not to greater wealth but to greater inequality in wealth and income distribution, more pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, and worsening health and other outcomes. The world, and Ireland, needs a new social contract between its citizens and its governments, one that can address the current series of crises and build a world characterised by the wellbeing of all its people and its environment.

### **A New Social Contract**

Ireland's social contract is broken. Covid-19 has caused us to think about many things that previously we may never really have considered: the importance of good public services; the need for a social security system that provides real security in the face of sickness and unemployment; and about concepts such as inter-dependence and solidarity. It has led us to reassess what we mean by 'essential work'; who really are the 'essential workers'; and is it right that many of them are treated the way they are? And it has fundamentally changed the relationship between business and the State.

We need to focus on the wellbeing of all. There is no doubt that a New Social Contract is needed to do this. The legitimate expectations of citizens are not being met. This is most obvious in areas such as housing and homelessness, a two-tier healthcare system, an ongoing failure to provide rural broadband and high levels of poverty and social exclusion, especially among children. Now is the perfect opportunity to develop a new and radical social contract for Ireland's second century.

*Social Justice Ireland's* proposals focus on delivering five key outcomes:

- a vibrant economy which works for the benefit of society;
- decent services and infrastructure which are accessible to all;
- a fair taxation system to support our social and economic infrastructure;
- good governance which facilitates everyone having a say in decisions that affect them;
- sustainability - meaning that development is balanced across the regions and progress is measured in terms of social cohesion and the common good.

Essentially the social contract is how we ensure wellbeing for all. How the standard of living everyone expects and agrees on is implemented and delivered and how the balance of rights and responsibilities among citizens, communities, institutions and government is maintained. Put simply, the key questions are: what standard of living do people want and expect, and what infrastructure, services and resources are required to deliver this?

A social contract sets out the expectations, the rights, and the responsibilities of all parts of society – individuals, institutions and government. It means that everyone contributes to the common good – economically, socially or culturally – on the assumption that the State will provide a minimum standard of living, essential social services and infrastructure and the protection of basic rights.

The strength of a democracy is defined by the strength of its social contract and the quality of life and wellbeing of its citizens. People expect a well-run economy; good governance; a state that acts in the interests of its people; and they expect to have a say on the issues that affect them. They expect society to provide them with decent services and infrastructure. They also expect that decisions being made are aimed at securing fairness across generations and a sustainable future.

Poverty impacts hardest on those experiencing it in their day-to-day lives. It limits their options and opportunities and narrows their focus to week-to-week survival and the unavoidable trade-offs of living on inadequate incomes. 661,518 people in Ireland are living in poverty, of which 210,363 are children. In a wealthy country, these statistics simply do not make sense, they almost defy logic.

A key part of the social contract is solidarity between generations and the delivery of wellbeing for all. At different points in the lifecycle, all of us will be either net beneficiaries from, or net contributors to, society. This differs, depending on whether we are children, adults of working age, or pensioners. It depends on whether we are in full-time education, engaged in caring work, in paid employment, or volunteering in the community. But always, we are contributing to and benefiting from the social contract in different ways.

If Government is serious about our long-term wellbeing, about securing our public finances in a changed world, decarbonising the economy and preparing for digital and technological transformation then all its initiatives must be underpinned by a new social contract that treats our environment, society and economy equally.

We have an opportunity now to develop and agree on a new social contract and how it should be delivered. *Social Justice Ireland* believes that at the heart of this new social contract is a commitment that benefits derived from things like technological development, economic growth, and societal advancement are shared. A real republic will stand for social justice and for equality. *Social Justice Ireland* calls on leadership from all sectors of Irish society to become part of a debate on a new social contract for a new century.

## A New Social Dialogue

If Ireland is to succeed in addressing the challenges it faces, the pathway to doing so must be founded on consensus, must be well-managed, and must be properly evaluated. It has been widely recognised that Ireland's governance was poor in certain areas prior to the economic crisis a decade ago. This is particularly so with reference to financial regulation and the organisation of the banking system. Moreover, that economic crisis led Government to make rash short-term decisions, particularly on fiscal and financial policy. These decisions were often made without any consultation, and many have since been recognised as very damaging, particularly in the case of the bank guarantee.

Ireland would greatly benefit from having a structure that would engage all sectors at a national level. To come to a consensus on the standard of living that people want and agree on, and, how this is to be delivered requires dialogue, with input from all sectors of society. Choices must be made and agreement reached on how the social contract is to be delivered.

Social dialogue was essential to Ireland emerging from its last period of high inflation and recession in the 1980s. Social dialogue helps highlight issues at an early stage which would allow them to be addressed promptly. More importantly, it ensures that the various sectors of society are involved in developing mutually acceptable solutions to problems that emerge which in turn would be most likely to ensure their support for such solutions when implemented by Government. For such an approach to succeed it must include all five pillars of social dialogue i.e. employers, trade unions, farmers, community & voluntary, and environmental.

*Social Justice Ireland* believe that Government should also take further steps to increase the transparency of budgetary and other important decisions, as well as further increase their research and evaluation capacity. The Irish budgetary process leaves a great deal to be desired. The level of engagement in the budget process by the Houses of the Oireachtas is low by EU standards. The level of transparency with the wider public is also too low. We recognise the excellent work done by the Oireachtas Committee and the Parliamentary Budget Office but much more is required.

## Financing the Transition

The consequences of Russia's invasion of Ukraine are with us already as a steady stream of refugees arrives in Ireland. Government has taken the correct decision in welcoming them into the country and working to provide the services, accommodation and supports they need. There are five key challenges that must now be addressed:

1. Most of the current response is understandably short-term. However, the long-term implications need to be addressed immediately as a matter of

urgency as many of these refugees may not be in a position to return to Ukraine for years.

2. Most of the needs of Ukrainians are very similar to those on which Irish society is already facing major challenges e.g. housing, healthcare, education, public transport and childcare.
3. The implications of the gendered nature of this migration also needs to be addressed – most of the migrants are women and children. This means that childcare is essential to enable adults to take up employment should they wish.
4. The fact that Ireland already had refugees and asylum seekers and the Direct Provision system in place also needs to be addressed – all refugees should have access to the same rights, services and supports.
5. Finally, how all of this is to be financed is a question that requires an urgent answer as it will cost a great deal of money.

The first four of these challenges can be addressed within the framework of a new social contract and social dialogue already set out. We make these initial additional comments on the fifth challenge. *Social Justice Ireland* believes that significant additional Government expenditure, financed in the short-term by the issuance of debt rather than additional taxation, is going to be required in the period ahead if this challenge is to be met. This borrowing is affordable and is the correct thing to do for the future if Ireland is going to address the Ukrainian migration challenge in a coherent and adequate manner.

Ireland should engage with the EU Commission to ensure they are willing to show further flexibility and suspend the fiscal rules and ensure they are willing to support this correct response to the Ukrainian migration. This does not mean that we borrow over the long-term to avoid broadening the tax base and increasing the total tax-take. We need to do both, but not simply to reduce the deficit or the debt. Rather, we should see the present situation as a welcome opportunity to refocus on preparing Ireland for a post-carbon, post-Ukrainian migration world. The State should begin to plan now for the additional tax measures necessary, over the long-term, to finance universal services and income supports for all the people in Ireland.





## Chapter two

## 2.

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# TOWARDS WELLBEING FOR ALL

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The devastation of the pandemic that has been an ever-present reminder of the inherent inequalities in rich societies has been replaced by the horrors of war, with similar distributional impacts. Those who are weakest will always suffer the most. This may be the prevailing narrative, borne of centuries of inequality and self-preservation, but it does not have to be this way.

In previous editions of this book, this Chapter considered three major challenges:

- The challenge of inequality;
- The challenge of demographic change; and
- The challenge of climate change.

These challenges remain central to Ireland's development. They are deeply intertwined and impact profoundly on each other. Inequality is pervasive in Ireland. The latest EU SILC data indicates that 660,000 people in Ireland, including over 210,000 children, were living in poverty in 2020. More than three quarters of a million people, including over 250,000 children, were experiencing enforced deprivation, going without basic necessities due to a lack of adequate income. Social transfers are playing a significant role in reducing income inequality, without them almost 40 per cent of the population would live in poverty rather than 13.2 per cent, but more needs to be done (see Chapter 3).

This inequality also leads to a gross disparity in the provision of public services. During the height of the pandemic, the incidence rates of Covid-19 in poorer areas across the country were multiples of wealthier areas. Even when these areas were only streets apart. Now that the pandemic has receded, and restrictions and healthcare supports are withdrawn, Covid-testing is being conducted by private operators for a fee beyond what most low-income households could reasonably be expected to afford. This is effectively a health-tax on poor households.

The pandemic has also had a major impact on the delivery of education and training, particularly in the area of apprenticeships and vocational training. The crisis provided a powerful test of the potential of online learning, and it also

revealed its key limitations, including the prerequisite for adequate digital skills, computer equipment and internet connection to undertake training online; the difficulty of delivering traditional work-based learning online; and the struggle of teachers used to classroom instruction (Scarpetta & Quintini, 2020). In order for online learning to represent a valuable alternative to face-to-face instruction, it needs to tackle issues of inclusiveness to ensure all adults (including those with lower digital skills, limited access to IT and lower self-motivation) can benefit. It also needs to provide high-quality reskilling and upskilling opportunities that can translate into sustainable employment opportunities for job seekers (Scarpetta & Quintini, 2020).

The crises facing Ireland today remain rooted in inequality. Among these crises we have a cost of living crisis that disproportionately impacts low-income households and older people; we have an energy security crisis that disproportionately impacts low-income and rural communities; and we are facing a food security crisis, which will impact households already struggling to make ends meet and have potentially environmentally damaging impacts.

## **The Cost of Living Crisis**

Inflation in Ireland and across the Euro area has increased steadily since late 2020. The Parliamentary Budget Office puts overall inflation in Ireland at 5 per cent in January 2022 (Bedogni & Wrynn, 2022). Analysis by the Central Bank, however, indicates that the rate is as high as 6.1 per cent for households in the bottom 20 per cent of the income distribution, while those in the top 20 per cent experienced an increase of 5.3 per cent. Older households, aged 65+, also experienced a higher rate of inflation (6.1 per cent) than younger households (5.2 per cent for those aged <35) (Lydon, 2022).

Heatmaps produced by the Parliamentary Budget Office indicate that Transport, Communications, Clothing and Footwear, and Furnishings and Household Maintenance were key commodity groups driving inflation (Bedogni & Wrynn, 2022). Ireland was also found to be the second most expensive country in the EU27 (40 per cent above the EU average), in terms of comparative price levels of consumer goods and services. And that's before we talk about the cost of housing (see Chapter 6).

In a staggering acknowledgement of the inadequacy of Budget 2022 in addressing the needs of low-income households, February 2022 saw the announcement of a cost of living package to mitigate the impact of inflation. However, those who were left behind in Budget 2022 were left behind again. The failure to benchmark social welfare rates and to make tax credits refundable means that people on fixed incomes and in low paid employment, who have been most impacted by rising costs, will continue to struggle. The real value of their wages or social welfare payments will continue to fall.

The cost of living crisis is an issue of adequate income. While *Social Justice Ireland* welcomed the energy credit, changes to the working family payment, the fuel allowance and the drugs payment scheme, as well as changes to school and public transport charges, these measures fail to deal with the reality of the unavoidable trade-offs people living on inadequate incomes have had to make for two years because core social welfare rates were not increased in either Budget 2020 or Budget 2021, and the increase in Budget 2022 was half of what was required.

## The Energy Security Crisis

Directly related to the cost of living crisis, indeed one of the main drivers, is the cost of energy. More than half of the recent increase in inflation was caused by increases in energy costs. These increases have both direct and indirect effects. The direct effects in home heating and fuel costs see an almost immediate increase in household bills. The indirect effects, an increase in non-domestic energy bills, are passed on more slowly to the consumer (Lydon, 2022). Thus the impact of energy price hikes will continue to be felt by households into the future as businesses attempt to recoup their additional costs through increasing the cost of provision of goods and services.

A lack of an adequate, sustainable energy source for Ireland has resulted in our reliance on energy imports. In 2020, Ireland's energy import dependency was 72 per cent, meaning that we import almost two thirds of the energy we need. This is a decrease from the height of our dependency in 2016, when it varied from 85 to 90 per cent, however it has been increasing since 2017 when it was 67 per cent (SEAI, 2021). A 2020 report on energy security estimated the cost of energy imports in 2018 at €5 billion (SEAI, 2020). In 2010, the Russian-Ukrainian gas disputes disrupted supply in several EU countries and led to the introduction by the European Commission of regulations to safeguard supply into the future. A subsequent European Energy Security Strategy, stress-tested for two energy-disruption scenarios (the cessation of Russian gas imports into the EU, and a disruption to Russian gas imports through Ukraine) highlighted the vulnerability of EU gas supply and resulted in the publication of the 2015 Energy Union Strategy which sought to diversify energy imports into Europe and provide for a more united EU energy market (SEAI, 2020). The current situation between Russia and Ukraine will test the efficacy of this Strategy.

As a percentage of primary energy supply, Ireland's renewable energy was just 11.6 per cent in 2019, compared to an OECD total of 21.63 per cent (OECD, 2022). According to SEAI, while Ireland has reduced its dependence on imported energy, the increase in our domestic energy generation is primarily from natural gas which is a fossil fuel. This runs contrary to our targets of reducing emissions, increasing renewable energy, and eliminating our dependence on fossil fuels.

Investment in renewable energy and retrofitting on the scale required to meet our national climate ambition and maintain energy security requires large scale

investment in infrastructure. An upgrade of the national grid must be a key element of infrastructure investment so that communities, cooperatives, farms and individuals can produce renewable energy and sell what they do not use back into the national grid, thus becoming self-sustaining and contributing to our national targets. The economic and environmental impact of data centres will also require a review and revision if we are ever to reach a sustainable indigenous renewable energy supply.

The issues around renewable energy subsidies and energy poverty must be addressed. Too often subsidies are only taken up by those who can afford to make the necessary investments. Retrofitting is a prime example. As those who need them most often cannot avail of them due to upfront costs, these subsidies are functioning as wealth transfers to those households on higher incomes while the costs (for example carbon taxes) are regressively socialised among all users. Incentives and tax structure must look at short and long term costs of different population segments; eliminating energy poverty and protecting people from energy poverty should be a key pillar of any Just Transition platform.

The latest retrofitting scheme, which sees increased supports to social welfare-dependent households, is very welcome, however more is needed for households who do not qualify and who cannot avail of other retrofitting schemes as they struggle to pay their bills. According to the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU), 255,058 domestic electricity customers (12 per cent) and 112,991 domestic gas customers (16 per cent) were in arrears at the end of 2020 (Commission for Regulation of Utilities, 2021). The moratorium on electricity and gas disconnections, in place since March 2020, was lifted in March 2021 and has not been reinstated in the wake of rising inflation. Households will continue to feel the impact of the energy crisis long into the future, with utility suppliers increasing prices across the board, Government must do more to address these costs.

## **The Food Security Crisis**

Ireland is the most food secure country in the world, ranking first out of 113 countries, according to the Global Food Security Index 2021 (The Economist Group, 2021), however this ranking is dependent on the stability of costs associated with agricultural production, such as fertiliser, feed and, of course, energy. In the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, these things are uncertain.

The establishment of the National Fodder and Food Security Committee, which held its first meeting on the 11<sup>th</sup> March 2022, followed the Government's call for farmers to increase the production of grain to offset the negative impact on the supply of feed and fertiliser as a result of Russia's actions. The Committee is headed by Teagasc and extends to a reported 30 representatives of the agriculture industry. Government recently announced a €12 million package for the tillage sector, of which €10 million will go towards incentivising farmers to grow additional tillage crops.

While all of this is very necessary, it is regrettable that neither the Environmental nor Community and Voluntary Pillar are represented on the new Committee. Changes in food production will come with environmental impacts. These impacts must be assessed and weighted against the benefit of pursuing any course of action. It is therefore imperative that the expertise is available within the Committee to conduct such assessments.

A scarcity of food will likely increase food prices, disproportionately affecting lower income households. The absence of the Community and Voluntary Pillar from the Committee means there is no voice for those who will be most affected by increased costs. This must be addressed.

## **Where is the Wellbeing?**

In the past year, the Government has worked to deliver a Well-being Framework to “to better measure Ireland’s progress as a country and better align policy decisions with people’s experiences.” Aligning that Framework with the SDGs would also ensure policy coherence between our national targets and our international commitments.

The First Report on a Well-being Framework for Ireland was published in July 2021 (Government of Ireland, 2021), setting out the work undertaken among stakeholders to that point. The overarching Vision set out in that First Report was:

enabling all our people to live fulfilled lives now and into the future. It is ingrained in well-being across person, place and society. (p.14).

This Vision had two elements, firstly to provide an overarching framework for policy making and deliver greater policy coherence across Government Departments; and secondly to improve the impact of policy on people’s lives. Determining the second element, of course, requires the ability to measure that impact. It is said that what is counted is what counts, and so the indicators used to measure the impact of the Well-being Framework are critical.

In developing the dimensions, the Department of the Taoiseach drew primarily on the OECD Well-being Framework, consisting of 11 domains. The National Economic and Social Council (NESC) also established a Subgroup of Stakeholders and Experts, of which Social Justice Ireland was part. This Subgroup provided consultation supports throughout the development of the Well-being Framework with a focus on equality and inclusion. The NESC Report on Ireland’s Well-being Framework Consultation (NESC, 2021) identified three overarching and inter-linked priorities – Equity, Agency and Sustainability, ensuring that all voices are heard, particularly those who may be furthest away from the policy space (but likely to be among the most impacted by policy changes).

Ireland's Well-being Framework consists of 11 dimensions:

1. Subjective Well-being
2. Mental and Physical Health
3. Income and Wealth
4. Knowledge and Skills
5. Housing and Local Area
6. Environment, Climate and Biodiversity
7. Safety and Security
8. Work and Job Quality
9. Time Use
10. Community, Social Connections, and Cultural Participation
11. Civic Engagement and Cultural Expression

According to the First Report, each of the dimensions were explored in three ways: an overarching definition that reflects on the capability approach; several aspects to illustrate how the high-level definition will directly relate to people's lived experiences; and some examples of how the dimensions link with each other. But this is just one illustration of how these dimensions interconnect. Civic Engagement and Cultural Expression is as much a personal dimension as it is a societal one. Subjective Well-being can depend on the place as much as the person. Housing and Local Area certainly spans all three.

This is all very laudable, but what is to happen next? Since the publication of the First Report there has been regrettably little action in progressing this Wellbeing Framework into policy development. Instead we see a Government lurching from crisis to crisis without an overarching vision of what it hopes to achieve.

## **Pathway to Wellbeing – Building a New Social Contract**

*Social Justice Ireland* has a vision for an Irish society that we believe most Irish citizens would aspire to living in. This vision, and a model for its development and achievement, is outlined in this chapter and in subsequent chapters of this publication.

*Social Justice Ireland* believes strongly in the importance of developing a rights-based approach to social, economic, environmental, and cultural policy. Such an approach would go a long way towards addressing the inequality Ireland has been experiencing and should be at the heart of a new Social Contract.

We believe seven basic rights should be acknowledged and recognised<sup>1</sup>. These are the rights to (Healy, et al., 2015):

1. Sufficient income to live life with dignity;
2. Meaningful work;
3. Appropriate accommodation;
4. Relevant education;
5. Essential healthcare;
6. Cultural respect; and
7. Real participation in society.

For these seven rights to be vindicated, greater public expenditure to fund a broader provision of services is required.

As part of a new Social Contract, Government should ensure that future tax and spending policy is focussed on building up Ireland's social infrastructure, prioritising areas such as healthcare, social housing, education, childcare and early education facilities. These are areas in particular where Ireland is experiencing an infrastructure deficit. Without adequate future planning for the kinds of social infrastructure and services we need, it will not be possible to maintain – never mind improve – the current standards of living for all citizens, from children to older people.

To achieve the vision just set out, *Social Justice Ireland* has proposed a policy framework for a new Social Contract that identifies five key policy outcomes and sets out three key areas for action within each (Table 2.1). Each of these five key policy outcomes must be achieved if the vision set out in this chapter is to be realised. It is not enough to have three or even four of the five, while neglecting other areas. All five must be worked on simultaneously. It is not a question of getting the economy right and everything else will follow. That approach has led us from boom to bust to boom to bust. This must end.

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<sup>1</sup> These are not the only rights we support and advocate. However, they are critically important for the development of a balanced society and economy which delivers wellbeing for all.



**Table 2.1**     A Policy Framework for a New Social Contract

Vibrant economy	Decent services and infrastructure	Just taxation	Good governance	Sustainability
Deal with the Deficit	Increase Investment	Increase the overall Tax-Take	Open, transparent, accountable structures	Climate Justice
Financial Stability	Quality Services	Taxation Governance	Social Dialogue	Protect the Environment
Boost Public Investment	Minimum Social Floor	Broader Tax Base	Real Participation / Deliberative Democracy	Balanced Regional Development
Decent Jobs				Sustainable Progress Index
Reduce Inequality				

We need the investment in infrastructure and services to develop a thriving economy. We need just taxation to fund this. We need good governance to ensure people have a say in shaping the decisions that impact them. We also need to ensure that everything that is done is sustainable; environmentally, economically and socially.

This will require new approaches to the world of work and a recognition of much of the work done in society that goes unpaid, under-recognised and undervalued.

It will also require recognition that our tax and welfare systems are not fit for purpose in the twenty first century. The time has come to set a minimum floor of income and services below which no one should fall. The social welfare system and the income tax credits system should be replaced by a Universal Basic Income which would be far more appropriate for today's economy. This should be accompanied by the development of Universal Basic Services to secure the wellbeing of all.

A new Social Contract will also require us to give climate action the priority it urgently needs. The response to Covid-19 showed that society can be mobilised quickly and effectively to address a real and present danger. Climate change represents such a danger, but the policy response so far has been wholly inadequate. We now know that we can respond quickly and effectively to major threats. An effective response to climate change must figure prominently in the new Social Contract.

## **The Need for Social Dialogue and Ethical Policymaking**

The implementation of a Wellbeing Framework and the development of a new Social Contract requires that Government engage with all stakeholders to develop a series of policy responses that are fit for purpose.

The current cost of living, energy and food crises in Ireland demand that all stakeholders have a seat at the table. These issues are too important, and too volatile, to be left to vested interests alone. A new social dialogue is essential to ensure that no-one is left behind in this transition.

A recent article by Paolo Mauro, Deputy Director of the IMF's Fiscal Affairs Department, looks at putting moral perspectives into public finances (Mauro, 2022). Mauro argues that policy decisions on taxation and expenditure are inherently moral decisions which have, to date, been viewed from the perspective of economic efficiency. Income redistribution, he says, has not been based on moral considerations, possibly for fear that it may be viewed as subjective.

Designing policies with an understanding of the moral and instinctual judgements of a population can foster greater political and policy engagement. This in turn, allows for greater collective ownership of the decisions that are made. People's experiences automatically influence their decision-making. Mauro's article gives the example that "communitarians' opposition to progressive taxation declined among individuals directly hurt by the pandemic through job loss or illness". Of course it did. When sectors of society feel that policies don't affect them or don't benefit them, they are less likely to engage with those policies.

Research by Stantcheva (2021), cited in the Mauro article, indicates that fairness is more important to individuals surveyed in the United States than efficiency, when it came to their attitudes towards taxation and progressivity in the tax system. Another influencer was how people understood their own perceptions of a policy issue. It was found in another study by Green (2013) that when people were asked their view on controversial policy topics, then asked to read up on those topics before being questioned again, respondents were more likely to moderate their views having realised their knowledge deficit.

Mauro's article concludes that designing the presentation of a policy to be more appealing to citizens with "different moral perspectives" can be a helpful start in developing consensus. So how do we make this happen?

## **Strategic Investment in Wellbeing**

In his speech announcing Budget 2022, the Minister for Finance indicated, although the public health outlook is positive, Ireland remained in a period of significant socio-economic uncertainty.

*Social Justice Ireland* has long argued for the adoption of counter-cyclical fiscal policies and consequently we welcomed that Budget 2022 was based on a large fiscal deficit with those resources used to prop up the economy and society in what would otherwise be a period of extensive austerity. The pandemic has highlighted key issues that have been a focus of our work for many years, including:

- The importance of the welfare system in providing a safety net for all;
- The inadequacy of most rates of core welfare payments;
- The challenges faced by low paid workers and their families;
- The opening divides between those in stable employment and those with precarious jobs; and
- The underfunding of our health, housing and social care systems.

While recovery is underway for some, we can see that it is unfolding in different ways for different groups and different parts of our country. Policy must be better focused on addressing and minimising these divisions. Issues of youth unemployment, long-term unemployment, regional stagnation, and neglected public services need increased attention. In the year ahead, we should work to avoid or minimise these and other pandemic scarring effects.

Ireland, like all other European countries and most other developed world states, has relied on large scale borrowing to cope with the reduction in tax revenue and pay for the various welfare and enterprise supports necessitated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Fortunately, the accommodative approach of the European Central Bank has allowed Government to easily access funds and at historically low interest rates.

Figures from the documents accompanying Budget 2022 revealed the current and expected levels of debt, and debt financing costs, that Ireland is facing. The pandemic has resulted in the net national debt climbing from 82 per cent of national income (as measured by GNI\*) in 2019 (Budget 2020) to reach an expected level of 90 per cent in 2021 and 86 per cent by 2023. Fortunately, interest costs remain low with these costs expected to be €3,395m in 2022 - a reduction on the costs faced in 2020 (€3,830m). However, although debt costs are low now, the scale of debt remains an issue and a strategic risk to the state in the longer term. It is also likely that these costs will rise due to the invasion by Russia of Ukraine.

To minimise future debt financing challenges, and to avoid the adoption of unnecessary austerity measures in the years to come, *Social Justice Ireland* believes that Government should prioritise the development of a European-wide debt warehousing strategy for the additional debt brought on by the pandemic and the Russian invasion. This debt should be separated from the existing national debt and financed by a 100 year ECB bond with a near-zero interest rate.

## Conclusion

As we meet yet another global challenge, it is important to acknowledge that despite well documented problems and challenges, Ireland is in the privileged position of having public services and social infrastructure to rely on at a time of crisis. This is due to the social contract that underpins our social infrastructure. The social contract as a concept has evolved to encompass a situation whereby citizens contribute to the common good – whether economically, socially or culturally – on the assumption that the State will ensure a minimum standard of living, provision of essential social services and infrastructure, and the protection of their basic rights.

As part of this social contract arrangement in a modern democratic society, citizens may expect:

- access to meaningful work, as well as protection from poverty at times where paid employment is not accessible;
- a minimum floor of income and services;
- an education system that is relevant, accessible and high in quality;
- a guarantee that their needs will be met at times of ill-health;
- the regulation and protection of the environment for the good of all citizens; and
- ensured participation in civic life and in the decisions that affect them.

In return, citizens have a responsibility to contribute to society in different ways at different points in the lifecycle. This may be through being employed; through paying taxes; through engaging in caring and voluntary work; or making other contributions to the economic, social, cultural or environmental wellbeing of society.

A key part of the social contract is solidarity between generations. At different points in the lifecycle, all of us will (from a financial perspective) be either net beneficiaries from, or net contributors to, society. This differs, depending on whether we are children, adults of working age, or pensioners. It depends on whether we are in full-time or part-time education, engaged in caring work or in paid employment, or volunteering in the community. But, at almost all times, we are contributing to and benefiting from society in different ways.

We must reconceptualise the interaction of employment and work, taxation, and welfare and give serious consideration to policies such as a universal basic income and universal basic services.

Having set out our vision for Ireland, presented a Wellbeing Framework for a new Social Contract, and provided some details of the policy initiatives required under each of its five pillars, we now move on to look in much greater detail at key aspects of these five pillars.

We provide a fuller analysis of both the first pillar, a vibrant economy, and the associated just taxation system, in chapter 4 where we also set out a more detailed set of policy proposals.

We address decent social services and infrastructure in chapters 3 – on income distribution; 5 – work, unemployment and job creation; 6 – housing and accommodation; 7 – healthcare; 8 – education; 9 – other public services. On each of these we provide an analysis and critique of the present situation, set out a vision for a fairer future and make a detailed set of policy proposals aimed at moving in that direction.

The fourth pillar, good governance, is addressed in chapter 10, where we again provide analysis and critique together with concrete policy proposals.

The fifth pillar, sustainability, is addressed in chapters 11 – sustainability; 12 – rural development; and 13 – the global south, following the same approach.

Chapter 14 provides further details on the values that underpin our approach, our focus and our proposals.

In their book *The Inner Level* Wilkinson and Pickett argue that:

The reality is that inequality causes real suffering, regardless of how we choose to label such distress. Greater inequality heightens social threat and status anxiety, evoking feelings of shame which feed into our instincts for withdrawal, submission and subordination: when the social pyramid gets higher and steeper and status insecurity increases, there are widespread psychological costs. Status competition and anxiety increase, people become less friendly, less altruistic and more likely to put others down.

(Wilkinson & Pickett, 2018, p. 58)

More equal societies are better societies. They are safer. They are healthier. They look after the wellbeing of their inhabitants. They rely on measurements, not of economic growth (or at least, not of economic growth alone), but of happiness, civic participation and societal growth. Ireland, and indeed the planet, now faces new and mounting crises; a situation where business as usual can mean only social and environmental catastrophe. Developing a Wellbeing Framework that promotes equality will help reduce the cyclical lurching from one crisis to the next (or simultaneous crises) and involve better planning and preparedness.

*Social Justice Ireland* has developed alternatives to existing policies and advocated for them for many years. We have reached a point where adoption of those policies is surely a necessity. Those ideas and alternatives to existing policies, ideas that would result in a fairer more just society, are contained herein.

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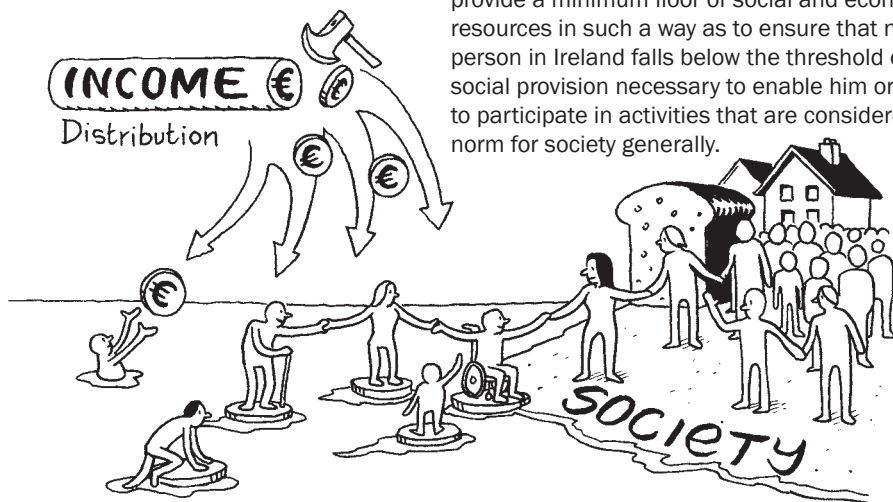
## Chapter three

## Chapter 3

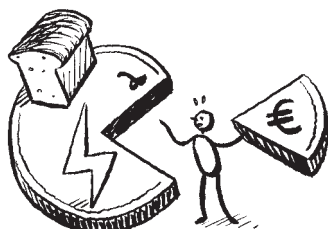
### Income and Income Distribution

#### Core Policy Objective:

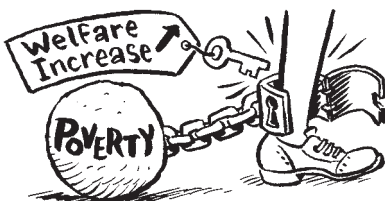
To provide all with sufficient income to live life with dignity. This would require enough income to provide a minimum floor of social and economic resources in such a way as to ensure that no person in Ireland falls below the threshold of social provision necessary to enable him or her to participate in activities that are considered the norm for society generally.



#### Key Issues and Evidence



Lower income households spend a greater proportion of their income on food and energy and are more exposed to price increases.

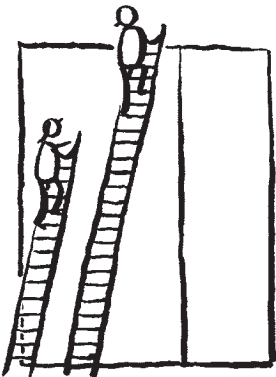


Data shows that welfare increases in recent years lead to a welcome reduction in poverty rates.

Policy Solutions



A universal  
state pension.



Equity of social welfare rates.



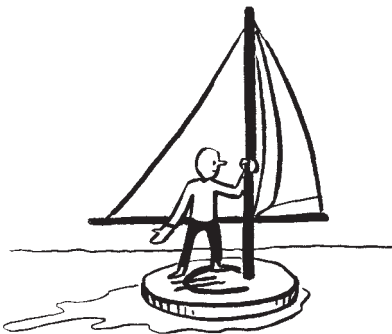
Increase in social  
welfare payments.



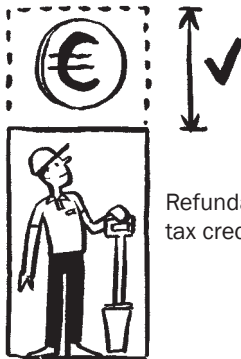
A Universal Basic Income



A cost of disability payment.



Decent rates of pay  
for low paid workers.



Refundable  
tax credits.



Adequate  
payments for  
children.

### 3.

## INCOME AND INCOME DISTRIBUTION

### **Core Policy Objective: INCOME AND INCOME DISTRIBUTION**

To provide all with sufficient income to live life with dignity. This would require enough income to provide a minimum floor of social and economic resources in such a way as to ensure that no person in Ireland falls below the threshold of social provision necessary to enable him or her to participate in activities that are considered the norm for society generally.

High rates of poverty and income inequality have been the norm in Irish society for some time. They are problems that require greater attention than they currently receive, but tackling these problems effectively is a multifaceted task. It requires action on many fronts, ranging from healthcare and education to accommodation and employment. However, the most important requirement in tackling poverty is the provision of sufficient income to enable people to live life with dignity. No anti-poverty strategy can possibly be successful without an effective approach to addressing low incomes.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter addresses the issue of income in three parts. The first (section 3.1) examines key evidence relating to the extent and nature of poverty and the income distribution in Ireland. Subsequently section 3.2 considers the key policy reforms that we believe should be pursued. The chapter concludes (section 3.3) by summarising our key policy priorities in this area.

If the challenges addressed in this chapter are to be effectively addressed in the years ahead, *Social Justice Ireland* believes that the following key initiatives are required:

- increase in social welfare payments;
- equity of social welfare rates;
- adequate payments for children;

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<sup>1</sup> Annex 3, containing additional information relevant to this chapter, is available on the *Social Justice Ireland* website: <https://www.socialjustice.ie/publication>

- refundable tax credits;
- decent rates of pay for low paid workers;
- a universal state pension; and
- a cost of disability payment.

### 3.1 Key Evidence

#### *Poverty*

While there is still considerable poverty in Ireland, there has been much progress on this issue over the past two decades. Driven by increases in social welfare payments, particularly payments to the unemployed, the elderly and people with disabilities, the rate of poverty notably declined between 2001 and 2009.<sup>2</sup> Subsequently, welfare rates were reduced and poverty increased during the economic crash. In recent years, driven once again by welfare increases, poverty has fallen and now stands at 13.2 per cent of the population according to the latest data, which is for 2020.

Data on Ireland's income and poverty levels are provided by the annual *SILC*, or *Survey on Income and Living Conditions*. This survey replaced the *European Household Panel Survey* and the *Living in Ireland Survey* which had run throughout the 1990s. Since 2003 the *SILC / EU-SILC* survey has collected detailed information on income and living conditions from up to 120 households in Ireland each week; giving a sample of 4,000 to 6,000 annually.

*Social Justice Ireland* welcomes this survey and in particular the accessibility of the data produced. Because this survey is conducted simultaneously across all European Union (EU) states, the results are an important contribution to the ongoing discussions on income and poverty levels across the EU. It also provides the basis for informed analysis of the relative position of the citizens of member states. In particular, this analysis is informed by a set of agreed indicators of social exclusion covering four dimensions of social exclusion: financial poverty, employment, health, and education. They also form the basis of the EU Open Method of Co-ordination for social protection and social inclusion and associated poverty and social exclusion targets.

#### **What is poverty?**

The National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) published by Government in 1997 adopted the following definition of poverty:

*People are living in poverty if their income and resources (material, cultural and social) are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living that is regarded as*

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<sup>2</sup> Irish household income data has been collected since 1973 and all surveys up to the period 2008-2010 recorded poverty levels above 15 per cent.

*acceptable by Irish society generally. As a result of inadequate income and resources people may be excluded and marginalised from participating in activities that are considered the norm for other people in society.*

This definition was reiterated in the subsequent *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016 (NAPinclusion)* and restated in the current *Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025*.

### **Where is the poverty line?**

How many people are poor? On what basis are they classified as poor? These and related questions are constantly asked when poverty is discussed or analysed.

In trying to measure the extent of poverty, the most common approach has been to identify a poverty line (or lines) based on people's disposable income (earned income after taxes and including all benefits). The European Commission and the United Nations (UN), among others, use a poverty line located at 60 per cent of median income. The median disposable income is the income of the middle person in society. This poverty line is the one adopted in the *SILC* survey. While the 60 per cent median income line has been adopted as the primary poverty line, alternatives set at 50 per cent and 70 per cent of median income are also used to clarify and lend robustness to assessments of poverty.

The most up-to-date data available on poverty in Ireland comes from the 2020 *SILC* survey, conducted by the CSO and published in December 2021. In that year the CSO gathered data from a statistically representative sample of 4,243 households containing 10,683 individuals. The data gathered by the CSO is very detailed and incorporates income from work, welfare, pensions, rental income, dividends, capital gains and other regular transfers. Where possible, this data was subsequently verified anonymously using PPS numbers.

According to the CSO, the median disposable income per adult in Ireland during 2020 was €24,674 per annum or €472.86 per week. Consequently, the income poverty lines for a single adult derived from this are:

50% of median	€236.43 a week
60% of median	€283.72 a week
70% of median	€331.00 a week

Updating the 60 per cent median income poverty line to 2022 levels, using published CSO data on the growth in average hourly earnings in 2021 (+2.6 per cent) produces a relative income poverty line of €286.48 for a single person. In 2022, any adult below this weekly income level will be counted as being at risk of poverty (CSO, 2022).

Table 3.1 shows what income corresponds to this poverty line for a number of household types. The figure of €291.09 is an income per adult equivalent figure. It is the minimum weekly disposable income (after taxes and including all benefits) that one adult needs to be above the poverty line. For each additional adult in the household this minimum income figure is increased by €192.12 (66 per cent of the poverty line figure) and for each child in the household the minimum income figure is increased by €96.06 (33 per cent of the poverty line)<sup>3</sup>. These adjustments reflect the fact that as households increase in size they require more income to meet the basic standard of living implied by the poverty line. In all cases a household below the corresponding weekly disposable income figure is classified as living at risk of poverty. For clarity, corresponding annual figures are also included.

**Table 3.1** The Minimum Weekly Disposable Income Required to Avoid Poverty in 2022, by Household Types

Household containing:	Weekly poverty line	Annual poverty line
1 adult	€291.09	€15,189
1 adult + 1 child	€387.16	€20,202
1 adult + 2 children	€483.22	€25,214
1 adult + 3 children	€579.28	€30,227
2 adults	€483.22	€25,214
2 adults + 1 child	€579.28	€30,227
2 adults + 2 children	€675.34	€35,239
2 adults + 3 children	€771.40	€40,252
3 adults	€675.34	€35,239

Source: *Social Justice Ireland* calculation based on CSO income and earnings data.

One immediate implication of this analysis is that most weekly social assistance rates paid to single people are €88 below the poverty line.

### How many have incomes below the poverty line?

Table 3.2 outlines the findings of various poverty studies since detailed national poverty assessments commenced in 1994. Using the EU poverty line set at 60 per cent of median income, the findings reveal that almost 13 out of every 100 people in Ireland were living in poverty in 2020. The table shows that over time poverty

<sup>3</sup> For example, the poverty line for a household with 2 adults and 1 child would be calculated as €291.09 + €192.12 + €96.06 = €579.28.

rates have fluctuated. In general, decreases have occurred in periods where national budgets have given greater attention to improving minimum welfare payments or prioritising welfare dependent households. Conversely, poverty has increased in periods where welfare payments were less of a policy priority and therefore gaps opened between those benefiting from tax and earnings changes and those households dependent on support from the social transfer system<sup>4</sup>.

**Table 3.2**      Percentage of Population Below Various Relative Income Poverty Lines, 1994-2020

	1994	1998	2001	2005	2009	2013	2016	2020
50% line	6.0	9.9	12.9	10.7	6.9	8.5	9.2	5.5
<b>60% line</b>	<b>15.6</b>	<b>19.8</b>	<b>21.9</b>	<b>18.3</b>	<b>14.1</b>	<b>16.2</b>	<b>16.2</b>	<b>13.2</b>
70% line	26.7	26.9	29.3	28.0	24.5	23.9	26.0	22.3

**Source:** CSO SILC reports (various years) and Whelan et al (2003:12).

**Note:** All poverty lines calculated as a percentage of median income.

Because it is sometimes easy to overlook the scale of Ireland’s poverty problem, it is useful to translate these poverty percentages into numbers of people. Using the percentages for the 60 per cent median income poverty line and population statistics from CSO population estimates, we can calculate the numbers of people in Ireland who have been in poverty for a number of years between 1994 and 2020. These calculations are presented in table 3.3. The results give a better picture of just how significant this problem is.

<sup>4</sup> See tables 3.5 and 3.6 for further analysis of this point.



**Table 3.3** The Numbers of People Below Relative Income Poverty Lines in Ireland, 1994-2020

	% of persons in poverty	Population of Ireland	Numbers in poverty
1994	15.6	3,585,900	559,400
1998	19.8	3,703,100	733,214
2001	21.9	3,847,200	842,537
2005	18.3	4,133,800	756,485
2009	14.1	4,533,400	639,209
2013	16.2	4,614,700	747,581
2016	16.2	4,739,600	767,815
2020	13.2	4,977,400	657,017

**Source:** See Table 3.2 and CSO online database of population estimates.

**Note:** Population estimates are for April of each year.

The table's figures are telling. Looking over the past 25 years, despite a reduction in the headline poverty rate (from 15.6 per cent to 13.2 per cent) there are almost 100,000 more people in poverty. Notably, over the period from 2004-2008, the period corresponding with consistent Budget increases in minimum social welfare payments, almost 145,000 people left poverty. This progress was reversed by the subsequent recession, and the rate and number in poverty began to fall from 2016 onwards driven by various budgetary policies that prioritised lower income households and welfare. The latest figures suggest that the numbers in poverty today are similar to those of a decade ago.

The fact that there are almost 660,000 people in Ireland living life on a level of income that is this low remains a major concern. As shown in table 3.1 these levels of income are low and those below them clearly face difficulties in achieving what the NAPS described as *"a standard of living that is regarded as acceptable by Irish society generally"*.

The Annex that accompanies this chapter provides a more detailed profile of those groups in Ireland that are living in poverty including the working poor, children, older people, people with a disability and those living in regional and rural areas. It also explores the incidence of poverty (the proportion of all those in poverty that belong to particular groups in Irish society) and reveals how in 2020 three in ten of Ireland's adults with an income below the poverty line were employed and that overall, 44 per cent of adults at risk of poverty in Ireland were associated with the labour market.

## The scale of poverty – numbers of people

As the two tables in the last subsection deal only in percentages it is useful to transform these proportions into numbers of people. Table 3.3 revealed that almost 660,000 people were living below the 60 per cent of median income poverty line in 2020. Using this figure, table 3.3 presents the number of people in poverty in that year within various categories. Comparable figures are also presented for selected years over the last decade.

The data in table 3.4 is particularly useful in the context of monitoring changes in the composition of poverty and framing anti-poverty policy. Recent changes in the headline poverty numbers – showing a decrease of over 120,000 since 2012 – hide a variety of experiences for different parts of the populations. Since 2012 poverty has fallen among the unemployed, children, students and those in working in the home, but has risen for workers, those who are retired and people who are ill or have a disability.

**Table 3.4** Poverty Levels Expressed in Numbers of People, 2012-2020

	2012	2015	2018	2020
Overall	776,335	764,111	650,838	657,017
<b>Adults</b>				
Employed	94,713	104,683	104,785	132,717
Unemployed	149,056	108,504	82,656	65,045
Retired	45,804	55,780	61,830	51,247
Ill/Disabled	56,672	64,185	80,053	87,383
Student/pupil	110,240	117,673	78,101	70,301
Fulfilling domestic tasks	120,332	113,088	79,402	55,189
Other	14,750	14,518	9,763	15,768
<b>Children</b>				
Children (under 16 yrs)	184,768	185,679	154,249	179,366
Children (under 18 yrs)	232,124	226,177	190,696	208,931

**Source:** Calculated using CSO SILC Reports (various years) and data from table 3.3.

**Poverty and welfare supports**

*Social Justice Ireland* believes in the very important role that social welfare plays in addressing poverty. As part of the *SILC* results the CSO has provided an interesting insight into the role that social welfare payments play in tackling Ireland’s poverty levels. It has calculated the levels of poverty before and after the payment of social welfare benefits.

Table 3.5 shows that without the social welfare system almost 4 in every 10 people in the Irish population (37.9 per cent) would have been living in poverty in 2020. Such an underlying poverty rate suggests a deeply unequal distribution of direct income; an issue we address further in the income distribution section of this chapter. In 2020, the actual poverty figure of 13.2 per cent reflects the fact that social welfare payments reduced poverty by almost 25 percentage points.

A report by Watson and Maitre (2013) examined these effects in greater detail and noted the effectiveness of social welfare payments, with child benefit and the growth in the value of social welfare payments, playing a key role in reducing poverty levels up until 2009. The CSO have also shown that in 2009 poverty among those aged 65 and older reduced from 88 per cent to 9.6 per cent once social welfare payments were included. The same study also found that social welfare payments (including child benefit) reduced poverty among those under 18 years of age from 47.3 per cent to 18.6 per cent – a 60 per cent reduction in poverty risk (CSO, 2010:47)<sup>5</sup>.

These findings, combined with the social welfare impact data in table 3.5, underscore the importance of social transfer payments in addressing poverty; a point that needs to be borne in mind as Government forms policy and priorities in the years to come.

**Table 3.5**     The Role of Social Welfare (SW) Payments in Addressing Poverty

	2001	2005	2010	2015	2020
Poverty pre-SW	35.6	40.0	50.2	46.2	37.9
Poverty post-SW	21.9	18.3	14.7	16.3	13.2
<b>The role of SW</b>	<b>-13.7</b>	<b>-21.7</b>	<b>-35.5</b>	<b>-29.9</b>	<b>-24.7</b>

Source: CSO SILC Reports (various years) using national equivalence scale.

The importance of welfare transfers was further highlighted by the CSO in their 2020 release which included an assessment of the impact that Covid-19 supports to workers and businesses had on poverty levels. The December 2021 *Poverty Insights* report estimated that the collective impact of the pandemic unemployment

<sup>5</sup> This data has not been updated in subsequent SILC publications.

payment (PUP) and the wage subsidy scheme (WSS) was to reduce poverty by 7.7 percentage points, meaning that these supports kept over 380,000 additional people out of poverty in 2020.

Analysis in the accompanying Annex to this chapter<sup>6</sup> (see table A3.1 and the subsequent text) shows that many of the groups in Irish society that experienced increases in poverty levels over the last decade have been dependent on social welfare payments. These include the unemployed, the retired, lone parents and those who are ill or have a disability. Table 3.6 presents the results of an analysis of five key welfare recipient groups performed by the ESRI using poverty data for five of the years between 1994 and 2001. These were the years that the Irish economy grew fastest and the core years of the ‘Celtic Tiger’ boom. Between 1994 and 2001 all categories experienced large growth in their poverty risk. For example, in 1994 only five out of every 100 old age pension recipients were in poverty. In 2001 this had increased ten-fold to almost 50 out of every 100. The experience of widow’s pension recipients is similar.

**Table 3.6** Percentage of Persons in Receipt of Welfare Benefits/Assistance Who Were Below the 60 Per Cent Median Income Poverty Line, 1994-2001

	1994	1997	1998	2000	2001
Old age pension	5.3	19.2	30.7	42.9	49.0
Unemployment benefit/assistance	23.9	30.6	44.8	40.5	43.1
Illness/disability	10.4	25.4	38.5	48.4	49.4
Lone Parents allowance	25.8	38.4	36.9	42.7	39.7
Widow’s pension	5.5	38.0	49.4	42.4	42.1

Source: Whelan et al (2003: 31).

Table 3.6 highlights the importance of adequate social welfare payments to prevent people becoming at risk of poverty. Over the period covered by these studies, groups similar to *Social Justice Ireland* repeatedly pointed out that these payments had failed to rise in proportion to earnings and incomes elsewhere in society. The primary consequence of this was that recipients slipped further and further back and therefore more and more fell into poverty. In 2022, as we plan future budgetary priorities, it is important that adequate levels of social welfare be maintained to ensure that the mistakes of the past are not repeated. We outline our proposals to achieve this later in the chapter.

<sup>6</sup> Available online at [www.socialjustice.ie](http://www.socialjustice.ie)

## Poverty and living costs

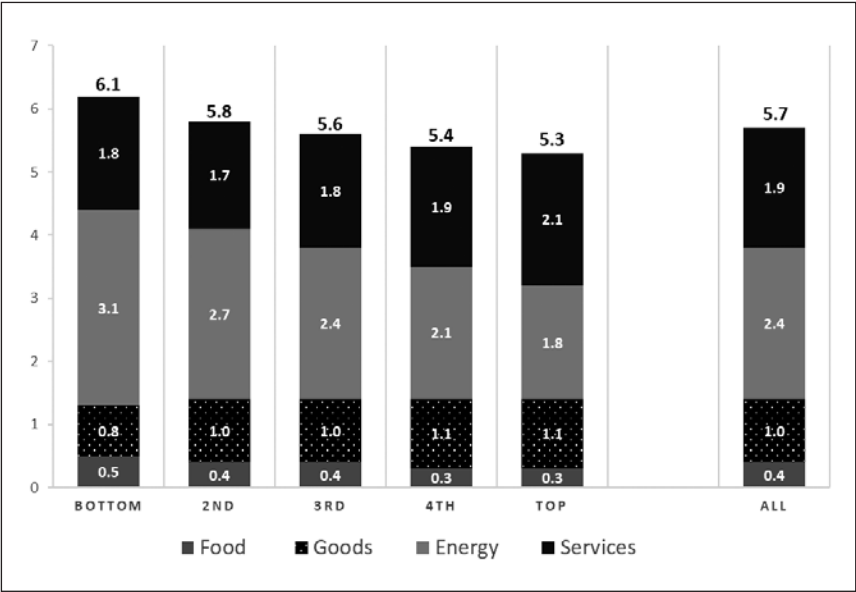
As outlined earlier, poverty rates are calculated using disposable income – the post income tax and welfare transfer amount individuals and households have to make ends meet. The standard of living this income can provide is further influenced by the recurring day-to-day costs individuals face and their ability to afford these. As we highlight elsewhere in this publication, these effects can be pronounced for people with disabilities, those with recurring illness (and associated medical needs) and low-income families with children.

During the past year, two publications have provided further insights into the challenges low-income households face in Ireland today. A Central Bank *Economic Letter* published in February 2022 provides an estimate of the distributive effect of recent, and ongoing, inflation (Lydon, 2022). Using data from the Household Budget Survey the study found that the impact of inflation is greatest for those households in the bottom twenty percent (bottom quintile) of the income distribution – see Chart 3.1. Given that these lower income households spend a greater proportion of their income, compared to better off households, they are more exposed to price increases; they also spend a greater proportion of their income on food and energy. While the study finds that all households are experiencing significant price increased (5.7 per cent in the year to December 2021), the effect of this inflation impacts the living standards of those on the lowest incomes the hardest. As inflation persists, policy will need to target these low income households and assist with the growing living cost challenges they face. Elsewhere, CSO SILC data highlights the concentration of individuals who are unemployed, long-term ill or disabled, living alone, and single parents in the bottom two deciles of the income distribution.<sup>7</sup> Targeted measures to support these welfare dependent households will be an essential part of the evolving policy response to the current experience of inflation and should form a core part of the policy measures adopted before, and as part of, Budget 2023.

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<sup>7</sup> See SILC 2020 Table 2.6.

**Chart 3.1**      Composition of Inflation across the Income Distribution, 2021 (quintiles)



Source: Lydon (2022: 3).

The effect of housing costs on the living standards of low income households is illustrated by new data released by the CSO as part of their SILC 2020 report. The data provide new insights into the scale of housing costs (rent, mortgage interest) many households face and highlights how dramatically these living costs reduce disposable income. As a means of illustrating this, the CSO have calculated the proportion of the population with a disposable income below the standard national poverty line after they have paid their housing costs. These results can be compared to the standard poverty rates already outlined in this chapter.

Table 3.7 reports the results of this analysis by household tenure. It highlights how significantly housing costs impact on the living standards of renters and in particular low income families who live in accommodation provided by local authorities or receive social housing supports. Post housing costs, one in every two of these low income households have an income below the poverty line, this compares to one in five for the whole population and one in twelve for households who are owner occupiers. The CSO analysis also highlighted big increases in poverty for single parent households, people who are unemployed, and people with long standing illness or disabilities.

**Table 3.7** Poverty Rates Before and After Housing Costs, by tenure type in 2020

	Before	After
All population	13.2	19.0
Owner occupiers - all	7.1	8.2
<i>with mortgage</i>	4.8	7.1
<i>without mortgage</i>	9.5	9.5
Renters or Rent Free - all	27.6	44.7
<i>rent free</i>	15.7	15.7
<i>LA tenants</i>	37.6	49.8
<i>with HAP, RAS, rent supplement</i>	22.7	55.9
<i>with no housing supports</i>	16.7	30.7

**Source:** CSO SILC Report 2020.

**Note:** Housing costs include rent and mortgage interest and do not include capital payments on mortgages.

*Social Justice Ireland* welcomes the publication of these new poverty figures. They further illustrate the challenges low income household face and provide an important insights into the effectiveness of current social housing supports and the impact of increases in private rental costs on the living standards of those in society with the lowest incomes.<sup>8</sup>

### Poverty and deprivation

Income alone does not tell the whole story concerning living standards and command over resources. As we have seen in the NAPS definition of poverty, it is necessary to look more broadly at exclusion from society because of a lack of resources. This requires looking at other areas where ‘as a result of inadequate income and resources people may be excluded and marginalised from participating in activities that are considered the norm for other people in society’ (NAPS, 1997). Although income is the principal indicator used to assess wellbeing and ability to participate in society, there are other measures. In particular, these measures assess the standards of living people achieve by assessing deprivation through use of different indicators.

<sup>8</sup> See Chapter 6 and *Social Justice Ireland Housing and Poverty 2022 (January 2022)* available on our website.

### *Deprivation in the SILC survey*

Since 2007 the CSO has presented 11 measures of deprivation in the *SILC* survey, compared to just eight before that. *Social Justice Ireland* and others have expressed serious reservations about the overall range of measures employed in this indicator. We believe that a whole new approach to measuring deprivation should be developed. Continuing to collect information on a limited number of static indicators is problematic in itself and does not present a true picture of the dynamic nature of Irish society. However, notwithstanding these reservations, the trends are informative and offer some insight into the changes in income over recent years on households and living standards across the state.

The results presented in table 3.8 shows that in 2020 the rates of deprivation recorded across the set of 11 items varied between 0.9 and 17.6 per cent of the Irish population. Overall, 69.8 per cent of the population were not deprived of any item, while 14.6 per cent were deprived of one item, 6.3 per cent were without two items and 9.3 per cent were without three or more items. Among those living on an income below the poverty line, almost four in ten (38.3 per cent) experienced deprivation of two or more items.



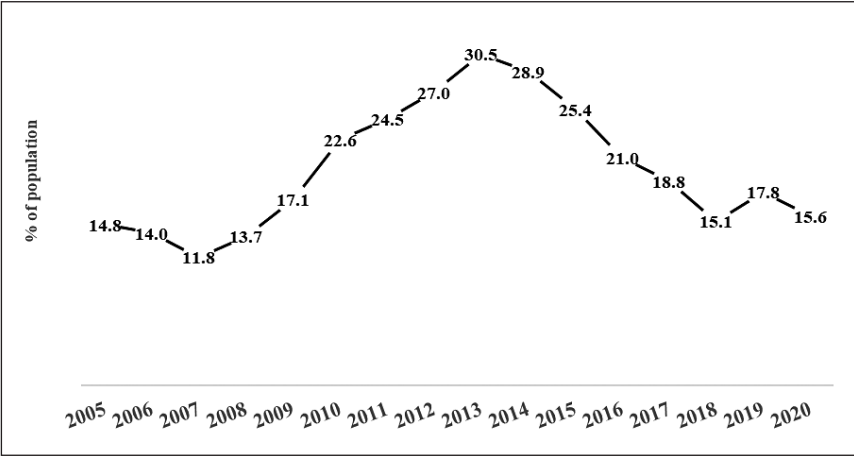
**Table 3.8** Levels of Deprivation for Eleven Items Among the Population and Those in Poverty, 2019 (%)

Deprivation Item	Total Population	Those in Poverty
Without heating at some stage in the past year	9.3	21.4
Unable to afford a morning, afternoon or evening out in the last fortnight	7.9	19.3
Unable to afford two pairs of strong shoes	2.4	7.7
Unable to afford a roast once a week	4.0	9.8
Unable to afford a meal with meat, chicken or fish every second day	1.4	3.8
Unable to afford new (not second-hand) clothes	7.8	20.6
Unable to afford a warm waterproof coat	0.9	2.2
Unable to afford to keep the home adequately warm	3.4	7.8
Unable to replace any worn out furniture	17.6	35.7
Unable to afford to have family or friends for a drink or meal once a month	11.4	28.5
Unable to afford to buy presents for family or friends at least once a year	4.4	12.5

**Source:** CSO (2021).

**Note:** Poverty as measured using the 60 per cent median income poverty line.

**Chart 3.2** Deprivation Rate, 2005-2020



Source: CSO SILC Reports (various years).

It is of interest that from 2007 to 2013, as the economic crisis took hold, the proportion of the population that experienced no deprivation fell from 75.6 per cent in 2007 to 55.1 per cent in 2013. Since then this figure has improved. Simultaneously, the proportion of the population experiencing deprivation of two or more items (the deprivation rate) more than doubled – see Chart 3.2. By 2020 just over 776,000 people (15.6 per cent of the population) were experiencing deprivation at this level. The most common deprivation experiences include: being unable to afford to replace worn out furniture, being unable to afford to have family or friends for a drink or meal once a month and having to go without heating at some stage in the past year. Should policy intervention be insufficient, these indicators will be useful to track the impact on low income households of the current inflation and fuel prices challenges.

***Deprivation and poverty combined: consistent poverty***

‘Consistent poverty’ combines deprivation and poverty into a single indicator. It does this by calculating the proportion of the population simultaneously experiencing poverty and registering as deprived of two or more of the items in Table 3.8. As such, it captures a sub-group of those who are poor.

The *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016 (NAPinclusion)* published in early 2007 set its overall poverty goal using this earlier consistent poverty measure. One of its aims was to reduce the number of people experiencing consistent poverty to between 2 per cent and 4 per cent of the total population by 2012, with a further aim of eliminating consistent poverty by 2016. A revision to this target was published as part of the Government’s *National Reform Programme 2012 Update for*

*Ireland* (2012). The revised poverty target was to reduce the numbers experiencing consistent poverty to 4 per cent by 2016 and to 2 per cent or less by 2020. This target has been retained, and the time period extended to 2025, as part of Government's *Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-25* (Government of Ireland, 2020). *Social Justice Ireland* participated in the consultation process on the revision of this and other poverty targets. While we agree with the revised 2 per cent consistent poverty target (it is not possible to measure below this 2 per cent level using survey data) we proposed that this target should be accompanied by other targets focused on the overall population and vulnerable groups.

It should also be noted that, despite various Governments establishing and revising poverty targets on a number of occasions over the past decade, none of these have been achieved.

Using the combined poverty and deprivation measures, the 2020 *SILC* data indicates that 4.5 per cent of the population experience consistent poverty; the lowest figure recorded for the rate was 4.2 per cent in 2008 (CSO, 2021). Overall, the 2020 figures suggest that approximately 225,000 people live in consistent poverty. The reality of the current living cost challenges, the likely uneven nature of the post-pandemic recovery, and the limited sense of urgency to adequately address these issues is pushing Ireland further away from these targets.

The Annex accompanying this chapter also examines the experience of people who are in food poverty and fuel poverty alongside an assessment of the research on minimum incomes standards in Ireland.

### **The Cost of Poverty**

Two recent studies have highlighted the costs that poverty imposes on society and on individuals living in poverty.

A report commissioned by the Society of St Vincent DePaul, and authored by Collins, examined *The Hidden Cost of Poverty* by estimating the public service cost of poverty in Ireland (Collins, 2020). It identified the additional public service costs that Irish society carries as a result of current and past experiences of poverty. The main estimate presented by the report found that the annual public service cost of poverty to Ireland is almost €4.5bn. Expressed in per capita terms this finding implies that poverty imposes a public service cost equivalent to a sum of €913 per person in the state each year (€2,600 per household). The report also noted that this additional public sector expenditure is equivalent to 5.1% of total General Government Revenue and 5% of total General Government Expenditure. Put another way, €1 in every €20 collected by the state from taxes, social insurance and charges ends up being allocated by the state to make up for the way that poverty damages people's lives. *Social Justice Ireland* welcomes this report, it provides a heretofore absent benchmark for the recurring annual costs to the state of poverty, and highlights for all members of society, whether they are above or below the poverty line, the costs incurred by society as a result of poverty.

A CSO report published in December 2020 examined *The Intergenerational Transmission of Disadvantages* using data from a module included in the SILC 2019 survey (CSO, 2020). Based on answers from people aged 25-59 about their life situation when they were about 14 years old, the report explored if a person's household circumstances as a teenager are associated with poverty indicators in later life. Among its findings, the report highlighted the intergenerational impacts of lower completed education levels as respondents whose parents had lower secondary education had a 16.2 per cent risk of poverty as adults compared with 6.2 per cent for those who had parents with third level education. The CSO report also found that financial disadvantage in childhood appears to persist to adulthood. People who described the financial situation of their teenage home as bad were most likely to be at risk of poverty (18.2 per cent) or living in enforced deprivation (39 per cent) as adults in 2019.

### **Poverty: a European perspective**

It is helpful to compare Irish measures of poverty to those elsewhere in Europe. Eurostat, the European Statistics Agency, produces comparable 'at risk of poverty' figures (proportions of the population living below the poverty line) for each EU member state. The data is calculated using the 60 per cent of median income poverty line in each country. Comparable EU-wide definitions of income and equivalence scale are used<sup>9</sup>. The latest data available for all member states is for the year 2020.

As table 3.9 shows, Irish people experience a below average risk of poverty when compared to all other EU member states. Eurostat's 2008 figures marked the first time Ireland's poverty levels fell below average EU levels. This phenomenon was driven, as outlined earlier in this review, by sustained increases in welfare payments in the years prior to 2008. Ireland's poverty levels have remained below EU-average levels since then. In 2020, across the EU, the highest poverty levels were found in the most recent accession countries and in some of the countries most impacted by the economic crisis one decade ago: Bulgaria, Romania, Latvia, Spain, Lithuania, Estonia and Italy. The lowest levels were in Finland, Denmark, Slovakia, and Czechia (formerly the Czech Republic).

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<sup>9</sup> Differences in definitions of income and equivalence scales result in slight differences in the poverty rates reported by Eurostat for Ireland when compared to those reported earlier which have been calculated by the CSO using national definitions of income and the Irish equivalence scale.

**Table 3.9** The Risk of Poverty in the European Union, 2020

Country	Poverty Risk	Country	Poverty Risk
Bulgaria	23.8	Poland	14.8
Romania	23.4	Cyprus	14.3
Latvia	21.6	Belgium	14.1
Spain	21.0	<b>Ireland</b>	<b>13.9</b>
Lithuania	20.9	Austria	13.9
Estonia	20.7	France	13.8
Italy	20.1	Netherlands	13.4
Germany	18.5	Slovenia	12.4
Croatia	18.3	Hungary	12.3
Greece	17.7	Finland	12.2
Luxembourg	17.4	Denmark	12.1
Malta	16.9	Slovakia	11.4
Portugal	16.2	Czechia	9.5
Sweden	16.1	<b>EU-27 average</b>	<b>17.1</b>

**Source:** Eurostat online database (ilc\_li02).

**Note:** Italy data is for 2019.

The average risk of poverty in the EU-27 for 2020 was 17.1 per cent. Overall, while there have been some reductions in poverty in recent years across the EU, the data suggests that poverty remains a large and ongoing EU-wide problem. In 2020 the average EU-28 level implied that 75.2 million people live in poverty across the EU.<sup>10</sup>

### ***Income Distribution***

As previously outlined, despite improvements, poverty remains a significant problem in Irish society. The purpose of economic development should be to improve the living standards of all of the population. A further loss of social cohesion will mean that large numbers of people continue to experience deprivation and the gap between that cohort and the better-off will widen. This has implications for all

<sup>10</sup> We discuss Europe 2020 poverty and social exclusion targets in the Annex to this chapter.

of society, not just those who are poor; a reality that has begun to receive welcome attention recently.

Analysis of the annual income and expenditure accounts yields information on trends in the distribution of national income. However, the limitations of this accounting system need to be acknowledged. Measures of income are far from perfect gauges of a society. They ignore many relevant non-market features, such as volunteerism, caring and environmental protection. Many environmental factors, such as the depletion of natural resources, are registered as income but not seen as a cost. Pollution is not registered as a cost but cleaning up after pollution is classed as income. Increased spending on prisons and security, which are a response to crime, are seen as increasing national income but not registered as reducing human wellbeing.

The point is that national accounts fail to include items that cannot easily be assigned a monetary value. But progress cannot be measured by economic growth alone. Many other factors are required, as we highlight elsewhere in this review<sup>11</sup>. However, when judging economic performance and making judgements about how well Ireland is really doing, it is important to look at the distribution of resources as well as its absolute amount<sup>12</sup>.

### **Ireland's income distribution: latest data**

The most recent data on Ireland's income distribution, from the 2020 SILC survey (published in December 2021), is summarised in chart 3.3. It examines the income distribution by decile starting with the 10 per cent of individuals with the lowest income (the bottom decile) up to the 10 per cent with the highest income (the top decile).

The data presented is equivalised, meaning that it has been adjusted to reflect the number of adults and children in a household and to make it possible to compare individuals located in households of different sizes and compositions. It measures disposable income which captures the amount of money available to spend after receipt of any employment/pension income, payment of all income taxes, and receipt of any welfare entitlements.

In 2020, the top 10 per cent of the population received almost one quarter of the total income while the bottom decile received just 4 per cent. Collectively, the poorest 60 per cent of households received a very similar share (39.8 per cent) to the top 20 per cent (37.9 per cent). Overall, the share of the top 10 per cent is almost 6 times the share of the bottom 10 per cent.

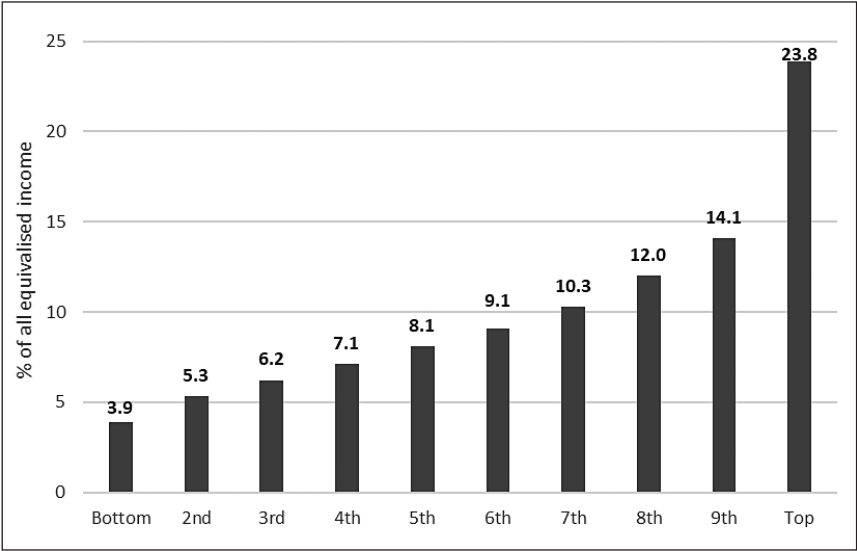
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<sup>11</sup> We return to critique National Income statistics in chapter 11. There, we also propose some alternatives.

<sup>12</sup> We examine the issue of the world's income and wealth distribution in chapter 13.

