



Social Justice Ireland

Inequality and Social Cohesion: The potential impact of economic inequality on integration



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Introduction

In recent years, many countries have witnessed a concerning rise in both inequality and anti-immigrant sentiment. Ireland held local and European elections in June 2024, and according to figures compiled by an Irish news website, “more than 100 people stood for far-right parties or as far-right independents” and “although most were unsuccessful in their endeavours to be elected, the vast majority managed to get more than 2% of first preference votes – the previous best by a far-right candidate in Ireland – in the areas where they stood”.¹ Five of these candidates were successful in winning a seat on their local council.

In today's interconnected world, the proliferation of disinformation and conspiracy theories poses a significant threat to democratic societies and exacerbates existing social, economic, and political inequalities. Disadvantaged communities are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of disinformation and conspiracy theories, as feelings of disconnection from the system and of being left behind can result in distrust of perceived mainstream establishment narratives. This can lead to being more susceptible to dis- and misinformation, manipulation and exploitation (Casara, B. G. S. et al, 2022). As such, addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach that tackles both the socio-economic root causes of inequality and the cultural and political factors driving anti-immigrant sentiments.

This policy paper examines the impacts of inequality and poverty in Ireland today, then builds on (forthcoming²) research undertaken by Dr Daniel Jolley and Dr Michael Hattersley at the University of Nottingham, Dr Yvonne Skipper at the University of Glasglow and Prof Karen Douglas at the University of Kent, which explores the links between the impact of inequality, conspiracy beliefs, and anti-immigrant sentiment. A critical insight of this research is that inequality is not only materially damaging, but it also likely undermines social cohesion and political literacy. If policy intends to tackle the symptom, it needs to address the cause.

The paper concludes with policy proposals to foster inclusivity and address anti-immigrant sentiment by tackling poverty and combating inequality, as well as ideas on how to combat disinformation and conspiracy beliefs, promote information literacy, enhance media literacy, and foster a more informed and resilient society.

Current Context

The political landscape in Ireland has shifted of late, becoming more polarised. Debate and discussion are ever more vital to ensure that more voices are heard, and genuine engagement occurs. 2023 and 2024 have been unfortunately noteworthy due to the number of demonstrations and protests against migration, some of which turned violent, and an increasing number of arson attacks on properties both correctly and incorrectly earmarked for emergency accommodation. These emboldened and aggressive actions impact the political atmosphere directly, with many of the demonstrations taking place outside Government buildings and, on occasion, outside the homes of both Government and Opposition politicians.

¹ <https://www.thejournal.ie/far-right-candidates-ireland-local-councils-6403594-Jun2024/>

² A Project Report can be accessed via <https://nottingham-repository.worktribe.com/output/38911924>.

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* Policy Framework for a new Social Contract, requires the promotion of deliberative democracy, new criteria in policy evaluation, and the continued development of a social dialogue process involving all sectors of society (Social Justice Ireland, 2020). This is a core tenet of living in a democracy. At a time when the very fabric of democracy is increasingly under threat right across the globe, with over 70 countries holding elections in 2024, this is something we must strive to protect.

Despite high levels of employment, growth and record levels of windfall revenues, Ireland remains a deeply unequal society. According to the Central Bank, "as of Q2 2023, the wealthiest 10 per cent of Irish households owned €518 Bn, or 48 per cent of total household net wealth in the country (Central Bank of Ireland, 2024). Indeed, income inequality has remained stubbornly stable over the past fifty years. While the total value of household income has increased, not much has changed about its distribution. The share of total household disposable income going to the top quintile (20 per cent) of households between 1973 and 2022 has steadily remained between 40 and 45 per cent. While the share going to the bottom quintile of households has remained around 5 per cent. This creates the conditions where disadvantaged groups end up pitted against each other for the allocation of resources. This has been noted in the Parliamentary Budget Office's January 2024 publication, 'A Socio-Economic Profile of International Protection Accommodation Locations 2024', which states that across 20 counties, areas with accommodation centres are more disadvantaged, on average, than areas without accommodation centres, within that county (Parliamentary Budget Office, 2024). Also, in the months immediately following the arrival of refugees fleeing Russia's invasion of Ukraine, *Social Justice Ireland* published *Migrations in Our Common Home Responding with Care – Ireland's response to the Ukrainian crisis* (Social Justice Ireland, 2022). In the context of existing inadequacies in our infrastructure and services, we asked the question: How do we contend with the very real risk of putting different vulnerable groups, both local and migrant, in competition for scarce State resources?

