

Poverty Focus

2025

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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 multi-faceted 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.**

Analysis by Micheál Collins and Catherine Kavanagh, presented at *Social Justice Ireland's* conference "The Social Justice Movement – A Fifty Year View", in January 2024, demonstrates that income inequality has remained stubbornly stable over the past fifty years.

While the total value of 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. Compare this with the aver-

age of 5.5 per cent going to the bottom 20 per cent.

In this publication, we focus on the nature and experiences of poverty in Ireland. Drawing on the available statistical evidence, we outline how poverty is measured, the value of the poverty line and consider many of the groups in our society who are most exposed to poverty.

This year we pay particular attention to the challenges facing households due to the recent large increases in housing and general living costs. The real value of an income is what it can buy. The cumulative change in the Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) costs between 2020 and 2025 is 18.8 per cent (Food +20.2 per cent and Energy + 58.2 per cent). The cost of core essentials has risen sharply and despite the slowing of inflation rates, prices are unlikely to return to 2020 levels. Households on low and fixed incomes, particularly those reliant on social transfers are having to make impossible choices in order to remain within their weekly budget. In 2025, the core social welfare rate of €244 is €122 a week below the 2025 poverty line of €366.

Poverty Profiled: the main groups

Total Population: 11.7% of all in poverty

Children (under 16 years): 26.7% of all in poverty

Workers: 22.3% of all in poverty

The Retired: 14.5% of all in poverty

Those unable to work due to illness/disability: 11% of all in poverty

Those fulfilling domestic tasks (e.g. parents & carers): 9.1% of all in poverty

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Poverty Focus is an annual document issued by Social Justice Ireland. It aims to provide an update on the latest data and trends on poverty in Ireland, updated values of the annual poverty line and links to other Social Justice Ireland research on this topic. Each year Poverty Focus will highlight one area of concern while also commenting on the general policy landscape. Comments, observations and suggestions on this document are welcome.

Poverty and How it is Measured

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 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 has been reiterated in all subsequent national strategies addressing poverty and social inclusion, including the current *Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025*, and has gained widespread international recognition.

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 (income after taxes and all benefits).

Where that line should be drawn is sometimes a contentious matter, but most European studies [including those carried out by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) in Ireland] suggest a line, which is at 60 per cent of median income, adjusted to take account of family size and composition. The median income is the income of the middle person in society’s income distribution, in other words it is the middle income in society.

Irish data on poverty looks at those living below this 60 per cent line and is published each year by the CSO using results from a comprehensive national survey called *SILC (Survey on Income and Living Conditions)*. The latest data was published in March 2025 for the year 2024 and is used throughout this document.

Where is the Poverty Line?

The most up-to-date data available on poverty in Ireland comes from the 2024 *SILC* survey, conducted by the CSO. In that year the CSO gathered data from a statistically representative sample of 4,885 households and 12,066 individuals.

The data gathered by the CSO is very detailed. It incorporates income from work, welfare, pensions, rental income, dividends, capital gains and other regular transfers. Where possible, the data is subsequently verified anonymously using PPS numbers.

When gathering income data, the SILC survey uses income from the year before the survey as the ‘income reference period’. Therefore, the data published in the 2024 report refers to income levels in 2023. According to the CSO, the median disposable income per adult in Ireland during 2023 was €29,996 per annum or €574.86 per week. Consequently, the 60 per cent of median income poverty line for a single adult derived from this value was €344.91 a week.

Updating this figure to 2025 levels, using published CSO data on the growth in average hourly earnings in 2024 (+6.21 per cent) produces a relative income poverty line at the start of that year. In 2025 that figure is €366.30 for a single person; any adult below this weekly income level will be counted as being at risk of poverty.

Table 1 applies this poverty line to a number of household types to show what income corresponds to each household’s poverty line.

Table 1: Poverty Levels Expressed in Numbers of People, 2020-2024	
	2024
Overall	629,495
Adults	
Employed	140,377
Unemployed	44,065
Retired	91,277
Long-term Ill/Disabled	69,244
Student, pupil	47,842
Fulfilling domestic tasks	57,284
Other	11,331
Children	
Children (under 16 yrs)	168,075
Children (under 18 yrs)	190,108

Source: Calculated using CSO SILC Report

The types of households chosen reflect the most common household compositions across the population.

The figure of €366.30 is an income per adult equivalent figure. This means that it is the minimum weekly disposable income (after taxes and including all benefits) that one adult needs to receive to be outside of poverty.

