



Wellbeing: Measuring What Matters

An Alternative Framework for a Fairer Future

2025 edition



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Wellbeing Framework has become a valuable tool for guiding Ireland's policy decisions. Each year, the Government of Ireland publishes a wellbeing report, *Understanding Life in Ireland*, to assess the quality of life across economic, social, and environmental domains. In this report, we examine the Government's wellbeing framework and then present an alternative wellbeing framework, informed by public consultation.

Our analysis shows that the Government's current approach treats the wellbeing framework as a high-level snapshot rather than a tool for identifying and understanding disparities. By leaving out equality and sustainability, the framework misses the issues that matter most for ensuring fair and lasting progress.

Social Justice Ireland's alternative wellbeing framework aims to provide a comprehensive and more grounded picture by prioritising a set of indicators that reflect the lived experiences of different groups. The table below provides a snapshot of the key areas of progress, stagnation, and decline across the 11 wellbeing dimensions using this alternative set of indicators. As shown, *Social Justice Ireland's* approach also restores equality and sustainability as core pillars of wellbeing measurement, and highlights areas where progress has been insufficient, inequitable, or unsustainable.

Performance is calculated based on a combination of percentage change over time (typically a five-year period, depending on data availability) and an international comparison of Ireland's standing relative to the EU/OECD average and the best-performing country. Equality is measured as the relative percentage difference between the best- and worst-performing groups for each indicator; perfect equality equals to one, and values further away from one indicate greater inequality. This approach captures disparities across different demographic groups to assess whether progress is being shared equitably. Sustainability scores reflect progress for indicators that have been tagged as sustainability-related and are calculated using the same method as performance.

Overall Findings

- **Performance:** Four dimensions – Connections, Community and Participation; Work and Job Quality; Knowledge, Skills and Innovation and Income and Wealth show modest improvements. Two dimensions – Housing and Built Environment (0.23) and Civic Engagement, Trust and Cultural Expression (0.13) – show only marginal progress. However, five dimensions – Subjective Wellbeing; Mental and Physical Health; Environment, Climate and Biodiversity; Safety and Security; and Time Use – show negative performances.
- **Equality:** Disparities exist across all nine dimensions measured for equality. Three dimensions show a relatively smaller gap in inequalities – Connections, Community and Participation (0.71); Mental and Physical Health (0.57); and Subjective Wellbeing (0.45). However, this still reflects a substantial gap between the best- and worst-performing groups. Four dimensions show very large differences, almost 80 to 100 per cent, between the best- and worst-performing groups: Knowledge, Skills and Innovation (0.22); Environment, Climate and Biodiversity (0.15); Time Use (0.04) and Income and Wealth (0.03). While two dimensions: Housing and Built Environment (-0.62); and Work and Job Quality (-0.23) exhibit worsening divides, suggesting a deepening gap between advantaged and disadvantaged groups.

- **Sustainability:** Performance in sustainability remains marginal across five out of six dimensions tagged for sustainability, except Connections, Community and Participation where performance is noteworthy (0.68). However, this marginal gain is not sufficient to indicate meaningful progress in ensuring long-term resilience. Knowledge, Skills and Innovation (0.03) show little to no progress. Alarmingly, Environment, Climate and Biodiversity (-0.18) show a concerning decline, highlighting ongoing challenges in meeting emissions reduction targets and energy affordability concerns.

Performance, Equality and Sustainability Scores Across SJI's Alternative Wellbeing Dimensions

Dimension	Performance	Equality	Sustainability
Subjective Wellbeing	-0.08	0.45	
Mental and Physical Health	-0.04	0.57	
Income and Wealth*	0.29	0.03	0.29
Knowledge, Skills and Innovation*	0.31	0.22	0.03
Housing and Built Environment*	0.23	-0.62	0.28
Environment, Climate and Biodiversity*	-0.18	0.15	-0.18
Safety and Security	-0.14		
Work and Job Quality	0.39	-0.23	
Time Use	-0.13	0.04	
Connections, Community and Participation*	0.54	0.71	0.68
Civic Engagement, Trust and Cultural Expression*	0.13		0.13

Note: (*) indicates that the dimensions that have sustainability indicators

Colour scale for Performance and Sustainability scores



For Performance and Sustainability: A score of +1 indicates a 100 per cent improvement. A score of 0 means no change in trend and -1 indicates 100 per cent deterioration and/or that Ireland is the worst-performing country in EU or OECD.

Colour scale for Equality Scores



For Equality, a score of +1 indicates no difference between the best and worst-performing groups, while 0 reflects 100 per cent difference and -1 reflects 200 per cent difference

What Do These Findings Tell Us and Why We Need a New Approach to Wellbeing?

The results of *Social Justice Ireland's* alternative wellbeing framework paint a troubling picture of societal wellbeing. While some areas show modest improvements, substantial disparities persist, and progress in key dimensions remains fragile and uneven. In particular, the lack of focus on equality and sustainability in the Government's Wellbeing Framework risks presenting an overly optimistic picture that does not accurately reflect the lived realities of many.

Although both frameworks aim to measure wellbeing across multiple dimensions, they differ significantly in the choice of indicators, scoring method, and focus areas, which ultimately present two distinct realities of life in Ireland. As illustrated in the table above, *Social Justice Ireland's* alternative wellbeing framework explicitly highlights inequalities that lie behind these averages. These inequalities do not show up in the [Government's dashboard](#), as the visual summary gives the

impression of improvement, while the real gaps are hidden away in the text. Moreover, as with any high-level dashboard, there is a risk of assuming that aggregate improvements mean that life is better for everyone when in reality some groups remain significantly disadvantaged. A wellbeing framework should make these differences visible.

Towards a Fairer Future

The key question is how to effectively improve wellbeing. This is where a comprehensive, coherent policy agenda guided by principles of fairness, sustainability, and the common good would be transformative. The social contract must foster societal wellbeing if it is to last. If it fails to do so, it risks a breakdown in the social fabric and a loss of faith in our democratic institutions. *Social Justice Ireland* proposes an integrated policy framework for a new social contract that identifies five key policy outcomes, mentioned below, essential to enhancing wellbeing.

Vibrant Economy



An economy that works for everyone must go beyond headline growth figures. *Social Justice Ireland's* alternative framework shows that economic performance cannot be viewed in isolation from inequalities in housing, healthcare, and job quality. It highlights that in-work poverty, income adequacy, and housing affordability remain critical challenges, despite positive economic trends. Building a vibrant economy means ensuring that economic gains are shared fairly across society.

Decent Services and Infrastructure



Wellbeing requires more than income – it demands access to quality services, such as healthcare, housing, and education. Our alternative framework exposes gaps in healthcare access, long waiting lists, and housing stress that disproportionately affect low-income households, renters, and disadvantaged groups. Addressing these gaps through equitable public services is essential for fostering resilience and improving wellbeing.

Just Taxation



Ensuring that everyone pays their fair share is central to funding public services and reducing inequality. The alternative framework highlights income inequality and the need for progressive taxation policies that support social infrastructure to enhance wellbeing.

Good Governance



Trust in institutions is a cornerstone of societal wellbeing. Our alternative framework includes indicators like trust in government and satisfaction with democracy, revealing a decline in public confidence. Without transparent, accountable governance, policies aimed at improving wellbeing will lack public buy-in. Strengthening civic engagement and trust in institutions is key to a functioning democracy that serves all citizens.

Sustainability



As demonstrated in this report, long-term wellbeing cannot be achieved without policies that address social, economic, and environmental sustainability in a holistic and integrated manner, recognising that wellbeing must be long-lasting, maintained across generations and shared equitably.

As Ireland continues to embed the Wellbeing Framework in its policymaking processes, it is essential to prioritise equity, inclusion, and long-term sustainability, paving the way for a fairer and more just society.

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Introduction

This report by *Social Justice Ireland* provides an independent assessment of wellbeing in Ireland. By prioritising indicators that better reflect the lived experiences of individuals and communities, the alternative wellbeing framework ensures that policymaking addresses inequality and sustainability and fosters a path toward long-term resilience.

Each year, the Government of Ireland publishes a wellbeing report, *Understanding Life in Ireland*, to assess the quality of life across economic, social, and environmental domains. This framework now plays an increasingly important role in policymaking, including its use in the budgetary process and in shaping discussions during the National Economic Dialogue, the Summer Economic Statement, and the Budget Day documentation. It is therefore essential to critically assess both the evolving priorities within the framework as well as how comprehensively it represents the wellbeing of all segments of the population.

Social Justice Ireland commends this development in policymaking, however, since 2024, the Government's report presents a limited perspective, focusing on aggregate trends while removing equality and sustainability from its core measurement approach. While these issues are acknowledged in the narrative, their absence from core metrics makes it difficult to evaluate who is benefitting from progress and whether the gains are sustainable.

In this paper, we critically examine the Government's report *Understanding Life in Ireland: The Well-being Framework 2025*, assessing the effectiveness of the Government's approach, their chosen indicators and their ability to capture the complexity of wellbeing across different social groups. We then present an alternative wellbeing framework, informed by public consultation, that reintegrates equality and sustainability more explicitly into the wellbeing measurement. This alternative approach aims to provide a comprehensive and more grounded picture by prioritising a set of indicators that reflect the lived experiences of different groups, helping to ensure that policymaking genuinely enhances the quality of life for all.

By focusing on equitable wellbeing outcomes, the alternative wellbeing framework aligns closely with *Social Justice Ireland's* vision for a new social contract, which emphasises inclusive growth, sustainable development, and social cohesion. Our analysis reveals that, while Ireland has made progress in several dimensions of wellbeing – including improvements in education, community participation, and employment – deep inequalities still persist. For instance, housing affordability continues to remain a significant and ongoing challenge, with renters and low-income households facing increasing financial strain. Income inequality is widening, and environmental sustainability indicators show little to no progress. These disparities highlight the need for a holistic and balanced approach to measure wellbeing, one that ensures no group is left behind.

Background

The assessment of wellbeing has emerged as a comprehensive and meaningful measure of societal progress that goes beyond traditional economic indicators. To enhance and streamline the understanding of quality of life in Ireland, the Government of Ireland developed a Wellbeing Framework that aligns with the global trend toward adopting broader measures of progress. Its primary objective is to guide policy decisions through a multidimensional lens encompassing economic, social, and environmental factors. *Social Justice Ireland* warmly welcomed this development.

Since its inception, the Government's Wellbeing Framework has gone through an iterative process of consultation and refinement. Some of the key milestones in this process are outlined below.

Figure 1: Key Milestones in the Government's Wellbeing Framework



Unfortunately, the Government's 2024 Wellbeing Framework marked a concerning shift. The framework moved away from explicitly measuring equality and sustainability. As of 2025, the Government continues to apply this revised methodology in its wellbeing assessment. A detailed critique of these changes is presented in our 2024 edition of this report.¹

In the next section, we critically assess the Government's 2025 framework, and in Section 4 we calculate wellbeing scores for each of the 11 dimensions using *Social Justice Ireland's* alternative set of indicators.

¹ <https://www.socialjustice.ie/publication/wellbeing-measuring-what-matters>

A Limited Perspective: Gaps in the Government's 2025 Wellbeing Framework

The Government's report *Understanding Life in Ireland: The Well-being Framework 2025* opens by stating that the "framework provides a high-level holistic overview of how our country is doing, economically, environmentally, and socially," while also acknowledging that "these indicators are partial reflections of the totality of life experiences and they cannot include all data on life in Ireland." While it is true that no framework can capture everything, the wellbeing framework was designed to provide a robust, comprehensive picture of societal progress - one that reflects lived experiences, highlights inequalities, and ensures that no one is left behind. When progress is assessed primarily through aggregated national trends, inequalities are easily masked.

Significant progress had been made up to the 2023 report, which, although more complex, was a step in the right direction as it integrated equality and sustainability aspects into the core measurements. Instead of building on this strong foundation, the 2025 wellbeing framework, similar to last year, steps back from it. By removing these aspects, the framework weakens its ability to assess who is being impacted most and whether progress is truly shared (Social Justice Ireland, 2025a).

As with the 2024 publication, Government's 2025 wellbeing report presents a largely positive picture of national progress. This optimistic narrative is shaped both by the selection of indicators used and by the removal of equality and sustainability from the core metrics. We previously indicated that such an approach risk oversimplifying the realities facing many in society and could make wellbeing appear better than it really is, and that concern has proven true again. The Government reports strong national and international performance, noting positive trends in eight of the 11 dimensions, and progress on sustainability in several areas. However, many of these findings are shaped by the choice of indicators. For instance, the Housing and Built Environment dimension appears to show strong improvement mainly because it tracks new dwelling completions and the share of homes receiving A or B energy ratings. While the dimension does include the housing cost overburden rate (which shows little progress) and the average distance to everyday services (for which limited data is available), the overall picture still appears positive. This does not match people's lived experiences, as housing remains one of Ireland's biggest challenges. Even though the narrative mentions the cohort that is affected by it the most, leaving it out of the core metrics creates a façade of progress.

This approach brings further challenges. Although the Government's report highlights population groups with the lowest outcomes—such as unemployed people, single-parent households, older persons, renters, lower-income households, and individuals with long-term illnesses—the exclusion of equality and sustainability from the performance metrics means these disparities risk being sidelined in policymaking. Without explicit measurement, inequalities become less visible, less urgent, and ultimately less central to decision-making. This limits the framework's ability to assess structural issues such as housing affordability, income inequality, environmental degradation, and working conditions—areas where equitable and sustainable solutions are essential.

As with any high-level dashboard, there is a risk of assuming that aggregate improvements mean that life is better for everyone when in reality some groups remain significantly disadvantaged. A wellbeing framework should make these differences visible.

SJI's Alternative Wellbeing Framework

In this section, *Social Justice Ireland* presents its alternative wellbeing framework, which offers a more inclusive and equitable approach to measuring progress. By integrating a broader range of meaningful indicators, it provides a more accurate picture of wellbeing in Ireland – one that is grounded in lived reality and places greater emphasis on those most at risk of being left behind.

Rationale and Methodology

To better understand public priorities for wellbeing, *Social Justice Ireland* conducted a survey in 2022, asking respondents to rank a set of six potential indicators under each of the wellbeing dimensions, from one to six, with one being the least important and six being the most important. The selection included indicators from the Government's Dashboard and datasets readily available from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) and other reputable sources. This survey, disseminated over the summer months through our social media channels, our Weekly Digest, and our Members' Bulletin, received 236 responses (Bennett C. , 2022).

Based on the survey findings, we have proposed a series of alternative (highest-ranked by survey respondents) indicators for each of the 11 dimensions to better reflect wellbeing concerns. In several cases, the government indicators were retained, as they aligned with public priorities. The CSO has a vast collection of datasets that could apply to the 11 dimensions of the wellbeing framework. Many, we would suggest, offer a better approximation of wellbeing in Ireland and can better capture how policies are experienced by different segments of the population.