A study by Collins (2017) provided a detailed insight into the nature of the underlying market or direct income distribution; that linked to earnings of all types. The research showed that the distribution of market income is concentrated on incomes of less than €50,000 per annum – representing 80 per cent of all earners. A conclusion of the study is that “the shape of that [earnings] distribution, and the prevalence of low income earners within it, points towards a need for greater consideration to be given to the underlying nature and distribution of market earnings” (Collins, 2017).

**Chart 3.3** Ireland’s Income Distribution by decile (or 10% group) in 2020



Source: CSO SILC (2021).

Income distribution data for the last few decades suggested that the overall structure of that distribution has been largely unchanged. One overall inequality measure, the Gini coefficient (which will be examined in further detail later in this chapter), ranges from 0 (no inequality) to 100 (maximum inequality) and has stood at approximately 30 for Ireland for some time. In 2020 it stood at 28.8. If we as a society wish to address and close these income divides, future Government policy must prioritise those at the bottom of the income distribution. Otherwise, these divides will persist for further generations and perhaps widen.

### Income distribution: a European perspective

Another of the indicators adopted by the EU at Laeken assesses the income distribution of member states by comparing the ratio of equivalised disposable income received by the bottom quintile (20 per cent) to that of the top quintile.

This indicator reveals how far away from each other the shares of these two groups are – the higher the ratio, the greater the income difference. Table 3.10 presents the most up-to-date results of this indicator for EU states. Ireland's ratio of 4.1 is below the EU average. Overall, the greatest differences in the shares of those at the top and bottom of income distribution are found in many of the newer and poorer member states. However, some EU-15 members, including Germany, Italy and Spain also record large differences.

**Table 3.10** Ratio of Disposable Income Received by Bottom Quintile to That of the Top Quintile in the EU-27, 2020

Country	Ratio	Country	Ratio
Bulgaria	8.0	Cyprus	4.3
Romania	6.6	Hungary	4.2
Germany	6.5	Netherlands	4.2
Latvia	6.3	<b>Ireland</b>	<b>4.1</b>
Lithuania	6.1	Sweden	4.1
Italy	6.0	Austria	4.1
Spain	5.8	Poland	4.1
Greece	5.2	Denmark	4.0
Estonia	5.0	Finland	3.7
Luxembourg	5.0	Belgium	3.7
Portugal	5.0	Czechia	3.3
Malta	4.7	Slovenia	3.3
Croatia	4.6	Slovakia	3.0
France	4.5	<b>EU-27 average</b>	<b>5.2</b>

**Source:** Eurostat online database (ilc\_di11).

**Note:** Italy data for 2019.

A further measure of income inequality is the aforementioned Gini coefficient, which ranges from 0 to 100 and summarises the degree of inequality across the entire income distribution (rather than just at the top and bottom).<sup>13</sup> The higher the

<sup>13</sup> See Collins and Kavanagh (2006: 159-160) who provide a more detailed explanation of this measure.



Gini coefficient score the greater the degree of income inequality in a society. As table 3.11 shows, over time income inequality has been reasonably static in the EU as a whole, although within the EU there are notable differences. Countries such as Ireland cluster around the average EU score and differ from other high-income EU member states which record lower levels of inequality. As the table shows, the degree of inequality is at a notably lower scale in countries like Finland, Sweden and the Netherlands. For Ireland, the key point is that despite the aforementioned role of the social transfer system, the underlying degree of direct income inequality (see earlier) dictates that our income distribution remains much more unequal than in many of the EU countries we wish to emulate in terms of economic and social development.

**Table 3.11** Gini Coefficient Measure of Income Inequality for Selected EU States, 2005-2020

	2005	2010	2015	2020
EU-27	30.6	30.2	30.8	30.8
<b>Ireland</b>	<b>31.9</b>	<b>30.7</b>	<b>29.7</b>	<b>28.7</b>
Germany	26.1	29.3	30.1	34.4
Spain	32.2	33.5	34.6	32.1
France	27.7	29.8	29.2	29.3
Netherlands	26.9	25.5	26.7	28.2
Sweden	23.4	25.5	26.7	26.9
Finland	26.0	25.4	25.2	26.5

**Source:** Eurostat online database (ilc\_di12).

**Note:** The Gini coefficient ranges from 0-100 with a higher score indicating a higher level of inequality.

### Income Distribution and Recent Budgets

Budget 2022, delivered in October 2021, marked the second Budget of the current coalition Government. It was a Budget that *Social Justice Ireland* described as failing by ‘leaving those on low incomes behind’. In this subsection, we first review the distributive impact of Budget 2022 before presenting the results of our analysis of the cumulative impact of changes over the Government’s two Budgets.

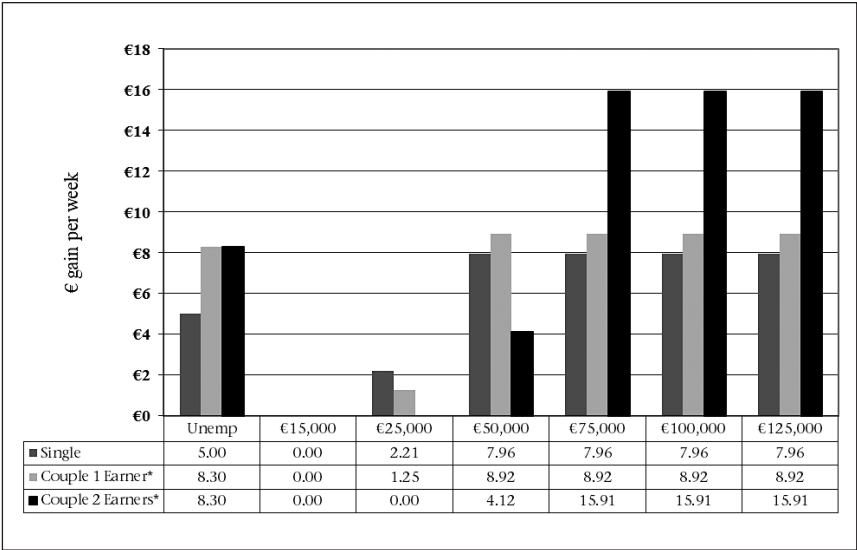
#### *Impact of Budget 2022*

When assessing the change in people’s incomes following any Budget, it is important that tax changes be included as well as changes to basic social welfare payments. In our calculations, we have not included any changes to other welfare

allowances and secondary benefits as these payments do not flow to all households. Similarly, we have not included changes to other taxes (including indirect taxes and property taxes) as these are also experienced differently by different household types. Wage increases, including those for the statutory minimum wage, are also excluded as the nature and value of these changes will differ across earners.

Chart 3.4 demonstrates the changes arising from Budget 2022 for the various household groupings we track annually. Single people who are unemployed will benefit from the weekly increase from March and the Christmas bonus increase which equates to €5.00 a week (€260 a year). Those on €25,000 a year will see an increase of €2.21 a week (€115 a year) while those on €50,000 will be €7.96 a week (€415 a year) better off. Couples with one income on €25,000 a year will be €1.25 a week (€65 a year) better-off while those on €50,000 will be €8.92 a week (€465 a year) better off. Couples with two incomes on €75,000 a year will be €15.91 a week (€830 a year) better off while those on €100,000 will be €15.91 a week (€830 a year) better off in 2022. The analysis also highlights the limited gains for low income working households; the adoption of a refundable tax credit system is overdue and needed to address this large and budget-forgotten group.

**Chart 3.4**      Impact of Income Tax and Welfare Payment Changes from Budget 2022



Source: Social Justice Ireland (2021:6).

Notes: \* Except in case of the unemployed where there is no earner. Unemployed aged 26 years and over. All other earners have PAYE income. Couple with 2 earners are assumed to have a 65%/35% income division.

### ***Impact of Tax and Benefit Changes on Families, 2020-2022***

Over the past few years *Social Justice Ireland* has developed its ability to track the distributive impact of annual Budgets on households across Irish society. Our analysis tracks changes from year to year (pre and post each Budget) and across a number of recent years<sup>14</sup>.

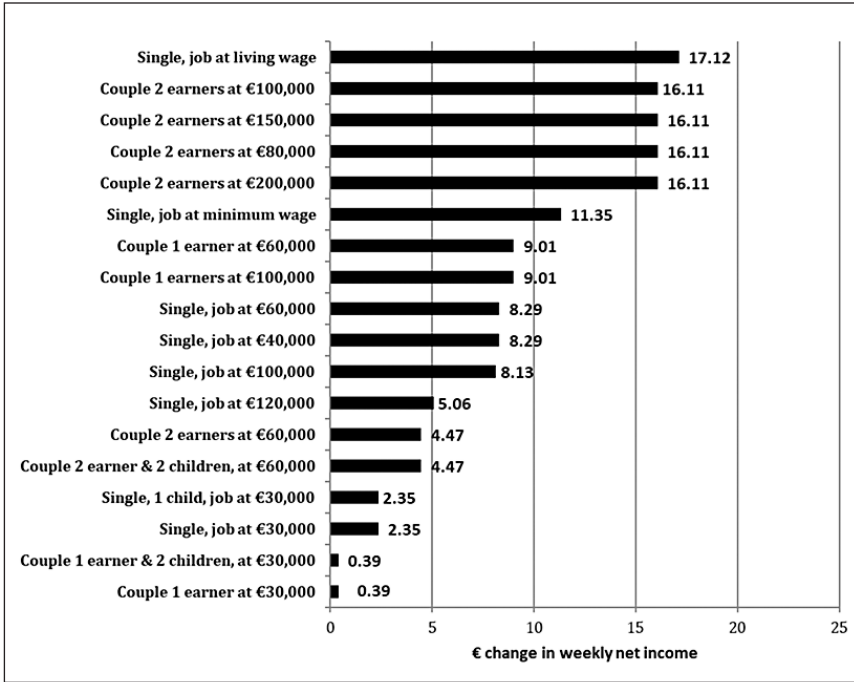
Following Budget 2022, we assessed the cumulative impact of changes to taxation and welfare over the two Budgets delivered by the current Government (Budgets 2021 and 2022). As different policy priorities can be articulated for each Budget, it is useful to bring together the cumulative effect of policy changes on various household types.

The households we examine are spread across all areas of society and capture those with a job, families with children, those unemployed and pensioner households. Within those households that have income from a job, we include workers on the minimum wage, on the living wage, workers on average earnings and earners with incomes ranging from €30,000 to €200,000. In the case of working households, the analysis is focused on PAYE earners only and therefore does not capture the Budget 2021 measures targeted at the self-employed. The analysis is focused on changes to income taxation and welfare measures and does not take account of other budgetary changes in taxation and service provision.

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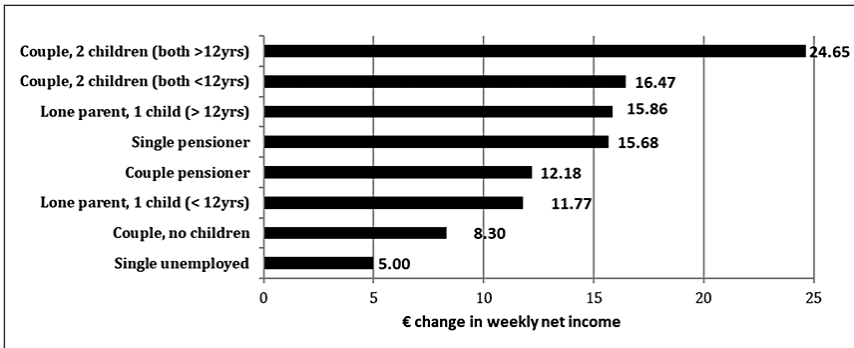
<sup>14</sup> A document on our website entitled '*Tracking the Distributive Effects of Budget Policy – 2022 edition*' provides a more detailed overview of the approach taken by *Social Justice Ireland* to generate these results.

**Chart 3.5** Cumulative Impact on Households with Jobs, 2020-2022



Source: *Social Justice Ireland* Income Distribution Model.

**Chart 3.6** Cumulative Impact on Welfare Dependent Households, 2020-2022



Source: *Social Justice Ireland* Income Distribution Model.

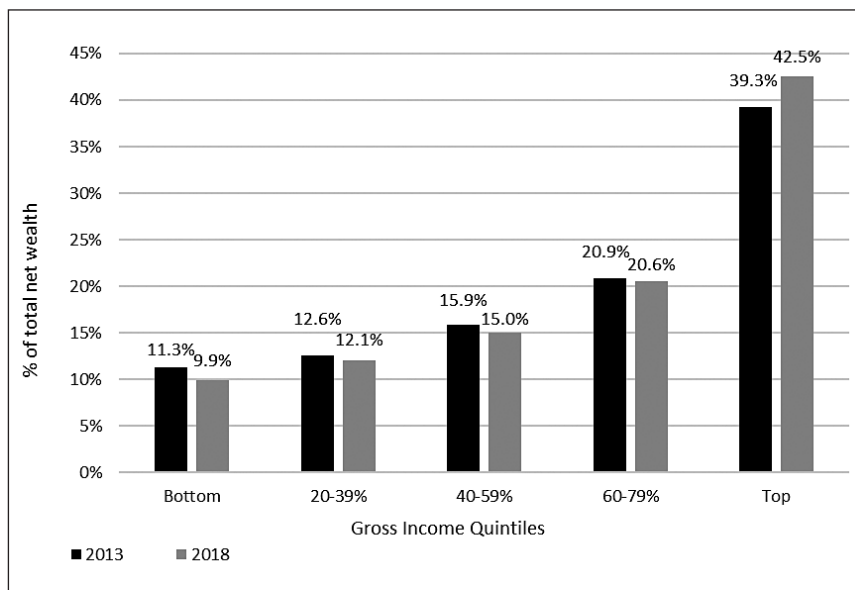
As there were limited changes in income after Budget 2021, most changes reflect measures from Budget 2022. Among households with jobs (see chart 3.5), the gains experienced range from a mere 39 cent per week (for low income couples on €30,000) to €16.11 per week for couples with incomes over €80,000. Earners on the living wage gain more on account of the increase in the level of that payment. The analysis highlights how low income families, those with incomes below the standard rate income tax threshold gained least from the budget measures over the past two years.

Among households dependent on welfare (see chart 3.6), the gains have ranged from €5 per week for single unemployed individuals to €24.65 per week for unemployed couples with 2 children over 12 years of age. The gains experienced by welfare dependent households over recent years explain much of the reason why the levels of income inequality and poverty have fallen in recent years. *Social Justice Ireland* has consistently argued for the prioritisation of low income welfare dependent families in Budgetary policy and welcome these outcomes. However, we are concerned that recent Budgets have shifted away from this approach and regrettably expect that much of this recent progress will be reversed.

### **Ireland's Wealth Distribution**

While data on income and poverty levels has improved dramatically over the past two decades, a persistent gap has been our knowledge of levels of wealth in Irish society. Data on wealth is important, as it provides a further insight into the distribution of resources and an insight into some of the underlying structural components of inequality.

**Chart 3.7** Distribution of Net Wealth by Gross Income Quintile, 2013 and 2018



Source: Compiled from CSO HFCS online database.

**Table 3.12** Net Wealth in Ireland by Income Quintile, 2013 and 2018

<i>Household median net wealth (€)</i>			
Income Quintile	2013	2018	Change
Bottom	77,300	95,400	+18,100
20-39%	58,100	129,700	+71,600
40-59%	85,400	126,800	+41,400
60-79%	112,300	214,600	+102,300
Top	207,000	412,100	+205,100
All Households	102,600	178,400	+75,800

Source: Compiled from CSO HFCS online database.

A welcome development was the publication by the CSO in early 2015 of the first Household Finance and Consumption Survey (HFCS). The HFCS is part of a European initiative to improve countries knowledge of the socio-economic and

financial situations of households across the EU. For the first time, its results offer robust information on the types and levels of wealth that households in Ireland possess. The data was collected for 2013 across 5,545 households and was followed by a second survey completed with 4,793 households in 2018.

The CSO's net wealth measure includes the value of all assets (housing, land, investments, valuables, savings and private pensions) and removes any borrowings (mortgages, loans, credit card debt etc) to give the most informative picture of households' wealth. Table 3.12 and Chart 3.7 outline the key results for 2013 and 2018. The median (middle) household net wealth in Ireland in 2018 was €178,400, 74 per cent higher than the equivalent figure from 2013. The CSO suggest this is associated with an increase in house prices over the period, as most Irish household wealth is concentrated in property and in particular housing. Housing assets also explain the presence of wealth holdings right across the income distribution although wealth is dramatically concentrated in the top quintile (twenty per cent group). The Gini coefficient for net wealth in 2018 was 67, more than twice the level recorded for income inequality.

The composition and distribution of wealth points towards policy issues to be considered, concerning inheritance taxes (capital acquisitions tax), gift taxes and capital gains taxes – some of which are addressed in the next chapter. The arrival of this new data also allows, for the first time, an opportunity for informed consideration of policy options around wealth, as well as income inequality. As further analysis of this data, and new editions emerge, *Social Justice Ireland* looks forward to contributing to that debate.

## 3.2 Key Policies and Reforms

### *Paying a Living Wage*

Over the past decade *Social Justice Ireland* and a number of other organisations have come together to form a technical group which researched and developed a Living Wage for Ireland. In July 2014 the group launched a website ([www.livingwage.ie](http://www.livingwage.ie)) and a technical paper outlining how the concept is calculated. The latest update to the figure was published in September 2021 and reported a Living Wage rate of €12.90 per hour for 2021/22.

### **What is a Living Wage?**

The establishment of a Living Wage Rate for Ireland adds to a growing international set of similar figures which reflect a belief across societies that individuals working full-time should be able to earn enough income to enjoy a decent standard of living. The Living Wage is a wage which makes possible a minimum acceptable standard of living. Its calculation is evidence based and built on budget standards research which is grounded in social consensus.

In principle, a living wage is intended to establish an hourly wage rate that should provide employees with sufficient income to achieve an agreed acceptable minimum standard of living. In that sense it is an income floor, representing a figure which allows employees to afford the essentials of life. Earnings below the living wage suggest employees are forced to do without certain essentials so they can make ends meet.

### **How is the Living Wage Calculated?**

The Living Wage for Ireland is calculated on the basis of the Minimum Essential Standard of Living research in Ireland, conducted by the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice (VPSJ). This research establishes a consensus on what members of the public believe is a minimum standard that no individual or household should live below.

The Living Wage Technical Group decided to focus the calculation of a Living Wage for the Republic of Ireland on a single-adult household. In its examination of the methodological options for calculating a robust annual measure, the group concluded that a focus on a single-adult household was the most practical approach. However, in recognition of the fact that households with children experience additional costs which are relevant to any consideration of such households standards of living, the group has also published estimates of a Family Living Income each year<sup>15</sup>.

The calculations established a Living Wage for the country as a whole, with costs examined in four regions: Dublin, other Cities, Towns with a population above 5,000, and the rest of Ireland. The expenditure required varied across these regions and, reflecting this, so too did the annual gross income required to meet this expenditure. To produce a single national rate, the results of the gross income calculation for the four regions were averaged; with each regional rate being weighted in proportion to the population in the labour force in that region. The weighted annual gross income is then divided by the number of weeks in the year (52.14) and the number of working hours in the week (39) to give an hourly wage. Where necessary, this figure is rounded up or down to the nearest five cent<sup>16</sup>. The Technical Group plans to update this number on an annual basis.

### **The Merits of a Living Wage**

*Social Justice Ireland* believes that concepts such as the Living Wage have an important role to play in addressing the persistent income inequality and poverty levels outlined earlier in this chapter. As shown in table 3.4, there are many adults living in poverty despite having a job – the working poor. Improvements in the

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<sup>15</sup> See Living Wage Technical Group (2021:4).

<sup>16</sup> A more detailed account of the methodology used to calculate the Living Wage has been published by the Living Wage Technical Group and is available at [www.livingwage.ie](http://www.livingwage.ie)



low pay rates received by many employees offers an important method by which levels of poverty and exclusion can be reduced. Paying low paid employees a Living Wage offers the prospect of significantly benefiting the living standards of these employees and we hope to see this new benchmark adopted across many sectors of society in the years to come.

### ***Maintaining an Adequate Level of Social Welfare***

A lesson from past experiences of economic recovery and growth is that the weakest in our society get left behind unless welfare increases keep track with increases elsewhere in the economy. Consequently, *Social Justice Ireland* believes that benchmarking minimum rates of social welfare payments to movements in average earnings is therefore an important policy priority.

Almost 15 years ago, Budget 2007 benchmarked the minimum social welfare rate at 30 per cent of Gross Average Industrial Earnings (GAIE). This was a key achievement and one that we correctly predicted would lead to reductions in poverty rates, complementing those already achieved and detailed earlier<sup>17</sup>. Since then, the CSO discontinued its *Industrial Earnings and Hours Worked* dataset and replaced it with a more comprehensive set of income statistics for a broader set of Irish employment sectors. A subsequent report for *Social Justice Ireland* found that 30 per cent of GAIE is equivalent to 27.5 per cent of the new average earnings data being collected by the CSO (Collins, 2011). A figure of 27.5 per cent of average earnings is therefore the appropriate benchmark for minimum social welfare payments and reflects a continuation of the previous benchmark using the current CSO earnings dataset.

Table 3.13 applies this benchmark using CSO data for 2019 to the start of 2022. In normal years the data is updated using ESRI projections for wage growth for the current year, but given current uncertainties, they have not published any such projections for 2022. Based on these calculations, as of early 2022 the updated value of 27.5 per cent of average weekly earnings equals €234.65 implying a shortfall of almost €27 between the minimum social welfare rates being paid in 2022 (€208) and this threshold.

Given the importance of this benchmark to the living standards of many in Irish society, and its relevance to anti-poverty commitments, the current deficit highlights a need for the Government, and Budget 2023, to further increase minimum social welfare rates and commit to converging on a benchmark equivalent to 27.5 per cent of average weekly earnings. We have engaged with the Commission on Taxation and Welfare to encourage them to recommend this proposal and will further update the calculations as part of our pre-Budget submission, *Budget Choices*, in mid-2022.

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<sup>17</sup> Annex 3 outlines how this significant development occurred.

**Table 3.13** Benchmarking Social Welfare Payments for 2022 (€)

Year	Av. Weekly Earnings	27.5% of Av. Weekly Earnings
2019	774.68	213.04
2020	814.99	224.12
2021 & start of 2022	853.27	234.65

Notes: Earning data from CSO *Earnings and Labour Costs* (March 2022).

### ***Individualising social welfare payments***

The issue of individualising payments so that all recipients receive their own social welfare payments has been on the policy agenda in Ireland and across the EU for several years.

At present the welfare system provides a basic payment for a claimant, whether that be, for example, for a pension, a disability payment or a jobseeker's payment. It then adds an additional payment of about two-thirds of the basic payment for the second person. For example, following Budget 2022, a couple on the lowest social welfare rate receives a payment of €346 per week. This amount is approximately 1.66 times the payment for a single person (€208). Were these two people living separately they would receive €208 each; giving a total of €416. Thus, by living as a household unit such a couple receive a lower income than they would were they to live apart.

*Social Justice Ireland* believes that this system is unfair and inequitable. We also believe that the system as currently structured is not compatible with the Equal Status Acts (2000-2018). People, more often than not women, are disadvantaged by living as part of a household unit because they receive a lower income. We believe that where a couple is in receipt of welfare payments, the payment to the second person should be increased to equal that of the first. An effective way of doing this would be to introduce a basic income system (see next subsection).

### ***Introducing a Basic Income***

Over the past two decades major progress has been achieved in building the case for the introduction of a Basic Income in Ireland. This includes the publication of a *Green Paper on Basic Income* by the Government in September 2002 and the publication of a book by Clark entitled *The Basic Income Guarantee* (2002). More recently, *Social Justice Ireland* hosted a conference and published a book on Basic Income (*Basic Income: Radical Utopia or Practical Solution?*), new European and Irish Basic Income networks have emerged, and the concept of a Basic Income has moved

to become one commonly discussed and considered in public policy contexts<sup>18</sup>. *Social Justice Ireland* welcomes the commitment in the current *Programme for Government- Our Shared Future* (2020) to the adoption of a Universal Basic Income pilot during the lifetime of the current Government and we look forward to engaging with Government on the design, implementation and evaluation of that initiative. We will also engage with any proposals that emerge from the Low Pay Commission's consideration of a Basic Income scheme. Recent results from the European Social Survey suggest that 58 per cent of the Irish population are in favour of the introduction of a Basic Income.

### **The case for a Basic Income**

*Social Justice Ireland* has consistently argued that the present tax and social welfare systems should be integrated and reformed to make them more appropriate to the changing world of the 21st century. To this end we have sought the introduction of a Basic Income system. This proposal is especially relevant at the present moment of economic upheaval.

A Basic Income is an income that is unconditionally granted to every person on an individual basis, without any means test or work requirement. In a Basic Income system every person receives a weekly tax-free payment from the Exchequer while all other personal income is taxed, usually at a single rate. The basic-income payment would replace income from social welfare for a person who is unemployed and replace tax credits for a person who is employed.

Basic income is a form of minimum income guarantee that avoids many of the negative side-effects inherent in social welfare payments. A Basic Income differs from other forms of income support in that:

- It is paid to individuals rather than households;
- It is paid irrespective of any income from other sources;
- It is paid without conditions; it does not require the performance of any work or the willingness to accept a job if offered one; and
- It is tax free.

There is real danger that the plight of large numbers of people excluded from the benefits of the modern economy will be ignored. Images of rising tides lifting all boats are often offered as government's policy makers and commentators assure society that prosperity for all is just around the corner. Likewise, the claim is often made that a job is the best poverty fighter and consequently priority must be given to securing a paid job for everyone. These images and claims are no substitute for concrete policies to ensure that all members of society are included. Twenty-first

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<sup>18</sup> These networks are the European Citizens' Initiative for Unconditional Basic Income and Basic Income Ireland.

century society needs a radical approach to ensure the inclusion of all people in the benefits of present economic growth and development. Basic Income is such an approach.

As we are proposing it, a Basic Income system would replace most social welfare payments and income tax credits. It could be set at a level that would guarantee an income above the poverty line for everyone. It would not be means-tested. There would be no 'signing on' and no restrictions or conditions. In practice, a Basic Income recognises the right of every person to a share of the resources of society.

The Basic Income system ensures that looking for a paid job and earning an income, or increasing one's income while in employment, is always worth pursuing, because for every euro earned the person will retain a large part, while they retain their Basic Income payment. It thus removes poverty traps and unemployment traps in the present system. Furthermore, women and men would receive equal payments in a Basic Income system. Consequently, the Basic Income system promotes gender equality because it treats every person equally.

It is a system that is altogether more secure, rewarding, simple and transparent than the present tax and welfare systems. It is far more employment-friendly than the present system. It also respects other forms of work besides paid employment. This is crucial in a world where these benefits need to be recognised and respected. It is also very important in a world where paid employment cannot be permanently guaranteed for everyone seeking it. There is growing pressure and need in Irish society to ensure recognition and monetary reward for unpaid work. Basic income is a transparent, efficient and affordable mechanism for ensuring such recognition and reward.

Basic income also lifts people out of poverty and the dependency mode of survival. In doing this, it restores self-esteem and broadens horizons. Poor people, however, are not the only ones who should welcome a Basic Income system. Employers, for example, should welcome it because its introduction would mean they would not be in competition with the social welfare system. Since employees would not lose their Basic Income when taking a job, there would always be an incentive to take up employment. Healy and Reynolds (2016: 22-26) address, and refute, a number of other objections raised against the Basic Income proposal.

### **Costing a Basic Income**

During 2016 Murphy and Ward presented an estimate for the cost of a Basic Income for Ireland. Using administrative data from the Census, social protection system and taxation system, the paper estimated a cost where payments were structured as follows: children = €31.05 per week; adults of working age = €150.00 per week; older people aged 66-79 = €230.30 per week; and older people aged 80+ = €240.30 per week). The paper estimated a total cost of €31.3 billion per annum for a Basic Income and outlined a requirement to collect a total of €41.3 billion in revenue (tax and social insurance) to fund a Basic Income plus the retention of other

existing targeted welfare supports. It was noted that the necessary revenue could be raised via a flat 40 per cent personal income tax<sup>19</sup> and a increase in employers PRSI contributions, from 10.75 per cent to 13.5 per cent. Under such a system, no individual would actually have an effective tax rate of 40 per cent, as they would always receive their full Basic Income and it would always be tax-free. For example, a single earner on €60,000 would face a net tax rate (after receiving their Basic Income payment) of 27 per cent (Murphy and Ward, 2016: 132).

Overall, the paper offers an affordable and sustainable structure for implementing a Basic Income system in Ireland.

### **Arguing for a Basic Income**

For many decades, the European social model has been offering its citizens a future that it has obviously failed to deliver. Despite strong rhetoric to the contrary, economic issues, targets and outcomes are constantly prioritised over social issues. As a result, poverty, unemployment and social exclusion have been growing. It is time to recognise that current policy approaches are not working and that an alternative is required.

The introduction of a Basic Income system would be a radical step towards a desirable future where nobody would be excluded. It would also provide a practical solution to several of the major challenges faced by our societies today if they wish to ensure that every man, woman and child has sufficient income to live life with dignity, has access to meaningful work, and can genuinely participate in shaping the world around them and the decisions that impact on them.

The following are ten reasons to introduce a Basic Income:

- It is work and employment friendly.
- It eliminates poverty traps and unemployment traps.
- It promotes equity and ensures that everyone receives at least the poverty threshold level of income.
- It spreads the burden of taxation more equitably.
- It treats men and women equally.
- It is simple and transparent.
- It is efficient in labour-market terms.
- It rewards types of work in the social economy that the market economy often ignores, e.g. home duties, caring, etc.

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<sup>19</sup> This was for illustrative purposes. The authors believe the money could, and should, be raised in a more progressive manner.

- It facilitates further education and training in the labour force.
- It faces up to the changes in the global economy.

### 3.3 Key Policy Priorities

*Social Justice Ireland* believes that the following policy positions should be adopted in responding to the poverty, inequality and income distribution challenges highlighted throughout this chapter.

- If poverty rates are to fall in the years ahead, *Social Justice Ireland* believes that the following are required:
- increase in social welfare payments.
- equity of social welfare rates.
- adequate payments for children.
- refundable tax credits.
- decent rates of pay for low paid workers.
- a universal state pension.
- a cost of disability payment.

*Social Justice Ireland* believes that in the period ahead Government and policy makers generally should:

- Acknowledge that Ireland has an on-going poverty problem.
- Adopt targets aimed at reducing poverty among particular vulnerable groups such as children, lone parents, jobless households, and those in social rented housing.
- Examine and support viable alternative policy options aimed at giving priority to protecting vulnerable sectors of society.
- Carry out in-depth social impact assessments prior to implementing proposed policy initiatives that impact on the income and public services that many low income households depend on. This should include the poverty-proofing of all public policy initiatives.
- Recognise the problem of the 'working poor'. Make tax credits refundable to help address the situation of households in poverty which are headed by a person with a job.
- Support the widespread adoption of the Living Wage so that low paid workers receive an adequate income and can afford a minimum, but decent, standard of living.

- Introduce a cost of disability allowance to address the poverty and social exclusion of people with a disability.
- Recognise the reality of poverty among migrants and adopt policies to assist this group. In addressing this issue also replace direct provision with a fairer system that ensures adequate allowances are paid to asylum seekers.
- Accept that persistent poverty should be used as the primary indicator of poverty measurement and assist the CSO in allocating sufficient resources to collect this data.
- Move towards introducing a comprehensive Basic Income system.

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### **Online databases**

CSO online database, web address: <http://www.cso.ie/en/databases/>

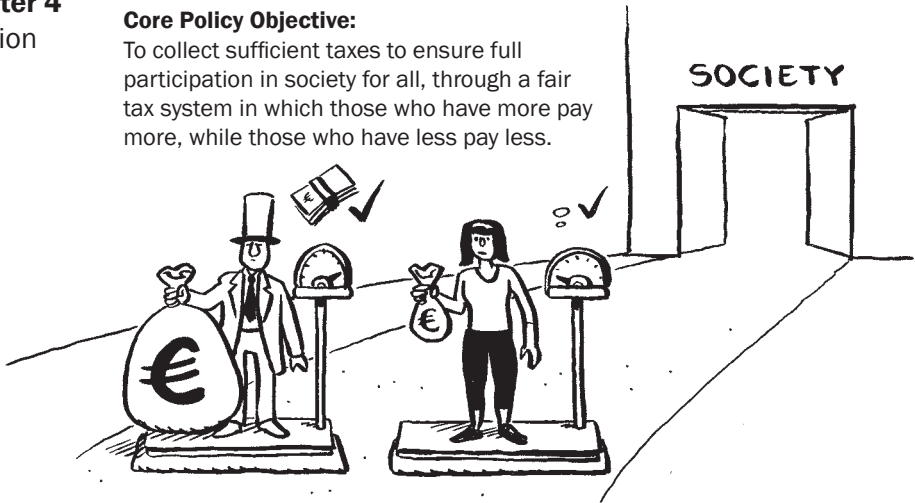
Eurostat online database, web address: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>



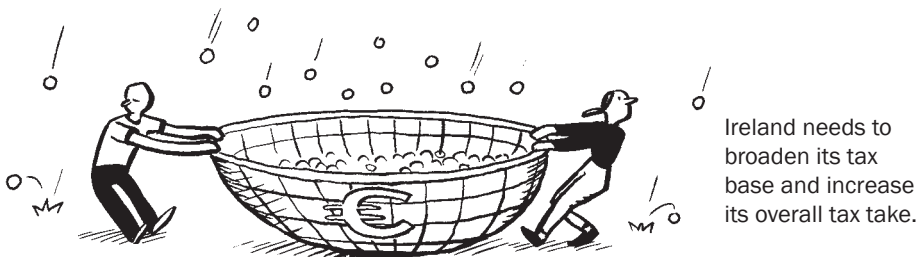
## Chapter four

**Chapter 4**  
**Taxation**

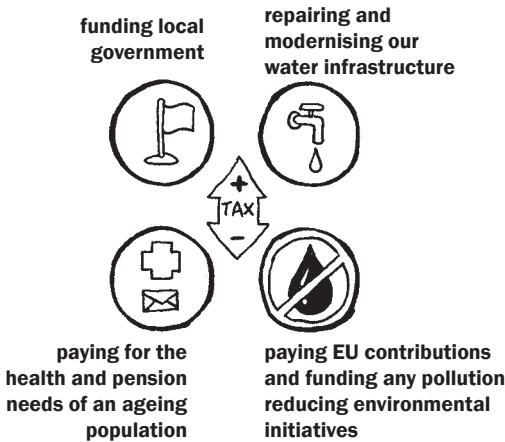
**Core Policy Objective:**  
To collect sufficient taxes to ensure full participation in society for all, through a fair tax system in which those who have more pay more, while those who have less pay less.



**Key Issues/Evidence**

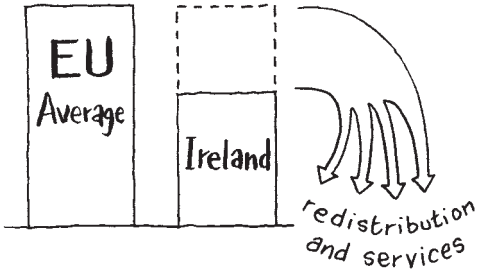


Decisions to raise or reduce overall taxation revenue should be linked to demands on resources now and into the future including:



Suggestions that higher levels of taxation will damage Ireland's competitiveness relative to other countries are not supported by international studies of competitiveness.

## Policy Solutions



Poverty proof budget tax changes to ensure they do not widen rich poor gap.

Move towards increasing the total tax-take so that sufficient revenue is collected to provide redistribution and public services at average-European levels.



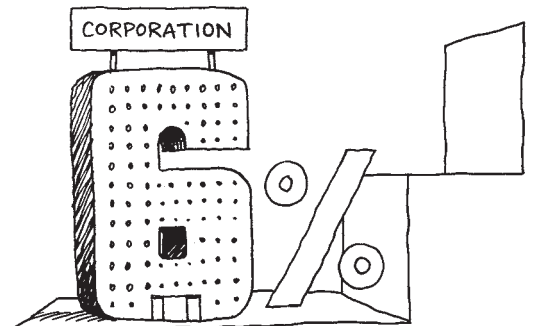
Make tax credits refundable to address the 'working poor' issue.



Adopt policies which further shift the burden of taxation from income tax to eco-taxes on the consumption of fuel and fertilisers, waste taxes and a site value tax.



Continue to reform the area of tax expenditures and monitor on an on-going basis the cost and benefits of all current and new tax expenditures.



Ensure that corporations based in Ireland pay a minimum effective corporate tax rate of 6 per cent.

## 4.

# TAXATION

### Core Policy Objective: TAXATION

To collect sufficient taxes to ensure full participation in society for all, through a fair tax system in which those who have more pay more, while those who have less pay less.

The experience of the last decade has highlighted the centrality of taxation in budget deliberations and to policy development at both macro and micro level. Taxation plays a key role in shaping Irish society through funding public services, supporting economic activity and redistributing resources to enhance the fairness of society. Consequently, it is crucial that clarity exist with regard to both the objectives and instruments aimed at achieving these goals. To ensure the creation of a fairer and more equitable tax system, policy development in this area should adhere to our core policy objective outlined above. In that regard, *Social Justice Ireland* is committed to increasing the level of detailed analysis and debate addressing this area.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter addresses the issue of taxation in three parts. The first (section 4.1) examines key evidence relating to Ireland's present taxation position and outlines the anticipated future taxation needs of the country. Subsequently section 4.2 considers the key policy reforms that we believe should be pursued including approaches to reforming and broadening the tax base and proposals for building a fairer tax system. The chapter concludes (section 4.3) by summarising our key policy priorities in this area.

If the challenges and needed reforms we address in this chapter are to be effectively addressed, *Social Justice Ireland* believes that Government's key policy priorities in this area should be to:

- increase the overall tax-take;
- adopt policies to broaden the tax base; and

<sup>1</sup> We present our analysis in this chapter and in the accompanying Annex 4 available at <https://www.socialjustice.ie/publication>.

- develop a fairer taxation system.<sup>2</sup>

## 4.1 Key Evidence

### Assessing the Adequacy of Ireland's Total Tax-Take

The need for a wider tax base is a lesson painfully learnt by Ireland during the 2008-2011 economic crisis. A disastrous combination of a naïve housing policy, a failed regulatory system, and foolish fiscal policy and economic planning caused a collapse in exchequer revenues. It is only through a strategic and determined effort to reform Ireland's taxation system that these mistakes can be avoided in the future. The narrowness of the Irish tax base resulted in almost 25 per cent of tax revenues disappearing, plunging the exchequer and the country into a series of fiscal policy crises. As shown in Table 4.1, tax revenues collapsed from over €63bn in 2007 to a low of €47.4bn in 2010; it has since increased exceeding 2007 levels in 2016 and reaching just over €77bn in 2020. This recovery, while both significant and remarkable, has also been fuelled by short-term windfall revenue from some multi-national companies.

**Table 4.1** The Changing Nature of Ireland's Tax Revenue (€m)

	2007	2008	2010	2015	2020
Direct Taxes	26,087	22,964	19,569	27,863	37,567
Indirect Taxes	25,854	22,557	18,076	22,487	24,217
Capital Taxes	432	368	245	401	505
Social Contributions	10,723	11,010	9,511	12,134	14,970
<b>Total Taxation</b>	<b>63,096</b>	<b>56,899</b>	<b>47,401</b>	<b>62,884</b>	<b>77,259</b>
% GDP	32.0%	30.4%	28.3%	23.9%	20.7%
% GNP	37.4%	35.4%	34.1%	31.3%	27.3%
% GNI	37.0%	35.1%	33.8%	31.1%	27.2%
% GNI*	38.1%	36.4%	36.9%	38.7%	37.1%
% GNDI	37.6%	35.7%	34.5%	31.7%	27.6%

**Source:** CSO online database (GFA03 and N2024 N2007).

**Note:** Total taxation expressed as a percentage of published CSO national income figures at current prices. GDNI is Gross National Disposable Income and represents the total income available to the nation for either consumption or saving.

<sup>2</sup> Much greater detail on each of these and related areas is provided later in this chapter.

### *Future taxation needs*

Government decisions to raise or reduce overall taxation revenue needs to be linked to the demands on its resources. These demands depend on what Government is required to address or decides to pursue. The effects of the economic crisis a decade ago, and the way it was handled, also carry significant implications for our future taxation needs. The rapid increase in our national debt, driven by the need to borrow both to replace disappearing taxation revenues and to fund emergency 'investments' in the failing commercial banks, has increased the on-going annual costs associated with servicing the national debt. Similarly, the need for the state to rescue or support so many aspects of our economy and society during the COVID-19 pandemic has triggered large scale borrowing and future liabilities to both service and repay this debt.

Ireland's national debt increased from a level of 24 per cent of GDP in 2007 - low by international standards - to peak at 120 per cent of GDP in 2013. Documents from the Department of Finance, to accompany Budget 2022, moved to express debt levels as a percentage of GNI\* given how misleading the GDP has recently become. They indicated that that debt levels reached 106.2 per cent of GNI\* (€237 billion) in 2021 and anticipated these will fall to 99.2 per cent of GNI\* (€239 billion) in 2022. The unpredictable nature of the pandemic, the Ukrainian crisis, and the likely challenging recovery from both, suggest that the national debt may climb further in the immediate years ahead. Despite favourable lending rates and payback terms, there remains a recurring cost to service this debt – costs which have to be financed by current taxation revenues. The estimated debt servicing cost for 2022 is €3.4bn (Department of Finance, 2021a: 52, 54).

These new future taxation needs are in addition to those that already exist for funding local government, repairing and modernising our water infrastructure, paying for the health and pension needs of an ageing population, paying EU contributions and funding any pollution reducing environmental initiatives that are required by European and International agreements. Collectively, they mean that Ireland's overall level of taxation will have to rise significantly in the years to come – a reality Irish society and the political system need to begin to seriously address and one *Social Justice Ireland* stressed in our 2022 submission to the Commission on Taxation and Welfare.<sup>3</sup>

As an organisation that has highlighted the obvious implications of these long-terms trends for some time, *Social Justice Ireland* welcomes the development over the past few years where the Government has published a section of the April *Stability Programme Update* (SPU) focused on the long-term sustainability of public finances.

Research by the OECD (2008) and the ESRI (2010) have all provided some insight into future exchequer demands associated with healthcare and pensions in Ireland in the decades to come. The Department of Finance has used the European

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<sup>3</sup> The submission is available on our website.



Commission 2021 *Ageing Report* as the basis for its assumptions from 2019-2070 which are summarised in table 4.2.

**Table 4.2** Projected Age-Related Expenditure, 2019-2070

Expenditure areas	2019	2030	2040	2050	2060	2070
% GDP						
Total Pension Expenditure	4.6	5.9	6.9	7.5	7.5	7.6
<i>of which:</i>						
<i>Social Welfare pensions</i>	3.5	4.4	5.2	6.1	6.6	6.9
<i>Public sector pensions</i>	1.0	1.5	1.6	1.4	0.9	0.7
Health care	4.1	4.4	4.8	5.1	5.3	5.5
Long-term care	1.3	1.6	2.0	2.4	2.8	3.2
Education	3.3	3.3	3.1	3.2	3.2	3.2
<b>Total age-related spending</b>	<b>13.2</b>	<b>15.2</b>	<b>16.7</b>	<b>18.1</b>	<b>18.8</b>	<b>19.4</b>
% GNI*						
Total Pension Expenditure	7.4	9.6	11.2	12.1	12.2	12.3
<i>of which:</i>						
<i>Social Welfare pensions</i>	5.8	7.2	8.5	9.9	10.7	11.3
<i>Public sector pensions</i>	1.6	2.4	2.7	2.3	1.5	1.1
Health care	6.6	7.2	7.8	8.3	8.7	8.9
Long-term care	2.0	2.7	3.2	3.9	4.5	5.1
Education	5.3	5.3	5.0	5.2	5.2	5.1
<b>Total age-related spending</b>	<b>21.4</b>	<b>24.7</b>	<b>27.2</b>	<b>29.5</b>	<b>30.6</b>	<b>31.5</b>

Source: Department of Finance (2021b: 53, 54).

Over the period the report anticipates an increase in the older population (65 years +) from approximately 704,000 people in 2019 to 1.2m in 2040 and to a peak of almost 1.8m in 2070. Over the same period, the proportion of those of working age will decline as a percentage of the population and the old-age dependency ratio

will increase from almost five people of working age for every older person today to less than three for every older person from 2040 onwards (Department of Finance, 2021b: 53). While these increases imply a range of necessary policy initiatives in the decades to come, there is an inevitability that an overall higher level of taxation will have to be collected.

### ***How much should Ireland collect in taxation?***

As detailed in Chapter 2, *Social Justice Ireland* believes that, over the period ahead, policy should focus on increasing Ireland's tax-take. Previous benchmarks, set relative to the overall proportion of national income collected in taxation, have become redundant following recent revisions to Ireland's GDP and GNP levels as a result of the tax-minimising operations of a small number of large multinational firms.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, an alternative benchmark is required.

We have proposed a new tax take target set on a per-capita basis; an approach which minimises some of the distortionary effects that have emerged in recent years. Our target is calculated using CSO population data, ESRI population projections, and CSO and Department of Finance data on recent and future nominal overall taxation levels. The target is as follows:

***Ireland's overall level of taxation should reach a level equivalent to €15,000 per capita in 2017 terms. This target should increase each year in line with growth in nominal GNI\*.***

Table 4.3 compares our target to the Budget 2022 expectations of the Department of Finance. We also calculate the overall tax gap for the economy; the difference between the level of taxation that is proposed to be collected and that which would be collected if the *Social Justice Ireland* target was achieved. As part of our calculations, we have adjusted the expected Department of Finance tax take to remove an estimate of the windfall short-term corporate taxes the state is currently receiving; revenues which are likely to go elsewhere as the broader OECD and EU reforms of corporate taxation regimes advances. We have chosen a conservative figure of €4.5billion to make this adjustment.

In 2022 the overall tax gap is €11.4 billion and the average gap over the period 2020-2022 is €9.9 billion per annum.

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<sup>4</sup> For many years *Social Justice Ireland* proposed that the overall level of taxation should reach 34.9 per cent of GDP.

**Table 4.3** Ireland's Tax Gap, 2020-2022

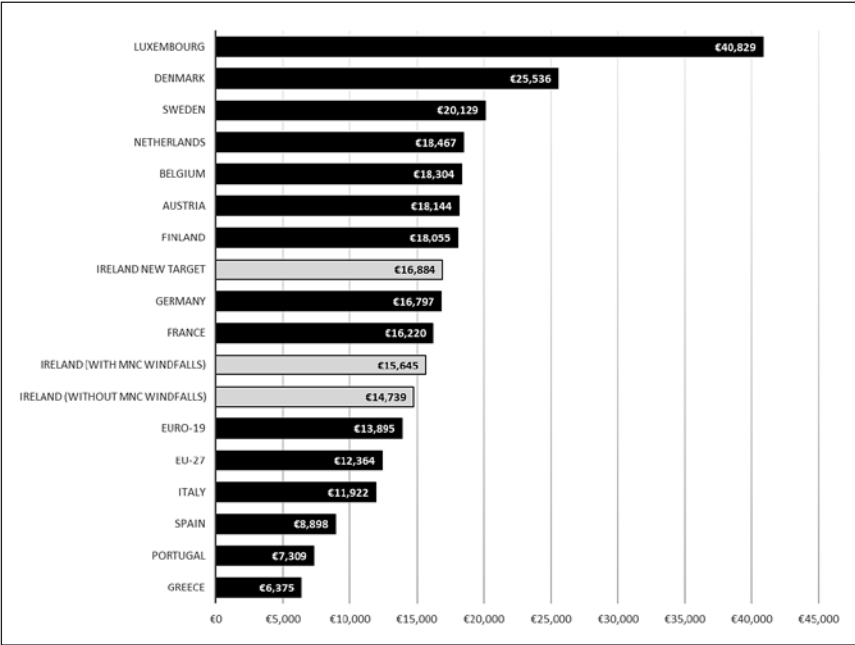
	2020	2021	2022
<b>Tax-take € per capita</b>			
Budget 2022 projection	€14,738	€16,572	€17,242
<i>Social Justice Ireland</i> target	€16,884	€18,080	€19,514
Difference	€2,146	€1,508	€2,271
<b>Overall Tax-take €m</b>			
Budget 2022 projection <sup>#</sup>	€73,357m	€82,887m	€86,928m
<i>Social Justice Ireland</i> target	€84,038m	€90,428m	€98,379m
<b>Tax Gap</b>	<b>€10,680m</b>	<b>€7,541m</b>	<b>€11,451m</b>

**Notes:** Calculated from Department of Finance (2021a: 14, 51, 53), CSO population data and ESRI population projections (Morgenroth, 2018:48). The Tax Gap is calculated as the difference between the Department of Finance projected tax take and that which would be collected if total tax receipts were equal to the *Social Justice Ireland* target.

<sup>#</sup> The tax take has been adjusted to remove €4.5b as a conservative estimate of short-term tax revenues from MNCs; targets are calculated post its removal.

Increasing the overall tax take to this level would require a number of changes to the tax base and the current structure of the Irish taxation system, reforms which we address in the next section of this chapter. Increasing the overall taxation revenue to meet this new target would represent a small overall increase in taxation levels and one that is unlikely to have any significant negative impact on the economy.

**Chart 4.1** Per-Capita Tax Take in EU-15 States, 2020



**Source:** Calculated from Eurostat online database and see notes to Table 4.3.

**Note:** UK data not available for 2020.

Chart 4.1 compares the target to the situation in other comparable high-income EU states (the EU-15) using the latest Eurostat data which is for 2020. The updated *Social Justice Ireland* tax target for 2020 is €16,884 per capita. In that year Ireland's per capita tax figure was €15,645 when the tax windfalls of multi-national corporations (MNCs) are included but about €2,100 below the target when these transitory revenue sources are excluded. The *Social Justice Ireland* tax target does not alter Ireland's relative position or alter its status as among the lowest taxed economies in Europe. However, reaching that level would provide a lot more recurring revenue for the state to invest in public services and improved living standards for all. As a policy objective, Ireland can remain a low-tax economy, but it should not be incapable of adequately supporting the economic, social and infrastructural requirements necessary to support our society and complete our convergence with the rest of Europe.

### ***Taxation and competitiveness***

Suggesting that any country's tax-take should increase often produces negative responses. People think first of their incomes and increases in income tax, rather

than more broadly of reforms to the tax base. Furthermore, proposals that taxation should increase are often rejected with suggestions that they would undermine economic growth. However, a review of the performance of a number of economies over recent years sheds a different light on this issue and shows limited or no relationship between overall taxation levels and economic growth.

One argument made against increases in Ireland's overall taxation levels is that it will undermine competitiveness. However, the suggestion that higher levels of taxation would damage our position relative to other countries is not supported by international studies of competitiveness. In the annex to this chapter, we compare taxation levels in Ireland to those in other leading competitive economies and find that almost all collect a greater proportion of national income in taxation.

## 4.2 Key Policies and Reforms

### *Reforming and broadening the tax base*

*Social Justice Ireland* believes that there is merit in developing a tax package which places less emphasis on taxing people and organisations on what they earn by their own useful work and enterprise, or on the value they add or on what they contribute to the common good. Rather, the tax that people and organisations should be required to pay should be based more on the value they subtract by their use of common resources. Whatever changes are made should also be guided by the need to build a fairer taxation system; one which adheres to our already stated core policy objective.

The following summarise the areas we consider a priority:

- Tax Expenditures / Tax Reliefs
- Minimum Effective Tax Rates for Higher Earners
- Corporation Taxes
- Site Value Tax
- Second Homes
- Empty Houses and Underdeveloped Land
- Taxing Windfall Gains
- Financial Transactions Tax
- Carbon Taxes

### *Tax Expenditures / Tax Reliefs*

A significant outcome from the 2008/09 Commission on Taxation is contained in part eight of its Report which details all the tax breaks (or “tax expenditures” as they are referred to officially). Subsequently, two members of the Commission produced

a detailed report for the Trinity College Policy Institute which offered further insight into this issue (Collins and Walsh, 2010). Since then, the annual reporting of the costs of tax expenditures has improved considerably with much more detail than in the past being published annually by the Revenue Commissioners and an annual reports included as part of the Budget.

An examination of the comprehensive tax expenditure data published by the Revenue Commissioners for the tax year 2018 is informative. Within the list there are approximately 85 discretionary tax breaks involving revenue forgone of €15.8 billion per annum; these are tax relieving measures that could be phased out, restructured, or delivered more appropriately as direct expenditure.

Some progress has been made in addressing and reforming these tax breaks since 2009, and we welcome this progress. However, despite this, recent Budgets and Finance Bills have introduced new tax breaks targeted at high earning multinational executives and research and development schemes, and extended tax breaks for film production and the refurbishment of older buildings in urban areas. For the most part, there has been no, or limited, accompanying documentation evaluating the cost, distributive impacts or appropriateness of these proposals.

The Commission on Taxation (2009: 230), Collins and Walsh (2010:20-21) and most recently a report for the Oireachtas Budgetary Oversight Committee (2019) have highlighted and detailed the need for new methods for evaluation/introducing tax reliefs. We strongly welcomed these proposals, which were similar to those made by the directors of *Social Justice Ireland* to the Commission in written and oral submissions. We included similar proposals in our submission to the current Commission on Taxation and Welfare. The proposals focused on prior evaluation of the costs and benefits of any proposed expenditure, the need to collect detailed information on each expenditure, the introduction of time limits for expenditures, the creation of an annual tax expenditures report as part of the Budget process and the regular scrutiny of this area by an Oireachtas committee. Recently there has been some progress in this direction with a report for the Department of Finance, accompanying Budget 2015, proposing a new process for considering and evaluating tax breaks. Documentation accompanying Budgets 2016-2022 also included an annual tax expenditure report. We welcome this development and believe it is important to further develop this work, to deepen the proposed analysis and to further improve the ability of the Oireachtas to regularly review all of the tax expenditures in the Irish taxation system.

*Social Justice Ireland* believes that reforming the tax break system would make the tax system fairer. It would also provide substantial additional resources which would contribute to raising the overall tax-take towards the modest and realistic target we outlined earlier.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See section later in this chapter on the standard rating of tax expenditures.

### ***Minimum Effective Tax Rates for Higher Earners***

The suggestion that it is the better-off who principally gain from the provision of tax exemption schemes is reflected in a series of reports published by the Revenue Commissioners entitled *Analysis of High Income Individuals' Restriction*. These reports provided details of the Revenue's assessment of top earners in Ireland and the rates of effective taxation they incur.<sup>6</sup> The reports led to the introduction of a minimum 20 per cent effective tax rate as part of the 2006 and 2007 Finance Acts for all those with incomes in excess of €500,000. Subsequently, Budgets have revised up the minimum effective rate and revised down the income threshold from where it applies – reforms we have welcomed as necessary and long-overdue. Most recently, the 2010 Finance Bill introduced a requirement that all earners above €400,000 pay a minimum effective rate of tax of 30 per cent. It also reduced from €250,000 to €125,000 the income threshold where restrictions on the use of tax expenditures to decrease income tax liabilities commence.

The latest Revenue Commissioners analysis of the operation of these new rules is for the tax year 2018 (Revenue Commissioners, 2020). Table 4.4 gives the findings of that analysis for the 97 individuals with income in excess of €400,000 who were subject to the restriction. The report also includes information on the distribution of effective income tax rates among the 261 earners subject to the restriction and with incomes between €125,000 and €400,000.

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<sup>6</sup> The effective taxation rate is calculated as the percentage of the individual's total pre-tax income that is liable to income tax and that is paid in taxation.

**Table 4.4** The Distribution of Effective Income Tax Rates Among Those Earning in Excess of €125,000 in 2018 (% of total)

Effective Tax Rate	Individuals with incomes of €400,000+	Individuals with incomes of €125,000 - €400,000
< 15%		15
15% < 20%		23
20% < 25%		42
25% < 30%	<10*	60
30% < 35%	0	58
35% < 40%	43	51
40% < 45%	44	12**
45% < 50%	<10	
> 50%	0	
<b>Total Cases</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>261</b>

**Source:** Revenue Commissioners (2020: 8, 10).

**Note:** Effective rates are for income taxation and USC only. They do not include PRSI. \*these earners are classified as having a rate of 'less than or equal to 30 per cent'. \*\* these 12 earners are classified as having a rate of 'above 40 per cent'.

*Social Justice Ireland* welcomed the introduction of this scheme which marked a major improvement in the fairness of the tax system. The published data indicate that it seems to be working well; however, there are still surprisingly low effective income taxation rates being reported.

The report states that the average effective tax rate faced by earners above €400,000 in 2018 was 40.3 per cent, equivalent to the amount of income tax and USC paid by a single PAYE worker with a gross income of €172,000 in that year. Similarly, the average income tax and USC effective tax rate faced by people earning between €125,000 - €400,000 in 2018 (29 per cent) was equivalent to the amount of income tax paid by a single PAYE worker with a gross income of approximately €70,000 in that year. The contrast in these income levels for the same overall rate of income taxation brings into question the fairness of the taxation system as a whole. Such an outcome may be better than in the past, but it still has some way to go to reflect a situation where a fair contribution is being paid.

*Social Justice Ireland* believes that it is important that Government continues to raise the minimum effective tax rate so that it is in line with that faced by PAYE earners on equivalent high-income levels. Following Budget 2022 a single individual on



an income of €125,000 gross will pay an income tax and USC effective tax rate of 36.9 per cent (down from 39.3 per cent in 2014); a figure which suggests that the minimum threshold for high earners has potential to adjust upwards over the next few years. We also believe that Government should reform the High-Income Individuals' Restriction so that all tax expenditures are included within it. The restriction currently does not apply to all the tax breaks individuals avail of, including pension contributions. This should change in Budget 2023.

### ***Corporation Taxes***

Over the past few years there has been a growing international focus on the way multi-national corporations (MNCs) manage their tax affairs. The OECD's Base Erosion and Profits Shifting (BEPS) examination has established the manner and methods by which MNCs exploit international tax structures to minimise the tax they pay.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, the European Commission has undertaken a series of investigations into the tax management and tax minimisation practices of a number of large MNCs operating within the EU, including Ireland. The European Parliament's Special Committee on Tax Rulings has also completed a review of the EU tax system and highlighted its problems and failures (TAXE, 2015).<sup>8</sup>

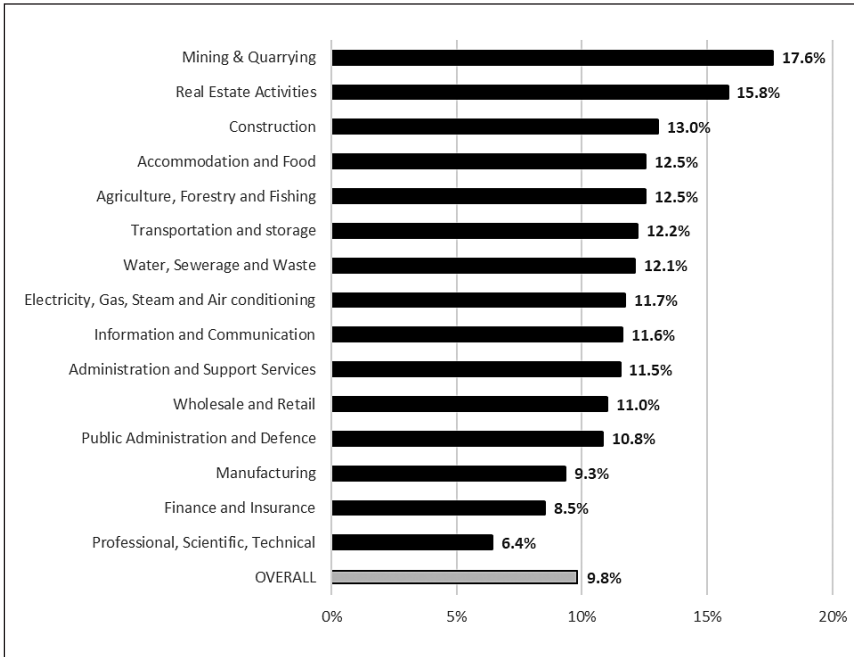
Given the timeliness and comprehensiveness of this work, it is important that it leads to the emergence of a transparent international corporate finance and corporate taxation system where multinational firms pay a reasonable and credible effective corporate tax rate. We welcome progress towards this over the past year, and the acceptance by the Irish Government that the system needs to change albeit that this will result in lower corporate tax revenues to the exchequer in the years to come.

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<sup>7</sup> See [www.oecd.org/ctp/beps.htm](http://www.oecd.org/ctp/beps.htm)

<sup>8</sup> See [www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/taxe/home.html](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/taxe/home.html)

**Chart 4.2** Effective Corporation Tax Rates by Sector in Ireland, 2016



**Source:** C&AG (2017: 296).

**Note:** Effective tax rates can exceed the statutory rate of 12.5% where there is income beyond trading profits such as passive income which is charged at 25%.

A chapter within the 2016 Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG, September 2017) provided a new and important insight into corporation tax receipts in Ireland. The report is the first comprehensive examination of this area for some time, even though corporation taxes comprise around 15 per cent of annual tax revenue. Looking at tax receipts for 2016 it found that there were 44,000 corporate taxpayers but that receipts were dominated by “a small number of taxpayers, mainly multi-national enterprises (MNEs)” (2017:289). The effective rate varied between sectors and the C&AG findings are summarised in chart 4.2; the overall effective corporation tax rate was found to be 9.8 per cent in 2016. The C&AG findings for the effective rate among the top 100 corporate taxpayers, who account for 70 per cent of tax revenue, are summarised in Table 4.5. Overall, the C&AG report points towards a concentration of corporation tax among a small group of multi-national firms and highlights that it is a small number of these firms who are aggressively minimising their tax liabilities.

**Table 4.5** Effective Corporate Tax Rates of the Top 100 Taxpayers, 2016

Effective Rate	Number of Companies
0% or less	8
Between 0% and 1%	5
Between 1% and 5%	1
Between 5% and 10%	7
Between 10% and 12%	14
More than 12%	65
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: C&AG (2017: 299).

*Social Justice Ireland* has long advocated for the adoption of an EU-wide agreement on a minimum effective rate of corporation tax. We welcome international developments over the past year to achieve a minimum rate of 15 per cent for large firms, but this is still low and open to being undermined by use of tax breaks and tax write-offs, such that some large firms will continue to contribute small amounts of corporate taxation. In the medium-term we believe that a minimum rate should be agreed within the EU and set below the 2021 EU-27 average headline rate of 22 per cent but above the existing low Irish level.<sup>9</sup> A headline rate of 17.5 per cent and a minimum effective rate of 10 per cent seem appropriate. This reform would simultaneously maintain Ireland's low corporate tax position and provide additional revenues to the exchequer. Based on the C&AG report the impact of such a reform would be confined to a small number of firms yet it is likely to sustainably raise overall corporate tax revenues. Rather than introducing this change overnight, agreement may need to be reached at EU level to phase it in over three to five years. Reflecting this, we proposed prior to Budget 2022 that the effective rate be adjusted to a minimum of 6 per cent – an opportunity regrettably missed.

*Social Justice Ireland* believes that the issue of corporate tax contributions is principally one of fairness. Profitable firms with substantial income should make a contribution to society rather than pursue various schemes and methods to avoid such contributions.

### **Site Value Tax**

Taxes on wealth are minimal in Ireland. Revenue is negligible from capital acquisitions tax (CAT) because it has a very high threshold in respect of bequests and gifts within families and the rates of tax on transfers of family farms and firms

<sup>9</sup> Data from Eurostat (2021: 45).

are very generous. Some recent Budgets have extended the Group A (parent to child) CAT threshold and the likely future revenue from this area remains limited given the taxes current structure.<sup>10</sup> The requirement, as part of the EU/IMF/ECB bailout agreement, to introduce a recurring property tax led Government in Budget 2012 to introduce an unfairly structured flat €100 per annum household charge and a value-based Local Property Tax in Budget 2013. While we welcome the overdue need to extend the tax base to include a recurring revenue source from property, we believe that a Site Value Tax, also known as a Land Rent Tax, would be a more appropriate and fairer approach.

In previous editions of this publication we have reviewed this proposal in greater detail.<sup>11</sup> There has also been a number of research papers published on this issue over the past decade.<sup>12</sup> Overall, they point towards a recurring site value tax that is fairer and more efficient than other alternatives. *Social Justice Ireland* believes that the introduction of a site value tax would be a better alternative than the current value based local property tax. A site value tax would lead to more efficient land use within the structure of social, environmental and economic goals embodied in planning and other legislation.

### ***Second Homes, Empty Houses and Underdeveloped Land***

A feature of the housing boom of the early 2000s was the rapid increase in ownership of holiday homes and second homes. For the most part these homes remain empty for at least nine months of the year. It is a paradox that many were built at the same time as the rapid increases in housing waiting lists (see chapter 6).

Results from Census 2016 identified that the number of vacant houses on Census night was 259,562 (April 2016) implying that 12.8 per cent of the national housing stock was vacant. 61,204 of these units were classified as holiday homes meaning that almost 200,000 were empty homes that could act as the main accommodation for an individual or family. Given that there is always some ‘natural’ turnover in the housing market, the true ‘empty’ figure is somewhat lower but still very significant.

What is often overlooked when the second home issue is being discussed is that the infrastructure to support these houses is substantially subsidised by the taxpayer. Roads, water, sewage and electricity infrastructure are just part of this subsidy which goes, by definition, to those who are already better off as they can afford these second homes in the first place. We believe that people purchasing second houses should have to pay these full infrastructural costs, there is something perverse in the fact that the taxpayer subsidises the owners of these unoccupied houses while many people do not have basic adequate accommodation.

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<sup>10</sup> Budget 2017 previously extended the Group B and C thresholds further reducing the revenue yield of this tax source.

<sup>11</sup> See for example the 2013 edition of the Socio-Economic Review pages 132-134.

<sup>12</sup> These include O’Siochru (2004:23-57), Dunne (2004:93-122), Chambers of Commerce of Ireland (2004), Collins and Larragy (2011), and O’Siochru (2012).

The introduction of the Non-Principal Private Residence (NPPR) charge in 2009 was a welcome step forward. However, notwithstanding subsequent increases, the charge was very low relative to the previous and on-going benefits that are derived from these properties. It stood at €200 in 2013 and was abolished under the 2014 Local Government Reform Act. While second homes are liable for the local property tax, as are all homes, *Social Justice Ireland* believes that second homes should be required to make a further annual contribution in respect of the additional benefits these investment properties receive. An annual charge of €500 would seem reasonable and would provide additional revenue to local government of approximately €170m per annum.

In the context of a shortage of housing stock (see chapter 6), building new units is not the entire solution. There remains a large number of empty units across the country, something reflected in the aforementioned 2016 Census data. *Social Justice Ireland* believes that policy should be designed to reduce the number of these units and penalise those who own units and leave them vacant for more than a six-month period. We propose that Government should introduce a levy on empty houses of €200 per month with the revenue from this charge collected and retained by local authorities.

Local authorities should also be charged with collecting an enhanced site value tax on underdeveloped land, such as abandoned urban centre sites and land-banks of zoned land on the edges of urban areas. This tax should be levied at a rate of €2,000 per hectare (or part thereof) per annum. Income from both measures should reduce the central fund allocation to local authorities.

### ***Taxing Windfall Gains***

The vast profits made by property speculators on the rezoning of land by local authorities was a particularly undesirable feature of the early 2000s economic boom. For some time, *Social Justice Ireland* has called for a substantial tax to be imposed on the profits earned from such decisions. Re-zonings are made by elected representatives supposedly in the interest of society generally. It therefore seems appropriate that a sizeable proportion of the windfall gains they generate should be made available to local authorities and used to address the ongoing housing problems they face (see chapter 6). In this regard, *Social Justice Ireland* welcomed the decision to put such a tax in place in 2010 and strongly condemned its removal as part of Budget 2015. Its removal has been one of the most retrograde policy initiatives in recent years. *Social Justice Ireland* believes that this tax should be re-introduced. Taxes are not just about revenue, they are also about fairness. A windfall tax level of 80 per cent is appropriate and, as Table 4.6 illustrates, this still leaves speculators and land owners with substantial profits from these rezoning decisions.

**Table 4.6** Illustrative Examples of the Operation of an 80% Windfall Gain Tax on Rezoned Land

Agricultural Land Value	Rezoned Value	Profit	Tax @ 80%	Post-Tax Profit	Profit as % Original Value
€50,000	€400,000	€350,000	€280,000	€70,000	140%
€100,000	€800,000	€700,000	€560,000	€140,000	140%
€200,000	€1,600,000	€1,400,000	€1,120,000	€280,000	140%
€500,000	€4,000,000	€3,500,000	€2,800,000	€700,000	140%
€1,000,000	€8,000,000	€7,000,000	€5,600,000	€1,400,000	140%

**Note:** Calculations assume an eight-fold increase on the agricultural land value upon rezoning.

### ***Financial Transactions Tax***

Recurring periods of international economic chaos of the two decades have shown that the world is now increasingly linked via millions of legitimate, speculative and opportunistic financial transactions. Similarly, global currency trading increased sharply throughout recent decades. It is estimated that a very high proportion of all financial transactions traded are speculative which are completely free of taxation.

