

Tracking the Distributive Effects of Budget Policy

Including an analysis of permanent changes to income taxation and welfare between 2020-2025

2025 edition



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1. Introduction

Each year, on the day after the annual Budget is announced, *Social Justice Ireland* produces an analysis and critique of that Budget. Included in that document is an assessment of the direct distributive impact of the measures announced by Government. These principally capture changes to income taxes, welfare payments and other universal payments/entitlements.

This document complements our most recent analysis, following Budget 2025. It provides two further assessments of recent distributive choices:

- a distributive analysis of all the income taxation, welfare and cost-of-living measures announced in Budget 2025 and an assessment of the proportion of these that represent temporary income changes;
 and
- a distributive analysis of the permanent changes to income taxation and welfare over the five Budgets delivered by the Government that held office from 2020-2025.

We also include an assessment of how the gaps between jobseekers and those on middle and very high incomes have changed over recent years including the impact of the measures in the most recent Budget and cost of living initiatives.

The final section of the document provides further details on the approach taken by *Social Justice Ireland* to generate these results.

2. Distributive Analysis of Budget 2025's Cost-of-Living and Tax-Benefit Measures

Budget 2025, announced in October 2024, was the final budget of the outgoing coalition Government and was presented as some aspects of the cost-of-living crisis continued to challenge households across Irish society. Like Budgets 2023 and 2024, it contained a mixture of measures that took effect before the end of that year and measures that took effect from the start of 2025. In this section of the report, we bring together this range of announced policies to consider their cumulative effect on the income of households. The measures we examine capture:

- The household energy credit paid to all households in late 2024, once off increases in welfare payments (two double child benefit payments, lump sum payments to recipients of the fuel allowance, living alone allowance and qualified child increase) made before the end of 2024, and the Christmas bonus welfare payment. These are collectively referred to as 'Budget 2025 for 2024' measures.
- The household energy credit paid to all households in early 2025, plus changes taking effect from January 1st to welfare rates and income taxation (via changes to bands, credits, the USC and PRSI).
 These are collectively referred to as 'Budget 2025 for 2025' measures.

The households we examine are those tracked annually in our income distribution model. They 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 incomes ranging from €30,000 to €200,000; €30,000 is almost equivalent to the living wage for a single worker. In the case of working households, the analysis is focused on PAYE earners only. We present the results of this analysis in Table 1.

Table 1: Combined Weekly Impact (€) of Budget 2025 Cost-of-Living Measures and Tax-Benefit Changes

				Of these measures:			
	Budget	Budget	Total	-		Тетр.	
	2025	2025	for			welfare	
	for	for	Budget	Tax	Welfare	&	% temp.
	2024	2025	2025	change	increase	credits	measures
Welfare Dependent Households							
Couple, 2 children (both over 12yrs)	26.45	<i>38.32</i>	64.77		35.92	28.85	44.5%
Couple, 2 children (both under 12yrs)	26.14	30.32	56.46		27.92	28.54	50.5%
Couple pensioner	18.24	25.20	43.43		22.80	20.63	47.5%
Lone parent, 1 child (over 12yrs)	20.92	22.40	43.32		20.00	23.32	53.8%
Lone parent, 1 child (under 12yrs)	20.77	18.40	39.17		16.00	23.17	59.2%
Couple, no children	9.80	22.32	32.12		19.92	12.20	38.0%
Single pensioner	17.31	14.40	31.70		12.00	19.70	62.1%
Single unemployed	6.85	14.40	21.24		12.00	9.24	43.5%
Households with Jobs							
Couple 2 earners at €200,000	2.40	41.07	43.46	38.67		4.79	11.0%
Couple 2 earners at €150,000	2.40	38.67	41.07	36.27		4.79	11.7%
Couple 2 earners at €100,000	2.40	35.31	37.70	32.91		4.79	12.7%
Couple 1 earners at €100,000	2.40	27.01	29.40	24.61		4.79	16.3%
Couple 1 earner at €60,000	2.40	25.85	28.24	23.45		4.79	17.0%
Couple 2 earner and 2 children, at €60,000	13.14	14.08	27.22	11.68		15.54	57.1%
Single, job at €100,000	2.40	21.74	24.13	19.34		4.79	19.9%
Couple 1 earner and 2 children, at €30,000*	20.81	2.95	23.76	0.55		23.21	97.7%
Single, job at €120,000	2.40	21.35	23.75	18.95		4.79	20.2%
Single, job at €60,000	2.40	20.58	22.97	18.18		4.79	20.9%
Couple 2 earners at €80,000	2.40	16.53	18.92	14.13		4.79	25.3%
Single, 1 child, job at €30,000*	7.77	10.61	18.38	8.21		10.16	55.3%
Couple 2 earners at €60,000	2.40	14.08	16.48	11.68		4.79	29.1%
Single, job at €40,000	2.40	9.46	11.86	7.06		4.79	40.4%
Single, job at €30,000	2.40	7.74	10.13	5.34		4.79	47.3%
Couple 1 earner at €30,000	2.40	2.95	5.34	0.55		4.79	89.7%