Our survey found that in the Safety and Security dimension, current indicators such as the *murder rate per 100,000 population* and the *population who worry about being a victim of crime*, were ranked lowest in importance as the respondents felt they do not capture the full reality of safety concerns in Ireland. In contrast, indicators on *incidences of gender-based violence* and *incidence of racism and/or discrimination* were ranked higher, as they better reflect the lived experiences of various groups in the society, offering a more accurate and meaningful assessment of safety and security. Notably, the third government indicator *persons killed or injured on roads* was retained, as respondents considered it more relevant than the number of gardaí. Similarly, in the Work and Job Quality dimension, while *mean weekly earnings* indicator was retained, alternative indicators like *in-work poverty* and the *number of long-term unemployed* were selected due to their higher rankings. These indicators highlight significant challenges faced by low-income workers and long-term jobseekers, which directly impact overall wellbeing. Moreover, under the Housing and Built Environment dimension, indicators like *new dwelling completions* or *average distance to everyday services* provide some contextual value but fall short in addressing immediate wellbeing concerns. Alternative indicators such as *mortgage debt burden* and *at risk of poverty rates after rent and mortgage interest* were ranked higher. These indicators highlight the financial strain on households, particularly renters and low-income families, and better reflect the unequal distribution of housing affordability. These indicators also align more closely with the framework's core principles of equity and sustainability in housing policy.

This demonstrates that wellbeing measurement must go beyond surface-level statistics to capture the realities of diverse population groups. While the Government's simplified Dashboard provides broad snapshot, it risks overlooking critical aspects of wellbeing. Societal wellbeing can only be considered

truly strong when it prioritises those furthest behind. As emphasised in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)² commitment to "leave no one behind," ensuring the wellbeing of the most vulnerable must be the fundamental benchmark for progress. Thus, a more inclusive and participatory approach—one that reflects the lived experiences of all people, particularly those facing structural inequalities—is necessary for Ireland to develop a wellbeing framework that genuinely serves its society.

Scoring Wellbeing

The scoring for each dimension in this report is presented using performance, equality, and sustainability scores, using the Government's 2023 methodology as detailed in Appendix 1. Each score ranges from -1 to +1, with the following interpretations:

- **Performance:** A score of +1 reflects a 100 per cent improvement in the trend over approximately five years (depending on data availability) and/or that Ireland is the best-performing country for the indicator in EU or OECD. A score of 0 indicates no change and/or Ireland's performance is same as the EU or OECD average, while -1 represents a 100 per cent deterioration or that Ireland is the worst-performing country in EU or OECD.
- **Equality:** Equality scores measure disparities across demographic groups. A score of +1 indicates no difference between the best and worst-performing groups, while 0 reflects 100 per cent difference and -1 reflects 200 per cent difference (a negative score arises if the relative percentage difference exceeds 100 per cent).
- **Sustainability:** Sustainability scores consider performance of indicators tagged as 'sustainable'. A score of +1 indicates a 100 per cent improvement in the trend over approximately five years (depending on data availability) and/or that Ireland is the best-performing country for the indicator in EU or OECD. A score of 0 means no change in trend and -1 indicates 100 per cent deterioration and/or that Ireland is the worst-performing country in EU or OECD.

This scoring framework offers a structured approach to assess wellbeing across dimensions.

Alternative Wellbeing Framework: Key Findings

The indicators used by *Social Justice Ireland's* alternative wellbeing framework aim to provide a more comprehensive and nuanced perspective on Ireland's wellbeing (Figure 2). It prioritises indicators that reflect the lived experiences of individuals and different groups, and therefore highlights key areas of progress, stagnation, and decline across the 11 dimensions.

Overall Findings

- **Performance:** Four dimensions – Connections, Community and Participation; Work and Job Quality; Knowledge, Skills and Innovation; and Income and Wealth – show modest improvements. Two dimensions – Housing and Built Environment (0.23) and Civic Engagement, Trust and Cultural Expression (0.13) – show only marginal progress. However, five dimensions – Subjective

² <https://unsdg.un.org/2030-agenda/universal-values/leave-no-one-behind>

Wellbeing; Mental and Physical Health; Environment, Climate and Biodiversity; Safety and Security; and Time Use – have declined, with negative performances.

- **Equality:** Perfect equality is equal to one, therefore, the further an indicator is from one, the greater the inequality. As shown in Table 1, disparities exist across all nine dimensions measured for equality. Three dimensions show a relatively smaller gap in inequality – Subjective Wellbeing (0.45); Mental and Physical Health (0.57); and Connections, Community and Participation (0.71). However, these values still reflect substantial differences between the best- and worst-performing groups. Four dimensions show very large disparities, almost 80 to 100 per cent, between the best- and worst-performing groups: Knowledge, Skills and Innovation (0.22); Environment, Climate and Biodiversity (0.15); Time Use (0.04); and Income and Wealth (0.03). While two dimensions: Housing and Built Environment (-0.62) and Work and Job Quality (-0.23) exhibit worsening divides, suggesting a deepening gap between advantaged and disadvantaged groups.
- **Sustainability:** Performance in sustainability remains marginal across five out of six dimensions tagged for sustainability, except Connections, Community and Participation where performance is noteworthy (+0.68). However, this marginal gain is not sufficient to indicate meaningful progress in ensuring long-term resilience. Knowledge, Skills and Innovation (0.03) show little to no progress. Alarmingly, Environment, Climate and Biodiversity (-0.18) show a concerning decline, highlighting ongoing challenges in meeting emissions reduction targets and energy affordability concerns.

Table 1: Performance, Equality and Sustainability Scores Across Alternative Wellbeing Dimensions

Dimension	Performance	Equality	Sustainability
Subjective Wellbeing	-0.08	0.45	
Mental and Physical Health	-0.04	0.57	
Income and Wealth*	0.29	0.03	0.29
Knowledge, Skills and Innovation*	0.31	0.22	0.03
Housing and Built Environment*	0.23	-0.62	0.28
Environment, Climate and Biodiversity*	-0.18	0.15	-0.18
Safety and Security	-0.14		
Work and Job Quality	0.39	-0.23	
Time Use	-0.13	0.04	
Connections, Community and Participation*	0.54	0.71	0.68
Civic Engagement, Trust and Cultural Expression*	0.13		0.13

Note: (*) indicates that the dimensions that have sustainability indicators

Colour scale for Performance and Sustainability scores



For Performance and Sustainability: A score of +1 indicates a 100 per cent improvement. A score of 0 means no change in trend and -1 indicates 100 per cent deterioration and/or that Ireland is the worst-performing country in EU or OECD.

Colour scale for Equality Scores



For Equality, a score of +1 indicates no difference between the best and worst-performing groups, while 0 reflects 100 per cent difference and -1 reflects 200 per cent difference

These findings show that while Ireland has made progress in some areas, major disparities and structural challenges remain, requiring sustained and targeted policy interventions. However, this contrasts with the Government's Wellbeing Dashboard, which again presents a broadly positive view of progress, mainly by focusing on high-level international comparisons and aggregate trends that may mask inequalities and vulnerabilities within Irish society.

Improvements can be seen in Connections, Community, and Participation dimension, which reflects stronger community ties. There is also positive performance in Work and Job Quality and Income and Wealth dimensions which further indicate economic developments, particularly in reducing long-term unemployment and poverty risks. However, as can be seen in Table 1, *Social Justice Ireland's* alternative wellbeing dashboard explicitly highlights inequalities behind these averages. With equality scores of -0.23 and 0.03, these dimensions show a widening gap, ongoing in-work poverty and persistent income disparities that disproportionately affect women, renters, and single-parent households. These inequalities do not show up in the Government's dashboard as the visual summary gives the impression of improvement, while the real gaps are hidden away in the text.

A similar pattern can be seen in the Knowledge, Skills and Innovation dimension. The Government's dashboard reports positive trends based on indicators like *reading and math performance in 15-year-olds* and the *number of research and development personnel*. However, our alternative dashboard uses indicators that better capture everyday skills gaps, including digital skills and school completion. These matter greatly for wellbeing, as the world of work is changing rapidly and becoming more digital. Without these skills, people face barriers to equal access opportunities and participation in an evolving labour market. While Ireland performs well in some areas, gaps in equality and sustainability remain, putting vulnerable groups at risk in a digitally driven economy. Long-term sustainability will require continued investment in lifelong learning and digital inclusion to maintain a skilled and adaptable workforce.

Housing and Built Environment continues to be one of the most serious challenges. The Government's report highlights increase in *new dwelling completions* and *energy ratings for homes* as signs of progress. In contrast, *Social Justice Ireland* focuses on indicators such as *mortgage debt burden* and *at risk of poverty rates after housing costs*. These show that housing affordability has worsened in recent years. The equality score of -0.62 reflects a deepening divide. Likewise, in Environment, Climate and Biodiversity, the Government uses indicators on *pollution, grime or other environmental problems, waste generation, and emissions reductions*, while our alternative dashboard highlights *biodiversity loss* and the *financial burden of energy costs on lower-income households*, in addition to *emissions reduction*. These choices matter because they can change how progress is understood.

In the next section of this report, we present a detailed analysis of the alternative indicators under each of the 11 dimensions, using the Government's 2023 methodology (see Appendix 1 for details). We also link UN Sustainable Development Goals to each dimension, showing how the wellbeing framework connects to UN SDGs.

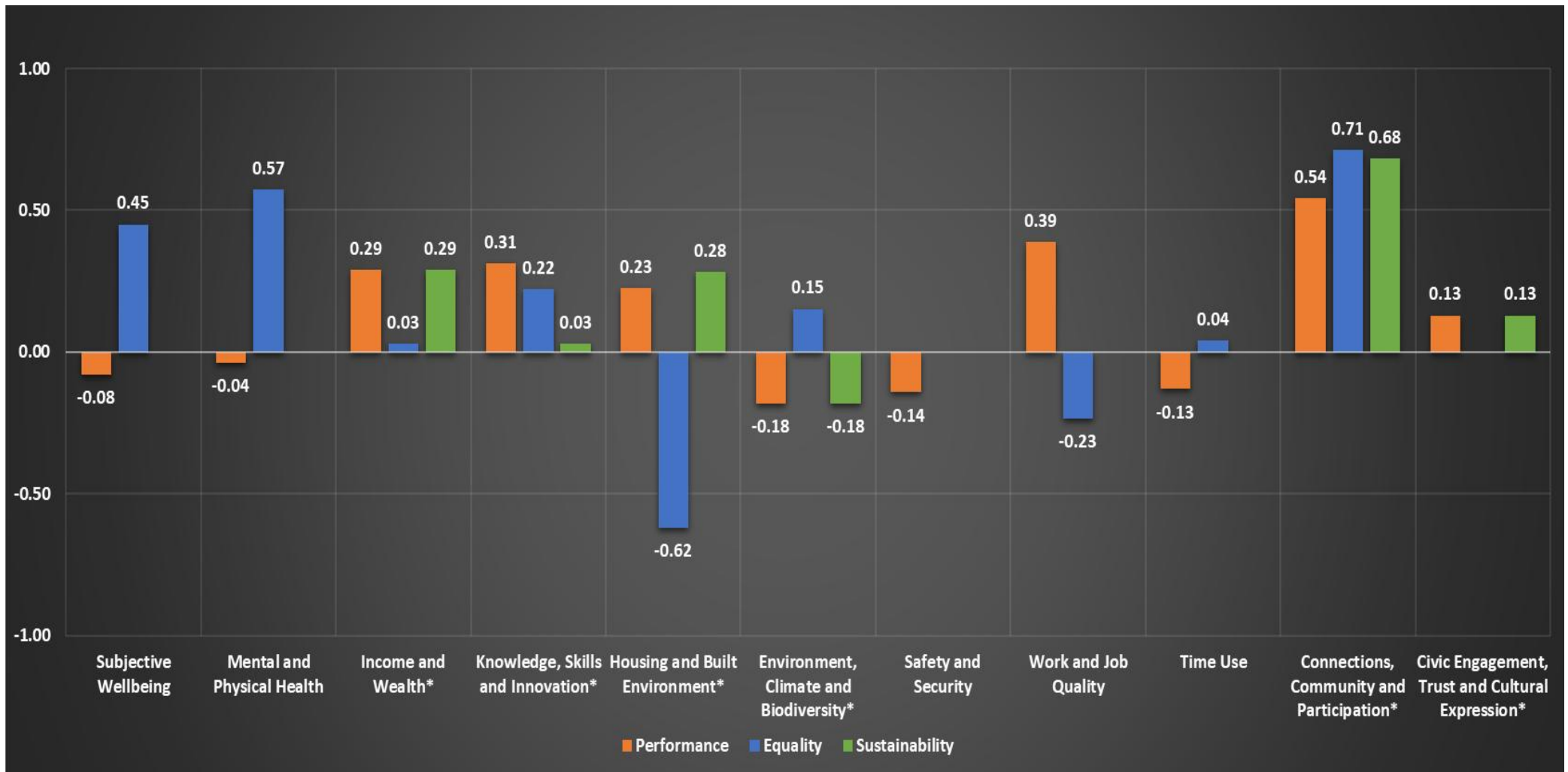


Figure 2: Social Justice Ireland's Alternative Wellbeing Dashboard

Note: (*) indicates that the dimensions that have sustainability indicators.

Subjective Wellbeing



The indicators chosen for this dimension were: **Overall life satisfaction**; **Social Inclusion**; and **Access to Public Services**. This dimension aligns with **SDG 3: Good Health and Wellbeing** and **SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities**.

Figure 3 presents the performance and equality scores for these key indicators, as well as for the overall Subjective Wellbeing dimension. The results show a concerning picture: the overall performance score of -0.08 indicates a deterioration in subjective wellbeing compared to previous years, while an equality score of 0.45 suggests a disparity of over 50 per cent between the best and worst performing groups.

A closer look at the indicators reveals a mixed picture. Overall Life Satisfaction shows minimal progress and has further deteriorated since 2023 along with significant disparities persisting across different groups, particularly when considering health status and employment categories. Social Inclusion is difficult to measure accurately due to a dearth of updated data, limiting its ability to provide an accurate and timely reflection of wellbeing. Meanwhile, Access to Public Services shows a grave negative performance, owing to its declining satisfaction levels, particularly in healthcare and administrative sector. Each indicator is explored in greater detail below, providing further insights into the challenges and gaps that persist within this dimension.