Occasional insights are provided by surveys, the most comprehensive of which is provided by the Bank for International Settlements (BIS) *Triennial Central Bank Survey of Foreign Exchange and Derivatives Market Activity*. The most recent of these was conducted in April 2019 and published in late 2019. The data covered 53 countries and the activities of almost 1,300 banks and other dealers. The overall results of the survey are presented in the annex, while those for Ireland were outlined by the Irish Central Bank (2019) who provided specific data for the activities of 14 reporting banks based in Ireland. They found that in April 2019:

- The estimated daily foreign exchange turnover for Ireland was US\$7.2bn up from \$2.2bn in 2016 (3.3 times higher).
- The estimated daily turnover in interest rate derivative markets in Ireland was US\$7.3bn up from US\$1.1bn (6.8 times higher).
- The importance of Ireland in both these sectors increased between 2016 and 2019. In global terms, Ireland ranks 36<sup>th</sup> in terms of foreign-exchange contracts and 21<sup>st</sup> in terms of interest-rate derivatives.

Transactions in these markets represent a mixture of legitimate, speculative and opportunistic financial transactions. Estimates continue to highlight that a very large proportion of these activities are speculative, implying that large and

growing amounts of these transactions make no real or worthwhile contribution to economies and societies beyond increasing risk and instability.

*Social Justice Ireland* regrets that to date Government has not committed to supporting recent European moves to introduce a Financial Transactions Tax (FTT) or Tobin Tax. The Tobin tax, first proposed by the Nobel Prize winner James Tobin, is a progressive tax, designed to target only those profiting from speculation. It is levied at a very small rate on all transactions but given the scale of these transactions globally, it has the ability to raise significant funds. In September 2011 the EU Commission proposed an FTT and its proposal has evolved since then through a series of revisions and updates. We include specific details in the annex.

In our opinion, the tax offers the dual benefit of dampening needless and often reckless financial speculation and generating significant funds. For societies an FTT is a win-win; less needless financial speculation and more state revenue. A report from the Nevin Economic Research Institute estimated the likely revenue yield from the FTT's adoption by Ireland. Taking account of the need for Government to abolish stamp duty on shares, the report estimated a net revenue yield of between €320m and €350m per annum (Collins, 2016).

We believe that the revenue generated by this tax should be used for national economic and social development and international development co-operation purposes, in particular assisting Ireland and other developed countries to fund overseas aid and reach the UN ODA target (see chapter 13).

*Social Justice Ireland* believes that the time has come for Ireland to support the introduction of a Financial Transactions Tax.

### ***Carbon Taxes***

Budget 2010 announced the long-overdue introduction of a carbon tax. This had been promised in Budget 2003 and committed to in the *National Climate Change Strategy* (2007). The tax has been structured along the lines of the proposal from the Commission on Taxation (2009: 325-372) and is linked to the price of carbon credits which was set at an initial rate of €15 per tonne of CO<sub>2</sub> and subsequently increased in Budget 2012 to €20 per tonne. Budget 2013 extended the tax to cover solid fuels on a phased basis from May 2013 with the full tax applying from May 2014. Budget 2020 further increased the tax (to €26 per tonne) and this was increased further, to €33.50 per tonne, in Budget 2021. The 2020 Finance Act included a schedule of annual carbon tax increases so that it reaches €100 per tonne in 2030; reflecting commitments in the Programme for Government and the recommendations of the 2019 all-party report on climate change.

*Social Justice Ireland* welcomed the introduction of this tax, we regretted the initial lack of accompanying measures to protect those most affected by it, in particular low-income households and rural dwellers. While this has not been fully addressed, we welcome that all revenue from carbon tax increases since 2020 have

been earmarked to fund environmental programmes, energy efficiency measures and social protection measures targeting low-income households. Looking to the planned increases over the next decade, we believe that Government should be more specific in defining how it will assist these rural and low-income households. Furthermore, we are concerned that the effectiveness of the tax is being undermined as there is less focus on the original intention of encouraging behavioural change and greater emphasis on raising revenue.

### ***Building a Fairer Taxation System***

The need for fairness in the tax system was clearly recognised in the first report of the Commission on Taxation almost four decades ago. It stated:

“...in our recommendations the spirit of equity is the first and most important consideration. Departures from equity must be clearly justified by reference to the needs of economic development or to avoid imposing unreasonable compliance costs on individuals or high administrative costs on the Revenue Commissioners.” (1982:29)

The need for fairness is just as obvious today and *Social Justice Ireland* believes that this should be a central objective of the current reform of the taxation system. Below we outline a series of reforms that would greatly enhance the fairness of Ireland’s taxation system. This subsection is structured in five parts:

- Standard rating discretionary tax expenditures
- Favouring fair changes to income taxes
- Introducing Refundable Tax Credits
- Reforming individualisation
- Making the taxation system simpler

#### ***Standard rating discretionary tax expenditures***

Making all discretionary tax reliefs/expenditures only available at the standard 20 per cent rate would represent a crucial step towards achieving a fairer tax system. If there is a legitimate case for making a tax relief/expenditure available, then it should be made available in the same way to all. It is inequitable that people on higher incomes should be able to claim certain tax reliefs at their top marginal tax rates while people with less income are restricted to claim benefit for the same relief at the lower standard rate of 20 per cent. The standard rating of tax expenditures, otherwise known as reliefs, offers the potential to simultaneously make the tax system fairer and fund the necessary developments they are designed to stimulate without any significant macroeconomic implications.



### ***Favouring fair changes to income taxes***

Reducing taxes is not a priority for *Social Justice Ireland* either in the forthcoming Budget 2023 or any future plans for taxation policy reforms undertaken by the new Government. We believe that any available money should be used to improve Ireland's public services and infrastructure, reduce poverty and social exclusion and to meet our national climate targets – policy priorities detailed throughout this publication. However, discussion and policy considerations often focuses on income taxation reductions, and as a consequence, we have published a series of documents over the past few years that have examined, from the perspectives of fairness, various reform choices. The most recent document is entitled *Fairness in Changing Income Taxes* (Social Justice Ireland, 2020).<sup>13</sup> As a minimum, the analysis highlights the distributive impact taxation policy choices can have and the potential policy has to pursue both fair and unfair outcomes.

### ***Introducing refundable tax credits***

The move from tax allowances to tax credits was completed in Budget 2001. This was a very welcome change because it put in place a system that had been advocated for a long time by a range of groups. One problem persists, however. If a low income worker does not earn enough to use up his or her full tax credit then he or she will not benefit from any income tax reductions introduced by Government in its annual budget. As we have demonstrated earlier in this publication (see Chapter 3) this has been the case for a large number of low income workers following recent Budgets.

Making tax credits refundable would be a simple solution to this problem. It would mean that the part of the tax credit that an employee did not benefit from would be “refunded” to him/her by the state.

The major advantage of making tax credits refundable lies in addressing the disincentives currently associated with low-paid employment. The main beneficiaries of refundable tax credits would be low-paid employees (full-time and part-time). Chart 4.3 displays the impacts of the introduction of this policy across various gross income levels. It shows that all of the benefits from introducing this policy would go directly to those on the lowest incomes.

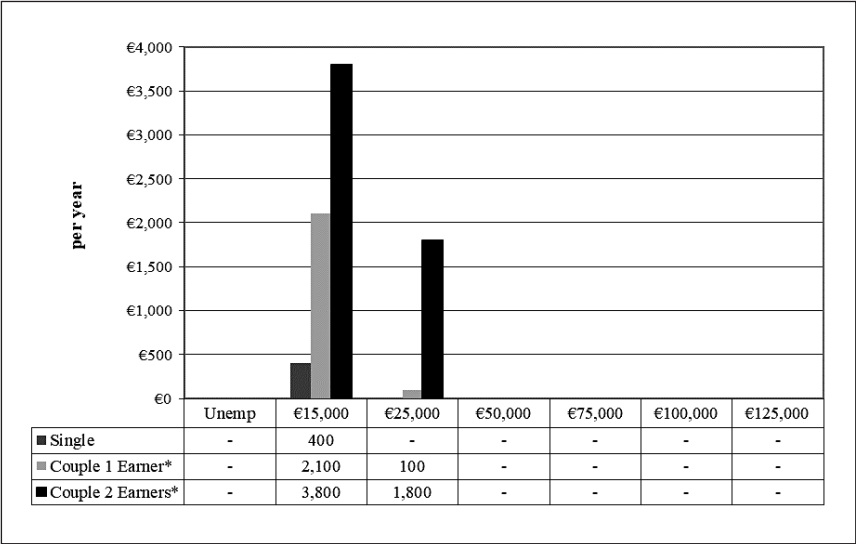
With regard to administering this reform, the central idea recognises that most people with regular incomes and jobs would not receive a cash refund of their tax credit because their incomes are too high. They would simply continue to benefit from the tax credit as a reduction in their tax bill. Therefore, as chart 4.3 shows, no change is proposed for these people and they would continue to pay tax via their employers, based on their net liability after deduction of tax credits by their employers on behalf of the Revenue Commissioners. For other people on low or irregular incomes, the refundable tax credit could be paid via a refund by the

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<sup>13</sup> The document is available on our website.

Revenue Commissioners at the end of the tax year. Following the introduction of refundable tax credits, all subsequent increases in the level of the tax credit would be of equal value to all employees. To illustrate the benefits of this approach, charts 4.4 and 4.5 compare the effects of a €100 increase in the personal tax credit before and after the introduction of refundable tax credits. Chart 4.4 shows the effect as the system is currently structured – an increase of €100 in credits, but these are not refundable. It shows that the gains are allocated equally to all categories of earners above €50,000. However, there is no benefit for those workers whose earnings are not in the income tax net.

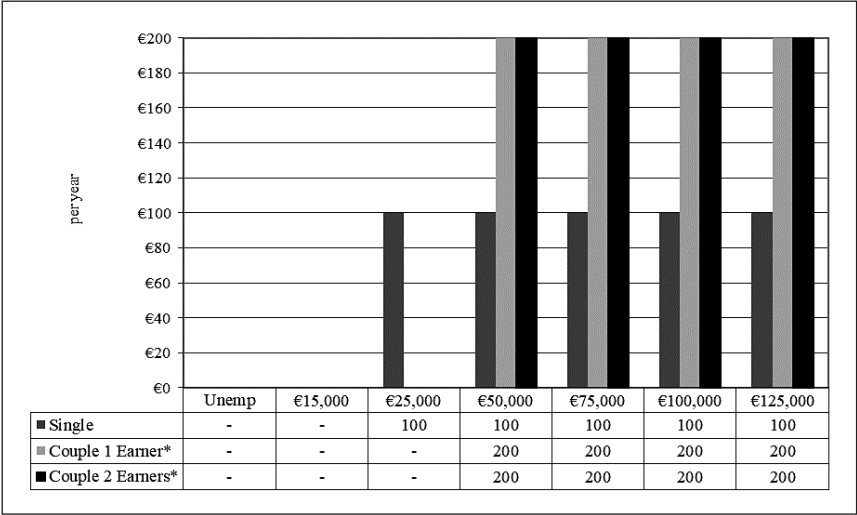
**Chart 4.3**      How Much Better Off Would People Be if Tax Credits Were Made Refundable?



Notes:      \* Except where unemployed as there is no earner. Refund of personal and employee credit.

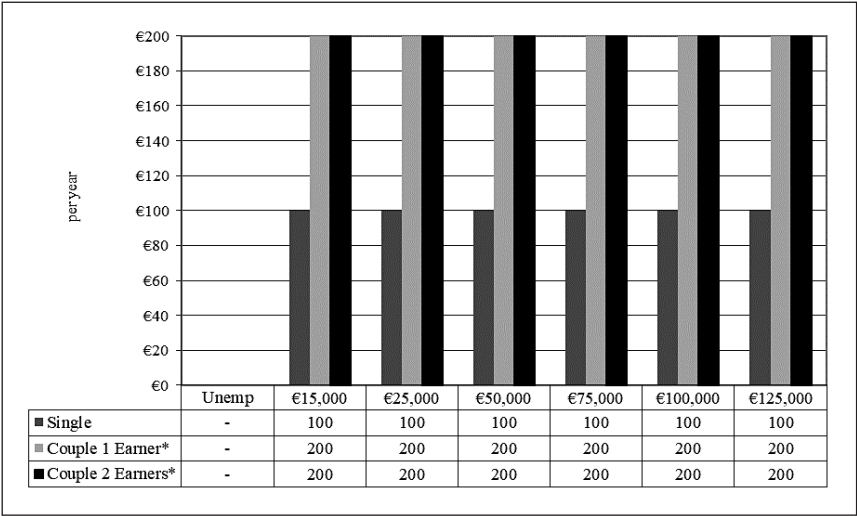
Chart 4.5 shows how the benefits of a €100 a year increase in personal tax credits would be distributed under a system of refundable tax credits. This simulation demonstrates the equity attached to using the tax-credit instrument to distribute budgetary taxation changes. The benefit to all categories of income earners (single/couple, one-earner/couple, dual-earners) is the same. Consequently, in relative terms, those earners at the bottom of the distribution do best.

**Chart 4.4**      How Much Better Off Would People Be if Tax Credits Were Increased by €100 Per Person?



Notes:    \* Except where unemployed as there is no earner. Refund of personal and employee credit.

**Chart 4.5**      How Much Better Off Would People Be if Tax Credits Were Increased by €100 Per Person and This was Refundable?



Notes:    \* Except where unemployed as there is no earner. Refund of personal and employee credit.

The merits of adopting this approach are: that every beneficiary of tax credits would receive the full value of the tax credit; that the system would improve the net income of the workers whose incomes are lowest, at modest cost; and that there would be no additional administrative burden placed on employers.

During 2010 *Social Justice Ireland* published a detailed study on the subject of refundable tax credits. The cost of making this change would be €140m. We outline the details of this proposal in the annex. Once adopted, a system of refundable tax credits as proposed in our study would result in all future changes in tax credits being experienced equally by all employees in Irish society. Such a reform would mark a significant step in the direction of building a fairer taxation system and represent a fairer way for Irish society to allocate its resources.

### ***Reforming individualisation***

*Social Justice Ireland* supports the individualisation of the tax system. However, the process of individualisation followed to date has been deeply flawed and unfair. The cost to the exchequer of this transition has been in excess of €0.75bn, and almost all of this money went to the highest income 30 per cent of the population. A significantly fairer process would have been to introduce a basic income system that would have treated all people fairly and ensured that a windfall of this nature did not accrue to the best off in this society (see Chapter 3).

Given the current form of individualisation, couples with one partner losing his/her job end up even worse off than they would have been had the current form of individualisation not been introduced. Before individualisation was introduced, the standard-rate income-tax band was €35,553 for all couples. Above that, they would start paying the higher rate of tax. Now, the standard-rate income-tax band for single-income couples is €45,800 while the band for dual-income couples covers a maximum of a further €27,800 (up to €73,600). If one spouse (of a couple previously earning two salaries) leaves a job voluntarily or through redundancy, the couple loses the value of the second tax band.

### ***Making the taxation system simpler***

Ireland's tax system is not simple. Bristow (2004) argued that "some features of it, notably VAT, are among the most complex in the world". The reasons given to justify this complexity vary but they are focused principally around the need to reward particular kinds of behaviour which are seen as desirable by legislators. This, in effect, is discrimination either in favour of one kind of activity or against another. There are many arguments against the present complexity and in favour of a simpler system.

Discriminatory tax concessions in favour of particular positions are often very inequitable, contributing far less to equity than might appear to be the case. In many circumstances they also fail to produce the economic or social outcomes which were being sought and sometimes they even generate very undesirable

effects. At other times they may be a complete waste of money, since the outcomes they seek would have occurred without the introduction of a tax incentive. Having a complex system has other down-sides. It can, for example, have high compliance costs both for taxpayers and for the Revenue Commissioners.

For the most part, society at large gains little or nothing from the discrimination contained in the tax system. Mortgage interest relief, for example, and the absence of any residential or land-rent tax contributed to the rise in house prices up to 2007. Complexity makes taxes easier to evade, invites consultants to devise avoidance schemes and greatly increases the cost of collection. It is also inequitable because those who can afford professional advice are in a far better position to take advantage of that complexity than those who cannot. A simpler taxation system would better serve Irish society and all individuals within it, irrespective of means.

### 4.3 Key Policy Priorities

*Social Justice Ireland* believes that if the challenges and needed reforms we have highlighted throughout this chapter are to be effectively addressed, Government's key policy priorities in this area should be to:

- increase the overall tax-take;
- adopt policies to broaden the tax base; and
- develop a fairer taxation system.

Policy priorities under each of these headings are listed below.

#### *Increase the overall tax-take*

- Move towards increasing the total tax-take so that sufficient revenue is collected to provide redistribution and public services at average-European levels.

#### *Broaden the tax base*

- Continue to reform the area of tax expenditures and further enhance procedures within the Department of Finance and the Revenue Commissioners to monitor on an on-going basis the cost and benefits of all current and new tax expenditures;
- Continue to increase the minimum effective tax rates on very high earners (those with incomes in excess of €125,000) so that these rates are consistent with the levels faced by PAYE workers;
- Move to negotiate an EU wide agreement on minimum corporate taxation rates (a rate of 17.5 per cent would seem fair in this situation);

- Adopt policies to ensure that corporations based in Ireland pay a minimum effective corporate tax rate of 10 per cent. As an interim measure introduce a 6 per cent rate in the next Budget;
- Impose charges so that those who construct or purchase second homes pay the full infrastructural costs of these dwellings;
- Restore the 80 per cent windfall tax on the profits generated from all land re-zonings;
- Join with other EU member states to adopt a financial transactions tax (FTT) and discourage needless and unwelcome financial market speculation;
- Adopt policies which further shift the burden of taxation from income tax to eco-taxes on the consumption of fuel and fertilisers, waste taxes and a land rent tax. In doing this, government should minimise any negative impact on people with low incomes.

*Develop a fairer taxation system*

- Apply only the standard rate of tax to all discretionary tax expenditures;
- Make tax credits refundable;
- Accept that where reductions in income taxes are being implemented, they should favour fair options which do not skew the benefits towards higher earners;
- Ensure that individualisation in the income tax system is done in a fair and equitable manner;
- Integrate the taxation and social welfare systems;
- Begin to monitor and report tax levels (personal and corporate) in terms of effective tax rates;
- Develop policies which allow the taxation on wealth to be increased;
- Ensure that the distribution of all changes in indirect taxes discriminate positively in favour of those with lower incomes;
- Adopt policies to simplify the taxation system;
- Poverty-proof all budget tax packages to ensure that tax changes do not further widen the gap between those with low income and the better off.

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### ***Online databases***

CSO online database, web address: <http://www.cso.ie/en/databases/>

Eurostat online database, web address: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>



## Chapter five

## Chapter 5

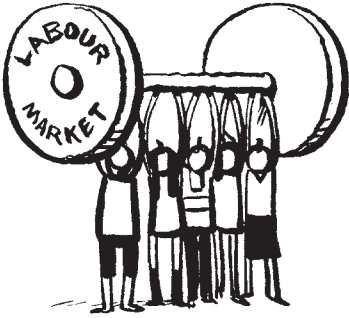
### Work, Unemployment and Job Creation

#### Core Policy Objective:

To ensure that all people have access to meaningful work.



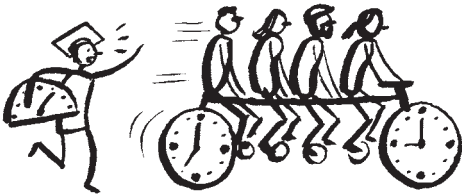
#### Key Issues/Evidence



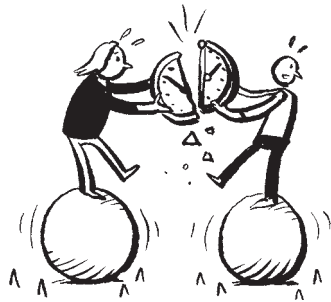
Ireland's labour market has recovered strongly from the from the period of closures and lockdowns throughout much of 2020. Although the numbers unemployed are slightly increased, all other indicators report a strong improvement.



One third of those who are unemployed are long-term unemployed. As the pandemic unemployment payment is phased out, there is potential for the numbers unemployed and on welfare supports for more than one year to increase.

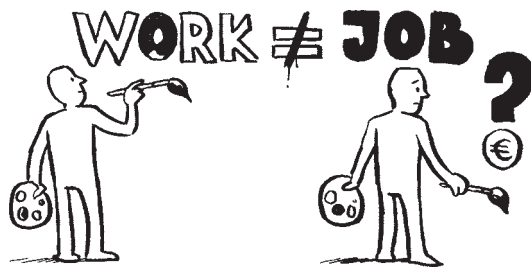


While the number of people employed is higher now than at anytime, just over one in five workers are part-time workers and there are 110,000 of these who are underemployed.



The growth in the number of individuals with less work hours than ideal and in precarious employment situations is a major labour market challenge and one which may grow in the period ahead.

## Policy Solutions



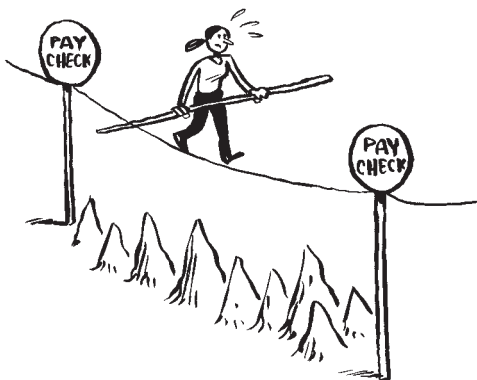
Recognise that the term “work” is not synonymous with the concept of “paid employment”. Everybody has a right to work, i.e. to contribute to his or her own development and that of the community and the wider society. This, however, should not be confined to job creation. Work and a job are not the same thing.



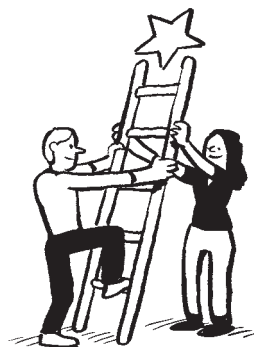
Launch a major investment programme focused on prioritising initiatives that strengthen social infrastructure, including a comprehensive school building programme and a much larger social housing programme.



Adopt policies to address the worrying issue of youth unemployment. In particular, these should include education and literacy initiatives as well as retraining schemes.



Recognise the challenges of long-term unemployment and of precarious employment and adopt targeted policies to address these.



Resource the up-skilling of those who are unemployed and at risk of becoming unemployed through integrating training and labour market programmes.

## 5.

## WORK, UNEMPLOYMENT AND JOB CREATION

### **Core Policy Objective: WORK, UNEMPLOYMENT AND JOB CREATION**

To ensure that all people have access to meaningful work

The scale and severity of the economic collapse just over one decade ago saw Ireland revert to the phenomenon of widespread unemployment. Despite the attention given to the banking and fiscal collapse, the transition from near full-employment to high unemployment was the most telling characteristic of that recession. It carried implications for individuals, families, social cohesion and the exchequer's finances which were serious. At that time, the unemployment rate peaked at 16 per cent of the labour force at the beginning of 2012. CSO data and economic forecasts for the remainder of 2022 indicate that unemployment will reach an annual rate of between 5 and 5.5 per cent of the labour force in 2022. The Covid-19 pandemic and the economic disruption from the Ukraine crisis point towards upwards risks for these expectations. However, relative to the position in late 2020 and early 2021 these outcomes represent a very welcome improvement.

This chapter addresses the topic of Work, Unemployment and Job Creation in three parts. The first (section 5.1) reviews recent trends in Ireland's labour market. Subsequently section 5.2 considers the key policy reforms that arise for various sectors of the working-age population and outlines a series of proposals for responding to current labour market challenges around employment, unemployment and participation. Despite pre-pandemic progress, *Social Justice Ireland* considers that the policy response in a number of areas has been weak. The section concludes with some thoughts on the narrowness of how we consider and measure the concept of 'work'. The chapter concludes (section 5.3) by summarising our key policy priorities in this area<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> The analysis complements information on the measurement of the labour market and long-term trends in employment and unemployment detailed in Annex 5 which is available online at: <http://www.socialjustice.ie/>

If the challenges we address in this chapter are to be effectively addressed, *Social Justice Ireland* believes that Government should<sup>2</sup>:

- Resource the up-skilling of those who are unemployed and at risk of becoming unemployed through integrating training and labour market programmes.
- Launch a major investment programme focused on prioritising initiatives that strengthen social infrastructure, including a comprehensive school building programme and a much larger social housing programme.
- Adopt policies to address the worrying issue of youth unemployment. In particular, these should include education and literacy initiatives as well as retraining schemes.
- Recognise the challenges of long-term unemployment and of precarious employment and adopt targeted policies to address these.
- Recognise that the term “work” is not synonymous with the concept of “paid employment”. Everybody has a right to work, i.e. to contribute to his or her own development and that of the community and the wider society. This, however, should not be confined to job creation. Work and a job are not the same thing.

## 5.1 Key Evidence

### Recent Trends in Employment and Unemployment

The nature and scale of the recent transformation in Ireland’s labour market is highlighted by the data in Table 5.1. It, and subsequent Tables, examine the situation a decade ago, just before the Covid-19 pandemic hit and in 2021. 2011 marked a year where Ireland was in deep economic crisis as the banking and property crash continued to unfold. Unsurprisingly, the labour market is transformed since then with an additional 407,000 people in the labour force, an extra 620,000 at work, higher participation rates and 212,000 less people in unemployment. Compared to the pre-pandemic labour market, the situation in quarter four 2021 illustrates how strongly the labour market has recovered from the period of closures and lockdowns throughout much of 2020. Although the numbers unemployed are slightly increased, all other indicators report a strong improvement.

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<sup>2</sup> Much greater detail on these and related initiatives is provided later in this chapter.

**Table 5.1** Ireland's Labour Force Data, 2011 – 2021

	2011	2019	2021	Change 11-21
Labour Force	2,226,500	2,467,800	2,633,300	+406,800
LFPR%	61.8	62.6	65.1	+3.3
Employment%	60.1	70.1	73.0	+12.9
Employment	1,886,400	2,357,300	2,506,000	+619,600
<i>Full-time</i>	1,438,400	1,866,200	1,955,000	+516,600
<i>Part-time</i>	447,900	491,100	551,000	+103,100
<i>Underemployed</i>	147,200	108,100	110,200	-37,000
Unemployed%	15.3	4.5	4.8	-10.4
Unemployed	340,100	110,500	127,400	-212,700
LT Unemployed%	9.3	1.6	1.7	-7.6
LT Unemployed	206,500	38,600	44,300	-162,200
Potential Additional LF	<i>n/a</i>	99,300	103,500	<i>n/a</i>

**Source:** CSO, LFS on-line database.

**Notes:** All data is for Quarter 4 of the reference year.

LFPR = ILO labour force participation rate and measures the percentage of the adult population who are in the labour market.

Employment% is for those aged 15-64 years.

Underemployment measures part-time workers who indicate that they wish to work additional hours which are not currently available.

*n/a* = comparable data is not available.

LT = Long Term (12 months or more). LF = Labour Force.

This transformation in the labour market has significantly altered the nature of employment in Ireland when compared to the depth of the recession in 2011. Overall, employment grew by almost one-third (620,000 jobs) and Table 5.2 traces the impact of this change across various sectors, groups and regions. Within the CSO's broadly defined employment sectors all four increased in size over the period: agricultural employment experienced the smallest increase (3,100 jobs) compared to 70,000 additional jobs in both construction and in industry. The service sector, one acutely impacted by the 2009-2013 economic crash, recorded the largest growth accounting 475,000 of the additional jobs created over the past decade. The services sector now accounts for 76 per cent of all employees. Over the period the number of employees grew by 37 per cent while the number of self-employed increased by 9 per cent. Compared to the late 2019 labour market the Table illustrates how employment has not recovered in the construction sector or in industry.

**Table 5.2** Employment in Ireland, 2011 – 2021

	2011	2019	2021	Change 11-21
Employment	1,886,400	2,357,300	2,506,000	+619,600
<b>Sector</b>				
Agriculture	103,700	106,800	106,800	+3,100
Construction	88,200	147,100	158,300	+70,100
Industry	244,900	286,300	314,100	+69,200
Services	1,445,100	1,810,900	1,919,400	+474,300
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	1,008,600	1,272,700	1,328,100	+319,500
Female	877,800	1,084,700	1,177,900	+300,100
<b>Employment Status</b>				
Employees*	1,575,500	2,014,300	2,154,500	+579,000
Self Employed	299,200	331,100	326,500	+27,300
Assisting relative	11,600	11,900	25,000	+13,400
<b>Region</b>				
Border	n/a	183,700	191,100	n/a
West	n/a	221,500	232,100	n/a
Mid-West	n/a	215,400	239,700	n/a
South-East	n/a	195,400	205,600	n/a
South-West	n/a	337,900	354,100	n/a
Dublin	n/a	724,400	768,500	n/a
Mid-East	n/a	345,100	364,200	n/a
Midland	n/a	133,900	150,800	n/a

**Source:** CSO, LFS on-line database.

**Notes:** \* Numbers recorded as employed include those on various active labour market policy schemes. Regional data only available from 2012. See also notes to Table 5.1.

The consequence of the 2009-2013 crisis period job losses was a sharp increase in unemployment and emigration which took some time to dissipate. Dealing with unemployment, Table 5.3 shows how it has changed between 2011 and 2021, a period when the numbers unemployed decreased by almost 60 per cent. As the table shows, male unemployment fell by almost 150,000 and female unemployment by 65,000; changes that illustrate the depth of the economic crisis a decade ago. Most of the 2021 unemployed are seeking to return to a full-time job with just over 25 per cent indicating that they were seeking part-time employment.

The improvement in the number and rates of long-term unemployment are also highlighted in Table 5.3 and in Chart 5.1. The number of long-term unemployed exceed 200,000 in 2011 but had fallen to less than 40,000 by late 2019. The 2021 figure, of 44,300, implies that one-third of all those currently unemployed are in that situation for more than one year. During 2022, as the pandemic unemployment payment is phased out, there is potential for the numbers unemployed and on welfare supports for more than one year to increase. While the improvements over the last decade are very welcome, the experience of the 1980s showed the dangers and long-lasting implications of an unemployment crisis characterised by high long-term unemployment rates. While this remains a policy challenge, *Social Justice Ireland* regrets that it is a policy area which receives limited attention.

Addressing this ongoing issue remains a major challenge and we outline our suggestions for targeted policy action later. However, it is clear that reskilling many of the unemployed, in particular those with low education levels, will be a key component of the response. Using data for the fourth quarter of 2021, 40 per cent of the unemployed had no more than second level education with 17 per cent not having completed more than lower secondary (equivalent to the junior certificate). Post-pandemic, as employment recovers and as unemployment declines, *Social Justice Ireland* believes that major emphasis should be placed on those who are trapped in long term unemployment – particularly those with the lowest education levels.



**Table 5.3** Unemployment in Ireland, 2011 - 2021

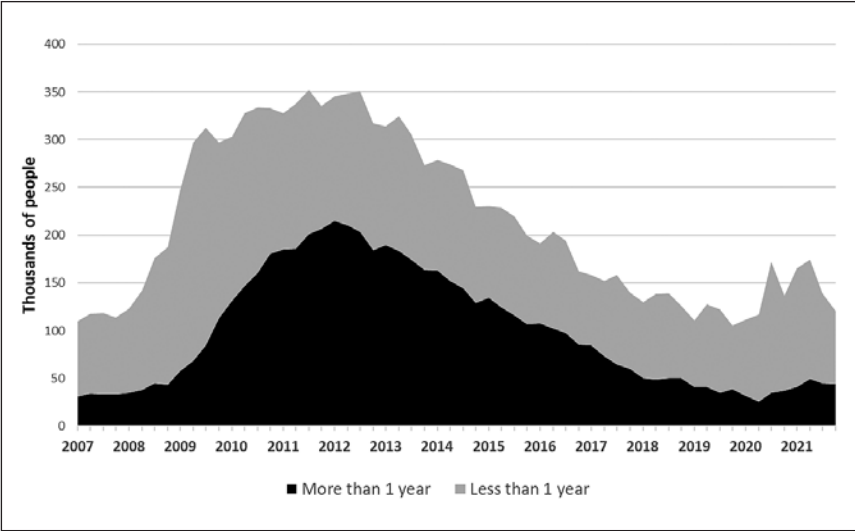
	2011	2019	2021	Change 11-21
Unemployment	340,100	110,500	127,400	-212,700
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	215,800	62,100	68,100	-147,700
Female	124,300	48,400	59,200	-65,100
<b>Employment sought</b>				
Seeking FT work	289,100	79,200	90,800	-198,300
Seeking PT work	37,800	28,400	32,700	- 5,100
<b>Age group</b>				
15-24 years	86,300	28,100	35,000	-51,300
25-44 years	174,500	49,400	51,600	-122,900
45-65 years	78,700	32,100	38,900	-39,800
<b>Region</b>				
Border	n/a	7,100	7,400	n/a
West	n/a	9,600	11,200	n/a
Mid-West	n/a	11,000	11,300	n/a
South-East	n/a	14,300	14,300	n/a
South-West	n/a	13,100	13,000	n/a
Dublin	n/a	33,800	42,700	n/a
Mid-East	n/a	15,400	20,300	n/a
Midland	n/a	6,300	7,100	n/a
<b>Duration</b>				
Unemp. less than 1 yr	129,200	66,600	76,500	-52,700
Unemp. more than 1 yr	206,500	38,600	44,300	-162,200
LT Unemp. as% Unemp	60.7%	34.9%	34.8%	

**Source:** CSO, LFS on-line database.

**Note:** See also notes to Table 5.1.

Previous experiences, in Ireland and elsewhere, have shown that many of those under 25 and many of those over 55 find it challenging to return to employment after a period of unemployment. This highlights the danger of the long-term unemployment and the potential for the emergence of a structural unemployment problem. Given this, *Social Justice Ireland* believes that a major commitment to retraining and re-skilling will be required in the years ahead.

**Chart 5.1** Long-Term Unemployment in Ireland, 2007-2021



**Source:** CSO, LFS on-line database.

**Note:** Long term unemployment is defined as those unemployed for more than one year.

## 5.2 Key Policies and Reforms

### Upskilling and Retraining the Unemployed

Live register data offer a useful insight into the skills and experience of a large proportion of those who should be the target of further upskilling and retraining initiatives. Table 5.4 presents a breakdown of the February 2022 live register number by people's last occupation, and also examines the differences between those over and under 25 years. Among this group, the figures highlight the need for targeted retraining of people who hold skills in sectors of the economy that are unlikely to return to the employment levels of the pre-pandemic period. As such, they frame several of the challenges for upskilling and retraining of many unemployed and underemployed individuals.

**Table 5.4** Persons on Live Register by Last Occupation – February 2022

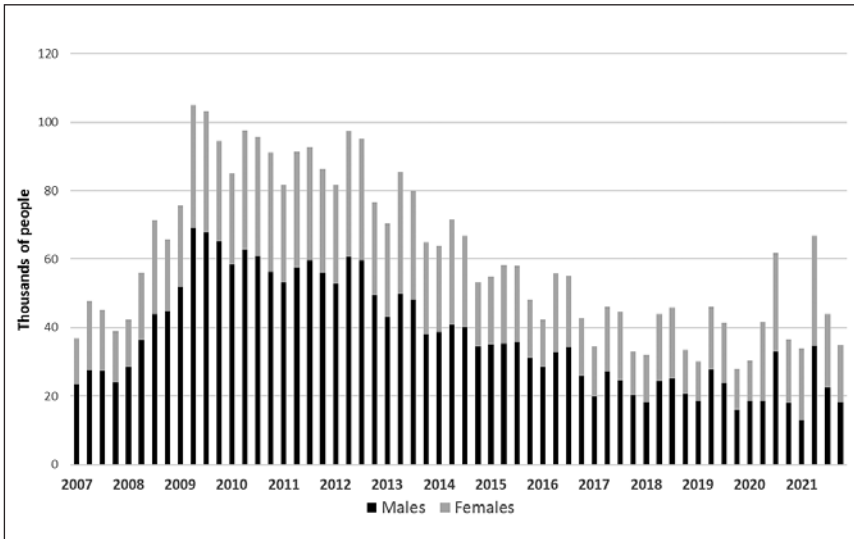
Occupational group	Overall	Under 25 yrs	Over 25 yrs
Managers and administrators	6,956	121	6,835
Professional	8,420	283	8,137
Associate prof. and technical	4,372	191	4,181
Clerical and secretarial	14,272	574	13,698
Craft and related	22,192	1,451	20,741
Personal and protective service	17,662	1,437	16,225
Sales	12,793	1,749	11,044
Plant and machine operatives	19,432	1,654	17,778
Other occupation	18,136	1,752	16,384
No occupation	39,013	7,553	31,460
<b>Total</b>	<b>163,248</b>	<b>16,765</b>	<b>146,483</b>

Source: CSO Live Register on-line database.

### Tackling Youth Unemployment

As Charts 5.2 illustrates, youth unemployment remains a major labour market policy challenge albeit that the picture is drastically better than one decade ago. The Chart highlights the very rapid increase in the numbers unemployed under 25 years-of-age as the 2008-2013 economic crisis unfolded. The numbers in this group more than doubled between 2007 and 2009, peaking at almost 105,000 in Q2 2009. Since then decreases have occurred, reaching 39,000 in 2019 before climbing during the 2020 and 2021 Covid-19 lockdowns.

**Chart 5.2** Youth Unemployment by Gender, 2007-2021



Source: CSO, LFS on-line database.

The latest data (see Table 5.3) indicate that 35,000 people under the age of 25 are unemployed – 18,000 males and 17,000 females. Experiences of unemployment, and in particular long-term unemployment, alongside an inability to access any work, training or education, tends to leave a ‘scarring effect’ on young people. It increases the challenges associated with getting them active in the labour market at any stage in the future. In the short-term it makes sense for Government to invest in the ‘youth unemployed’ and *Social Justice Ireland* considers this to be a central priority.

### Addressing Underemployment and Precarious Employment

The figures in Table 5.1 also point towards the growth of various forms of part-time work and a high number of underemployed workers over recent years. While the number of people employed is higher now than at any time, just over one in five workers are part-time workers and there are 110,000 of these who are underemployed, that is working part-time but at less hours than they are willing to work.

Judged over time, the CSO labour force data suggest the emergence of a greater number of workers in precarious employment situations. The growth in the number of individuals with less work hours than ideal, as well as those with persistent uncertainties concerning the number and times of hours required for work, is a major labour market challenge and one which may grow in the period

ahead. Aside from the impact this has on the well-being of individuals and their families, it also impacts on their financial situation and adds to the working-poor challenges we outlined in Chapter 3. There are also impacts on the state, given that the Working Family Payment (formerly known as Family Income Supplement (FIS)) and the structure of jobseeker payments tend to lead to Government subsidising these families' incomes, and indirectly subsidising some employers who create persistent precarious employment patterns for their workers.

*Social Justice Ireland* believes that now is the time to adopt substantial measures to address and eliminate these problems. Our commitment to the development and adoption of a Living Wage (see Section 3.2) reflects this. Also in that context, the establishment of the Low Pay Commission is a welcome development. It is important that this group provides credible solutions to these labour market challenges and that such proposals are implemented.

### Boosting Labour Force Participation

Increasing labour force participation, in particular among women, represents a further policy challenge for labour market policy. As Table 5.5 illustrates, the proportion of individuals who are actively participating in the labour market has increased since 2011 and 2019. However, these rates are still lower than ideal with in particular female labour market participation well below the levels it should be reaching. The gender gap, of ten percentage points, illustrates this outcome quite clearly.

Policy responses to this challenge need to be broad-based, and include initiatives addressing childcare provision and affordability, retraining, family-friendly employment strategies and enhanced employment quality. It is important that we remember these participation rates, and the challenges they imply, as we review priorities for any further recovery in employment and decreases in unemployment in the period ahead.

**Table 5.5** Labour Force Participation Rates by Gender, 2011-2021

	2011	2019	2021	Change 11-21
Both sexes	61.8	62.6	65.1	+3.3
Males	69.2	68.9	70.3	+1.1
Females	54.7	56.5	60.1	+5.4
<b>Gender Gap*</b>	<b>14.5</b>	<b>12.4</b>	<b>10.2</b>	

**Source:** CSO, LFS on-line database.

**Note:** \* the gender gap is the difference in percentage points between male and female participation levels.

## Work and People with Disabilities

Results from Census 2016 provide the most recent insight into the scale and nature of disability in Ireland. In a document published in November 2017, the CSO reported that a total of 643,131 people had a disability in Ireland; equivalent to 13.5 per cent of the population. The most common disability was a difficulty with pain, breathing or other chronic illness which was experienced by 46.1 per cent of all people with a disability. This was followed by a difficulty with basic physical activities, experienced by 40.9 per cent. The report found that both these disabilities were strongly age-related. It also showed that 1.2 per cent of the population were blind or had a sight related disability (54,810 people); 1.4 per cent of the population suffered from an intellectual disability (66,611 people); 2.2 per cent of the population were deaf or had a hearing related disability (103,676 people); 2.6 per cent of the population had a psychological or emotional condition (123,515 people); 3.3 per cent of the population had a difficulty with learning, remembering or concentrating (156,968 people); 5.5 per cent of the population had a difficulty with basic physical activities (262,818 people); and 6.2 per cent of the population had a disability connected with pain, breathing or another chronic illness or condition (296,783 people)<sup>3</sup>.

The Census 2016 data also revealed that there was 176,445 persons with a disability in the labour force, representing a participation rate of 30.2 per cent; less than half that for the population in general. These findings reflect earlier results from Census 2011 (CSO, 2008), the 2006 National Disability Survey (CSO, 2010) and a QNHS special module on disability (CSO, 2004).

A 2017 ESRI report examined the employment transitions of people with a disability and found that among those of working age most (82 per cent) had worked at some stage in their life but that 35 per cent had been without work for more than four years (Watson et al, 2017). It also found that were Government policy to facilitate the employment of people with a disability who want to work, some 35,600 additional people with a disability would join the active workforce; a figure equivalent to 1.5 per cent of the 2017 labour force (Watson et al, 2017:56).

This low rate of employment among people with a disability is of concern. Apart from restricting their participation in society it also ties them into State-dependent low-income situations. Therefore, it is not surprising that Ireland's poverty figures reveal that people who are ill or have a disability are part of a group at high risk of poverty (see Chapter 3).

*Social Justice Ireland* believes that further efforts should be made to reduce the impediments faced by people with a disability to obtain employment. In particular, consideration should be given to reforming the current situation in which many such people face losing their benefits, in particular their medical card, when they

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<sup>3</sup> Note, some individuals will experience more than one disability and feature in more than one of these categories.

take up employment. This situation ignores the additional costs faced by people with a disability in pursuing their day-to-day lives – see Annex 3 for our proposals on a cost of disability allowance. For many people with disabilities the opportunity to take up employment is denied to them and they are trapped in unemployment, poverty, or both.

### **Asylum Seekers and Work**

During February 2018 the Supreme Court formally declared the absolute ban preventing asylum seekers taking up work as unconstitutional. The declaration followed an initial decision in May 2017 with the court giving the Government time to adopt new legislation and procedures to accommodate the decision. In effect, the Government failed to do so, and the Supreme Court removed the ban.

*Social Justice Ireland* welcomed this long overdue recognition; we had called for policy reform in this area for some time. However, we remain concerned by Government's attempts to limit these rights and restrict the opportunities of Asylum Seekers. At the root of these problems are issues regarding the effectiveness of the current system of processing asylum applications. Along with others, we have consistently advocated that where Government fails to meet its own stated objective of processing asylum applications in six months, the right to work should be automatically granted to asylum seekers. Recent reforms have made welcome progress in this direction. Detaining people for an unnecessarily prolonged period in such an excluded state is completely unacceptable. Recognising and facilitating asylum seekers' right to work would assist in alleviating poverty and social exclusion among one of Ireland's most vulnerable groups<sup>4</sup>.

### **Acknowledging the Work of Carers**

The work of Ireland's carers receives minimal recognition despite the essential role their work plays in society. Results from the 2016 Census offered an insight into the scale of these commitments, which save the state large costs that it would otherwise have to bear.

Census 2016 found that 4.1 per cent of the population provided some care for sick or disabled family members or friends on an unpaid basis. This figure equates to 195,263 people. The dominant caring role played by women was highlighted by the fact that 118,151 (60.5 per cent) of these care providers were female<sup>5</sup>. When assessed by length of time, the census found that a total of 6,608,515 hours of care were provided by carers each week, representing an average of 38.3 hours of unpaid help and assistance each. Two thirds of this volume of care was provided by female carers. Using the minimum wage as a simple (if unrealistically low) benchmark to

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<sup>4</sup> We examine this issue in further detail in chapter 10.

<sup>5</sup> A CSO QNHS special module on carers (CSO, 2010) and a 2008 ESRI study entitled '*Gender Inequalities in Time Use*' found similar trends (McGinnity and Russell, 2008:36, 70).

establish the benefit which carers provide each year suggests that Ireland's carers provide care valued at more than €3.4bn per annum<sup>6</sup>.

*Social Justice Ireland* welcomed the long overdue publication of a *National Carers Strategy* in July 2012 (Department of Health, 2012). The document included a 'roadmap for implementation' involving a suite of actions and associated timelines, and identifies the Government Department responsible for their implementation. However, these actions were confined to those that could be achieved on a cost neutral basis. Various progress reports of the strategy have been published to date and point towards some progress on the actions set out. However, these are, as a group, limited given the unwillingness of Government to allocate sufficient resources to supporting those in this sector.

*Social Justice Ireland* believes that further policy reforms should be introduced to reduce the financial and emotional pressures on carers. In particular, these should focus on addressing the poverty experienced by many carers and their families alongside increasing the provision of respite care for carers and for those for whom they care. In this context, the 24 hour responsibilities of carers contrast with the improvements over recent years in employment legislation setting limits on working-hours of people in paid employment.

### **Recognising All Work**

A major question raised by the current labour-market situation concerns assumptions underpinning culture and policymaking in this area. The priority given to paid employment over other forms of work is one such assumption. Most people recognise that a person can be working very hard outside a conventionally accepted "job". Much of the work carried out in the community and in the voluntary sector comes under this heading. So too does much of the work done in the home. *Social Justice Ireland's* support for the introduction of a basic income system comes, in part, because it believes that all work should be recognised and supported (see Chapter 3).

During the recession Government funding for the Community and Voluntary sector reduced dramatically and this has not, as yet, been restored. It is essential that Government appropriately resource this sector into the future and that it remains committed to the principle of providing multi-annual statutory funding. The introduction of the Charities Regulatory Authority, the Governance Code and the Lobbying Register in recent years is intended to foster transparency and improve public trust. However, it is essential that the regulatory requirements are proportional to the size and scope of organisations, and do not create an unmanageable administrative burden which detracts from the core work and deters volunteers from getting involved.

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<sup>6</sup> Calculation based on 2016 minimum wage of €9.15 per hour.



In August 2019, the Department of Rural and Community Development published *Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: A Five-Year Strategy to Support the Community and Voluntary Sector in Ireland 2019-2024* (Department of Rural and Community Development, 2019). This Strategy sets out the vision for community and voluntary sector development over the next five years. It contains a series of 11 policy objectives across all stakeholders, from Public Participation Networks to civil society organisations to local and national Governments.

The Community Services Programme works to tackle disadvantage by providing supports to community-based organisations that enables them to deliver social, economic and environmental services, with a particular focus on areas that, by virtue of geographical isolation or social isolation or have too low a level of demand to satisfy market led providers. The groups in receipt of these services may not otherwise have any access.

*Social Justice Ireland* recommends that implementation of the five year Strategy be resourced in a way that recognises the important role of the Community and Voluntary Sector, the local role of the PPNs, and the challenges of community development, and seeks to generate real partnerships between communities and agencies.

*Social Justice Ireland* believes that government should recognise, in a more formal way, all forms of work. We believe that everyone has a right to work, to contribute to his or her own development and that of the community and wider society. We also believe that policymaking in this area should not be exclusively focused on job creation. Policy should recognise that *work* and a *job* are not always the same thing.

### 5.3 Key Policy Priorities

*Social Justice Ireland* believes that if the challenges and needed reforms we have highlighted throughout this chapter are to be effectively addressed, Government's key policy priorities in this area should be to:

- Resource the up-skilling of those who are unemployed and at risk of becoming unemployed through integrating training and labour market programmes.
- Launch a major investment programme focused on prioritising initiatives that strengthen social infrastructure, including a comprehensive school building programme and a much larger social housing programme.
- Adopt policies to address the worrying issue of youth unemployment. In particular, these should include education and literacy initiatives as well as retraining schemes.

- Recognise the challenges of long-term unemployment and of precarious employment and adopt targeted policies to address these.
- Recognise that the term “work” is not synonymous with the concept of “paid employment”. Everybody has a right to work, i.e. to contribute to his or her own development and that of the community and the wider society. This, however, should not be confined to job creation. Work and a job are not the same thing.

*Social Justice Ireland* believes that in the period ahead Government and policymakers generally should:

- Expand funded programmes supporting the community to meet the growing pressures throughout our society.
- Establish a new programme targeting those who are very long-term unemployed (i.e. 5+ years).
- Ensure that at all times policy seeks to ensure that new jobs have reasonable pay rates, and adequate resource are provided for the labour inspectorate.
- Adopt policies to address the working poor issue including a reform the taxation system to make the two main income tax credits refundable.
- Develop employment-friendly income tax policies which ensure that no unemployment traps exist. Policies should also ease the transition from unemployment to employment.
- Adopt policies to address the obstacles facing women when they return to the labour force. These should focus on care initiatives, employment flexibility and the provision of information and training.
- Reduce the impediments faced by people with a disability in achieving employment. In particular, address the current situation in which many face losing their benefits, including the medical card, when they take up employment.
- Facilitate the right to work of all asylum seekers and resource the improvement of the current system of processing asylum applications.
- Give greater recognition to the work carried out by carers in Ireland and introduce policy reforms to reduce the financial and emotional pressures on carers. In particular, these should focus on addressing the poverty experienced by many carers and their families, as well as on increasing the provision of respite opportunities to carers and to those for whom they care.
- Request the CSO to conduct an annual survey to discover the value of all unpaid work in the country (including community and voluntary work and work in the home). Publish the results of this survey as soon as they become available.

- Recognise that the term “work” is not synonymous with the concept of “paid employment”. Everybody has a right to work, i.e. to contribute to his or her own development and that of the community and the wider society. This, however, should not be confined to job creation. *Work* and a *job* are not the same thing.

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### **Online database**

CSO online database, web address: <http://www.cso.ie/en/databases/>

## Chapter six

# Chapter 6

## Housing and Accommodation

### Core Policy Objective:

To ensure that adequate and appropriate accommodation is available for all people and to develop an equitable system for allocating resources within the housing sector.



### Key Issues/Evidence



Population expansion, need more homes



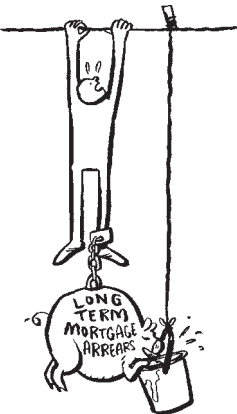
Lack of suitable housing for older people and people with disabilities



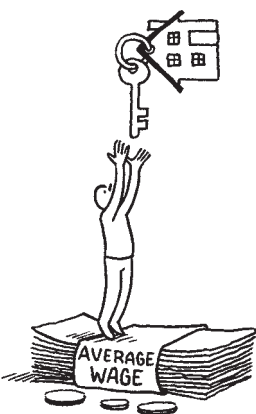
High level of vacancy and dereliction



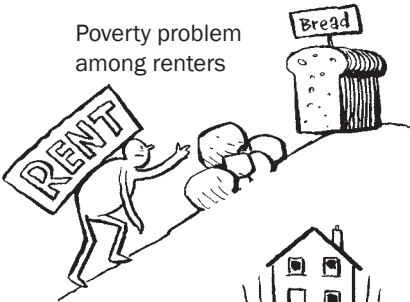
High number of homeless and not all being counted



Long Term Mortgage Arrears increasing



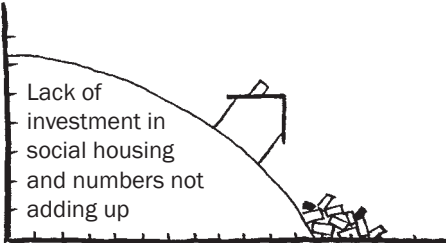
House purchase and Rent are unaffordable



Poverty problem among renters



Lack of sustainable, appropriate Traveller Accommodation



Lack of investment in social housing and numbers not adding up

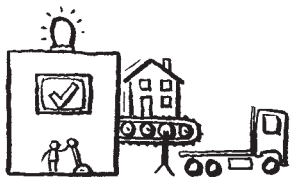
## Policy Solutions



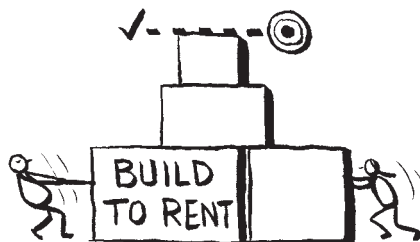
Housing First for Families.



Set a target of 20 per cent of all housing stock to be social housing.



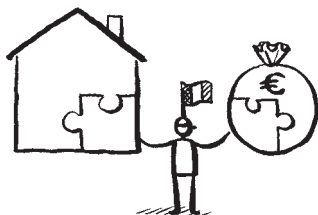
Address affordability through supply-side cost reductions



Reduce reliance on the Build to Rent sector.



Life-cycle approach to housing development and town planning.



Invest in an equity scheme for borrowers in late state mortgage arrears of 10 years+.



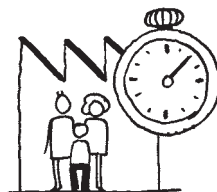
Encourage the right type of supply



Deal with vacancy and dereliction.



Sanction Local Authorities who do not utilise their budget for Traveller accommodation.



Introduce legislation to limit the length of time families can spend in Family Hubs and other emergency accommodation.

## 6.

## HOUSING AND ACCOMMODATION

**Core Policy Objective: Housing & Accommodation**

To ensure that adequate and appropriate accommodation is available for all people and to develop an equitable system for allocating resources within the housing sector.

Ireland has been in the midst of a housing and homelessness crisis for almost a decade. The scale and severity of the economic collapse in 2008 saw Ireland all but abandon capital housing projects, particularly in the areas of social and affordable housing. The replacement of social housing delivery with “social housing solutions” saw an exponential increase in the number of social housing households accommodated in the private rented sector. This, in part, led to increases in rent costs for tenant households and the development of a market in social housing investment, which drove up house prices generally. Added to that, the mortgage arrears crisis of the mid-2010s, the legacy of which is still being felt today, and we see the number of homeless people remain stubbornly high. And that’s just the official data. There is currently no mechanism for counting the real number of homeless people, the number of households who need additional social housing supports, or the number of adults living with parents who would prefer to live independently.

This chapter addresses the topic of Housing and Accommodation in three parts. The first (section 6.1) reviews recent housing trends in Ireland. Subsequently section 6.2 considers the key policy reforms that arise for each of the sectors of society with various accommodation needs and outlines a series of proposals for responding to the crisis. Despite improvements in recent months, and the introduction of a new housing strategy in September 2021, *Social Justice Ireland* is of the view that there is still a significant gap in what is planned in the areas of social housing, homelessness and affordability and what is required. The chapter concludes (section 6.3) by summarising our key policy priorities in this area.

The provision of adequate, and appropriate accommodation is a key element of *Social Justice Ireland’s* Wellbeing Framework for a new Social Contract as outlined in Chapter 2. To achieve this objective in the years ahead, *Social Justice Ireland* believes that the Government must:



- Encourage the right type of supply and reduce reliance on the Build to Rent sector.
- Address affordability issues by concentrating on supply-side cost reductions rather than demand-side income subsidies; invest in new methodologies and reconsider higher density developments.
- Set a target of 20 per cent of all housing stock to be social housing and achieve this through directly building more social housing and decentralising responsibility for social housing to Local Authorities.
- Increase the provision of ‘Housing First’ accommodation for families in emergency accommodation, with wraparound supports to include public health nurses, dieticians, speech and language therapists, physical therapists, and mental health workers.
- Introduce legislation to limit the length of time families can spend in Family Hubs and other emergency accommodation.
- Take a life-cycle approach to housing development and town planning.
- Invest in an equity scheme for borrowers in late state mortgage arrears of 10 years+.
- Introduce sanctions for local authorities who do not utilise funding available to provide safe, sustainable Traveller accommodation.
- Deal with vacancy and dereliction through the tax system and introducing Compulsory Sale Orders.

## 6.1 Key Evidence

### *Population Expansion*

Population projections indicate that Ireland’s demographics are due to shift from a relatively young population as it is now, to one with a significant proportion of older people by 2051 and is expected to grow considerably over the next 35 years (Hegarty, 2019). This expanding population needs accommodation that is suitable to their needs and supports both family formation and increasing age. In its Economic Letter – *Population Change and Housing Demand in Ireland*, the Central Bank of Ireland indicated that 27,000 houses were needed per annum between 2011 and 2019 (Confey & Staunton, 2019). Residential construction completions during this period averaged over 10,000 per annum (see Chart 6.1), implying a “significant degree of unmet housing need over this period.” (Confey & Staunton, 2019, p. 14). Housing for All, the Government’s new housing strategy, estimates demand at 33,000 homes per year, however this does not account for pent-up demand of approximately 90,500 homes due to years of underinvestment.

*Current Housing Supply*

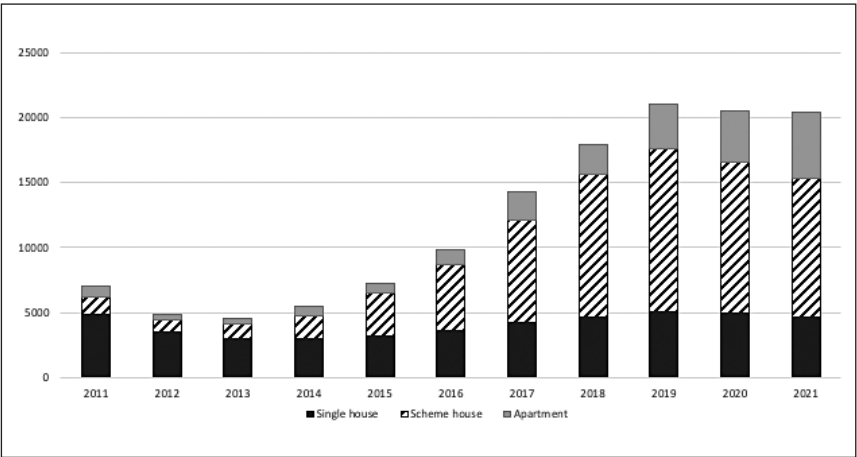
*Construction*

Census 2016 puts the current housing stock at 2,003,645 in 2016, of which just under 1.7 million are occupied and over 180,000 are vacant units, excluding holiday homes (Central Statistics Office, 2017a).

Figures released by the CSO in 2018 showed that housing construction between 2011 and 2017 had been continuously overestimated through the use of ESB Connections data as a substitute for an actual dwelling completions count. The CSO has been collating this data since, with the latest results set out in Chart 6.1. While new dwelling construction has increased since 2013, between 2016 and 2021 (the lifespan of Rebuilding Ireland), a total of just 104,092 dwellings were built, resulting in an average of just 17,349 for each of the six years, considerably less than the target of 25,000 per annum (Central Statistics Office, 2022a).

Between 2011 and 2014, two thirds of all new dwelling completions comprised of single units, while less than a quarter were scheme developments, and apartments accounted for 11.3 per cent. Between 2015 and 2021, this trend reversed with less than one third (27.4 per cent) of all new dwellings in that period comprising of single units compared to over half (55.7 per cent) attributed to schemes, and 16.9 per cent apartments. The number of apartments being built has risen steadily since 673 completed in 2015 to 5,107 in 2021, accounting for one in every four dwellings completed last year.

**Chart 6.1**     New Dwelling Completions 2011 to 2021



**Source:** Extracted from CSO, New Dwelling Constructions by Type of House and Year, PxStat [NDA02]

While the number of new dwelling completions being delivered is still below what is required to keep pace with demographic change and accounting for obsolescence, the upward overall trend, and that of scheme developments, is a positive sign. However, dwelling completions are not of themselves enough to address our current housing crisis. This increase needs to be reflected in the provision of social and (genuinely) affordable housing and long-term private rental solutions. There are also questions to be asked as to who is buying these new dwellings and for what purpose.

### *Vacancy and Dereliction*

According to the most recent figures there were 183,312 (excluding holiday homes) vacant properties on Census night 2016. Of these, 140,120 were houses and 43,192 were apartments. While this figure represents a decrease in vacancy rates per population size in all counties when compared to Census 2011, when the preliminary figures for each county are compared to the county breakdown of the Social Housing Needs Assessment 2020 there remains more vacant properties than households in need in every county, assuming the figures produced in the Summary of Housing Needs Assessment 2020 are correct, as discussed later in this Chapter.

It should be noted that the GeoDirectory Report puts the number of vacant units at 90,158, with highest rates in Leitrim, Mayo and Roscommon (GeoDirectory, 2022). That same report indicates that there were 22,096 derelict properties across the country at December 2021. The highest number is in Mayo (2,924), followed by Donegal (2,651) and Galway (1,946). The lowest rates of dereliction are in Carlow (233), Wicklow (244) and Louth (254). So, there is anywhere from 112,000 to 183,000 vacant and derelict properties across the country that could be brought into use.

In early 2017, the Government introduced the Repair and Leasing Scheme for owners of vacant properties to access funding of up to €40,000 to repair their properties which would then be leased to the local authority for use as social housing for a term of between five and 20 years, with a target of 3,500 properties to be brought back into use. The latest data from the Department indicates that of the 2,168 applications made, just 227 leases were signed in respect of 273 properties (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2021). Just over one in ten applications resulted in a lease. This is clearly not working.

The Housing for All Strategy committed to the introduction of a new vacant land tax to replace the Vacant Site Levy. This was introduced in Budget 2022, however at a rate of 3 per cent, and with a lead-in time of 3 years, this will have little impact. The programme to CPO (compulsory purchase order) vacant properties has been delayed to Q2 2022; as have the implementation of the position of Vacant Site Officer in each Local Authority; the amendments to the Fair Deal scheme to use the properties left vacant by nursing home residents; the proposed amendments to the planning regulations to exempt certain commercial premises which require

a change of use to residential (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2022). This disappointing lack of progress begs the question of whether Government is really serious about addressing vacancy in a meaningful way.

## ***Housing Affordability***

### ***Home Ownership***

A number of initiatives have been implemented by this and previous Governments in an effort to make housing more affordable.

Help to Buy was introduced in Budget 2017 to help first time buyers who bought or self-built a property by giving a maximum amount of €20,000. This has since been increased to a maximum of €30,000. An analysis of the Help to Buy data published by the Revenue Commissioners and purchases of homes (all and new) published on the Property Price Register suggests that this scheme is being used to support purchases in the higher end of the price range. In 2021, more than one in three (34.5 per cent) homes supported by the Help to Buy Scheme were in the €301-375,000 price range compared to 14.6 per cent of all home purchases registered on the property price register, and 24 per cent of new homes.

In September 2018, the Government launched the Land Development Agency, with an initial capital investment of €1.25 billion, to build 150,000 units over 20 years. One of the objectives of the new Agency was to deliver at least 40 per cent of housing built on lands transferred from the State in the form of social (10 per cent) and affordable (30 per cent) housing. The remaining 60 per cent would be privately owned. The Land Development Agency (LDA) Act 2021 was passed in July 2021. While the purposes of this Act are laudable, its execution will likely result in an increase in private development on public land, rather than a real increase in public and affordable housing. The Agency is given wide-ranging powers to acquire (including by Compulsory Purchase Order) public and other lands for development and to sell lands to Local Authorities and others, and to enter into contracts and joint ventures in respect of these public lands.

The latest support for home purchases came in 2021 with the publication of the Affordable Housing Act 2021 and the introduction of the ‘First Home’ Affordable Purchase Shared Equity Scheme. Under this scheme, first time buyers who have accumulated a deposit and are approved for a mortgage can access an equity loan from the State to make up the difference between what they can finance themselves (savings and mortgage) and the actual purchase price of the home, up to €30,000. Rather than make the home affordable, this artificially maintains high house prices by inflating the purchasers’ income, while circumventing the Central Bank’s macroprudential rules. Instead of one mortgage, the purchaser has two loans charged to the property, their mortgage and the equity loan.

Meanwhile, housing affordability has worsened in recent years, becoming less affordable between 2013 and 2019, before recovering slightly in 2020 (Parliamentary

Budget Office, 2022a). However, it must be noted that an affordability calculation based on earnings in 2020 will be distorted as average earnings increased in response to a lay-offs in lower-paid jobs during the pandemic. Between 2012 and 2020 house prices increased by 77 per cent, compared to wage growth of 23 per cent in the same period (Parliamentary Budget Office, 2022a) and asking prices have increased by 14.4 per cent in the year to December 2021, just 10.3 per cent below the 2007 peak (Central Statistics Office, 2022).

### *Rental*

The main initiatives to make rent more affordable have been the introduction of Rent Pressure Zones and Cost Rental housing. Rent Pressure Zones (RPZs) were introduced in December 2016 to place a cap of four per cent on rent increases in certain strategic areas. This rate was replaced in July 2021 with the Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices (HICP), however with cost of living increases exceeding 5 per cent, this was revised again to the lower of the HICP or 2 per cent. However, rents continue to rise. The average monthly rent for a tenant rose by €100, or 6.8 per cent, in the year to Q3 2021, for a national average of €1,516 per month. Between 2011 and 2020 rents increased, on average, by 5.3 per cent (Parliamentary Budget Office, 2022a). This suggests that RPZs are not as effective as had been hoped. In response to a Parliamentary Question in November 2021, the Minister for Housing confirmed that by July 2021, 29 cases for breach of RPZ limits had been heard by the Circuit Court, with an expected 250 cases to be confirmed in 2022 (O'Brien, 2021).

Cost rental is a tenancy popular in other European countries, notably Austria and the Netherlands. The premise is that rents will be divorced from the market and based instead on the cost of providing the property – building, finance and maintenance. This type of tenure has gained popularity in Ireland, however the scale of provision has been too low to have any real impact on market prices. One complaint about cost rental in Ireland is that rents continue to be out of reach of low-income households. At between €1,200 and €1,300 per month, this is true, however cost rents should remain at this level despite any inflation in the private sector, making it more cost-effective in the longer term. The Affordable Housing Act 2021 put cost rental on a statutory footing. Section 34 of the Act provides that cost rental tenants will not be eligible for housing subsidies available to tenants in the private rented sector generally unless they have had a change of circumstances making them eligible after 6 months. In the absence of real social housing provision, discussed later in this Chapter, this creates the unusual situation whereby social housing tenants in the private rented sector could be paying more in rent and top-ups than their wealthier counterparts who can avail of cost rent.

### *Homelessness*

The latest data indicate that 9,150 people accessed emergency homeless accommodation in the week 24-30 January 2022. Family homelessness has decreased by 10 per cent (from 1,130 families in July 2016 to 1,119 in January 2022) since the beginning of the previous housing strategy, Rebuilding Ireland. It is too early to tell if Housing for All will have the required impact, however it did little to

stop the cycle of increasing homelessness in the last quarter of the year, decreasing slightly in December, before increasing again in January (in September 2021 when Housing for All was introduced, there were 8,475 people accessing emergency accommodation, including 1,005 families. By November, these numbers had increased to 9,099 people and 1,108 families, before decreasing to 8,914 people and 1,077 families in December 2021).

These are the ‘official’ data on homelessness. They do not include those staying with family and friends, they do not include rough sleepers, they do not include homeless families temporarily accommodated in housing owned by their Local Authority, they do not include the women and children in domestic violence refuges, and they do not include asylum seekers in transitional accommodation. In 2019, a report commissioned by the European Commission referred to the current state of data collection on homelessness in Ireland as “statistical obfuscation if not ‘corruption’.” (Daly, 2019). This is unlikely to change with Housing for All. In July 2021, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage reclassified dependents aged 18+ as adults, thus distorting the number of adults, families, and dependants accessing homeless accommodation.

Family Hubs were first introduced in 2017 as an alternative to hotels and B&Bs. In response, the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) warned of the risks: of institutionalising families and normalising family homelessness (Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, 2017). This warning was ignored, with Minister Eoghan Murphy TD urging Local Authorities to build more ‘rapid build’ Family Hubs at the Second Housing Summit in January 2018, and increased funding for Family Hubs provided in Budgets 2019 and 2020. The only mention of family hubs in the Programme for Government 2020 is a commitment to provide additional supports to students living there.