Understanding the Problems of Inequality and Poverty

Inequality, in particular, economic inequality, is about the unequal distribution of resources, opportunities, and wealth among individuals or groups within a society. It manifests in various forms, including income inequality, wealth disparity, and unequal access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. Inequality not only undermines social cohesion but also perpetuates cycles of poverty and marginalisation, contributing to resentment and discontent among disadvantaged communities: "Down the ages, and from around the world, there is endless evidence that inequality in general, and wealth inequality in particular, creates the divisions that make for unhappy societies – and that is dangerous" (Byrne, p.6,2024).

Over half a million people in Ireland live in poverty. Almost 177,000 of them are children. 65,000 are aged over 65. In 2023, one in seven children lived in households that were below the poverty line and 264,064 children were living in households experiencing deprivation. Living in poverty can have extensive and multifaceted effects on individuals, families, and communities.

Intergenerational Transmission of Disadvantage

A report from the CSO examined the inter-generational transmission of disadvantages based on the 2019 SILC, focusing on people aged 25 to 59 and their life situation when they were 14 years old (Central Statistics Office, 2020). They found that those who had experienced financial or educational disadvantage in their teens (that is, having grown up in disadvantaged households) were more likely to be at risk of poverty or experiencing enforced deprivation than their wealthier peers. Financial disadvantage in childhood seems to continue through to adulthood. Respondents who reported that the financial situation in their teenage home was bad were less likely to be working or have attained third level education as adults. Of those teenagers who lived in households experiencing financial disadvantage, 18.2 per cent were now, as adults, living at risk of poverty, and 39 per cent experienced enforced deprivation. This compares with those who lived in more financially secure homes as teenagers, where, as adults, 8.4 per cent were living at risk of poverty and 10.1 per cent experienced enforced deprivation.

The same survey also examined the link between the level of educational attainment of both the parent and child. More than three in four (77.9 per cent) of the respondents whose parents achieved a third level qualification had done likewise. Whereas, 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. Respondents who had working parents at age 14 were also more likely themselves to be in employment, whereas 18.2 per cent were currently without paid employment. This compares with those who grew up in households with no working parents, with 41.7 per cent without paid employment as adults.

This intergenerational transmission of low levels of skills and educational qualifications to children, therefore, has an impact on their financial wellbeing when they reach adulthood. Poverty also restricts access to opportunities for personal and professional development. Structural barriers and systemic inequalities can perpetuate disparities in access to resources and social mobility. Living in poverty can take a significant psychological and emotional toll on individuals and families. Chronic stress, anxiety, depression, and feelings of hopelessness are common experiences among those facing economic hardship.

High rates of poverty and income inequality have been the norm in Irish society for some time. These problems require greater attention than they currently receive but tackling them effectively is a multifaceted task. It requires action on many fronts, not only in education but also in healthcare, accommodation, and employment, to name but a few.

Housing

9,899 adults and 2,093 families with 4,404 dependent children accessed local authority managed emergency accommodation in the week of the 24th to 30th June 2024 (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2024). And that's just the official data. These figures do not include those staying with family and friends, rough sleepers, homeless families temporarily accommodated in housing owned by their Local Authority, women and children in domestic violence refuges, and 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). People living in poverty are more likely to reside in

substandard housing with inadequate sanitation, heating, and ventilation. These conditions can contribute to physical health problems, such as respiratory illnesses and exposure to environmental hazards.

Health

The link between poverty and ill-health is well established by research. Poor people get sick more often and die younger than those in the higher socio-economic groups. Ireland faces significant challenges in this area. Inequalities in health in Ireland are closely linked with wider social determinants, including living and working conditions and access to services, trends which, taken together with an aging population, must be addressed now to avoid significant problems in the future. International reports underline inequalities in life expectancy by socio-economic status, including education level, income, or occupational group.³ 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, 2020). Internationally, poor people have had higher rates of COVID-19 infection and death, and income inequality itself also worsens outcomes (World Health Organisation, 2021). A range of studies provide concerning evidence relative to inequality and health in Ireland. The OECD⁴ 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.⁵

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 (Economic and Social Research Institute, 2013). The Irish Health Survey⁶ 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. Disadvantaged people report higher levels of having a long-lasting condition – 29 per cent of Very disadvantaged persons compared to 22 per cent of Very affluent people. 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. Official statistics from the CSO suggest that life expectancy in Ireland differs based on socio-economic background (Central Statistics Office, 2019a). 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. All of this research and data tells us, in summary, poor people get sick more often and die younger than those in the higher socioeconomic groups.