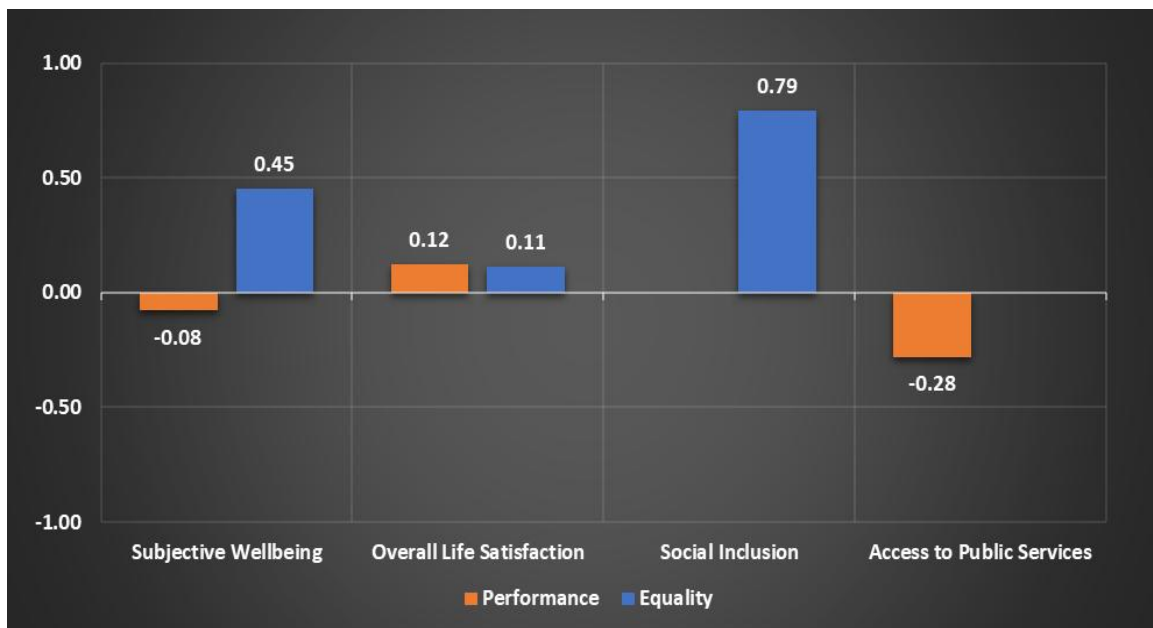


Figure 3: Subjective Wellbeing dimension and indicator score

Indicator 1: Overall Life Satisfaction

The proportion of the population rating their overall life satisfaction as 'high' has shown a slight deterioration, decreasing from 26.8 per cent in 2020 to 26.4 per cent in 2024³, as highlighted in the Government's Wellbeing Report. While not directly comparable due to methodological changes, it is

³ <https://data.cso.ie/table/WBB63>

worth noting that in 2018, overall satisfaction stood at 44.4 per cent, highlighting a significant decline since pre-pandemic levels.

At the European level⁴, Ireland's performance continues to remain positive, with the current rate of 26.4 per cent above the EU average of 21.8 per cent. This is 9 percentage point lower than Denmark, the best-performing country, where 35.4 per cent of respondents reported high overall life satisfaction.

Notable disparities are revealed upon a closer look at the data. By age group, older adults reported higher satisfaction levels, with 32.3 per cent of those aged 65+ rating their overall life satisfaction as high, compared to around 24.7 per cent for those aged 25-49 years and 23.8 per cent for the ones aged 50-64. Health status further underscores these inequalities. Among individuals with 'very good' general health, 37.1 per cent reported high overall life satisfaction, declining from 40.1, while only 5.6 per cent of those with 'bad or very bad' health declining from 12.9 in 2023 did so. This disparity has widened significantly, increasing from 18.4 percentage points in 2020 to 31.5 percentage points in 2024, indicating that individuals with poorer health are being left further behind.

Indicator 2: Social Inclusion

Identified by survey respondents as particularly relevant for measuring wellbeing, this indicator is also one of those used by the government itself. The most recent available data, from 2018⁵, showed a mean score of 7.6 out of 10, indicating a positive overall perception of social inclusion. While equality across age and sex is broadly consistent, nevertheless significant disparities emerge when principal economic status is considered. Individuals unable to work due to permanent sickness or disability reported the lowest mean score at 6.3, followed closely by the unemployed at 6.4. In contrast, those at work reported a mean score of 7.8, while students reported the highest score at 8.0. Even though this indicator provides some insights, it still has limited utility because of its outdated data, which is now nearly seven years old. Without updated data, it is impossible to assess progress or emerging trends in social inclusion. This highlighted the need for the government to ensure more frequent and robust data collection to maintain the relevance of such indicators.

Indicator 3: Access to Public Services

We now turn to access to public services. This is a critical determinant of wellbeing, and satisfaction with these services reveals a mixed and concerning picture. According to the CSO Trust Survey 2023, satisfaction with the education system remains relatively strong, with 70 per cent of the population reporting satisfaction in 2023, unchanged from 2021. In contrast, satisfaction with administrative services has declined significantly, falling from 63 per cent in 2021 to just 51 per cent in 2023. The most concerning trend is observed in satisfaction with the healthcare system, which dropped sharply from 32 per cent in 2021 to 26 per cent in 2023, reflecting widespread dissatisfaction with healthcare delivery (CSO, 2024).

Internationally, we witness Ireland's performance varying considerably across different services. For the education system, Ireland ranks seventh highest among OECD countries, with a satisfaction rate of 68.1 per cent. Finland outranks everyone with 80.8 per cent, while the OECD average stands at 57.1 per cent. However, it is Ireland's performance in the healthcare system that is far more concerning,

⁴ Eurostat [ILC_PW05]

⁵ <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/hubs/p-wbhub/well-beinginformationhub/civicengagementtrustandculturalexpression/perceivedsocialinclusion/>

as it recorded the lowest satisfaction rate of all OECD countries at 25.9 per cent, well below the OECD average of 52.4 per cent. Meanwhile, Belgium leads with an impressive satisfaction rate of 80.7 per cent. Similarly, satisfaction with administrative services places Ireland among the fifth lowest performers, with a rate of 51.2 per cent, compared to the OECD average of 65.7 per cent. Luxembourg tops this category with a satisfaction rate of 83.2 per cent (CSO, 2024).

These findings reveal significant challenges in Ireland's public services, particularly in healthcare and administrative sectors, where performance lags both domestically and internationally. It is crucial that these issues are addressed to improve wellbeing and restoring public trust.

Mental and Physical Health



The indicators selected for this dimension were: **Inability to afford adequate healthcare; Outpatient and In-patient Waiting Lists; and Self-reported unmet need for medical attention.** This dimension aligns with **SDG 3: Good Health and Wellbeing.**

Figure 4 presents the performance and equality scores for these indicators, as well as for the overall Mental and Physical Health dimension. The results indicate a performance score of -0.04 for the dimension, reflecting marginal deterioration to no improvement in access to healthcare. Meanwhile, an equality score of 0.57 reflects the disparate access to services across different groups, including barriers faced by younger individuals and women in securing affordable healthcare.

While we witness some progress in reducing financial barriers to healthcare, nevertheless significant challenges persist, particularly in waiting lists for inpatient treatment and increasing unmet medical attention. These persistent delays in accessing timely medical care reflect broader systemic failure. These low scores are also a reflection of the demographic vulnerability regarding challenges to healthcare access, further highlighting the need for policy interventions and systemic improvements. Each indicator is discussed in detail below.

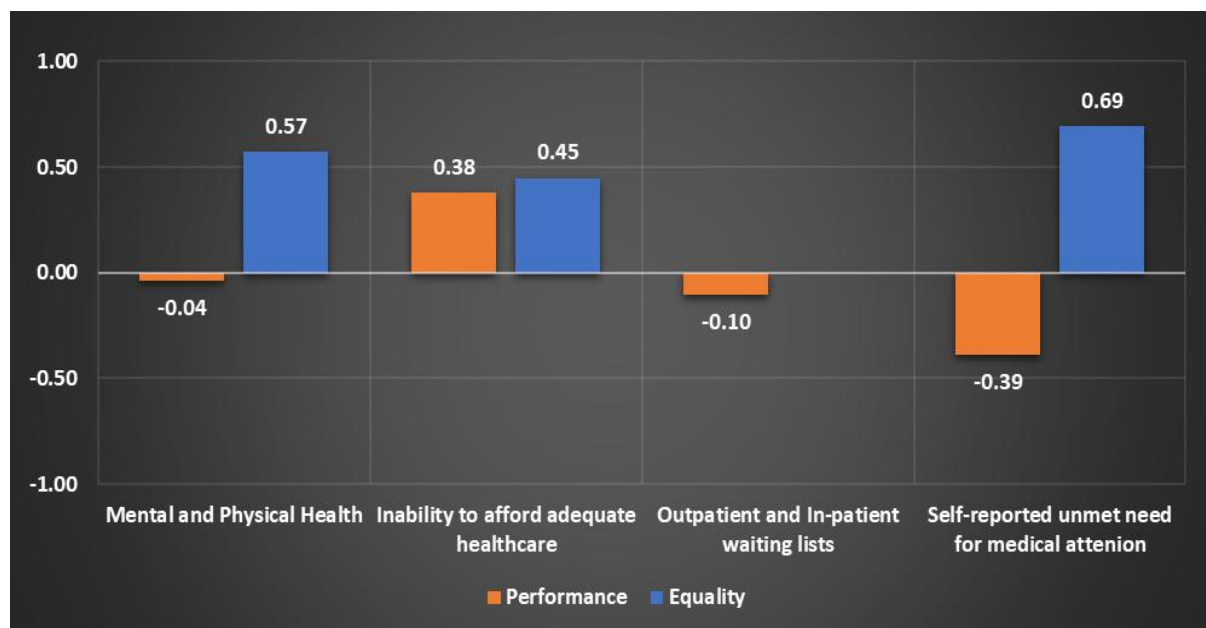


Figure 4: Mental and Physical Health indicators performance

Indicator 1: Inability to afford adequate healthcare

The inability to afford adequate healthcare is assessed using Eurostat's indicator⁶ on *self-reported unmet needs for healthcare services due to financial reasons*, which considers medical, dental, mental health care, and prescribed medicines. The latest available data, from 2019, shows that 12.1 per cent of the population in Ireland reported unmet healthcare needs, marking a significant improvement from 35.9 per cent in 2014. However, it is necessary to note that 2019 is the most recent data available, making it outdated for accurately assessing the current landscape of healthcare access and affordability. This underscores the need for updated and timely data to track progress and identify emerging challenges effectively.

At the European level, Ireland performs better than the EU-27 average of 13 per cent. However, the best-performing countries, such as Cyprus (3.7 per cent) and the Netherlands (5.3 per cent), demonstrate what is achievable with more equitable healthcare systems. Within Ireland, disparities persist: 13.3 per cent of women reported unmet healthcare needs, compared to 10.7 per cent of men. In terms of age group, 16.6 per cent of individuals aged 25-34 report the highest unmet need, compared to just 6.4 per cent of those aged 65 and older. While progress is welcome, these findings highlight the need to address barriers faced by younger individuals and women to ensure access to affordable healthcare for all.

Indicator 2: Outpatient and In-patient Waiting Lists

The Irish healthcare system continues to face a setback due to its outpatient and inpatient waiting lists⁷. As of July 2025, there were 614,470 people awaiting outpatient treatment, reflecting a modest increase from 601,140 in July 2023 – a 2 per cent increase over last three years. However, inpatient waiting lists have worsened, with 100,019 people awaiting treatment in July 2025, up from 83,133 in July 2023. These waiting lists, while showing minor progress in outpatient treatment, remain a major concern due to their impact on timely access to care. Unlike other indicators, there is no international benchmark or comparable EU data, making it challenging to evaluate Ireland's performance in comparison to other European counterparts.

Indicator 3: Self-reported unmet need for medical attention.

The final indicator in this dimension is as per the Government's Wellbeing Dashboard. The proportion of people aged 16 and over with self-reported unmet need for medical attention witnessed a slight rise, from 1.8 per cent in 2020 to 2.9 per cent in 2024⁸. While this rate aligns with the EU-27 average of 2.5 per cent, it remains significantly higher than the best-performing countries – Cyprus (0.1 per cent), Malta (0.3 per cent), and Czechia (0.5 per cent).

The data reveals a considerable discrepancy across sex with women (3.4 per cent) having higher unmet needs compared to men (2.5 per cent), a pattern consistent with broader trends in healthcare access. These figures highlight the gendered nature of healthcare disparities, as women are more likely to face unmet medical needs despite ongoing improvements in healthcare accessibility.

⁶ Eurostat [HLTH_EHIS_UN2E]

⁷ Waiting List Numbers by Hospitals and Specialties as of 31st July 2025, www.ntpf.ie

⁸ Eurostat [TESPM110]

Income and Wealth



The indicators selected for this dimension were: **Population at risk of poverty**; **Income Equality / Inequality**; and **Median real household disposable income**. This dimension aligns with **SDG 1: No Poverty**, **SDG 5: Gender Equality** and **SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities**. These indicators provide a comprehensive view of income distribution, poverty, and economic disparities, which are essential for assessing the wellbeing of individuals and households.

Figure 5 presents the performance, equality, and sustainability scores for the key indicators under this dimension, as well as the overall Income and Wealth dimension. The results show a modest positive performance (0.29) and sustainability score (0.29), suggesting slight improvements in income levels and economic resilience. However, the equality score of 0.03 reflects a concerning (almost 100 per cent) income and wealth disparities across different demographic groups.

While the Poverty Risk of the Population indicator shows the highest performance and sustainability score (0.32), the equality score reveals significant disparities that persist across demographic groups and economic statuses. Similarly, Income Equality/Inequality presents a troubling equality score of -0.38, highlighting a widening income gap. This score reflects a substantial divide between the top and bottom income deciles, with the top 10 per cent of the earners receiving more than 5.5 times the income share of the bottom 10 per cent. Median Real Household Disposable Income shows relatively balanced performance scores, with relatively high equality score (0.37), however, it still indicates a 60 per cent disparity in distribution. This underscores the persistent challenges in achieving equitable and sustainable income growth in Ireland, and the need for structural reforms to address these disparities. Further details on each of these indicators are explored in the sections below.

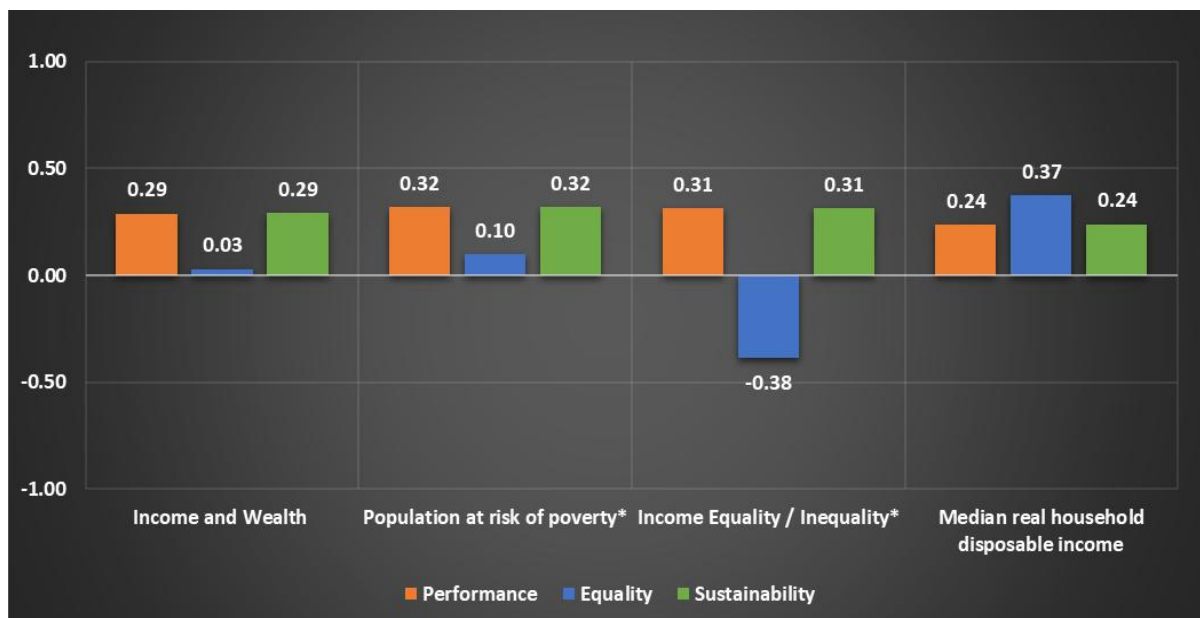


Figure 5: Income and Wealth dimension and indicators score

Note: *Population at risk of poverty and Income Equality / Inequality are sustainability indicators

Indicator 1: Population at risk of Poverty

According to the latest Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) data, the proportion of the population at risk of poverty decreased from 13.2 per cent in 2020 to 11.7 per cent in 2024. *Social Justice Ireland* warmly welcomes this progress. The latest figure is among the lowest rates ever recorded for Ireland, and an outcome driven by short-term welfare related cost-of-living supports. The CSO has calculated that without these measures the poverty rate in 2024 would be 14.1 per cent (759,000 people); suggesting that the cost-of-living measures succeeded in keeping almost 130,000 people out of poverty during 2024. However, as these measures are not permanent, we can expect headline poverty rates to increase once again from 2025.