A report published in April 2019 by the Ombudsman for Children’s Office (OCO) shows just how prescient IHREC’s warnings were, as children as young as 10 describe their living conditions as being “like a prison” (Ombudsman for Children’s Office, 2019). While the Report does point out that Family Hubs have been found to be better than hotel rooms, in the long-term they remain an unsuitable solution.

And what of our ageing population? The number of people aged 65 and above who are homeless has increased by 56 per cent since the introduction of Rebuilding Ireland (from 83 in July 2016 to 130 in January 2022), although there were fluctuations during that period. While there is a relatively low instance of homelessness among adults aged 65+, the rate of increase since the inception of the previous housing strategy is concerning. Frailty is often a challenge that comes with ageing and is exacerbated by poor living conditions.

### *Financial Costs of Homelessness*

The societal cost of homelessness is, as yet, unknown. Children born into, or at risk of, homelessness are presenting to services unable to crawl or walk due to lack

of space and unable to chew food because their parents have no option but to maintain a diet of ready-made pureed food as a source of nutrition far beyond the stage when other children their age would have been weaned<sup>1</sup>. This is also reflected in the concerns reported by Temple Street Children's University Hospital in its report of 842 children being discharged into homelessness in 2018<sup>2</sup> and a study conducted by the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland (Royal College of Physicians Ireland, 2019). Time lost in the first five years of a child's development is not easily recovered. It requires wraparound supports, including physical and speech therapies, counselling services and dieticians. It was therefore disappointing that no provision for Housing First for Families was made in the Housing for All Strategy.

The financial cost is easier to quantify. While decreasing since its peak in 2019, since 2014 €941 million has been spent by Local Authorities on emergency accommodation alone. Expenditure in this area peaked in 2019, €183 million, before decreasing to €171 million in 2020 and €153 million in 2021. This may be partly attributable to the pandemic and it will be interesting to see what impact that had when the 2022 figures are published.

Homelessness is becoming normalised. According to the Homelessness Quarterly Progress Report (October to December 2021), 58 per cent of all homeless adults and 62 per cent of all dependents accessing emergency accommodation had been doing so for more than six months. For families accessing emergency accommodation during Q4 of 2021, 58 per cent have done so for at least six months, and 39 per cent were accessing emergency accommodation for a year or more. The proportion of families accessing emergency accommodation for two or more years rose from 16 per cent in Q4 of 2019 to 21 per cent in Q4 of 2021. In those families accessing emergency accommodation for over two years, there are 424 children (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2022a).

The most recent rough sleeper count, taken in October 2021, showed 94 persons sleeping rough in Dublin over the course of the week of the count. Of these 94 people, 82 had PASS records, indicating that they had previously been assessed as homeless by a Local Authority. Charity remains a key feature of the response to rough sleeping, with increasing numbers of food outreach services visible on the streets. This work is commendable, but it should not be used by Government to abdicate its responsibility to provide basic shelter for those in need.

In the breakdown of Specific Accommodation Requirements contained in the Summary of Social Housing Needs Assessments (Housing Agency, 2021), the number of households reporting 'Household member(s) is homeless' increased by 2.1 per cent (130 households) to 6,367. This is an increase of 33.6 per cent since 2017

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/bad-diets-affecting-swallow-reflex-of-homeless-children-charity-says-1.4055281>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cuh.ie/2019/01/842-children-who-attended-temple-streets-ed-in-2018-were-discharged-with-no-fixed-home-address-29-increase-on-2017-figure/>

when 4,765 households reported homelessness as their main need. Even with the continued decrease in official numbers in need of social housing, the homelessness crisis is undeniable and must be addressed.

### *Social Housing*

The number of homes owned by Local Authorities was 141,128 at the end of 2020. A further c.30,000 were rented by Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs). In total, only 9 per cent of all housing stock in Ireland is social housing. This is far lower than our nearest neighbour Northern Ireland (24 per cent), England (17 per cent) and our European peers such as Austria (24 per cent), France (16 per cent), Sweden (17 per cent) and The Netherlands (29.1 per cent) (Housing Europe, 2021).

The last three decades have seen ‘a significant reduction in the traditional role of council housing as the primary source of accommodation for low-income renters due in part to the contraction of capital funding for council housing, which fell by 94 per cent between 2008 and 2013 (Norris & Hayden, 2018, p. 38). The expansion and contraction of capital spending on housing by central government demonstrates just how volatile this basic necessity for low-income families is, and how responsive it is to economic shocks. Analysis of capital and current expenditure on social housing delivery and supports states that prior to 2009, capital funding accounted for an average of 70 per cent of the total annual spend on housing (including Rent Supplement), however since the crash of 2008, there is a clear trend towards current expenditure and, since 2015, there has been an almost equal amount of capital and current expenditure each year – with an aggregate of €6.27bn on capital and €6.46bn on current housing programmes to 2021 (Parliamentary Budget Office, 2022).

### *Social Housing Needs Assessments and HAP*

According to the Summary of Social Housing Needs Assessments 2020, published in March 2021, there were 61,880 *households* on the waiting list for social housing, presenting as a decrease of 9.9 per cent on the previous year (Housing Agency, 2021). However, the truth is that the housing crisis is worsening as Government continues to look to the private sector for solutions. The Summary of Social Housing Needs Assessments does not include households in receipt of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) as these households are deemed to have their needs met. This means that households who would, pre-2014, have been given Rent Supplement and included in the social housing waiting list data, are no longer included. As of 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020, there were 59,821 households in receipt of HAP.

There has also been some debate surrounding the methodology used by local authorities in collecting information about those still on the housing waiting list, namely an ‘opt in’ letter requesting information on housing status which, if not returned, results in automatic removal from the list. While discretion was given to local authorities to make further contacts by telephone and text message, this method of data collection adversely affects those with low literacy skills and those with reduced capacity to engage in this manner, whether through stress



or other socio-economic factors. It therefore risks excluding the most vulnerable households and could be a contributory factor to the rising rate of family homelessness, discussed earlier in this Chapter. As stated, households in receipt of Rent Supplement are counted, and account for a sizable number of households on the social housing waiting list, those in receipt of the HAP, those living in local authority rented accommodation, those in accommodation under the Rental Accommodation Scheme, anyone in accommodation provided under the Social Housing Capital Expenditure Programmes or any households on the transfer list are not counted as in need of social housing assistance. According to estimates published by the Parliamentary Budget Office, the number of people with an ongoing social housing need (those on the waiting list and those in receipt of HAP) is 260,000 (Parliamentary Budget Office, 2022). More than one in every 20 people in Ireland is in need of a home.

### *Mortgage Arrears*

At the end of Q3 of 2021, there were 63,478 home mortgages (private dwelling house (PDH) and buy-to-let (BTL)) in arrears, with 47,545 of these in arrears of more than 90 days (Central Bank of Ireland, 2021). This represents a decrease on the same period in the previous year of 11 per cent of both all mortgage accounts in arrears and those in arrears of more than 90 days. Notably, the only increase in the Q3 2021 PDH figures is the number of mortgages in arrears for over 10 years, which increased by 416 mortgages to 5,430.

### *Non-bank Entities*

Non-bank entities are Retail Credit Firms and Credit Servicing Firms and do not, as the name might suggest, provide banking facilities. As of Q3 2021, non-bank entities owned 14 per cent of all PDH mortgage accounts and 67 per cent of all PDH mortgage accounts in arrears over one year. Of the 5,430 PDH accounts in arrears of more than 10 years, 76 per cent (4,160) are owned by non-bank entities (Central Bank of Ireland, 2021).

In recent years, mortgage banks have been selling mortgage loan books to non-bank entities as part of a strategy to reduce the number of non-performing loans (NPLs) to within EU parameters. Consumer advocates have expressed concern about the lack of consumer protections for borrowers, particularly those whose loans were performing, while those in favour of this strategy cite the high level of NPLs acting as a barrier to accessing better credit terms, thereby contributing to Ireland's high mortgage rates. Data extracted from the Central Bank's quarterly statistical report on mortgage arrears show that while the number of PDH mortgages held by non-bank entities has risen by 158 per cent since 2016, the number in arrears was decreasing between 2016 and 2018, before increasing sharply in the years 2019 to 2021 (currently standing at 24,632).

### *Local Authorities*

Of the 14,779 Local Authority mortgages active as of Q3 2021, 34.4 per cent were in arrears, representing 5,080 low-income households, 15.6 per cent of which are in arrears of more than 90 days (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2021a). This represents a reduction of 553 mortgages in arrears compared to the same period in 2020. During this period there were also 266 fewer mortgages recorded in total.

The latest local authority repossession figures show 1 forced and 5 voluntary repossessions in 2021 (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2021b). The only option for these families is adequate social housing, which this and previous Governments have failed to provide.

### *Insolvency Supports*

In October 2017, the Government established the Abhaile project under the remit of the Citizens Information Board. This project increased funding to MABS (the State's Money Advice and Budgeting Service) existing mortgage supports in place since September 2015; continued to fund the Accountants' service, put in place in October 2017; and funded a new voucher system for borrowers in late-stage mortgage arrears to access a Personal Insolvency Practitioner for one meeting to determine eligibility for an insolvency arrangement or a Solicitor for legal advice as well as a system of Court Mentors at repossession hearings across the country.

According to the Third Report of the Abhaile Scheme, some 14,319 Personal Insolvency Practitioner (PIP) vouchers were issued between mid-2016 when the Scheme began and December 2019 (p.18). It should be noted here that PIP vouchers are provided per borrower, not per mortgage, and so the number of mortgages involved is less. Of these, 10,073 have been presented for payment. At €500 plus VAT of 21 per cent per voucher, this equates to a value of €6,255,333 redeemed out of a possible €8,892,099.

A breakdown of the outcomes for the 10,073 borrowers who presented their PIP Vouchers for payment (p.22) indicates less than 2 in 5 (39 per cent, n=3,929) have a solution or trial solution in place. Just 23 per cent were granted a Personal Insolvency Arrangement (PIA) (n=2,357); a further 13 per cent entered into an informal solution with their lender (n=1,336), either an Alternative Payment Arrangement (ARA) or Mortgage to Rent (MTR); and just 2.3 per cent were made bankrupt (n=236). Of the 41 per cent who were progressing solutions (n=4,130), 2,015 (20 per cent of the total) were in progress to a formal solution (PIA or bankruptcy) and 2,115 were in progress to an informal solution (21 per cent of the total). The remaining 20 per cent of borrowers who accessed a PIP voucher either surrendered their property or had it repossessed (2 per cent, n=201) or disengaged after advice (18 per cent, n=1,813).

So, for €6.25 million, less than half of all borrowers who presented their PIP voucher for payment (n=4,608, 45.7 per cent) had accessed or were in the process of accessing an insolvency solution. The 3,451 (34 per cent) who accessed or were in progress towards an informal solution could have achieved the same result by accessing MABS' free money advice supports without the need or expense of a PIP.

### *Mortgage to Rent*

Since its introduction in 2012, only 1,682 households have availed of the scheme out of a total of 6,089 cases (28 per cent) and a further 720 are being progressed. Even if all 720 were successful, that is still only two in every five applicants. Mortgage to Rent does not serve all counties equally. Counties Donegal, Sligo, Roscommon, Leitrim, Galway City and Longford have all had less than 100 successful cases since Q2 2015.

Mortgage to Rent has been reviewed twice, the first time in February 2017<sup>3</sup>. While the eligibility criteria for borrowers in mortgage arrears remained largely unchanged following that review, one of the main outcomes was the introduction of a new funding model, using private equity. Private equity vehicles are, by their nature, profit driven and without tight regulations and buy-back options for the State, Mortgage to Rent tenants may fall foul of market fluctuations. The second review took place in February 2021 and resulted in welcome improvements to the eligibility criteria, including income limits, equity limits and size of the property. These improvements will no doubt help support some households, however based on the last ineligible cases summary report from the Housing Agency<sup>4</sup>, 330 of the 460 cases (72 per cent) were ineligible on the grounds that the household was either over or under-occupied. The changes to this element announced in February 2021 apply only to borrowers aged 65+ or where there's a disability in the household. There is no evidence in the 2021 review that this will have a significant impact on the numbers eligible.

Of the 6,089 applications for Mortgage to Rent, 3,227 were terminated:

- 621 referred to duplicate applications that should not have been in the system at all, so that brings the number on both sides down to 2,606 out of 5,468 (48 per cent).
- 668 were declined by the AHB or Local Authority. AHBs were most likely to decline in Meath, Tipperary, Dublin City, Waterford, Fingal and Limerick. Local Authorities were most likely to decline in Cork County, Tipperary, Cavan, Roscommon and Meath.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/changes-in-mortgage-to-rent-scheme/>

<sup>4</sup> [www.housingagency.ie/housing-information/mortgage-rent-scheme](http://www.housingagency.ie/housing-information/mortgage-rent-scheme)

- 240 had “No AHB Interest”. Most likely to be the case in Tipperary, Limerick, Cork County, Galway County and Meath.
- 197 could not agree a sale. Most likely in Louth, Kildare, Meath, Waterford and Dublin City.
- 1,474 are listed as “Withdrawn”, without any published data on why that might be.

Both Personal Insolvency Arrangements and Mortgage to Rent will work for some households, but there are still many in long-term arrears for whom there is little support.

### ***Private Rented Sector***

Approximately 13 per cent of the population are living in private rented accommodation. According to the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB), there were 165,736 landlords registered with the RTB in 2020 and 297,837 tenancies. The number of landlords rose steadily from 2006, when there were 83,102 landlords and peaked in 2012 with 212,306 landlords. A sharp decrease to 160,160 landlords in 2014 was followed by some slight fluctuations in the following years. The narrative that landlords are “fleeing the market” is not quite true, however in the wake of the Global Financial Crash in 2008, and subsequent increase in property values, there was a decrease in the numbers continuing to rent their properties. In recent years, we have instead seen an increase in institutional landlords, corporations with property portfolios in the Buy to Rent (and lately the social housing) markets. In July 2021, the RTB published a report on large landlords, those with 100+ tenancies (Residential Tenancies Board and Amárach Research, 2021). Of the many interesting findings within this report, this quote stands out in terms of the effect institutional landlords have on the meaning of “home” within the rental context:

They see what they offer tenants not as a property but as a proposition. They are marketing a location and an environmental context – not just the individual property.

*p.11*

Notwithstanding an increase in large landlords, the latest Daft.ie Rental Report indicates that just 1,397 homes were available to rent in Ireland at the end of 2021, 712 of which were in Dublin (Lyons, 2022). In addition to a lack of supply, we also have an affordability issue.

The same Daft.ie Rental Report referred to earlier indicates that the average asking rent nationwide between September and December 2021 was €1,524, an increase of 3 per cent on the previous quarter. Annual growth was highest in Leitrim and Donegal, at 24.8 and 24.3 per cent respectively, while lowest annual growth rates were experienced in Louth and Kildare (8.3 and 8.9 per cent respectively) (Lyons, 2022). In Dublin, average asking rents range from €1,897 in North County Dublin to €2,258 in South County Dublin. These are the rents sought in respect of new

tenancies and, as such, may differ from average rents being paid in existing tenancies. However, it does indicate that Rent Pressure Zones legislation is not having the desired effect.

In terms of existing rents being paid, the RTB Rent Index, indicates that rents grew on an annualized basis by 8.3 per cent, higher than the previous quarter and the highest since Q4 2017 when it was 8.4 per cent (Residential Tenancies Board, 2021).

### *Private Rent and Poverty*

With rent inflation outstripping increases in average earnings, it is perhaps unsurprising that tenants in private rented accommodation are most likely to experience poverty, both before and after paying their rent. In January 2022, *Social Justice Ireland* published a report 'Housing and Poverty 2022' which analysed the impact of housing costs (mortgage interest and rent) on poverty rates, based on statistics provided by the Central Statistics Office from the EU SILC module for 2020 (Social Justice Ireland, 2022). This report found that of the 71.2 per cent living in owner occupied property, which equates to some 3,568,188 people, 7.1 per cent are at risk of poverty (253,341 people). When mortgage interest is factored in, 8.2 per cent of all people living in owner occupied homes are at risk of poverty, some 292,591 people, with the rate for those with a mortgage increasing from 4.8 per cent to 7.1 per cent (the rate for those with no mortgage stays the same).

A similar, but far more stark, pattern is observed when we consider people in rented accommodation. Overall, 27.6 per cent of people living in rented or rent-free accommodation, some 398,354 people, are at risk of poverty before rent payments are taken into account. The breakdown within this tenure type indicates that 15.7 per cent living rent free; 37.6 per cent renting from the Local Authority; 22.7 per cent renting with other forms of social housing support; and 16.7 per cent renting without housing supports are at risk of poverty before rent payments are factored in. This increases sharply to 44.7 per cent overall for those living in rented or rent free accommodation; 49.8 per cent for those renting from the Local Authority; 55.9 per cent renting with other forms of social housing support; and 30.7 per cent for those renting without housing supports once rent is accounted for.

This not only shows the deep inequalities experienced by people living in the private rented sector generally, but clearly demonstrates that private rented subsidies are not the solution and the inadequacy of low incomes when almost half of all people living in properties rented from the Local Authority are at risk of poverty after making rent payments.

### *Rent Inspections*

Each Local Authority has a target of inspecting 15 per cent of rental properties in their area. In 2019, the percentage of registered tenancies inspected rose to 9.93 per cent, from 7.39 per cent in 2018. It was hoped that this increase in inspections would be consistent, however in 2020, just 6.73 per cent of rental properties were

inspected. Of these tenancies inspected, between 75.45 per cent (Leitrim) and 100 per cent (Carlow, Cavan, Galway City, Kilkenny, Laois, and Waterford) were found to be non-compliant (National Oversight and Audit Committee, 2021). One solution to this low standard is to make it mandatory for all landlords to have a certificate procured prior to letting, that states the rental property meets a minimum standard.

### ***Accommodation for Persons with Disabilities***

According to the Summary of Social Housing Needs Assessments, 4,000 households reported, within the specific breakdown of housing requirements, a household member as having an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or intellectual disability, a decrease of 3 per cent on the previous year (Housing Agency, 2021). A breakdown of the Main Need for Social Housing Support shows that 5,800 households reported some form of disability<sup>5</sup>, a decrease from 6,173 the previous year.

In 2021, funding was allocated or increased to a number of schemes to support housing for older people and people living with a disability. In May 2021, Ministers O'Brien and Burke announced €23 million in funding for the Disabled Persons Grant scheme (DPG) which supports adaptations and extensions to existing Local Authority housing stock, and the Improvement Works in Lieu of Local Authority Housing Scheme (IWILS) which supports improvements or extensions to private housing stock where the tenant has been approved for social housing, "meeting their social housing need" and reducing the waiting list for social housing. These schemes are important and necessary, and the increases are to be welcomed, however they are still catching up from previous years of underfunding.

While the majority (almost 69 per cent) of people living with a disability own their own home with or without a mortgage (Central Statistics Office, 2017b), 12.4 per cent are living in the private rented sector (an increase of almost 13 per cent in real numbers of persons living with a disability in the private rented sector compared to Census 2011). The IWILS scheme is only available to people who are deemed eligible for social housing, which would exclude most of the 69 per cent who are owner occupiers. There is little incentive for private landlords to modify their properties to meet the needs of tenants living with a disability or older tenants when they could attract equal or higher rents with new tenants.

Housing Adaptation Grants is the collective term given to the three grants: Housing Aid for Older People, Housing Aid for People with a Disability and Mobility Aid Grant. These grants are provided to eligible people to modify their own homes, allowing them to live at home, within their communities, for longer. Given the large proportion of people living with a disability who own their own homes, the Housing Adaptation Grants are especially important. In 2010, a total of €77.3

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<sup>5</sup> Listed as physical disability; mental health disability; intellectual disability; medical or compassionate grounds; sensory disability; and other form of disability

million was paid in respect of 13,588 grants. These grants were subject to cuts during the austerity years, and in 2013 reached their lowest point in the decade, with €37.7 million paid in respect of 7,011 grants, less than half 2010 levels. Building on moderate increases since 2015, the total amount paid in respect of these grants in 2021 was €56.5 million in respect of 10,283 grants. An improvement on 2013, but still considerably lower than 2010 levels (Table 6.1).

In addition, delays in accessing the necessary Occupational Therapists to certify a need for home modifications means that people living with disabilities may be at risk in their homes due to lack of necessary works.

**Table 6.1** Housing Adaptation Grants, by Type, 2008-2021

	Housing Aid for Older People		Housing Aid for People with a Disability		Mobility Aid Grant	
	No. of Grants Paid	Value €,'000	No. of Grants Paid	Value €,'000	No. of Grants Paid	Value €,'000
2008	1,439	6,421	788	7,733	415	1,442
2009	4,294	19,345	3,429	32,955	1,267	4,188
2010	7,205	30,775	4,347	39,849	2,036	6,688
2011	6,510	27,098	3,273	27,695	1,975	6,381
2012	4,848	19,910	3,088	26,147	2,066	6,764
2013	2,815	11,247	2,506	20,885	1,690	5,548
2014	3,634	13,498	2,192	17,386	1,721	5,570
2015	3,127	11,267	2,600	20,841	1,869	6,284
2016	3,425	12,647	2,714	20,867	1,871	6,548
2017	3,558	13,254	3,449	27,857	2,073	7,295
2018	3,640	13,904	3,622	29,739	2,151	7,601
2019	4,021	15,426	3,891	32,246	2,111	7,593
2020	3,290	12,762	3,165	26,653	1,682	5,960
2021	4,736	19,184	3,811	31,062	1,736	6,246

**Source:** Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Housing Statistics, Other Local Authority Housing Scheme Statistics, Housing adaption grants, various years

Lack of availability of grants for home modifications coupled with low income, lower levels of educational attainment (13.7 per cent had completed no more than primary education (Central Statistics Office, 2017b), compared to 4.2 per cent of the general population) and a prevalence of poverty means that those with a disability are unlikely to be able to afford adequate accommodation to support independent or assisted living.

In January 2022, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage published the National Housing Strategy for Disabled People 2022-2027 (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2022b). The stated vision for the strategy is:

To facilitate disabled people to live independently with the appropriate choices and control over where, how and with whom they live, promoting their inclusion in the community. To further enable equal access for disabled people to housing with integrated support services.

This is a very welcome vision, which must be sufficiently resourced for delivery. The new strategy is centred around six themes:

- Theme 1: Accessible Housing and Communities. This focuses on the provision of accessible housing for people living with a disability and the promotion of universal design principles.
- Theme 2: Interagency Collaboration and the Provision of Supports. This will include better collaboration between Local Authorities and the HSE, inter-departmental cooperation and information sharing between agencies.
- Theme 3: Affordability of Housing. This focuses on enabling access to affordable housing for people with disabilities.
- Theme 4: Communication and Access to Information. This aims to ensure that people with disabilities are not disadvantaged in communicating their needs and in the communication they receive.
- Theme 5: Knowledge, Capacity, and Expertise: This theme seeks to increase awareness and understanding of disability and housing within the relevant organisations, such as Local Authorities, Approved Housing Bodies, the HSE, and disability service providers. It also places an emphasis on increasing awareness regarding disabled people's effective participation and inclusion in their communities.
- Theme 6: Strategy Alignment. This theme focuses on ensuring that all Government strategies and policies from a housing perspective promote the rights of disabled people, in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD).



These themes are all very welcome and, if delivered simultaneously could work towards providing real, sustainable housing solutions for people with disabilities.

*Social Justice Ireland* believes that ensuring that people with a disability can live independently where possible should be a key policy priority. Providing the resources for this, including suitable housing and housing-related supports, must be one of the foundations of such a policy.

### ***Traveller Accommodation***

According to statistics compiled by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, the number of families in all Traveller accommodation increased by over a quarter (28 per cent) between 2008 and 2019. The highest rate of increase was in accommodation provided by Approved Housing Bodies with the assistance of the local authority which rose by over 200 per cent (from 119 to 427 families), followed by an increase of 170 per cent in shared accommodation (from 345 to 933 families), those accommodated from their own resources (35 per cent, from 513 to 744 families), and those in private rented accommodation (26 per cent, from 1,516 to 1,919 families). During this period, the number of families accommodated on local authority halting sites decreased (8 per cent, from 1,035 to 952), while those in standard local authority housing increased by 25 per cent (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2021c).

In 2019, the highest proportion of families were housed in standard local authority accommodation (25 per cent, 4,034 families) and private rented accommodation (26 per cent, 1,919 families) with an overall drop of 211 or 1.9 per cent in the number of families.

In July 2019, the results of the Traveller Accommodation Expert Review were published (Traveller Accommodation Expert Review Group, 2019). In this Report, the Expert Review Group identified as a “fundamental problem” the lack of a strong evidence base for policy making. The direction of housing policy generally, whereby social housing is now provided by way of the private sector, also presents particular difficulties for Travellers as they face “strong barriers” in accessing private rented accommodation. This Report concludes with a series of recommendations on all aspects of Traveller accommodation provision, from delivery suitable to the need; to planning; capacity and resources; and governance. *Social Justice Ireland* supports these recommendations and urges Government to develop an implementation plan to ensure that they are affected.

The reported conditions experienced by Traveller families, that of increased overcrowding, discrimination within the private rented sector, greater risk of homelessness, and associated health difficulties warrants that this issue be treated as an emergency and that local authorities be compelled to utilise the increased funding available to ensure that Traveller families and their children are supported to live with dignity.

A Spotlight report in 2018 identified an ‘implementation gap’ “in that it appears to have resulted in housing outcomes which contradict the policy intention” (Visser, 2018, p. 23). This would support the earlier reported suggestion that some politicians are “involved in LTACCs [Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee] for the purposes of opposing Traveller accommodation” (RSM PACEC Limited, 2017, p. 33).

In July 2021, the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) published accounts of the first Council-by-Council equality review on Traveller Accommodation in the history of the State (Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, 2021). This review found that, between 2008 and 2018, of €168.8 million allocated to local authorities for Traveller-specific accommodation, just two thirds (€110.6 million) was drawn down, although it should be noted that the full budget was drawn down in 2020.

The review also found that there was poor information being gathered by Local Authorities to enable them to make policy decisions concerning Traveller accommodation; that not enough evidence existed to suggest that Local Authorities were taking proper account of Traveller culture and identity, with 22 Local Authorities not making any reference in its review to its Caravan Loan Scheme to provide caravans to Travellers who wish to live on halting sites. It also found a lack of meaningful engagement with Travellers on their perspectives of the private rented sector or provision of mainstream accommodation and services.

## 6.2 Key Policy Reforms

The housing system in Ireland has become characterised by profit and privatisation: private developers building on State land; private landlords receiving large subsidies to provide “social housing solutions”; private operators of emergency accommodation; and private investment in short-term, high-yield lettings. This is a policy failure. *Social Justice Ireland* welcomed many aspects of the Housing for All plan, as a considerable improvement on its predecessor, however there are still policy gaps through which the very marginalised may fall. To this end, we have a series of policy recommendations which we strongly urge Government to adopt.

### *Encourage the Right Supply*

Increasing supply is an instinctive response to a housing crisis. However, all supply is not made equal. Changes to building regulations which allowed for lower standards in buy to rent properties to make them viable for investors has led to substandard accommodation not intended for long-term housing. Housing for All commits to increasing the housing stock by 33,000 units per year, to reach a total increase of 156,000 over the life of the strategy. Even if this were sufficient (which we believe it is not), development must be affordable and sustainable and seek to provide long-term homes, rather than short-term investment opportunities.

### *Increase Affordability*

The Government's response to generations who cannot afford to buy or rent a home is to concentrate on demand-side subsidies. The Help to Buy and Affordable Home Equity Scheme artificially inflate the incomes of first time buyers to enable them to reach a market price that would otherwise be unattainable. This is a tacit acknowledgement that housing is unaffordable, while also maintaining those unaffordable prices. These supports should be tapered and withdrawn.

There are a number of supply-side initiatives that would help to reduce house prices and make them actually affordable:

- Open up procurement so that developers could come together to bid for materials and buy in bulk, thereby reducing unit costs. The LDA may have a role in coordinating and facilitating this procurement.
- Investigate the use of “delivery labs” such as those used in some parts of the United States and Saudi Arabia which bring together all stakeholders – industry experts, analysts, communities, builders and developers. The Housing Commission could be expanded to seek to do this nationally, or a series of regional or local labs could be developed to facilitate. Because of the full stakeholder approach to the design labs, there's less “nimbyism”.
- Demand full transparency from developers through the development of a developer / builder register that requires them to publish costs.
- Invest in new methodologies, such as modular homes; greater use of timber frame houses; and a reduction on the reliance on concrete. This will also fit in with our environmental obligations under the National Reform and Resilience Plan as concrete is very carbon intensive and bad for the environment. These methodologies are also easier to scale as some or all of the units can be built off site and shipped to location.
- Invest in Research and Development of new IT platforms to monitor materials and equipment productivity, assembling data in real-time and predicting issues before they arise, allowing them to be dealt with quicker.
- Reconsider density, not as up, but as out. It is possible to have high density, low-medium rise.
- Focus the apprenticeships provided for in Housing for All on new methodologies, so that there is a mix of practical experience and class-based learning. Driving change here will not only support a transition to these new methodologies but provide a cutting-edge construction workforce.
- Waive some or all construction levies for developers, conditional on the full waiver applying to house prices. This could begin in areas with greater increases in house prices – Dublin City, Fingal and the Border counties, or could be linked to Our Rural Future and incentivise building in towns and villages.

### *Build More Social Housing*

As discussed in this Chapter, Ireland's social housing supply is approximately 9 per cent of our housing stock. According to Housing Europe, this is at odds with many of our European counterparts (Housing Europe, 2021). *Social Justice Ireland* proposes that Government set a target that 20 per cent of all housing stock be social housing by 2030. This would equate to an additional 232,800 social housing units to be delivered in the next eight years. Housing for All commits to just 90,000 but lacks clarity over how 42,500 of those could be delivered within the plan. The current need, based only on the social housing waiting lists, HAP tenancies, RAS tenancies and households in receipt of Rent Supplement is over 157,000. This does not account for households leaving Direct Provision; new households fleeing war; households in refuges for Domestic Abuse; the majority of the homeless as currently counted; or all of the homeless not currently counted within official data (as would be counted under an ETHOS typology proposed by FEANSTA). It also does not take account of future demand, averaging 27,500 per year.

This would also require a winding-down of housing subsidies which have been proven not to provide sustainable homes and, instead, to exacerbate inflation in the private rented sector.

Building homes where they are needed the most requires decentralising control to Local Authorities, allowing them to control the development in line with their county development plans which have been subject to extensive consultation with their communities. Local Authorities can also develop at cheaper rates, with average construction cost of a 2-bed of €230,300 and a 3-bed of €214,076 in 2020. To achieve these lower costs, Government must make State land available for development and restrict the sales of State land suitable for residential development to private developers.

Government needs now to invest in capital projects to provide social housing and associated infrastructure. The change in classification of Tier 3 Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs), to inside the general government sector, means that local authorities and AHBs could pool their full property portfolios for the purpose of accessing low-cost credit. The European Investment Bank has committed to funding social housing projects in Ireland, included in the €291.3 million infrastructure package committed in 2018. A pool of approximately 180,000 rented properties between local authorities and AHBs would likely attract lower lending rates, so that differential rents, which traditionally do not cover costs associated with the provision of housing, could service more of the loan.

The ring-fencing by Local Authorities of rents received and any sale proceeds from tenant-purchase schemes should also be considered. Rather than forming part of the general local authority budget, money received should be dedicated to the maintenance and development of local authority housing. In their 2018 Report, Norris and Hayden (2018) recommended that local authorities freeze any tenant purchase schemes to maintain local authority housing stock and redesign the

schemes so that former tenants can only sell their home back to the local authority. In the context of a national emergency, these are all areas which should be explored and implemented.

### *Homes Not Hubs*

As seen earlier in this Chapter, the homelessness crisis is showing no sign of abating. Family homelessness has risen by 180 per cent from November 2014 to November 2021 and, with private rent inflation, persistent mortgage arrears and lack of construction of social housing, it is likely that this crisis will continue to deepen. *Social Justice Ireland* welcomed the commitment in Housing for All to the eradication of homelessness by 2030 but were disappointed that this did not extend Housing First beyond vulnerable adults to families experiencing homelessness. In Budget 2022, the Government committed to the expansion of family hubs for homeless families, notwithstanding the warnings from IHREC (Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, 2017) and reports of the lived experiences of families and children accessing this accommodation (Ombudsman for Children's Office, 2019). In its policy statement, IHREC recommended an amendment to section 10 of the Housing Act 1988 to limit the amount of time a family may spend in Family Hubs as well as other forms of emergency housing, a similar regime as in Scotland and something that *Social Justice Ireland* has been advocating for. This would then allow for the expenditure allocated to Family Hubs to be used to support the Housing First programme.

### *A Lifecycle Approach to Housing Delivery*

Housing type mix is just as important as volume, allowing people to stay within their communities as their housing needs expand and contract over time. One bedroomed apartments located close to home for young people starting out, larger houses then as people start families and back to smaller sized houses as they age and their household contract. And all within the same community allowing for ties and links to services and supports to be maintained.

To this end, *Social Justice Ireland* calls on Government to revisit the Building Regulations with liveable communities in mind. While Buy to Rent is a business and investment opportunity, producing cheaper and lower standard housing, it is also a tenant's home. In the event of another market crash, these may have no other option but to stay in these properties, properties with no obligation to have amenities such as creches, car parking spaces, balconies and so on. We also call for the acceleration of rezoning for "over the shop" accommodation for residential use, something that we note is considered in Housing for All.

Older people and people living with disabilities have a range of needs, from the very minimal to the very complex in care. The first step is the winding down of congregated settings, which needs to accelerate to minimise the harmful effect on people currently accommodated there. The next step is then the provision of alternative accommodation which takes account of a person's, and their carer's, needs. Housing design for older people and people living with disabilities should

incorporate a life-cycle approach to ensure that those with deteriorating conditions can continue to live a life with dignity and in their own home for as long as possible. This approach would see the adoption of Universal Design principles in the development of housing responses, as committed to in the Government's policy statement on housing for our older population (Government of Ireland, 2019).

#### *Introduce an Equity Scheme to Deal with Long-term Mortgage Arrears*

As discussed earlier in this Chapter, while both Personal Insolvency Arrangements and Mortgage to Rent will support some households in arrears, the number of mortgages in arrears of more than 10 years is increasing. *Social Justice Ireland* proposes that Government develop a fund to take an equity stake in homes with mortgage arrears of 10 years+. Government is not averse to taking equity in private homes, as has been demonstrated by the Shared Equity provisions in the recently passed Affordable Housing Act, 2021. Our proposal would see the State use the Shared Equity model to support those who need it most to avoid homelessness.

#### *Increase Access to Traveller Accommodation*

The primary issue relating to the lack of suitable Traveller accommodation is not that funding is not being made available, as is the case in other areas of housing policy, but (apart from 2020) that this funding is not being utilised by the Local Authorities tasked with providing this accommodation. Stakeholder reviews have been undertaken to identify the type of accommodation most suitable and preferable for Travellers, however it is the 'implementation gap' identified in the Oireachtas Spotlight report referred to earlier in this Chapter (Visser, 2018) that is creating the barrier. As with other areas of housing policy, realistic targets should be developed for local authorities to provide Traveller families with safe, suitable accommodation. Discrimination and bias among elected representatives must be challenged and sanctions imposed on Local Authorities who do not access funding to meet developed targets.

#### *Address Vacancy*

There are between 90,000 and 180,000 vacant homes across Ireland. In order to tackle this issue, we must first be able to quantify it with some accuracy. We need new ways of mapping vacant dwellings, such as that piloted in Wallonia, using utility connections and activity. A further 22,096 are classified by the GeoDirectory as being derelict. Vacancy and dereliction should be dealt with together as one can very quickly become the other.

The proposed Zoned Land Tax set to replace the Vacant Site Levy, set at 3 per cent on land zoned for housing, will apply after 2 years for land zoned before January 2022 that has not been developed by 12 months of the date of zoning or 3 years for land zoned after January 2022 and that has been vacant or idle for 12 months. A better alternative to this tax would be a Site Value Tax, discussed in more detail in Chapter 4. This would be a better solution as it is applicable immediately to all sites, zoned or otherwise, and could generate revenue straight away. This would also

simplify the land tax system by removing the Zoned Land Tax, the Non-Principal Private Residence Tax and the Property Tax.

If not replaced by a Site Value Tax, we suggest that amendments be made to the Zoned Land Tax to make it more effective. It is too low (the Vacant Site Levy was set at 7 per cent). The tax should also have an independent valuation attached (rather than self-assessment); and should apply to both residential and commercial zoning.

In addition to the Zoned Land Tax to address hoarding, Government must increase resources to Local Authorities to enforce the Derelict Site Levy and allow for Local Authorities to apply for judgement mortgages to enforce accumulating unpaid sums, which could then be used to well-charge the property, allowing the Council to take it into possession. Just €378,000 was collected in Derelict Site Levies in 2020, while 8 Local Authorities sought to impose the levy but could not. The Derelict Site Levy needs to be very clearly defined and set at a far higher rate than the current 7 per cent.

Finally, we propose the use of Compulsory Sale Orders (CSOs) alongside Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs) to compel the sale of vacant and derelict sites. CSOs were proposed by the Scottish Land Commission in their proposal to Government in 2018 and compel the owner of a property or site to sell it at open auction to the highest bidder. This is more cost effective for the Local Authority as it requires administration, rather than full purchase, costs.

### 6.3 Key Policy Priorities

*Social Justice Ireland* believes that the following policy positions should be adopted in addressing Ireland's housing and homelessness crisis:

- Encourage the right type of supply and reduce reliance on the Build to Rent sector.
- Address affordability issues by concentrating on supply-side cost reductions rather than demand-side income subsidies; invest in new methodologies and reconsider higher density developments.
- Set a target of 20 per cent of all housing stock to be social housing and achieve this through directly building more social housing and decentralising responsibility for social housing to Local Authorities.
- Increase the provision of 'Housing First' accommodation for families in emergency accommodation, with wraparound supports to include public health nurses, dieticians, speech and language therapists, physical therapists, and mental health workers.

- Introduce legislation to limit the length of time families can spend in Family Hubs and other emergency accommodation.
- Take a life-cycle approach to housing development and town planning.
- Invest in an equity scheme for borrowers in late state mortgage arrears of 10 years+.
- Introduce sanctions for local authorities who do not utilise funding available to provide safe, sustainable Traveller accommodation.
- Deal with vacancy and dereliction through the tax system and introducing Compulsory Sale Orders.



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## Chapter seven

## Chapter 7

### Healthcare

#### Core Policy Objective:

To provide an adequate healthcare service focused on enabling people to attain the World Health Organisation's definition of health as a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.

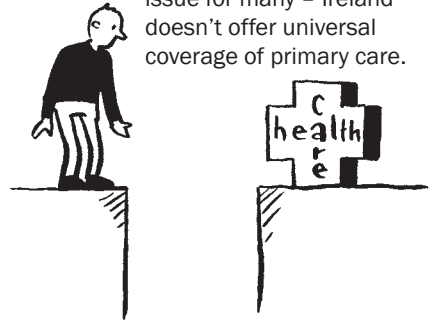


#### Key Issues/Evidence

Health = a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and must be seen as so.



Access to healthcare is an issue for many – Ireland doesn't offer universal coverage of primary care.

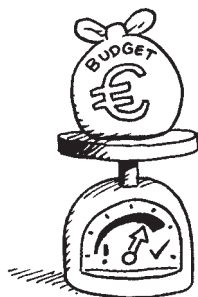
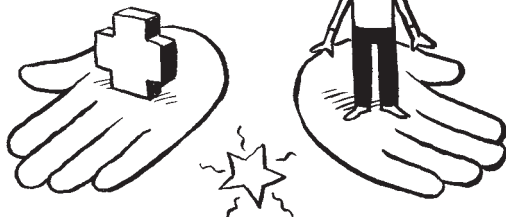


Our population is growing and it is ageing which means we need a different approach to healthcare – one we can access in our communities, close to home.



## Policy Solutions

Increase the availability and quality of Primary Care and Social Care services.



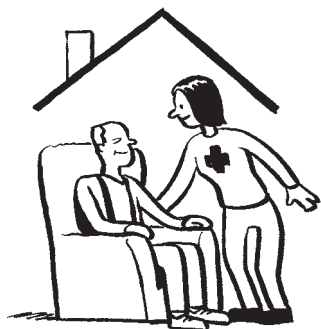
Ensure that additional resources committed for the development of the healthcare system in 2021 are retained and used to implement Sláintecare.



Ensure medical card coverage for all people who are vulnerable.



Create additional respite care and long-stay care facilities for older people and people with disabilities and provide capital investment to build additional community nursing facilities.



Create a statutory entitlement to Home Care Services.

Institute long-term planning and investment in the sector, acknowledging the impending demographic changes in Ireland, to ensure that we can cope with these changes.



## 7.

## HEALTHCARE

**Core Policy Objective: HEALTHCARE**

To provide an adequate healthcare service focused on enabling people to attain the World Health Organisation's definition of health as a *state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity*.

Healthcare services are important in themselves and to economic success in a range of ways. People should be assured that they can access treatment and care in times of illness or vulnerability, a key element of our Wellbeing Framework for a new Social Contract outlined in chapter 2. The standard of care significantly depends on the resources made available, which in turn depend on the expectations of society. Our health system, and its workers, have been placed under tremendous pressure since March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and significant additional resources have had to be provided since. The full impact and cost of the pandemic is yet to be reckoned with, given, amongst other things, the postponement of care and treatment related to other illnesses. The pandemic has highlighted both the vital role of healthcare in society and the serious shortcomings of our healthcare system. It must also be a starting point for major changes in our approach to healthcare. This Chapter outlines some of the major considerations *Social Justice Ireland* believes Government should bring to bear on decision-making about the future of our health service.

In summary, if healthcare is to meet the standard set out here in the years ahead, *Social Justice Ireland* believes that Government needs to shift to a model that prioritises primary and social care that would:

- Increase the availability and quality of Primary Care and Social Care services.
- Ensure medical card-coverage for all people who are vulnerable.
- Create a statutory entitlement to home care.
- Create additional respite care and long-stay care facilities for older people and people with disabilities and provide capital investment to build additional community nursing facilities.

- Institute long-term planning and investment in the sector, acknowledging the impending demographic changes in Ireland, to ensure that we can cope with these changes.
- Ensure that additional resources committed for the development of the healthcare system in 2021 are retained and used to implement Sláintecare.

## 7.1 Key Evidence

### Changing Demographics

Ireland's population is growing, and its composition is changing – it is getting older. Official statistics suggest that the population in 2021 has grown by 6 per cent since the 2016 Census to 5.01 million, and that population growth is set to continue for at least the next two decades (Department of Health, 2021). The population is growing across all regions and age groups, with the most significant growth among older people.

Thus, although Ireland's population is young in comparison to other European countries, it is ageing. The population aged 65+ has increased by 35 per cent since 2012 and Ireland's rate of ageing continues to be higher than the average for EU countries (Department of Health, 2021). Population growth is particularly marked amongst people aged 85+ whose numbers are projected to increase by 153.2 per cent between 2021 and 2041 (Department of Health, 2021).

Ageing populations represent increased longevity, a success story that is to be welcomed. But significant increases, particularly in the numbers of people who are over 85, will result in increased numbers living with long-term illness or disability, which must be planned for using an appropriate model of healthcare. The 2016 Census (CSO, 2017b) demonstrates a strong link between disability and increased age: in 2016, over 220,000 people aged 65+ experienced disability, representing 35 per cent of that age group and also 35 per cent of the overall population with disabilities. Reports from the ESRI project increased demand for health and social across all sectors to 2030 (in home care, long-term and intermediate care and in hospital beds/inpatient services) (Wren *et al*, 2017; Keegan *et al*, 2018).

### Access, Waiting Times and Expenditure on Healthcare

Ireland remains the only western European country without universal coverage for primary care (OECD, 2019b). Ireland's health system ranked 22<sup>nd</sup> out of 35 countries in 2018 but on the issue of accessibility, Ireland ranked *worst* (Health Consumer Powerhouse, 2019). That report notes that even if a waiting-list target of 18 months were reached, it would still be the worst waiting time situation in Europe. Quality of health care is considered generally good by the European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies, but access to services is constrained by costs and waiting times.

Irish hospitals are working at near full capacity. The number of hospital beds in 2019 (2.9 per 1,000 population) was the third lowest in the EU (OECD and WHO, 2021). Pre-COVID-19, hospitals frequently ran at 95 per cent occupancy rates – above the capacity considered safe (OECD and WHO, 2021). A high utilisation rate of hospital beds can be a sign of hospital efficiency, but it can also mean that too many patients are treated at secondary care level (OECD/European Union, 2020).

Ireland’s complex two-tier system for access to public hospital care means that private patients have speedier access to diagnostics and treatment, while those in the public system can spend lengthy periods waiting for first appointments with specialists and for treatment. Official statistics suggest that an enormous 636,695 people were waiting for an outpatient appointment in November 2021 while 75,740 people were waiting for treatment as an in-patient or day case (National Treatment Purchase Fund, 2021). Among them, those waiting 18+ months for an outpatient appointment were signification at 165,266 people while 11,686 people were waiting 18+ months for an inpatient/day case appointment. The COVID-19 pandemic may have contributed to the numbers on the waiting lists in recent times. However, as Table 7.1. shows, the numbers were particularly high in November 2021, but there have been very high numbers on waiting lists over many years.

**Table 7.1**      Waiting Lists for Outpatient and Inpatient/Day Case, 2014-2021

	Dec 2014	Nov 2016	Nov 2018	Nov 2019	Nov 2020	Nov 2021
<b>Outpatients</b>						
Total waiting	385,781	440,629	515,360	563,410	612,576	636,695
Waiting 18+ months	20,474	29,478	88,361	105,502	156,955	165,266
<b>Inpatient/Day Case Active Waiting List*</b>						
Total waiting	63,105	81,103	70,989	66,594	72,843	75,740
Waiting 18+ months	566	4,001	5,413	4,577	8,629	11,686

**Source:** National Treatment Purchase Fund (2021).

\*People waiting for an appointment date for their treatment are categorised as **‘Active’**. In addition, other lists published by the National Treatment Purchase Fund include a list characterised as ‘Inpatient/Day Case: Patients who have a scheduled date for their admission are categorised as To Come In’; ‘Planned Procedure list’; ‘Planned Procedure GI Endoscopy.’ In November 2021 there were 73,867 people on the Planned Procedure GI Endoscopy list.

Accessing our complex system depends on whether one has a medical card, a GP visit card, private health insurance, private resources to spend on health services, where



one lives and what type of services one is trying to access; it is people who are poorest, sickest and those with disabilities who find it hardest to pay charges, to negotiate access, and who must wait longer for care (Burke, 2016). As well as undermining equity and efficiency in the health system, private health insurance represents a financial burden on households, accounting for around 3 per cent of household spending on average in 2015–2016, up from 2 per cent in 2009–2010 (Johnston et al. 2020). Furthermore, while 46 per cent of the population has private health insurance, about 20 per cent has neither private health insurance nor a medical card (OECD and WHO, 2021). The medical card system protects many households from financial hardship, but poorer households are still disproportionately likely to experience financial hardship, and protection has been eroded over time (Johnston et al, 2020). Even relatively low user-charges can operate as barriers to access and lead to financial hardship for very poor households, and there is a high degree of income inequality in unmet need for prescribed medicines in Ireland, with disparities between the richest and poorest being particularly large relative to dental care (Johnston et al, 2020). The European Health Interview Survey (EHIS) shows that unmet need for prescribed medicines in Ireland is on average more than twice as high as the EU average and more than twice as high among people with the least education than those with the most (Johnston et al, 2020). The pandemic also limited access to care for people with health conditions not related to COVID-19 and unmet needs for medical care because of delayed or missed consultations are likely to lead to poorer health outcomes in the future.

Eurostat publishes self-reports of unmet needs for medical care. When we look at reasons associated with problems of access (*could not afford to, waiting list, too far to travel*) in Ireland the rate was 2.1 per cent (for those aged 16+ in 2020) (Eurostat online database hlth\_silc-08). However, low-income groups are most affected: 4 per cent in the lowest income quartile, contrasting with 0.4 per cent in the highest (again for those aged 16+ in 2020). When considering other survey instruments such as the EHIS (carried out approximately every five years), Ireland had the *second highest* rate of unmet needs for medical care due to cost, waiting times or travel distance among EU countries in 2014, at 40.6 per cent, substantially higher than the EU as a whole (26.5 per cent) (OECD and WHO, 2021). These differences may be explained by differences in the methodologies used by each instrument.

Total health care spending as a percentage of Irish Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was 6.9 per cent in 2018 (the latest year for which comparable data are available from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) 2021), putting Ireland fifteenth in EU-27 for total health spending. However, as a percentage of Modified Gross National Income (GNI<sup>1</sup>), total health expenditure in Ireland was 11.4 per cent in 2018 – the second highest amongst EU countries after Germany (CSO, 2021). Growth in public spending on health since 2014 has been driven by acute hospitals,

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<sup>1</sup> Modified GNI is an indicator recommended by the Economic Statistics Review Group designed to exclude globalisation effects that are disproportionately impacting the measurement of the size of the Irish economy.

increased staff numbers and growth in medicine costs (Johnston et al, 2020 citing report from Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, 2018). While cross-country comparison of healthcare expenditure is challenging, analysis suggests that Ireland's apparent high ranking in an international context is driven by relatively high prices for healthcare delivery, particularly salaries, rather than due to the volume of care delivered (Keegan et al, 2020). International comparison suggests that spending on inpatient care and long-term care in Ireland is relatively high (OECD and WHO, 2021). An ESRI report suggests that certain care currently delivered in hospitals could, in line with current Sláintecare proposals, be more appropriately delivered in the community if there were increased investment in community care (Keegan et al, 2020).

Government financing accounted for 75 per cent of total health expenditure in 2019 compared to the EU average (80 per cent) (OECD and WHO, 2021). While the proportion of expenditure from private health insurance schemes was 14 per cent (the second highest in the EU and almost three times higher than the EU average) almost half of the Irish population has in-patient health insurance (OECD and WHO, 2021).

**Table 7.2** Ireland: Breakdown of Expenditure on Health, 2019

Source of Financing	%
Govt. financing	75
Out-of-Pocket Payments	11.7
Private Health Insurance Schemes	14

**Source:** OECD and WHO (2021). **Note:** out-of-pocket payments include direct payments, cost-sharing for services outside the benefit package and informal payments.

Another issue is that healthcare costs tend to be higher in countries that have larger populations of older people, and Ireland currently has a relatively low proportion of older people though it is growing rapidly, as already discussed. People aged 65+ in Ireland make up 14.4 per cent of the population (2020) while the EU average is 20.6 per cent. See Table 7.3.

**Table 7.3** EU and Ireland, some Population Comparisons, 2020

2018	Ireland	EU-27
Median age	38.1	43.9
Proportion aged 65+	14.4	20.6
Proportion aged 85+	1.6	2.9

**Source:** Eurostat Online Database demo\_pjanind.

Before the onset of COVID-19, the Irish public hospital system was operating under pressure from population growth and ageing, and as a result of cuts to bed capacity in the preceding decades (Keegan et al, 2020). According to the European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies, the pandemic exposed health system weaknesses – in particular a shortage of health workers in the public sector and low intensive care unit capacity in public hospitals and it also revealed some strengths in responding to crises, including the ability to develop technological solutions and to mobilise additional funding rapidly for health reform, health workforce and hospital resources (OECD and WHO, 2021).

Like the governments of other countries, the Irish government made additional allocations to the health sector to deal with the pandemic. These commitments included expanding hospital capacity, developing primary and community-based responses, procurement of medical equipment, and an assistance scheme for private nursing homes. The successful delivery of the COVID-19 vaccination programme illustrates the ability of that system to respond in a coordinated way, adapt as challenges emerge and successfully implement a complex programme countrywide. As of the end of August 2021, Ireland's vaccination programme had achieved better rates than the EU average, with almost 70 per cent of the population receiving two doses (or equivalent) and with COVID-19 accounting for 5,100 deaths, a death rate about one third lower than the EU average (OECD and WHO, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted how our healthcare services, which had struggled in normal times, had to be provided with significant additional resources in amounts that would not even have been considered previously. What had been claimed to be impossible was taken to be the only sensible course of action during the crisis. As the scale of the pandemic's impact on the health system recedes, the period ahead is one where there is a unique opportunity to implement significant reform of Ireland's healthcare system. It is important to ensure that the approximately €4bn additional resources committed for the development of the healthcare system in 2021 are retained and now fully rolled out in 2022 to implement Sláintecare.

## **7.2 Key Policies and Reforms**

In the rest of this Chapter, we focus mainly on healthcare policies and how they address specific groups and issues. We first outline some context for the discussion that follows discussing how health is impacted by poverty and inequality and how the model of healthcare in Ireland is problematic.

### ***Poverty, Health and Life-Expectancy***

Health is not just about healthcare. The link between poverty and ill-health is well established by research. International reports underline inequalities in life expectancy by socio-economic status, including education level, income or occupational group (OECD, 2019). On average across OECD countries, people

without a high-school diploma can expect to live about 6 years less than those with third-level education. People with low incomes are less likely to see a doctor while access to preventative services is systematically concentrated amongst the better-off. In older age, there are large disparities in the experience of disability by income level: on average across EU countries, about 18 per cent of people aged 65+ in the highest income quintile (top 20 per cent) report disability compared with 43 per cent among those in the lowest 20 per cent (OECD/European Union, 2020).

A range of studies provide concerning evidence relative to inequality and health in Ireland. The OECD (2019b) suggests that a high proportion of Irish adults report being in good health, but differences occur across income groups: only 73 per cent of people in the lowest income quintile (lowest 20 per cent) assess their health as good, compared to 93 per cent in the highest (in 2017). Furthermore, Ireland was one of five OECD countries where people aged 65+ in the lowest income quintile (lowest 20 per cent) are more than twice as likely to report living in poor or fair health, compared with those in the highest income quintile (OECD, 2019a). At the other end of the lifespan, the *Growing Up in Ireland* study highlights a widening health and social gap by the time children are just 5 years old. Children from the highest social class (professional/managerial) are more likely than those from the lowest socio-economic group to be considered very healthy and have no problems (Growing Up in Ireland, 2013).

The Irish Health Survey (CSO, 2020) suggests that the more disadvantaged a person is, not only is their self-reported health status poorer, but the more they engage with the health system. This survey also highlights the poorer health status of unemployed people who report higher levels of mental ill-health than people in employment.

Life expectancy is another area where differences exist between socio-economic groups in Ireland. Life expectancy at birth is continuing to increase, standing at 84.7 years for women and 80.4 years for men (in 2019) (Department of Health (2021)). The gap between male and female life expectancy has narrowed in the past decade. These are positive developments. However, life expectancy differs based on socio-economic background (Central Statistics Office, 2019). For example, life expectancy at birth of males living in the most deprived areas was 79.4 in 2016/2017 compared with 84.4 for those living in the most affluent areas. The corresponding figures for females were 83.2 and 87.7 years, respectively. Of course, the pandemic may be found to have had an impact on life expectancy, as falling life expectancies are seen in 2020 in most OECD countries where data is available (Department of Health, 2021).

The above shows how, in summary, poor people get sick more often and die younger than those in the higher socio-economic groups. The Department of Health (2021: 1) acknowledges that Ireland faces significant challenges in this area and that inequalities in health and difficulties around access to healthcare are amongst those that if not addressed now, 'will lead to an unhealthy and costly future'.

## *Healthcare Model*

Problems with the Irish healthcare system are often apparent through difficulties of access (discussed already). However, that is not the whole story – as well as waiting times for access to hospital care, there are barriers in access to primary care and delays in Accident & Emergency Department admissions. When the financial crisis occurred in 2008, Ireland still had poorly developed primary and community care services (WHO & European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies, 2014) and austerity policies followed leading to continuous cuts to staff and budgets alongside increasing demand for care (Burke *et al*, 2016).

Problems with overcrowding in emergency departments are a regular feature of the Irish system. The Irish Nurses and Midwives Association (INMO, 2022) document that over 70,275 patients went without a bed in hospitals in 2021. In this situation outpatient appointments and surgeries can be cancelled and effects are felt throughout the system – not to mention the human suffering involved and the risks to safety. The 2019 national survey of patients found that 7,927 people (70 per cent of those answering this question) said they waited longer than six hours before being admitted to a ward; 331 people (4 per cent) waited 48+ hours (National Care Experience Programme, 2019).

Contributing to these problems is inability to discharge people, often older patients, due to lack of step-down facilities, nursing homes and other forms of support in communities. A study suggests that formal care is available to only 24 per cent of those needing care and (amongst the different groups examined) 38 per cent of people over 65 have unmet needs for care, as do 34 per cent of disabled adults (Privalko *et al*, 2019). The OECD (2019b) highlights how many hospital admissions could be avoided in Ireland (especially for chronic conditions like Asthma and COPD) if there were improvements in primary care. Thus, community services are not fully meeting growing demands associated with population change, reflected in inappropriate levels of admission to, and delayed discharges from, acute hospitals. With increases in the population, especially amongst older people, the acute hospital system will be unable to operate effectively without a shift towards primary and community services as a principal means of meeting patient needs.

*Social Justice Ireland* is concerned that the ageing of the population is not being properly planned for. Although Budget 2022 made some changes (e.g. increasing the fuel allowance and increasing the Social Welfare Pension), it took limited steps to begin planning for the future health and care needs of older people. An opportunity to resource and implement the proposed statutory right to home care was regrettably missed; so too was the restoration of Home Adaptation Grants to 2010 levels and a substantial increase in funding for the HSE National Safeguarding Teams. The Department of Health (2018) acknowledges that the current health service needs to evolve, noting that there is an over-reliance on hospitals, that community-based services are fragmented, and that there is a lack of integration within and across different services.

Sláintecare makes proposals for a ten year strategy for health care and health policy in Ireland. Robust rollout of Sláintecare could strengthen the effectiveness of the health care system (OECD and WHO, 2021). However, as the OECD/European Union (2020) noted, while the Strategy and Action Plan commit to expanding eligibility for health care on a phased basis, they do not commit to legislating for entitlement to care and the expansion of services required to deliver universal health coverage. As noted already, the additional resources committed for the development of the healthcare system in 2021 should be retained and now fully rolled out to implement Sláintecare. In order to deliver the modern, responsive, integrated public health system that the report envisages it is vital that the necessary investment is made. Reform will require investment *before* savings can be made. Not undertaking the required prior investment will mean that recurring problems illustrated above, and in the rest of this Chapter, will continue and will be exacerbated as our population ages.

### 7.3 Key Policy Priorities

Community-based health and social services require a model of care that is accessible and acceptable to the communities they serve, one that, amongst other things, affords primary care priority over acute care and recognizes the need for adequate resources across the full continuum of care, including primary care, social care, and specialist acute hospital services. There are many areas requiring action if the basic model of care that is to underpin the health services is not to be undermined. These areas include:

- Older people's services
- Primary Care
- Children and family services
- Disability,
- Obesity, and
- Mental health.

We now address each of these in turn.

#### *Older People's Services*

According to the ESRI, good home care and long-term residential care services help reduce older people's lengths of stay in acute hospitals, and hospital stays are shorter in Irish counties that are better supplied with these services (Walsh *et al*, 2019). Ireland provides relatively low levels of formal home care by comparison with several other countries, with research suggesting that 38 per cent of older people who need home care do not have their needs met (Privalko *et al*, 2019). As previous iterations of this review have evidenced, numbers of people receiving home help and the hours allocated reduced from 2008 and especially from 2010,

and there were still fewer people in receipt of Home Help support in 2017 than there had been in 2008 despite population ageing (see Healy *et al*, 2019).

Amongst the issues that the pandemic has highlighted is fragmentation in how long-term care is provided for older people and the relative detachment from the health service of private nursing homes (see Houses of the Oireachtas Special Committee on Covid-19 Response, 2020). It is to be hoped that the shortcomings in the response to COVID-19 within nursing homes especially in 2020, and the high levels of deaths of residents, might lead to a more community focused approach to long-term care of older people in the future as well as better linkages and oversight between public and private sectors.

The year 2020 saw suspensions of some services (such as Day care) due to the pandemic (HSE, 2021a). The HSE Annual Report for 2020 suggests that 17.5 million hours of home support (combining home care packages and home help but not intensive home care packages) were delivered to some 52,881 people (HSE, 2021a). As Table 7.4. shows, the funding provided and numbers in receipt remain at similar levels to the previous two years. However, the HSE acknowledges that demand for home support continues to exceed the level of service, that resources have not kept pace with population growth or with the increasing support needs of the growing numbers of people aged 80+ (HSE, 2021b: 45). In March 2021, there were 1,601 people waiting for home support funding, but there had been a significant reduction in the number of people waiting on funding over the course of 2020 as a result of several factors including availability of additional funding to address those waiting<sup>2</sup> (HSE, 2021b). However, due to COVID-19 (with related illness amongst clients and staff), considerable numbers of home support services were temporarily suspended - at end March 2021 these numbered 3,327, of which 2,750 were suspended by the client/family and the balance suspended by the HSE, impacting on the total number of hours delivered (HSE, 2021b:45).

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<sup>2</sup> Extra funding for home support made available in Budget 2021 in the context of the pandemic.

**Table 7.4** Support to Older People in the Community and in Nursing Homes

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
<b>Home Support*</b>					
People in Receipt			53,000	51,345	52,881
Hours delivered			17.13m	17.48m	17.5m
<b>Intensive Home Care Packages</b>					
People in Receipt			250	188	149
Hours Delivered			406,000	376,665	
<b>NHSS (Fair Deal) funded places</b>					
Numbers of People	23,142	22,949	23,305	23,629	22,755 <sup>^</sup>
% of 65+ population (approx.)	3.7	3.5	3.5	3.3	3.3 <sup>^</sup>

**Source:** HSE Annual Report and Financial Statements (2012 – 2020).

<sup>^</sup> These figures comes from HSE Management Data Report, Jan 2021.

\* Comprising Home Care Packages and Home Help services; HSE figures were amalgamated for these two services from 2018 making comparison with previous years difficult. For figures for each service from previous years see Healy *et al*, 2019.

Over 60 per cent of the older people's budget goes towards long-term residential care while only approximately 4 per cent of the over 65 population live in residential care settings (Department of Health, 2015:56). People supported by the NHSS (Fair Deal) scheme in 2020 numbered approximately 22,700 (approximately 3.3 per cent of people aged 65+), a proportion that has been relatively static over recent years, as Table 7.4 shows.

A statutory basis for home care has been called for by *Social Justice Ireland* and initiatives taken in this direction in recent years are welcome, but publication of details and implementation are regrettably delayed. Supporting people to live at home requires an integrated approach that ensures access to a range of supports in the home as well as transitional facilities (including step-up, step-down, convalescence, assessment and review, respite and rehabilitation services). To achieve this, deficits in infrastructure need to be addressed urgently with an emphasis on replacement and/or refurbishment of facilities. If this is not done, inappropriate admissions of older people to acute care facilities will continue with consequent negative effects on acute services and on people and their families. Planning and investment are required to meet the challenges presented by population ageing, and also to address the infrastructural deficits created by underinvestment. *Social Justice Ireland* believes that on the capital side, an investment in the order of a total of €500 million over



five years (€100 million each year), is required to meet growing need, including the refurbishment of community nursing facilities, and the rollout of Sláintecare.

### ***Primary Care***

Countries with a strong primary care sector have better health outcomes, greater equity, lower mortality rates and lower overall costs of healthcare (Department of Health, 2016). The development of Primary Care Teams and primary care networks across the country was intended to reduce problems within healthcare provision, and to shift from over-reliance on acute hospital services to a more community based model. Community Healthcare Networks (CHNs) were subsequently envisaged as the fundamental unit of organisation for the delivery of community healthcare with 96 CHNs envisaged across Ireland, each serving a population of 50,000. There are also 91 Children's Disability Networks (CDNs) to be established to align to the 96 CHNs (HSE, 2021b).

*Social Justice Ireland* (2021) acknowledged the commitment in Budget 2022 to progressing CHNs and enhancing community care; however we are concerned that specific funding has not been identified. Moving toward a more community based model will require prioritisation of enhanced community care including the funding and provision of CHNs, Community Specialist Teams and Home Support Services. Greater transparency about their planning and roll-out is also needed. Work done on existing centres and networks is welcome, but more is needed to ensure that they are properly operational, staffed and integrated within the entire system. A comprehensive plan for their implementation should be published identifying how the CHNs will link with mental health and social care services and how collectively these community services will be integrated with acute hospital services as well as other important services at local government, education and wider community level. *Social Justice Ireland* believes that an investment of €150 million is needed to support the infrastructural development and rollout of Community Health Networks.

### ***Children and Family Services***

Even though Ireland's population is ageing rapidly, those aged under 14 represent over one fifth of our population (20.3 per cent in 2020), contrasting with an EU-28 average of 15.1 per cent (Eurostat online database demo\_pjanind). The United Nations has voiced concerns about children's health in Ireland, including about mental health services, health of children in single-parent families, children in poverty and Traveller and Roma children (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2016). There is a need to focus on health and social care provision for children and families in tandem with the development of community services (such as CHNs) and a universal approach to access to healthcare.

Providing universal access to GP care for children under 6 is a welcome development of recent years (as is its proposed extension to those aged 6-7 announced in Budget 2022). However, older children are not yet included. Furthermore, hospital waiting lists remain a significant issue. In January 2022, some 84,916 children were waiting

for an outpatient appointment, of whom over 24,400 were waiting for 18+ months, while over 8,000 children were on hospital inpatient waiting lists (inpatient and day case), of whom over 1,400 were waiting 18+ months (NTPF 2022). There are also large numbers waiting for assessment and treatment in community-based therapeutic services such as physiotherapy and ophthalmology, many of them for more than a year (HSE, 2021b). Another area of concern relates to delays in assessments of need of children with disabilities<sup>3</sup>; those waiting in December 2021, numbered nearly 4,000 (Ombudsman for Children's Office, 2020; 2021).

Turning to mental health issues, the policy *A Vision for Change* (2006) committed to the establishment of specialist Child and Adolescent Mental Health teams (or CAMHS). *A Vision for Change* (revised as per Census 2011 data) recommended the establishment of 129 CAMHS teams, but there are currently only 72 in place (Mental Health Commission, 2022). Additional funding and the development of two additional CAMHS hubs were announced in Budget 2022 and welcomed by *Social Justice Ireland* (2021) but there have been service deficits, delays and problems with funding and implementation in this area over many years.

The Child Care Law Reporting Project (CCLRP) (2021) identifies gaps in the provision of mental health services for children, including cases where children in care did not qualify for a CAMHS response under its diagnostic criteria, and they highlight the need for greater interagency cooperation – between the Tusla and the HSE, including CAMHS.

In addition, waiting lists for CAMHS can be significant; children on the waiting list numbered 2,625 in March 2021 with 282 (over one in 10) waiting for 12+ months and regional variations (HSE 2021b). CAMHS units operate only in three counties nationally, and they generally do not take out-of-hours admissions (Mental Health Commission, 2021). Admitting children and young people to adult units has been roundly criticised by the Mental Health Commission and by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child; regrettably, this practice continues, although numbers involved reduced in 2020 and 2021 (HSE, 2021b; Mental Health Commission, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic compounded weaknesses in child protection services (CCLRP, 2021) and it may also have negatively affected mental health of children and young people; this needs to be a priority area for policies in the future.

Many community and voluntary services are being provided in facilities badly in need of refurbishment or rebuilding. Despite poor infrastructure, these services provide vital services. There is a great need to support such activity and, in particular, to meet its infrastructural requirements.

A range of issues other than those just discussed need attention including issues of child protection, child poverty, youth homelessness, and the issue of young carers.

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<sup>3</sup> An assessment of needs is arranged by the HSE to determine the health or educational services required by a person with a disability.

## *Disability*

Some 13.5 per cent of the population, or 643,121 people, experience disability (Central Statistics Office, 2017a). Disability policy was set out in the 2004 *National Disability Strategy* (and its 2013 implementation plan) and in the *National Disability Inclusion Strategy, 2017-2021*. The HSE developed the *Transforming Lives* programme intended to build better services for people with disabilities. Following recommendations from a Taskforce on Personalised Budgets, demonstration projects were established to examine a model for the roll-out of these payment models. As mentioned already, work is also ongoing relative to establishing a statutory homecare scheme. We are waiting to see whether the schemes that emerge from these processes are capable of contributing to a coordinated, wrap-around model of care.

Disability services, including respite and personal assistant services, have not recovered from cuts made during the last economic crash. Issues have already been highlighted, above, of delays in delivery of assessments of need, of waiting lists for therapies and for community mental health services for children and young people. Research highlights ongoing problems for disabled people in respect of community and home supports; approximately a quarter of disabled people report unmet health care needs due to waiting times, compared to a State average of 14 per cent (CSO, 2020). And, as highlighted already, research suggests that that 34 per cent of disabled adults have unmet needs for home care (Privalko *et al*, 2019). That report also found that compared with other countries, adults with a disability in Ireland receive relatively little formal home care. In addition, almost 1,500 younger people with disabilities were found to be residing in nursing homes in Ireland, in part because community supports are inadequate (Pierse *et al*, 2018).