Source: Social Justice Ireland Income Distribution Model.

Notes: Table includes all measures announced as part of Budget 2025 including measures for the remainder of 2024 (Budget 2025 for 2024) and those for all of 2025 (Budget 2025 for 2025). Each household category is sorted by the size of the overall Budget 2025 package. Temporary measures include once-off welfare payments and household energy credits. Tax changes includes changes to income taxes and PRSI. *Depending on circumstances, these household may also be entitled to the Working Family Payment.

Overall, the total weekly impact on the households examined is large, ranging from €21 to €65 a week for welfare dependent households and from €5 to €43 a week for households with jobs. Within welfare dependent households the largest disposable income gains have been received by those with children. Among working households tax changes have favoured those with income subject to the higher income tax rate.

As part of our budgetary policy engagement over recent years, *Social Justice Ireland* has highlighted that there is a marked difference in the way that recent budgetary choices have delivered income changes to households. They have included *temporary measures*, such as electricity credits and one-off additional welfare related payments, alongside *permanent measures* such as changes to the value of core welfare payments and changes to tax credits, tax bands and PRSI rates. The new Government (appointed in early 2025) has made it clear that these temporary measures will be discontinued as the cost-of-living crisis fades, however, the income effect of the permanent changes will remain. Consequently, we think it is important to consider the distributive impact of the Budget taking account of these differences; something that Government has failed to do through the recent set of cost-of-living crisis Budgets.

Table 1 decomposes the Budget 2025 household income changes to examine whether they are associated with permanent changes to income taxation and welfare rates, or temporary measures. It shows that temporary measures are more concentrated among welfare dependent households and those at work but on low incomes. Conversely, the income gains received by higher income working households are much more associated with permanent measures (income taxation reductions). For example, temporary measures represented between 47-62% of the income gains for pensioners but only 11-16% of that received by couples with incomes over €100,000. Once the temporary measures disappear, the income effect associate with these permanent measures will remain and notably widen Irish societies income divisions.

A notable finding is that Budget 2025 provided least for the large cohort of lower income workers; those earning above the minimum wage but below annual income levels that allow them to experience much of the value of the income tax changes. A group earning around €15 to €20 per hour (€30,000 to €40,000 per annum). Year after year this large group of workers hears of 'gains' from the Budget but experiences little if any of them; something that cannot persist both due to its distributive effects and the socio-political reality that we cannot keep ignoring these workers and families. *Social Justice Ireland* has continually highlighted the relevance of refundable tax credits as a means of making the taxation system fairer and helping this low-income group.