At the European level, Eurostat's 'at risk of poverty' may differ from CSO's SILC estimates, as they apply a different equivalence scale to make the data comparable across all EU member states. Ireland's poverty risk of 12.7 per cent in 2024 is below the EU-27 average of 16.2 per cent, placing it among the better-performing countries, just 3.2 percentage points above Czechia, the EU's best performer. Since 2008, Ireland's poverty levels have consistently remained below the EU average.

Diving deeper into the data reveals important demographic characteristics associated with poverty risk in Ireland. In addition to the at risk of poverty rates differences among men (12.1 per cent) and women (11.3 per cent), significant disparities exist across other demographics as well. By age group, children under 18 have a 15.3 per cent risk of poverty, while adults aged 50-64 have 11.4 per cent risk. In contrast, older adults aged 65+ experienced a substantial increase in poverty risk, from 8.3 per cent in 2023 to 13.3 per cent in 2024, an increase by 64 per cent; this brings the number of older people living below the poverty line to 106,385 in 2024. Principal economic status plays a key role, with 32.5 per cent of individuals unable to work due to long-term health problems, and 34.1 per cent of unemployed individuals at risk of poverty. Educational attainment also impacts poverty risk: individuals with primary or lower education levels have a 26.3 per cent risk of poverty, compared to 4.2 per cent for those with third-level degrees. Household composition adds another layer of disparity, with 25.9 per cent of single adults aged 65+ and 1-adult-with-children households facing the highest poverty risk compared to multi-adult households. Furthermore, tenure status reveals stark contrasts; 21.8 per cent of renters are at risk of poverty compared to just 7.3 per cent of owner-occupied households.

Indicator 2: Income Equality / Inequality

The 2024 SILC survey, published in March 2025, provides further insights into Ireland's income distribution (summarised in Figure 6). It reveals a significant gap between the top and bottom deciles, with the bottom 10 per cent receiving just 4.2 per cent of total income, while the top 10 per cent received nearly a quarter of the total (22.9 per cent). Overall, the share of the top 10 per cent is more than 5.5 times the share of the bottom 10 per cent. The poorest 60 per cent of households collectively received 41.3 per cent of total income, almost equivalent to the 37 per cent received by the top 20 per cent.

The Gini coefficient, a key measure of income inequality, declined from 28.5 per cent in 2020 to 26.9 in 2024, reflecting the pro-poor distributive effects of temporary cost-of-living measures. However, inequality is expected to rise again once these measures are withdrawn. At the European level, the indicators adopted by the EU at Laeken⁹ assesses the income distribution of member states by

⁹In December 2001 the European Council agreed on a list of social indicators to guide the fight against poverty.

comparing the ratio of equivalised disposable income received by the bottom quintile (20 per cent) to that of the top quintile – the higher the ratio, the greater the income difference. Ireland’s ratio of 3.9 is below the EU average of 4.7. The best performing country here was Slovenia (3.3).

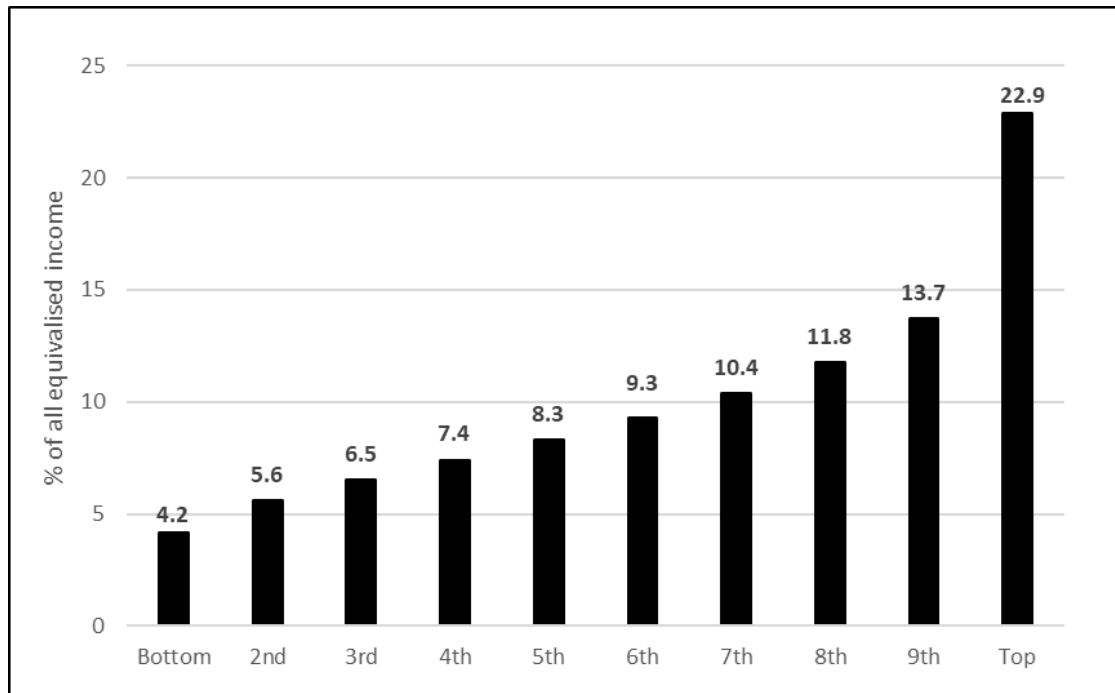


Figure 6: Ireland's Income Distribution by decile (or 10% group) in 2024

Source: CSO SILC (2025)

Indicator 3: Median real household disposable income

Between 2020 and 2024, the median real household disposable income increased by 9 per cent reflecting overall income growth. However, it is worth noting that between 2023 and 2024, even though there was a marginal rise in the real value of median household income from €50,162 to €50,406, the rising cost of living cannot be ignored. Further, we see that disaggregated data reveals that not all households benefitted equally from income growth. Households with male heads of household had higher disposable incomes than those with female heads, and those unable to work due to long-term health problems had the lowest median disposable income at €28,532.

Educational disparities further exacerbate inequality, with households headed by individuals with primary or lower education levels earning €25,727 compared to €65,140 for those headed by individuals with third-level degrees. By household composition, households with one adult aged 65+ or more broadly, those with at least one adult aged 65+, and one adult with children aged under 18, experienced a decline in their median real household disposable income. Tenure status also plays a significant role, with owner-occupied households enjoying a median disposable income 1.44 times higher than that of renters.

At the EU level¹⁰, Eurostat data is used as it provides a comparable measure across all member states, and as noted earlier, this differs from CSO figures. In 2024, Ireland had the fourth highest median equivalised net income at €32,955, behind Luxembourg (€50,799), Denmark (€34,843) and Austria (€33,210).

¹⁰ EUROSTAT [ILC_DIO4]

While notable progress has been made by Ireland in reducing poverty and maintaining relatively low levels of income inequality compared to the EU, much of this progress can be credited to temporary government interventions. There is an apparent uncertainty about the long-term sustainability of these gains, particularly for vulnerable groups, as these temporary supports are phased out. Persistent inequalities in income distribution, education, and housing tenure further highlight the need for structural reforms to ensure sustainable and inclusive growth.



Knowledge, Skills and Innovation

The indicators selected for this dimension were: **Early School Leavers**; **Lifelong learning rate**; and **Digital Skills**. This dimension aligns with **SDG 4: Quality Education**. Reflecting key areas of educational attainment and learning opportunities, these indicators are central to improving societal wellbeing, equity, and innovation.

Figure 7 presents the performance, equality, and sustainability scores for the Knowledge, Skills, and Innovation dimension and its indicators. The results show moderate overall performance (0.31), low equality score (0.22), and negligible sustainability score (0.03), indicating some advancements have been made but persistent disparities remain.

We observe positive performances in Early School Leavers and Digital Skills, with both indicators performing well nationally as well as internationally. However, the Lifelong Learning Rate shows stagnation. While improvements are noted across the indicators, disparities based on age, education level, income group, and employment status paint a different picture, highlighting the need for targeted interventions. Each indicator is discussed in detail below.

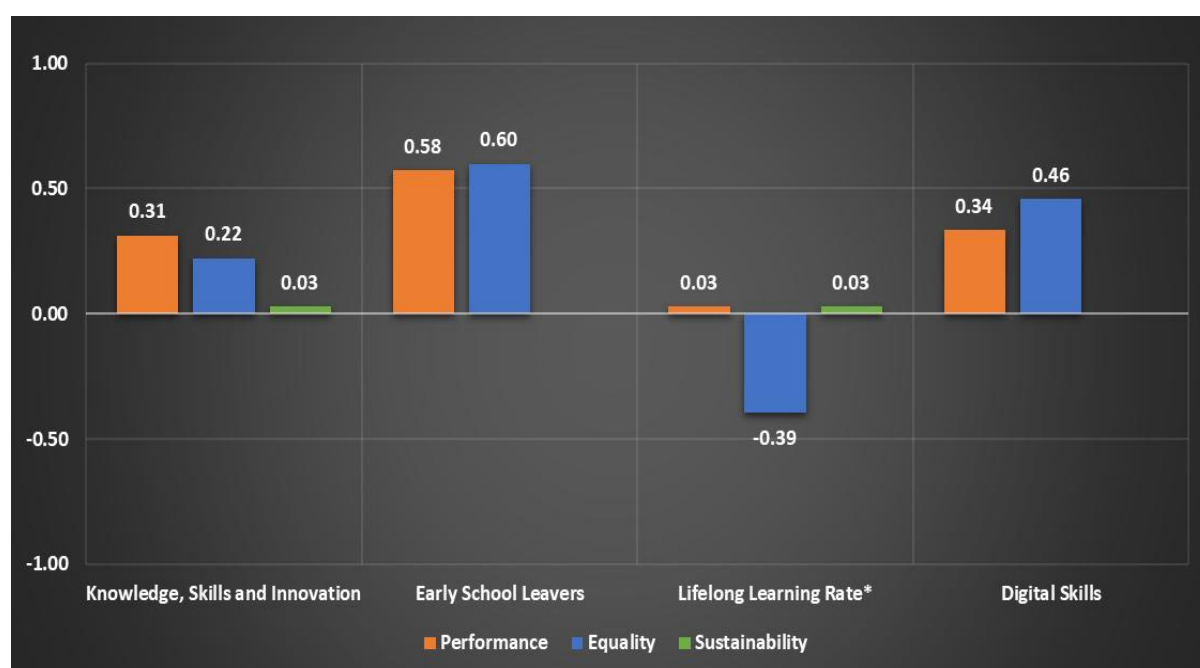


Figure 7: Knowledge, Skills and Innovation indicators performance

Note: Lifelong learning rate is a sustainability indicator

Indicator 1: Early School Leavers

Individuals who fall in the age group of 18-24, whose highest level of education is lower secondary or below and who are not engaged in further formal or non-formal education are defined as early school leavers. The proportion of early school leavers in Ireland has seen a significant and welcome decline in recent years. In Q2 2020, 5 per cent of individuals aged 18 to 24 were classified as early school leavers, a figure that has dropped to just 3 per cent in Q2 2024¹¹. This represents a substantial improvement over the last two decades, with the rate having fallen from 14 per cent in the 2004.

Disparities between sexes are relatively small, with the rate for males at 3 per cent compared to 2 per cent for females. At a European level¹², Ireland ranks as one of the best performers in reducing early school leaving, with a rate of 4 per cent in 2023 – tying with Greece and Poland for second place. Croatia leads the EU with the lowest rate at 2 per cent, while the EU-27 average stands at 10 per cent. This downward trend in early school leaving represents a major success story for Ireland's education system and demonstrates its commitment to improving educational outcomes.

Indicator 2: Lifelong Learning Rate

Lifelong learning, which assesses participation in education and training among adults, continues to be a critical indicator of continuous skill development and adaptability in a dynamic economy. Between Q1 2021 and Q1 2025, Ireland's lifelong learning rate showed a slight drop, decreasing from 12.2 per cent to 11.5 per cent.

When compared to other EU countries¹³, Ireland's rate of 14.7 per cent in 2024¹⁴ is slightly above the EU-27 average of 13.3 per cent. However, Ireland falls far behind the best-performing countries, such as Sweden (37.5 per cent), Denmark (31.2 per cent), and the Finland (29.1 per cent).

Disparities in lifelong learning participation are also evident across age groups and principal economic status. The rate is highest for students at 98.7 per cent, as expected, but participation declines sharply with age: 9.9 per cent for those aged 25-34, and significantly lower for those aged 55-64 (2.2 per cent). Similarly, individuals who are engaged in home duties report the lowest rate, highlighting the need for targeted support to promote lifelong learning among different groups. This trend indicates that as individuals near retirement age, participation in learning declines, potentially reflecting a dearth of opportunities or incentives to engage in further education. It is important to understand that for equality score, students and individuals aged 18-24 years have been excluded, as their high participation rates reflect their primary status as learners rather than disparities related to employment or socio-economic conditions.

Indicator 3: Digital Skills

Digital skills are increasingly becoming essential in modern economies, and Ireland performs well in this area. According to Eurostat data¹⁵, 72.9 per cent of Irish citizens aged 16-74 had basic or above-basic overall digital skills in 2023, up from 70.5 per cent in 2021. Internationally, Ireland performs well

¹¹ <https://data.cso.ie/table/EDQ07>

¹² <https://data.cso.ie/table/EATR05>

¹³ Eurostat [TRNG_LFS_01]

¹⁴ This differs because the age ranges used in the two measures are not the same: the CSO covers ages 18–74, while Eurostat covers ages 25–64.

¹⁵ Eurostat [ISOC_SK_DSKL_I21]

and ranks third among EU member states, behind the Netherlands (82.7 per cent) and Finland (82 per cent), and well above the EU average of 55.6 per cent.