A report commissioned by government estimates that people with disabilities face average annual costs of disability ranging from €9,482 to €11,734 per annum, and some individuals face considerably higher costs (Indecon, 2021). Additional expense related, amongst other things, to health needs – for equipment, aids and appliances, medicines and care and assistance. The report's findings should inform policy immediately so that people who bear the extra cost of disability are supported in terms of additional income supports, resourced and accessible public services, pathways to employment, and other supports.

Budget 2022 committed extra funding for disability services, which is to include a focus on inappropriate placing of children with disabilities in nursing homes and an investment in residential, respite and personal assistance services, which *Social Justice Ireland* welcomed (2021). However, the amount involved was a significant decrease on that provided in 2021 and we expressed disappointment that no specific provision was made for a multiannual funded plan to meet the State's Commitments under the UN Convention on the rights of people with Disabilities. Despite a range of policy documents over years proposing major changes in the way that disability services are delivered, *Social Justice Ireland* is concerned that the pace of change is too slow. *Social Justice Ireland* called for a dedicated reform fund to

support the transition to a new model of service, given the scale of infrastructural development required to move away from communal settings towards a community based, person-centred model of service.

It goes without saying that disabled people need to be supported, not only by the health service, but also across the range of government and local authority areas of work<sup>4</sup>.

### ***Obesity and Chronic Illness***

Rates of overweight and obesity are higher in Ireland than in most other EU countries (OECD, 2019b). Over half of Irish adults (aged 15+) are overweight or obese (with over a quarter being obese alone) (CSO, 2020). People from lower socio-economic backgrounds experience a greater degree of overweight and obesity, and without change, a significant impact on quality of life, life expectancy and healthcare costs in Ireland is predicted (Layte and McCrory, 2011). The *Growing Up in Ireland* study evidences worsening levels of overweight or obese by age 20 amongst young adults (as compared with age 17/18); obesity risk was greater amongst young women and those from less advantaged backgrounds (O'Mahony *et al*, 2021). Ireland is experiencing high levels of both obesity and food poverty; food poverty affects almost one in eight citizens (Irish Heart Foundation and Social Justice Ireland, 2015).

*Social Justice Ireland* called for a Sugar Sweetened Drinks Tax and welcomed its introduction in Budget 2018 and we have also called for an investment financed by the Sugar Sweetened Drinks tax to develop effective obesity prevention programmes and meet the targets in the Obesity Policy and Action Plan 2016-2025. It is concerning that the latest progress report notes that levels of obesity have stabilised rather continued to decline. We look forward to the outcome of the mid-term review, and a renewed effort to meet the targets by 2025.

### ***Mental Health***

The area of mental health is one requiring urgent attention as already outlined in respect of children's mental health services, discussed above. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased risks of development of mental health conditions across countries, particularly amongst young people and people in lower-income groups, while also adding further stress to mental health services and compounding issues of access to them (OECD/European Union, 2020). The connection between disadvantage and ill health when the social determinants of health (such as housing, income, childcare support, education and so on) are not met is well documented and this is true in respect of mental health issues. So, for example, people in the lowest income group are more than twice as likely to report chronic depression than those in the highest income group across the EU (OECD, 2018). The estimated prevalence of mental health disorders is relatively high in Ireland

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<sup>4</sup> Other disability related issues are addressed throughout this review.

compared with other European countries yet spending on mental health is relatively low (OECD, 2018).

There were 1,687 staff in the General Adult Community Mental Health Service by December 2018, which represents only 74.8 per cent of the clinical staffing levels recommended in the 2006 policy roadmap *A Vision for Change* (HSE, 2018). Ireland has the third lowest number of inpatient psychiatric care beds in the European Union, and while *A Vision for Change* had planned to reduce acute psychiatric hospital beds, the promised alternative services have not been provided in the community (IHCA, 2020). In addition, more than 10,800 people (children and adults) were waiting for treatment from a psychologist in March 2021 with more than half of these waiting for over a year (HSE, 2021b). Overall, the pace of implementation of change is extremely slow and concerning relative to mental health issues.

Many mental health facilities are old, have been neglected and this means that mentally ill people receive treatment in ‘unsuitable, run-down’ centres, and ongoing inappropriate design of mental health facilities, such as shared bathrooms and sleeping accommodation became problematic during the COVID-19 pandemic (Mental Health Commission, 2021: 70,81). In addition, the Inspector of Mental Health highlights continued lack of development of mental health rehabilitation services (rehabilitation meaning an approach to recovery from mental illness that maximizes quality of life and social inclusion). One example relates to recommendations from *A Vision for Change* (2006) to develop 48 rehabilitation teams, whereas in 2019 only 23 poorly staffed teams existed (Finnerty, 2019). Much development continues to be needed in community services including outreach and follow-up programmes for people who have been in-patients, supported housing, retraining and rehabilitation.

Providing good mental health services is a necessary investment in the future wellbeing of the country. Funding has been allocated in recent budgets for mental health services and the implementation of *Sharing the Vision* (Government of Ireland, 2021) and *Social Justice Ireland* welcomed these allocations. However, progress in implementation has continued to be slow related partly to recruitment difficulties. There also needs to be a focus on people who may be particularly vulnerable, including people with intellectual disability homeless people, prisoners, Travellers, asylum seekers, refugees and other minority groups.

### ***Older people and Mental Health***

Approximately 15 per cent of people aged 60+ experience mental illness (including depression, dementia, anxiety, alcohol dependence and schizophrenia) (Mental Health Commission, 2021). Despite population ageing, Ireland lacks a comprehensive, nationwide mental health service for older people; with only 66 percent of the recommended number of specialist teams in place, and with them staffed only at 54 per cent (Mental Health Commission, 2021). The Inspector of Mental Health Services has noted that lack of community support (including of

Day hospitals) increases the probability of dependence on residential care and that we have much lower levels of dedicated acute mental health beds for older people compared with England and Northern Ireland (Mental Health Commission, 2021).

A co-ordinated service needs to be provided to meet the demand occasioned by population ageing. Older people with dementia are a particularly vulnerable group. They are estimated to number between 39,000 and 55,000 people, and the incidence is increasing as the population ages (Pierse, O'Shea and Carney, 2019). Specialist care units are required to care for people with dementia, but their provision is very limited, and there are significant inequities regarding access to them and their geographic location (Cahill *et al*, 2015). A National Dementia Strategy was published in 2014 focused on three priority areas– intensive home care supports, GP education, and training and dementia awareness. In addition, there are many areas that also require investment, including day centres, respite services and other supports for carers, quality long-term care (at home and in care settings) and specialist care units, as well as evaluation and monitoring of all services.

### ***Suicide – a Mental Health Issue***

Suicide is the ultimate, and most deadly, manifestation of mental health issues. The most recently available statistics (which are still provisional) suggest that the overall rate was 6.8 per 100,000 people in 2020 and this was a decrease on the rate for 2019 (8.6 per 100,000 people) and it continued a downward trend from 2012 (National Office of Suicide Prevention, 2021). The numbers affected were 340 people– 259 males, 81 females in 2020 (again, based on provisional figures) (National Office of Suicide Prevention, 2021).

While it is not easy to compare suicide rates among European countries (because of variations in registration/reporting systems), cross-country comparisons suggest that Ireland's rate was 22nd highest for all ages; 16th highest for ages 15 to 19; 23rd highest for ages 50 to 54; and 30th highest for ages 85+ (in all cases out of 33 countries) (National Office of Suicide Prevention, 2021). The Implementation Plan for *Connecting for Life* (Ireland's National Suicide Prevention Strategy 2015-2020) has been extended and a new implementation plan published (2020 to 2022). The National Office for Suicide Prevention (2021) notes that particular attention should be given to the mental health needs of priority groups, including young people, middle-aged men, older people, homeless people, people with pre-existing mental health and physical health conditions, people who have experienced child sexual abuse, and those who experience domestic violence.

The issue of suicide is a significant healthcare and societal problem and the rates amongst some groups raise particular concerns. Of course, the statistics only tell one part of the story. Behind each of these statistics are families and communities devastated by these tragedies as well as a unique personal story which leads to people taking their own lives. *Social Justice Ireland* believes that further attention and resources need to be devoted to researching and addressing Ireland's suicide problem.

## 7.4 Key Policy Priorities on Healthcare

Factors highlighted throughout this review will have implications for the future of our healthcare system, including projected ageing of our population. As an ESRI report concluded, two decades of rapid population growth, a decade of cutbacks in public provision of care and a consequent build-up of unmet need and demand for care, will require additional expenditure, capital investment and expanded staffing and will have major implications for capacity planning, workforce planning and training (Wren *et al.*, 2017).

As already mentioned, *Social Justice Ireland* welcomed the recognition within Sláintecare that Ireland's health system should be built on foundations of primary care and social care. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted shortcomings in our healthcare system across a range of areas and also demonstrated how vital an integrated public system of care is, with health care workers having been at the heart of the response to challenges unprecedented in living memory. We cannot return to a two-tier healthcare system and access to healthcare based on need, not income, should remain an important aim for Ireland's healthcare system. Furthermore, investment in a reconfigured model of healthcare is overdue, one that emphasises primary and social care. In the context of our past mistakes, it is important that Ireland begins to plan for this additional demand and begins to train staff and construct the needed facilities. It is also necessary for leadership that communicates the need to invest in reform now so that the necessary services are in place to enable us to afterwards shift to a different model of care that emphasises primary care more. We need to ring-fence the COVID costs incurred in 2020 and 2021 for the investment required, financed with a very long-term low-interest loan (30 to 50 years) provided by the EU and the European Central Bank.

The following is a summary of key policy priorities and actions that *Social Justice Ireland* recommends:

- Ensure that announced budgetary allocations are valid, realistic and transparent and that they take existing commitments into account.
- Complete the roll-out of the Community Health Networks across the country and thus increase the availability and quality of Primary Care and Social Care services.
- Ensure medical card-coverage for all people who are vulnerable.
- Act effectively to end the current hospital waiting list crisis.
- Create a statutory entitlement to Home Care Services. This will require increased funding, but will save the State money long-term, as home support allows people to remain living in their own homes, rather than entering residential nursing care.

- Create additional respite care and long-stay care facilities for older people and people with disabilities and provide capital investment to build additional community nursing facilities.
- Implement all aspects of the dementia strategy.
- Increase educational campaigns promoting health, targeting particularly people who are economically disadvantaged, acknowledging that a preventative approach saves money in the long-run.
- Properly resource and develop mental health services, and facilitate campaigns giving greater attention to the issue of suicide.
- Adopt a target to reduce the body mass index (BMI) of the population by 5 per cent by 2025.
- Work towards full universal healthcare for all. Ensure new system structures are fit for purpose and publish detailed evidence of how new decisions taken will meet healthcare goals.
- Enhance the process of planning and investment so that the healthcare system can cope with the increase and diversity in population and the ageing of the population projected for the next few decades.
- Ensure that structural and systematic reform of the health system reflects key principles aimed at achieving high performance, person-centred quality of care and value for money in the health service.



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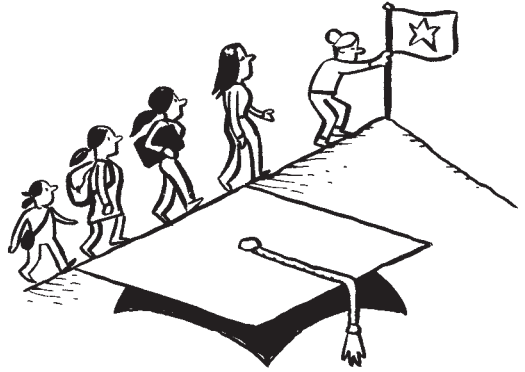
## Chapter eight

## Chapter 8

### Education and Educational Disadvantage

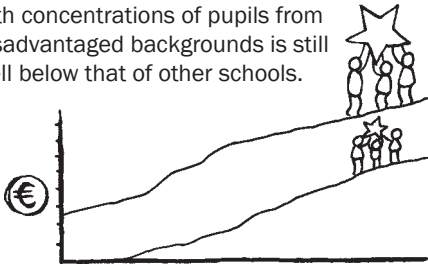
#### Core Policy Objective:

To provide relevant education for all people throughout their lives, so that they can participate fully and meaningfully in developing themselves, their community and the wider society.

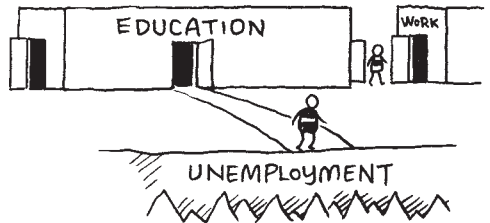


#### Key Issues/Evidence

Despite some progress, the achievement of pupils in schools with concentrations of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds is still well below that of other schools.



The longer a person stays in education the more likely they are to be in employment. The risk of unemployment increases considerably the lower the level of education.



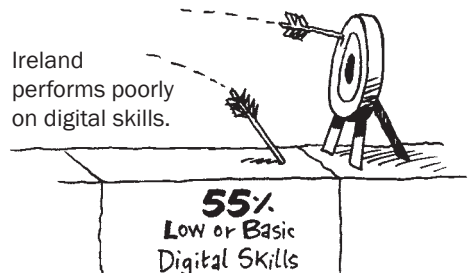
Ireland has the second lowest expenditure on ECCE for 3 to 5 year olds in the OECD.



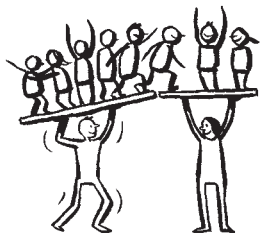
Ireland still has a low take up of lifelong learning compared to rest of EU.



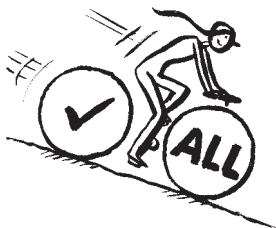
Ireland performs poorly on digital skills.



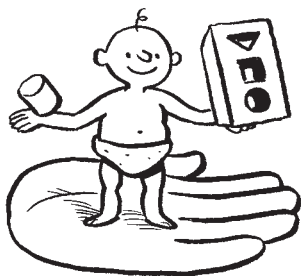
## Policy Solutions



Commit to reducing class sizes and pupil teacher ratios at primary and post primary level by 1 point per annum to 2030.



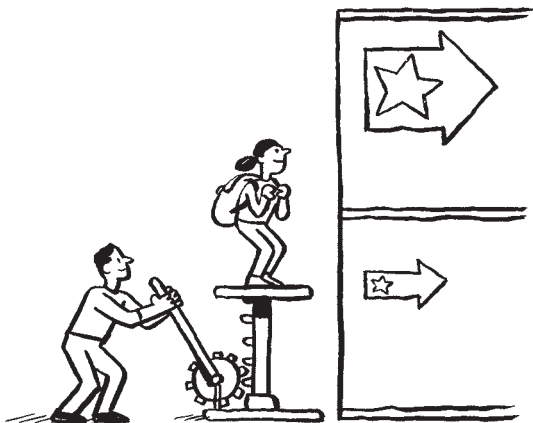
Fully resource 'Adult Literacy for Life'.



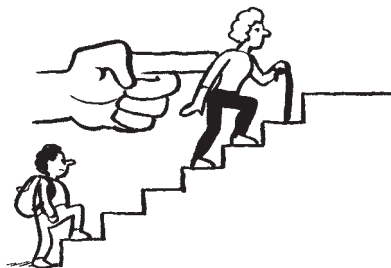
Commit to increasing investment in Early Childhood Care and Education by 0.1 per cent of GDP annually to reach 1 per cent of GDP by 2027.



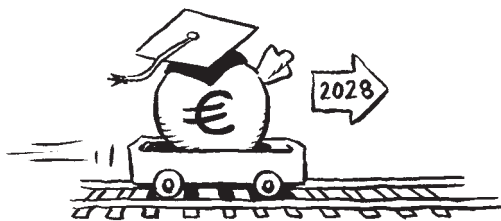
To meet the digital and green transitions develop an integrated skills development, vocational training, apprenticeship and reskilling strategy.



Make the improvement of educational outcomes for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and disadvantaged communities a policy priority.



Revise our lifelong learning target to reach 15 per cent by 2022 and to reach 20 per cent by 2026, ensuring sufficient resources are made available.



Develop a framework to deliver sustainable funding revenues for higher education over the next five years with a roadmap to 2028.

## 8.

## EDUCATION AND EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE

### **Core Policy Objective: EDUCATION & EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE**

To provide relevant education for all people throughout their lives, so that they can participate fully and meaningfully in developing themselves, their community and the wider society.

The impact of education, particularly to improve the lives of the most disadvantaged, cannot be overstated. It is a Constitutionally-protected right for all and contributes to the well-being of our citizens.

Access to appropriate education and skills development from early years to adulthood is one of the key public services that enables participation in society, public life and the labour market. The potential impact of digital transition on the labour market makes access to education and training throughout adulthood a priority. It forms a key element of our Wellbeing Framework for a new Social Contract outlined in chapter 2.

The focus of our education system must be to ensure people are engaged and active citizens and have the necessary critical and creative skills to navigate an ever-changing employment environment, can adapt to transitions as they occur and participate fully in society. This is especially important for children and young people today who have had their education disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, who, upon leaving formal education, will be entering a very different employment landscape to their parents, and will face the challenges and opportunities presented by the digital and green transitions

To achieve this core policy objective in the years ahead, *Social Justice Ireland* believes that policy should:

- Make the improvement of educational outcomes for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and disadvantaged communities a policy



priority, with additional resources focused on addressing the persistence of educational disadvantage.

- Commit to increasing investment in Early Childhood Care and Education by 0.1 per cent of GDP annually to reach 1 per cent of GDP by 2027.
- Commit to reducing class sizes and pupil teacher ratios at primary and post primary level by 1 point per annum to 2030.
- Revise our lifelong learning target to reach 15 per cent by 2022 and to reach 20 per cent by 2026, ensuring sufficient resources are made available.
- To meet the digital and green transition challenges develop an integrated skills development, digital transition, vocational training, apprenticeship and reskilling strategy.
- Fully resource ‘Adult Literacy for Life’ by increasing the adult literacy budget to €100 million by 2030, including €25 million to improve ancillary and support services.
- Develop a framework to deliver sustainable funding revenues for higher education over the next five years with a roadmap to 2028.

## 8.1 Key Evidence

### *Education in Ireland – enrolments*

According to the Department of Education there were just over 1,133,829 full-time students in the formal Irish education system for the academic year 2021/2022. At primary level there are 546,121 students, at second level there are 391,703 students and 196,005 students are at third level (Department of Education, 2021 & 2021a). Numbers at primary level peaked in 2019 and are projected to decline to a low of 440,551 by 2033 and rise again thereafter reaching 474,888 enrolments by 2040 (Department of Education, 2021b). At second level, enrolments have risen by eight per cent over the past five years and are projected to rise sharply in the coming years, peaking in 2024 with 408,794 pupils, and falling gradually thereafter (Department of Education, 2021b).<sup>1</sup> At third level, the number of students is expected to increase annually between 2018 and 2030, peaking at 222,514 fulltime enrolments (Department of Education, 2018a). In terms of employment, numbers working in the overall education sector is projected to reach 116,000 in 2021, an increase of 9 per cent in seven years (PBO, 2021).

A reduction in student numbers does not necessarily mean a corresponding reduction in expenditure. The publication of a technical paper on developing a teacher demand and supply model is a useful first step in planning to meet current and future demands (Department of Education, 2021c). A surplus of teachers at

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<sup>1</sup> There are significant regional variations within the projections at primary and post primary level.

primary and post primary level is projected in 2036 if no actions are taken now. Potentially we can implement policy instruments now to reduce our class sizes (particularly at primary level), reduce pupil teacher ratios, and ensure that demand and supply are managed appropriately. It is important that as student intake changes, existing resources are used to address persistent challenges within the education system such as pupil teacher ratios and addressing educational disadvantage which persists in our education systems. In addition, mitigating the impacts of Covid induced school closures, especially for students already experiencing disadvantage requires a long-term response beyond the Covid Learning and Supports Scheme launched in 2021.

While expenditure on education has increased in recent Budgets, it is worth noting that this increase in expenditure has been necessary to simply keep pace with existing demand, there are still areas within our education system which require reform and indeed further resourcing. Government should use these projections to ensure that our education system has all the resources that it requires to meet our national ambitions, current and future needs and to address the challenges outlined in this chapter.

### ***Expenditure on Education***

Expenditure on education in Ireland is not keeping pace with the increased number of students. Between 2010 and 2015 expenditure per student decreased by 15 per cent in primary to post-primary non-tertiary education and by 21 per cent in tertiary education while the number of students increased by 9 per cent and 13 per cent respectively (OECD, 2018:4). Increased funding capital and current expenditure on education announced in the most recent Budget, while welcome, is insufficient to both meet current and future demands and address the previous shortfall. Ireland ranks in last place out of 36 developed countries for investment in education as a measure of our gross domestic product (GDP), according to latest OECD data. In 2018, Ireland spent 3.3% of GDP on primary to tertiary educational institutions, which is 1.6 percentage points lower than the OECD average. Across levels of education, Ireland devoted a lower share of GDP than the OECD average at both non-tertiary and tertiary levels. (OECD, 2021). Notwithstanding the challenges associated with GDP, it is clear that the adequate resourcing of education across all levels remains a concern.

It is clear that a significant increase in funding is required if Ireland is to have a high-quality education system that provides relevant education and training throughout the lifecycle.

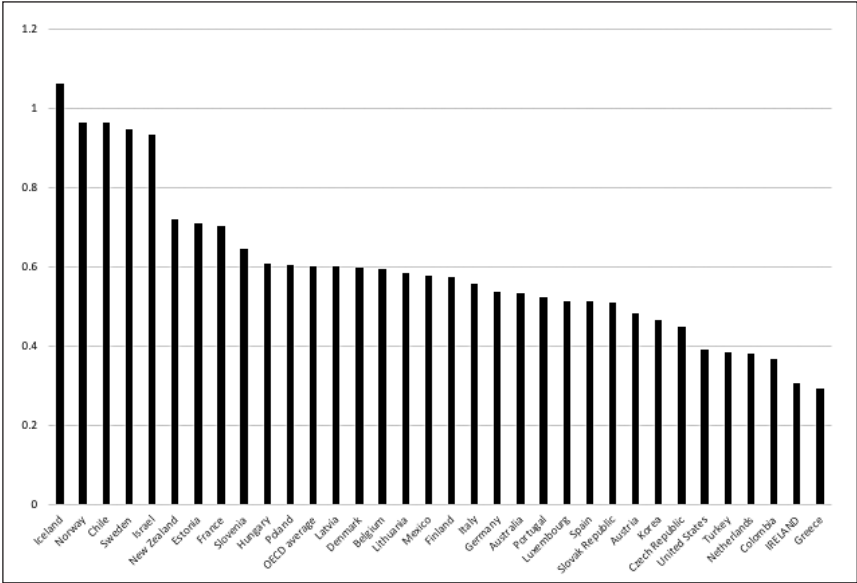
### ***Early Childhood Care and Education***

The most striking feature of investment in education in Ireland relative to other OECD countries is its under-investment in early childhood education. In consecutive studies, Ireland has one of the lowest levels of expenditure in pre-primary education in the OECD. Ireland has the highest level of private provision of Early Childhood Care and Education in the OECD, although it is mainly financed

by public sources (OECD, 2019) along with relatively low Government investment, low wages for educators and high fees for consumers (Oireachtas Library Research Service, 2020).

Looking at expenditure on education for three to five year olds in the OECD, Ireland had the second lowest amount of expenditure at 0.3 per cent of GDP (see Chart 8.1) despite a trebling of public investment in childcare programmes between 2011 and 2016. In comparison, Iceland, Norway and Sweden spent between 1.1 and 0.9 per cent of GDP.

**Chart 8.1** Expenditure on all children aged 3-5 years enrolled in early childhood education and care (ECEC) and primary education, as a percentage of GDP (2018)



Source: OECD (2021).

Early childhood is the stage where education can most effectively influence the development of children and help reverse disadvantage (European Commission, 2011). Pupils who had access to quality early childhood education perform better On PISA<sup>2</sup> testing than those who did not attend pre-primary education, even allowing for differences in their socio-economic backgrounds (OECD, 2016:233).

<sup>2</sup> Programmes for International Student Assessment (PISA) assesses the preparedness of 15-year-olds to meet the challenges they may encounter in their future lives, including education.

International evidence indicates that in countries where there is primarily public provision of early childhood care and education it tends to be more affordable, accessible, and of higher quality than in private provision countries (Oireachtas L&RS, 2020). One of the key challenges identified towards the provision of universal early childcare in Ireland is the market driven approach to provision at present. High staff turnover and poor pay and conditions are also a feature of the sector (Early Childhood Ireland, 2020). A review of Early Years Education published by the Department of Education and Skills (2018) found that while almost all services provide warm and welcoming environments and strong evidence of positive relations was found between the staff, the children and their families, there remained many challenges including the need to improve working conditions for staff in the sector.

A well-resourced and integrated policy is required to address the issues raised in the review and to deliver high quality early years learning provision for children and their families. 'First 5: A Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families' contains welcome high-level policy commitments and strategic actions. In order to deliver on the commitment of all children having access to safe, high-quality, developmentally appropriate early childhood education, long-term planning and sufficient resourcing are vital to embed quality and deliver on this commitment.

### *Primary Level*

Ireland has a pupil teacher ratio (PTR) at primary level of 15.2 (the EU average is 13.6) and an average class size of 23.3 (the EU average is 20). As smaller class sizes make the biggest difference to the youngest classes, Government policy must ensure that the PTR in the youngest classes in primary school is at a level which allows teachers to provide early interventions without disruption. This is essential to ensure the best educational outcomes for all children and a smooth transition from early years settings to the formal education system. Reduced class sizes and PTR are also necessary for the success of the Covid Learning Supports Scheme and other policies designed to mitigate the impact of interrupted learning in 2020 and 2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The number of children with special needs at primary level in Ireland increased by 63 per cent between 2014 and 2018 (Department of Education and Skills, 2019a). The School Inclusion Model Pilot is designed to provide the particular supports these children require, although families still face significant challenges finding places for their children. An area of concern that has emerged is the number of children with special educational needs on short school days.

Research found one in four children with an intellectual disability or developmental disability has been put on a short school day (Brennand & Browne, 2019). The report outlined the detrimental impact that this is having on children with additional needs, their education and on their families. Notwithstanding the increases in investment in Special Needs Education in recent Budgets, clearly much more

remains to be done in order to meet demand, mitigate the impact of extended school closures, and to support schools to ensure that they have the required number of staff with appropriate qualifications, and the necessary programmes, supports and resources to meet the needs of this cohort of pupils. In terms of planning and resourcing, it is vital that all departmental projections take into account the needs of this cohort as they move from primary level to post primary and beyond.

Ireland performed well in the 2019 TIMSS (an assessment of mathematics and science) and fourth class students in 2019 were among the top three performing countries at mathematics. In terms of reading skills, Ireland performed extremely well in the 2016 PIRLS<sup>3</sup> assessment of reading skills, ranking fourth of the fifty countries who participated in reading skills, and third in reading skills in an online environment. The outcomes for disadvantaged students are not as positive.

The gap between the performance of students in disadvantaged areas and their peers is also evident in results on education and cognitive development from the Growing up in Ireland survey which found significant differences in reading test scores by socio-economic background and that this socio-economic gap in reading test scores widened in primary school, with children from disadvantaged backgrounds who were early high performers being outperformed by children from more advantaged backgrounds by 9 years of age (Government of Ireland, 2021).

The Action Plan for Education (DES, 2019b) focuses on the need to address the disparity between DEIS<sup>4</sup> bands by increasing literacy and numeracy levels in DEIS Band 1 schools. The target improvement rates of between 27 and 42 per cent by 2020 do not demonstrate sufficient ambition to really effect change and many young adults will have fallen out of education into low-paid precarious employment before even these targets are met. The forthcoming update of this action plan should include more ambitious targets. In terms of policy, the focus must be on keeping average class sizes below 20 (as per ERC findings discussed in this chapter), reducing the pupil teacher ratio further and ensuring all DEIS Band 1 and 2 schools have sufficient resources to implement strategies to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes for pupils.

### ***Second-level Education***

Irish second-level students performed very well in the 2019 PISA tests in reading, literacy, mathematics and science, scoring above the OECD average in all three domains. In reading and literacy Ireland ranked 4<sup>th</sup> out of 36 OECD countries.

- In reading literacy, 11.8 per cent of students in Ireland perform below Proficiency Level 2 (the OECD considers Level 2 to be the baseline proficiency for all three domains) implying they have insufficient reading

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<sup>3</sup> PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) is an international assessment of reading achievement of fourth class pupils.

<sup>4</sup> Delivering Equality of Opportunity In Schools

skills to deal with future needs in real-life or further education. This is some distance from the revised Literacy and Numeracy Strategy target of 8.5 per cent of students performing below Level 2 in PISA.

- In Science, 17 per cent of students performed below Level 2 – higher than the target of 10 per cent set out in the Action Plan for Education 2016-2019, to be achieved by 2025. These students can recognise basic scientific phenomena or simple patterns in data but lack the scientific skills and knowledge they may require in their future lives.
- In mathematics, 15.7 per cent of students in Ireland performed below Level 2, indicating that they lacked the mathematical knowledge and skills required for future education and work. This is well above the 10.5 per cent set out in the revised targets of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy.

Across the three domains, Ireland has below average proportions of low-performing students. Nevertheless, many students have insufficient skills to deal with future needs in real life, to participate in further education or employment. We are still some distance away from achieving the targets set out in the Action Plan for Education and a substantial gap remains between students in DEIS and non-DEIS schools. An analysis of trends in PISA achievement indicates that in reading, mathematics and science, students in DEIS schools have consistently achieved significantly lower average achievement than students in non-DEIS schools across all PISA cycles examined (Gilleece, 2020). While the size of the gap has narrowed significantly in reading, it has not changed significantly in mathematics or science. Some of the findings from this analysis are:

### **Reading**

- In DEIS schools, just over one-fifth of students (21.8 per cent) achieved a reading score below Level 2, more than twice the rate in non-DEIS schools (9 per cent). Such students are considered low achievers by the OECD.
- One quarter of boys (23.9 per cent) in DEIS schools have reading skills described by the OECD as inadequate for future study and work (below Level 2).

### **Mathematics**

- The average mathematics performance of students in DEIS schools is significantly lower than the OECD average, while students in non-DEIS schools had an average mathematics score significantly above the OECD average.
- The average mathematics performance of students attending DEIS schools was significantly lower than that of students in non-DEIS schools and the percentage of students categorised as low achievers in mathematics in DEIS schools (28 per cent) is more than double that of non-DEIS schools (12 per cent).

## Science

- Students attending DEIS schools had an average science score that was significantly lower than the OECD average while students in non-DEIS school had an average score significantly above the OECD average.
- The percentage of low achieving students in science in DEIS schools (28.2 per cent) is more than double that of non-DEIS schools (13.5 per cent).

Despite steady progress, significant variations in proficiency remain in Ireland between students in DEIS and non-DEIS schools. The main gains made by DEIS schools were between 2009 and 2012, where the percentage of low achievers in reading dropped from 35.4 per cent to 21.8 per cent, but progress has stalled since then. Students attending DEIS schools continue to score much lower on all three domains, pointing to the need to continue to focus resources on addressing educational disadvantage. Conversely students from fee paying schools continue to significantly out-perform those from non-fee paying schools, scoring considerably higher than students in non-fee paying schools on all three domains (McKeown et al, 2019). Despite the gains made between 2009 and 2012 there has been limited progress towards meeting the literacy and numeracy sub targets for DEIS schools set out in the Action Plan for Education (Gilleece, 2020).

- The targets for high achievers in reading (at or above Level 5) is 8 per cent. Despite a modest increase between 2015 (4.7 per cent) and 2018 (5.5 per cent) in the percentage of high reading achievers in DEIS schools progress has been limited and this target is unlikely to be achieved.
- There is also limited evidence of progress towards the target for the percentages at or above Level 4 in reading (2020 target 26 per cent), given that the percentage in 2015 was 21.4 per cent and in 2018, 21.2 per cent.
- There has been a positive and significant reduction in the percentage of students in DEIS schools at the lowest levels of proficiency in mathematics. In 2012, about three in eight students (37 per cent) in DEIS schools had mathematics scores below Level 2, by 2015 this had reduced to 29 per cent, and to just over one in four (28 per cent) in 2018. Despite improvements, progress has stalled and achieving the target for 2020 (23 per cent) will be challenging.
- There has been no increase in the percentages of students in DEIS schools performing at the highest levels in mathematics across PISA cycles. In particular, the percentage of students at or above Level 5 in mathematics in 2015 (4.7 per cent) is not significantly different to that in 2018 (3.6 per cent). Achieving the target for 2020 (9 per cent) will be extremely challenging.

Students from DEIS schools also score lower on wellbeing indicators (ERC, 2021). They score significantly lower in terms of home possessions, home educational resources, cultural possessions and family wealth than their peers in non-DEIS schools.

Progress on meeting the targets set out in the *National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2017-2021* at second-level is slower than that at primary level. However, the impact of measures in the strategy to improve literacy and numeracy at second-level (including Project Maths) is reflected in the improvements in the PISA results between 2012, 2015 and 2018. The strategy also proposes fundamental changes to teacher education and the curriculum in schools and radical improvements in the assessment and reporting of progress at student, school and national level. Progress on this issue is overdue, and budgetary and economic constraints must not be allowed to impede the implementation of the strategy.

Reform of the education system at second-level is being implemented with the phased replacement of the Junior Certificate examination with the Junior Cycle Student Award, incorporating a school-based approach to assessment. *Social Justice Ireland* welcomes the emphasis on learners thinking for themselves, being creative in solving problems and applying their learning to new challenges and situations. It is important that the recently announced reform of the senior cycle and leaving certificate deliver a truly student-centred approach in the second-level education system<sup>5</sup>. The findings of the senior cycle review undertaken by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment have not yet been published. The impact of the pandemic on the leaving certificate and the CAO system points to the need for substantial action and reform. Any reform of the system must address the widening gap between DEIS and non-DEIS schools in terms of students taking higher level course (McCoy et al, 2019). This reform must also take a broader view of access to further and higher education and explore pathways beyond the leaving certificate. *Social Justice Ireland* supports the provision of extra resources to DEIS schools to ensure that all students, but particularly those in disadvantaged areas, have equality of opportunity once they complete their second level education.

There has been an increase in retention rates in junior and senior cycle in DEIS post primary schools and an increase in the proportion of students in DEIS schools taking Higher Level papers in English and Mathematics. The fact that the achievement and attainment gaps between DEIS and non-DEIS post primary schools is closing is very positive. However significant gaps still exist and this is a cause for concern. One of the key findings of this report echoes that of the evaluation of DEIS at primary level; that many of the achievement gaps that still exist have their basis in income inequality (Weir and Kavanagh, 2019).

It is clear the disadvantaged students will suffer greater impacts due to the disruption that Covid-19 caused to learning (Social Justice Ireland, 2021). Much of the progress made addressing educational disadvantage to date will be reversed unless the appropriate policies and investment are put in place. Policy makers must give serious consideration as to how the lost learning of students at all levels of education will be made up in the long-term.

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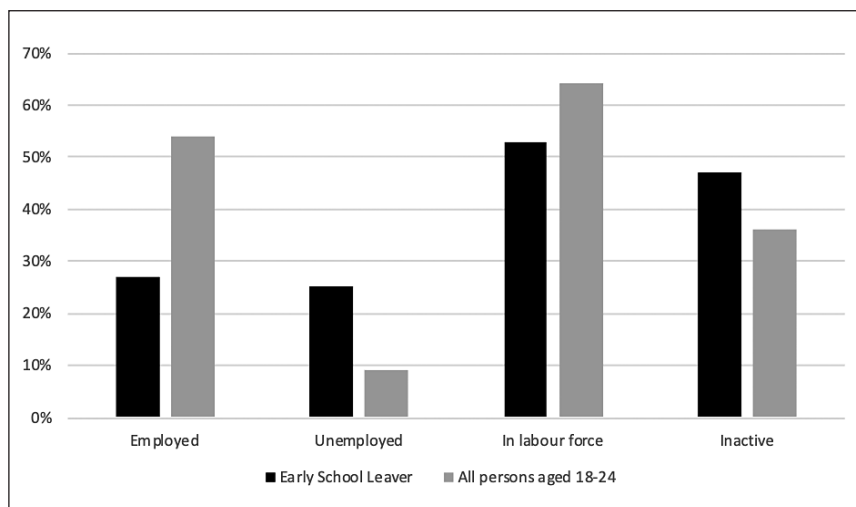
<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/f7bf7-minister-foley-announces-plan-for-reform-of-senior-cycle-education-equity-and-excellence-for-all/>



### Early School Leaving

Ireland has the fourth lowest early school leaving rate in the European Union at five per cent and Ireland ranked second in the European Union for the percentage of people aged 20-24 with at least upper-second level education at 94 per cent (CSO, 2019). This downward trend of early school leaving is a welcome development and Ireland has surpassed the national target set under the Europe 2020 Strategy.

**Chart 8.2:** Labour Market Status for Early School Leavers and total population 18-24 year olds Q2 2019



Source: (CSO, 2019).

According to the CSO, (see Chart 8.2) an early school leaver is three times as likely to be unemployed than the general population aged 18-24. Only one in four of them are in employment compared to the general population for that age group and just under half (47 per cent) are not economically active. A further report by the CSO (2019b) analysed the outcomes for students who started second level education in 2011 – 2013. When comparing early school leavers to those who completed the Leaving Certificate, the report found that just 43.8 per cent of early school leavers were in employment compared to 74 per cent of their peers who finished school, and that the median earnings for early school leavers were €65 less than their peers (€345 per week compared to €410 per week). These figures are a cause of concern. The poor labour market status of early school leavers points to the need for a continued focus on this cohort and on addressing educational disadvantage. As we move towards a future where digital transformation will disrupt the labour market, having the greatest impact on people with lower levels of education and skills (OECD, 2019b), it is important that this cohort are not left behind.

Ireland also faces challenges in the area of young people not engaged in employment, education or training (NEETs) in disadvantaged areas. The impact of Covid-19 in terms of disrupting access to education and employment opportunities will likely make it more challenging for the younger generation to maintain quality jobs and income (OECD, 2020b). Providing support and opportunities for young people not engaged in employment, education or training must be a priority for Government or we risk creating a generational divide. The gap between retention rates in DEIS and non-DEIS schools has halved since 2001, but it still stands at 8.5 per cent.<sup>6</sup> Government must work to ensure that schools in disadvantaged areas are supported to bring the rate of early school leavers to below Ireland's country-specific target of 8 per cent under the EU2020 Strategy and towards the national rate of 4 per cent. Overall, we believe that the situation calls for a long-term policy response, which would encompass alternative approaches aimed at ensuring that people who leave school early have alternative means to acquire the skills required to progress in employment and to participate in society. The recent Action Plan for Increasing Traveller Participation in Higher Education contains a welcome broader view of access and recognises the need to support traditional and non-traditional routes to higher education. A wide range of access options to education and training is pertinent when it comes to dealing with the issue of early school leaving.

The longer a person stays in education the more likely they are to be in employment. The risk of unemployment increases considerably the lower the level of education. Participation in high quality education has benefits not only for young people themselves but also for taxpayers and society. These benefits typically last over the course of an individual's lifetime. Adults with a tertiary degree in Ireland earn on average 81 per cent more than adults with upper secondary education. They are also more likely to be employed, the employment rate is 11 percentage points higher for degree holders than for those with an upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education (OECD, 2019a). Socio-economic disadvantage also follows a student throughout the education system with younger graduates from more affluent areas earning around €2,000 more a year on average than their peers from disadvantaged areas. Even when controlling for different factors, graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds earn more than €600 less after graduation than others (HEA, 2020:129). This underscores the value of investing in education at all stages, and the particular importance of investing in early childhood education, and a continued focus on tackling educational disadvantage. The benefits of investing in education, both to the individual, to the economy and to society, far outweigh any initial outlay of resources. This is something that should be at the forefront of decisions regarding the investment and resourcing of our education system as a whole.

The OECD PIAAC (Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies) study found that the children of parents with low levels of education

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/Key-Statistics/education-indicators-for-ireland.pdf>

have significantly lower proficiency than those whose parents have higher levels of education, thus continuing the cycle of disadvantage.<sup>7</sup> The challenge posed by this intergenerational transmission of disadvantage are outlined in recent research. An OECD report on education in Ireland (OECD 2018) found that the educational attainment levels of 25-64 year olds are very similar to that of their parents and that 40 per cent of adults whose parents did not attain upper secondary education had also not completed upper secondary education. A report from the CSO (2020b) on the intergenerational transmission of disadvantages found that those who had experienced educational disadvantage in their teens were more likely to be at risk of poverty or experiencing enforced deprivation than their wealthier peers in adulthood. In line with OECD findings on educational attainment the report found that three in ten (30.6 per cent) of those whose parents finished their education at lower secondary level also left school at the same point. Of those whose parents ceased their education at lower secondary level, 16.2 per cent were at risk of poverty as adults compared with 6.2 per cent of adults whose parents completed third level. Educational level attained is linked to earnings and earning potential as well as being one of the most important individual factors in reducing the risk of poverty for adults and, as this educational level seems to be linked across generations, it is important for reducing child and household poverty.

### *Higher Education*

Full-time enrolment in higher education has increased by almost 33 per cent in the last decade to 186,890 students (DES, 2018b) and numbers are projected to reach 222,514 by 2030. An increasing population of school-leavers demands that considerable investment is required to ensure that the higher education sector in Ireland can continue to cope. However public funding for higher education in Ireland has been decreasing since 2009 despite steadily increasing enrolments both full- and part-time. The Parliamentary Budget Office, in a recent report on tertiary Education Funding in Ireland (PBO, 2019), estimates that funding per undergraduate student (full-time, part-time, remote and FETAC) enrolled in 2019 was 50 per cent lower than in 2008. The report presents a clear and detailed outline of the challenges facing the sector. The report recommends that any increases in State funding are accompanied by the recommended administrative reforms. Crucially it recommends that funding be sourced from sustainable revenues to prevent a repetition of the cuts to funding seen during the last economic and fiscal crisis.

Little if any progress has been made on the issue of funding for the higher education sector, despite the publication of two separate reviews into the issue. The final report of the Expert Group on Future Funding of Higher Education in Ireland (2016) recommended three funding options for consideration by Government: (i) a pre-dominantly state-funded system; (ii) increased state funding with continuing upfront student fees; and (iii) increased state funding with deferred payment of fees (student loans). The report concluded that an additional €1 billion in annual

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/Ireland.pdf>

funding would be needed by 2030 to sustain and improve provision of higher education in Ireland, with €600m of this required by 2021. Despite increases in funding in recent Budgets an additional €600m has not been invested in the sector in 2021. An estimation of the value of the higher education sector to the economy found that every €1 invested generates a return of approximately €9.<sup>8</sup> Without certainty regarding funding, the necessary reforms and innovations required in further and higher education will not succeed.

At the request of Government and the Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills, the European Commission is now conducting an economic evaluation of the funding options in the Cassells Report, a report from the Commission (DG REFORM) was delivered in May 2021, the contents have not been published and no decision has yet been made on the recommendations.<sup>9</sup> We are no closer to developing a strategy to fund the sector. Substantial changes to the funding model are required, and regardless of what funding model or option is chosen, a significant increase in State funding will be required.

### ***Further Education and Training***

Further Education and Training and Lifelong Learning should play an integral role in the lives of people in the labour force to prepare people for the impact of digitalisation and to enable them to take full advantage of potential opportunities. The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (2018) examined the potential impacts of digitalisation on the workforce in Ireland. One in three jobs in Ireland has a high risk of being disrupted by digital technologies, although the report points out that this is more likely to mean changes to job roles and tasks rather than job losses. The sectors most at risk are retail, transport, hospitality, agriculture and manufacturing.

The most significant finding for policy is that the jobs at highest risk are elementary, low-skilled occupations and the impact is most likely to be felt by people with lower levels of educational attainment. These findings are reinforced by the SOLAS Quarterly Skills Bulletin on Older Workers Q2 2019 which found that technological change will have the greatest impact on people employed in elementary, administrative, sales and operative roles and that approximately one third (146,300) of workers aged 50-59 are employed in these occupations.

The report concluded that measures must be taken to protect older workers from the threat of technological changes in the workplace. A further report on automation risk and the labour market (SOLAS, 2020), which identified six occupational groups in particular which have large numbers of employees whose roles were at risk of automation. These groups are operatives & elementary, sales & customer service, administrative & secretarial, hospitality, agriculture & animal care and transport & logistics. The report concludes that the future world of work will require significant

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.iua.ie/publications/iua-budget-submission-2020/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2021-11-30/97/>

upskilling/ reskilling opportunities across all areas of the labour market to meet the challenges and opportunities posed by automation in the workplace.

Apprenticeships and Traineeships are an essential part of the Further Education and Training System in Ireland. One of the five high level objective of the Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021-2025 is that the profile of the apprenticeship population will more closely reflect the profile of the general population. the focus on increased participation of students from disadvantaged backgrounds and other specific target groups is very welcome. The age profile of apprentices in Ireland is young compared to other countries and is predominantly taken up by those of an age when second level education is completed. In 2018, 45 per cent were under 19 and 40 per cent aged 20 to 24 years. Just 10 per cent were aged 25-29 and only 5 per cent aged 30 or over. By comparison in England 21 per cent of the apprenticeship population is over 35. The age profile of those engaging in apprenticeships and traineeships requires closer scrutiny as this is an area that has the potential to address many of the challenges a digital transformation will bring. *Social Justice Ireland* is disappointed that the age profile was not expanded in the Action Plan.

### ***Lifelong Learning***

Lifelong learning has an important contribution to make to people's wellbeing, to creating a more inclusive society and to supporting a vibrant and sustainable economy (Department of Education and Skills, 2017). The non-vocational element of lifelong learning and community education also brings major social and health benefits to participants outside the labour force.

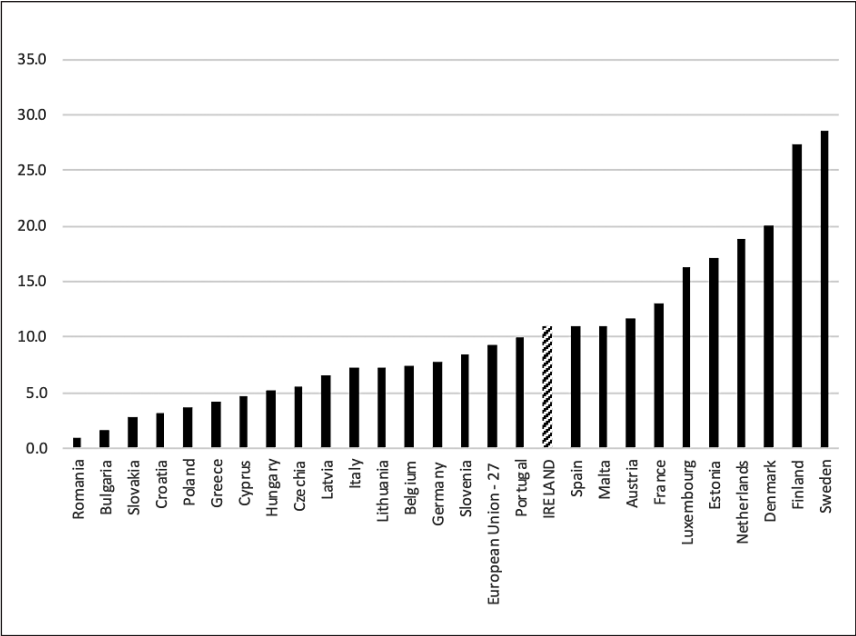
Access to lifelong learning should be an integral part of the education system in order to address the income and labour market challenges that some members of society face. It also must be accessible and flexible to address the challenges which were identified in the Adult Skills Survey, those of unmet demand and being difficult to access.<sup>10</sup> Various agencies (European Commission, Expert Group on Future Skills Needs) identify generic skills and key competences as a core element of the lifelong learning framework. These include basic skills such as literacy, numeracy, digital competence, language skills, people-related and conceptual skills, critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, risk assessment and decision making.

Ireland's lifelong learning participation rate is slowly improving, it rose to 13 per cent in 2019 but fell back to 11 per cent in 2020 (see Chart 8.3). Our national target is to reach 15 per cent by 2025 as set out in the National Skills Strategy. As progress is being made, Government should consider revising this target to reach 15 per cent by 2023 and to reach 20 per cent by 2026.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/aes/adulteducationsurvey2017/>

**Chart 8.3** EU-28 Lifelong Learning Participation Rates, 2020



Source: Eurostat (2022).

Those engaged in lifelong learning are more likely to be professionals than low-skilled operatives and employed in public administration, professional services and finance. These sectors are more likely to provide in-house training, continuous professional development and have policies for subsidising education, than the retail or construction sectors. Employers must be encouraged and incentivised to participate in the development of any lifelong learning strategies. This not only supports the development of the employee but contributes to the retention rate and effectiveness of the business, which in turn reduces the costs associated with hiring and developing new staff.

*Adult Literacy*

Literacy is defined as the capacity to understand, use and reflect critically on written information, the capacity to reason mathematically and use mathematical concepts, procedures and tools to explain and predict situations, and the capacity to think scientifically and to draw evidence-based conclusions (OECD, 2015). The OECD PIAAC study (2013) is the only current measure of adult literacy in Ireland and provides at least a basis for discussion of this important issue. The data on adult literacy and numeracy is dated and we welcome the fact that work has commenced

on the delayed 2021-2022 round of PIAAC. In order to implement the correct policies in this area up to date data is required.

According to the evidence we have from the 2013 PIAAC study, Ireland is placed 17th out of 24 countries in terms of literacy, with 18 per cent of Irish adults having a literacy level at or below Level 1. People at this level of literacy can understand and follow only basic written instructions and read only very short texts (OECD, 2013). On numeracy, Ireland is placed 19th out of 24 countries with 26 per cent of Irish adults scoring at or below Level 1. In the final category, problem solving in technology rich environments, 42 per cent of Irish adults scored at or below Level 1. In other words, a very significant proportion of Ireland's adult population possesses only very basic literacy, numeracy and information-processing skills, insufficient to compete in a market where the skillsets of even highly-skilled workers are likely to be obsolete in a matter of years.

There is a cost to the state for unmet literacy and numeracy needs. But there is a positive and rapid return on investing in adult literacy and numeracy. These benefits are across the board both for the participants, the Exchequer and the economy. It is estimated that the annual income gain per person per level increase on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) was €3,810 and the gain to the Exchequer, in terms of reduced social welfare transfers and increased tax payments, being €1,531 per annum (NALA, 2020: 15). Investing in adult skills, particularly the literacy, numeracy and digital literacy needs of those who have the lowest skills is an important investment in our human capital.

'Adult Literacy for Life: A ten-year strategy for adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy' was published in 2021. The strategy contains three high level targets: decrease the share of adults in Ireland with unmet literacy needs, that is PIAAC Level 1 or below, from 18% to 7%; decrease the share of adults in Ireland with unmet numeracy needs, that is PIAAC Level 1 or below, from 25% to 12%; decrease the share of adults in Ireland without basic digital skills from 47% to 20%. Although the strategy makes commitments to funding to mitigate educational disadvantage, support community education and target vulnerable cohorts, there is no amount allocated for the lifetime of the strategy. We recommend that Government resource the strategy by implementing the recommendation of the 2006 Adult Literacy report which proposed a quadrupling of the adult literacy tuition budget from €25 million to about €100 million over seven years with an additional €25 million for improving ancillary and support services.<sup>11</sup>

### ***Skills Development***

While Ireland performs relatively well in terms of skills development among young people, a comparatively small share of the adult population perform well on all levels of the PIAAC. Managing digital transformation in the labour market and the shift to a green economy requires investment in human capital and a well-trained

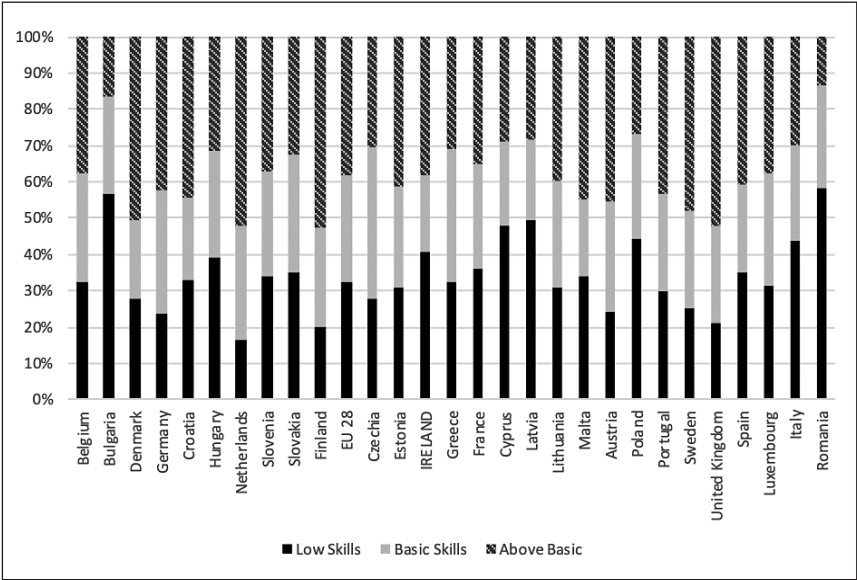
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<sup>11</sup> [http://archive.oireachtas.ie/2006/REPORT\\_20060531\\_1.html](http://archive.oireachtas.ie/2006/REPORT_20060531_1.html)

and skilled general workforce at all levels (Cedefop, 2020). Educational success is now about creative and critical approaches to problem solving, decision making and persuasion, applying the knowledge that we have to different situations. It is about the capacity to live in a multifaceted world as an active and engaged citizen.<sup>12</sup> Continuous investment in skills development, adult learning and lifelong learning are the best policy tools available, allowing investment in human capital and ensuring we can manage these transitions.

Ireland's performance on digital skills is concerning (see Chart 8.4). Over 55 per cent of the population have low or basic digital skills. Over one third of the adult population (36 per cent) has low digital skills, well above the EU average (28 per cent). Only one fifth of the population have basic digital skills. This general gap in digital skills is also confirmed by the OECD PIAAC survey of adult learning. Clearly one implication is that expenditure on training will have to increase, especially if we are to meet our digital literacy target. Across the OECD average spending on training for the unemployed and workers at risk of involuntary unemployment is only 0.13 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP).

**Chart 8.4** EU-28 Digital Skills Levels, 2019



Source: Eurostat (2021)

<sup>12</sup> <http://oecd.org/general/thecasefor21st-centurylearning.htm>



A report by the OECD on Well-being in the Digital Age (OECD, 2019b) found that the digital transformation could compound existing socio-economic inequalities, with the benefits in terms of earnings and opportunities accruing to a few, and the risks falling more heavily on people with lower levels of education and skills. The report notes that 14 per cent of all jobs are at high risk of being lost due to automation, with another 32 per cent at risk of significant change over the next 10 to 20 years. This means that nearly half of the labour force will be impacted by changes to their jobs as a result of automation by 2040. The pandemic provided a powerful test of the potential of online learning, and it also revealed its key limitations, including the prerequisite of adequate digital skills, computer equipment and internet connection to undertake training online, the difficulty of delivering traditional work-based learning online, and the struggle of teachers used to classroom instruction (OECD, 2020b). Our training and skills development policy must be adapted to meet this challenge.

## 8.2 Key Policies and Reforms

### *Addressing educational disadvantage*

Welcome progress has been made at primary and post primary level in terms of closing the achievement and attainment gaps between DEIS and non-DEIS schools. However significant gaps still exist – many of which have their basis in income inequality, and this is a cause for concern. Further resourcing is clearly needed to address educational disadvantage and to close the gap between students in DEIS schools and non DEIS schools. Continued support for DEIS schools must be a policy priority and the positive policy measures which are seeing reductions in the achievement gap must be used as a stepping stone to further improvements. The recent expansion of the DEIS programme, to incorporate an additional 310 schools supported by a funding allocation of €32m is very welcome. It is important that building on the progress that has been made, closing the attainment gap and mitigating the impact of interrupted learning are supported by this expansion. While advances have been made to address inequality in our education system, and the DEIS programme is proving to have a positive effect, children from lower socio-economic backgrounds continue to underperform in literacy, numeracy and science. Literacy and numeracy trends in DEIS schools have not been resolved and the targets for 2020 have not been met, it is important sufficient resourcing is available to support the targets in the current DEIS plan. Decisions regarding numeracy and literacy policy, investment, and the allocation of resources within the education system must be focused on reversing this negative trend.

However, not all children experiencing disadvantage attend DEIS schools and many students who would benefit from the extra supports available in DEIS schools cannot do so. *Social Justice Ireland* recommends that adequate resources are allocated to non-DEIS schools to enable them to fully support disadvantaged pupils.

## ***Funding***

Education is widely recognised as crucial to the achievement of our national objectives of economic competitiveness, social inclusion, and active citizenship. It benefits not just the individual, but society as a whole and the returns to the economy and society are a multiple of the levels of investment. However, the levels of public funding for education in Ireland are out of step with these aspirations. Under-funding is particularly severe in the areas of early childhood education, lifelong learning and second chance and community education – the very areas that are most vital in terms of the promotion of greater equity and fairness.

The projected increased demand outlined earlier in all areas of our education system must be matched by a policy of investment at all levels that is focused on protecting and promoting quality services for those in the education system.

Government must develop and commit to a long-term sustainable funding strategy for education at all stages, recognising the importance of a life-cycle approach to educational support. This funding strategy should incorporate capital and current expenditure and be coherent with present strategies and funding already allocated as part of Ireland 2040. The overall priority must be to deliver multiannual funding linked to long-term strategies at all levels with the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills playing a key role.

## ***Early Childhood Care and Education***

High quality educational experiences in early childhood contribute significantly to life-long learning success (DES, 2018c). This sector needs to be supported by Government, financially and through policy, to ensure that all children have equal access to this success and all of the benefits of quality education. This is even more pertinent in light of the detrimental impact of Covid-19 on the delivery of early childhood education.

The Educational Research Centre (ERC, 2017c) found that tackling inequality at pre-school level before a child attends primary school was found to have a significant impact on educational disadvantage if certain conditions are met. These conditions are that the pre-school is of a high quality, are adequately funded, have low adult-child ratios, highly qualified staff with quality continued professional development, positive adult-child interactions, effective collaboration with parents, appropriate curricula, adequate oversight, monitoring and evaluation, and inclusivity and diversity. Government must ensure that all early years settings meet these conditions by 2022.

An appropriate and ambitious approach would be to set a target of investing 1 per cent of GDP by 2027 in early childhood care and education (the expenditure of the top performing countries in the OECD). Investment should increase by a minimum of 0.1 per cent GDP annually to meet the to reach this new target by 2027 with annual updates on progress to the Oireachtas.

### ***Higher Education***

Higher education is facing a significant funding shortfall and future resourcing of this sector is a key challenge currently facing Government. For Higher Education, the *Final Report of the Independent Expert Panel* (HEA, 2018) points out that funding requirements for higher education should be benchmarked against the funding in those countries we aspire to emulate and compete with. This is critical if we are to maintain our skills base while fostering innovation and upskilling the labour force. *Social Justice Ireland* welcomes innovation in funding allocation and a move towards a more demand-based system to support students in their chosen careers.

Increasing demand for places combined with significant cuts in funding between 2010 and 2015 imply that it would be extremely difficult to fund the sector with a combination of limited public expenditure and student loans, meaning one of the recommendations of the HEA Report to supplement funding by way of ‘income contingent loans’ is no longer feasible. Investment in higher education will have to increase significantly over the next decade, regardless of which option or funding model Government decides to implement. Government should develop a framework to deliver sustainable funding revenues for higher education over the next five years with a roadmap to 2028. This framework should have clear medium and long-term targets.

Ireland requires a sustainable funding strategy for higher education. This strategy must ensure that sufficient and sustainable revenue streams are made available for such investment on an annual basis.

A broadening of access routes to higher education must also form part of any new funding strategy. If higher education is to integrate into lifelong learning and to play the leading role it can play in climate transition, and as the future of work and employment changes, a broadening of access routes is imperative.

### ***Further Education and Training***

The lifelong opportunities of those who are educationally disadvantaged are in sharp contrast to the opportunities for meaningful participation of those who have completed a second or third-level education. If the Constitutionally-enshrined right to education is to be meaningful, there needs to be recognition of the barriers to learning that some children of school-going age experience, particularly in disadvantaged areas, which result in premature exit from education. In this context, second chance education and continuing education are vitally important and require on-going support and resourcing.

Although the funding available for education increased in Budgets since 2016, the deficits that exist within the system, particularly as a result of the impact of austerity budgeting, require significant additional resources. This requires the development of a long-term education policy strategy across the whole educational spectrum to ensure that education and continuous upskilling and development of

the workforce is prioritised if Ireland is to remain competitive in an increasingly global marketplace and ensure the availability of sustainable employment.

A key policy component must be a review of the age profile of apprenticeships and how this can be expanded (as outlined earlier in this chapter) and the integration of the latest OECD recommendations on training and skills into the National Skills Strategy. Further Education has a key role to play to ensure we meet our lifelong learning targets and it must be supported and resourced to ensure we meet our targets.

### 8.3 Key Policy Priorities

*Social Justice Ireland* believes that the following policy positions should be adopted in responding to educational disadvantage:

- Make the improvement of educational outcomes for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and disadvantaged communities a policy priority, with additional resources focused on addressing the persistence of educational disadvantage.
- Commit to increasing investment in Early Childhood Care and Education by 0.1 per cent of GDP annually to reach 1 per cent of GDP by 2027.
- Commit to reducing class sizes and pupil teacher ratios at primary and post primary level by 1 point per annum to 2030.
- Revise our lifelong learning target to reach 15 per cent by 2022 and to reach 20 per cent by 2026, ensuring sufficient resources are made available.
- To meet the digital and green transition challenges develop an integrated skills development, digital transition, vocational training, apprenticeship and reskilling strategy.
- Fully resource 'Adult Literacy for Life' by increasing the adult literacy budget to €100 million by 2030, including €25 million to improve ancillary and support services.
- Develop a framework to deliver sustainable funding revenues for higher education over the next five years with a roadmap to 2028.

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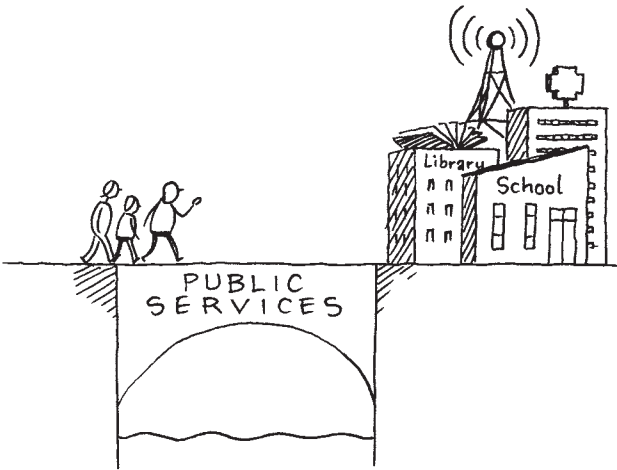




## Chapter nine

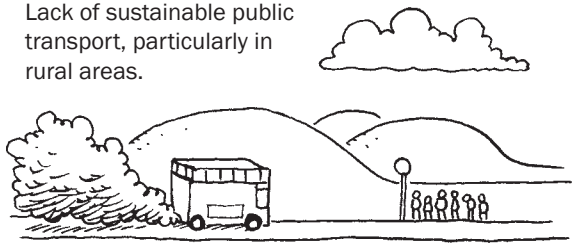
**Chapter 9**  
Other Public Services

**Core Policy Objective:**  
To ensure the provision of, and access to, a level of public services regarded as acceptable by Irish society generally.

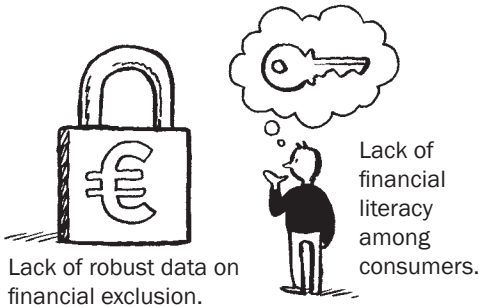


**Key Issues/Evidence**

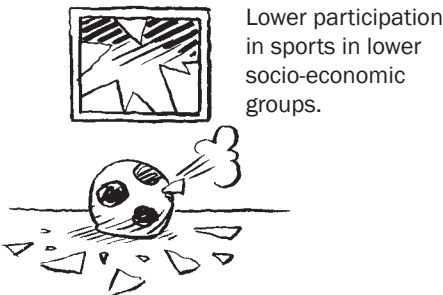
Lack of sustainable public transport, particularly in rural areas.



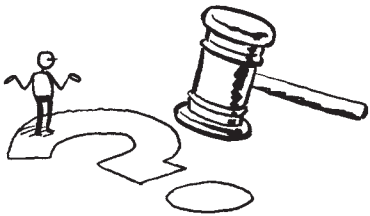
Lack of highspeed broadband access, particularly in rural areas – still no National Broadband roll-out.



Lack of robust data on financial exclusion.

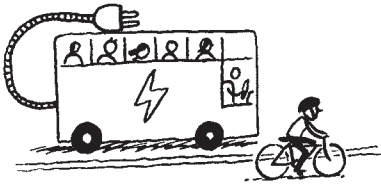


Lower participation in sports in lower socio-economic groups.



Underfunding of Civil Legal Aid – restricts access to justice.

## Policy Solutions



Increase investment in sustainable public transport and introduce hard infrastructure for cycling.



Invest in early years education and childcare and tackle the issue of insurance costs in the sector.



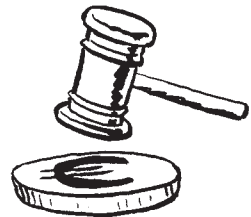
Develop a research programme to gather robust data on financial exclusion.



Introduce financial literacy programmes into mainstream education at primary and secondary level.

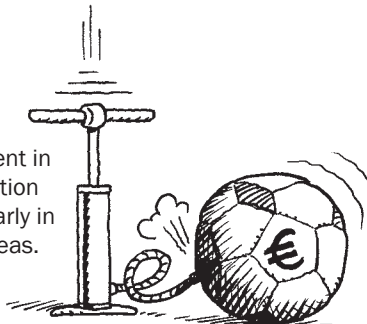


Roll out broadband, particularly in rural areas.



Increase investment in civil legal aid.

Increase investment in sports and recreation facilities, particularly in disadvantaged areas.



## 9.

## OTHER PUBLIC SERVICES

**Core Policy Objective: OTHER PUBLIC SERVICES**

To ensure the provision of, and access to, a level of public services regarded as acceptable by Irish society generally.

The Covid 19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of ensuring the provision of the myriad of services that are required for well-being. The impact on almost every aspect of daily life; transport, childcare, access to information, access to health and well-being outlets, highlighted to all of society, the importance of these essential services.

This chapter looks at public services in a range of areas not addressed elsewhere in the Review. These include Public Transport; Childcare; Digitalisation; Financial Services; Legal Aid; Regulation; Library Services and Sports and Recreation Facilities.

In the context of the objective of providing ‘Decent Services and Infrastructure’ – a core pillar of *Social Justice Ireland’s* Social Contract, in addition to proposals contained in earlier chapters, Government must also:

- Increase the provision of public transport in rural areas and provide greater investment in sustainable transport and biofuels.
- Invest in hard infrastructure for cycle lanes.
- Ensure connectivity to affordable high speed broadband access right across the country.
- Develop programmes to enable all internet users to critically analyse information and to become “savvy, safe surfers” and a grants scheme to support low income and vulnerable households to purchase ICT equipment needed to access public services on implementation of the National Digital Strategy.

- Increase investment in early childhood education and care and after-school care by 0.1 per cent of GDP each year with a view to reaching 1 per cent of GDP by 2027.
- Introduce financial literacy and education to the primary and secondary school curricula.
- Track levels of financial exclusion and build and monitor policies and practices aimed at eliminating it in its entirety.
- Ensure that the Legal Aid Board is adequately funded so that people in the court system are guaranteed equality of access to justice.
- Include, in the Commission for Regulating Lobbying's Annual Reports, policy areas with the greatest lobbying activity, the lobbying organisations and the designated public officials engaged so as to highlight to the general public those influencing the political decision-making process.
- Invest in the continuous professional development and wellbeing of library staff to ensure the success of the Libraries Strategy.
- Increase funding to encourage sports participation and active lifestyle programmes.
- Ring-fence revenue gained through the sweetened drinks tax to fund sport and recreational facilities and services.