³<https://www.oecd.org/health/health-for-everyone-3c8385d0-en.htm>

⁴https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/health-at-a-glance-2019_4dd50c09-en

⁵Ibid

⁶<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-ihsmr/irishhealthsurvey2019-mainresults/>

Overall, life expectancy is continuing to increase, currently standing at 84 years for women and 81 years for men (Department of Health, 2022). As in many countries, life expectancy is higher for women than men, but in Ireland this gap has narrowed in the past decade. These are positive developments. However, the poorer outcomes for those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds remains a cause for concern.

Education

Whilst Ireland performs well overall in terms of education, a cohort is being left behind. In 2022, almost one third of early school leavers aged 18-24 were not economically active.⁷ CSO data shows that 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 analysed the outcomes for students who started second level education in 2011 – 2013 (Central Statistics Office, 2019). 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 for 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, 2019), it is important that this cohort is not left behind.

Disinformation and Conspiracy Theories

Disinformation encompasses false or misleading information deliberately spread to deceive or manipulate audiences for political, ideological, or economic purposes. It can take various forms, including fake news, propaganda, misinformation, and conspiracy theories, and spread rapidly through social media, online platforms, and traditional media channels. Disinformation undermines trust in institutions, distorts public discourse, and poses threats to democracy, social stability, and public health.

A recent report from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) acknowledges that “disinformation is not a new phenomenon, but digitalisation has fundamentally changed its reach and impact. Communication technologies now allow for anyone with an internet connection to produce and distribute content, but without the responsibility to adhere to journalistic or academic and scientific ethics and standards, long built to favour information integrity”.⁸

Conspiracy theories are speculative explanations suggesting that events or situations are the result of secret, even sinister plots by powerful groups or individuals. These theories often challenge the official or mainstream accounts, positing that the true explanation is being concealed from the public. Conspiracy theories can span a wide range of topics, from government cover-ups to hidden agendas behind global pandemics or economic crises. They often thrive on uncertainty and distrust,

⁷<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-eda/educationalattainmentthematicreport2022/>

⁸https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/governance/facts-not-fakes-tackling-disinformation-strengthening-information-integrity_d909ff7a-en

leveraging ambiguous evidence, coincidences, or anomalous events to create compelling, albeit unfounded, stories. While some may stem from genuine skepticism, many conspiracy theories can fuel misinformation, erode public trust in institutions, and even incite harmful actions or divisiveness within society.

Anti-Immigrant Sentiment

Anti-immigrant sentiment encompasses negative attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours directed towards immigrants or minority ethnic groups. This sentiment often arises from fear, cultural differences, perceived economic threats, or political rhetoric that scapegoats immigrants for societal problems. Left unchecked, anti-immigrant sentiment can lead to discrimination, hate crimes, and social exclusion, undermining the principles of diversity and inclusivity. Despite the economic benefits that migration brings, for example, in Ireland, “immigrants pay more in than they get out”⁹ and the “proportion of all immigrants with third level qualifications has increased ...to just under 70 per cent in 2022”¹⁰, there is a growing narrative that those arriving here, especially those seeking asylum, are draining scarce resources. The ongoing accommodation crisis has been in place for some communities for decades and has been simply exacerbated by the large numbers of people arriving here in recent years. Employment, educational and health supports were difficult to access for some communities, and it is in these communities, as noted above, that many accommodation centres are often placed.

If the system does not deliver for a sector of society, if that rising tide did not take into account the leaky hulls and, on occasion, lack of boats, it may be that for that section of the community, the system is easier to ignore and work around as distrust builds. Instead of two communities who are struggling to access resources coming together, they are pitted against each other. So, does this zero-sum thinking, that if one gets it, the other must do without, lead to believing anti-immigrant conspiracy theories and, therefore, breeding anti-immigrant sentiment in disadvantaged communities?