For each additional adult in the household this minimum income figure is increased by €241.76 (66 per cent of the poverty line figure) and for each child in the household the minimum income figure is increased by €120.88 (33 per cent of the poverty line). 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. I

n 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.

One immediate implication of this analysis is that most weekly social assistance rates paid to single people are €122 below the poverty line.

2025 Focus: Living Costs

Our Poverty Profile on page one dealt mainly in percentages, but to understand poverty in Ireland better it is useful to transform these proportions into numbers of people.

The overall poverty rate of 11.7 per cent in 2024 corresponds to 629,495 people living below the 60 per cent of median income poverty line in that year. Table 2 presents the count of the number of people in poverty in that year within various categories. Comparable figures are also presented for selected years since 2012.

The data in the table 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 216,000 since 2012 – hide a variety of experiences for different parts of the population.

Since 2012 poverty has fallen among the unemployed, children, students and those working in the home, but has risen for workers, those who are retired and people who have a long-term illness or disability.

Low Income Households and the Cost-of-Living Crisis

Whilst the rapid rate of inflation that emerged from mid-2021 has slowed, the high prices for staples that continue to persist pose particular challenges for low-income households. New data from the CSO, which combined its inflation data with that collected in the most recent Household Budget Survey, found that the impact of inflation is greatest for those households in the bottom four deciles of the income distribution.

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 are also very exposed to the nature of the current cost-of-living crisis as they also spend a greater proportion of their income on food and energy. As high prices persist, policy will need to more impactfully target these households and further assist with the ongoing cost of living challenges they face.

Elsewhere, CSO SILC data highlights the concentration of individuals who are unemployed, long-term ill or disabled, living alone, single parents, retired and low income workers in the bottom four deciles of the income distribution.

Targeted measures to support these households needs to be an essential part of the evolving policy response to the cost-of-living crisis. While the crisis has impacted the living standards of all households, it continued to have a pronounced effect on those with the lowest incomes who were already struggling to make ends meet.

Impact of Cost-of-Living Measures on Poverty

Without cost of living supports the at risk of poverty rate would have been 14.1 per cent. The 2024 consistent poverty rate was 5.0 per cent, without cost-of-living measures, the rate would have been

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5.6 per cent. While these measures supported vulnerable households, particular people aged over 65, the majority of these measures were one off in nature. The CSO SILC conducted analysis looking at the impact of cost of living measures by household composition in reducing poverty rates.

They note that largest impact was in single-adult households composed of one adult aged 65 years and over. Cost-of-living measures reduced the at risk of poverty rate for people in this age group in from 21.1 per cent to 13.3 per cent.

Despite declining inflation, cost-of-living pressures remain a challenge for those on the lowest incomes. While the number at risk of poverty has fallen, the deprivation rate has actually risen to 913,717 people, reflecting the damaging impact cost-of-living pressures.

Table 2: Minimum Disposable Income Required to Avoid Poverty in 2025		
Household containing:	Weekly line	Annual line
1 adult	€366.30	€19,113
1 adult + 1 child	€487.18	€25,421
1 adult + 2 children	€608.06	€31,728
1 adult + 3 children	€728.93	€38,036
2 adults	€608.06	€31,728
2 adults + 1 child	€728.93	€38,036
2 adults + 2 children	€849.81	€44,343
2 adults + 3 children	€970.69	€50,651
3 adults	€849.81	€44,343

Source: Social Justice Ireland calculation based on CSO SILC and earning data

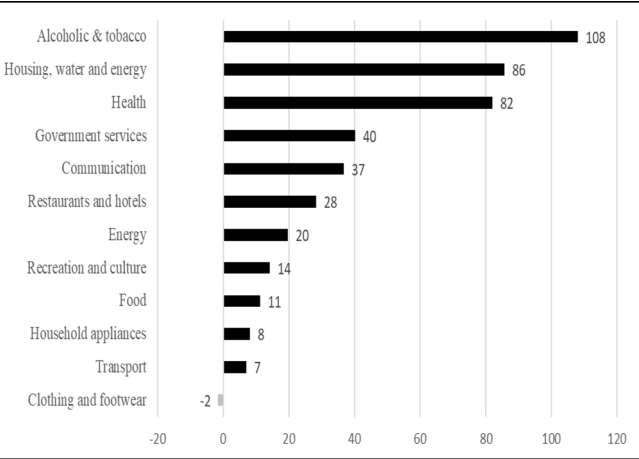
Poverty and Living Costs

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. These effects can be pronounced for people with disabilities, those with recurring illness (and associated medical needs) and low-income families with children.