## 9.1 Key Evidence

### *Public Transport*

According to the National Travel Survey 2019 (Central Statistics Office, 2020), 73.7 per cent of all journeys taken in 2019 were by private car (as driver or passenger), whereas public transport accounted for just 4.8 per cent of all journeys. Those in densely populated areas were less likely to use a car than those in thinly populated areas, with private cars accounting for 61.7 per cent of all journeys in urbanised areas, compared to 83.8 per cent in thinly populated areas. Public transport was used over four times as much in densely populated areas than thinly populated areas reflecting the greater availability of public transport in more densely populated areas.

The Transport Omnibus 2020 (Central Statistics Office, 2021) showed an overall increase in passengers on public transport between 2010 and 2019 but decreasing for 2020 due to travel restrictions. (Table 9.1).

**Table 9.1:** Summary of Scheduled Bus Passenger Services 2010 to 2020

	2010 (,000)	2019 (,000)	2020 (,000)	% Change 2010-2020
Dublin city services	118,977	138,311	68,927	-42
Provincial city and town services	16,620	26,699	13,551	-18.4
Other scheduled services	20,640	20,074	9,017	-56.3
School Transport Scheme	42,327	42,614	28,730	-32.1

Source: CSO, Transport Omnibus 2020, extracted from Table 8.1

In addition to the 68.9 million bus passengers in Dublin city, over 19.2 million passengers used the two Luas lines in 2020, 12.8 million passengers used the Dublin suburban rail and DART services with decreasing numbers across all modes of transport due to travel restrictions imposed in March of 2020.

The bicycle sharing scheme in Dublin saw 1.78 million journeys undertaken in 2020, a decline from 3.8 million from 2019 and continuing the downward trend since 2016. When we compare data since 2015, the year in which all four bicycle schemes were operational, we see a decline in journey numbers even pre-Covid, year on year, since 2016 in Dublin, Cork and Limerick (Table 9.2).

**Table 9.2** Bicycle Sharing Scheme, Dublin, Cork, Galway and Limerick, 2015 to 2020

	2015	2016	2018	2020	% Change 2015-2020
Dublin	4,072,878	4,355,437	3,858,882	1,780,825	-5.2
Cork	289,426	290,590	271,581	81,380	-6.2
Galway	19,934	13,574	39,005	6,903	+95.6
Limerick	40,118	32,892	27,772	10,758	-30.8

Source: CSO, Transport Omnibus, various years, extracted from Tables 8.16 and 8.17

The bicycle sharing scheme is an excellent initiative and supports environmentally sustainable commuting in urban centres. However, without hard infrastructure for cycle lanes, our continued reliance on private cars for urban commutes makes city-cycling hazardous. *Social Justice Ireland* therefore calls on Government to expedite the introduction of hard infrastructure to support safe cycling in our cities.

The lack of reliable public transport in rural areas means that rural households are more reliant on their car to access basic services and commute to and from work and school. This reliance is contributing to our carbon footprint, with transport being one of the three main contributing industries. Whilst transport emissions were reduced in 2020 by 15.7 per cent, passenger cars were responsible for 59 per cent of that.<sup>1</sup> Government expenditure on public transport as a percentage of total land transport expenditure has fluctuated since 2002, reaching a low of 30 per cent in 2006. The proportion of the spending allocation for public and sustainable transport in 2020 was 45 per cent. (Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service, 2021).

Covid 19 created a shift in the use of public and private transport. For example, Dublin City Council implemented Covid Mobility measures, increasing cycle lanes and the width of pavements by decreasing access for private car use, many of which are still in place despite the lifting of travel restrictions. As of the end of January 2022, bus and rail journeys across the country are still below pre Covid-19 levels with journeys for the week commencing 23<sup>rd</sup> January still only at 65.7 per cent of journeys undertaken in March 2020. Rail travel (includes Intercity and DART services) in particular are still low, with journeys only reaching 52.9 per cent of pre Covid-19 levels. Luas journeys increased by 55.7 per cent between the first and last weeks of January 2022 but are still also below pre Covid-19 levels. Many may still be working from home meaning less commuters. (Central Statistics Office, 2022).

Infrastructure must be in place to support thinly populated areas to grow and thrive, while those living in Dublin and surrounds, with access to an extensive public transport network, should be encouraged and incentivised to use it. We must look at measures implemented due to Covid-19, particularly in relation to walking tracks and cycling lanes, and work towards making these a more permanent transport feature.

### *Childcare*

In 2018, just 43.1 per cent of children under the age of three years are cared for only by their parents, which means 56.9 per cent of children under the age of three are cared for by people other than their parents, be it grandparents, childminders or with formal childcare providers.<sup>2</sup>

### *Affordability*

Affordable childcare and child-friendly employment arrangements are key requirements for greater labour participation among young mothers (OECD, 2016:17). Cost is also key in keeping women in the workplace with many working

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.epa.ie/ghg/transport/>

<sup>2</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Living\\_conditions\\_in\\_Europe\\_-\\_childcare\\_arrangements](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Living_conditions_in_Europe_-_childcare_arrangements)

women citing childcare costs as a reason to consider leaving the workplace.<sup>3</sup> In September 2019, the then Department of Children and Youth Affairs published findings from a survey of almost 4,000 childcare providers revealing that the average fee for full-time childcare provision is now €184 per week, with the highest being in the Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown area (€251 per week on average) and the lowest in Carlow (an average of €148 per week) (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2019).

Affordability of childcare is much more of an issue in Dublin and surrounds, and Cork, than the rest of the country, with the subsidy accounting for just 9 per cent of the cost in the most expensive area.<sup>4</sup> While the cost of childcare may have grown nationally by 4.3 per cent between 2015/2016 and 2016/2017, this hides the geographical disparity where, for example, in Leitrim the average cost of childcare, including the subsidy is €530, or one third of a full-time minimum wage worker's take-home pay. This increases to 49 per cent of take-home pay in Dublin City Centre. Rates for part-time childcare have dropped in many counties, increasing the disparity, with Carlow cited as seeing a decrease of 30 per cent to €230 and Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown experiencing an 8 per cent increase to €558. This accounts for a cost of between 15 and 31 per cent of the take-home pay of a full-time minimum wage worker (Nugent, 2017).

High childcare costs present a barrier to employment, particularly among young women with children. An increase in the cost of childcare led to a decrease in the number of paid working hours for mothers. An increase in the cost of provision of just 10 per cent could lead to a 30 minute reduction in a mother's working hours (Russell, McGinnity, Fahey, & Kenny, 2018).

However, high childcare costs do not translate to high wages for childcare workers. A report by Pobal found that "a correlation between wages and fees could not be found" (Pobal, 2021). The average hourly wage earned by all staff working directly with children in 2019/2020 was €12.45. The Report notes that one of every two earned below the Living Wage rate for 2020 which was €12.30. In addition, there are increasing demands on childcare workers to improve their skills and qualifications, leading to a realistic expectation of better pay and conditions and slow down the reported staff turnover rate of 18 per cent in the sector (Pobal, 2021).

The pandemic has highlighted the importance of this industry and the importance of ensuring that staff are supported and as such, *Social Justice Ireland* believes that childcare staff should earn a decent wage and that Government should ensure that subsidies aimed at improving the conditions of childcare staff are not used to increase costs to parents. This could be facilitated to some extent by legislating to

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/half-of-working-mothers-consider-giving-up-work-over-childcare-costs-1.4189580>

<sup>4</sup> Dunlaoghaire-Rathdown



reduce ancillary costs such as insurances which are having a detrimental effect on the sector.

#### *Early Years Strategy – First 5*

In November 2018, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs published the first Early Years Strategy. *First 5, a Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028* recognises the importance of family care in the first twelve months of a child's life and outlines the objective to allow a mother or father access to paid parental leave during this time, with a further action point of encouraging greater work-life balance practices in employment, as outlined in the EU Directive on Work-Life Balance (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2018). A further objective set out under Goal C – Positive play-based early learning, is to increase safe, high-quality, developmentally appropriate, integrated childcare, which reflects diversity of need, which will be met through making childcare more affordable, extend the provision of subsidised childcare and the integration of additional supports for children with increased needs.

*Social Justice Ireland* welcomed the publication of the Early Years Strategy, with its child-centred focus and inter-Departmental governance and implementation plan and proposes a target of investing 1 per cent of GDP by 2027 in early childhood care and education (the expenditure of the top performing countries in Europe). Investment needs to increase by a minimum of 0.1 per cent of GDP with a view to reaching 1 per cent of GDP by 2027 in line with the top performing countries in the OECD (see Chapter 8 for more). This level of investment is crucial to ensuring that all children have access to quality childcare and after-school care which supports their development and facilitates parents to participate in the labour market.

#### ***Digitalisation***

Arguably one of the biggest changes brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic has been to working practices. With many adults and children both working and learning from home, good quality, affordable, reliable internet connection is now a necessity, not a luxury. It is an essential economic, social and educational inclusion tool that enables people to fully participate in society and remain connected and informed. It will be important to ensure ease and equality of access so that already disadvantaged or marginalised groups do not fall further behind. That there are still areas in (particularly rural) Ireland who continue to be disadvantaged by way of limited or poor access, the digital divide will further exacerbate educational disadvantage in areas with poor connectivity.

Internet connectivity in 2020 stood at 92 per cent, an increase of one percentage point from 2019. Almost every household with children is connected to the internet compared to 79 per cent of adult only households. Fixed broadband connection is the most commonly used, accounting for 85 per cent of households. Households in Dublin and the Mid-East continue to outpace the rest of the country for access to fixed broadband (with 92 per cent and 90 per cent connectivity respectively),

while the Border and West Regions fare the worst (with 73 per cent and 79 per cent respectively) (Central Statistics Office, 2020b).

Among households who did not have internet access, the main reasons for not having it were that it was not needed (55 per cent), followed by a lack of skills (32 per cent), prohibitive cost of access and high equipment costs (18 per cent and 19 per cent). Nine per cent also reported the lack of availability of broadband internet as a factor (Central Statistics Office, 2020b).

At European level, Ireland ranks 5<sup>th</sup> (up one from 2020) in the EU Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) (European Commission, 2021). They report that fixed, very high-capacity network (VHCN) coverage has “rocketed” from 35 per cent to 83 per cent in 2020. However, despite this, in terms of connectivity, the take up of at least 100Mbps fixed broadband is only 31 per cent compared to the EU average of 34 per cent.

Although Ireland performs above the EU average in advanced digital skills (for example, for the indicators on ICT specialists, female ICT specialists and ICT graduates), the basic digital skills of the population are a little lower (53% against the EU average of 56%).

Ireland’s use of the internet is broadly in line with the European average. Our use of the internet points to a society that is moving away from personal social interaction, towards virtual engagement with others. According to the DESI, Ireland scores a perfect 100 for digital services, “particularly in open data and providing digital public services for citizens and businesses”. The internet is now more important than ever and the basic digital skills of the population are a little behind the rest of the EU (53 per cent compared with 56 per cent), this skills gap needs to be addressed and supported to ensure that the increasing number of services who operate primarily or exclusively online are available to all.

### *National Broadband Plan*

Broadband, particularly for rural areas, is essential if Ireland is to keep pace with globalisation while also ensuring balanced rural development. If the change to working from home becomes permanent for many, location will no longer be an issue allowing many to relocate from expensive urban centres to more rural locations. *Social Justice Ireland* urges Government to expedite the roll-out on the National Broadband Plan without further delays.

### *Financial Services*

Financial services were becoming increasingly digital, with more and more daily, everyday transactions moving on-line or becoming cashless even before the Covid-19 pandemic. The resulting restrictions proved difficult for those that did not have the ability to make payments for goods with cards, either in store or on-line. Access to financial services, now more than ever is key to inclusion in society.

With the publication of the White Paper to End Direct Provision and to Establish a New International Protection Support Service (2021) committing to facilitating the opening of bank accounts for International Protection applicants - the Basic Payment Account - the spotlight is once again on the importance of financial inclusion.

Financial exclusion is not just about access to bank accounts but access to reasonable, affordable credit that takes account of the financial position of the consumer while cognisant of the need for people on low incomes to meet contingency expenditures without resorting to high cost credit, 'pay day loans' and 'home credit companies' which can charge APRs of up to 287 per cent. Illegal moneylenders are also in operation. Credit unions have traditionally provided low cost credit to members within their 'common bond' area charged at 1 per cent interest per month, or 12 per cent per annum. These loans are provided as an alternative to high cost credit from legal and illegal moneylenders for families having difficulties saving for life events such as a child's communion, home improvements or the unexpected breakdown of an essential appliance.

In 2018, almost four in ten people (37.3 per cent of the population) reported being unable to face an unexpected financial expense.<sup>5</sup> The pandemic has exacerbated this with many who found it hard to manage household expenses before finding it even harder. (Society of St.Vincent De Paul, 2022) The 'It Makes Sense' loan or Personal Micro Credit Loan, introduced in 2016 and operated through participating credit unions, is already in existence for borrowers with impaired credit. This allows a member of a participating credit union to access a moderate loan, of between €100 and €2,000, with payments deducted at source from their social welfare payments via the Household Budget Scheme. Not all credit unions provide this loan, with some citing regulatory and macroprudential lending issues and others providing a similar product to existing customers. The 'It Makes Sense' loan is an inter-Departmental initiative and, as such, should be subject to monitoring and review, focused on consumer protection and financial inclusion.

While there are a number of organisations available to provide support for those in financial difficulties, there is not enough emphasis on prevention and money management education. Discussions at the Central Bank of Ireland Civil Society Roundtable in November 2019, acknowledged that further investment in the area of financial literacy was required, with agreement that this should be incorporated into mainstream education.<sup>6</sup> MABS, the State's Money Advice and Budgeting Service, did provide money management education as part of its community supports, however, the future of the support is unclear given the restructure of the MABS companies and the replacement of the MABS National Development

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<sup>5</sup> Eurostat Database [ilc\_mdex05]

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.centralbank.ie/events/event-detail/2019/11/29/default-calendar/civil-society-roundtable>

Company with a National Support Company. More needs to be done to develop this skill from an early age, with classes in late-primary and secondary schools.

In light of the severity of its impact, *Social Justice Ireland* welcomed the inclusion of financial literacy in the Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025 and urges Government to build a module on financial literacy in to the primary and secondary curricula. It is incumbent on Government to track levels of financial exclusion and to build and monitor policies and practices aimed at eliminating it in its entirety by 2025.

### ***Legal Supports and Access to Justice***

Access to justice is a basic human right, however in order to achieve equality of access, there must be a balance of power on both sides. In a legal context, the balance of power almost always rests with those who can afford counsel. Redressing this balance requires the availability of free and low-cost legal services to those who need the advice of a qualified solicitor or barrister but who cannot afford the costs associated with it.

The Legal Aid Board provides advice and representation on criminal and civil matters for those on low income. Criminal legal aid, through the Garda Station Legal Advice Revised Scheme, the Legal Aid – Custody Issues Scheme and the Criminal Assets Bureau Ad-hoc Legal Aid Scheme, is free of charge to the user, subsidised by the State for those dependent on social welfare or having a gross income of €20,316 per annum or less. Civil legal aid is also subsidised but is not free. Applicants are means tested and pay a minimum fee of between €30 and €130 for this service. Their case is also subject to a principles test and a merits test, to ascertain if the case has a chance of success. Their civil services range from family law matters (including separation, divorce and custody and a free family mediation service), debt, wills and inheritance.

In 2020, there were 18,522 applications for legal aid made, of which 13,209 related to civil matters, 1,174 for international protection, 959 related to the Abhaile Scheme (for borrowers in late-stage mortgage arrears, (see Chapter 6 for more information) and 3,180 cases related to family mediation (all numbers saw a decrease from 2019 due to the pandemic) (Legal Aid Board, 2021).

Previous cuts in both staffing levels and funding for the Legal Aid Board and the decision to raise costs for legal services has had the inevitable effect of both to deter and deny access to justice.

In its Submission to the United Nations Human Rights Committee on the List of Issues for the Fifth Periodic Examination of Ireland, the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) provides the UN with updates ahead of its preparation of the List of Issues. This report notes that the “Commission has called for the remit of the Legal Aid Board to be reviewed and for civil legal aid services to be made available in a wider range of areas, for the minimum contribution fee for

civil legal aid to be reviewed, particularly in light of the Legal Aid Board's Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty obligations, and for the Legal Aid Board to be adequately resourced to ensure that waiting times are reduced".<sup>7</sup>

The White Paper to End Direct Provision and to Establish a New International Protection Support Service (Government of Ireland, 2021) confirms that the Legal Aid Board will bring forward proposals to the Department of Justice by 2022 on what would be required to support 3,500 applicants for international protection per year and estimates an additional allocation for the Legal Aid Board of €8.8 million.

Consumers who need legal advice, but do not require legal representation, can access the Free Legal Advice Centres (FLAC). FLAC provide a network of volunteers through clinics held primarily in Citizens Information Centres nationwide. FLAC volunteers provide advice on a range of legal issues, including family law, debt, probate, employment and property.

Covid-19 restrictions meant that in person clinics ceased for FLAC in March of 2020. They conducted 2,658 consultations in total (123 of those over the phone). The number of calls to their information and referral telephone service remained almost static, 12,468 calls in 2020 compared with 12,469 in 2019. However, the calls took longer as more in depth advice was given in lieu of in person consultations and opening hours were reduced. The pandemic is reflected in the types of queries. Employment law queries rose by 39 per cent and as 2020 progressed, "unprecedented numbers of family law queries in relation to access to children, and marital breakdown from families under pressure" (FLAC, 2021).

The Legal Aid Board and FLAC provide valuable services, however *Social Justice Ireland* believes that access to justice is such a fundamental human right that it should not be dependent on well-intentioned volunteers dealing with a range of legal topics in twenty minute increments and calls on Government to ensure that people's rights are protected and dignity respected in this most fundamental way, by adequate access to justice through the court system.

### ***Regulation***

How accountability is translated into practice can be closely related to the independence of the regulator and its functions and powers (OECD, 2016:17). The areas most associated with 'light touch' regulatory policy in Ireland are the financial and property sectors. Thousands of households continue to feel the effects of the economic crash, while lack of robust regulation of the planning processes have left Ireland with urban sprawl across towns and cities, and inaccessible one-off

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.ihrec.ie/app/uploads/2020/12/Submission-to-UN-HR-Committee-on-the-LOIPR-on-Irelands-5th-periodic-examination.pdf>

properties in remote areas, widening the ‘urban/rural’ divide by making essential services inaccessible and ineffective.

### *Ireland’s Regulatory Position*

The Register of Lobbying<sup>8</sup> was introduced in 2015 to increase transparency and accountability, making information available to the public on the identity of those lobbying designated public officials and the nature of those lobbying activities. According to its Annual Report for 2020, there were 2,085 registered lobbyists and almost 11,600 returns had been received by the Commission in Regulating Lobbying, a increase on the previous year when a reported 9,600 returns were made (Commission in Regulating Lobbying, 2020). Health was the number one topic. While this increased transparency is to be welcome, the question of what, if any, effect it is having on a cultural shift from vested to public interest remains. Greater attention must be drawn to the information available on the Lobbying Register.

*Social Justice Ireland* calls for the inclusion in the Commission’s Annual Reports of policy areas with the greatest lobbying activity, the lobbying organisations and the designated public officials engaged so as to highlight to the general public those influencing the political decision-making process.

### *Creating Regulatory Policy*

Reactionary regulation, introduced after a crisis, can also serve to further exclude those who it should serve to protect, by placing barriers to goods and services in the way of those without the resources to engage with increasing bureaucracy. *Social Justice Ireland* believes that regulation has a place in protecting the rights of the vulnerable by addressing the balance of power when engaging with corporations and political structures, but not be so involved as to create a barrier rather than a safety net.

The OECD recommends that the governance of regulators follow seven principles to ensure the implementation of proper policy:

1. Role Clarity
2. Preventing Undue Influence and Maintaining Trust
3. Decision Making and Governing Body Structure
4. Accountability and Transparency
5. Engagement
6. Funding
7. Performance Evaluation

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.lobbying.ie/>

These principles work together as a continuum with clarity from the start and performance evaluation informing governance policy, thereby creating levels of clarity as learning from the evaluation is utilised. If these principles were ingrained in the process for development of regulation and governance of regulators, consumer protection and independence would naturally follow from regulation in line with these central tenets.

*Social Justice Ireland* believes that regulation should have consumer protection at its centre rather than the aim of increasing market participation. Before engaging in any new regulatory processes, the Government should ensure that the rights of its citizens are protected, including the right to a reasonable standard of living with access to basic services at a reasonable cost.

### ***Library Services***

The temporary closure of libraries due to the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted just what an important community facility they are. Students of all ages had no access to resources, those who borrow rather than buy books and those who use the meeting spaces to gather together were now without.

Libraries provide an important social and educational role in Ireland, with over 17 million visits annually by 1,195,909 registered members across 330 branch libraries and 30.5 mobile libraries.<sup>9</sup> Operated by Local Authorities, they play an important role in ensuring access to information, reading and learning material. In recent years, libraries have greatly expanded their offering, with a roll-out of digital services including e-books, and access to journals and catalogues online and, in between 2012 and 2017 added 45 new or extended library branches. They also provide affordable internet access and support for people who may not own a computer, an important service, particularly in areas with low connectivity and/or high numbers of older people.

As part of their commitment towards equity of access, library membership is now free for core services. *Social Justice Ireland* welcomes the broadening of the scope of the library service, the introduction of Libraries Ireland, the availability of e-learning and electronic resources etc. However, it is important that these developments do not result in a closing or downgrading of smaller branch libraries, which play a significant role in supporting communities.

A new strategy for the public library service was delivered in 2018. *Our Public Libraries 2022*<sup>10</sup> sets out three strategic programmes for the delivery of the library service. The first is Reading and Literacy, which includes rolling out Right to Read programmes for children; the second is Learning and Information, which seeks to establish libraries as a key resource for the promotion of and access to lifelong

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/7468fd-public-libraries/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/720f68-public-library-strategy-2018-2022/>

learning and health and wellbeing; and the third is Community and Culture, which intends to establish libraries as central to communities, providing inclusive spaces for cultural, community and civic events. The plan to enhance the position of libraries as community hubs is a welcome one. It contains ‘Strategy Enablers’ – specific actions underpinning each strategy, which include enhancing library buildings to meet the needs of the surrounding society, expanding the capital build programme, increasing staffed library open hours and ‘My Open Library’ (that is, the unstaffed opening hours) to more libraries across the country, introducing universal access to library services and removing fines and upgrading library ICT systems.

The Libraries Strategy will only succeed with the commitment of library teams, particularly in the areas of community engagement and education. *Social Justice Ireland* recommends that their central role to this success should be well supported through resources allocated to their continued professional development and wellbeing. We recommend a particular focus on encouraging new and disadvantaged communities to avail of the benefits of the library for broad education and recreation purposes. Libraries have an opportunity to collaborate with local stakeholders, become vibrant information hubs and centres of enterprise, culture and learning fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### ***Sports and Recreation Facilities***

#### ***Adult Participation***

Almost half of all adults in Ireland regularly participate in sports (46 per cent), some 1.78 million people. This represents an increase of three percentage points since 2017, the baseline used to measure against the targets set in the National Sports Policy 2018-2027 and shows that adult participation is doing well against a target of 50 per cent participation by 2027 ( Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media , 2018).

The gap between the active sports participation between men and women increased, this may be due to the closure of inside spaces within which to exercise and the halting of many team sports for some parts of 2020 and 2021. Older age groups however became more active. Overall, just 34 per cent of the adult population meet the national physical activity guidelines through participating in at least 30 minutes of moderate or greater intensity exercise or physical activity at least five times per week (Sport Ireland, 2021).

Adults reporting a long-term health problem or disability are less likely to participate in sports than adults reporting no long-term health problem or disability and those with a lower socio-economic status were also less likely than their well-off counterparts to participate in sport (Sport Ireland, 2021).



### *Child Participation and Outdoor Play*

Child participation in sport decreases with age. Eighty per cent of primary school children in the Republic of Ireland participate in a community sport at least once a week, compared to 58 per cent of post primary school children (Woods, et al., 2018). The gap for school sport is narrower (70 per cent of primary school children play a school sport at least once a week compared to 63 per cent of post primary school children), however with just 17 per cent of primary school children and 10 per cent of post-primary school children meeting the physical activity guidelines, more work is needed outside of the school environment to support child physical activity.

Organised sport does not appeal to every child, and physical activity through outdoor play is especially important to ensure that children are encouraged to get active. Outdoor play is also important for socio-emotional and cognitive development. A recent study on the importance of outdoor play, based on the Growing Up in Ireland data, found that although the majority of Irish children engage in some form of outdoor play, neighbourhood safety was a concern among some parents who limited their children's outdoor play time due to heavy traffic, adequate/appropriate outdoor play facilities in their area, poor condition of footpaths, roads and lighting, or littering (Egan & Pope, 2018). This study does not look at the socio-economic profile of the children involved; however, it provides a clear indication that investment in neighbourhood safety and outdoor play facilities would increase the likelihood of outdoor play among young children.

### *Child Obesity*

Child obesity is increasing across many developed countries and is a cause for concern for the future health and wellbeing of the population and has been identified by the World Health Organisation European Region as a serious public health problem.<sup>11</sup> The Department of Health, in 2016, launched the Obesity Action Plan 2016 – 2025, 'A Healthy Weight for Ireland' as part of the overall Healthy Ireland initiative with a target to decrease by 0.5 per cent a year the level of excess weight in children.<sup>12</sup> 1 in 5 of the primary school children included in a study for 2018 and 2019 were overweight or obese with noticeable differences between children attending schools classified as disadvantaged. (Mitchell L, 2020)

In older children, 20 per cent of 13 year olds are overweight and six per cent are classified as obese, with girls more likely to be overweight or obese than boys (Williams, et al., 2018). Of those who were non-overweight at 9 years old, 89 per cent have remained so, with 10 per cent becoming overweight and 1 per cent becoming obese in the intervening period. Of those who were overweight at 9 years

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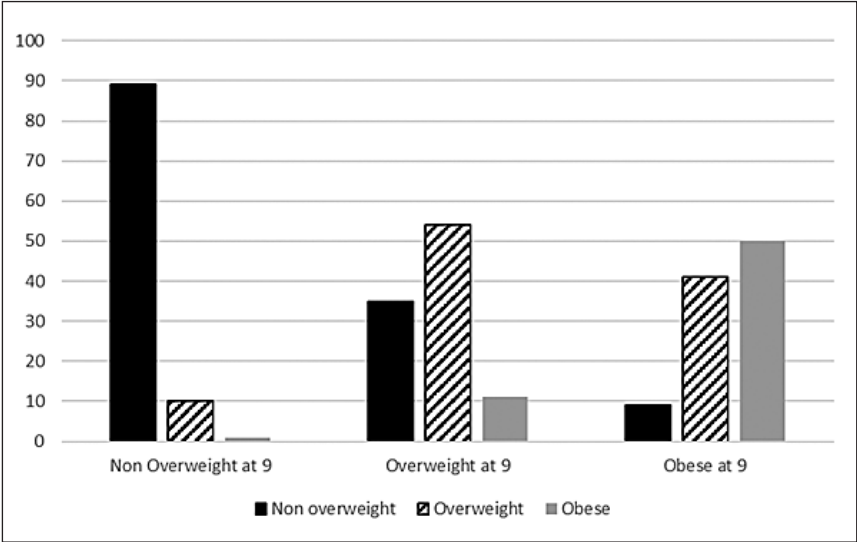
<sup>11</sup> Europe WHO-ROf. The challenge of obesity in the WHO European Region and the strategies for response.; 2007

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/c778a9-a-healthy-weight-for-ireland-obesity-policy-and-action-plan-2016-202/>

old, 35 per cent are non-overweight, 54 per cent remained overweight and 11 per cent became obese.

Of those who were classified as obese at 9 years old, 9 per cent became non-overweight, 41 per cent became overweight and 50 per cent remained obese (Chart 9.1).

**Chart 9.1**     Change in Weight Status of 13 year olds since 9 years of age



Source: Growing Up in Ireland, Williams et al, 2018

*National Physical Activity Plan*

The low rate of participation in physical activity among Ireland’s children and adults, high rates of use of private transport for even short journeys, including the school run which sees approximately only one quarter of primary school children walking, cycling or skating and the increasing prevalence of online shopping means that Ireland is becoming a more sedentary country. The National Physical Action Plan, published in 2016 as part of the Healthy Ireland framework, contains ambitious targets for eight key action areas including children and young people, work places, public awareness and sport and physical activity in the community.

*Social Justice Ireland* commends Government on the initiatives undertaken in furtherance of this plan, such as ‘Park Runs’ and the site ‘getirelandactive.ie’ that recommends physical activities for a range of ages and lifestyles and calls on Government to encourage children and adults, particularly those from a low socio-

economic backgrounds to increase their participation in sports through the further development of playgrounds and subsidised sports centres.

### *Sports and Recreation Funding*

The largest and most well-known sports organisation in Ireland is the GAA, whose clubs not only provide a physical outlet for those playing the games, but also as a social and recreational space for people to volunteer. However, maintaining facilities to a high standard and encouraging wide participation is expensive, and there is a need to offer support-funding to clubs in this regard. This is particularly important for sports which do not have access to large gate receipts. Government should be cognisant of the health, societal and economic benefits of sports and social outlets, and provide sufficient ring-fenced funding to complement this voluntary effort.

A source of revenue that could be ring-fenced for sports participation and recreational activities is the Sugar-Sweetened Drinks Tax<sup>13</sup> which was introduced in May 2018 and could provide investment of between €30 and €40 million. If appropriately allocated, this revenue could move Ireland further towards attaining the targets of the *National Plan for Physical Activity*.

### *The Privatisation of Public Services*

Government continues to look to the market and engage private enterprise to provide the public services that should be part of a basic floor that everyone in the State should expect. They do this notwithstanding evidence that it is more expensive and less effective. The rationale given is that the private sector can provide more, faster and cheaper, but again this is not borne out in the evidence.

Affording a basic floor of services that everyone in the State should expect is a move towards what is termed “Universal Basic Services”, a concept developed by the Institute for Global Prosperity in 2017 and expanded on by Professor Ian Gough of the London School of Economics in his article in *The Political Quarterly* (Gough, 2019). Universal Basic Services are those which are “collectively generated activities that serve the public interest” (Gough, 2019, p. 1), that are basic and available to everyone who needs them.

It is important to note that Gough presents the concept of Universal Basic Services as an alternative to Universal Basic Income, however *Social Justice Ireland* does not. We view them rather as complementary concepts based on the principles of social justice and equity. Universal Basic Services provide basic healthcare, education, childcare, transport and so on. The “universality” refers not only to the availability but to the need (the vast majority of us will require these services at some point

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<sup>13</sup> For full details on a joint proposal from the Irish Heart Foundation and *Social Justice Ireland* see <http://www.socialjustice.ie/content/publications/reducing-obesity-and-future-health-costs-proposal-health-related-taxation>

over the lifecycle), and so a common, or universal, basket of services can be determined with some degree of consensus. Universal Basic Income, on the other hand, provides a sufficient floor of income to purchase necessities (such as food, heating, clothes and so on) which are, to a degree, discretionary (we do not all eat the same food, use the same heating provider, wear the same clothes and so on). In our Wellbeing Framework for a new Social Contract we propose a minimum social floor of universal basic services and universal basic income below which no-one in society should fall.

## 9.2 Key Policy Priorities

*Social Justice Ireland* believes that the following policy positions should be adopted in addressing Ireland's many public services deficiencies:

- Increase the provision of public transport in rural areas and provide greater investment in sustainable transport and biofuels.
- Invest in hard infrastructure for cycle lanes.
- Ensure connectivity to affordable high speed broadband access right across the country.
- Develop programmes to enable all internet users to critically analyse information and to become “savvy, safe surfers” and a grants scheme to support low income and vulnerable households to purchase ICT equipment needed to access public services on implementation of the National Digital Strategy.
- Increase investment in early childhood education and care and after-school care by 0.1 per cent of GDP each year with a view to reaching 1 per cent of GDP by 2027.
- Introduce financial literacy and education to the primary and secondary school curricula.
- Track levels of financial exclusion and build and monitor policies and practices aimed at eliminating it in its entirety.
- Ensure that the Legal Aid Board is adequately funded so that people in the court system are guaranteed equality of access to justice.
- Include, in the Commission for Regulating Lobbying's Annual Reports, policy areas with the greatest lobbying activity, the lobbying organisations and the designated public officials engaged so as to highlight to the general public those influencing the political decision-making process.
- Invest in the continuous professional development and wellbeing of library staff to ensure the success of the Libraries Strategy.

- Increase funding to encourage sports participation and active lifestyle programmes.
- Ring-fence revenue gained through the sweetened drinks tax to fund sport and recreational facilities and services.

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## Chapter ten

**Chapter 10**  
People and Participation

**Core Policy Objective:**

To ensure that all people from different cultures are welcomed in a way that is consistent with our history, our obligations as world citizens and with our economic status.

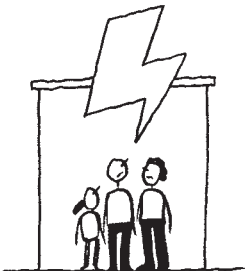
To ensure that every person has a genuine voice in shaping the decisions that affect them and that every person can contribute to the development of society.



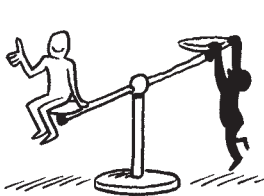
**Key Issues/Evidence**



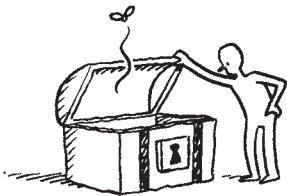
Lack of planning for a changing and ageing population.



Human Rights violations in Direct Provision centres.



Racism, particularly in political discourse.



Funding for the Community and Voluntary sector still not restored to pre-crisis levels.

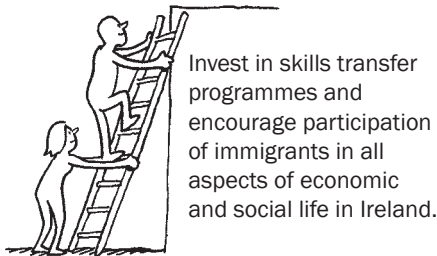


Ireland not meeting our UN obligations.

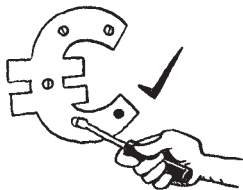


Lack of sustained social dialogue at local and national level.

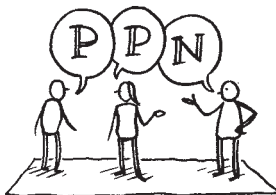
**Policy Solutions**



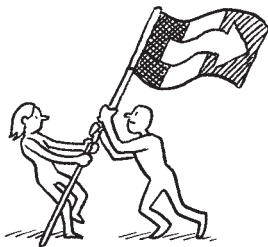
Implement the recommendations of The Report of the Advisory Group on the Provision of Support, including Accommodation, to Persons in the International Protection Process (Day Report)



Reinstate funding for Traveller specific initiatives pending the outcome of the Joint Oireachtas Committee hearings on Issues Affecting the Traveller Community



Adequately resource Public Participation Networks and promote social dialogue at local level.



Implement the national strategies concerning the Community and Voluntary sector.



Promote social dialogue at national level

## 10.

## PEOPLE AND PARTICIPATION

**Core Policy Objective: PEOPLE AND PARTICIPATION**

To ensure that all people from different cultures are welcomed in a way that is consistent with our history, our obligations as world citizens and with our economic status.

To ensure that every person has a genuine voice in shaping the decisions that affect them and that every person can contribute to the development of society.

The infrastructure, services and policies that a country develops and implements are determined in large part by the make-up of its population. Every person should have a right to have a say in how and where infrastructure and services are delivered, and what policies are implemented to shape their communities. Local and national Government policies affect every one of us, and every one of us should have our say. Part of the ‘Good Governance’ pillar in *Social Justice Ireland’s* Wellbeing Framework for a new Social Contract, set out in Chapter 2, requires the promotion of deliberative democracy, as well as new criteria in policy evaluation and the continued development of a social dialogue process involving all sectors of society. This is a core tenet of living in a democracy. At a time when the very fabric of democracy is under threat across the globe, this is something we must strive to protect.

In this Chapter we explore the changing demographics within Ireland, set out some of the challenges of these changes, and how they might be met in Ireland today.

If the objectives set out above are to be achieved *Social Justice Ireland* believes that Government should:

- Invest in the retention of young graduates and programmes to assimilate skills obtained while abroad.
- Fully implement the recommendations of the Commission for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination within a reasonable timeframe.

- Fully implement the recommendations of the 2019 Trafficking in Persons Report.
- Reinstate funding for Traveller-specific initiatives and implement the recommendations of the Seanad Public Consultation Committee published in January 2020.
- Adequately resource the Public Participation Network (PPN) structures for participation at Local Authority level and ensure capacity building is an integral part of the process.
- Promote deliberative democracy and a process of inclusive social dialogue to ensure there is real and effective monitoring and impact assessment of policy development and implementation using an evidence-based approach at local and national level.
- Resource an initiative to identify how a real participative civil society debate could be developed and maintained.

## 10.1 Key Evidence

### *People*

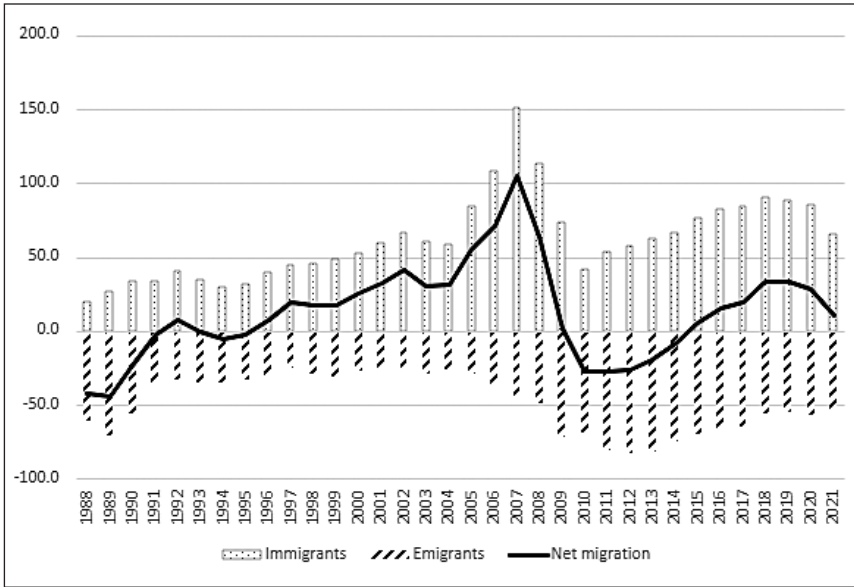
According to the CSO, in a paper presented at the *Social Justice Ireland* Social Policy Conference 2019, Irish society has changed significantly in the last 50 years, becoming more urbanised and increasingly well educated, particularly women. Fertility rates are declining and the age at which women are having their first child has increased from 24.9 in 1980 to 31 in 2017. Life expectancy, on the other hand, has increased with male life expectancy reaching 79.3 years in 2015 and female life expectancy reaching 83.3 years that year (Hegarty, 2019).

This reduction in fertility levels and increased life expectancy means that Ireland's population, while still relatively young, is getting older. The average age of the population is now 37.4, an increase of 6.3 years since 1981. The population is also becoming more diverse, with an estimated 3.6 per cent of the population (183,500 people) with a stated nationality as being from outside of the EU.

### *Emigration and Immigration*

Net migration into Ireland was positive in April 2021, continuing a pattern which has been in place since 2015. This means that more people have entered the country than are leaving it, although the pandemic has necessarily resulted in a decrease in both immigration and emigration. Analysing migration trends over the past 30 years, we see a relatively high rate of emigration in 1988 and 1989, at a time of recession, which decreased slowly over the next 10 years peaking again in 2012 whereas immigration figures rise slowly from 1990, peaking in 2007. (Chart 10.1).

**Chart 10.1** Immigration, Emigration and Net Migration, ,000 people, 1988-2021



**Source:** CSO, Population and Migration Estimates April 2021, Table 1.

**Note:** Figures for 2016 taken from Census 2016; Figures for 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021 are preliminary.

The recent years of decreasing emigration and increasing immigration indicated a renewed confidence in Ireland's economic prospects, however given the issues with housing, health and the cost of living, explored elsewhere in this book, we will need to continue to monitor migration trends. The figures for 2021 show the smallest increase in population growth since 2014. Covid-19 health measures are likely to be a main factor, due to the restriction on movements and a contraction of available employment, coupled with the lowest levels of natural increase (births minus deaths) recorded since 2000.

In terms of nationality, less than one in five (16.6 per cent) of total immigrants to Ireland in 2021 had a nationality from within the EU (excluding Ireland and the UK), 4.3 per cent were UK nationals and 14.1 per cent had a nationality from within the rest of the world (CSO, 2021) (Table 10.1).

**Table 10.1** Estimated Migration by Nationality, 2017 – 21, by '000

Year		Irish	UK	Rest of EU 15	EU16-27	Rest of World	Total
2018	Immigration	28.4	7.3	11.6	12.2	30.9	90.3
	Emigration	-28.3	-4.1	-6.8	-7.1	-10.0	-56.3
	Net	-0.1	3.2	4.8	5.0	20.8	34.0
2019	Immigration	26.9	7.4	12.6	11.1	30.6	88.6
	Emigration	-29.0	-3.2	-4.5	-7.0	-11.2	-54.9
	Net	-2.1	4.3	8.0	4.1	19.4	33.7
2020	Immigration	28.9	5.5	9.2	11.4	30.4	85.4
	Emigration	-28.3	-2.5	-5.2	-9.2	-11.4	-56.5
	Net	0.5	3.0	4.1	2.2	19.0	28.9
2021	Immigration	30.2	4.3	7.6	9.0	14.1	65.2
	Emigration	-22.8	-3.0	-7.6	-5.1	-15.4	-54.0
	Net	7.3	1.3	0.0	3.9	-1.3	11.2

**Source:** Extracted from CSO Population and Migration Estimates, April 2021, Table 1.3.

**Notes:** Data relates to the year to April. 'Rest of EU' refers to Pre 2004 EU members less UK and Ireland. 'EU16-28' refers to EU Members that joined after 2004.

### *Ireland as a multicultural society*

Integration is defined in current Irish policy as the 'ability to participate to the extent that a person needs and wishes in all of the major components of society without having to relinquish his or her own cultural identity' (Department of Justice and Equality, 2017). For the 12.7 per cent of the population who are non-Irish nationals, achieving real integration requires concerted policy responses aimed at supporting education, job activation, tackling hate speech and racism and supporting cultural awareness.

According to Census 2016, there was a total of 535,475 non-Irish nationals – representing 200 different nations – living in Ireland on Census night (CSO, 2017a). The main nationalities were Polish (23 per cent) and UK (19 per cent). Other nationalities with over 10,000 residents included USA, Brazil, France, Germany,

India, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Spain. Non Irish nationals have a very different age profile to the rest of the population with half aged between 25 and 42 compared with a quarter of the Irish population. There are proportionately fewer children under 14 (12.3 per cent versus 22.5 per cent), and older people (4 per cent versus 13 per cent) among non-Irish nationals. The unemployment rate among non-Irish nationals was 15.4 per cent, compared with a rate of 12.6 per cent among the Irish population.

Census 2016 also asked people to identify their ethnicity and cultural background. 681,016 people identify themselves as other than “White Irish”, of whom 234,289 identify as Black, Asian or other people of colour.

At the time of writing, almost 13,500 Ukrainian refugees, primarily women and children, have arrived in Ireland with thousands more expected. The EU is granting “temporary protection” status, which means they can live, settle and work in the EU for a period of time. This is to be welcomed; however, it is in stark contrast to the treatment of refugees fleeing other war-torn territories. Our approach needs to be consistent, placing human rights at the centre of International Protection policies.

### ***Racism in Ireland***

According to the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance fifth Report on Ireland (European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, 2019) while Ireland has made some progress in tackling racism in recent years, there is still more to be done, particularly in areas of hate speech and hate crimes; ethnic profiling; gender identity; supporting the needs of Travellers and Roma, particularly when it comes to accommodation; and supporting asylum seeker applications to be processed more efficiently and tackling specific areas of discrimination in Direct Provision.

In 2019, Ireland appeared before the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (UNCERD). The Committee’s concluding observations published in January 2020, acknowledged some positive advances, such as the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2018; the official recognition of Travellers as an ethnic minority in 2017; and the adoption of the Migration Integration Strategy 2017-2020, amongst others (United Nations, 2020). However, the list of concerns and recommendations is still considerable, including the system of Direct Provision (there have since been moves to end Direct Provision, discussed below), Human Trafficking, data collection, the legislative Framework for the elimination of racial discrimination and the increasing incidence of racist hate speech (United Nations, 2020).

In 2020, there were 700 reported racist incidents (compared with 530 in 2019), 99 were linked to discrimination, 159 of these were criminal offences and hate speech accounted for 334 (almost double the number from 2019). 33 per cent of both victims of racist criminal acts and discrimination were of African descent (Irish Network against Racism, 2020).



Data from the CSO<sup>1</sup>, as of Q1 2019, 17.7 per cent of the population aged 18+, or approximately 636,000 people, experienced some form of discrimination in the two years prior to the interview. Of this 636,000, the most common ground of perceived discrimination was age (34.1 per cent, c.217,000 people); Race/skin colour/ethnic group/nationality (21.9 per cent, c.139,000 people); and gender (18.6 per cent, c.118,000 people). Persons from a non-White ethnic background were the group most likely to experience discrimination in Accessing Services (23.1 per cent) and the second most likely group to experience discrimination in the Workplace (19.8 per cent).

The evidence suggests that equality legislation is not having the desired effect of combatting inequality and discrimination and that, even as recently as 2019, these issues affected 636,000 people living in Ireland. Ireland has experienced profound societal changes since the introduction of the first piece of equality legislation, this review presents a timely opportunity to reflect that.

The same report from the CSO indicated that nearly one in eight (11.8 per cent) people aged 18+, including those who had not experienced discrimination, had no knowledge or understanding of their rights under the Irish equality legislation, compared to 56.8 per cent who had a 'moderate understanding' of their rights and 31.4 per cent who had a 'good understanding'.

### *Travellers*

There were 30,897 Irish Travellers in 2016, an increase of 5 per cent from 2011, only three percent of whom were aged 65 and over, compared to 13.3 per cent for the general population. (CSO, 2017a). Notwithstanding the statement of recognition of Travellers as an ethnic minority, Travellers continue to face discrimination in education, employment, and accommodation, with a discernible gap in health over the life course (Watson, et al., 2017).

According to the 2016 Census, education levels amongst Travellers remain low, with 62 per cent having primary education or less, 13 per cent having completed second level and only one per cent having a college degree. Eighty per cent of Travellers reported as being unemployed, compared with 13 per cent for non-Travellers. Watson, et al., 2017 suggest that much of this is directly related to low levels of education. Traveller health is also poor with 19 per cent categorised as having a disability compared to 13.5 per cent of the general population. The suicide rate amongst Traveller men is almost seven times higher than in the general population, and this is an indicator of a serious mental health issues in the Traveller Community. Overall life expectancy for Travellers is low with only 7.5 per cent of Travellers aged over 54 years compared with 23 per cent of the overall population.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/ed/equalityanddiscrimination2019/>

## ***Migrant Workers***

Census 2016 reports that 342,000 people in the work force were non-Irish nationals, with the four leading origins being the UK, Poland, Lithuania and Romania. Forty-two percent of all non-Irish national workers were employed in four main sectors, namely Wholesale and Retail Trade (45,812), Accommodation and Food Services (40,859), Manufacturing Industries (36,387) and Human Health and Social Work (21,779). In terms of socio-economic groupings, nearly half (47 per cent) were classified in non-manual, manual skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled occupations, compared with 39 per cent of Irish nationals. This is at variance with the high educational qualifications of immigrants, indicating that many are employed below their skill level. There is a need to accelerate the appropriate recognition of qualifications gained in other countries, so that migrants can work in their fields of expertise. Non-EEA nationals require a work permit to take up employment in Ireland in sectors where there is a skills shortage. In 2021, 16,275 permits were issued, 957 were refused and a further 7360 were withdrawn (Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, 2021).

In January 2022, a scheme opened to allow applications from undocumented migrants and their families living in the State to apply for a permit to remain and reside in the State. This is very welcome, however there are many people who will not be eligible based on the criteria applied and the imposition of a fee of €700 for a family and €550 for an individual may pose a barrier, particularly given the precarious nature of the employment of many undocumented migrants.

## ***Human Trafficking***

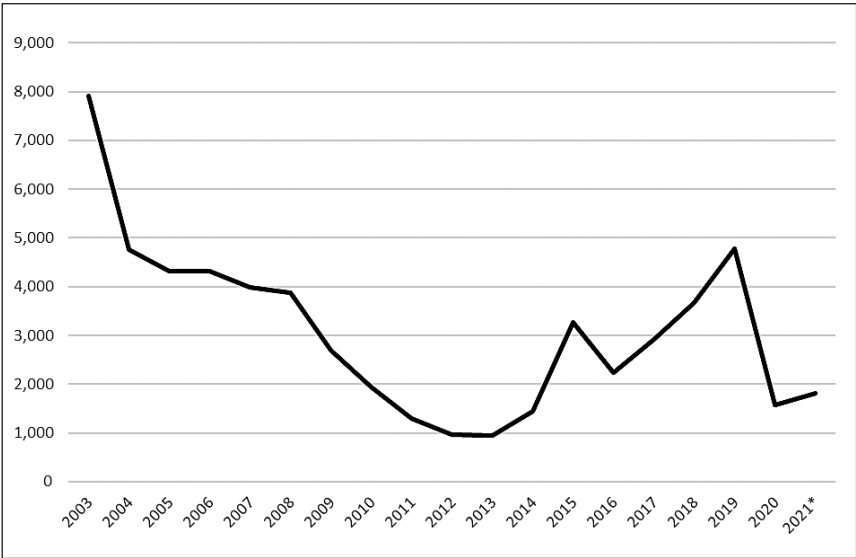
The second report on Ireland's performance on implementing the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA, 2017), confirms that trafficking is on the increase in Ireland, mainly for sexual and labour exploitation. They note a high number of undocumented migrants working in personal care, hospitality, fisheries, agriculture (including illegal activities such as cannabis grow houses). While all these individuals may not have specifically been trafficked into Ireland, their precarious employment conditions put them at a serious disadvantage and restrict their choices. The delegation developing the third GRETA report visited Ireland in December 2021 and their report is expected in Autumn 2022.

## ***Asylum Seekers and Direct Provision***

### ***Asylum Seekers***

Asylum seekers are defined as those who come to Ireland seeking permission to live in Ireland because there are substantial grounds for believing that they would face a real risk of suffering serious harm if returned to their country of origin. In contrast to programme refugees, asylum seekers must have their immigration status defined when they arrive. 10.2 shows the number of applications for International Protection made to Ireland between 2003 and 2021 (up to October 2021).

**Chart 10.2** Applications for International Protection, 2003 to 2021\*



**Source:** International Protection Office, Monthly Statistical Report, various years.

**Note:** Data for 2021 refers to up to October 2021.

Between January and October 2021, there were 1,808 applications for International Protection received to Ireland’s International Protection Office (International Protection Office, 2021). This represents a slight increase on 2020 which saw numbers fall dramatically after a period of increases. The number of asylum seekers in 2019 represented an increase of 39 per cent on 2018, which itself was an increase of 81 per cent on 2017. The decrease in 2020, therefore, is a likely consequence of restrictions on travel as a result of Covid-19.

According to the Immigration in Ireland Annual Review 2020 (Department of Justice, 2022), 42 people were deported from the State in 2020, 34 of those within the first three months of the year. The Report notes that, from December 2020, no further deportation orders would be enforced during the pandemic “except in circumstances where an individual may be a threat to national security and whose presence in Ireland would be contrary to the public interest”.

*Direct Provision*

In October 2021, there were 6,841 people living in the Direct Provision system, totalling 70 separate locations across 21 counties (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2021).

Under Direct Provision as operated in almost all of these centres, asylum-seekers receive accommodation and board, together with a weekly allowance. The system has been in place for 20 years and has come in for criticism from a number of Oireachtas Committee and independent reports, from the people directly living in the system and by both international and national human rights organisations.

There is a commitment in Programme for Government 2020 to end the system of Direct Provision which is supported by The Report of the Advisory Group on the provision of support including Accommodation to persons in the International Protection Process (The Day Report) (Department of Justice and Equality, 2020). The corresponding White Paper was published on the 26<sup>th</sup> February 2021 and sets out Government policy to replace the Direct Provision system and establish a new International Protection Support Service over the next four years which would ideally be expedited (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2021). This new system will support those applying for protection to integrate in Ireland from day one with health, education, housing and employment supports. Applicants will stay in a new Reception and Integration Centre for no more than four months. These centres will be delivered on behalf of the State by non-profit organisations. Applicants will receive language and employment activation supports during this initial orientation period. After the first four months, anyone with a claim still in progress will move to accommodation within the community, families with own door and single people will have own room accommodation. Other supports such as access to legal aid and assistance, access to work, education and training, access to driving licences and bank accounts are provided for which are all welcome steps. The Day Report recommends a time limited system that will deliver decisions faster and makes proposals to bring about an end to the current system of accommodation provision. There is an acknowledgement that sourcing accommodation will be a challenge in light of the current lack of availability of social housing and the high demand for affordable private rental accommodation. However, the Report recommends that the new system be fully in place by 2023 by way of interim changes, requiring a whole of Government response (Department of Justice and Equality, 2020).

### *Participation*

Ensuring that people are involved in making the decisions that affect them and their communities is a key element of real democracy. True involvement requires participation that goes beyond voting (representative democracy). By definition, such a deliberative democracy approach requires a leaving aside of power differentials and making a specific effort to ensure that the voices and views of people who are not traditionally influential are heard and taken into account (Coote, 2011; Healy & Reynolds, 2011; Elster, 1998),

People want to be more involved and to participate in debates concerning policies, particularly those that directly affect them. The extensive use of social media as a forum for discussion and debate indicates a capacity to question the best use of State resources to develop a just and fair society. It is crucially important for our

democracy that people feel engaged in this process and all voices are heard in a constructive way. It is imperative that groups with power, recognise, engage with, and develop partnerships with people to co-create services and policy.

### ***A forum for dialogue on civil society issues***

The need for a new forum and structure for discussion of issues on which people disagree is becoming more obvious as political and mass communication systems develop. A civil society forum and the formulation of a new social contract against exclusion has the potential to re-engage people with the democratic process. Our highly centralised government, both in terms of decision-making and financially, means that citizens are represented more by professional politicians than by their local constituency representatives. While there have been some structural improvements, such as an enhanced committee structure, the introduction of Public Participation Networks (PPNs) (discussed below), better success rates for Bills led by the opposition and a budgetary oversight process, much remains to be done before Ireland has a genuinely participative decision-making structure.

### ***Participation in Local Government - Public Participation Networks (PPNs)***

In 2014, the Local Government Act was amended to introduce Public Participation Networks (PPNs) in every local authority in the country. The PPN recognises the contribution of volunteer-led organisations to local economic, social and environmental capital. It facilitates input by these organisations into local government (Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, 2017) By the end of 2020, over 17,530 community and voluntary, social inclusion and environmental organisations were members of a PPN. More than 941 PPN representatives were elected to over 410 committees on issues such as strategic policy, local community development, joint policing and so on. (Department of Rural and Community Development, 2022)

Local authorities and PPNs work together collaboratively to support communities and build the capacity of member organisations to engage meaningfully on issues that concern them. PPNs have a significant role in the development and education of their member groups, sharing information, promoting best practice and facilitating networking. Local authorities also have a vital role to play in facilitating participation through open consultative processes and active engagement. Building real engagement at local level is a developmental process that requires intensive work and investment

### ***Supporting the Community & Voluntary Sector***

Community and Voluntary organisations have a long history of providing services and infrastructure at local and national level and are engaged in most, if not all, areas of Irish society. They provide huge resources in energy, personnel, finance and commitment that, were it to be sourced on the open market, would come at considerable cost to the State. There are an estimated 189,000 employees in registered charitable organisations in Ireland. Over half of all registered charities

have between one and 20 volunteers, with three per cent having 250 or more. It is estimated that the value of this volunteering work, using the minimum wage, is €648.8 million per year (this increases to €1.5 billion when using the average income) (Indecon, 2018). It is important to note, however, that this report is based on those charities that are required to register with the Charities Regulator, which accounts for approximately 300,536 volunteers. The CSO put the number of volunteers at nearer one million, when sporting, human rights, religious and political organisations are included.

During the recession Government funding for the Community and Voluntary sector reduced dramatically and this has not, as yet, been restored. It is essential that Government appropriately resource this sector into the future and that it remains committed to the principle of providing multi-annual statutory funding. The introduction of the Charities Regulatory Authority, the Governance Code and the Lobbying Register in recent years is intended to foster transparency and improve public trust. However, it is essential that the regulatory requirements are proportional to the size and scope of organisations, and do not create an unmanageable administrative burden which detracts from the core work and deters volunteers from getting involved.

In August 2019, the Department of Rural and Community Development published *Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: A Five-Year Strategy to Support the Community and Voluntary Sector in Ireland 2019-2024* (Department of Rural and Community Development, 2019). This Strategy sets out the vision for community and voluntary sector development over the next five years. It contains a series of 11 policy objectives across all stakeholders, from Public Participation Networks to civil society organisations to local and national Governments.

The Community Services Programme works to tackle disadvantage by providing supports to community-based organisations that enables them to deliver social, economic and environmental services, with a particular focus on areas that, by virtue of geographical isolation or social isolation or have too low a level of demand to satisfy market led providers. The groups in receipt of these services may not otherwise have any access.

*Social Justice Ireland* recommends that implementation of the five year Strategy be resourced in a way that recognises the important role of the Community and Voluntary Sector, the local role of the PPNs, and the challenges of community development, and seeks to generate real partnerships between communities and agencies.

### ***National Social Dialogue***

Social dialogue is a critically important component of effective decision making in a modern democracy. Government needs to engage all sectors of society to develop policies that will shape the future and to ensure priority is given to well-being and the common good; to address the challenges of markets and their failures; to link

rights and responsibilities. Otherwise policy is likely to produce lop-sided outcomes that will benefit those who have access, while excluding others, most notably the vulnerable.

The Community and Voluntary Pillar provides a mechanism for social dialogue that should be engaged with by Government across the range of policy issues in which the Pillar's members are deeply involved. All aspects of governance should be characterised by transparency and accountability. Social dialogue contributes to this. We believe governance along these lines can and should be developed in Ireland.

If Ireland is to succeed in addressing the challenges identified it faces, the pathway to doing so must be founded on consensus, must be well-managed, and must be properly evaluated. Reforming governance and widening participation must remain a key goal. An increased recognition of the need to include all stakeholders in the decision-making process is needed. A deliberative decision-making process, involving all stakeholders and founded on reasoned, evidence-based debate is required. To secure a new Social Contract, participation by various sectors of society is essential. One component of real participation is recognition that everyone should have the right to participate in shaping the society in which they live and the decisions that impact on them. In the 21st century this involves more than voting in elections and referenda. Ireland needs real, regular and structured deliberative democracy to ensure that all interest groups and all sectors of society can contribute to the discussion and the decision-making on the kind of society Ireland wishes to build.

## **10.2 Key Policies and Reforms**

### ***Implement Skills Transfer Programmes***

The numbers of migrants with a third level education continued to rise in 2021. Of those immigrating to Ireland, both the number (from 28,200 in 2012 to 42,600 in 2021) and proportion (56 per cent in 2012 to 70 per cent of all immigrants in 2021) with a third level education has increased. Migrants tend to be younger than the general population with just over half of both immigrants and emigrants in 2020 aged between 25 and 44. People aged over 65 continued to be the least likely to migrate (CSO, 2021).

The number of emigrants with a third level education increased from 28,300 in 2019 to 32,500 in 2021. As a proportion of all emigrants, this represents 63.7 per cent of the total. Immigrants with a third level education numbered 42,600 or 70.8 per cent of the total. Of those who left Ireland in 2021, 58.6 per cent were employed (a slight increase in the number, from 28,600 to 29,900). A further 21.5 per cent were students, a decrease of over six percentage points on 2020 figures. The proportion of emigrants who are unemployed has been in decline since 2012, reflecting the decrease in unemployment generally since then. However, in 2021 the number of unemployed people emigrating increased from 3,000 in 2020 to 5,200 reflecting

the impact Covid-19 health measures had on employment prospects. The lack of affordable housing, affordable childcare and other services is likely a contributing factor to the increase in employed emigrants from this country. If we are to retain our skilled workforce, we need to take a broader approach to retention that takes a whole of life-cycle approach.

In light of higher educational attainment levels of immigrants into Ireland, and the increasing number of Irish people returning to this country, there is a need for a skills transfer programme for returning migrants in order to ensure the skills that they have acquired whilst working abroad are recognised in Ireland. This is something that *Social Justice Ireland* has advocated for previously. Given the investment made in the education of young graduates, it is essential that steps are taken to retain them and their expertise within Ireland, and to attract back those who have emigrated in recent years. Of course, this is coupled with the need to provide both decent work and infrastructure to support increasing numbers of immigrants who will need to be housed and whose healthcare and childcare needs must be accommodated, as set out in *Social Justice Ireland's* Wellbeing Framework for a new Social Contract outlined in Chapter 2.

There has been criticism of Irish immigration policy and legislation specifically due to the lack of support for the integration of immigrants and a lack of adequate recognition of the permanency of immigration. In June 2019, the ESRI published a report on a study of the labour market integration of non-EU nationals in Ireland (Arnold, et al., 2019). This Report, based on an EU-wide study, looked at the policies and practices aimed at labour market integration of non-EU migrants and found that poor recognition of qualifications and lack of targeted measures to develop skills are key challenges for migrants' integration.

For many migrants, immigration is not temporary. They will remain in Ireland and make it their home. In turn, Irish people are experiencing life in different cultural contexts around the world. Ireland is now a multi-racial and multi-cultural country and Government policies should promote and encourage the development of an inclusive and integrated society with respect for, and recognition of, diverse cultures.

### ***Implement the recommendations of the Commission for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination***

The consequences of racism are very serious, increasing fear and insecurity. The European Network Against Racism (European Network against Racism (Ireland), 2018) noted that "Racism has a demonstrable impact on the lives of those targeted.... there is psychological impact, ... impact on their social connectedness, and economic impacts through for example increased costs or lost income." This is unacceptable in a society that prides itself on its open and accepting character. But racism is not only socially damaging, it is also harmful to the economy. As Ireland seeks to attract FDI and is sourcing workers from all over the world to meet skills



shortages and in light of the increase in reported racist incidents, it is imperative that racism in all areas is definitively addressed.

It is also clear that more is needed to raise awareness among the general population of the equality legislation, not just with those who are most at risk of experiencing discrimination, but also those who are at risk of perpetrating it. However, with just 3 per cent of the people who experienced discrimination making an official complaint, and just 1.7 per cent contacting the Gardaí, raising awareness of the legislation alone may not result in any greater use of the legislation to combat discrimination. It would appear that a person's knowledge of their rights increases with their experience of discrimination, with almost one in three people who had experienced discrimination (32.3 per cent) having a 'very good understanding' of their rights. Educational attainment also plays a role here, with 46.3 per cent of people with a third level education and 35.2 per cent of persons with a post-Leaving Certificate education having the greatest understanding of their rights.

*Social Justice Ireland* welcomed the recommendations of the CERD and the commitments made in the Programme for Government (Government of Ireland, 2020) and we now urge Government to continue to fulfil these commitments.

### ***Reinstate funding for Traveller specific initiatives***

Housing continues to be problematic for Travellers with Census 2016 figures showing that 39 per cent of Traveller accommodation was overcrowded compared with 6 per cent for all households. In contrast to previous trends, the number of caravans being used increased by 10 per cent between 2011 and 2016. 517 Travellers (1.7 per cent) were recorded as homeless on Census night 2016 compared with 0.1 per cent of the overall population.

Much has been accomplished in recognising the ethnicity and uniqueness of the nomadic nature of the Travelling community and policy could be better shaped to recognise and support this. Housing legislation provides for the provision of social housing in the form of fixed dwellings. Traveller specific provision is limited to the Caravan loan scheme, halting sites and group housing schemes. There is no equal mechanism for local authorities to support Travellers to preserve their identity and culture by renting a caravan to a Traveller household on the same basis that a council house is rented to a settled family.

In 2021, the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC), published the First Council-by-Council Equality Review on Traveller Accommodation.<sup>2</sup> The main issues that emerged from the review were consistent underspends of Local Authority accommodation funds (2020 did see the full allocation spent as a reaction to Covid-19 health measures), a lack of real data to inform decision-making and no discussion of Travellers' actual accommodation preferences.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ihrec.ie/our-work/equality-review/>

The National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (Department of Justice and Equality, 2017a) was published in 2017. This lists 149 actions across Government under the headings of cultural identity, education, employment, children and youth, health, gender equality, anti-discrimination, accommodation and access to public services. Traveller services were disproportionately hit during the austerity programme, and that reversing the impact of those cuts will require concerted action (Pavee Point, 2013). The INAR Report to CERD (Irish Network Against Racism, 2019) clearly indicated that the pace of progress of this Strategy was inadequate. In light of the levels of discrimination faced by members of the Traveller community, more urgent action is needed to protect and support Traveller people. *Social Justice Ireland* calls for the full implementation of the new Strategy, in particular in the critical areas of education and accommodation.

### ***Fully Implement the recommendations of the 2019 Trafficking in Persons Report***

The Programme for Government (2020) makes a commitment to enact legislation that encompasses both UN and EU measures and protocols to combat the smuggling and trafficking of migrants. The Department of Justice and Equality committed in June of 2020 to study the recommendations contained in the Trafficking in Persons Report 2020 (US Department of State, 2021) and state that ending the crime of human trafficking is a priority for the country.<sup>3</sup> The Human Trafficking investigation and Coordination Unit has been established with the Garda Síochána. As of June 2020, there were approximately 80 ongoing criminal investigations with regard to trafficking of persons with no direct convictions for the offence of trafficking but successful convictions for associated charges.<sup>4</sup>

As part of the Department of Justice and Equality commitment, a number of initiatives are planned or are due to begin in the near future; under Article 19 of the EU Human Trafficking Directive, legislation is currently being drafted that will designate the IHREC as Ireland's independent National Rapporteur for Anti-Human Trafficking, legislation is also being drafted to strengthen the framework of penalties, a review is to take place of the Criminal Justice (Sexual Offences) Act 2017, ongoing engagements with NGOs to identify ways of providing suitable accommodation to victims of trafficking and the establishment of a forum for stakeholders and victims.

*Social Justice Ireland* welcomes these recommendations and urges Government to act on them.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/4d124-statement-in-relation-to-the-trafficking-in-persons-report-2020/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://ilas.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/PR20000130>

### *Promote Deliberative Democracy*

There is a renewed appreciation of the importance of participation. The OECD Framework for Measuring Well-Being and Progress<sup>5</sup> as well as a newly created Well-Being Framework for Ireland both consider civil engagement as a key indicator.<sup>6</sup> In the OECD measure, Stakeholder Engagement “reflects how different stakeholders can participate in the development of new laws and regulatory standards..... 17 countries have listed examples of their policies and Ireland is not one of them” so much more work needs to be done (Clark, et al., 2022).

The democratic process would also benefit from the development of a new social contract against exclusion and in favour of a just society. This contract would include a forum for dialogue on civil society issues. Short-term initiatives such as the Presidents Ethics Initiative,<sup>7</sup> the Constitutional Convention<sup>8</sup> and Citizens Assembly<sup>9</sup> are welcome but need to be mainstreamed and reach all sections of Irish Society.

*Social Justice Ireland* welcomed the appointment of the National Economic and Social Council (NESC), whose role is to advise the Taoiseach on strategic policy issues relating to sustainable economic, social and environmental development. The annual National Economic Dialogue is also a useful model to share the perspectives of civil society, Government and the various sectors of society on key budgetary issues. However, a single event is inadequate and does not allow for a broader discussion on the interplay between economic and social issues.

*Social Justice Ireland* recommends that such a National Dialogue takes place more frequently, and that the focus is broadened from the economic to include social and environmental issues.

*Social Justice Ireland* also proposes that Government authorises and resources an initiative to identify how a civil society forum<sup>10</sup> could be developed and maintained and to examine how it might connect to the growing debate at European level around civil society issues. There are many issues such a forum could address including the meaning of citizenship in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the shape of the social model Ireland wishes to develop; how to move towards a low carbon sustainable future and so on. To that end, *Social Justice Ireland* calls for the PPNs to be adequately resourced and supported.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/wise/measuring-well-being-and-progress.htm>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/1fb9b-a-well-being-framework-for-ireland-join-the-conversation/?referrer=http://www.gov.ie/wellbeing-framework/>

<sup>7</sup> For further details see <http://www.president.ie/en/the-president/special-initiatives/ethics>

<sup>8</sup> For more information see <https://www.constitution.ie/Convention.aspx>

<sup>9</sup> For more information see <https://www.citizensassembly.ie/en/>

<sup>10</sup> For a further discussion of this issue see Healy and Reynolds (2003:191-197).