Research Overview and Findings

Research undertaken by Dr Daniel Jolley and Dr Michael Hattersley at the University of Nottingham, Dr Yvonne Skipper at the University of Glasgow and Prof Karen Douglas at the University of Kent (forthcoming²), explores the links between the impact of inequality, conspiracy beliefs, and anti-immigrant sentiment.

The research provides empirical evidence linking experiences of inequality with belief in non-European immigrant conspiracy theories and anti-immigrant sentiment. The researchers also explore the contextual factors that underpin this relationship, focusing on societal anomie.

Anomie can be defined as a state of disorder or confusion in a society when standard norms and values are either weak or unclear. This weakening of moral standards or guidance for individuals to follow can in turn cause a breakdown of social bonds between an individual and the community and disconnection, deviance, and social instability among individuals.

⁹<https://www.ft.com/content/c6bb7307-484c-4076-a0f3-fc2aeb0b6112>

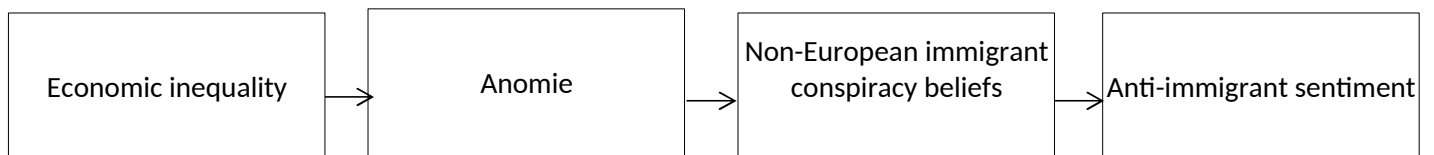
¹⁰https://www.centralbank.ie/docs/default-source/publications/quarterly-bulletins/boxes/q4-2022/box-e-population-change-and-migration-in-ireland-recent-evidence.pdf?sfvrsn=3062951d_5

In a series of empirical studies with 3,643 participants in the UK and Ireland, the researchers examined the role of economic inequality and societal anomie. For the purposes of the research, societal anomie is understood as confusion over societal changes, a feeling that values and moral standards are weakening, causing a disconnect between people and their community. In other words, people feel increasingly alienated from wider society, especially as it undergoes changes; they no longer feel connected to the common good.

Societal anomie was measured in the studies with questions like “compared to the country I knew before, I barely recognise what the country is becoming” to examine if this anomie could be identified as a precursor to conspiracy theories targeting non-European immigrants. Such conspiracy theories often focus on demographic change, for instance, the “Eurabia” or “Great Replacement” conspiracy theories that accuse Muslim communities of attempting to erase European culture.

The researchers’ contention is that economic inequality may promote general feelings of anomie. This sense of alienation is, not unexpectedly, exacerbated when people are socially marginalised by poverty and inequality, when the society in which they live does not seem to work for them. This then fosters an increase in the appeal of xenophobic conspiracy theories, which in turn may encourage anti-immigrant attitudes and behaviours. The researchers tested this theoretical model, as presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Theoretical model tested in this research programme.



Anti-immigrant sentiment was measured with questions targeting violent (e.g., physical attacks on immigrants) and non-violent (e.g., boycotting organizations that support immigrants) behavioural intentions toward non-European immigrants, alongside also asking participants whether they supported policies relating to immigration (e.g., refugees receiving social welfare payments).

Key Findings

Study 1

In their first study with UK participants ($n = 491$, Study 1a), perceptions of (and self-reported actual) economic inequality were positively correlated with the perception that society is breaking down (anomie). This ‘anomie’ or distrust of the system was then linked with the endorsement of non-European immigrant conspiracy theories – for example, participants were more likely to believe theories such as “*non-European immigrants work in secret to destabilise the British economy*”. Such beliefs were then linked with anti-immigrant sentiment, including the likelihood of being violent towards non-European immigrants and being unsupportive of pro-immigrant policies. This pattern of results was replicated in a sample of Irish participants ($n = 493$, Study 1b).

Study 2

Their second study ($n = 760$, Study 2) recruited participants who lived in *more* and *less* areas of economic inequality in the UK. The researchers found that those participants who lived in more (vs less) reported greater anomie, which was again associated with non-European conspiracy theories and anti-immigrant sentiment. Importantly, these effects held when controlling for age, sex, ethnicity, education, and length of time living in the region.