Overall, Eurostat (2024) has highlighted how Ireland’s consumer price levels are notably out of line with those in other EU states – see Chart 1. Looking at prices for 2023 they found that the EU’s highest price levels were recorded in Denmark (143 per cent of the EU average), Ireland (142 per cent) and Luxembourg (135 per cent) while the lowest were in Bulgaria and Romania (each 60 per cent) and Poland (66 per cent).

When compared to European averages Eurostat found that Irish consumers paid more for most areas of day-to-day spending including health (+82 per cent), government services (+40 per cent), communications (+37 per cent), energy (+20 per cent), food (+11 per cent), appliances (+8 per cent) and transport (+7 per cent). Only clothing was cheaper than the EU average (-2 per cent). The analysis highlights the relevance of policy addressing many of the drivers of these higher prices and the potential to improve the living standards of many by adopting initiatives to reduce many of these differences. Given that lower income households spend a greater proportion of their income, compared to better off households, they would be the group that would benefit most from successful attempts to address many of these price differences.

Chart 1: Percentage Difference between Irish Consumer Prices and Average EU levels, 2023



Poverty and Housing Tenure

The Eurostat data also show how housing costs in Ireland, including costs for energy, are 82 per cent higher than the EU average. The effect of housing costs on the living standards of low income households is illustrated in more detail by data released by the CSO as part of their annual SILC report.

The data provide an insight 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.

Table 3 reports the results of analysis by household tenure for 2024. It demonstrates 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. After housing costs, just over 40 per cent of renters live on an income below the poverty line with this rate being 43 per cent for local authority tenants and almost 60 per cent for those on HAP, RAS and in receipt of rent supplement.

These rates compare to an after-housing costs poverty rate of one in five for the whole population and less than one in ten for households who are owner occupiers. The CSO analysis also highlighted that after housing costs there are big increases in poverty for single parent households, people who are unemployed, the retired and those who live alone.

Table 3: Poverty Rates Before and After Housing Costs, by tenure type in 2024

	Before	After
All population	11.7	17.9
Owner occupiers—all	7.3	7.9
With mortgage	4.3	5.5
Without mortgage	10.3	10.3
Renters or Rent Free—all	21.8	40.6
Rent free	14.4	14.4
LA Tenants	29.5	43.4
With HAP, RAS, RS, etc	21.5	57.3
With no housing supports	18.7	35.5

Source: CSO SILC 2025—Housing costs include rent and mortgage interest and do not include capital payments on mortgages.

Hidden Poverty

The figures we examine on poverty in Ireland derive from the CSO’s annual Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC). Although this provides an excellent insight into the lived experience of the Irish population, both at a point in time and over time, it does not provide the full picture. In particular, the SILC survey only captures those living in households.

Therefore, it misses many groups in society who would be regarded as the poorest including those who are homeless, those in temporary accommodation (such as in hotels), and those living in institutions (such as prisoners, hospital patients, and those in Direct Provision). Among these groups there is ‘hidden poverty’ not captured by the annual statistics.

Poverty and Older People

According to the CSO’s 2022 *Census Results* there were 726,232 people aged over 65 years in Ireland in 2022, an increase of almost 89,000 since the previous Census (2016). 190,000 of them live alone and of those, more than 30,000 are aged over 85. When poverty is analysed by age group, the 2024 figures show that 13.3 per cent of those aged above 65 years live in relative income poverty. This equates to 106,385 older people living in poverty, an increase of 64 per cent compared to 2023. This number would be substantially higher were it not for the impact of one-off measures.

The CSO also report that without the temporary cost of living measures in that year the rate would have been 21.1 per cent. As these measures are unlikely to continue, the true picture of older person poverty will reveal itself in future data and this is a notable concern.

Among all those in poverty, the retired have experienced the greatest volatility in their poverty risk rates. In 1994 some 5.9 per cent of this group were classified as poor; by 1998 the figure had risen to 32.9 per cent and in 2001 it peaked at 44.1 per cent. The most recent data record relatively lower rates, with the reduction over the last decade driven by increases in old age pension payments. While these decreases are welcome, it remains a concern that so many of this country’s senior citizens are living on so little.

Moving to Persistent Poverty

Social Justice Ireland is committed to using the best and most up-to-date data in its ongoing socio-economic analysis of Ireland. We believe that to do so is crucial to the emergence of accurate evidence-based policy formation. It also assists in establishing appropriate and justifiable targeting of state resources.