However, demographic disparities persist across different sectors. By sex, the gap is relatively small, with 74.4 per cent of males and 71.4 per cent of females reporting basic or above-basic digital skills. By age group, the differences are more pronounced, while 88 per cent of individuals aged 25-34 possess basic digital skills, this drops to 47 per cent for those aged 55 and over. Education also plays a significant role as only 14.4 per cent of individuals with no or low formal education report basic digital skills, compared to 88.2 per cent of those with higher education.

Geographic disparities, though smaller, are also there. In rural areas, 71 per cent of individuals have basic or above-basic skills, compared to 74.5 per cent in towns and suburbs and 73 per cent in cities. Finally, employment status reveals stark differences. Among individuals aged 25-64, 47 per cent of those who are retired or not in the labour force report basic digital skills, compared to 85.4 per cent of those who are employed, self-employed, or family workers. These trends highlight the importance of addressing digital skill gaps among older people, lower-income groups, and those outside the labour force to ensure equitable access to opportunities in an increasingly growing digital society.

Addressing these disparities through targeted policies and supports is essential to ensure that everyone can benefit from educational and skill development opportunities, contributing to Ireland's overall wellbeing and competitiveness in both domestic and the international market.

Housing and the Built Environment



The indicators selected for this dimension were: **Housing Affordability; At risk of poverty rate after rent and mortgage interest; and Mortgage Debt Burden**. This dimension aligns with **SDG 1: No poverty** and **SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities**. These indicators are critical for understanding the intersection of housing costs, poverty, and debt, which significantly impact overall wellbeing.

Figure 8 presents the performance, equality, and sustainability scores for the key indicators under this dimension, as well as the overall Housing and Built Environment dimension. As shown in the graph, while Housing Affordability and the at risk of poverty rate after rent and mortgage interest show negligible positive performance scores (0.28 and 0.07 respectively), their equality scores reveal stark disparities across income levels, household compositions, and tenure types. Notably, the slightly positive performance score for housing affordability is driven solely by Ireland's relatively better position in comparison to the EU-27 average. Nationally, housing affordability has deteriorated, with increasing housing costs outpacing wage growth over the past decade. The Mortgage Debt Burden indicator reflects a slight positive performance (0.32), underscoring the growing relief for households in long-term mortgage arrears.

Collectively, the figure highlights on-going challenges within Ireland's housing system. The equality scores are negative, indicating deteriorating conditions and widening inequality, with sustainability showing only a slight positive score due to Ireland's relatively better ranking within the EU-27. Further details on each of these indicators are provided below.

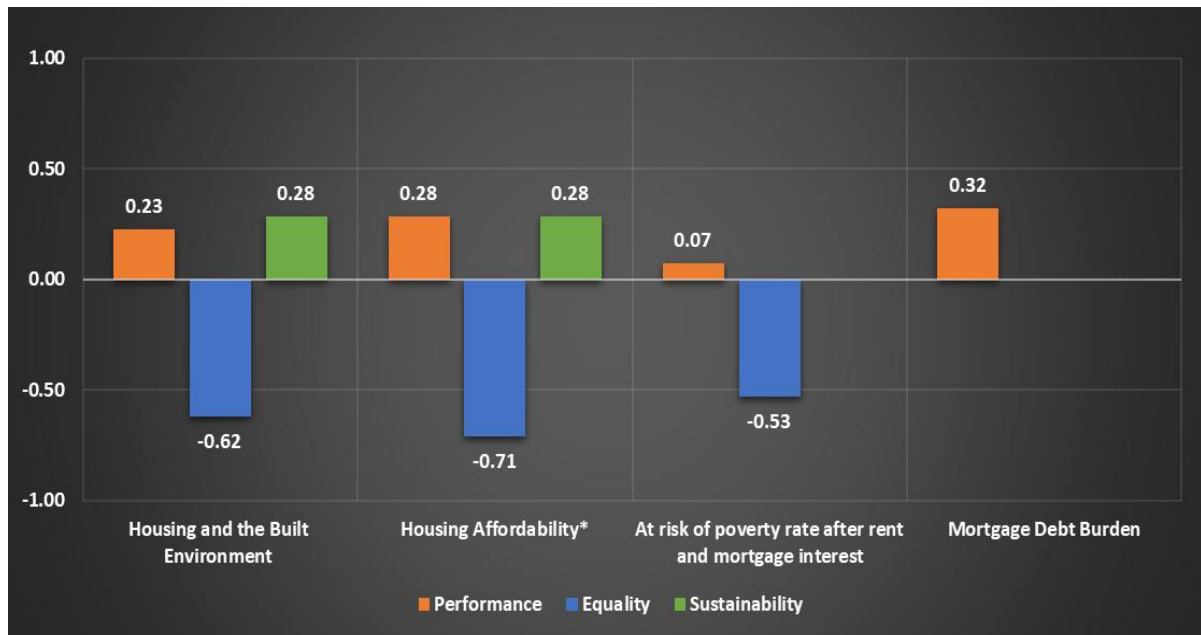


Figure 8: Housing and the Built Environment dimension and indicators score

Note: Housing Affordability is a sustainability indicator

Indicator 1: Housing Affordability

In recent years housing affordability has worsened, becoming less affordable between 2013 and 2019, before recovering slightly in 2020 (Parliamentary Budget Office, 2022). However, it must be noted that an affordability calculation based on earnings in 2020 will be distorted as average earnings increased in response to lay-offs in lower-paid jobs during the pandemic. Between 2012 and 2022 house prices increased by 75.7 per cent and rents surged by over 90 per cent, compared to wage growth of just 27 per cent in the same period (Parliamentary Budget Office, 2023). Housing affordability continues to be a significant concern, and to analyse this issue further, we use the Housing Cost Overburden (HCO) rate, which is also used as a government indicator.

The HCO rate measures the percentage of the population living in households where total housing costs exceed 40 per cent of disposable income. Unlike narrower definitions of housing costs, this metric accounts for mortgage repayments or rent, utilities, structural insurance, and maintenance expenses. In 2024¹⁶, the HCO rate in Ireland increased to 4.5 per cent, up from 4.2 per cent in 2020. While Ireland performs better than the EU-27 average of 8.2 per cent, ranking fourth behind Cyprus (2.4 per cent), Croatia (3.7 per cent) and Slovenia (3.8 per cent) and hence a slightly positive performance score (0.28).

For those below the poverty line (set at 60 per cent of median equivalised income), the HCO rate rises to 17 per cent, compared to just 2.7 per cent for those above this threshold. By income quintile, the rate is 13.6 per cent for the bottom quintile (i.e. the 20 per cent of the population with the lowest incomes) and only 0.9 per cent for the top quintile. Household composition also impacts HCO rates, with single adults younger than 65 years facing the highest rate of 19 per cent, while multi-adult households (including two adults, at least one aged 65 or older) have the lowest rate at 0.8 per cent. Tenure status reveals striking disparities, with tenants renting at market rates facing an 18.3 per cent HCO rate, compared to around 1 per cent for owner-occupiers with or without a mortgage. This is also

¹⁶ Eurostat [ILC_LVHO07A]

a sustainability indicator and while the performance score for this indicator is positive (0.28) due to Ireland's relative position compared to the EU, housing affordability remains a pressing concern nationally.

Indicator 2: At risk of poverty rate after rent and mortgage interest

When looking at disposable income after mortgage interest and rent payments¹⁷, the at risk of poverty rate declined from 19.3 per cent in 2020 to 17.9 per cent in 2024. Over the same period, the overall poverty rate fell from 13.2 per cent to 11.7 per cent. This slight improvement in the at risk of poverty rate after housing costs still reflects significant challenges, as it indicates that almost 963,000 people, around one in six of the total population, live below the poverty line because of housing costs.

Furthermore, the CSO's Survey in Income and Living Conditions (SILC) highlight just how significantly housing costs impact on the living standards of renters. This is particularly the case for low-income families who live in accommodation provided by local authorities or receive social housing supports. 21.8 per cent of renters are at risk of poverty, which increases to 40.6 per cent once housing costs are included, with this rate being 43.4 per cent for local authority tenants and 57.3 per cent for those on HAP, RAS and in receipt of rent supplement. These rates compare to an after-housing costs poverty rate of 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, and people with long standing illness or disabilities. At EU-level, the comparable indicator is the housing cost overburden rate, which is discussed above.

Indicator 3: Mortgage Debt Burden

For those who are particularly at risk of homelessness, mortgage debt burden is another critical issue. Borrowers in mortgage arrears for over 10 years represent a significant and growing challenge. As of March 2025, 5,289 home mortgages were in arrears for over a decade (including 4,229 primary dwelling house (PDH) mortgages and 1,060 buy-to-let (BTL) mortgages), an almost 30 per cent decrease from March 2021, when 7,571 mortgages were in arrears (5,416 PDH mortgages and 2,155 BTL mortgages) (Central Bank of Ireland, 2025), thus marking a positive outcome. At the European level¹⁸, Ireland had the fourth-highest rate of arrears on mortgage or rent payments in 2024, at 5.6 per cent, compared to the EU average of 3.1 per cent. Only Greece, Spain and Finland reported higher rates.

These indicators highlight persistent challenges in housing affordability, poverty, and mortgage debt in Ireland, emphasising the disproportionate impact on low-income households, renters, and vulnerable groups.

Environment, Climate & Biodiversity



The indicators selected for this dimension were: **Access to reliable, affordable and sustainable energy sources; Biodiversity loss; Proportion of the population able to keep their homes adequately warm; and Greenhouse Gas Emissions.** This dimension aligns with **SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy, SDG**

¹⁷ <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-silc/surveyonincomeandlivingconditionssilc2024/poverty/>

¹⁸ Eurostat [ILC_MDES06]

11: Sustainable Cities and Communities, SDG 12: Climate Action, and SDG 15: Life on Land. These indicators highlight Ireland's pressing environmental challenges and the need for sustainable, equitable solutions.

Figure 9 presents the performance, equality, and sustainability scores for the key indicators under this dimension, as well as the overall Environment, Climate, and Biodiversity dimension. The results are once again concerning, with both performance (-0.08) and sustainability (-0.08) showing negative trends. The equality score (0.15) suggests more than 90 per cent inequality, indicating a stark divide in environmental outcomes across different demographic groups and insufficient progress in achieving national and international targets.

Indicators for Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Biodiversity Loss both show negative scores in performance and sustainability, highlighting Ireland's continued challenges in transitioning to a sustainable, low-carbon and equitable future. Similarly, Access to Reliable, Affordable, and Sustainable Energy Sources and Proportion of the Population Able to Keep Their Homes Adequately Warm indicators reflect ongoing issues in energy affordability and home heating, particularly for lower-income households. Further details of each indicator are provided below, highlighting the specific gaps and challenges within this dimension.

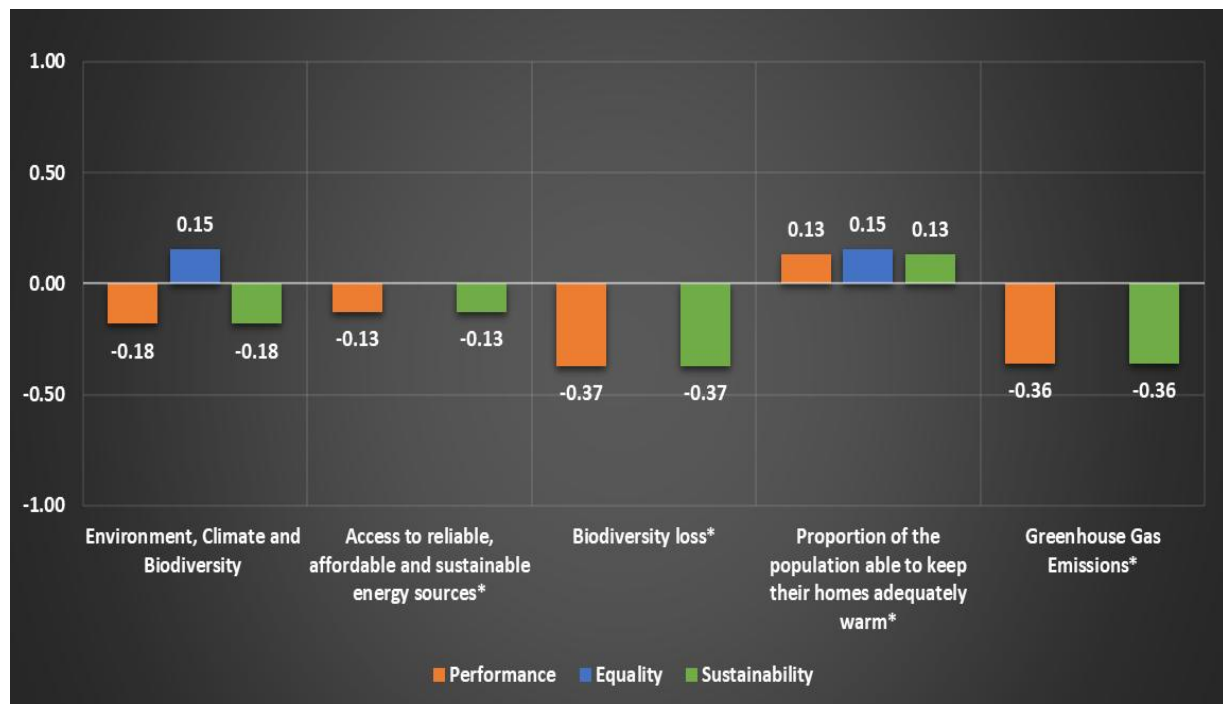


Figure 9: Environment, Climate and Biodiversity dimension and indicators score

Note: *Access to reliable, affordable and sustainable energy sources, Biodiversity loss, Proportion of the population able to keep their homes adequately warm and Greenhouse Gas Emissions are all sustainability indicators

Indicator 1: Access to reliable, affordable and sustainable energy sources

Despite some improvement in the share of renewables during recent years, Ireland's fuel mix for electricity generation remains heavily dependent on carbon-based fossil fuels. In 2023, 40.7 per cent of Ireland's electricity supply came from renewable energy, down slightly from 42 per cent in 2020 (SEAI, 2024; SEAI, 2021). This decline runs contrary to Ireland's national targets to reduce emissions, increase renewable energy production, and eliminate reliance on fossil fuels. Compounding the

challenge, Ireland's dependency on imported fossil fuels has worsened, rising from 72 per cent in 2020 to 82.6 per cent in 2023. At the European level¹⁹, Ireland lags significantly behind other countries. In 2023, the EU average share of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption was 24.55 per cent, with the best-performing countries being Sweden (66.4 per cent) and Finland (50.8 per cent). In contrast, Ireland recorded just 15.25 per cent, far below the EU average and slightly by its annual 2030 target of 16 per cent. Looking ahead, Ireland's overall renewable energy share must rise to 43 per cent by 2030 to meet its ambitious goals. As of 2023, Ireland ranks fourth-last among EU member states for the share of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption. These figures highlight the urgent need for Ireland to accelerate its renewable energy transition.

