



Strategic Plan

2026-2030



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Why *Social Justice Ireland*? Context and Response

Social Justice Ireland is one of the leading voices championing a more just, fair and equal society. It is an entirely independent research and policy development think-tank. For many years *Social Justice Ireland* has been a leading bulwark against injustice and a force for progressive change in Ireland. Through forensic research, tireless advocacy and by diligently holding successive governments to account, *Social Justice Ireland* has worked to protect the rights of the most vulnerable in our society. This work takes on an added urgency as we face into the challenging period ahead.

The Context for *Social Justice Ireland*'s Strategic Plan 2026-2030

Ireland is in a privileged position with strong GDP, GNI* and employment figures, while the exchequer has seen unprecedented levels of corporate windfall revenue in recent years. The potential risk of external shocks to the economy has implications for our corporate tax-take in the longer term. This requires planning for a sustainable tax-take and wise investment of available funds into infrastructure and services to embed resilience. Notwithstanding potential risks, the Irish economy is in a strong and stable position. Yet the social dividend from this economic success has not reached everyone. We have failed to adequately build on recent years of economic growth and revenues to put a social floor of adequate income and services in place for everyone.

Looking to the future, Ireland is going through several major transitions, each of which is only going to deepen with time. Four mega-trends have been identified known as the four Ds: decarbonisation, digitalisation, deglobalisation, and demographic change. They represent transformations in how our society and economy function: the way Irish people live and work and support ourselves and care for our families, are all changing rapidly. Climate change is already taking its toll on both our natural environment and human society. The digital and deglobalisation transitions are gaining momentum and are already restructuring our economy and the way we work. Risks associated with deglobalisation have been exacerbated by shifts in global trade arising from a sea-change in longstanding trade policy in the USA. Demographic change is already having a significant impact on the demand and delivery of social services and infrastructure, and this is set to expand in the years ahead.

At the same time, while much is changing, many of the problems facing our society are longstanding: inequality, poverty, and under-investment in our social services and infrastructure remain major challenges. Although the economy in Ireland has experienced record growth in recent years, infrastructure and services are far below the levels and standards that would be expected in a normally functioning society. Our housing crisis is growing deeper and the gap between those who have and those who never had, widens every day. Our health system is overwhelmed with thousands on waiting lists and all across the country our rural communities are in decline. Developments in areas such as taxation, participation and sustainability fall below the minimum standards. In the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic and Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine, a cost-of-living crisis eroded income gains, particularly for low- and middle-income households. Meanwhile every day we continue to blindly ignore our commitment to protect our environment.

The scale of change has been underestimated and so, poorly managed to date. At every turn, there are examples of failures of public policy to provide the infrastructure required to keep pace with

population growth. This failure has been compounded by rising unplanned immigration, providing a convenient scapegoat for the systemic pressures being widely experienced. These infrastructure deficits are further compounded by difficulties in recruiting and retaining key personnel to deliver expanded and more specialised public services across health and education, policing and defence, caring and public administration. Taken together, these developments have resulted in a widespread sense of dissatisfaction and frustration on the part of many.

The upshot of all this is that the traditional social contract upon which we have built our society is becoming redundant. We are wealthier than at any time in our history, and yet almost 630,000 people are living below the poverty line, 190,000 of whom are children, and over 16,000 people have been forced to resort to emergency homeless accommodation. We would be naïve to believe that this will not have consequences for the social fabric. In Ireland, and across the world, anger and fear have given rise to an aggressive politics of hostility and exclusion. If existing problems, many of which are already at crisis level, are left unresolved, they risk exacerbating the negative consequences of the social, economic, technological and environmental transitions underway.

Social Justice Ireland's Response

At the heart of *Social Justice Ireland's* analysis is a question of fairness. Our analysis of the five Budgets of the previous term of Government (2020-2025) found that the cumulative impact of budgetary policy was ultimately regressive: when the temporary measure applied during that period fell away, those on higher incomes benefitted most from changes to taxation and benefits between 2020 and 2025. The decision to allocate substantial resources to the wealthy rather than the poorest in our society is plainly unfair. This is the background for *Social Justice Ireland's* continued focus on fairness over the period of the next five years of this strategic plan.

Social Justice Ireland is fundamentally concerned with the distribution of our society's resources and how they can best be deployed to cultivate the conditions by which each person's needs are met and each person's full participation in society is supported.

Building a resilient and just society requires a robust and adequately resourced social infrastructure, decent and accessible services, a fair economy in which the benefits of prosperity are shared, and an adequate social protection system.

Now is the time to take radical action to lay the foundations for a sustainable, inclusive and socially just republic. This requires insightful value-laden analysis of the challenges facing our society; a critique of the existing policy framework and model of development; an alternative vision for the future; and practical policy recommendations to make that alternative a reality. This is the mission of *Social Justice Ireland*.

Social Justice Ireland's work is designed specifically to ensure that the choices society makes are rooted in the core values of justice, equality and inclusion, and are based on the rigorous application of evidence-based research.

Through a mixture of authoritative research, rigorous analysis of government policy and the development of fully-tested and fully-costed initiatives, *Social Justice Ireland* identifies the root causes of inequality and injustice and offers effective and lasting solutions to those problems.

Most importantly, our work is independent, transparent and free from outside influence or political agenda.

Social Justice Ireland interrogates, informs and inspires every section of our government, our institutions and our communities, enabling the choices we make about our society to be made in a more deliberative process.