As part of the EU structure of social indicators, Ireland has agreed to produce an indicator of persistent poverty. This indicator measures the proportion of those living below the poverty line in the current

Table 4: Poverty Rates Including and Excluding Cost of Living Measures 2022 - 2024			
	2022	2023	2024
At Risk of Poverty	12.5%		
Consistent Poverty	4.9%		
At Risk of Poverty including measures		10.6%	11.7%
Consistent Poverty including measures		3.6%	5.0%
At Risk of Poverty excluding measures		13.0%	14.1%
Consistent Poverty excluding measures		4.4%	5.6%

Source: CSO SILC 2023

year and for two of the three preceding years. It therefore identifies those who have experienced sustained exposure to poverty which is seen to harm their quality of life seriously and to increase levels of deprivation.

To date the Irish SILC has not produced any detailed results and breakdowns for this measure. We regret the unavailability of this data and note that there remain some sampling and technical issues impeding its annual publication. *Social Justice Ireland* believes that this data should be used as the primary basis for setting poverty targets and monitoring changes in poverty status. Existing measures of relative and consistent poverty should be maintained as secondary indicators.

If there are impediments to the annual production of this indicator, they should be addressed and the SILC sample augmented if required. A measure of persistent poverty is long overdue and a crucial missing piece in society’s knowledge of households and individuals on low income.

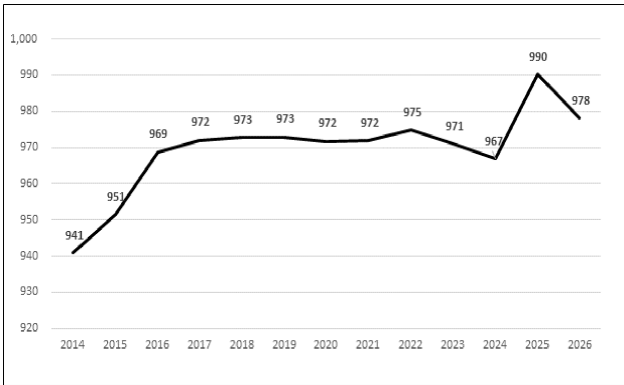
Income Gaps and the 2020-2025 Coalition Government

Budget 2025 marked the fifth and final Budget of the coalition Government that held office from 2020 -2025. There is now 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 that 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. Meanwhile, the middle -poor gap decreased (by €3.92 per week, €204 per annum). This is 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 high-

est 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.

Chart 2: The Rich-Poor Gap, 2014-2026 (€ per week)



Source: Social Justice Ireland, Budget 2026 Analysis and Critique

Poverty: A European Perspective

It is helpful to compare Irish measures of poverty with 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 scales are used - note these slightly differ from national definitions. The latest data available for all member states is for the year 2024 when the average risk of poverty in the EU-27 was 21 per cent.

As chart 3 shows, Irish people experience a below average poverty rate 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 by sustained increases in welfare payments in the years prior to 2008.

Ireland’s poverty levels have remained below average EU levels since then. In 2024, across the EU, the highest poverty levels were found in the recent accession countries and in some of the countries most impacted by the economic crisis just over one decade ago - Bulgaria, Romania, Greece, Lithuania, Spain, Latvia, Italy, Estonia and Croatia. The lowest levels were found in Czechia (formerly the Czech Republic), Slovenia, Netherlands, Poland, Ireland and Finland. 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 2024 the

average EU-27 level implied that 93.3 million people live in poverty across all EU member states.