Indicator 2: Biodiversity loss

In terms of biodiversity, it is interesting to note that Ireland has had the same number of Natura2000 sites (consisting of both Special Protected Areas (SPAs) under the EU Birds Directive and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) under the EU Habitats Directive) between 2015 and 2020 (923,000 hectares). The common and farmland bird indices both improved between 2017 and 2022 (CSO, 2023). While at a European level²⁰, Ireland had the second lowest proportion of Surface of the terrestrial protected areas at 13.9 per cent, which comprised of nationally designated protected areas and Natura 2000 sites (both marine and terrestrial protected areas designated under the EU Habitats and Birds Directives), just ahead of Finland (13.4 per cent) and far below the EU average of 26.1 per cent. The best performing countries are Bulgaria at 41 per cent followed by Slovenia at 40.5 per cent which demonstrate far greater biodiversity protection. Ireland's low proportion of protected areas highlights a critical gap in addressing biodiversity loss.

Indicator 3: Proportion of the population able to keep their homes adequately warm

While the proportion of the population unable to keep their home adequately warm has decreased considerably to 4.9 per cent in 2024 from 7.2 per cent in 2023, it is nevertheless higher from 3.5 per cent recorded in 2020. Internationally²¹, this places Ireland 16th (sharing its ranking with Belgium, Czechia and Croatia) among EU member states and still performing better than the EU average of 9.2 per cent. Luxembourg (2.1 per cent), Finland (2.7 per cent), Poland and Slovenia (3.3 per cent) lead as the best-performing nations in this category.

Within Ireland, sex differences are minimal, with 4.7 per cent of men and 5.1 per cent of women unable to afford adequate warmth. However, disparities become stark when considering age, economic status, education level, and household composition. Children under 17 are disproportionately affected, with 6.1 per cent living in homes unable to maintain adequate warmth. Economic disparities are more pronounced: 10 per cent of unemployed individuals and 11.4 per cent of those unable to work due to long-standing health problems face this issue, compared to just 3 per cent of retirees and 3.6 per cent of employed individuals. Looking at the education levels of the head of the household, we see similar patterns as seen in income inequality and housing affordability, with 5 per cent of those with lower secondary education and 6.3 per cent of those with primary education or below unable to afford warmth, compared to just 3.1 per cent of those with third-level degrees. Household composition shows that lone-parent households (13 per cent) and single-person households (between 4.6 to 9.4 per cent) are most affected, while households with three or more

¹⁹ Eurostat [SDG_07_40]

²⁰ Eurostat [SDG_15_20]

²¹ Eurostat [SDG_07_60]

adults have a much lower rate of 2.2 per cent. Tenure status further reveals that 9.4 per cent of renters or those in rent-free arrangements struggle to afford warmth, compared to just 2.9 per cent of owner-occupied households.

Indicator 4: Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Finally, greenhouse gas emissions present another critical challenge. Between 2019 and 2023, Ireland reduced its greenhouse gas emissions by only 8 per cent, far from the reductions needed to meet climate targets. In terms of international comparability²², Ireland's emissions in 2023 were 11.1 tonnes per capita, the highest among EU member states after Luxembourg (10.6 tonnes per capita) and significantly above the EU average of 6.7 tonnes per capita. Sweden, the best-performing country, recorded just 1.2 tonnes per capita, followed by Romania at 3.0 tonnes per capita. These figures highlight Ireland's ongoing struggle to reduce emissions and transition to a low-carbon economy.

Despite some progress made in the renewable energy, Ireland continues to lag behind its EU peers in critical areas such as greenhouse gas emissions, renewable energy adoption, and biodiversity protection. The disparities in energy poverty further emphasise the need for inclusive, equitable solutions that prioritise vulnerable populations. Addressing these challenges will require bold, sustained policy action and increased investment in sustainable energy and conservation efforts.

Safety and Security



The indicators selected for this dimension were: **Incidences of violence against women and girls; Incidences of racism and/or discrimination; and Persons killed or injured on roads.** This dimension aligns with **SDG 5: Gender Equality, SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities** and **SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.**

Figure 10 presents the performance scores for each of these indicators as well as for the overall Safety and Security dimension. The figure highlights particularly poor outcomes for incidences of violence against women and girls and racism/discrimination, calling for an urgent need for targeted interventions. On the other hand, there has been a slight positive trend in road safety over the years, both nationally and relative to other EU member states. Despite this, the overall performance of the Safety and Security dimension is poor, highlighting ongoing challenges that demand sustained attention and policy action. Each of these indicators are discussed in greater detail below.

Please note: the sustainability and equality aspects are not considered in this dimension, as all the indicators reflect situations that are inherently concerning.

²² Eurostat [SDG_13_10]

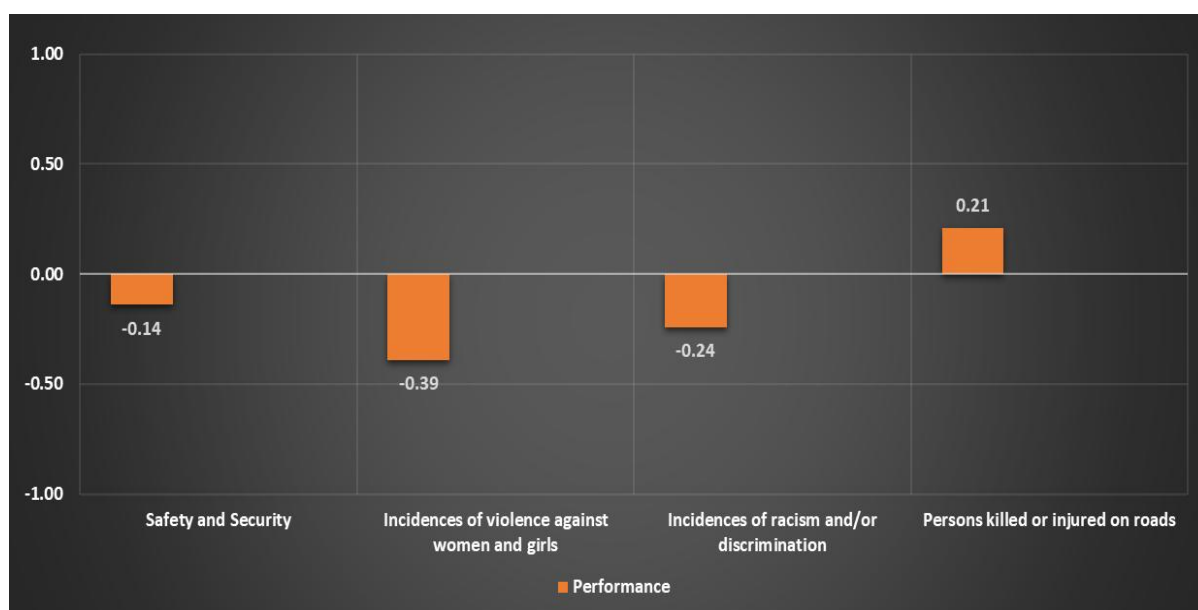


Figure 10: Safety and Security dimension and indicators score

Indicator 1: Incidences of violence against women and girls

The lack of standardised national recording for violence against women and girls remains a significant gap in data availability. However, recorded crime statistics related to sexual offences highlight a worrying trend. Between Q1 2021 and Q2 2025²³, there was a 25 per cent increase in recorded sexual offences, rising from 3,060 to 3,822 cases. While there has been a slight decrease from the previous year (3,331 cases), these figures indicate an overall upward trend.

In a European context²⁴, Ireland performs poorly on violence against women and girls. The EU average for women who have experienced physical (including threats) or sexual violence is 30.7 per cent, while Ireland ranks among the worst-performing countries, with 40.7 per cent of women reporting experiences of violence. Ireland's position in the top eight out of 27 EU countries highlights the scale of the challenge and the critical need for comprehensive measures to prevent and address violence against women and girls effectively.

Indicator 2: Incidences of racism and/or discrimination

The most recent data available on discrimination is from 2024, which reported a 24 per cent increase in the proportion of the population experiencing discrimination between 2019 and 2024. Specific groups reported significantly higher levels of discrimination, including non-Irish nationals, LGBTQ+ individuals, members of religions other than Roman Catholic, and the unemployed.

Racism on the other hand has been rising over the years. Data from the Irish Network Against Racism (INAR) highlights the growing prevalence of racism in Ireland. In 2022, INAR recorded 600 reports of racism, including 190 incidences of discrimination, 223 criminal offences, and 136 cases of hate speech (Michael, Reynolds, & Omid, 2023). This also represents more than 50 per cent increase from 2018, when 390 reports were recorded, comprising 118 incidences of discrimination, 103 criminal offences, and 118 cases of hate speech (Michael, 2019). Despite the limitation posed by the official statistics,

²³ <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-rc/recordedcrimeq12025/>

²⁴ Eurostat [GBV_ANY_AGE]

these figures nevertheless indicate the increasing racism and discrimination in Ireland which undermine safety and social cohesion in Ireland.

Indicator 3: Persons killed or injured on roads

As per the Government's Wellbeing Report, the number of people killed or injured on Ireland's roads has seen a marginal reduction, providing a positive trend in an otherwise concerning dimension. Between 2019 and 2023, the number of road casualties decreased from 7,719 to 7,122 per annum.

Internationally at the European level, Ireland performs well in road safety. As of 2023²⁵, Ireland recorded 34 deaths per million inhabitants, ranking 6th lowest in the EU and performing better than the EU average of 46 deaths per million inhabitants. Sweden (22), Denmark (27), and Malta (30) were the best performing countries.

While the reduction in road fatalities is welcome, the continuous efforts to reduce casualties and promote road safety must remain a concerning priority. Further, incidences of gender-based violence and racism/discrimination highlight significant challenges that require urgent attention. The persistent upward trends in sexual offences and discrimination undermine overall wellbeing and security.

Addressing these issues demands more comprehensive data collection, targeted interventions, and sustained policy focus to improve safety for all members of society.

Work and Job Quality



The indicators selected for this dimension were: **In-work poverty**; **Mean weekly earnings**; and **Number of long-term unemployed**. This dimension aligns with **SDG 1: No Poverty** and **SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth**. These indicators provide insight into Ireland's labour market dynamics, income disparities, and employment challenges, particularly for vulnerable groups.

Figure 11 illustrates the performance and equality scores for key indicators under the Work and Job Quality dimension. While the overall performance score for this dimension is positive (0.39), the equality score (-0.23) indicates continuing and deepening disparities in income and employment outcomes across various demographics. The Number of Long-term Unemployed indicator shows the strongest performance score (0.51), reflecting Ireland's progress in reducing long-term unemployment. However, the equality scores for Mean Weekly Earnings remain concerning, pointing to structural inequalities affecting the labour market. Each indicator is examined in greater detail below, highlighting the challenges and opportunities in this dimension.

²⁵ Eurostat [TRAN_SF_ROADUS]



Figure 11: Work and Job Quality dimension and indicators score

Indicator 1: In-work poverty

Over recent years, there have been slight fluctuations in the proportion of people in employment and at risk of poverty. This rate decreased from 5.1 per cent in 2018 to 4.4 per cent in 2019. However, as mentioned earlier due to changes in the time series, direct comparisons with subsequent years are not possible. In 2020, the rate rose to 6.5 per cent before declining to 5.4 per cent in 2024, based on SILC data, reflecting minimal improvement. These figures highlight a persistent problem: having a job is not, in itself, a guarantee of living in a poverty-free household. Over time poverty figures for the working poor have remained more-or-less static, reflecting a persistent problem with low earnings. In 2024, 140,377 people in employment were still at risk of poverty. This is a remarkable statistic, and it is important that policy better recognises and addresses this problem.

From a European perspective²⁶, Ireland performs better than the EU-27 average of 8.2 per cent, with 5.3 per cent of employed persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion, ranking fifth behind Finland (2.8 per cent), Czechia (3.7 per cent), Belgium (4.3 per cent), and the Netherlands (4.5 per cent). However, the persistence of in-work poverty in Ireland reflects a broader issue of wage adequacy and highlights the importance of policies aimed at introducing living wage and reducing cost of living pressures for low-income workers.

Indicator 2: Mean weekly earnings

There has been a significant improvement in the mean weekly earnings over the past five years, rising from €860.45 in Q1 2021 to €1,026.20 in Q1 2025, a 19 per cent increase. This progress is commendable, as it reflects broader income growth within the labour market. However, significant income disparities persist across sectors. In Q1 2025, workers in the Information and Communications sector earned the highest mean weekly earnings at €1,839.67, while workers in Accommodation and Food Services earned just €436.10. Similarly, those in Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation earned €692.42, highlighting the uneven distribution of earnings across industries.

²⁶ Eurostat [ILC_LI04]

At the European level²⁷, the annual net earnings indicator of a full-time single worker without children earning an average wage provides a useful cross-country comparison. When using purchasing power standards (PPS), a unit adjusted for price differences across countries to reflect real purchasing power, Ireland ranks fifth in the EU-27. In 2024, Irish workers average annual net income was €33,691.43, slightly above the EU average of €28,906.22. The top three performing countries were the Netherlands (€40,948.44), Luxembourg (€37,629.50), and Austria (€37,358.86). While Ireland's relative position is positive, the stark disparities across industries highlight the need for more equitable wage distribution.

Indicator 3: Number of long-term unemployed

While the rate of long-term unemployment (defined as being unemployed for 12 months or more) has improved significantly, declining from 1.7 per cent of the total labour force aged 15 to 74 years in Q1 2021 to 0.9 per cent in Q1 2025 (CSO, 2025), the profile of those who remain long-term unemployed reveals important challenges. Most long-term unemployed individuals are women in the age bracket of 25-54 years. The improvements in the number of long-term employed are very welcome and given the current strength of the labour market, *Social Justice Ireland* believes that major emphasis should be placed on those who are trapped in long term unemployment – particularly those with the lowest education levels. Previous experiences, in Ireland and elsewhere, have shown that many of those under 25 and many of those over 55 find it challenging to return to employment after a period of unemployment.

At European level²⁸, the long-term unemployment rate is measured as a percentage of total unemployment. As of Q1 2025, Ireland's long-term unemployment rate stood at 21.6 per cent, well below the EU average of 31.1 per cent, placing Ireland fifth among EU member states. However, Ireland remains significantly behind the best-performing country, Denmark, where the rate is just 14.1 per cent, highlighting the need for further efforts to address this issue comprehensively.

As shown in Figure 11, Ireland's labour market has achieved positive progress in reducing long-term unemployment and increasing mean weekly earnings. Nevertheless, the persistence of in-work poverty and significant income disparities across industries highlights areas that require closer examination and targeted attention. Policies addressing wage adequacy, ensure equitable income distribution, and support vulnerable groups, particularly the long-term unemployed, are critical for promoting inclusive labour market outcomes. While Ireland performs relatively well in comparison to EU-27 averages, sustained efforts are needed to ensure that economic growth translates into meaningful improvements in job quality and worker wellbeing.

Time Use



The indicators selected for this dimension were: **Long working hours in main job; Commuting Times;** and **Providing at least 20 hours of care per week**. This dimension aligns with **SDG 5: Gender Equality** and **SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth**.