Study 3

Next, in their third study ($n = 790$, Study 3a), feelings of inequality were experimentally manipulated using a virtual society with UK participants. In this task, participants imagine that they have moved to a new country and are assigned to a social group towards the top (low inequality) or the bottom (high inequality) of society. The same pattern emerged as previously; high inequality (vs low) increased anomie, which was then associated with non-European immigrant conspiracy beliefs and anti-immigrant sentiment. This pattern of results was then replicated in a sample of Irish participants ($n = 321$, Study 3b) using the same virtual society manipulation.

Study 4

In their final study ($n = 788$, Study 4), the researchers manipulated exposure to conspiratorially themed material about non-European immigrants. UK participants in a high experimental economic inequality condition who were exposed to conspiracy theories about non-European immigrants (vs no exposure) reported a higher likelihood of behaving violently toward non-European immigrants.

Therefore, across these studies employing various research designs, their research establishes a clear link between economic inequality, the perception of societal breakdown, and conspiracy-driven anti-immigrant sentiment. Notably, this pattern emerged in both participants who lived in the UK and Ireland. The researchers conclude that their work adds nuance by suggesting that economic inequality may be a remote factor, indirectly promoting hostile sentiments and behaviours by fostering feelings of anomie and belief in conspiracy narratives. Addressing inequality in society is a pressing public policy concern, underscored by the findings of this research.

Policy Proposals

Increasing inequality is damaging on many levels, both personal and community, and “imperils not only the future wealth of our economy but the future health of our democracy (emphasis in original) (Byrne, 2024). If the research shows that there is a link between inequality and anti-immigrant sentiment, through anomie and conspiracy beliefs, then if Irish society is to tackle the latter, it must deal with the former.

In a speech in January, the former Taoiseach Leo Varadkar TD said “he ‘needs a bit of help’ from Dáil Deputies in preventing Ireland from becoming angrily divided over migrant arrivals”.¹¹ As the year has progressed, this situation is becoming more polarised, as evidenced by recent events and attacks at a number of sites which have been identified by the state for use as International Protection Accommodation Services (IPAS) centres. The clearest way to achieve this is to tackle the issues of poverty, homelessness, and lack of access to basic services. Indeed, most of the needs of immigrants are very similar to those on which Irish society is already facing major challenges, e.g., housing, healthcare, education, public transport, employment and childcare. Government must invest in

¹¹<https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/leo-varadkar-says-he-needs-help-from-dail-in-preventing-ireland-becoming-deeply-divided-on-migration/a1200883128.html>

infrastructure and services which benefit all, and encourage awareness-raising among hosting communities, including at educational level.

Ireland requires a new social contract between citizens and the State. The ambition of this social contract is to provide each citizen with accessible and affordable health care, housing, education, childcare, and disability services, as well as a living wage, upskilling, and a dignified retirement. It will provide greater security for individuals and communities and will be founded on the principle of equality, ensuring that every citizen can achieve their full potential.

The current Programme for Government: Our Shared Future notes that “Ireland has benefited immeasurably from a growing diversity over the past several decades. These new communities have an invaluable role in our economic, cultural and social life” and states that “this government will ensure that new and minority communities are fully recognised and integrated in Irish life with equality at its core” (Government of Ireland, 2020). The next Programme for Government should certainly recommit to this statement. The best way to realise this commitment is by building a society that is housed, has adequate income, and access to basic services. We now present some policy proposals to address the challenges highlighted in this briefing.

Promote Economic Equality and Wellbeing

Progressive Taxation: Implement progressive taxation policies to redistribute wealth and reduce income inequality. This includes making tax credits refundable. Adopt policies to ensure that corporations based in Ireland pay a minimum effective corporate tax rate of 15 per cent. 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 and move towards increasing the total tax-take so that sufficient revenue is collected to provide income adequacy and public services at average-European levels.

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. There are many adults living in poverty despite having a job – the working poor. Improvements in the 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. This measure can uplift low-income families, reduce poverty, and narrow the wealth gap.

Maintaining an Adequate Level of Social Welfare: Over 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 (*Social Justice Ireland*, 2024). 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. 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 to further increase minimum social welfare rates and commit to converging on a minimum benchmark equivalent to 27.5 per cent of average weekly earnings.