Overall, Budget 2025 followed Budgets 2023 and 2024 in taking this approach to the distribution of resources. It is one that *Social Justice Ireland* regrets. Although the Budgets have been progressive and successful in the short-term, by providing much needed help to households struggling to make ends meet, their longer-term legacy will be to widen further the gap between the better off and those on the lowest welfare and work incomes.

3. Distributive Analysis of Government Tax and Welfare Measures, 2020-2025

Budget 2025 marked the fifth and final Budget of the coalition Government that held office from 2020-2025. The first two of these were presented in the context of the challenging Covid-19 pandemic (Budget 2021 in October 2020, Budget 2022 in October 2021) while the third and fourth were presented during the cost-of-living crisis (Budget 2023 in September 2022, Budget 2024 in October 2023) and the fifth at the end of that crisis period (Budget 2025 in October 2024). Here, we track the cumulative impact of changes to income taxation and welfare over that Government's five Budgets — we do so by comparing the disposable income of households in 2025 with their disposable income when the Government took office in 2020. As different policy priorities can be articulated for each Budget and policy initiative, it is useful to bring together the cumulative effect of all these policy changes on various household types.

Our analysis captures changes to the value of core welfare payments and changes to tax credits, tax bands and PRSI rates announced in those five Budgets; policy measures we have referred to earlier as 'permanent measures'. As the analysis is intended to highlight the underlying distributive picture of recent Government policy we have not included the various temporary income support measures which were also part of these Budgets. The households we examine are the same as those included in Table 1 and are spread across all areas of society capturing those with a job, families with children, those who are unemployed and pensioner households.

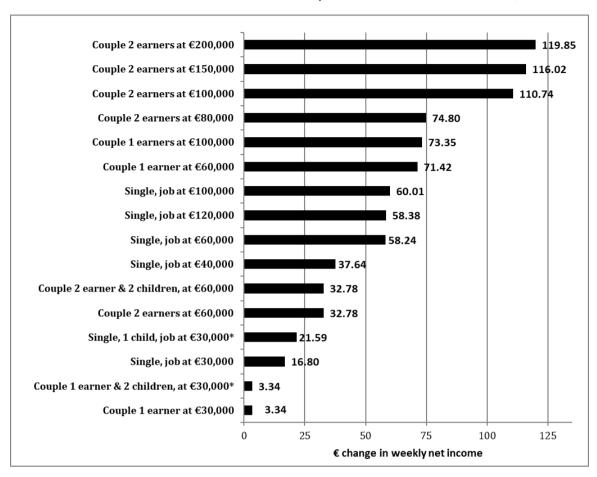
At the outset it is important to stress that our analysis does not take account of some other budgetary changes, most particularly to indirect taxes (VAT and excise), other charges (such as prescription charges and state exam fees) and property taxes. Similarly, it does not capture the impact of changes to the provision of public services or the many emergency measures that were introduced to respond to the Covid-19 emergency. As the impact of these measures differs between households it is impossible to quantify precise household impacts and include them here. Also, it does not include changes in earnings although CSO data indicate that these have been significant over the past three to four years reflecting shortages of labour, inflation pressures and public-sector pay agreements.

Comparing 2020 to 2025 for households with jobs (see chart 1), the weekly income gains experienced range from €3.34 per week (for low-income couples on €30,000) to €110-120 per week for couples with incomes over €100,000. The analysis highlights the gaps that recent Budget policy has opened up among working households; divides visible in this analysis but missing in much of the Budgetary commentary which did not distinguish between the transitory temporary measures and the tax and welfare changes that will persist. For example, comparing a couple with two earners on €60,000 to a couple with two earners on €100,000, the five budgets have delivered €39.32 more per week to the higher income household; opening up a gap between these households of €2,050 per annum. The analysis also demonstrates how low-income working families, those with incomes below the standard rate income tax threshold, have gained least from the Government's measures over the past five years.