²⁷ Eurostat [EARN_NT_NETFT]

²⁸ Eurostat [LFSQ_UPGAL]

Figure 12 illustrates the performance and equality scores for the key indicators under the Time Use dimension. Overall, the negative score for performance and 0.04 equality scores (indicating almost 100 per cent inequality) displays a concerning picture that suggests deteriorating conditions compared to previous years. We witness a negative performance for reducing long working hours (-0.03) solely because of Ireland's poor international performance along with significant inequalities (-0.28) across sectors, sex, and age groups is evident. Commuting Times continue to show a negative performance (-0.23) and reveal disparities that affect quality of life. The indicator on caregiving responsibilities also presents disparity, with just 0.36 equality score, however, data limitations and the lack of frequent updates reduce the utility of caregiving indicators. Each indicator is explored further below.

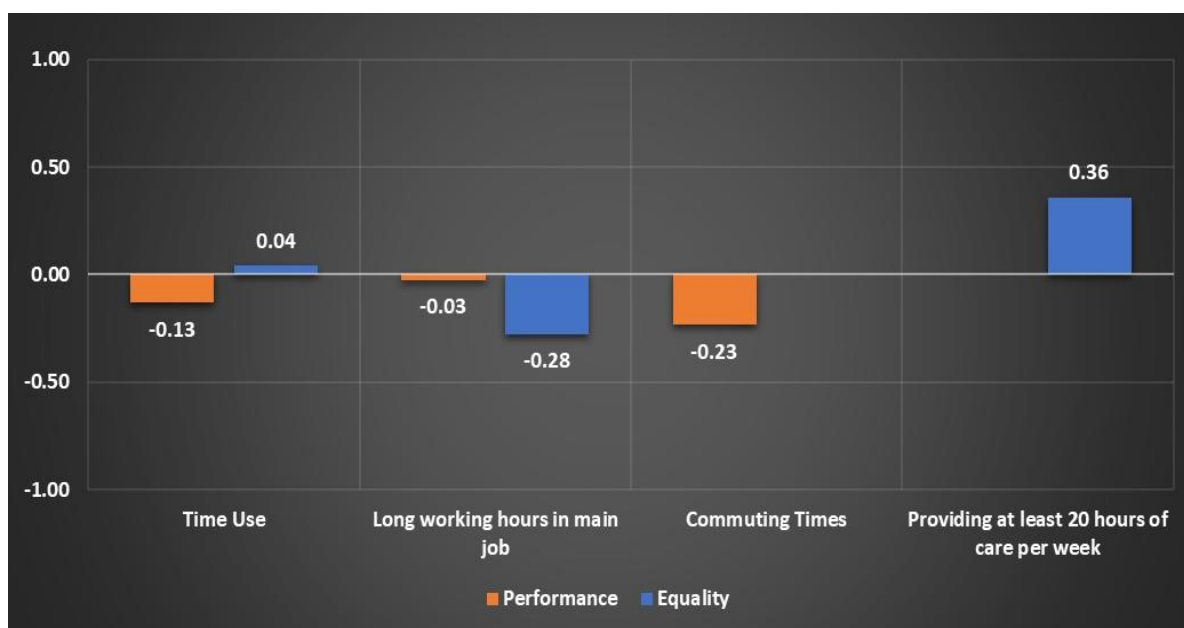


Figure 12: Time Use dimension and indicators score

Indicator 1: Long working hours in main job

The proportion of people in Ireland working long hours (49 hours or more) in their main job decreased from 9 per cent in Q1 2021 to 7.7 per cent in Q1 2025. However, as with other aspects of the labour market included in the Government's Wellbeing Framework, the average proportion conceals significant inequalities across sectors, sex and age groups. While just 4 per cent of those employed in the Human Health and Social Work Activities sector worked long hours, this figure rises dramatically to 41.4 per cent for those in the Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing sector. Similarly, sex disparities are notable: 11.8 per cent of men usually worked 49 hours or more per week in the Q1 2025, compared to 3.2 per cent of women (largely reflecting that many women either work fewer hours or take jobs with reduced hours due to care responsibilities). Age-related differences were also similar, with 15.6 per cent of individuals aged 65-74 years working long hours in comparison to 5.9 per cent of individuals aged 25-34 years. Ireland's overall long working hours rate is higher than the EU average. In 2024²⁹, EU-27 average stood at 6.5 per cent, while Ireland's rate was 7.7 per cent. While the decline in long working hours is welcome, the persistent disparities across demographics and sectors underscore the need for a more nuanced understanding of labour practices and their impact on wellbeing.

²⁹ Eurostat [LFSA_QOE_3A2]

Indicator 2: Commuting Times

In Ireland, the average commuting times have also shown a slight change, rising from 28.2 minutes in 2016 to 29.1 minutes in 2022 (CSO, 2023). Internationally speaking at a European level³⁰, the most recent comparable data is from 2019, when Ireland was joint fourth (alongside Belgium) for average commuting time, at 28 minutes. This is above the EU average of 25 minutes, with the shortest average commuting time recorded in Cyprus, at 19 minutes. While Ireland's commuting time remains longer than average, it is a critical area for analysis given its impact on quality of life and overall wellbeing.

In 2022, on average, males spent longer commuting to work (31.2 minutes) than females (26.9 minutes). Additionally, 11 per cent of commuters spent over an hour travelling to work, with males (13 per cent) more likely than females (8 per cent) to face long commutes. This difference may again reflect underlying societal norms and expectations, where women are often expected to work closer to home to manage caregiving and household responsibilities. Moreover, when looking at age cohorts, a higher proportion of people aged 25 to 34 (12 per cent) travelled for an hour or more to work compared with all other age groups. Among males, the age group with the highest proportion commuting to work for an hour or more was the 35- to 44-year-olds (14 per cent). For female commuters, the age cohort with the highest proportion of long commutes (10 per cent) was younger, 25 to 34 years. Geographic disparities are also notable, with counties bordering Dublin experiencing the longest commutes, particularly Meath, where the average journey time was 35 minutes. Conversely, Galway City recorded the shortest commutes, averaging 23 minutes. (CSO, 2023).

Indicator 3: Providing at least 20 hours of care per week

Another important dimension of time use is highlighted by the indicator on providing at least 20 hours of care per week. This is also used in the Government's Wellbeing report and while this indicator is relevant, its current data limitations undermine its utility. The Irish Health Survey, conducted every six years, provides the most recent data from 2019, but changes in methodology mean it cannot be compared with results from 2015. This low frequency of data collection poses challenges for tracking progress, and the government should consider either increasing the survey frequency or exploring alternative data sources. The available 2019 data reveal significant gendered, age-related, and socioeconomic disparities. 37 per cent of women aged 15 and over provided at least 20 hours of care per week, compared to 23 per cent of men. Older age groups are more likely to provide care, with 51 per cent of individuals aged 75 and over reporting at least 20 hours of caregiving. Socioeconomic disparities are also evident: over 35 per cent of individuals from disadvantaged or very disadvantaged backgrounds provided at least 20 hours of care weekly, compared to 23 per cent of those from affluent backgrounds.

Notably, the Government's Wellbeing Dashboard does not provide data on caregiving at the European level, leaving an important gap in comparative analysis. While the chosen indicator is relevant, its infrequent updates and the lack of international benchmarking hinder its effectiveness in providing actionable insights. Expanding the availability and regularity of this data would significantly enhance its value for policy-making and comprehensive wellbeing analysis.

³⁰ Eurostat [LFSO_19PLWK28]



Connections, Community and Participation

The indicators selected for this dimension were: **Population who feel lonely**; **Access to green / recreational space**; and **Population who have at least two people they can rely on**. This dimension aligns with **SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities**. These indicators reflect the crucial role of social connections, access to nature, and interpersonal trust in fostering community participation and overall wellbeing.

Figure 13 presents the performance, equality, and sustainability scores for the key indicators under this dimension, as well as the overall Connections, Community, and Participation dimension, which shows positive trends. The dimension showcases a relatively higher equality score (0.71) compared to other dimensions, along with considerable improvements in performance (0.54) and sustainability (0.68) overtime.

Both the indicators – the population who feel lonely and the population who have at least two people they can rely on – reveal positive scores for performance aspect indicating modest progress over time. The extremely high equality score for social support indicates that access to trusted relationships is relatively well distributed across demographic groups. However, the equality score of 0.50 for loneliness reveals that certain cohorts such as women, individuals aged 50-64 years, adults living alone, and single parents, experience significantly higher levels of loneliness. However, access to green and recreational space, despite being a vital wellbeing indicator, does not show measurable progress due to a lack of comparable data. Each indicator is examined in greater detail below, highlighting the challenges and opportunities in this dimension.

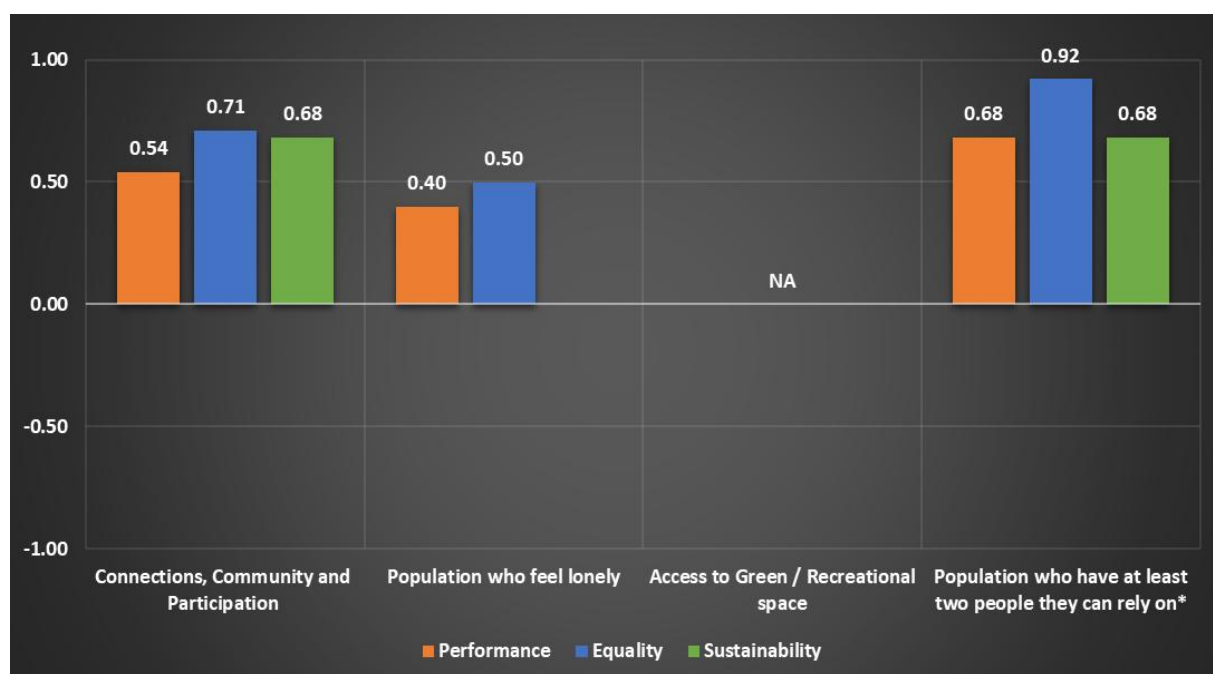


Figure 13: Connections, Community and Participation dimension and indicators score

Note: *Population who have at least two people they can rely on is a sustainability indicator

Indicator 1: Population who feel lonely

According to the CSO³¹, the proportion of the population who reported feeling lonely at least some of the time decreased from 19 per cent in 2020 to 11.4 per cent in 2024. However, disparities persist across demographic groups. Women (13 per cent) reported feeling lonelier than men (9.6 per cent). Within the age range of 16-64 years, individuals aged 50-64 years felt the loneliest (12.2 per cent), while loneliness was less prevalent among those aged 65 years and over (9.5 per cent). Household composition also significantly influenced loneliness levels. Adults living alone or with no other adults in the household reported the highest levels of loneliness: 20.7 per cent of adults of retirement age living alone, 20.9 per cent of adults of working age living alone, and 24.8 per cent of single parents reported feeling lonely at least some of the time. By comparison, households with two adults, at least one aged 65 or older, and households with three or more adults reported significantly lower loneliness rates, at 9.9 per cent and 10.2 per cent, respectively. These results have also decreased compared to 2023, indicating a positive outcome.

Studies on loneliness in Ireland have tended to focus on older people aged 50+ using data from the TILDA study³², and indeed the 2024 CSO Report on this aspect suggests that loneliness increases with age. However as emphasised previously, the learnings in respect of differences in social isolation among people living in urban or rural areas; loneliness by highest education achieved (Ward, May, Normand, Kenny, & Nolan, 2021); and the impact of loneliness on health outcomes and mortality risk (Donovan & Blazer, 2020) (Burns, Leavey, & Ward, 2022), would be worthy of study at a population level.

Indicator 2: Access to green / recreational space

Another crucial indicator of wellbeing is the access to green and recreational spaces. The CSO's *Household Environmental Behaviours – Visits to Nature Areas Report Q3 2021* reports urban green spaces were the most popular type of green and natural space visited by Irish households in Quarter 3 of 2021, with 32 per cent of households visiting most days and a further 34 per cent visiting most weeks. The figure was much higher for urban households with 74 per cent visiting most weeks. Fields, farms and countryside, and woodland or forest areas each witnessed visitation by 31 per cent of households most weeks (CSO, 2021). At a European level, data from the European Environment Agency on urban green spaces places Dublin in the bottom half of EEA countries in terms of total green infrastructure; second for urban green space; and the bottom third for urban tree cover (EEA, 2022). While the data presents a positive picture, the lack of comparable data over time prevents this indicator from being marked as showing progress.

Indicator 3: Population who have at least two people they can rely on

The rate of people in Ireland with at least two people they can rely on was 77 per cent in 2019, according to the Irish Health Survey. However, as shared earlier, the results are incomparable with those from 2015, and the survey is only conducted every six years, further limiting its usefulness for tracking progress. At the EU level³³, the most recent data available is from 2022, when 94.4 per cent of the Irish population reported having at least two people they could count on, compared to the EU average of 88.8 per cent. Ireland ranked tenth, with the top three performers being Portugal (97 per

³¹ [WBB21 - Percentage of individuals emotional well-being indicators](#). Trend only available from 2020 due to break in time series.

³² www.tilda.tcd.ie

³³ Eurostat [ILC_PW07]

cent), Cyprus (96.5 per cent) and Lithuania and Sweden (both 96.2 per cent). Notably, there was minimal variation across age groups, with between 75 and 81 per cent of respondents across all age ranges reporting that they had two or more people they could rely on in times of serious need.



Civic Engagement, Trust, and Cultural Expression

The indicators selected for this dimension were: **Trust in National Government**; **Satisfaction with how democracy works in Ireland**; and **Voter turn-out in National Elections**. This dimension aligns with **SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions**. Collectively, these indicators highlight the resilience of governance and the need to ensure inclusive and participatory decision-making at all levels, alongside the development of effective, accountable, and transparent institutions.