Invest in Education and Skills Development: 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 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 20 per cent by 2026, ensuring sufficient resources are made available and to meet the digital and green transition challenges, develop an integrated, multi-generational skills development, digital transition, vocational training, apprenticeship and reskilling strategy.

Foster Social Cohesion and Inclusivity

Support Integration Programs: Develop comprehensive integration programs that provide newcomers with language classes, cultural orientation, and support services to facilitate their integration into society. Promote inclusive policies that recognise the contributions of immigrants and refugees to their host communities. Resource community projects that benefit the entire community and which specifically provide opportunities for migrants to participate in and contribute to their new communities.

Promote Diversity and Cultural Exchange: Encourage intercultural dialogue, exchange programs, and initiatives that celebrate diversity and promote understanding between different ethnic, cultural, and religious groups. Invest in community-building activities and multicultural events that foster social cohesion and solidarity.

Combat Discrimination: Enforce anti-discrimination laws and strengthen measures to combat xenophobia and racism in public discourse and media. Provide support for victims of discrimination and promote tolerance and respect for diversity in schools and workplaces.

Effective management of migration

Fair and Transparent Immigration System: Establish immigration policies that are fair, transparent, and based on humanitarian principles. Streamline immigration processes, reduce bureaucratic barriers, and ensure timely processing of visa applications and asylum claims.

Address Root Causes of Migration: Address the root causes of migration, such as poverty, conflict, and climate change, through international cooperation, development aid, and conflict resolution

efforts. Invest in sustainable development projects and poverty alleviation programs in regions prone to emigration.

Forecasting

Convene a working group on Forecasting for Migration under the auspices of the Department of An Taoiseach with cross-sectoral membership, and Chaired by an independent expert and task that working group with developing a forecasting methodology within twelve months of first meeting.

Foster Community Engagement

Greater and more timely consultations with communities about the allocation of refugee accommodation and adequate allocation of resources and services

Promote Information Literacy

Education Initiatives: Integrate information literacy and critical thinking skills into school curricula at all levels. Develop age-appropriate educational materials and resources to teach students how to evaluate sources, discern fact from fiction, and navigate digital media responsibly.

Community Workshops: Organise community workshops, seminars, and outreach programs to raise awareness about the dangers of disinformation and provide practical tools and strategies for identifying and combating false information. Collaborate with libraries, community centres, and grassroots organizations to reach diverse audiences.

Public Awareness Campaigns: Launch public awareness campaigns to promote media literacy among the general public. Use digital media, social media, and traditional advertising channels to disseminate accurate information about the importance of critical media consumption and the risks of falling for misinformation.

Platform Accountability: Hold digital platforms accountable for the spread of disinformation on their networks through transparent content moderation policies, algorithmic transparency, and accountability mechanisms. Require platforms to remove false or misleading content promptly and provide users with reliable sources of information.

Fact-Checking Partnerships: Establish partnerships between digital platforms, fact-checking organisations, and academic institutions to facilitate the identification and debunking of disinformation. Promote the dissemination of fact-checked information and prioritize authoritative sources in search results and news feeds.

Community Empowerment: Empower disadvantaged communities to counter disinformation and advocate for their rights through community-led initiatives, citizen journalism, and grassroots organising. Provide resources and support for community-based media projects that amplify diverse voices and perspectives.

Conclusion

Inequality and anti-immigrant sentiment are complex and interconnected challenges that require coordinated efforts from governments, civil society, and the private sector. By promoting economic

equality, protecting workers' rights, fostering social cohesion, and promoting evidence-based immigration policies, societies can build more inclusive and resilient communities where everyone has the opportunity to thrive. Upholding principles of human rights, dignity, and solidarity is imperative in addressing these pressing issues and building a more just and equitable world for all.

Promoting information literacy, enhancing media literacy, regulating digital platforms, and supporting vulnerable communities can facilitate societies to build resilience against the harmful effects of disinformation and conspiracy theories, and promote a more informed, inclusive, and democratic public discourse. It is essential to uphold principles of transparency, accountability, and freedom of expression while safeguarding the rights and well-being of all individuals and communities, particularly those most at risk of exploitation and manipulation.

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Social Justice Ireland is an independent think-tank and justice advocacy organisation of individuals and groups throughout Ireland who are committed to working to build a just society where human rights are respected, human dignity is protected, human development is facilitated and

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