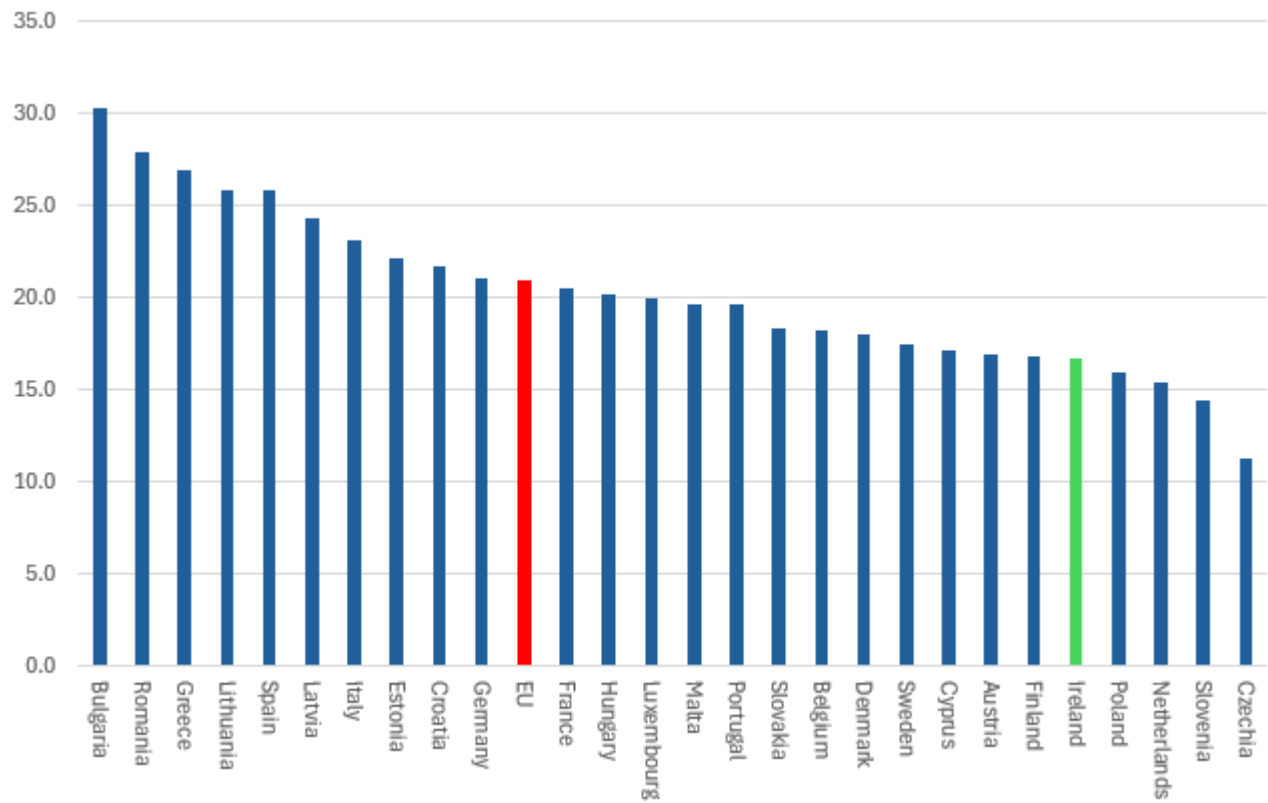
A new set of ‘Europe 2030 Social Targets’ were adopted by EU governments in June 2022 with one of the three headline targets aiming to reduce the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion by at least 15 million, including 5 million children, by 2030 (using 2019 as the baseline year).

This target is defined by the European Council on the basis of three indicators: the ‘at risk of poverty’ rate after social transfers; an index of material deprivation; and the percentage of people living in households with very low work intensity. It is calculated as the sum of persons relative to the national population who are at risk of poverty or severely materially deprived or living in households with very low work intensity, where a person is only counted once even if recorded in more than one indicator.

Social Justice Ireland regrets that the *Europe 2030* targets have shifted its indicator focus away from an exclusive concentration on the ‘at risk of poverty’ rate, we welcome the continued attention at a European level to issues regarding poverty, deprivation and joblessness.

However, the failure to reach the earlier ‘Europe 2020’ poverty targets underscores the need for more than token actions over the next 4-5 years. Also, it is worth noting that even if the EU 2030 target is achieved, it implies that 77 million Europeans would continue to experience poverty or social exclusion including 13 million children.

Chart 3: Poverty Rates across EU Countries, 2024 (Eurostat data)