Figure 14 presents the performance and sustainability scores for the key indicators under this dimension, as well as the overall Civic Engagement, Trust, and Cultural Expression dimension. The graph shows marginally positive performance and sustainability scores for the dimension overall.

Among the indicators, Satisfaction with how democracy works in Ireland (0.31), show modest positive performance and sustainability score, largely attributed to Ireland's relatively strong position among EU member states. Trust in National Government also shows marginal positive performance and sustainability scores (0.13). Nevertheless, this is again primarily driven by Ireland's relatively strong position among EU member states rather than an increase in public confidence. Meanwhile, Voter Turnout in National Elections gives a negative score, reflecting a concern regarding declining electoral participation. Each indicator is examined in greater detail below to shed light on these findings.

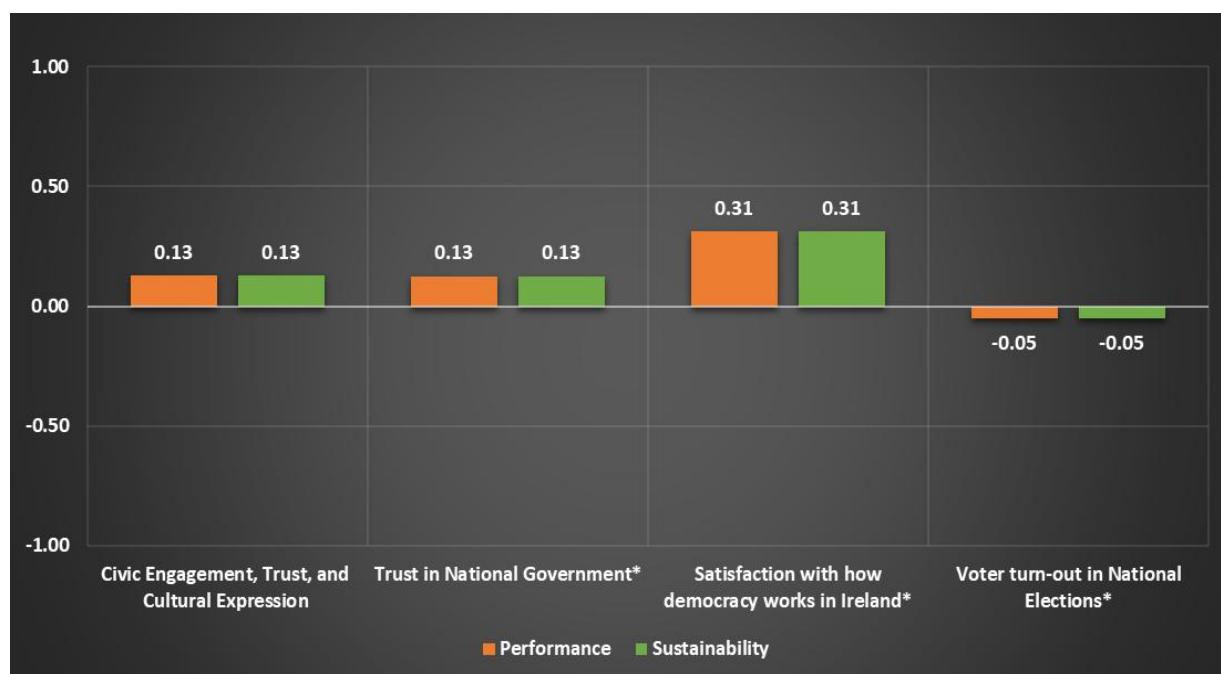


Figure 14: Civic Engagement, Trust, and Cultural Expression dimension and indicators scores

Note: *Trust in National Government, Satisfaction with how democracy works in Ireland, and Voter turn-out in National Elections are sustainability indicators.

Indicator 1: Trust in National Government

In the Eurobarometer Survey conducted in Spring 2023, 50 per cent of respondents in Ireland stated that they trusted the national government, while 49 per cent expressed trust in the national parliament. Conversely, 45 per cent indicated that they tended not to trust the national government, highlighting a split in public perception of governance (European Commission, 2023). By Spring 2025, trust levels had declined further, with only 49 per cent expressing trust in the national government and 46 per cent in national parliament, marking a drop from the previous survey. At the same time, 46 per cent of respondents stated that they did not trust the national government, reflecting growing dissatisfaction (European Commission, 2025).

At the European level³⁴, trust in governance varies widely. Ireland ranks fifth for trust in the national government, tied with Malta. At 36 per cent, the EU-27 average stands significantly lower than Ireland's (49 per cent), with Luxembourg leading at 74 per cent. For trust in national parliaments, Ireland ranks seventh (at 46 per cent), while the EU-27 average is 37 per cent. Denmark is the best-performing country, with 74 per cent of respondents expressing trust in their national parliament. While Ireland's position in these rankings is relatively strong, the downward trend in trust levels over time signals a need for continued focus on strengthening public confidence in governance.

Indicator 2: Satisfaction with how democracy works in Ireland

The Eurobarometer Survey also provides valuable insights into public satisfaction with democracy in Ireland. According to the Spring 2025 Eurobarometer Report, the proportion of people satisfied with how democracy works in Ireland was 79 per cent in Spring 2025, down from 80 per cent in 2024. Although this still represents a high level of satisfaction, the decline reflects concerns about democratic governance and civic processes.

In terms of international comparisons, Ireland ranks fifth among EU member states, with its satisfaction rate significantly above the EU-27 average of 58 per cent. Denmark and Luxembourg lead in this category, with 91 and 89 per cent of respondents expressing satisfaction respectively. While Ireland's position is commendable, the drop in satisfaction highlights the need to address public concerns and strengthen democratic institutions.

Indicator 3: Voter turn-out in National Elections

In terms of the national elections, the voter turn-out presented a less optimistic picture. In the 2024 General Election, voter turnout was 59.7 per cent, marking a decline of 3.2 percentage points compared to the 2020 General Election (62.9 per cent) (Irish Times, 2024; RTE, 2024). This continues a longer-term trend of declining electoral participation, as turnout in the 2016 General Election was 65.1 per cent, representing a cumulative drop of 5.4 percentage points over three election cycles (Oireachtas Library and Research Service, 2020). This steady decline highlights challenges in engaging the electorate and fostering widespread civic participation.

³⁴ <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/api/deliverable/download/file?deliverableId=100145>

Towards a Fairer Future: Key Policy Priorities

The Wellbeing Framework is a valuable tool for guiding Ireland's policy decisions, aiming to improve the quality of life in Ireland by considering social, economic, and environmental factors. However, the Government's current approach treats it as a high-level snapshot rather than a tool for identifying and understanding disparities. By leaving out equality and sustainability, the framework misses the issues that matter most for ensuring fair and lasting progress.

Social Justice Ireland's Alternative Wellbeing Framework seeks to bridge these gaps by incorporating more meaningful indicators that reflect the lived experiences of individuals and diverse groups. It goes beyond aggregate performance scores to reveal disparities in housing affordability, healthcare access, digital literacy, and violence against women and girls, among others. While there is still scope for improvement in methodology and indicators (as the data needs to be available for them), by prioritising equality and sustainability, the Alternative Framework provides a more nuanced picture of Ireland's wellbeing, identifying areas that require targeted policy interventions.

Thus, the key question is how to effectively improve wellbeing. This is where a comprehensive, coherent policy agenda guided by principles of fairness, sustainability, and the common good would be transformative. The social contract must foster societal wellbeing if it is to last. If it fails to do so, it risks a breakdown in the social fabric and a loss of faith in our democratic institutions. *Social Justice Ireland* proposes an integrated policy framework for a new social contract that identifies five key policy outcomes, mentioned below, essential to enhancing wellbeing (Social Justice Ireland, 2025b).

Vibrant Economy



An economy that works for everyone must go beyond headline growth figures. *Social Justice Ireland's* alternative framework shows that economic performance cannot be viewed in isolation from inequalities in housing, healthcare, and job quality. It highlights that in-work poverty, income adequacy, and housing affordability remain critical challenges, despite positive economic trends. Building a vibrant economy means ensuring that economic gains are shared fairly across society.

Decent Services and Infrastructure



Wellbeing requires more than income – it demands access to quality services, such as healthcare, housing, and education. Our alternative framework exposes gaps in healthcare access, long waiting lists, and housing stress that disproportionately affect low-income households, renters, and other disadvantaged groups. Addressing these gaps through equitable public services is essential for fostering resilience and improving wellbeing.

Just Taxation



Ensuring that everyone pays their fair share is central to funding public services and reducing inequality. The alternative framework highlights income inequality and the need for progressive taxation policies that support social infrastructure to enhance wellbeing.

Good Governance



Trust in institutions is a cornerstone of societal wellbeing. Our alternative framework includes indicators like trust in government and satisfaction with democracy, revealing a decline in public confidence. Without transparent, accountable governance, policies aimed at improving wellbeing will lack public buy-in. Strengthening civic engagement and trust in institutions is key to a functioning democracy that serves all citizens.

Sustainability



As demonstrated in this report, long-term wellbeing cannot be achieved without policies that address social, economic, and environmental sustainability in a holistic and integrated manner, recognising that wellbeing must be long-lasting, maintained across generations and shared equitably.

Each of these five key policy outcomes can be achieved with a new social contract that prioritises wellbeing. It is not enough to make progress in three or even four of the five, while neglecting other areas. All five areas for attention must be worked on simultaneously. It is not a question of getting the economy right and everything else will follow. Such a narrow perspective has led to a cycle of boom-and-bust economics that ignores the long-term wellbeing of society.

The *Sustainable Progress Index*, developed and published annually by *Social Justice Ireland*, further emphasises the need to measure progress in a way that accounts for social, economic, and environmental sustainability, ensuring that no group is left behind in the pursuit of wellbeing. Ireland faces critical challenges in housing, healthcare, income inequality, and climate action, which require bold and transformative policies (Clark, Kavanagh, & McGeedy, 2025). The Alternative Wellbeing Framework provides a comprehensive measure to assess where we are, identify key issues, and determine whether the progress made is inclusive and sustainable. This approach ensures that wellbeing improvements enhance life in Ireland, particularly for those who are most vulnerable.

As Ireland continues to embed the Wellbeing Framework in its policymaking processes, it is essential to prioritise equity, inclusion, and long-term sustainability. By adopting a more comprehensive and nuanced approach to wellbeing measurement, policymakers can ensure that Ireland’s progress is both resilient and inclusive, paving the way for a fairer and more just society.

As a starting point, the following policy recommendations linked to the outcomes for a renewed social contract would make a significant difference in improving Ireland’s Wellbeing:

Vibrant Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the widespread adoption of the Living Wage. • Introduce Refundable Tax Credits and support low paid workers through the Tax Credits System. • Plan for projected labour market changes and social insurance fund shortfalls.
Decent Services and Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set a target of 20 per cent of all housing stock in Ireland to be social housing. • Enhance the process of planning and investment so that the healthcare system can cope with the increase and diversity in population and the ageing of the population projected for the coming decades. • Invest in capacity building for communities. • Establish an expert social infrastructure and community planning forum.
Just Taxation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publish an Annual Resourcing Statement. • Set a new tax-take target on a per-capita basis to ensure long-term fiscal stability. • Provide an Annual Review of Tax Expenditures to ensure transparency and accountability. • Introduce a Minimum Effective Corporate Tax Rate of 15 per cent for large firms.
Good Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequately resource the Public Participation Network (PPN) structures for participation at Local Authority level. • Establish a Dialogue Forum in Every Local Authority involving the LA and the PPN. • Establish a social dialogue process at regional and national level.
Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate climate adaptation and natural capital accounting into the annual budgetary process and our national accounting systems. • Integrate green budgeting and social impact assessment of all climate proposals into the policy making process. • Apply the principle of the ‘common good’ to public investment into climate research and development.

For greater detail on the policy recommendations, please see *Social Justice Ireland’s* annual [Socio-Economic Review](#).

Appendix 1

This page lays out the methodology described in the Government's *Understanding Life in Ireland: The Well-being Framework 2023* (page 39 and 40). The following content is a verbatim excerpt from the report:

Note: Throughout and across all methods, performance is relative compared to previous performance and other countries' performance. For example, General Government Wealth remains negative (-€108.3 billion). However, over the last five years this figure has improved by almost 25% which is the basis of positive assessment over time.

Progress

Progress measurement is the average of 1) the percentage change over time (approximately 5 years, depending on data availability) and 2) a measure of international comparison.

International comparison measures the difference between Ireland's position (X_{ie}) and the average (\bar{X}) in comparison with the best performing country (X_{bc}) and the average:

$$\text{International comparison} = \frac{X_{ie} - \bar{X}}{X_{bc} - \bar{X}}$$

Where trend is not available, the international comparison measure is used on its own (and vice versa).

Therefore, where performance is 1, this means there was 100% improvement in the indicator over c. 5 years and/or Ireland is the best performing country. Where performance is 0 this means that there was no change over the last 5 years and/or Ireland's score is the same as the average. Where performance is -1, this means there was 100% deterioration in the indicator over c. 5 years and/or Ireland is the worst performing country.

Practical Example: Healthy Life Years

Healthy Life Years reduced slightly over the period 2015 to 2020 by 1.5% (or - 0.015).

Ireland is above the EU average by 2.2 years. By comparison, the top performer is above the EU average by 8.7 years: $2.2/8.7=0.25$.

Therefore, the average is $(-0.015+0.25)/2 = 0.12$

Equality

Equality measurement is 1 minus the average percentage difference of the best and worst performing groups for each indicator available on the CSO's Wellbeing Hub. Therefore, if there was perfect equality across groups the result would be 1. Where the average difference is greater than 100%, then the score is negative.

Practical Example: School-aged children who reported being happy with their life

91.1% of male school aged children who reported being happy with their life at present, compared to 85.6% of female children – this is a percentage difference of 6.2%.

88.6% of traveller children reported being happy with their life at present (the highest performing group) compared to 83.5% of children with a disability – this is a percentage difference of 5.8%.

The average of the two $(0.062+0.058)/2$ resulted in an average of 6% (or 0.06).

This can be read as 6% inequality, or 94% equality $(1-0.06=0.94)$.

Sustainability

Sustainability is the progress scores for those indicators that have been tagged as sustainable. For any dimension that contains sustainability indicators, an average of sustainability indicators can be compared to the performance of all of the indicators.

Practical Example: Environment, Climate and Biodiversity:

Indicators	Performance	Sustainability
Pollution, Grime or Other Environmental Problems	-0.037	
Water Bodies assessed as High or Good	-0.077	-0.077
Greenhouse gas emissions	-0.469	-0.469
Waste generated	-0.303	-0.303

Performance Calculation: $([-0.037] + [-0.077] + [-0.469] + [-0.303])/4 = -0.221$

Sustainability Calculation: $([-0.077] + [-0.469] + [-0.303])/3 = -0.283$

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This project has been part-funded by Coalition 2030, an alliance of 70+ civil society organisations from the international aid, domestic anti-poverty and equality, environment and trade union sectoral pillars working to ensure that Ireland keeps its promise to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, both at home and abroad.

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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