## 10.3 Key Policy Priorities

*Social Justice Ireland* believes that the following policy positions should be adopted to improve the lives of all those living in Ireland today:

- Invest in the retention of young graduates and programmes to assimilate skills obtained while abroad.
- Fully implement the recommendations of the Commission for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination within a reasonable timeframe.
- Fully implement the recommendations of the 2019 Trafficking in Persons Report.
- Reinstate funding for Traveller-specific initiatives and implement the recommendations of the Seanad Public Consultation Committee published in January 2020.
- Adequately resource the Public Participation Network (PPN) structures for participation at Local Authority level and ensure capacity building is an integral part of the process.
- Promote deliberative democracy and a process of inclusive social dialogue to ensure there is real and effective monitoring and impact assessment of policy development and implementation using an evidence-based approach at local and national level.
- Resource an initiative to identify how a real participative civil society debate could be developed and maintained.

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## Chapter eleven

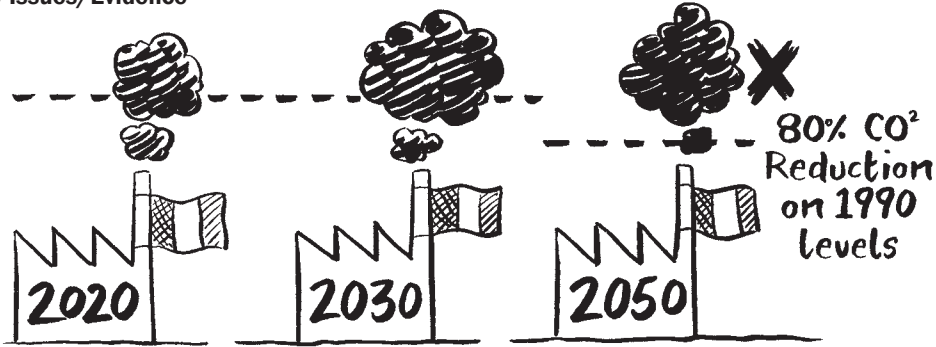
**Chapter 11**  
Sustainability

**Core Policy Objective:**

To ensure that all development is socially, economically and environmentally sustainable.



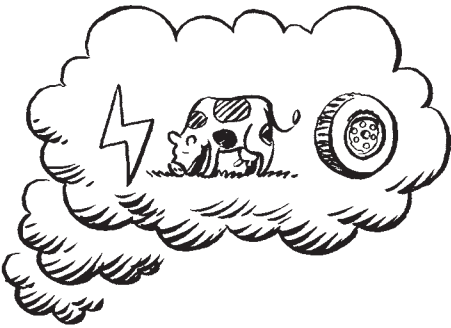
**Key Issues/Evidence**



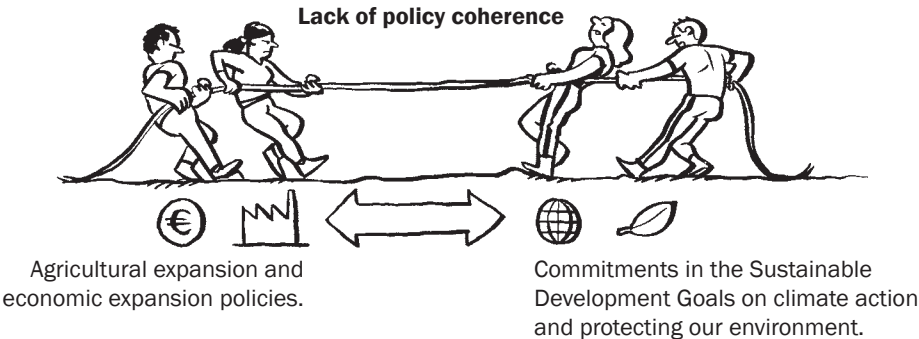
Ireland has not met our 2020 emissions targets and we are on track to overshoot our 2030 emissions targets.

Ireland is headed in the wrong direction to meet our national 2050 goal to reduce CO2 emissions by 80 per cent on 1990 levels.

Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions continue to increase in line with economic and employment growth and have returned to pre-Covid levels.



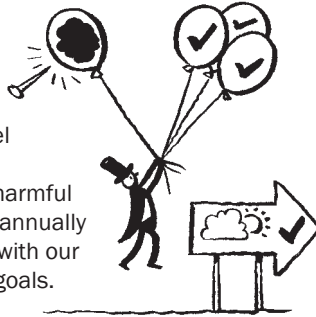
Our emissions are dominated by agriculture, transport and energy.





## Policy Solutions

Remove fossil fuel subsidies and environmentally harmful tax expenditures annually that do not align with our national climate goals.

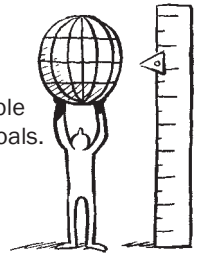


Integrate climate adaptation into the annual budgetary process.

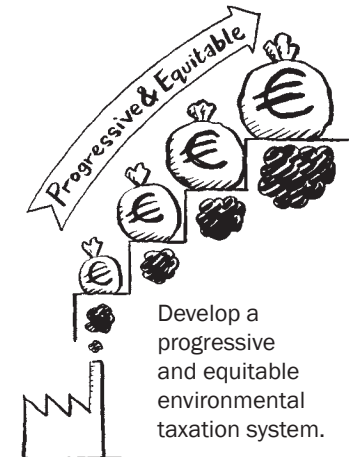


Fully resource the polices required to implement our 2030 climate targets.

Adopt targets and a reporting system for each of the Sustainable Development Goals.

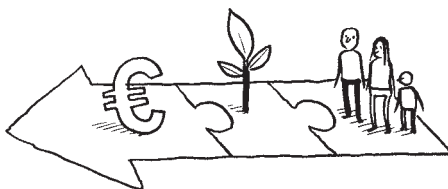


Fully resource the circular economy strategy.

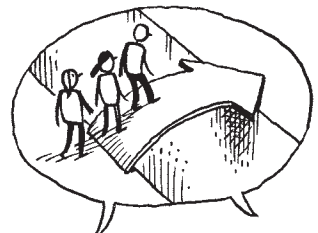


Develop a progressive and equitable environmental taxation system.

Develop a comprehensive mitigation and transition programme to support communities and people in the transition to a low carbon society.



Develop a new National Index of Progress encompassing environmental, economic and social indicators of progress



Develop a Just Transition Dialogue structure at regional and national level.

## 11.

## SUSTAINABILITY

**Core Policy Objective: SUSTAINABILITY**

To ensure that all development is socially, economically and environmentally sustainable.

Sustainable development is defined as ‘development which meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs’ (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). It encompasses three pillars; environment, society and economy. A sustainable development framework integrates these three pillars in a balanced manner with consideration for the needs of future generations. Maintaining this balance is crucial to the long-term development of a sustainable resource-efficient future for Ireland.

Ireland is committed to legally binding climate-based goals in 2020 and 2030 and a national commitment to be carbon neutral by 2050. Government has also committed to a Green New Deal in the Programme for Government. Ensuring development is sustainable socially, economically and environmentally will be key to achieving these targets. It is also crucial to delivering the Wellbeing Framework for a new Social Contract as outlined in Chapter 2.

To achieve this sustainable development in the years ahead, *Social Justice Ireland* believes that policy should:

- Fully resource the policies required to implement our 2030 climate targets.
- Integrate climate adaptation into the annual budgetary process.
- Adopt targets and a reporting system for each of the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Review all fossil fuel subsidies and environmentally harmful tax expenditures annually with a view to removing those that do not align with our national climate goals.
- Introduce shadow national accounts, and assign value to natural capital and ecosystems in our national accounting systems.

- Fully resource the CSO to implement the System for Environmental-Economic Accounts (SEEA) and the future compilation of natural capital accounts.
- Develop a comprehensive mitigation and transition programme to support communities and people in the transition to a low carbon society.
- Develop a progressive and equitable environmental taxation system.
- Develop a new National Index of Progress encompassing environmental and social indicators of progress as well as economic ones.
- Develop a Just Transition Dialogue structure at regional and national level.

## 11.1 Key Evidence

### *Global Context*

The international evidence regarding climate change and the impact of human activity is irrefutable. Extreme weather events have been made up to nine times more likely by global warming due to human activity. The Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change paints an ominous picture with scientists observing changes in the Earth's climate in every region and across the whole climate system. Some of the changes already set in motion—such as continued sea level rise—are irreversible over hundreds to thousands of years. Carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) is the main driver of climate change and without immediate, rapid and large-scale reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, limiting warming to close to 1.5°C or even 2°C will be beyond reach (IPCC, 2021).

Increased levels of greenhouse gases, such as CO<sub>2</sub>, increase the amount of energy trapped in the atmosphere which leads to global effects such as increased temperatures, melting of snow and ice, and raised global average sea level. Food production and ecosystems are particularly vulnerable. The latest research from the World Meteorological Organisation shows that 2011-2020 was the warmest decade on record, with 2015 to 2020 the warmest six-year period on record, in a persistent long-term climate change trend (WMO, 2020). This period is characterised by sea level rise, ice loss and extreme weather.

The latest United Nations Environment Programme Annual Emissions Gap Report (UNEP, 2021) concludes that new national climate pledges combined with other mitigation measures put the world on track for a global temperature rise of 2.7°C by the end of the century, well above the goals of the Paris climate agreement. This would lead to catastrophic changes in the Earth's climate. The world needs to halve annual greenhouse gas emissions in the next eight years to keep global warming below 1.5°C this century, the aspirational goal of the Paris Agreement.

### *National climate policy*

The Programme for Government commits to a Green New Deal and to an average 7 per cent per annum reduction in overall greenhouse gas emissions from 2021 to 2030 (a 51 per cent reduction over the decade), and to achieving net zero emissions by 2050. In order to meet our 2030 targets every measure in the Climate Action Plan will have to be fully implemented. Given challenges in implementing previous climate policies it is reasonable to question whether every measure in the plan will be implemented by 2030.

The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 established a legally binding framework with clear targets and commitments set in law, embedding the necessary structures and processes to ensure Ireland achieves national, EU and international climate goals and obligations in the near and long term on a statutory basis. The Climate Change Advisory Council (2021a) submitted its proposal for Ireland's first carbon budget programme on the 25th of October. The programme is broken down into three five-year carbon budgets. Carbon budgets prescribe the maximum amount of greenhouse gases that may be emitted over a specific period of time in the State.

The first two carbon budgets in the programme provide for the 51 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from the State by 2030 relative to 2018 as set out in the Climate Action and Low-Carbon Development (Amendment) Act. The annual Average Percentage Change in Emissions from the first carbon budget 2021-2025 is a reduction of 4.8 per cent, the second carbon budget 2026-2030 sees a reduction of 8.3 per cent, and the third budget 2031-2035 sees a reduction of 3.5 per cent.

The first carbon budget has built in the implications of the time-lag between making decisions and investments on the one hand, and on the other hand, seeing the emissions reductions come into effect.

The Climate Action Plan sets out indicative ranges of emissions reductions for each sector of the economy.

Emissions reductions by 2030 – by sector:

- Electricity: 62-81 per cent
- Transport: 42-50 per cent
- Buildings: 44-56 per cent
- Industry/Enterprise: 29-41 per cent
- Agriculture: 22-30 per cent
- Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF): 37-58 per cent

It also sets out the specific actions needed to deliver on our climate targets for each sector. The Plan also commits to a National Dialogue on Climate Action to give everyone in society the opportunity to play their part, and to embedding a just transition framework into the design and implementation of climate policy. This framework is comprised of four principles:

1. An integrated, structured, and evidence-based approach to identify and plan our response to just transition requirements.
2. People are equipped with the right skills to be able to participate in and benefit from the future net zero economy.
3. The costs are shared so that the impact is equitable and existing inequalities are not exacerbated.
4. Social dialogue to ensure impacted citizens and communities are empowered and are core to the transition process.

Progress has been made with the publication of the Climate Action Plan and the country's first ever series of carbon budgets to 2030. However, a significant gap remains between climate action policy and climate action delivery. Ireland has failed to meet its 2020 target of a 20 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions under the EU Effort Sharing Decision and will have to purchase emissions allowances from other Member States to meet the shortfall. Current projections also suggest the 2030 targets will be missed without the implementation of all actions in the Climate Action Plan (Climate Change Advisory Council, 2021b). Ireland is significantly off-track from paths that deliver long-term transition to climate neutrality and our 2050 national policy goals.

The increased incidence of flooding and other severe weather events are evidence of the impact that climate change and changing weather patterns are having on Ireland. It exposes the vulnerability of many of our services, communities and utilities and failure to act now will only result in greater expense later (Climate Change Advisory Council, 2020). The present rate of climate change demands a more urgent response if Ireland is to safeguard its resources, society and economy from its impacts.

### ***Emissions***

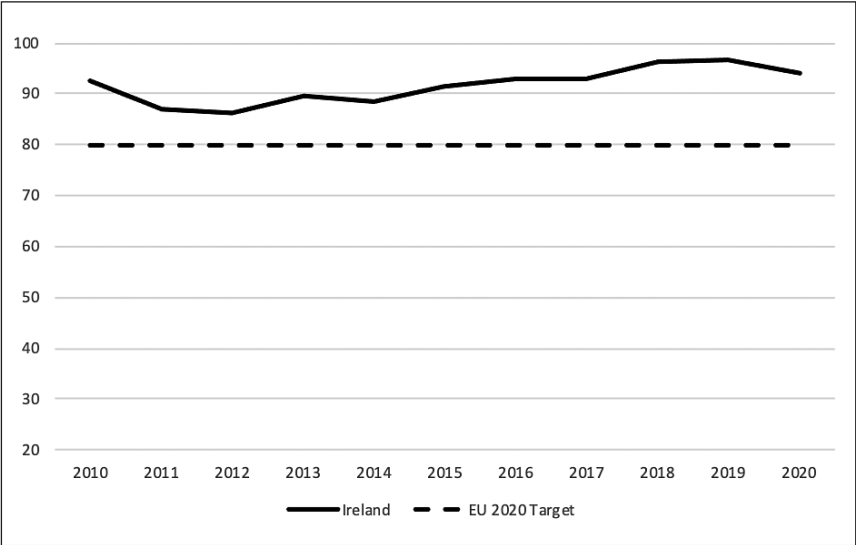
Emissions in Ireland are cyclical, and even though emissions fell during the recession, they immediately increased as economic activity increased. Even with the impact of the pandemic taken into account, Ireland will miss our energy and climate targets for 2020.

Provisional greenhouse gas emissions published by the Environmental Protection Agency for 2020 show that Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions decreased by 3.6 per cent in 2020, less than the reduction seen in 2019 (EPA, 2021).

Lockdown measures in response to the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in a 15.7 per cent decrease in Transport emissions, the largest sectoral emissions reduction. Peat fuelled electricity generation decreased by 51 per cent in 2020. Together with a 15 per cent increase in wind generation - this led to a 7.9 per cent reduction in Energy Industry emissions. Residential greenhouse gas emissions increased by 9.0 per cent, with a substantial increase in carbon intensive fossil fuel use driven by low fuel prices and working from home.

Agriculture emissions increased by 1.4 per cent in 2020, driven by increased activity in all areas, including a 3.2 per cent increase in the number of dairy cows. While the overall reduction in emissions of 3.6 per cent is welcome, the majority of the reduction was due to a short term decrease in transport emissions due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which is likely to be short-term.

**Chart 11.1** Greenhouse Gas Emissions Ireland's output versus Europe 2020 Target



Source: Eurostat, 2022.

Chart 11.1 tracks Ireland’s progress over time in relation to our Europe 2020 emissions reduction targets. What is clear from the chart is that Ireland came closest to our targets in the period 2011-2012, during the economic recession. The EPA noted at the time that Ireland’s reduced emissions resulted from reduced economic activity, not from any policy success, and has since noted that emissions continue to increase in line with economic growth, highlighting a complete failure at a political level to implement policies that will de-couple emissions from economic trends and put our economy and our society on a more sustainable footing.

There will be challenges in meeting our emissions targets in all sectors. The publication of the carbon budgets show just how far some sectors will have to go.

### *Agriculture*

Agriculture accounts for the largest proportion of Ireland's emissions (one third). The trend of persistently high levels of emission from agriculture (one of the highest in the EU) is a challenge that has not yet been adequately addressed. Irish dairy farms produce up to three times more greenhouse gas and ammonia emissions than other farming sectors (Teagasc, 2019), yet the dairy sector has been earmarked by Government for continued expansion. Increases in herd sizes on dairy farms is undermining any gains from more efficient and sustainable farming practices. This type of policy incoherence makes it challenging to support this sector to meet climate targets. Immediate action is required to meet the carbon budget target of a 22-30 per cent reduction in emissions from this sector by 2030.

Challenges relating to diverse objectives for the agriculture sector may be hard to resolve. This is evident in the 'Ag Climatise' strategy published by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (2020), while committing to an absolute reduction in the agricultural greenhouse gas inventory by 2030 sets no annual targets, and does not make any reference to the size of the national herd, which is a fundamental driver of agricultural emissions. 'Food Vision 2030' also fails to deal with the challenge posed by the expansion of the dairy herd and increasing emissions. This expansion in production in some farming sectors (dairy in particular) has negated the impact of efficiency gains and reduced activity in other farming sectors leading to increased emissions. This makes the targets set out for agriculture in the carbon budgets very challenging. Improvements in production efficiency will not be enough to meet the carbon budget target and the long-term trajectory for the livestock sector must be considered. Continued support for the beef sector must be contingent on much stronger conditionality and essential income support for low-income farm households via CAP (Common Agricultural Policy) should be consistent with the green transition and emissions reduction ambitions (CCAC, 2020). We must move away from the existing approach whereby the targets in our agricultural and food strategies serve to undermine the targets in our environmental policies.

With regard to our national and international climate commitments, we need to consider what agricultural policy will be best-placed to ensure Ireland meets its national and international targets: is it a policy of agricultural expansion and increased emissions to reach additional markets, or, is it a policy of ensuring Ireland produces the food required to meet our population needs and supports the agricultural sector in the developing world to ensure they can provide the food required to meet their own population needs? These are the kinds of issues that the Climate Action Plan must begin to address.

Policy change and investment is required immediately to support farmers in the transition to a greener economy and society.

## *Transport*

Transport trends are also going in the wrong direction, driving congestion and a host of sustainability problems and costs (CCAC, 2021b). Long-term integrated spatial and mobility planning supporting public transport and active travel in Ireland must be given urgent priority. While emissions fell significantly in 2020 due to the impact of the pandemic, emissions in Ireland are cyclical, thus transport emissions are likely to increase again. Significant investment is needed to develop a public transport network powered by electricity and renewable energy. To encourage electric car use the national charging infrastructure must be upgraded and the tax on electric vehicles should be reduced to make them a more affordable option.

The initial investment in public transport will be substantial if it is to have the necessary effect, but the long-term social, environmental and economic benefits of such a change would greatly outweigh the cost. It is vital that the upgrade to the public transport network has a strong focus on connectivity to ensure that people travelling from rural or regional areas to urban centres are encouraged to do so by public transport.

Road transport is just one element of transport emissions. Emissions from aviation are not taxed directly. Jet kerosene use increased by 1.2 per cent in 2019, and is now greater than petrol use, and air travel is now second only to private cars as a share of transport energy. As we begin to look at what measures are required to deliver on the policies in the Climate Action Plan, we must look at the aviation sector and the policy levers that are available to ensure that it makes a contribution to our climate targets. *Social Justice Ireland* has consistently argued that the aviation sector should make a contribution to Ireland's emissions targets<sup>1</sup> and outlined proposals as to how this could be achieved. Government must implement the key recommendations of 'The Impacts of Aviation Taxation in Ireland' (ESRI, 2021), in particular the recommendation to target the taxation of CO<sub>2</sub> directly by abolishing the Jet Kerosene exemption.

## *Cost of climate change*

As a member of the EU, Ireland has committed to legally binding emissions reduction targets; a 20 per cent reduction on 2005 emission levels by 2020, and a 30 per cent reduction on emissions compared to 2005 levels by 2030. Ireland will not meet the 2020 target and we are certainly not on a trajectory to make our 2030 targets. While the environmental implications of not meeting our emissions targets are obvious, there are also significant economic implications as a result of not meeting our EU 2020 targets. The Climate Change Advisory Council in its annual review notes that the use of public funds to buy emissions allowances in order to comply with our 2020 EU targets provides no domestic benefit, imposes a

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<sup>1</sup> For further details see our proposal on aviation taxation in Budget Choices 2020, 2021 and 2022.



current cost on the Exchequer, and leaves the country with an even bigger task to meet our future targets to 2030 and beyond (CCAC, 2019:iv). In the longer term, relying on purchasing credits can deepen carbon lock-in, and imposes a cost on the exchequer, and thereby ultimately on all citizens. This is a cost that could be avoided by actual emissions reductions.

The potential cost of climate change adaptation remains substantially unquantified at national scale, with it being left to individual sectors to address such issues. This approach is a barrier to effective decision making and opens the door to fragmentation and a conflict for resources (CCAC, 2021b). As we are projected to miss our 2020 targets, Ireland will be subject to fines at an estimated cost of between €65 million and €130 million per percentage point below the overall 16 per cent target (DCCAE, 2017:37). A recent assessment of Ireland’s progress towards achieving emission reduction targets set under EU Effort Sharing Decision No 406/2009/EU suggests that Ireland’s non-ETS emissions are projected to be between 2 per cent and 5 per cent per cent below 2005 levels in 2020 compared to a target of 20 per cent (EPA, 2020e).

Table 11.1 shows potential costs if we remain on this course – as well as variations on that scenario – assuming the two extremes noted above (€65m and €130m per percentage shortfall), as well as a mid-point. If Ireland remains on its current course, a best-case scenario looks like a fine in the region of €715m, but this could potentially be over €1 billion.

**Table 11.1** Projection of Possible Environmental Fines for Ireland in 2020 (€m)

Various scenarios	Fine per percentage point shortfall		
	€65m	€97.5m	€130m
EPA’s projected scenario is met (11% below 2005 levels)	€715	€1,072	€1,430
20% above EPA projection	€858	€1,287	€1,716
20% below EPA projection	€572	€858	€1,144
40% above EPA projection	€1,001	€1,501	€2,002
40% below EPA projection	€429	€643	€858

**Source:** Social Justice Ireland calculation based on EPA projections.

The European Commission launched the ‘*European Green Deal*’ (European Commission, 2019a) in December 2019. The plan is a roadmap to transform the European economic model by moving to a circular economy, reversing and averting biodiversity loss, and addressing climate change. The Green Deal for Europe contains a political commitment to become the first climate neutral continent by 2050. The European Pillar of Social Rights and the SDGs should form the basis of EU policy as it implements a European Green Deal. One of the challenges ahead is the raising of additional resources to fund the actions required for adaptation and transition. Simply rediverting existing funds will not be enough. A focus on green investment and climate as the core of our post-pandemic recovery plan offers the opportunity to respond to climate change and put us on the path to a just transition while rebuilding our economy and society.

The refocusing of the CAP budget to climate action presents an opportunity for farmers to invest in sustainable forms of agriculture and the Farm-to-Fork Strategy has the potential to deliver on short supply chains for farmers, and address some of the issues of product pricing for Irish farmers. Our agriculture, marine and agrifood strategies must reflect this new reality.

### ***Ireland’s environment and natural capital***

The deterioration of our environment and natural capital is also reflected in the latest EPA assessment of Ireland’s rivers (EPA, 2020b). The report found that over one third of rivers, and a quarter of lakes are failing to meet their environmental quality standards. The main threat to water quality is the presence of too many nutrients, such as phosphorus and nitrogen, which come primarily from agriculture and waste water. The problem is particularly acute in the south and south east where the main source is agriculture.

Climate change is also having an impact on biodiversity in Ireland. The EPA’s 2017 report repeats earlier assertions that the economic value of our ecosystem services is around €2.6 billion (EPA, 2017:24) but that the rate of habitat degradation and loss of biodiversity is accelerating across Europe, including in Ireland. Ireland needs to improve its data collection methods when it comes to biodiversity and to monitor the impact of climate change in this context to protect both our natural resources and our economy. Our natural capital and ecosystems should also be assigned value in our national accounting systems.

The decline of nature, biodiversity and insects, and the impacts, are starkly outlined in a series of international reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change<sup>2</sup>. The impact on Ireland is clear from reports from the EPA on water quality, air quality, biodiversity and emissions. Government must treat these reports as an

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ipcc.ch/srccl/>  
<https://www.ipcc.ch/srocc/home/>  
<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2019/05/nature-decline-unprecedented-report/>

impetus to implement a complete shift in policy away from business as usual and towards transition and adaptation. This requires immediate action and immediate investment. Although initially costly, the returns and dividend we will reap from the investment is significant. It will put Ireland on the pathway to meet 2030 and 2050 targets. Without action now the challenge becomes almost insurmountable.

Damaging environmental activity also affects health. According to the EPA (2021) about 1,300 premature deaths annually in Ireland can be attributed to air pollution. Those most impacted include older adults, people with chronic illnesses, children and those living in deprived communities. The World Health Organisation has described air pollution as the ‘single biggest environmental health risk’<sup>3</sup>. EPA figures show that air pollutants were above the WHO’s guideline values for health at 52 monitoring stations across Ireland in 2020 – mostly as a result of the burning of solid fuel in our cities, towns and villages. A nationwide Smoky Coal Ban is due to be implemented this year and must be part of a suite of policies to improve our air quality.

### ***Sustainable Development Goals***

The Global Goals for Sustainable Development were adopted at the UN General Assembly on 25th September 2015 and came into effect on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2016. These goals make up the *2030 Sustainable Development Agenda* which is defined as a ‘plan of action for people, planet and prosperity’.<sup>4</sup>

World leaders have committed to 17 Global Goals (also known as SDGs) containing 169 targets to achieve three distinct aims: to end poverty, fight inequality and tackle climate change over the 15 years to 2030. The SDGs commit countries to achieving sustainable development in its three dimensions – economic, social and environmental – in a balanced and integrated manner. To ensure these three dimensions are valued equally, new measures of progress will be required to ensure that economic progress does not come at the price of social or environmental progress.

*Social Justice Ireland* monitors Ireland’s performance towards achieving the SDGs through our annual *Sustainable Progress Index*. The latest version of the index shows that Ireland is ranked 9th out of the 14 countries on the economy (Social Justice Ireland, 2022). On the social index, Ireland is in the middle of the ranking, in 8th place. On the environmental index Ireland scores 9th which suggests notwithstanding the progress made in terms of the Climate Action Plan and carbon budgets, we face significant challenges in meeting our environmental targets. Several of the SDG scores reflecting the environment show the need to address some important sustainability issues. Challenges lie ahead if Ireland is to achieve its objectives on SDG 7 ‘Affordable and clean energy’, SDG12, ‘Responsible

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ambient-\(outdoor\)-air-quality-and-health](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ambient-(outdoor)-air-quality-and-health)

<sup>4</sup> <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

consumption and production’, SDG13, ‘Climate action’, and SDG6, ‘Clean water and sanitation’. Ireland’s *Sustainable Development Goals National Implementation Plan 2018-2020* is guided by four strategic priorities awareness, participation, support and policy alignment. If Ireland is to achieve the SDGs by 2030, national targets for each SDG is required as are new and ambitious policy measures. It is important that the Central Statistics Office’s (CSO’s) Sustainable Development Indicators are aligned with the *National Implementation Plan* so that Ireland has a comprehensive set of data to measure progress.

## 11.2 Key Policies and Reforms

Ireland has made some progress through the carbon budgets and Climate Action Plan. There is a limited window of opportunity to fully resource and implement these policies, which will require significant upfront investment and a strong implementation effort.

Ireland must learn to live, produce and consume within the physical and biological limits of the planet and rethink and redesign what we mean by social and economic ‘prosperity’ (EPA, 2016:159). To achieve this will require integrated and enduring governance, including brave social and economic measures.

A continued focus on cost-neutral or cost-effective actions to mitigate the impacts of climate change is misguided. While addressing the impact of climate change and implementing adaptation policies comes at a cost and requires strong collective effort, the cost of inaction and the associated social fallout would be much higher (European Commission, 2019c).

### *A green post-pandemic recovery*

The Climate Change Advisory Council and the EPA have stressed the absolute urgency of a green recovery if Ireland is to meet our climate ambitions and targets. The incorporation of emissions reduction targets into the National Development Plan is welcome, however more is required if economic, social and environmental policy are to align with our national climate goals. The OECD (2020) recommend three overarching principles to accelerate a fair, low-carbon recovery: (i) aligning the short-term emergency responses to the achievement of long-term economic, social and environmental objectives and international obligations; (ii) preventing both lock-in of high-emissions activities and worsened well-being of those in the bottom 40 per cent of the income distribution and (iii) systematically integrating environmental and equity considerations into the economic recovery and stimulus process.

Translating the OECD principles to the Irish context the new Government should:

**Integrate a Sustainable Development Framework into economic policy.**  
This would ensure that policies are socially, economically and environmentally

sustainable. Maintaining this balance is crucial to the long-term development of a sustainable resource-efficient future for Ireland.

**Develop a new National Index of Progress.** Government should develop a new National Index of Progress encompassing environmental and social indicators of progress as well as economic ones. This would involve moving beyond simply measuring GDP, GNI and GNI\* and including other indicators of environmental and social progress. Wellbeing indicators such as health (physical and mental), economy and resources, social and community development, participation, democracy and good governance, values, culture and meaning and environment and sustainability would be an appropriate frame for developing a new National Index of Progress. While *Social Justice Ireland* welcome Government's efforts to develop a Wellbeing Framework, the lack of urgency in implementing it and making the necessary procedural changes is concerning.

**Investment underpinned by a Just Transition Strategy.** One of the fundamental principles of a Just Transition is to leave no people, communities, economic sectors or regions behind as we transition to a low carbon future. Transition is not just about reducing emissions. It is also about transforming our society and our economy, and investing in effective and integrated social protection systems, education, training and lifelong learning, childcare, out of school care, health care, long term care and other quality services. Social investment must be a top priority of transition because it is this social investment that will support those people, communities, sectors and regions as we make the difficult transition to a carbon-neutral economy, transforming how our economy and society operates.

### ***Reducing our emissions***

Reducing emissions requires the implementation of policy decisions made in the interest of a sustainable future rather than short-term sectoral interests. Ireland's carbon budgets set out the emissions reductions required from each sector to 2030. Meeting these targets will be challenging for all sectors. Ambitious and substantive policies requiring sufficient resourcing and an all-of-Government approach are required to ensure that we meet our environmental targets. We are not limited in what we can do, but are limited by our political ambition and leadership, and by the fact that because we have left these decisions for so long, the effort required to achieve adaptation and transition will now be far greater than if we had acted years ago.

These commitments must be underpinned by ambitious and substantive policies requiring sufficient resourcing and an all-of-Government approach to ensure that we meet our environmental targets.

Progress towards changing farm practices has been limited and incentives to reduce on-farm greenhouse emissions have not been delivered on a wide scale (Curtin &

Hanrahan 2012: 9). The agriculture and food sector must build on its scientific and technical knowledge base to meet the emissions challenge.

Transport is another area which faces challenging targets. Despite impact of Covid-19 restrictions in emissions from this sector in 2020, 2021 data shows transport emissions have returned to 2019 levels. The reduction in carbon dioxide emissions in 2020 is less than the amount that will need to be achieved every year from 2021 to 2030 to meet our long-term decarbonisation goals (SEAI, 2021). Transport continues to dominate Ireland's energy use, and transport energy use has increased by 25 per cent since 2012. Heavy goods vehicles showed the strongest growth in energy use in transport in 2019, and electric vehicles made up just 0.3 per cent of the total private car stock.

Significant investment is needed to develop a public transport network powered by electricity and renewable energy. It is vital that the upgrade to the public transport network has a strong focus on connectivity to ensure that people travelling from rural or regional areas to urban centres are encouraged to do so by public transport. Government policy must also examine how to discourage private car use, particularly in urban areas, in conjunction with the provision of accessible and quality public transport and an improved cycling network all forming part of a transition to a low-carbon transport system.

Energy is the third largest driver of our emissions. Energy-efficient homes help reduce our carbon footprint as they require less fuel to heat. One of the most cost-effective measures to promote sustainable development is to increase building energy efficiency through retrofitting, for example. The SEAI estimate that €35 billion would be needed over the coming 35 years to make Ireland's existing housing stock 'low-carbon' by 2050. More than 50,000 homes will have to be retrofitted every year to meet the targets set out in the Programme for Government. Budget 2022 contained a welcome allocation of €85m to the Local Authority Retrofit Programme. Investment in renewable energy and retrofitting on the scale required to meet our national climate ambition requires large scale investment in infrastructure. However barriers persist to accessing grants for low income households. These are the households who are most likely to use solid fuels such as coal and peat; the very households that policy should be targeting. The upfront costs associated with accessing sustainable energy grants can act as a barrier for those on low incomes. Yet with an estimated 217,587 homes having the lowest BER ratings of F or G, it is imperative that Government support these households by redesigning these schemes to make them more accessible. While we welcomed the announcement of the National Retrofitting Programme (Government of Ireland, 2022), particularly the Free Energy Upgrade for households in receipt of certain social welfare payments, we remain concerned that the upfront cost associated with the One Stop Shop Service and Individual Energy Upgrade Grants Schemes remains a barrier to many low income households. Too often subsidies are only taken up by those who can afford to make the necessary investments. These subsidies are functioning as wealth transfers to those households on higher incomes while

the costs (for example, carbon taxes) are regressively socialised among all users. Incentives and tax structures must look at short and long term costs of different population segments and eliminating energy poverty and protecting people from energy poverty should be a key pillar of any Just Transition platform. A state led retrofitting scheme is required to ensure that people living in social housing and poor quality housing have access. This would increase energy efficiency, reduce bills, improve health outcomes, and assist us in meeting our climate-related targets.

Government should develop a national retrofitting strategy of sufficient scale, using the learning from the SEAI deep retrofit pilot programme, with an ambitious target to deep retrofit the entire existing housing stock in a 20 year timeframe and concurrent plans to increase capacity within the construction sector.

An upgrade of the national grid must be a key element of infrastructure investment so that communities, cooperatives, farms and individuals can produce renewable energy and sell what they do not use back into the national grid, thus becoming self-sustaining and contributing to our national targets.

### ***Fossil fuels and renewable energies***

Ireland's fuel mix for electricity generation is still dominated by carbon-based fossil fuels, but the share of renewables is improving, reaching 42 per cent in 2020 (SEAI, 2021). Ireland is highly dependent on imported fossil fuels for energy, our import dependency was 72 per cent in 2020. This runs contrary to our targets of reducing emissions, increasing renewable energy, and eliminating our dependence on fossil fuels. In 2020 renewables made up 13 per cent of final energy consumption, well short of the 2020 target of 16 per cent. In light of the current energy crisis, its impact on the cost of living and the challenges presented by the war in Ukraine, a move to renewable energy must be an immediate policy and investment priority.

The IMF note that globally fossil fuels are now massively under-priced, reflecting undercharging for production and environmental costs—including for air pollution and global warming. The estimate for the cost of global energy subsidies (the gap between existing and efficient prices) was around \$4.7 trillion in 2015, or about 6.3 percent of global GDP (IMF, 2020). Correctly pricing carbon would reduce its use while boosting the supply of low-carbon alternatives.

The subsidising of fossil fuels by the Exchequer is another example of policy incoherence. According to the latest data published by the CSO, €2.4 billion was not collected by the Exchequer due to direct subsidies and revenue foregone due to preferential tax treatment supported fossil fuel activities in Ireland in 2019 (CSO, 2022). Direct fossil fuel subsidies accounted for 11 per cent of total fossil fuel subsidies in 2019 while indirect subsidies arising from revenue foregone due to tax abatements accounted for 89 per cent. The excise exemption for jet kerosene accounted for the largest proportion, €634 million, 30 per cent of total indirect subsidies. Government must act on the recommendations of the report on the impact of aviation taxation in Ireland and abolish the Jet Kerosene exemption.

In 2019, Government raised €3.0 billion in energy taxes, of this just €0.4 billion was spent on environmental subsidies related to energy and emissions, while fossil fuel subsidies were €2.4 billion. Taxation policy must be aligned with our national climate targets.

A study by the ESRI (2020) found that budgetary cost of these subsidies was over six times higher than the entire carbon tax revenue of the Government in 2017. The value of these subsidies is substantially higher than the allocation to Just Transition and biodiversity in Budget 2022. Eliminating these subsidies means that government has a wider fiscal space available in terms of climate policy. Government can alleviate adverse climate change impacts by removing these subsidies rather than levying new environmental taxes or increasing the existing environmental tax rates/levels. This is something that must be considered in budgetary terms when implementing and designing climate policy. By ending environmentally damaging tax breaks and investing this money in people, communities and regions that will be most affected by climate adaptation, Government can help to ensure a Just Transition.

### ***Taxation***

Any programme for sustainable development has implications for public spending. In addressing this issue, it must be understood that public expenditure programmes and taxes provide a framework which help to shape market prices, reward certain activities and penalise others. A key aspect of this could be to broaden the tax base through environmental taxation. Eco-taxes, which put a price on the full costs of resource extraction and pollution, would help with the transition towards a resource efficient, low carbon, green economy. The taxation system should reflect the environmental costs of goods and services. Carbon tax plays a key part in this regard.

An appropriate carbon price floor would remove the need for ongoing support of renewables via the Public Service Obligation levy (CCAC, 2020). *Social Justice Ireland* has consistently proposed that revenues from carbon taxes are used to support households in energy poverty to improve energy efficiency and in low carbon technologies to improve the energy efficiency of the housing stock.

In designing taxes or incentives transitional measures, regional differentiation, the availability of alternatives and differences in purchasing power should all be taken into account. When designing environmental taxes it is vital that revenues generated should be used to offset any regressive impacts. When considering environmental taxation measures to support sustainable development and the environment, and to broaden the tax base, the Government should ensure that such taxes are structured in ways that are equitable and effective and do not place a disproportionate burden on rural communities or lower socio-economic groups. The European Commission has recommended the use of economic instruments such as taxation to ensure that product prices better reflect environmental costs.



Subsidies are also an element of the environmental tax code that should be reviewed. Eliminating these subsidies mean that government has a wider fiscal space available to it in terms of climate policy and taxation. In terms of overall public expenditure, systematic reviews should be carried out and published on the sustainability impacts and implications of all public subsidies and other relevant public expenditure and tax differentials. Subsidies which encourage activity that is damaging to natural, environmental and social resources should be abolished.

Environmental taxation, enforcing the polluter pays principle, and encouraging waste prevention can help to decouple growth from the use of resources and support the shift towards a low carbon economy. Incorporating social and environmental costs in regulating and pricing both goods and services, combined with promoting those goods and services which are sustainable, should become part of sustainable development policy.

### *Circular Economy*

A sustainable economy can only be achieved with transformative policies. The ‘circular economy’ theory is based on the understanding that it is the reuse of vast amounts of material reclaimed from end of life products, rather than the extraction of new resources, that should be the foundation of economic growth (Wijkman and Rockstrom, 2012:166). Furthermore, the shift to a circular economy is labour intensive, focusing on repair, recycling, research and development, regenerating natural capital, and preserving and enhancing land, oceans, forests and wetlands.

Embedding the circular economy principles into our economic framework is a key step towards decoupling economic growth from resource consumption and meeting the targets set out in the Climate Action Plan and the carbon budgets. Finland sees the transformation of its economy to a circular economy by 2035 as a key step towards its target of carbon neutrality by 2035. Key elements of the Finnish circular economy programme that can be applied to Ireland are the mainstreaming of the sharing economy and sustainable products and services; choices that strengthen a fair welfare society and the sustainable use of natural resources ensuring materials remain in circulation longer.

‘Living More, Using Less’ is Ireland’s first circular economy strategy, which has a welcome focus on policy coherence in order to deliver on our national ambitions. Among the objectives of the strategy are a national policy framework for Ireland’s transition to a circular economy; a commitment to reduce Ireland’s circularity gap, so that Ireland’s rate is above the EU average by 2030; and promoting increased investment in the circular economy in Ireland, with a view to delivering sustainable, regionally balanced economic growth and employment.

The circular economy in Ireland is supported by the Environmental Protection Agency Waste Prevention Programme. We welcome the establishment of the circular manufacturing platform CIRCULÉIRE and look forward to significant progress on the target of a 20 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and

waste production for 30 Irish companies. Adapting circular economy principles leads to economic benefits also. An analysis of the Smart Farming programme on 50 farms, identified 10 per cent greenhouse gas emissions reductions and savings of €6,336 per farm (EPA, 2020d). The concept of ‘cradle-to-cradle development’ involves reviewing the processes of production to not only minimise waste but eliminate it altogether. Ireland has often been lauded as a hub of innovation. Our environment, and consequently our economy and society, would benefit greatly from the adoption of ‘cradle-to-cradle’ design principles<sup>5</sup>.

The Circular Economy forms one of the key pillars of the Green New Deal for Europe and it is important that Ireland now moves to implement the monitoring framework provided in the European Commission 2018 Circular Economy Package<sup>6</sup>. The Circular Economy Bill, which puts ‘Living More, Using Less’ on a legislative footing is welcome progress. In particular we welcome the commitment in the bill to eliminate the use of disposable coffee cups and phasing out of single use disposable products, policies which *Social Justice Ireland* has consistently advocated for. A reduction in waste and consumption will help prevent waste of our finite natural resources and aid Ireland in meeting environmental targets. It will also positively impact our economy by eliminating harmful subsidies and enhancing adherence to the principle of ‘the Polluter Pays’.

### ***Mitigation and Transition - supporting communities and people***

One of the fundamental principles of a Just Transition is to leave no people, communities, economic sectors or regions behind as we transition to a low carbon future. Transition is not just about reducing emissions. This is just one part. It is also about transforming our society and our economy, and investing in effective and integrated social protection systems, education, training and lifelong learning, childcare, out of school care, health care, long term care and other quality services. Social investment must be a top priority of transition because it is this social investment that will support those people, communities, sectors and regions as we make the difficult transition to a carbon-neutral economy, transforming how our economy and society operates.

Transition to a sustainable economy can only be successful if it is inclusive and if the social rights and wellbeing of all are promoted. A Just Transition requires a social protection system – along with appropriate services and infrastructure – that prevents poverty and social exclusion for those that lose employment or income due to the effects or mitigation of climate change (NESC, 2020).

A comprehensive mitigation and transition strategy is required to ensure there is public support for our domestic and international environmental and Sustainable Development Goals. This strategy must pre-empt some of the challenges we face as

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.mcdonough.com/cradle-to-cradle/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/environment/circular-economy/>

we move to a more sustainable form of development. *Social Justice Ireland* proposes that the strategy should contain, as a minimum:

- Retraining and support for those communities who will be most impacted by the loss of employment related to the move away from fossil fuels;
- Support and investment in the circular economy with regional strategies and targets;
- Investment in the deep retrofitting of homes and community facilities;
- The provision of community energy advisors and community energy programmes;
- Investment in renewable energy schemes;
- Policies to eliminate energy poverty;
- Investment in a quality, accessible and well-connected public transport network.

The development of a national mitigation and transition strategy is a matter of priority if there is to be public support for the significant and fundamental changes required in the years ahead.

### ***Stakeholder engagement for a Just Transition***

In order to ensure the move to a sustainable future for all is successful, stakeholders from all arenas must be involved in the process. Social dialogue is an effective mechanism for fostering trust and adopting a problem-solving approach to transition (NESC, 2020).

Sustainable local development should be a key policy issue on the local government agenda, and the Public Participation Networks are a forum where sustainable development issues at a local level can become part of local policy making. Indeed there is a requirement for Local Authorities to integrate sustainable development principles in the Local Economic and Community Plan and for such plans to contain a statement which may include objectives for the sustainable development of the area concerned. Sustainable Development Councils (SDCs) are a model for multi-stakeholder bodies comprising members of all major groups – public, private, community, civil society and academic – engaged in evidence-based discussion. The EU-wide experience has been that SDCs are crucial to maintaining a medium and long-term vision for a sustainable future whilst concurrently working to ensure that sustainable development policies are embedded into socio-economic strategies and budgetary processes.

In order to develop a sustainable society, services and infrastructure must be well-planned and capable of adapting to the changing needs of the population over time. This means that policy planning and design should, from the very beginning,

include potential future changes, and as far as possible should be designed with these in mind.

An on-going social dialogue structure at regional and national level is required to ensure the appropriate services and infrastructure are delivered, and that there is ongoing public support for the pathway by which these services and infrastructure will come on-stream. There is an increased responsibility on local and national government to engage with communities on this issue and build local capacity (CCAC,2020). This dialogue should also focus on what is required to transition Ireland to a low-carbon future, and how such services and infrastructure can be delivered and managed in a sustainable way. This requires input from all stakeholders. Such a mechanism would ensure that there is support and understanding as to how services and infrastructure are to be resourced and rolled out at local, regional and national level.

### ***New measurements of progress***

Moving towards an economy and society built on sustainable development principles requires that we develop new metrics to measure what is happening in society, to our natural resources, to the environment and in the economy. We should be moving towards the OECD metrics of wellbeing as a driver of policies. We cannot tackle climate change and continue to pursue a growth model based on consumption.

As Stiglitz (2019) points out:

*“What we measure affects what we do, and if we measure the wrong thing, we will do the wrong thing. If we focus only on material wellbeing – on, say, the production of goods, rather than on health, education, and the environment – we become distorted in the same way that these measures are distorted.*

The European Commission has published guidelines on integrating ecosystems and natural capital into decision-making (European Commission, 2019b). Government should ensure that our natural capital and eco-systems are included, not only in the decisions making and policy making process, but also in our national accounts. The Commission guidelines state that the integration of ecosystems and natural capital should take place within existing frameworks, and that ex ante assessments on the environmental impacts of plans, policies or programmes should be carried out,

The SDGs related to natural capital and living ecosystems are the basis for achieving all other social and economic goals according to a recent report from the European Commission on integrating natural capital and ecosystems into decision-making. Ireland must develop a new National Index of Progress encompassing environmental and social indicators of progress as well as economic ones. By measuring and differentiating between economic activities that diminish natural and social capital and those activities that enhance them, we can better

track our progress and ensure that our economic welfare is sustainable. Such an Index would also allow us to move beyond a purely financial approach and look at the value added to or subtracted from our natural and social resources as a whole by the policies that we pursue. The use of such indicators would help ensure that issues such as climate justice and balanced regional development, among other key indicators of wellbeing, are given the priority they deserve by policymakers.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA, 2017(c)) report on the state of knowledge of climate change impacts in Ireland found that while there was sufficient information available to support the integration of environmental protection principles into economic and social policy making, there remained areas on which a number of ‘important knowledge gaps’ remain, such as coastal and marine, critical infrastructure, emergency planning and human health (2017:31).

The report indicates that climate change has the potential to impact all economic sectors, with adaptation measures made difficult by a lack of certainty of the severity of the risks and the subsequent impact on the insurance sector. It also makes a number of key recommendations including advancing the knowledge base; developing sectoral risk and vulnerability assessments; developing and assessing adaptation options which would include cost-benefit analyses; and developing and implementing governance structures. The Irish Government needs to take on board these recommendations to mitigate the costs of climate change on our economy, while having the benefit of providing jobs in implementing these measures. At a practical level the CSO should be fully resourced to implement the System for Environmental-Economic Accounts (SEEA) and the future compilation of natural capital accounts. These datasets will be vital to measure progress on environmental issues and the SDGs.

### *Policy Coherence*

Strong policies with clear adaptation goals, defined responsibilities and commitments that are coordinated across Government and across sectors can deliver progress on mitigating the worst impacts of climate change. This requires mainstreaming climate adaptation into our annual budgetary cycle, regular monitoring and evaluation and an inclusive governance that prioritises policies that address specific inequities based on gender, ethnicity, disability, age, location and income (IPCC, 2022). If Government is to deliver our 2030 targets, strong policy coherence; the mainstreaming of climate adaptation into fiscal policy; and governance focused on addressing inequalities is required.

To ensure policy coherence Government should integrate a Sustainable Development Framework into economic policy. There appears to be a strong degree of policy incoherence at national level, with government pursuing policies that result in increased emissions and inhibit the achievement of our climate-related goals. The increased emissions from both agriculture and transport mean that Ireland will be subject to fines for not meeting our European targets. Energy policy is also affected by policy incoherence. There is a mismatch between pursuing a policy

of data centre expansion, and the pressure that this will put on energy resources whilst simultaneously trying to reduce our energy emissions. Eirgrid found in their 'All-Island Generation Capacity Statement 2019-2028' that forecasted energy demand in Ireland continues to be heavily influenced by the expected growth of large energy users, primarily data centres. Data centres can require the same amount of energy as a small town and Eirgrid forecast that 29 per cent of total energy demand will come from data centres by 2028 (Eirgrid, 2019).

In addition to the immediate financial costs of missing our 2020 targets, the potential social, economic and environmental impacts of climate change are immense, and their cost must also be taken into account.

Government's commitment to green budgeting and the publication of all Exchequer climate-related expenditure is an important part of the policy coherence process and incorporating climate change and the SDGs into the budget process.

In order to improve policy coherence the SDGs should be placed at the centre of policy making in Ireland. Government should, as a matter of priority, outline a five-year plan containing the following:

- A plan to support the CSO to develop Ireland's System of Environmental-Economic Accounts (SEEA) and how the SEEA will be incorporated into the National Development Plan;
- All proposed environmental taxation changes over the period;
- Details of the energy efficiency and renewable energy projects that this revenue will fund over the period to support our low carbon transition;
- A circular economy strategy for Ireland;
- A mitigation and transition programme.

### 11.3 Key Policy Priorities

A successful transition to sustainability requires a vision of a viable future societal model and the ability to overcome obstacles such as vested economic interests, political power struggles and the lack of open social dialogue (Hämäläinen, 2013). Ireland is at the cusp of this transition. To achieve it in the years ahead, *Social Justice Ireland* believes that policy should:

- Fully resource the policies required to implement our 2030 climate targets;
- Integrate climate adaptation into the annual budgetary process;
- Adopt targets and a reporting system for each of the Sustainable Development Goals;

- Review all fossil fuel subsidies and environmentally harmful tax expenditures annually with a view to removing those that do not align with our national climate goals;
- Introduce shadow national accounts, and assign value to natural capital and ecosystems in our national accounting systems;
- Fully resource the CSO to implement the System for Environmental-Economic Accounts (SEEA) and the future compilation of natural capital accounts;
- Develop a comprehensive mitigation and transition programme to support communities and people in the transition to a low carbon society;
- Develop a progressive and equitable environmental taxation system;
- Develop a new National Index of Progress encompassing environmental and social indicators of progress as well as economic ones;
- Develop a Just Transition Dialogue structure at regional and national level.

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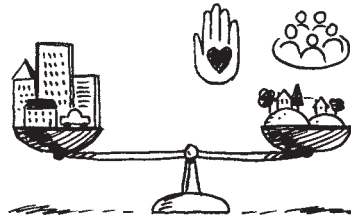
## Chapter twelve

## Chapter 12

### Rural Development

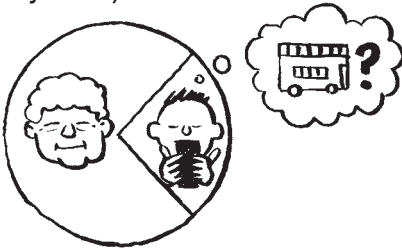
#### Core Policy Objective:

To achieve balanced regional development, with a particular emphasis on providing sustainable public services and employment opportunities.



To secure the existence of viable, vibrant and sustainable communities in all parts of rural Ireland.

#### Key Issues/Evidence

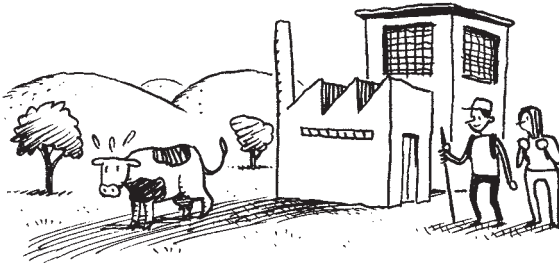


The average distance to most everyday services for people in rural areas is at least three times longer than for people in urban areas.

Rural areas generally have an older population, higher rates of part-time employment and lower median incomes than the national average.



Supporting rural households to ensure that they have sufficient incomes will be crucial to the future of rural Ireland.



The driver of the rural economy in Ireland is diverse – involving agriculture, services, manufacturing, tourism and others.

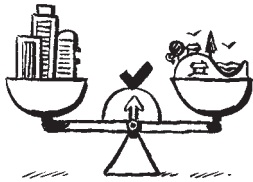


Lack of quality broadband is a considerable barrier to the sustainable development of rural Ireland.



Investment in education and training for people in low skilled jobs or unemployed in rural areas would deliver a major social and economic return.

## Policy Solutions



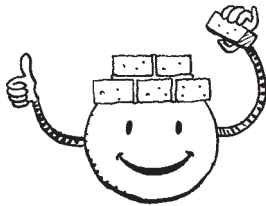
Ensure that investment is balanced between the regions.



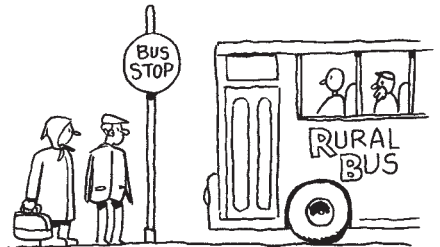
Sustainable agricultural practices and sustainable land management must form the basis of future agricultural policy.



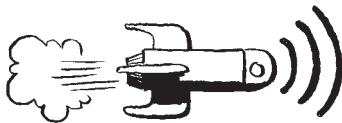
Prepare for the digital transition by investing in the regions and in social, infrastructural and human capital supports.



Ensure rural development policy is underpinned by social, economic and environmental wellbeing.

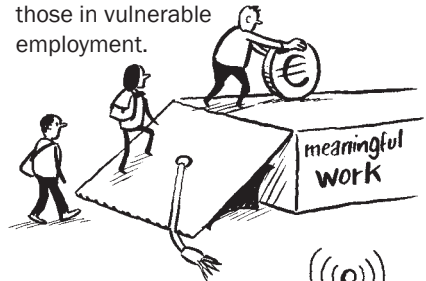


Invest in an integrated, accessible and flexible rural transport network.

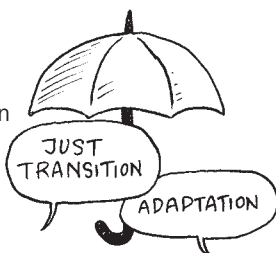


Prioritise rolling out high speed broadband to rural areas.

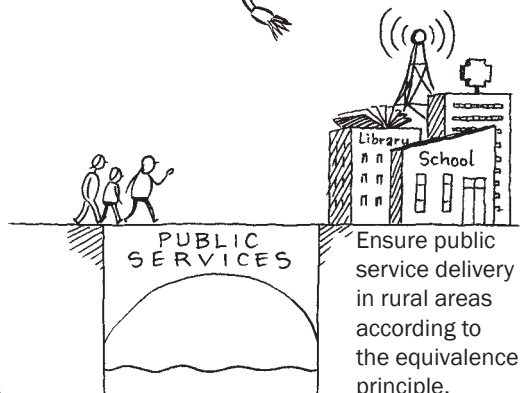
Invest in human capital through targeted education and training programmes, especially for older workers and those in vulnerable employment.



Establish a Just Transition and Adaptation Dialogue for rural areas.



Provide integrated supports for rural entrepreneurs, micro-enterprises and SMEs.



Ensure public service delivery in rural areas according to the equivalence principle.

## 12.

# RURAL AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### Core Policy Objective: RURAL AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

To achieve balanced regional development, with a particular emphasis on providing the sustainable public services and employment opportunities required.

To secure the existence of substantial numbers of viable communities in all parts of rural Ireland where every person would have access to meaningful work, adequate income and social services, and where infrastructure needed for sustainable development would be in place.

How we transition to a more sustainable society and how we ensure rural areas and regions are supported to adapt to the potential impact of the future of work will determine what kind of rural communities we will have in Ireland by 2040. Rural Ireland is a valuable resource with much to contribute to Ireland's future social, environmental and economic development. While remote working presents an opportunity to reinvigorate rural communities, significant challenges remain, particularly in the areas of job creation, service provision for an ageing population; protecting the natural capital and biodiversity of rural areas, and in encouraging young people who have left to return and settle in rural areas.

Balanced regional development is a key element of *Social Justice Ireland's* Wellbeing Framework for a new Social Contract. In order to achieve viable, vibrant and sustainable communities in all parts of Ireland in the years ahead, *Social Justice Ireland* believes that policy should:

- Ensure that investment is balanced between the regions, with due regard to sub-regional areas.
- Ensure rural development policy is underpinned by social, economic and environmental wellbeing.
- Prioritise rolling out high speed broadband to rural areas.
- Invest in an integrated, accessible and flexible rural transport network.

- Ensure that sustainable agriculture policy, sustainable land management, and short supply chains for farmers and consumers form the basis of future agricultural policy.
- Ensure that development initiatives resource areas which are further from the major urban areas to ensure they do not fall further behind.
- Invest in human capital through targeted education and training programmes, especially for older workers and those in vulnerable employment.
- Establish a Just Transition and Adaptation Dialogue to ensure rural areas are not disproportionately impacted by low carbon policies and are supported to meet the challenges posed by the future of work.
- Prepare for the potential impact of technology on the future of work by investing in the regions and ensuring the necessary social, infrastructural and human capital supports are in place to manage any upheaval.
- Provide integrated supports for rural entrepreneurs, micro-enterprises and SMEs.
- Ensure public service delivery in rural areas according to the equivalence principle.

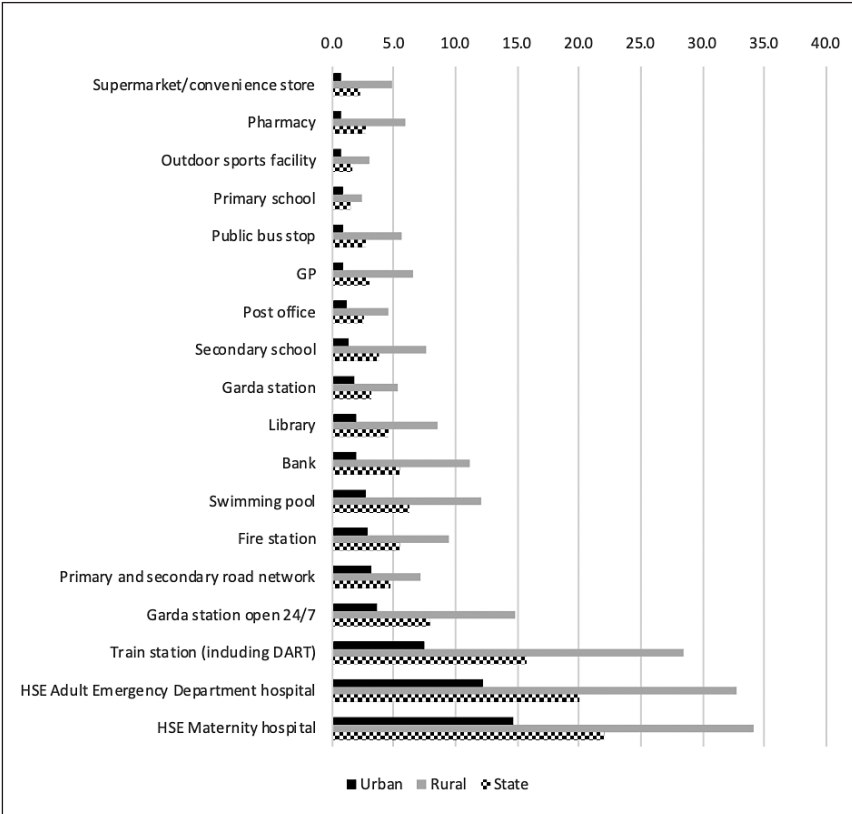
## 12.1 Key Evidence

### *Population and demographics*

Just over three in ten people in Ireland (31.4 per cent) live in a rural area, above the European average (CSO, 2019a). Countryside areas and settlements of less than 1,500 people are characterised by a lower proportion of young adults, and a higher proportion of older people compared with areas with populations over 50,000. This combination of outmigration of young adults for Third Level education and/or work and an ageing population poses a significant challenge for the delivery of services and the sustainability of rural economies.

Reports from the Central Statistics Office show that the average distance to most everyday services for rural dwellings was at least three times longer than for urban dwellings. For supermarkets/convenience stores, GPs and pharmacies, the average travel distance was seven times longer for rural dwellings (CSO, 2019b). Chart 12.1 gives an overview of the average distance to everyday services.

**Chart 12.1** Average distance (km) of residential dwellings to everyday services, by State, urban and rural area



Source: CSO Statbank 2019

Rural and regional policy has to grapple with issues such as higher poverty rates, lower median incomes, higher dependency ratios, distance from everyday services, and a higher rate of part-time employment – issues which have persisted over time. Rural areas are very diverse, not all face the same challenges. Revising the classification of rural areas and rural typologies would make for more informed policy development and give better indicators of the challenges and opportunities in rural areas (NESC, 2021).

### *Employment and Unemployment*

Rural areas faced challenges around seasonal employment, higher rates of part-time employment and lower median incomes prior to the onset of the COVID-19



pandemic. Census 2016 gave some insight into employment in rural areas finding that the employment rate is correlated with settlement size and that those living in villages of less than 1,500 inhabitants experience the highest rates of unemployment and the lowest participation in the labour market. In addition, the pool of people of working age who are not in the labour force due to either home duties or disability is at its highest in rural areas. In open countryside, the participation rate is the lowest, but the employment rate is higher reflecting farming, fishing and forestry activity which is 13 per cent of all work in these areas, but much of which is at a subsistence level. The prevalence of low-paid, part-time and seasonal work is a continual feature of rural employment. Whilst there has been a welcome increase in employment nationally in recent years, this was initially predominantly urban-based and has taken longer to spread into the regions and more rural areas. The increase in remote working is a positive move and can revitalise rural economies. However, the ongoing challenges prior to the pandemic (including the development and implementation of an effective rural proofing model) still have to be addressed. Despite this, there are opportunities for rural areas, as changes in consumption and production patterns and remote working habits may present new opportunities for sustainable growth in rural regions. To this end it is vital that 'Our Rural Future' and 'Making Remote Work' are fully resourced.

One of the clearest lessons from the crisis is that a good quality internet connection is not a luxury but is in fact essential to allow people to fully participate in society. This applies not just to economic inclusion, but to educational and social inclusion as well. If it was not clear prior to the current crisis that a quality internet connection is an equality issue, it surely is now. It is one that has both regional and financial dimensions and covers a broad range of policy areas. The slow roll-out of quality rural broadband will continue to pose a challenge for the regional economic and social development and to the generation of sustainable regional and rural employment. Remote working has the potential to transform rural areas in terms of employment flexibility and living standards generally once quality rural broadband is in place. Policies such as increased investment in healthcare and other public services and ensuring affordable and accessible quality public services to all regardless of urban or rural location must be part of the response. Improved and expanded public services (including public transport, broadband, healthcare, childcare) could contribute to regional attractiveness in remote and rural areas, while also supporting the transition to a low carbon economy (OECD, 2014).

### *Rural Economies*

One of the strengths of rural communities are their local networks and co-operative structures which are well placed to adapt to structural changes with the right support (OCED, 2020). Six opportunities for rural regions emerging from the crisis have been identified, the most relevant to the Irish context are enhancing the quality and use of digital tools and broadband in rural regions; momentum to accelerate a just transition towards a low-carbon economy for rural communities and the shift in consuming habits to favour local products and destinations (OECD,

2020). *Social Justice Ireland* welcomed the focus on supporting digital infrastructure and the green economy as part of ‘Our Rural Future’.

The main driver of Ireland’s rural economy has moved from the primarily agricultural to a more diverse base involving services, manufacturing, tourism and other industries. COVID-19 had a devastating impact on some of these sectors and ongoing support may be required. Areas of job creation identified for rural areas include social enterprise and social services (e.g., childcare and elder care), tourism, ‘green’ products and services, and cultural and creative industries. For rural areas to become sustainable in the long-term these sectors must form an integral part of regional employment strategies. Rural areas with an ageing population can face labour shortages and higher service provision costs. However, demand for labour in health and social care is high in rural areas and points to the growth potential of secondary and tertiary economies to boost the employment potential of rural areas (OECD, 2018).

O’Donoghue et al (2017) developed an economic strength model to assess the performance of towns, combining unemployment and migration data. Access to concentrated labour markets has had a strong impact on the recovery of rural areas and towns. Proximity to major urban centres is a key influence on rural areas, as those communities and villages within a 60-minute drive of an urban centre have better access to services and can retain and attract a younger population due to employment opportunities (OECD, 2018, O’Donoghue et al, 2017).

Even prior to COVID-19, there were significant differences between the regions in Ireland, highlighted by European Commission decision to downgrade the Northern & Western region from a “More Developed Region” to a “Transition Region” in 2019. The Northern and Western Region has lower disposable incomes, fewer viable farms, less commercial activity and generates less high valued jobs than the other (Northern and Western Regional Assembly, 2019). Even removing the distorting effect of Multinational Company activities on the GDP of the Southern and Eastern Regions, shows that despite faring better than the Northern and Western Region, they still face challenges. The policy solutions are those which will support regional growth centres, invest in human capital, enhance regional infrastructure and supporting SMEs in rural communities.

Rural areas can compensate for lower wages as a high quality of life is often more important in attracting and retaining workers and their families. For these reasons, high quality and connected public transport links and sustainable regional employment opportunities are vital to the future of rural economies. Identifying the needs of communities in terms services is important to ensure a vibrant rural community is sustained in rural areas (NESC, 2021). Investment in improved public services is essential to the success of ‘Our Rural Future’ and ‘Making Remote Work’, and it also makes rural areas more viable and attractive areas for investment. Rural economic policies must focus on sustaining, developing, and diversifying existing small enterprises as much as developing new ones. Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs)

have a key role to play here. Social and physical infrastructure must be in place to enable rural economies to diversify. Public policy can play a key role here by ensuring flexible education, training and labour market policies for rural areas; it can also ensure that transport policy is focussed on those areas not already well served by links and on incentivising the use of rail transport, particularly for freight transport. This would decrease traffic congestion on the road network and reduce transport emissions.

Structural shifts in employment and manufacturing and other industries combined with ageing and population loss has left many rural communities struggling. A withdrawal of public services (school, health services, post offices) can contribute to a community's decline. Government policy must recognise that low density rural economies are fundamentally different to urban economies and require different policies to meet a different set of opportunities and challenges (OCED, 2018). Ireland has the opportunity to be at the forefront of developing renewable energy, sustainable farming, the circular economy, and protecting and enhancing natural resources.

### *Income*

Supporting rural households to ensure that they have sufficient incomes will be crucial to the future of rural Ireland. This requires both social and economic supports, and broader skills and economic development strategies. Low-paid, part-time and seasonal work and long-term underemployment are significant factors in rural poverty and exclusion.

Looking at incomes on a county and regional level in 2019, the Border region and the Midland region had the lowest disposable income per person at €18,524 and €17,125 respectively. The average disposable income per person in the State in 2019 was €22,032. Looking at the period 2010-2019 the Border and Midlands regions earned significantly less than the state average (CSO, 2022). When broken down by county (acknowledging the uncertainty involved in these figures), only four counties had a per capita disposable income which exceeded the state average in 2019, Dublin, Limerick, Kildare and Cork. Westmeath, Donegal, Offaly, Longford, and Laois earned significantly less than the state average.

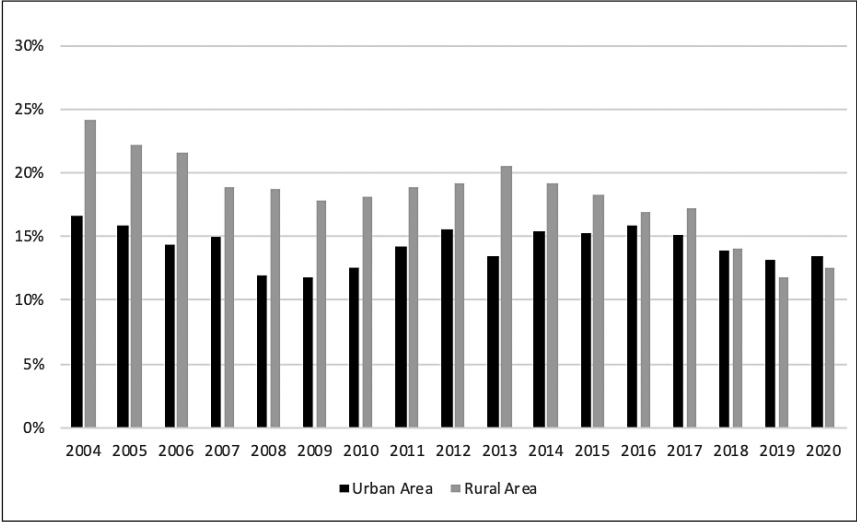
The amount of money required to achieve the Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) ranges from an estimated amount of €45 per week higher for rural couples with younger children (pre-school and primary age), to over €100 per week for rural couples with children of primary and second-level school age, than for their urban counterparts according to the latest MESL figures from the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice<sup>1</sup>. Higher costs in 2021 related to transport, insurance and fuel (as was the case in 2020). This trend will have been exacerbated by the impact of the pandemic. A consistent trend over the past decade is the increased at-risk-of-poverty rate in rural areas (see chart 12.2). The latest figures on poverty and

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.budgeting.ie/publications/mesl-2021/>

deprivation for 2020 from the central statistics office show a welcome reduction in the poverty and deprivation rates for rural areas. This progress is welcome and it is important that it is maintained. In the long-term policy must focus on reversing the persistent trend of poverty and deprivation in rural areas if the high level outcome of reducing regional income disparities in ‘Our Rural Future’ is to be achieved.