Poverty in Ireland: Key Facts

Poverty Rate

11.7% of Ireland’s Population

Poverty Number

629,495 people

Chart 4: Poverty Rate over time, 1994-2024

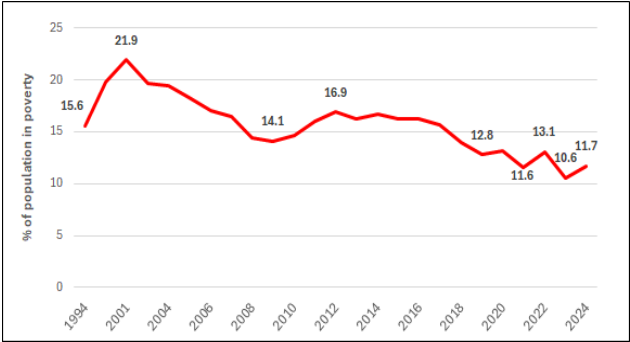


Chart 5: Poverty Numbers over time, 1994-2024

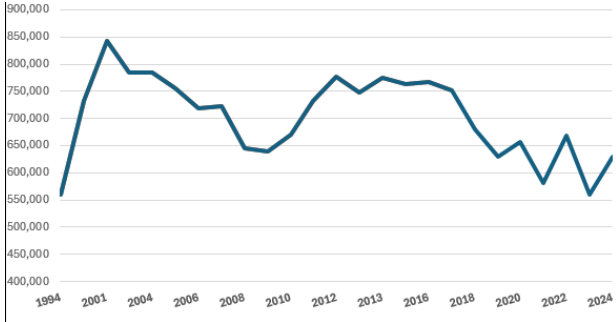


Table 5: Composition of Poverty, 2024

Employed	22.3%
Unemployed	7%
Retired	14.5%
Unable to work due to Illness/disability	11%
Student (18 yrs +)	7.6%
Children under 16	26.7%
Fulfilling domestic tasks	9.1%
Other	1.8%
Total	100.0%

Table 6: Risk of each group being in Poverty, 2024

Employed	5.4%
Unemployed	34.1%
Retired	13.3%
Unable to work due to Illness/disability	32.5%
Student, pupil	13.4%
Fulfilling domestic tasks	26.9%
Children (0-17 years)	3.3%
Overall population	11.7%

Chart 6: Deprivation in 2024 - % of pop. unable to afford*

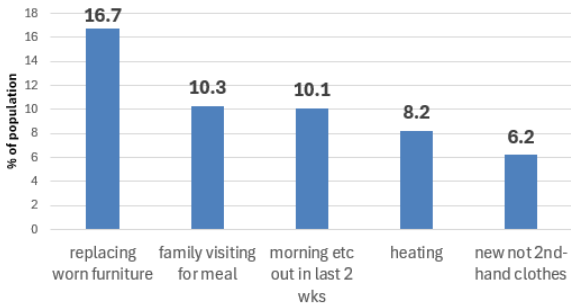


Chart 7: Poverty Risk by Age Group, 2024

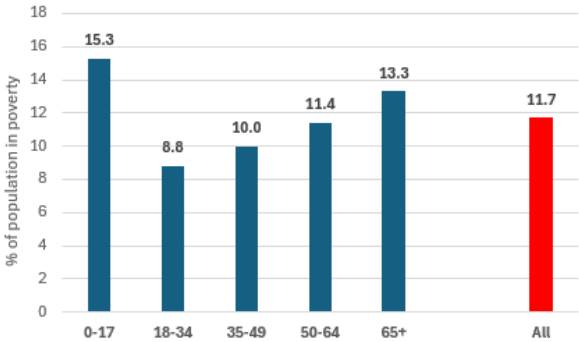


Table 7: The role of social transfer (welfare) payments in addressing poverty

	2023	2024
Poverty pre social transfers	34.1	31.4
Poverty post social transfers	10.6	11.7
The role of social transfers	-23.5	-19.7

Sources for this page:

CSO SILC reports and online database
See also Chapter 3 and Annex 3 of our annual Socio-Economic Review *Social Justice Matters*

Notes for this page:

* top five enforced deprivation items

Reducing Poverty: policy priorities

Social Justice Ireland believes that it should be a national priority 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.

If poverty rates are to fall further 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.

- Link the value of all core welfare payments to movements in average earnings, so that welfare dependent households do not fall behind.
- Recognise the problem of the 'working poor'. Make tax credits refundable to address the situation of households in poverty which are headed by a person with a job.
- Support the widespread adoption of a living-costs linked 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 long-term illness or disability.
- Recognise the reality of poverty among migrants and adopt policies to assist this group including the full implementation of the White Paper on the Elimination of Direct Provision.
- 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.
- Introduce a universal basic income system. No other approach has the capacity to ensure all members of society have sufficient income to live life with dignity.
- Acknowledge the failure to meet repeated policy targets on poverty reduction and commit sufficient resources to achieve ambitious and credible new targets.

Recent Publications from Social Justice Ireland

[Budget 2026 Analysis and Critique](#)

[National Social Monitor - Putting Fairness First: Delivering the Programme for Government](#)

[Tackling the Distributive effects of Budgets—2025 Edition](#)

All of these and many more of our publications specifically focused on poverty are available on our website at www.socialjustice.ie

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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 the environment is respected and protected.

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