Among households dependent on welfare (see chart 2), the gains have ranged from €42 per week for single unemployed individuals to €114 per week for unemployed couples with 2 children over 12 years of age. The gains are largest for welfare dependent household with children who benefited from a series of very welcome increases to the weekly qualified child allowance over the period; for children under 12 this has increased from €36 in 2020 to €50 in 2025 and for children over 12 the increase was from €40 to €62.

¹ These are examined in the earlier section of this document for Budget 2025. We have also examined their distributive profile in earlier editions of this document which are available on our website.

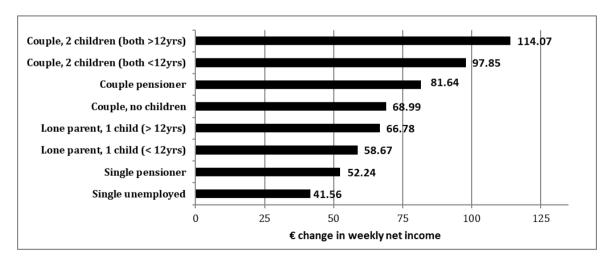
Chart 1: Cumulative Tax and Benefit Increase in Weekly Income for Households with Jobs, 2020-2025



Source: Social Justice Ireland Income Distribution Model.

Notes: *Depending on circumstances, these household may also be entitled to the Working Family Payment. Couple one earner is assumed to receive the Home Carer Tax Credit.

Chart 2: Cumulative Tax and Benefit Increase in Weekly Income for Welfare Dependent Households, 2020-2025



Source: Social Justice Ireland Income Distribution Model.

By looking at permanent (rather than once-off temporary) changes to income taxation and welfare rates our analysis provides a clearer picture of the distributive record of budgetary policy over the period of office of the last Government (2020-2025). Despite welcome welfare increases, particularly for families with children, it is the highest earners who have gained most over the five budgets. The deterioration in the relative standing of low and middle income households presents a troubling picture, one that will reveal itself further in the official income distribution data from the CSO for 2025 and 2026 onwards. *Social Justice Ireland* regrets that much of the recent progress on income distribution and inequality will have been reversed by these policy choices. Looking ahead, reversing these increased income gaps will pose important challenges for future budgetary policy.

4. The Rich-Poor and Middle-Poor Gap

As well as tracking the post-Budget income levels of different households, *Social Justice Ireland* is also focused on assessing how the income divides between different household types have changed following the adoption of Budgetary policies. Taking such an approach offers valuable insights into some of the short-term and mediumterm trends in income inequality. Again, there is merit in undertaking this analysis over multiple years so that the cumulative effect of budgetary policies is captured. To achieve this, we track the following two gaps: the Rich-Poor gap and the Middle-Poor gap. This year, following the conclusion of the term of the coalition Government elected in 2020 (2020-2025), we also include an assessment of the overall impact on these income gaps of budgetary policy adopted across the period of office of that Government.

The Rich-Poor gap

This gap monitors the income of single individuals on jobseekers' benefit ('poor') and the disposable income (after income taxation and employee social insurance) of a single PAYE worker earning €100,000 ('rich'). An annual income of €100,000 is chosen as representing very high-income earners given:

- how uncommon this income level is in Irish society (the top 180,000 earners representing 6.5 per cent of all earners in 2021 according to the Revenue Commissioners); and
- how it represents approximately twice average earnings.

The analysis tracks both the change to this gap each year (see chart 3) and the overall size of this gap following the most recent Budget (see chart 4). The analysis covers the period from Budget 2014 to the most recent measures.