**Chart 12.2** At Risk of Poverty by Area Type, 2004 – 2020



Source: CSO PxStat 2021

Recent data shows that remote rural areas have the highest total dependency ratio in the State. These areas also have the highest average age in the State, have the highest rate of part-time workers in the State (23.8 per cent) and, at 19.3 per cent, the highest poverty rate (CSO, 2019a).

The data in charts 12.1, and 12.2 give an insight into the challenges that face rural and regional communities. Our success in implementing policy to address these challenges will determine how well placed rural Ireland will be to respond to other challenges such as the transition to a sustainable society and the future of work.

**Farm Incomes**

In 2020 average family farm income was €25,615 (Teagasc, 2021a), an increase of one per cent on the previous year. As ever, there was a wide variation in farm incomes, with 25 per cent of farms earning an income of less than €5,000 in 2020, 19 per cent earning between €5,000 and €10,000 per annum and 31 per cent earning between €10,000 and €30,000 per annum. Three quarters of Irish farms earned an income of less than €30,000 in 2020 which points to the ongoing precarious nature of farm

incomes, and the viability challenges in the sector. Average farm income is highest on dairy farms and in the South East region. The Northern and Western region is the most disadvantaged region with the lowest farm income and the highest reliance on subsidies. Some key farm statistics (Teagasc, 2021a) include:

- Average family farm income was €25,615 in 2020.
- 75 per cent of farms earned a farm income of less than €30,000 per annum in 2020.
- Dairy farms represent just 17 per cent of the total farm population but account for half of total farm income in 2020.
- The average direct payment in 2020 was €17,842.
- Direct payments accounted for 157 per cent of all income on cattle rearing farms, 105 per cent of all income on sheep farms, 79 per cent of all income on tillage farms and 28 per cent of all income on dairy farms.
- Just 34 per cent of farms are considered economically viable with 33 per cent considered financially vulnerable.
- Just 18 per cent of farms are economically viable in the Northern and Western Region compared with 43 per cent of farms in the South.
- 52 per cent of farm households have off farm employment.

These statistics mask the huge variation in farm income in Ireland as a whole. Only a minority of farmers are, at present, generating an adequate income from farm activity and even on these farms, incomes lag behind the national average. Farm incomes are also inconsistent, as the prices of commodities fluctuate, and gains are predicated on expanding dairy production which runs contrary to our climate commitments (c.f. Chapter 11). The agriculture sector faces an uncertain outlook for 2022, with many potential gains being offset by rising fuel and fertiliser prices (Teagasc, 2021b).

Whilst dairy farming is the most profitable form of farming in Ireland, it has the highest proportion of farms with debt (64 per cent) (Teagasc, 2021a) and it is also the most volatile due to price fluctuations and a high dependency on them is not a sustainable way to maintain farm incomes.

It is clear that farming itself is not enough to provide an adequate income for many families as evidenced by the over reliance on direct payments and the number of farmers engaged in off-farm employment. Of further concern is the age profile of those engaged in farming. In 2016, around a quarter of farm holders in Ireland were aged 65 years and over, and just 5 per cent were aged less than 35 years (CSO 2019).

Welfare payments also support farmers. In 2020 there were 5,511 families comprising 7,718 adults and 4,213 children receiving the Farm Assist Payment<sup>2</sup>. The Rural Social Scheme (RSS) had 3,076 participants and by extension supported 1,946 children and 1,062 adults in 2020.

The Department of Agriculture (Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, 2018) acknowledged the need to break the link between emissions intensity and food production in 2018; a reflection of the fact that agriculture is the highest contributor to Ireland's Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions. Progress in this area has been incredibly slow and, as already noted, continuing to pursue an expansionist agricultural policy is at odds with reducing our GHG emissions.

An analysis of Irish agriculture found that beef and sheep farms (around 7 out of every 10 farms) face significant viability challenges, are heavily reliant on direct payments with the West, Mid-West and Midland regions are more exposed to negative shocks (Conefrey, 2019). The report concluded that low profitability and a high reliance of farm incomes on direct payments represent an important weakness in the sector.

### ***Rural Development***

With just under one third of Ireland's population classified as 'rural' (CSO, 2019a) it is important that our national development policy reflects this and addresses the particular challenges rural communities face. The current strategy for rural development in Ireland is contained in 'Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025'. *Social Justice Ireland* welcomed the publication of the strategy, and in particular the commitments to:

- develop an integrated, place-based approach to rural development to maximise investment and meet the long-term needs of individual parishes, villages and towns.
- develop an effective rural proofing model to ensure the needs of rural communities are considered in the development of Government policies.
- maximise our resources and strengths in the Green Economy to support employment opportunities for rural communities in areas such as renewable energy, sustainable tourism, energy retrofitting, the Bioeconomy and the Circular Economy.
- increase the capacity for remote and blended learning to enable young people, in particular, in rural areas to access further and higher education courses through online learning while living in their local communities.

*Social Justice Ireland* has consistently advocated for policy to focus on building sustainable and viable rural communities, including farming and other activities.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/802ec-2020-annual-statistics-report/>

In order to achieve this, significant investment in sustainable forms of agriculture is required, as well as rural anti-poverty and social inclusion programmes, in order to protect vulnerable farm households in the transition to a rural development agenda.

In order to fully deliver on the ambition in ‘Our Rural Future’ *Social Justice Ireland* recommends that Government focus on the following priority areas:

#### *Public services*

- Ensure public service delivery in rural areas according to the equivalence principle i.e., public services in rural areas should be of an equivalent quality to those in urban areas. This should form the core basis of the rural proofing model outlined in the strategy.
- To ensure viable rural and regional economies into the future means that Government must provide the required support for the provision of public services, investment in micro businesses and small or medium enterprises, innovation, and the sustainable use of natural resources and natural capital in Rural Economic Development Zones (REDZ).
- Improved and expanded public services (including public transport, broadband, healthcare, childcare) will contribute to regional attractiveness in remote and rural areas, provide the social and economic infrastructure to ensure that those who live there, and those who take up the opportunities in terms of remote working outlined in ‘Our Rural Future’ have access to quality public services and a better quality of life.

#### *Investment*

- For ‘Our Rural Future’ to be a success, the rollout of high quality broadband must be an immediate Government priority.
- It is vital that investment in infrastructure in the regions and rural areas is expedited to ensure rural economies can diversify and adapt to support thriving rural communities.
- The target of 400 remote working hubs, and 400 IDA investments is very welcome, in order to be fully realised adequate levels of investment and infrastructure are required.

#### *Sustainable rural communities*

- Implement rural policies at different scales that match with, for example, local services, labour supply and food chains and adapting them based on current and future needs. This would see collaboration between local agencies, employers, the community and voluntary sector, trade unions, and local and regional academic facilities in collaboration with the REDZ.

- An ongoing place-based dialogue with a diversity of stakeholders could ensure that rural areas and regions are well placed to meet the challenges of adapting to transition and the changing world of work.
- Rural development policy should be underpinned by a concept of wellbeing defined by three multi-dimensional objectives: economic, social and environmental, as recommended by the OECD. Developing policy via this framework means that household income, access to a broad set of services, and a cohesive community in a pleasant local environment are all key considerations of rural development policy.

### *Capacity building*

- Local authorities in conjunction with key local stakeholders can play a major role in more balanced regional development if they are given the requisite powers and functions including greater control over funding and the ability to adapt policy to meet regional needs. Local Authorities, civil society, Government Departments, enterprise and industry, PPNs, the community and voluntary sector and others must be involved in delivering place-based rural development policy.
- Capacity building for all stakeholders at local level is required to ensure that this form of policy development is successful. Investment in capacity building will make rural communities more resilient to external shocks and help to underpin the implementation of rural development policy.

### *Human capital and skills*

- Almost half of the labour force will be impacted by changes to their jobs as a result of automation by 2040. Our training and skills development policy must be adapted to meet this challenge to ensure that our regions and communities have the necessary supports in place to ensure that they can adapt to meet this challenge.
- As with many other aspects of rural development, decent broadband and transport systems are required to enable rural dwellers, particularly those on low incomes, to access education and skills development opportunities.

### *Just transition*

- Rural areas are among those that will be most impacted by the transition to a carbon-neutral society. They will also be impacted by the potential changes of technology and automation on employment and the future of work. An ongoing dialogue on how to support transition and adaptation is essential to ensure that vulnerable rural communities are protected, supported to meet future challenges, and not disproportionately impacted.
- The refocusing of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) budget to climate action presents an opportunity for farmers to invest in sustainable forms of agriculture and the Farm-to-Fork Strategy has the potential to deliver on



short supply chains for farmers, and address some of the issues of product pricing for Irish farmers.

A sustainable society requires balanced regional and rural development. The proportion of the population living in and around Ireland's capital city is already very high by international standards, and this is projected to continue growing. Dublin already accounts for half of economic output in Ireland (Morgenroth, 2018), yet we have continued to model our growth path, and design our public services, in a way that encourages, rather than discourages, such concentration. By continuing to locate a disproportionate amount of our best health, education, and cultural institutions in Dublin, we have driven a model of development that precludes the kind of regional balance required for Ireland to thrive. Project Ireland 2040 recognises that this imbalance must be addressed and commits to a more balanced approach with parity of future development across the regions. It aims to enhance regional accessibility and strengthen rural economies and communities, promoting sustainable resource management and a transition to a low carbon society. Outside the main cities and their hinterlands, the plan is to develop towns with populations of greater than 10,000 (20-25 per cent growth). It further seeks to limit urban and rural sprawl by concentrating development on underused spaces within current town and village boundaries.

By contrast, growth in small towns and rural areas is targeted to an average of 15 per cent. Overall, this will result in increased urbanisation and suburbanisation, and a reduction in the rural population. This may be a sensible approach from a planning perspective, given the cost of service delivery to areas of low population density. However, from a social perspective, it risks the atrophy of many rural communities, and the further isolation of their inhabitants, unless coherent plans are both put in place and implemented to support rural dwellers. As outlined earlier, the distance that many people in rural areas have to travel to access everyday services has the potential to further increase rural isolation.

A fund of €1 billion has been allocated to rural regeneration over the next 10 years, covering areas such as infrastructure deficits, development of town and village centres, creating enterprise spaces and digital hubs, and promoting tourism and heritage. However, it is apparent that this is not all new funding and the aim is to incorporate many existing funds (e.g. RAPID, CLAR, REDZ) under this umbrella.

#### *Rural Development Programme*

The next iteration of the Irish Rural Development Programme (RDP) will be determined by the final allocations in the European Commission Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) budget. The previous programme was predominantly focussed on agriculture and supporting the agri-food sector. In order to fulfil the objectives of Pillar II of CAP on rural development and environmental protection then a greater proportion of the budget must be given to these measures. LEADER is the programme that promotes social inclusion, economic development, and environmental measures in rural areas and it must get a greater allocation of funds

in the next round. There must also be a more coherent policy focus and looking at areas of market failure in terms of services provision that the state must address, and what LEADER programme can support the ambitions stated in the Programme for Government to move to a more sustainable economic model, balanced regional development and carbon neutrality. The programme should be fully aligned the rural development plan 2021-2025.

Government has a key role to encourage and stimulate projects which have the capacity to address core issues including rural poverty and a just transition to a low carbon future in rural areas. A reduction in the complexity and bureaucracy of the LEADER programme would also facilitate disadvantaged and less-well resourced groups to apply for funding. Arresting rural decline requires urgent action and resources. Government will have to increase investment in the development of rural areas through an increased contribution of national income. Given the scale of the challenge, a far more substantial Government response is required to support communities to create real bottom-up solutions.

### *Infrastructure and services*

The removal of services and associated resources from rural areas makes it increasingly difficult to maintain viable communities. Government must develop policies to deal with the new challenges an ageing population brings to rural areas in relation to health services, social services and accessibility for older and less mobile people. The most effective way of delivering appropriate services is to work in real partnership with local communities. The PPNs are a formal way for Local Authorities to engage with communities and develop such a collaborative approach (c.f. Chapter 10).

The inadequate provision of public services in rural areas in the context of a falling and ageing population is a cause for concern. Decisions need to be made regarding the provision and level of public services in rural areas, including the level of investment needed in areas such as childcare, care for adult dependents and older people, and public transport. This level of investment is essential to provide the services required to make remote work a success. If rural areas cannot offer people and families adequate social infrastructure the policy will fail.

Some European countries adopt the equivalence principle for the provision of services in rural areas, which decrees that public services in rural areas should be of an equivalent quality to those in urban areas. This would be a useful guide for investment in an Irish context.

### *Transport*

The lack of an accessible, reliable and integrated rural transport system is one of the key challenges facing people living in rural areas. Car dependency and the reliance of rural dwellers on private car access in order to avail of public services, employment

opportunities, healthcare, and recreational activities is a key challenge for policy makers. (For a more detailed discussion of public transport, see Chapter 9).

As outlined earlier in this chapter the average distance to most everyday services for rural dwellings was at least three times longer than for urban dwellings (CSO, 2019b). A further breakdown of this analysis shows that the average distance to a public bus stop in 'highly rural/remote areas' is, at 7.1 km, 17 times longer than the average distance of 0.4 km in cities. The average distance to a train station in 'highly rural/remote areas' is 47.3 km, 14 times longer than in 'cities' where it is 3.3 km. These figures must inform investment in a connected and accessible public transport system.

The lack of an integrated public transport system connecting more remote areas to major urban centres has a significant impact on quality of life and the ability to generate sustainable employment outside of urban centres. It particularly impacts on people on low incomes, those with a disability, or the elderly, who may not have access to a car and therefore depend on public transport. The recent increase in carbon tax will have a significant impact on rural dwellers if transport alternatives are not put in place. The carbon budgets set in a level of fuel inflation for the medium term, with prices projected to increase. Many of the policy changes necessary to meet climate change targets would likely increase fuel inflation on the long term (Parliamentary Budget Office, 2022). Alongside this, recent analysis from the Central Bank (2022) finds that rural dwellers are among those most impacted by the rising cost of energy. Supports must be put in place for rural dwellers. At present the majority of people living outside of urban areas have no choice but to use a car to commute.

Offering real connectivity to rural dwellers will require innovative and local approaches, some of which are presently hampered by licencing and insurance issues which could be resolved by Government. The reconfiguration of rural transport giving rise to Local Link is welcome, however sustained and increased investment is required and this is not apparent in *Ireland 2040*.

### *Broadband*

Lack of quality broadband is a considerable barrier to the sustainable development of rural Ireland. Fast reliable broadband is required for economic and social functions. Whether for farmers to make returns, for businesses to operate and develop, or for people to access information and services, quality broadband is a necessity. The broadband gap between urban and rural areas is an international phenomenon, public policy often lags behind fast moving technological developments and that generic policies in this area tend to neglect specific local needs (Salemink & Strijker, 2017).

The employment commitments in 'Our Rural Future' are heavily reliant on the provision of reliable, quality, high-speed broadband. Retaining the best qualified young people within rural Ireland is also dependent on the availability

of high-speed broadband for both quality local employment and social activity. The commitment of Government to roll out the fibre infrastructure to provide broadband to areas which will not be served by commercial operators is welcome. However, the commitment to between 30mbps and 40mbps broadband speed in rural areas contained in the National Broadband Plan for Ireland is insufficient to encourage diversification and economic growth.

Government must proactively address the issue of universal quality broadband provision in a sustainable way which is not dependent on the commercial priorities of multinational companies.

## **12.2 Key Policies and Reforms**

### ***Rural development***

Low density rural economies are fundamentally different to urban economies and as such require different policies to meet a different set of challenges and opportunities (OECD, 2018). Rural areas and small villages are connected and networked to the local regions and these local regional economies are dependent on interaction with the rural areas they connect with for sustainability (Walsh & Harvey, 2013). Given this interconnection it is important that rural and regional development is integrated to support sustainable local economies and to ensure that local services are utilised most effectively to address the specific needs of a particular region and the rural communities within it. Rural development that is appropriate for the challenges faced requires a step change in how we develop policy in Ireland.

There is an urgent need to deliver more balanced regional development, and local authorities in conjunction with key local stakeholders can play a major role if they are given the requisite powers and functions.

They must have greater control over funding and the ability to adapt policy to meet regional needs. Local Authorities, civil society, Government Departments, enterprise and industry, PPNs, the community and voluntary sector and others must be involved in delivering place-based rural development policy. Capacity building for all stakeholders at local level is required to ensure that this form of policy development is successful. Investment in capacity building will make rural communities more resilient to external shocks and help to underpin the implementation of rural development policy.

Capacity building will also be vital to implementing appropriate mitigation and transition programmes to support rural communities in the transition to a low carbon society. Rural development policy is place-based, reflecting the strengths, assets and challenges a region faces, and have multi-stakeholder input. The OECD recommends that rural development policy be underpinned by a concept of wellbeing as defined by three multi-dimensional objectives: economic, social and

environmental (OECD, 2018). Developing policy via this framework means that household income, access to a broad set of services, and a cohesive community in a pleasant local environment are all key considerations of rural development policy. Support for the community and voluntary sector and social enterprise is recognised as an important way to enhance wellbeing in rural communities and should continue to be resourced.

Public investment is one of the main instruments for rural development, not least to mitigate the market failure in the provision of certain goods and services (OECD, 2018). Government must invest to ensure wellbeing in rural areas is improved and address market failure in the delivery of infrastructure and services, especially broadband and transport. Public policy should facilitate connections between remote communities in rural regions to prevent isolation and improve service delivery.

### *Agriculture*

The European Commission's proposals for the CAP for 2021 to 2027 stipulate that at least 40 per cent of the CAP's overall budget and at least 30 per cent of the Maritime Fisheries Fund would contribute to climate action. This will have implications for Irish agriculture and fisheries as the new system will incentivise more sustainable practices. However, the new CAP will also have a reduced budget meaning there are less funds to be allocated within Ireland. The Green New Deal and the Farm to Fork Strategy will inform the priorities for the next iteration of CAP. The Commission's Farm to Fork Strategy is focused on the transition to a sustainable food system based on circular economy principles. Key priorities are reversing biodiversity loss, mitigating climate change, ensuring access to nutritious food and generating fair economic returns, reducing food waste and introducing sustainable food processing and short supply chains<sup>3</sup>. Irish agriculture policy should be at the forefront of developing short supply chains in order to progress the 'Farm to Fork' proposal. This would assist farmers in negotiating a fair price for their produce, and ensure consumers have access to locally produced food which is more sustainable in the long term.

Sustainable land management is crucial to Ireland moving to more sustainable agricultural practices. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) defines sustainable land management as the use of land resources to meet changing human needs while ensuring the long-term productive potential of these resources and the maintenance of their environmental functions. The adoption of sustainable land management would reward sustainable forms of agriculture and acknowledge the role of farmers as custodians of this vital national asset. Ireland will have to adapt to this new reality with sustainable agricultural policies, sustainable land management, protecting biodiversity and rural social and economic development guiding policy.

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<sup>3</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/food/farm2fork\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/food/farm2fork_en)

### ***Retraining and skills development***

In order to access employment, workers require the right skills. ‘Our Rural Future’ recognises the importance of ongoing skills development and lifelong learning to rural development. Investing in up-skilling lower skilled workers in rural regions has a greater impact on regional economic development than investing in increasing the number of highly skilled workers there (OECD, 2014). Focussed investment in education and training for people in low skilled jobs or those unemployed in rural areas as part of an overall regional employment strategy aimed at generating sustainable jobs should be an integral part of rural development policy. As with many other aspects of rural development, decent broadband and transport systems are required to enable rural dwellers, particularly those on low incomes, to access education and skills development opportunities.

Digital transformation will have a significant impact on the employment landscape. A report on Wellbeing in the Digital Age (OECD, 2019b) found that 14 per cent of all jobs are at high risk of being lost due to automation, with another 32 per cent at risk of significant change over the next 10 to 20 years. This means that nearly half of the labour force will be impacted by changes to their jobs as a result of automation by 2040. Our training and skills development policy must be adapted to meet this challenge to ensure that our regions and communities have the necessary supports in place to ensure that they can adapt to meet this challenge.

### ***The future of work***

A report by the Spatial and Regional Economics Research Centre at University College Cork, *Automation and Irish Towns: Who’s Most at Risk*, found that two out of every five jobs in Ireland are at high risk of automation (Crowley and Doran, 2019). The report also found that the level of exposure to automation across Ireland is wide-ranging, spanning towns across all four provinces. Towns where employment is dominated by agriculture and manufacturing are most at risk to the impact of automation on current employment.

Further research (SOLAS, 2020) found that 373,500 people in Ireland are employed in occupations which were considered at high risk of automation. The six groups with the largest number of persons employed whose jobs were at high risk of automation were; operatives & elementary, sales & customer service, administrative & secretarial, hospitality, agriculture & animal care and transport & logistics. Monaghan had the highest share employed in these occupations, followed by Cavan, Longford, Tipperary and Wexford. Overall, the report found that Dublin and its bordering counties had the lowest exposure to automation risk in these groups, while counties facing higher levels of exposure were located throughout each province.

There have been a number of international studies on the impact of automation and robotics globally. Generally, these studies find that tens of millions of existing jobs will be lost, and that new jobs will be created, many in yet-to-exist industries. The challenge we face is that the jobs that will be created will not necessarily

be in the same regions where job losses will be felt. This is an issue that has not received as much attention as it deserves. A report from Oxford Economics (2019) found that robotics and automation displace nearly twice as many jobs from lower income regions compared to high income regions within the same country. The report also found that automation will continue to drive regional polarisation and exacerbate income inequality. One significant finding from the report concerns the study of job moves of 35,000 workers over the course of their careers in the United States. More than half of those workers who left production jobs moved into three occupational categories: transport, construction and administration. These three occupational areas are among the most vulnerable to automation over the next decade.

Low skilled workers and struggling local economies will bear the brunt of automation and will feel the impact of unemployment and income inequality the most. In order to prepare for this Government must invest in the regions, particularly infrastructure and social and human capital, to ensure that we can meet the upheaval and adapt to the changes that are coming our way.

### ***Dialogue supporting transition and adaptation***

In order to develop a sustainable society, services and infrastructure must be well-planned and capable of adapting to the changing needs of the population over time. This means that policy planning and design should, from the very beginning, include potential future changes, and as far as possible should be designed with these in mind. Rural areas are among those that will be most impacted by the transition to a carbon-neutral society. They will also be impacted by the potential changes of technology and automation on employment and the future of work. An ongoing dialogue on how to support transition and adaptation is essential to ensure that vulnerable rural communities are protected, supported to meet future challenges, and not disproportionately impacted.

This requires input from all stakeholders. Such a mechanism would ensure that there is support and understanding as to how services and infrastructure are to be resourced and rolled out at local, regional and national level.

This dialogue should be built into any Just Transition framework with the appropriate mechanisms, supports and investment at all levels.

## **12.3 Key Policy Priorities**

*Social Justice Ireland* believes that the following policy positions should be adopted to promote balanced rural and regional development:

- Ensure that investment is balanced between the regions, with due regard to sub-regional areas.

- Ensure rural development policy is underpinned by social, economic and environmental wellbeing.
- Prioritise rolling out high speed broadband to rural areas.
- Invest in an integrated, accessible and flexible rural transport network.
- Ensure that sustainable agriculture policy, sustainable land management, and short supply chains for farmers and consumers form the basis of future agricultural policy.
- Ensure that development initiatives resource areas which are further from the major urban areas to ensure they do not fall further behind.
- Invest in human capital through targeted education and training programmes, especially for older workers and those in vulnerable employment.
- Establish a Just Transition and Adaptation Dialogue to ensure rural areas are not disproportionately impacted by low carbon policies and are supported to meet the challenges posed by the future of work.
- Prepare for the potential impact of technology on the future of work by investing in the regions and ensuring the necessary social, infrastructural and human capital supports are in place to manage any upheaval.
- Provide integrated supports for rural entrepreneurs, micro-enterprises and SMEs.
- Ensure public service delivery in rural areas according to the equivalence principle.



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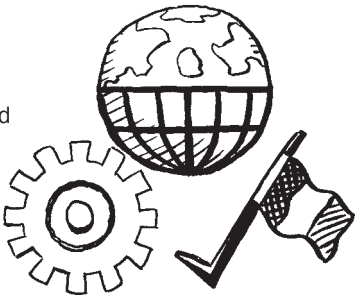
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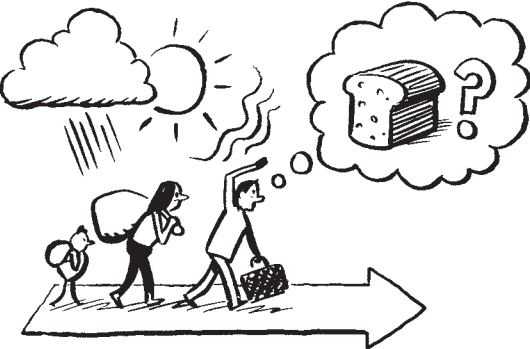
## Chapter thirteen

**Chapter 13**  
Global South

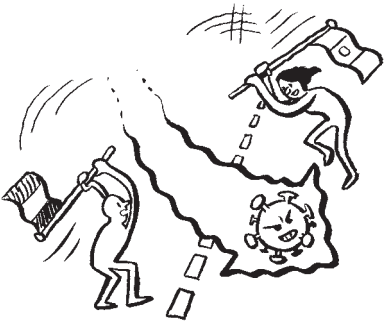
**Core Policy Objective:**  
To ensure that Ireland plays an active and effective part in promoting sustainable development in the Global South and to ensure that all of Ireland's policies are consistent with such development.



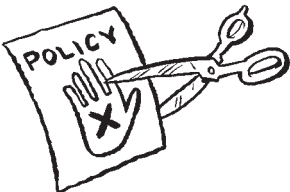
**Key Issues/Evidence**



Climate change = forced migration.



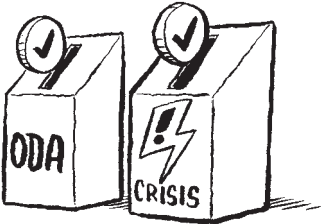
Disease does not respect borders.



Need to combat racism in policies



Just taxation in the Global South.



ODA target should not include costs of crises such as Ukrainian supports.

Policy Solutions

UN Target

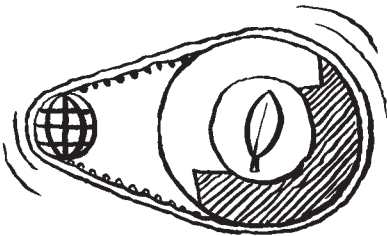
0.7% GNP

to Overseas Development Assistance

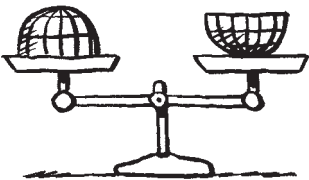
Renew its commitment to meet the United Nations target of contributing 0.7 per cent of national income to ODA by 2027 and set a clear pathway to achieve this.



Proper scrutiny for Irish Aid partners in Global South.



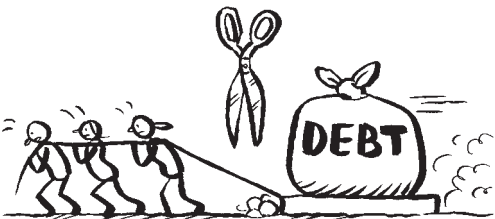
Work for changes in the existing international trading regimes to encourage fairer and sustainable forms of trade.



Ensure that Irish and EU policies towards countries in the Global South are just.



Support implementation of SDGs in Global South.



Debt forgiveness for poorest nations.



Take a person-centred approach to the AIDS/HIV crisis in Global South.

## 13.

## THE GLOBAL SOUTH

**Core Policy Objective: THE GLOBAL SOUTH**

To ensure that Ireland plays an active and effective part in promoting sustainable development in the Global South and to ensure that all of Ireland's policies are consistent with such development.

In the Foreword to the 2022 Special Report of the United Nations Development Programme (2022)–*New threats to human security in the Anthropocene. Demanding greater solidarity* – António Guterres notes

‘We are faced with a development paradox. Even though people are on average living longer, healthier and wealthier lives, these advances have not succeeded in increasing people’s sense of security. This holds true for countries all around the world and was taking hold even before the uncertainty wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic’.

He states that humans are making the world more insecure and precarious, linking this insecurity with the increasing disconnection of people and planet, rather than acknowledging that they are “deeply entwined” with increasing planetary pressures (United Nations, 2022, p. iii).

The Report points to the Covid-19 pandemic as increasing people’s insecurity, having impacted every facet of our wellbeing, killing millions of people worldwide, disrupting education, increasing inequalities and unsettling global economies (2022, p. 3). What followed was a rapid decline in Human Development Index values to levels last seen in 2010/2011, when the worst impacts of the 2008 economic crash were being felt across the world. The 2022 Report identifies four threats among a “new generation of human security threats”: Violent Conflict; Inequalities; Digital Technology Threats; and Health Threats and argues for a new human security frame based on trust across all relationships – personal; with institutions; and across countries. If we are to deliver on this new human security frame, *Social Justice Ireland* believes that policy should:

- Renew its commitment to meet the United Nations target of contributing 0.7 per cent of national income to ODA by 2027 and set a clear pathway to achieve this.
- Take a far more proactive stance at government level on ensuring that Irish and EU policies towards countries in the Global South are just.
- Ensure that Irish businesses operating in developing countries- in particular Irish Aid country partners – are subject to proper scrutiny and engage in sustainable development practices.
- Play a prominent role in the support and implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It should work with other governments to end the race to the bottom on corporate tax rates. This would help all countries deliver on their SDG commitments.
- Continue to support the international campaign for the liberation of the poorest nations from the burden of the backlog of unpayable debt and take steps to ensure that further progress is made on this issue.
- Work for changes in the existing international trading regimes to encourage fairer and sustainable forms of trade. In particular, resource the development of Ireland's policies in the WTO to ensure that this goal is pursued.
- Take a leadership position within European and broader international arenas to encourage other states to fund programmes and research aimed at taking a person-centred approach to the AIDS/HIV crisis.

## 13.1 Key Evidence

### *Violent Conflict*

The current conflict caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine has resulted in millions of Ukrainians displaced across Europe. It is expected that Ireland will take 200,000. The plight of these refugees, especially women and children, fleeing from violence and terror and trying to access safety in Europe has been graphically displayed on our TV screens and in newspapers in recent weeks. Unlike much of the commentary and reports of refugee crises in other countries, the dominant narrative surrounding Ukrainian refugees is not about who should take responsibility for accommodating these people, but rather how can we accommodate them as quickly and as safely as possible. Yes, there remains very little focus on the questions of what causes these problems or who is gaining from all this human misery, but the Irish response to this particular crisis has been in stark contrast to our response to the citizens of other war-torn countries. The 6,000 inhabitants of Ireland's Direct Provision system must look at Ministers welcoming Ukrainians at our borders, the overwhelming call for accommodation, and the almost immediate provision of PPS numbers and welfare supports and wonder "what's the difference?". Indeed, this is a good question for policymakers to ask themselves. Why is our response to the Ukrainian crisis so different to our response to the Syrian crisis, or the crisis in Afghanistan, or Palestine, or any other war-torn country? What makes a "deserving refugee"?

More critically, much as the pandemic demonstrated what could be done with sufficient political will, we must learn this lesson in respect of our response to refugees. If it is best practice to provide supports now and ask questions later in respect of Ukrainians, then it is best practice for all. This should provide the blueprint for Ireland's immigration policy going forward.

Coinciding with our 100,000 welcomes is the call to increase Ireland's military spending and a debate on our neutrality. The report of the Commission on the Defence Forces, published in February 2022, sought an increase from €1bn per annum current expenditure, to between €1.5 billion and €3 billion depending on the "Level of Ambition", ranging from enhanced capabilities identifying priority gaps and providing greater supports in the areas of peace keeping, crisis management and humanitarian aid, to conventional capability, being a full-scale defence force on par with similar sized European countries (Commission on the Defence Forces, 2022). Debate on the necessary scale of Ireland's defence forces has led to debate on Ireland's role in defence. Are we a peace-keeping nation, protecting our neutrality and responding to humanitarian crises, or have we ceded our neutrality, requiring a fully militarised defence force? And who benefits from this increased militarisation?

On this issue, figures from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) (2021) give us food for thought. World military expenditure was estimated at \$1,981 billion in 2020, 2.6 per cent higher than the previous year. Military expenditure in North America increased by 4.3 per cent compared to 2019 while in Western Europe spending was up by 3.9 per cent in the same period. Spending increased across almost all geographical areas, with the largest percentage increase experienced in North Africa (6.4 per cent) and Central Europe (6 per cent). The areas which decreased military spending were Central Asia (-8.4 per cent), South America (-2.1 per cent) and Central America and the Caribbean (-0.2 per cent).

The volume of international transfers of major weapons 2016-20 was almost at the same level as 2011-15 and remained at its highest level since the Cold War. The five largest arms suppliers in 2016-20 were USA, Russia, France, Germany and China and they accounted for 76 per cent of the total global volume of exports of major weapons. The biggest importers of arms in this period were Saudi Arabia, India, Egypt, Australia and China, which together accounted for 36 per cent of total arms imports.

On a global basis the overwhelming majority of violent conflicts are intra-state conflicts, and their victims are mostly civilians. These conflicts are fought with small arms. The production and trade of these arms is the least transparent of all weapons systems. Ireland, as a neutral country, is in a unique position to research, challenge and advocate for tight controls in the production and distribution of weapons, rather than engaging in increasing militarisation.



In addition to the Ukrainian crisis, a number of Irish Aid's partner countries' neighbour nations are currently mired in conflict, such as Ethiopia (which shares a border with South Sudan and Somalia) and Uganda (which shares a border with Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan). Ireland should ensure its country offices and overseas programmes engage in mediation efforts where possible and promote positive reconciliation efforts amongst civil society groups. Lessons learned from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's (DFAT) Reconciliation Fund projects - fostering peace and community interaction within Northern Ireland, as well as between communities in Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland and Britain - would allow the DFAT to offer positive insights on reconciliation and cross-border co-operation in other settings.

### *Migration*

Wars, inter-state conflicts and climate change result in the mass movement of peoples. According to the World Economic Forum, the number of people who were forcibly displaced due to violence, conflict, human rights violations or other events seriously disturbing public order was 82.4 million (Fleming, 2021). The United Nations High Commission for Refugees reported that more than 1 per cent of humanity, that is one out of every 95 people in the world, was displaced in 2020, with more and more unable to return home (UNHCR, 2021). Of these 82.4 million people, 11.2 million are new displacements, with 9.8 million seeking protection within countries and 1.4 million seeking protection outside their country. An estimated 42 per cent of all displaced people are children - some 34.6 million children.

There is also concern about the high number of stateless people<sup>1</sup> referred to in the UNHCR Report. Over 4.2 million people are reported stateless, however the estimate is likely to be much higher as this figure is based on reports from 94 countries and the UNHCR does not have any information on the number of stateless people for most of the world's countries (p. 50). These are people who are likely to be denied their Human Rights due to their status as "stateless person". However, there is some good news. A reported 63,200 stateless people in 27 countries were able to acquire or confirm their nationality in 2020 and, while this is lower than in the previous year, between 2014 and 2020 a reported 404,300 stateless persons acquired nationality.

The EU is a destination of choice for many migrants, and it is estimated that 535,000 people sought asylum in the EU in 2021, an increase of 28 per cent on 2020 (Eurostat, 2022). The highest reported number of asylum applicants in EU member states was in 2015, with 1,216,900, this decreased to 1,166,800 in 2016 before declining sharply to 620,300 in 2017. Given the number of refugees worldwide, this decline is likely due to the various deterrence programmes which have been implemented by the EU.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, a stateless person is a "person who is not considered as a national by any State under the operation of its law."

The EU and Ireland's response to the crisis overall has been inadequate. *Social Justice Ireland* believes that Ireland must accelerate the arrival of programme refugees and facilitate their full family reunification as soon as possible. Irish people have our own experiences of emigration, historically due to hunger and more recently due to a lack of economic opportunities at home. In addition, we have had a long tradition of solidarity with people facing oppression within their own countries. Unfortunately, that tradition has not been reflected in our policies towards refugees and asylum seekers. We have seen, with our response to the Ukrainian crisis, what can be done when the political will exists. This must provide a blueprint for future refugee programmes.

*Social Justice Ireland* believes that Ireland should use its position in international fora to highlight the causes of displacement of peoples. In particular, Ireland should use these fora to challenge the production, sale and easy access to arms and the implements of torture. Ireland should also take a leadership position within the EU promoting a human rights and humanitarian approach to addressing the refugee crisis and challenge the "closed border" policy of some governments. We should also take a leadership role in assisting the Least Developed Countries in mitigation programmes to address climate change.

### ***Inequalities***

Inequality is a major concern of the United Nations. In its 2022 Security Report it noted that the contribution to planetary pressures (CO2 emissions and materials consumption) by higher HDI countries is large compared to lower HDI countries (United Nations, 2022, p. 48). In its *Global Wealth Report 2021* Credit Suisse reports that the number of millionaires increased by 5.2 million to reach 56.1 million, meaning that an adult now needs wealth exceeding USD\$1 million to belong to the global top 1 per cent, while the ultra-high net worth (UHNW) group grew by an additional 24 per cent, the highest rate of increase since 2003. The bottom 50 per cent of adults in the wealth distribution own less than 1 per cent of total global wealth between them, while the top 10 per cent own 82 per cent and the top 1 per cent owns 45 per cent (Shorrocks, et al., 2021).

The 2020 UNHDR, while acknowledging the impact of the pandemic globally, highlights the deprivations, underdevelopment and inequalities that persist despite the progress in some areas (United Nations Development Programme, 2020). Tables 13.1 and 13.2 show some of these inequalities.

**Table 13.1** United Nations development indicators by region and worldwide

Region	GNI per capital (US\$ PPP)*	Life Expectancy at Birth (years)	Adult Literacy %**
Least Developed Countries	2,935	65.3	64.4
Arab States	14,869	72.1	79.4
East Asia and Pacific	14,710	75.4	95.8
Europe and Central Asia	17,939	74.4	98.5
L. America and Caribbean	14,812	75.6	93.7
South Asia	6,532	69.9	72.9
Sub-Saharan Africa	3,686	61.5	65.3
OECD	44,967	80.4	N/A
<b>Worldwide total</b>	<b>16,734</b>	<b>72.8</b>	<b>84.9</b>

**Source:** UNHD Report Human Development Index 2020, 303 and statistical tables supplementary download

**Notes:** \* Gross National Income (GNI) Data adjusted for differences in purchasing power.

\*\* Adult defined as those aged 15yrs and above.

The comparable rates for Ireland are: GNI per capita: \$68,371; Life expectancy: 82.3; adult literacy: not available

Tables 13.1 and 13.2 show the sustained differences in the experiences of various regions in the world. These differences go beyond just income and are reflected in each of the indicators reported in both tables. Today, average life expectancy is 20 years higher for people in the richest countries compared to those in Sub-Saharan Africa. Similarly, the UN reports that almost one in three adults in Southern Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa are unable to read.

These inequalities are also reflected in the sizeable differences in income levels (GNI per person) and in the mortality figures. Table 13.2 shows that there are 412 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births in Least Developed Countries as against 18 in the developed OECD countries. There are 76.7 deaths of children under the age of five per 1,000 live births in Sub-Saharan Africa as against 6.8 in every 1,000 live births in OECD countries.

**Table 13.2** Maternal and Infant Mortality Rates

Region	Maternal Mortality Ratio <sup>#</sup>	Under-5yrs Mortality rate <sup>*</sup>
Least Developed Countries	412	63.5
Arab States	135	33.2
East Asia and Pacific	73	15.6
Europe and Central Asia	20	15.4
L. America and Caribbean	73	16.3
South Asia	149	40.7
Sub-Saharan Africa	535	76.7
OECD	18	6.8
<b>Worldwide total**</b>	<b>204</b>	<b>37.2</b>

**Source:** UNHDR Gender Inequality Index 2020 Table5, Table 8 Health Outcomes

**Notes:** # ratio of the number of maternal deaths to the number of live births expressed per 100,000 live births

\*number of deaths per 1,000 live births.

\*\*The comparable rates for Ireland are: Maternal mortality: 5; Under 5 mortality: 3.7

Special attention should be paid to the 2020 UNHD Report which acknowledges the “unprecedented challenges” of the new apparent Anthropocene.

“This time, the way forward is not only about expanding people’s capabilities to lead lives they value—that is, expanding choices available to people. We must also carefully consider two other critical dimensions of human development: agency (that is, the ability to participate in decision-making and to make one’s desired choices) and values (that is, the choices that are most desired), with special attention to our interactions with nature, to our stewardship of the planet.” (p. 6).

Ensuring that these new challenges are addressed with require equitable distribution and availability of technology, especially access to broadband, participation in higher education, and real efforts to mitigate the effects of climate change.

### ***Digital Technologies Threats***

According to the World Economic Forum, an increasingly digitalised world creates new risks of cybercrime costing tens, if not hundreds, of millions of dollars. In addition to the financial costs, the report warns, there are also costs associated with

threats to infrastructure, social cohesion and well-being (World Economic Forum, 2022).

Ransomware attacks are becoming more prevalent, a necessary part of doing business online. In 2020 the total value of cryptocurrency received by ransomware addresses was USD\$406.34 million, compared to USD\$0.89 million in 2015 and USD\$0.51 million in 2013. These attacks are becoming “more aggressive and widespread” as well as using more sophisticated technologies. A Global Risk Perception Survey placed cybersecurity failure among the top 10 global risks that have worsened since the beginning of the pandemic (presumably as a result of an increasing number of businesses and individuals transacting almost exclusively online as a result of restrictions) (World Economic Forum, 2022). The report argues for greater trustworthy technologies on which to build a fairer online society.

### ***Health Threats***

#### ***Pandemics***

It is well-established that another pandemic is a likely future event. According to modelling work based on historical data and conducted by the Center for Global Development, the next pandemic could come sooner and be even more serious than Covid-19 (Smitham & Glassman, 2021). The frequency and severity of infectious diseases transmitted from wildlife to humans as been increasing since the early 2000s. While the increase in the frequency has been notable, the increase in severity is extreme, from approximately 2,500 deaths in the period 2015-2019 to 15,000 deaths in the period 2030-2034. The authors estimate the annual probability of a pandemic on the scale of Covid-19 to be 2.5-3.3 per cent in any given year, meaning a 47-57 per cent chance of another Covid-19-type pandemic in the next 25 years.

As was the case with Covid-19, in future pandemics the most vulnerable countries will be the ones least likely to mitigate the damage, with countries in Asia, South America and Africa being among the most vulnerable. This is why Overseas Development Aid and Climate Finance (discussed later in this Chapter) are so important. We need to build the resilience of vulnerable countries now to better prepare them, and the rest of the world, for future pandemics. Covid-19 demonstrated that disease does not respect borders. Ensuring the most vulnerable countries are equipped to manage the next pandemic benefits all countries.

#### ***HIV/AIDS***

The HIV/AIDS epidemic of previous decades has presented governments and development workers with major challenges. There are currently 37.7 million people living with HIV. A report by UNAIDS indicated that, in 2020, 1.5 million people were newly infected with HIV and 680,000 people died from AIDS-related illnesses. Important gains in the most affected regions of sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean have been counterbalanced by rising epidemics in Latin America,

eastern Europe and central Asia, and the Middle East and North Africa. (UNAIDS, 2021).

The UNAIDS Report advocates for a person-centred response to HIV/AIDS, utilising learning from the Covid-19 response. Such a response would include:

- HIV Services proven to prevent HIV infections or AIDS-related mortality.
- Societal enablers to include laws and policies, and societies that respect gender equality and do not discriminate against PLHIV and key populations.
- Service enablers which include the linkage or integration of services, differentiated service delivery and community-led services.
- System enablers to include infrastructure, strategic planning, budgeting and management systems, monitoring and evaluation system and communications systems.
- Development synergies across a range of sectors.

### *Climate Change*

*(Note: climate change is also discussed in Chapter 11. We return to the issue briefly to highlight the particular vulnerabilities of those living in developing countries)*

The Germanwatch Global Climate Risk Index 2021 (Eckstein, et al., 2021) which ranks countries according to their extreme weather risks, shows that less developed countries are generally more affected than industrialised countries. Of the ten most affected countries in 2019, eight out of the ten belong to the category low to lower-middle income. Five of them fall into the category Least Developed Countries. Between 2000 and 2019, six were developing countries in the low income or lower-middle income country groups, two, Thailand and Dominica, were classified as upper-middle income countries, and one (Puerto Rico) was an advanced economy generating high income (p. 24).

About 475,000 people died as a direct result of more than 11,000 extreme weather events globally during the period, and losses between 2000 and 2019 amounted to around US\$2.56 trillion (in purchasing power parities). Heatwave-fuelled droughts are being felt, first and foremost, in developing countries, however those countries most at risk of heatwaves are most under-represented in the research (p. 30).

The effects of climate change have increased the vulnerability of many communities, leading to enforced migration, internal displacement, poverty, hunger and even death. Food production is a huge challenge for communities constantly forced to move. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) estimates that such scarcity will lead to increased conflict and regional instability in many of the poorest parts of the world:

“Climate change can indirectly increase risks of violent conflicts in the form of civil war and inter-group violence by amplifying well-documented drivers of these conflicts such as poverty and economic shocks (medium confidence). Multiple lines of evidence relate climate variability to these forms of conflict” (IPCC, 2014, p. 20).

After years not adequately preparing for the impacts of climate change, a Working Paper by the Climate and Development Knowledge Network (CDKN) noted that adapting to climate change is now high on the political agenda for African governments (CDKN, 2021). Climate champions across African governments, business and civil society recognise that human-made climate change is well underway, even if African countries themselves had little to do with causing it. Among these adaptation strategies are investments in people’s skills and knowledge; investment in climate-smart economies including resilient water, energy and food systems; and investment in nature and nature-based solutions to climate change and green jobs.

The Working Paper points to an “urgent need” for more finance for adaptation overall, and for more climate finance to reach local actors to support local priorities and partnerships (currently just 10 per cent of climate finance worldwide reaches local actors) (p. 19). In his Speech on Budget 2022 the Minister for Finance gave a stark warning about the impact of climate change: “the world is burning, and the only chance we have to control those fires is through coherent and effective policies.” Wealthy countries paying our fair share towards climate finance is one policy that could make a real difference to the Global South.

Africa is one of the main recipients of Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) from Ireland. In 2019, Ireland launched a new Africa strategy (Government of Ireland, 2019). Two of the commitment set out in this Strategy are (p. 13):

- Work closely with African partners, as part of our commitment to implement the 2015 Paris Agreement, to ensure that resources to tackle climate change are made available where they are most needed; scale up our funding on climate action; future-proof all our development interventions; ensure that climate action is central to all new Country Strategies in Africa; and explore innovative approaches to climate finance and risk insurance.
- Increase our capacity to develop regional approaches, in areas such as the Horn of Africa and the Sahel, to cross-border issues such as conflict and fragility, climate change mitigation and adaptation, disaster risk reduction, and migration management, including through working closely with EU partners.

Ireland must ensure that our ODA is channelled towards initiatives aimed at tackling climate change that and local actors are engaged as key stakeholders in the process.

## ***Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)***

*(Note: The Sustainable Development Goals are also discussed in Chapter 11. We return to the issue briefly to highlight the particular need and urgency for their implementation, to support the people of developing countries)*

The vision of the SDGs is outlined in the Report of a study by the UN Stakeholder Forum (Osborn, et al., 2015). The SDGs are intended to be universal in the sense of embodying a universally shared common global vision of progress towards a safe, just and sustainable space for all human beings on the planet to thrive. They reflect the moral principles that no-one and no country should be left behind, and that everyone and every country should be regarded as having a common responsibility for playing their part in delivering the global vision.

In the formulation of these Goals, much of the international discussion focused on the pressing development needs of the developing countries and the support they will need from more developed countries and the international community in achieving the goals. Some of the individual goals and targets have been particularly shaped and calibrated to express the needs and aspirations of developing countries; others express the responsibilities of the developed world to assist the development process in the developing world.

Of critical importance where Ireland is concerned in this context are two key issues:

- The need for Ireland to provide funding and support to developing countries to help them achieve the SDGs in their own countries; and
- Ensuring ‘policy coherence for development’ i.e., not having any policy initiative taken by Ireland that works against the achievement of any SDG in a developing country.

Below we will analyse Ireland’s ODA Budget which will give us an opportunity to assess how Ireland is performing on the first of these issues. Here we focus on the second issue i.e., policy coherence. Policy coherence for development was recognised as a major issue long before the SDGs were agreed. It is, in fact, enshrined in the EU’s Lisbon Treaty. It recognises that the activities of any country can have impacts far beyond that country’s borders. These impacts can be negative or positive and often have major implications for the well-being of people in developing countries. We have already highlighted wars and climate change – two impacts with extremely negative consequences for many developing countries. Below we will look at the areas of human rights, governance, trade, tax and debt. These are all areas where a lack of policy coherence can see better off countries taking initiatives that impact negatively on the realisation of the SDGs in developing countries.

As a contribution to the work that needs to be done to promote policy coherence and implement the commitments made under the SDGs, *Social Justice Ireland* each year commissions Professor Charles Clark and Dr Catherine Kavanagh to



produce a report and a Sustainable Progress Index (latest edition: (Clark, et al., 2022)) to measure progress for Ireland. In order to track the achievement of the SDGs in a simple and easy to follow manner, the report aggregates the 17 SDGs into three indexes by broad dimension: economy, society and environment. Ireland's performance according to these indicators is measured and compared to past performance and to the performance of our EU-14 peers.

Under all three headings Ireland's ranking is worse now than it was in 2006. On the economy Ireland has slipped from 6<sup>th</sup> in 2006 to 9<sup>th</sup> in 2020, the latest year for which data was available, despite an excellent performance in GDP growth (although GDP is a problematic measurement, as has been pointed out previously in this publication).

On the environment, Ireland is ranked 10<sup>th</sup> of the 14 countries compared, having moved in the wrong direction on some indicators over the past number of years. Measuring its progress as a society, Ireland's position again declined, moving from 7<sup>th</sup> in 2006 to 8<sup>th</sup> in the latest edition (Clark, et al., 2022). This index is updated each year. The preparation of this index exposes gaps in data collection and highlighted the need for more relevant indicators to measure progress on the various goals. While some progress has been made, international cooperation is still needed so that comparable data can be produced.

*Social Justice Ireland* urges the Irish Government to give leadership in the various international fora in which it operates to ensure appropriate indicators and reliable statistics are available to monitor and evaluate progress on the SDGs. We also urge Government to prioritise policy coherence for development so that no policy developed by Ireland will be detrimental in any way to work being done in developing countries to move towards achieving the SDGs in full and on schedule.

### ***Ireland's commitment to Official Development Assistance (ODA)***

Before the launch of the Government's Annual Report on Official Development Assistance (ODA) for 2020, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Simon Coveney TD, stated his "ambition" for Ireland's future commitment to global development through ODA. *Social Justice Ireland* welcomes this ambition.

However, reaching the UN goal of 0.7 per cent of income in ODA will require increased effort in the years ahead. As Table 13.3 shows, over time Ireland had achieved sizeable increases in our ODA allocation. In 2006 a total of €814m (0.53 per cent of GNP) was allocated to ODA, which was the interim target set by the Government. Budget 2008 further increased the ODA budget to reach €920.7m (0.59 per cent of GNP). However, between 2008 and 2014 ODA budget was a focus of government cuts and in 2014, Ireland's ODA was €614.9m (0.41 per cent of GNI\* and a reduction of over 33 per cent on 2008). Since 2014, the monetary value of Ireland's ODA has increased. In Budget 2022, the allocation to ODA exceeded €1 billion, however as a proportion of GNI\*, Ireland's contribution has remained relatively static at 0.43 per cent (Government of Ireland, 2021).

*Social Justice Ireland* recognises and welcomes the increased contributions in recent Budgets to ODA<sup>2</sup>. However, Ireland still lacks a strategy for reaching the UN-agreed 0.7 per cent target and we call on the Government to develop such a strategy with a view to reaching this target by 2027. Notwithstanding our current economic difficulties, Ireland must continue to recover lost ground in relation to our ODA commitments if developing countries are to have a chance of emerging from this pandemic.

**Table 13.3** Ireland's net overseas development assistance, 2010-2022

Year	€m's	% of GNI*
2010	675.8	0.52*
2011	657.0	0.52*
2012	628.9	0.50*
2013	637.1	0.47*
2014	614.9	0.41*
2015	647.5	0.40*
2016	725.8	0.42*
2017	743.4	0.40*
2018	791.6	0.40*
2019	869.9	0.41*
2020	867.5	0.41*
2021	868**	0.42*
2022	1,044**	0.43*

**Source:** Government of Ireland (2021:84) and various Budget Documents.

\* Estimate based on GNI\*, which *Social Justice Ireland* considers to be a better measurement of Ireland's national income (GNI\* data from CSO National Income and Expenditure Annual Results, various years).

\*\* Projections from Budget documentation and Estimates.

In Table 13.4 below, *Social Justice Ireland* proposes a possible pathway to reaching the UN target. This pathway sees Ireland achieve the UN target of 0.7% over the

<sup>2</sup> Data for 2019-2020 refers to the actual amounts spent as per the Government of Ireland's Irish Aid Annual Report 2020.

next five years. Here again we use GNI\* as a more realistic measurement of Ireland's national income. This makes the target all the more achievable.

**Table 13.4** Possible pathways to ODA targets 2022-2027

Year	ODA €m	% of GNI*	Increase required €m
2022	1,044.0	0.42	
2023	1,271.6	0.50	207.6
2024	1,473.5	0.55	201.8
2025	1,691.4	0.60	218.0
2026	1,921.9	0.65	230.5
2027	2,170.8	0.70	249.0

**Calculations:** *Social Justice Ireland* based on estimates of Ireland's macroeconomic prospects contained in Budget 2022 Economic & Fiscal Outlook and author's calculations.

*Social Justice Ireland* believes that these allocation should not include the increase in expenditure in respect of the Ukrainian crisis which should be ring-fenced and warehoused (see Chapter 2).

Rebuilding our commitment to ODA and honouring the UN target should be important policy paths for Ireland to pursue in the coming years. Not only would its achievement be a major success for government and an important element in the delivery of promises made but it would also be of significance internationally. Ireland's success would not only provide additional assistance to needy countries but would also provide leadership to those other European countries who do not meet the target.

DFAT and the Irish Government regularly cite the positive assessments of Irish ODA given by international bodies. The OECD's most recent Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Peer Review of Ireland noted how Ireland's 'Ireland's approach to partnerships reflects the strong support for civil society and dedication to multilateralism that are hallmarks of its development co-operation.' (OECD, 2020). We can be justifiably proud of our record of providing high quality, untied, grant-based aid. We can be especially proud that we allocate aid to Least Developed Countries in a greater proportion than do the vast majority of other OECD countries.

*Social Justice Ireland* welcomes the Government's approach to allocating aid to the poorest and neediest countries of the world and for its capacity to work in

partnership with civil society in these countries and urges Government not to lose sight of the continuing and pressing need for this support.

Given Ireland's current and projected economic growth, *Social Justice Ireland* believes that Government should commit to reaching the UN target of 0.7 per cent of GNI\* to be allocated within the next five years.

## 13.2 Key Policy Priorities

*Social Justice Ireland* believes that the following policy positions should be adopted in responding to the current challenges being experienced by the Global South. The Irish Government should:

- Renew its commitment to meet the United Nations target of contributing 0.7 per cent of national income to ODA by 2027 and set a clear pathway to achieve this.
- Take a far more proactive stance at government level on ensuring that Irish and EU policies towards countries in the Global South are just.
- Ensure that Irish businesses operating in developing countries- in particular Irish Aid country partners – are subject to proper scrutiny and engage in sustainable development practices.
- Play a prominent role in the support and implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. In particular it should work with other governments to end the race to the bottom on corporate tax rates. This would help all countries deliver on their commitments on Sustainable Development Goals.
- Continue to support the international campaign for the liberation of the poorest nations from the burden of the backlog of unpayable debt and take steps to ensure that further progress is made on this issue.
- Work for changes in the existing international trading regimes to encourage fairer and sustainable forms of trade. In particular, resource the development of Ireland's policies in the WTO to ensure that this goal is pursued.
- Take a leadership position within European and broader international arenas to encourage other states to fund programmes and research aimed at taking a person-centred approach to the AIDS/HIV crisis.

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## Chapter fourteen

## 14.

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## VALUES

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The society we have today is the result of decisions taken over the past decades. It can be changed. If we desire change, it will only come as a result of different decisions being made by a variety of policy-makers and institutions. The proposals made in this Socio-Economic Review could be implemented if those with the competent authority took the decisions required. All decisions are based on values. Everyone can contribute to societal change by raising questions and encouraging debate around vision, values and ethics.

We need to reclaim and promote ethics in business, wealth creation and policymaking. Pope Francis reminds us that:

*“Development must not aim at the amassing of wealth by a few, but must ensure “human rights – personal and social, economic and political, including the rights of nations and of peoples”. The right of some to free enterprise or market freedom cannot supersede the rights of peoples and the dignity of the poor, or, for that matter, respect for the natural environment, for “if we make something our own, it is only to administer it for the good of all”. Business activity is essentially “a noble vocation, directed to producing wealth and improving our world”. God encourages us to develop the talents he gave us, and he has made our universe one of immense potential. In God’s plan, each individual is called to promote his or her own development, and this includes finding the best economic and technological means of multiplying goods and increasing wealth. Business abilities, which are a gift from God, should always be clearly directed to the development of others and to eliminating poverty, especially through the creation of diversified work opportunities. The right to private property is always accompanied by the primary and prior principle of the subordination of all private property to the universal destination of the earth’s goods, and thus the right of all to their use”(Pope Francis, 2020)*

The people who bear the cost of any economic downturn are obvious, the unemployed; emigrants who were forced to leave Ireland and cannot afford to return; poor, sick and vulnerable people who have had their income and social services cut. As we begin to exit Covid-19 related restrictions, there is still much fear, anxiety and anger in our communities. The critical question now is how do



we prevent a recurrence of the type of austerity responses we saw after the last economic crash? Indeed, how do we prevent a recurrence of another economic crash? While some people advocate good regulation as the solution, others are sceptical and search for more radical approaches.

These observations, reflections and questions bring to the fore the issue of values. Our fears are easier to admit than our values. Do we as a people accept a two-tier society in fact, while deriding it in principle? It is obvious that we are becoming an even more unequal world. The dualism in our national values allows us to continue with the status quo, which, in reality, means that it is okay to exclude almost one sixth of the population from society, while substantial resources and opportunities are channelled towards other groups and institutions.

To change this reality requires a fundamental change of values. We need a rational debate on the kind of society in which we want to live. If it is to be realistic, this debate should challenge our values and support us in articulating our goals and formulating the way forward.

### ***Human dignity, human rights and the common good***

*Social Justice Ireland* wishes to contribute to this debate and believes that the focus for this debate should be human dignity, human rights and the common good. Discussion and reflection on human dignity can be traced back to the writings of ancient philosophers and religious traditions. The history of this discourse is long and complex. However, it was not until 1948 that it was clearly articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. *Social Justice Ireland* believes that every person should have seven basic socio-economic and cultural rights, that is, the right to:

- sufficient income to live life with dignity,
- meaningful work,
- appropriate accommodation.
- participate in shaping the decisions that affect their lives.
- appropriate education
- essential healthcare
- an environment which respects their culture.

These rights can only be vindicated when society structures itself to provide the resources necessary in the interest of the common good. Hollenbach (1989) reminds us that rights are not simply claims to pursue private interests or to be left alone. Rather, they are claims to share in the common good of civil society.

Related to the discourse on human dignity is the discourse on the common good. This discourse can be traced to Plato, Aristotle and Cicero. More recently, the philosopher John Rawls defined the common good as 'certain general conditions that are...equally to everyone's advantage' (Rawls, 1971 p.246). François Flahault notes 'that the human state of nature is the social state, that there has never been a human being who was not embedded, as it were, in a multiplicity. This necessarily means that relational well-being is the primary form of the common good.....The common good is the sum of all that which supports coexistence, and consequently the very existence of individuals.' (Flahault, 2011 p.68)

This understanding was also reflected at an international gathering of Catholic leaders. They saw the common good as 'the sum of those conditions of social life by which individuals, families and groups can achieve their own fulfilment in a relatively thorough and ready way' (Gaudium et Spes no.74). This understanding recognises the fact that the person develops their potential in the context of society where the needs and rights of all members and groups are respected. The common good, then, consists primarily of having the social systems, institutions and environments on which we all depend work in a manner that benefits all people simultaneously and in solidarity

Human rights are the rights of all persons so that each person is not only a right-holder but also has duties to all other persons to respect and promote their rights. There is a sharing of the benefits of rights and the burden of duties. Alan Gewirth (1993) notes that human rights have important implications for social policy. On the one hand the State must protect equally the freedom and basic well-being of all persons and on the other hand it must give assistance to persons who cannot maintain their well-being by their own efforts.

### *Understanding of Justice*

Christianity subscribes to the values of both human dignity and the centrality of the community. The person is seen as growing and developing in a context that includes other people and the environment. Justice is understood in terms of relationships. The Christian scriptures understand justice as a harmony that comes from fidelity to right relationships with God, people and the environment. A just society is one that is structured in such a way as to promote these right relationships so that human rights are respected, human dignity is protected, human development is facilitated, and the environment is respected and protected (Healy and Reynolds, 2003:188).

### *Appropriate structures*

As our societies have grown in sophistication, the need for appropriate structures has become more urgent. The aspiration that everyone should enjoy the good life, and the goodwill to make it available to all, are essential ingredients in a just society. But this good life will not happen without the deliberate establishment of structures to facilitate its development. In the past charity, in the sense of alms-giving by some individuals, organisations and Churches on an arbitrary and ad

hoc basis, was seen as sufficient to ensure that everyone could cross the threshold of human dignity. Calling on the work of social historians it could be argued that charity in this sense was never an appropriate method for dealing with poverty. Certainly, it is not a suitable methodology for dealing with the problems of today. As demonstrated by the pandemic, charity and the heroic efforts of voluntary agencies cannot solve these problems on a long-term basis. Appropriate structures should be established to ensure that every person has access to the resources needed to live life with dignity.

### *Future Generations*

Few people would disagree that the resources of the planet are for the use of the people - not just the present generation, but also the generations still to come. In Old Testament times these resources were closely tied to land and water. A complex system of laws about the Sabbatical and Jubilee years (Lev 25: 1-22, Deut 15: 1-18) was devised to ensure, on the one hand, that no person could be disinherited, and, on the other, that land and debts could not be accumulated. This system also ensured that the land was protected and allowed to renew itself. Today, modern society needs to espouse this principle to ensure the protection and security of existing resources for the use of future generations.

### *Ownership and property*

These reflections raise questions about ownership. Obviously, there was an acceptance of private property, but it was not an exclusive ownership. It carried social responsibilities. We find similar thinking among the leaders of the early Christian community. St John Chrysostom, (4<sup>th</sup> century) speaking to those who could manipulate the law so as to accumulate wealth to the detriment of others, taught that ‘the rich are in the possession of the goods of the poor even if they have acquired them honestly or inherited them legally’ (Homily on Lazarus). These early leaders also established that a person in extreme necessity has the right to take from the riches of others what s/he needs, since private property has a social quality deriving from the law of the communal purpose of earthly goods (Gaudium et Spes 69-71).

Pope John Paul II has further developed the understanding of ownership, especially in regard to the ownership of the means of production. Recently this position has been reiterated by Pope Francis (2015): “the Church does indeed defend the legitimate right to private property, but she also teaches no less clearly that there is always a social mortgage on all private property, in order that goods may serve the general purpose that God gave them.” (No 93)

### *Technology*

One of the major contributors to the generation of wealth is technology. The technology we have today is the product of the work of many people through many generations. Through the laws of patenting and exploration a very small group of people has claimed legal rights to a large portion of the world’s wealth. Pope

John Paul II questioned the morality of these structures. He said ‘if it is true that capital as the whole of the means of production is at the same time the product of the work of generations, it is equally true that capital is being unceasingly created through the work done with the help of all these means of production’. Therefore, no one can claim exclusive rights over the means of production. Rather, that right ‘is subordinated to the right to common use, to the fact that goods are meant for everyone’. (Laborem Exercens No.14). Since everyone has a right to a proportion of the goods of the country, society is faced with two responsibilities regarding economic resources: firstly, each person should have sufficient resources to access the good life; and secondly, since the earth’s resources are finite, and since “more” is not necessarily “better”, it is time that society faced the question of putting a limit on the wealth that any person or corporation can accumulate. Espousing the value of environmental sustainability requires a commitment to establish systems that ensure the protection of our planet.

In his exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel*, (Evangelii Gaudium) Pope Francis (2013) named the trends that are detrimental to the common good, equality and the future of the planet. He says:

*“While the earnings of the minority are growing exponentially, so too is the gap separating the majority from the prosperity enjoyed by those happy few. This imbalance is the result of ideologies which defend the absolute autonomy of the marketplace and financial speculation. Consequently, they reject the right of states, charged with vigilance for the common good, to exercise any form of control.....Debt and the accumulation of interest also make it difficult for countries to realise the potential of their economies and keep citizens from enjoying their real purchasing power. To all this we can add widespread corruption and self-serving tax evasion, which have taken on worldwide dimensions. The thirst for power and possessions knows no limits. In this system, which tends to devour everything which stands in the way of increased profits, whatever is fragile, like the environment, is defenceless before the interests of a deified market, which becomes the only rule.” (par 56)*

Interdependence, mutuality, solidarity and connectedness are words that are used loosely today to express a consciousness which resonates with Christian values. All of creation is seen as a unit that is dynamic and interrelated. When we focus on the human family, this means that each person depends on others initially for life itself, and subsequently for the resources and relationships needed to grow and develop. To ensure that the connectedness of the web of life is maintained, each person depending on their age and ability is expected to reach out to support others in ways that are appropriate for their growth and in harmony with the rest of creation. This thinking respects the integrity of the person, while recognising that the person can achieve his or her potential only in right relationships with others and with the environment.

As a democratic society we elect our leaders regularly. We expect them to lead the way in developing the society we want for ourselves and our children. Election and budget times give an opportunity to scrutinise the vision politicians have for our society. Because this vision is based on values, it is worth evaluating the values being articulated. It is important that we check if the plans proposed are compatible with the values articulated and likely to deliver the society we desire.

Most people in Irish society would subscribe to the values articulated here. However, these values will only be operative in our society when appropriate structures and infrastructures are put in place. These are the values that *Social Justice Ireland* wishes to promote. We wish to work with others to develop and support appropriate systems, structures and infrastructures which will give practical expression to these values in Irish society.

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Social justice matters. That is why *Social Justice Ireland* publishes this book at this time. Irish society continues to face social, economic and environmental challenges. The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the deficits in our services and infrastructure, but it also showed the critical value of having an effective public service. Post pandemic, we face major challenges: how to address the cost-of-living crisis; how to deliver housing, healthcare and other vital services to everyone including those fleeing war; how to address persistently high levels of poverty and social exclusion; how to meet our climate targets whilst protecting those most impacted. There is no doubt that a new Social Contract to improve the wellbeing of all is needed. This publication addresses these issues, outlines ideas for a new Social Contract and seeks answers to the questions: where do we want to go, and what do we need to do to get there?

In this, its Socio-Economic Review for 2022, *Social Justice Ireland* presents:

- a detailed analysis of a range of key matters which are central to social justice.
- a vision of Ireland's future as a just and sustainable society, and
- a policy framework to move consistently and coherently towards becoming a just society.
- It also sets out detailed policy proposals needed to move in this direction.

Among the topics addressed in **Social Justice Matters** are:

- |                                       |                                          |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| • Towards Wellbeing for All           | • Education and Educational Disadvantage |
| • Income Distribution                 | • Other Public Services                  |
| • Taxation                            | • People and Participation               |
| • Work, Unemployment and Job-Creation | • Sustainability                         |
| • Housing and Accommodation           | • Rural Development                      |
| • Healthcare                          | • The Global South                       |
|                                       | • Values                                 |

**Social Justice Matters** provides a key reference point for anybody working on Irish social justice issues in 2022.



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