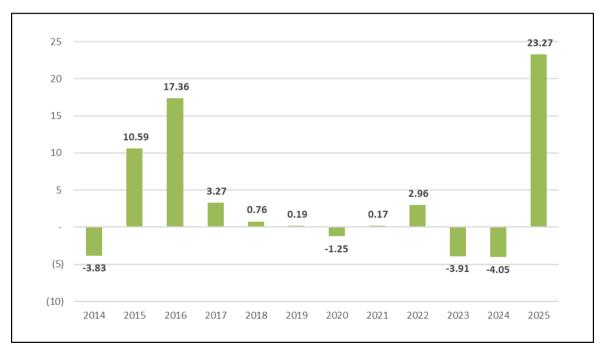


Chart 3: Budget-by-Budget Change in the Weekly Rich-Poor Gap, 2014-2025

Source: Social Justice Ireland Income Distribution Model.

Notes: The analysis presents the measures as announced in each annual Budget including temporary supports for that budgetary year. 2025 measures include welfare & income taxation changes announced for 2025 plus the electricity credit planned for early 2025.

1.000

Chart 4: The Rich-Poor Gap, 2014-2025 (€ per week)

Source: Social Justice Ireland Income Distribution Model.

Notes: See notes to Chart 3.

As a result of all the taxation, welfare and one-off temporary measures adopted in Budget 2025, the rich-poor gap increased by €23 per week (€1,214 per annum) in 2025. After that Budget the cumulative rich-poor gap stood at €990 per week (almost €52,000 per annum). The large change in 2025 has been driven by the end of most cost-of-living temporary supports for lower income households and the significant income taxation decreases received by well-off households in Budget 2025.

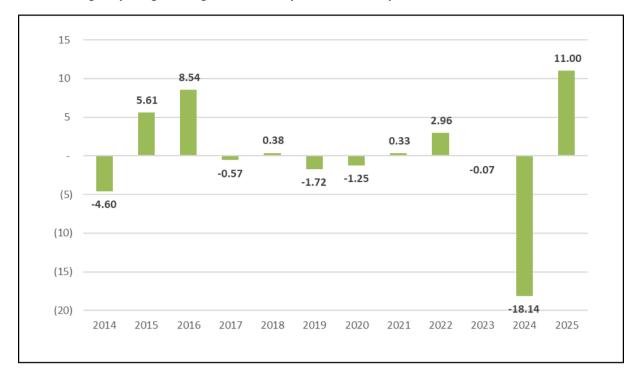
Looking across the entire period examined, the rich-poor gap has grown by a total of €49 per week (€2,575 per annum) over the period 2014-2025. Although the gap decreased as a result of some cost-of-living supports in recent years (2023 and 2024), in 2025 the rich-poor gap will climb to its highest level since our analysis commenced.

The Middle-Poor gap

This gap monitors the income of single individuals on jobseekers' benefit ('poor') and the disposable income (after income taxation and employee social insurance) of a single PAYE worker earning €40,000 ('middle'). This middle-income figure approximated average earnings which stood at €40,283 in 2019 according to the CSO and is not dissimilar to the latest value for median earnings of €43,221 (CSO for 2023). The analysis tracks both the change to this gap each year (see chart 5) and the overall size of this gap following the most recent budget (see chart 6). The analysis covers the period from Budget 2014 to the most recent Budget.

As a result of all the taxation, welfare and one-off temporary measures adopted in Budget 2025, the middle-poor gap grew by €11 per week (€574 per year). The change in the gap in 2025 has been driven by the end of most cost-of-living temporary supports for lower income households and income taxation changes (to tax credits and USC rates and bands) which exceeded the value of the weekly change in welfare payments.

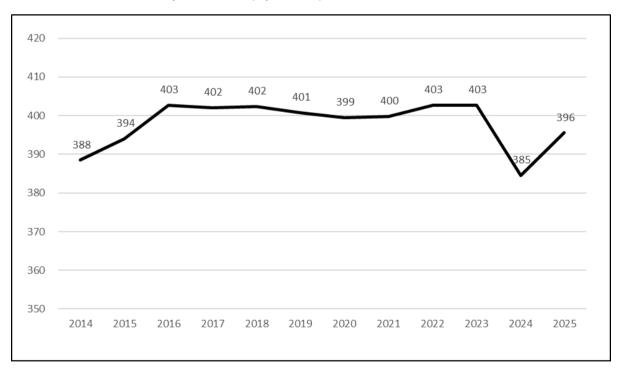
Chart 5: Budget-by-Budget Change in the Weekly Middle-Poor Gap, 2014-2025



Source: Social Justice Ireland Income Distribution Model.

Notes: This analysis tracks the annual disposable income change in the gap between single jobseekers and PAYE earners on €40,000 per annum. See also notes to Chart 3.

Chart 6: The Middle-Poor Gap, 2014-2025 (€ per week)



Source: Social Justice Ireland Income Distribution Model.

Notes: See notes to Chart 5.

The cumulative middle-poor gap stood at \leq 396 per week (\leq 20,639 per annum) in 2025. Looking across the entire period examined (2014-2025), the middle-poor gap has increased by \leq 7 per week (\leq 369 per annum). Although the gap decreased for the first time in over a decade as a result of the temporary income supports provided in 2024, these temporary measures are not currently scheduled to repeat beyond early 2025 and the expectation is that this gap is likely to grow further.

Income Gaps and the 2020-2025 Coalition Government

Budget 2025 marked the fifth and final Budget of the coalition Government that held office from 2020-2025. Therefore, this year edition of this document offers an opportunity to review the overall impact of that Governments policy choices on these income gaps. As different policy priorities can be articulated for each Budget and policy initiative, it is useful to bring together the cumulative effect of all these policy changes on various household types across whole period.

Based on our analysis we find:

- Over the period from 2020-2025, the rich-poor gap widened by €18.45 per week (€963 per annum)
 meaning the gap between those with the highest incomes and those on the lowest has widened as a
 result of policy choices.
- Over the period from 2020-2025, the middle-poor gap decreased (by €3.92 per week, €204 per annum); an outcome driven by the skewed nature of income tax reduction choices which prioritised higher earners and provided relatively little to low income workers paying income tax at the standard rate over those years.

Overall, our results suggest that budgetary policy over recent years has reduced the gap between people/households of working age in the bottom and middle of the income distribution while opening a greater gap between them and those with the highest incomes. *Social Justice Ireland* regrets that policy outcome, as a society we can ill afford to see the incomes of those with the most resources drift further away.

5. Social Justice Ireland's Income Distribution Model

Over the past decade *Social Justice Ireland* has developed its ability to track the distributive impact of annual Budget's on households across Irish society. Our analysis tracks changes from year to year (pre and post a Budget) and across a number of recent years (the lifetime of a Government etc). In this section, we describe the components of the model as it currently stands. We plan to continue to develop this model over time and details of these updates will be included in future editions of this document.

There are currently 28 household types included in the model. These have been selected on the basis of their representativeness in the income distribution and their importance for policy analysis. While some households (e.g. high income ones) are uncommon, there is a relevance in tracking the benefits or losses they incur as a result of policy measures. Household with and without children are included. Households at key points in the earnings distribution are included:

- at around the annual value of the living wage (as defined by the Living Wage Technical Group)
- at levels of earnings approximately equivalent to median earnings (€40,000) and multiples of this.
- at an income of €100,000 and above

The households examined divide into those with a job and those who are dependent on welfare income. The full set of households currently tracked by this analysis is outlined in **Table 2**.

The sources of income and welfare included in the analysis are outlined in **Table 3**. For many households, such as working households with children, income is received from both work and welfare and this composition of income is reflected in the analysis. Following Budget 2015 we included the 'water conservation payment' although it is not included in the analysis in subsequent years. Budgets 2017, 2018 and 2019 announced welfare increases to take place part way through the year and the weekly value of the annual increase in this payment is included. A similar approach is taken to welfare payments paid for part of the year (e.g. fuel allowance) or for cost of living supports provided over 2022-2025. Following Budgets 2024 and 2025, an adjustment has been made to the employee PRSI calculation to capture its increase in the final quarter of the year. As the model is tracking income changes over time, there are a number of welfare payments included in the analysis that do not current exist, for example the Early Childhood Supplement.

Finally, **Table 4** details the income taxation and social insurance measures that are included. Again, as the model is tracking income changes over time, there are a number of income taxation measures included in the analysis that do not current exist, for example the income levy.

Table 2: List of Households Included in the Analysis

Working Households	Welfare Dependent Households				
Household type - single PAYE	Working age Welfare Dependent				
Single, job at €30,000*	Single no job				
Single, job at €40,000*	Couple, no children, no job				
Single, job at €60,000*	Couple, 2 children (both <12yrs), no job*				
Single, job at €100,000*	Couple, 2 children (both >12yrs), no job*				
Single, job at €120,000*	Lone parent, 1 child (< 12yrs), no job*				
	Lone parent, 1 child (> 12yrs), no job*				
Household type - lone parent					
Single, 1 child, job at €30,000*	Retired Welfare Dependent				
	Single pensioner (66yrs plus)				
Couple - 1 earner (caring for an adult parent)	Couple pensioner				
Couple 1 earner at €30,000					
Couple 1 earner and 2 children, at €30,000					
Couple 1 earner at €60,000					
Couple 1 earners at €100,000					
Couple - 1 earner (no caring role)					
Couple 1 earner at €30,000					
Couple 1 earner and 2 children, at €30,000					
Couple 1 earner at €60,000					
Couple 1 earners at €100,000					
Couple - 2 earners (65%/35% income split)					
Couple 2 earners at €60,000					
Couple 2 earner and 2 children, at €60,000					
Couple 2 earners at €80,000					
Couple 2 earners at €100,000					
Couple 2 earners at €150,000					
Couple 2 earners at €200,000					

Notes: * indicates households that were revised or added as part of the 2021 model rebase. Pensioners are assumed to be receiving a contributory pension. Single earner households at the precise value of the minimum wage and living wage were discontinued from 2025.

Table 3: Sources of Income and Welfare Included in the Analysis

Households with a Job

Earnings

Child Benefit (where applicable)

Early Childhood Supplement (where applicable)

Water Conservation Payment (2015 only)

One off payments and credits, such as those announced during the 2022/25 cost of living crisis

Welfare Dependent Households

Jobseekers Benefit - over 25yrs

Jobseekers Benefit with qualified adult - over 25yrs

One Parent Family Payment - with 1 qualified child under 7yrs

State Pension - Contributory and under 80yrs

State Pension - Contributory and under 80yrs couple with qualified adult 66+

Qualified child (all to up to 2018; less than 12 years from 2019)

Qualified child - more than 12 years from 2019

Child Benefit 1st child

Child Benefit 2nd child

Child benefit 3rd child

Early Childhood supplement (per child up to 6yrs / 5.5yrs from Oct 2008)

Living alone allowance

Fuel allowance

Household Benefits Package

Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance

The Christmas Bonus is applied to these welfare payments as appropriate

One off payments and credits, such as those announced during the 2022/25 cost of living crisis

Water Conservation Payment (2015 only)

Table 5: Income Taxation and Social Insurance Measures Included in the Analysis

PRSI rate Self Employed

Minimum PRSI contribution Self Employed

Income Taxation Standard rate Higher rate Standard band couple one earner Standard band couple two earners Standard band lone parent Tax credits: Personal PAYE Couple/civil partnership Home Carer Single person child carer credit **Universal Social Charge (USC)** USC and its predecessors (income levy, training levy etc) are included various USC thresholds various USC rates USC surcharge for Self Employed Pay Related Social Insurance (PRSI) PRSI exemption for low earners PAYE PRSI taper for low earners PAYE PRSI rate PAYE PRSI low income exclusion: Self-employed

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 the environment is respected and protected.

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