Armed with the forensic research and analysis provided by *Social Justice Ireland*, issues and positions can be argued and discussed based on the available evidence rather than based on assertions of those who happen to be powerful.

Our singular, painstaking and relentless focus on justice and equality has enabled *Social Justice Ireland* to become one of the most powerful and trusted forces for social change in modern Irish history

Our Vision

Social Justice Ireland understands justice as a harmony that comes from fidelity to right relationships between people, institutions and the environment.

Social Justice Ireland envisages a just and sustainable society where human rights are respected, human dignity is upheld, human development is promoted and the environment is respected and protected.

Our Mission

At the heart of *Social Justice Ireland's* mission is a commitment to fairness and the common good. Our fundamental concern is with the distribution of our society's resources and how they can best be deployed to cultivate the conditions by which each person's needs are met, each person's full participation in society is supported, and sound stewardship of our environment is fostered.

We work to build a just and sustainable society by:

- **Researching** to produce coherent, independent, evidence-based social analysis which:
 - addresses the structural causes of injustice, whether these be economic, political, cultural or social,
 - provides a critique of current policy and articulates an alternative vision,
 - promotes core societal values of human dignity, sustainability, equality, human rights and the common good, and
 - identifies policy pathways towards a just and sustainable society.
- **Influencing** public policy by:
 - **communicating** our analysis and that of others, to inform the public, academia, politics, and civil society.

- **advocating** for a just and sustainable society with all relevant local, national and international policy makers, and
 - **engaging** with all policy making advisory forums and consultations.
- **Empowering** other societal actors, by:
 - sharing our policy analysis,
 - building civil society capacity to engage with policymaking and the budget process, and
 - by working in partnership with citizens, organisations and institutions who share our goals.
- **Organising** a modern, efficient, financially sustainable, and regulatory compliant charitable organisation

Our Values

- **Excellence:** We will be a centre of excellence, credible and effective in all that we do.
- **Leadership:** We will be visionary about an achievable sustainable future, unwavering in pursuit of our goals, while remaining responsive and adaptive to the evolution of the political, policy or public opinion environment.
- **Collaboration:** We will engage and respond in a spirit of dialogue with all societal actors. We will speak in a language appropriate to particular audiences, and draw on the work and experience of our members.
- **Independence:** We will be independent in our mission, research and analysis of policy

Our Seven Core Rights

The development and recognition of human rights has been one of the great achievements of the 20th century. In the 21st century, human rights have moved beyond civil and political rights to embrace social, economic and cultural rights. In this context, *Social Justice Ireland* believes that every person has seven core rights that should be part of any vision of the future:

- the right to sufficient income to live life with dignity
- the right to meaningful work
- the right to appropriate accommodation
- the right to relevant education
- the right to essential healthcare
- the right to real participation, and
- the right to cultural respect.

Policy decisions should be moving towards the achievement of each of these rights. Care should be taken that decisions are not moving society or the economy in the opposite direction.

Our Statement of Strategy and Theory of Change

Social Justice Ireland's function is to critique present socio-economic outcomes and existing public policy against our values and alternative vision of a just society, with the aim of seeing our proposed policy change implemented, thus moving us closer to a just society.

Social Justice Ireland distinguishes between short-term and long-term analysis and action. Our response to the short-term requires a focused critique of specific areas of policy together with targeted policy proposals. Our response to the long-term requires a critique of the present socio-economic paradigm and approach to public policy and the articulation of an alternative vision for Irish society and the development of a new social contract.

In this sense, *Social Justice Ireland's* mission is clear. How to achieve this is the critical question of strategy.

Our Theory of Change

Our Theory of Change has as its foundation *Social Justice Ireland's* ABC model of analysis.

- A. What is our understanding of the present social, economic, political and cultural context?
- B. What is the vision of the sustainable and socially just future to which we aspire?
- C. What policy initiatives should be pursued to get us there?

Social Justice Ireland cannot directly implement policy, we must persuade those who can. Our Theory of Change is based on the conviction that rigorous evidence-based social analysis, when effectively communicated, can influence public policy making. In this, we target both the political and civil servant levels, as well as the media and civil society in order to contribute to the public discourse.

Influence is diffuse in an open political system, the factors that go into policy making are multi-varied. Pathways to contribute to the policymaking milieu are likewise varied.

Therefore, *Social Justice Ireland's* strategic aim is to be able make the argument with the critical decision-makers who matter at the ministerial and civil servant level.

To do so we must cultivate points of access and opportunities for engagement. Therefore, *Social Justice Ireland's* strategic activities are Policy Analysis and Policy Influence.

Policy Analysis

- We will undertake social analysis, critique public policy and develop new policy proposals.

Policy Influence

- Promoting our analysis in a diffuse political system requires that we:

- Advocate with policy-makers,
- Engage with policy-making advisory processes, and
- Shape the public discourse, by:
 - Educating and persuading the public – via the old and new media;
 - Educating and persuading special interest groups – via direct engagement and indirect engagement through the old and new media;
 - Empowering civil society to better engage with public policy making processes.

Therefore, we will set two strategic targets and three key actions to influence public policy:

Strategic Target 1: Increase our access and engagement

Key Action: Cultivate points of access and opportunities for engagement with decision-makers.

Strategic Target 2: Shape the conversation to feed into political decision-making

Key Action: Engage in the public discourse via the media to share our analysis, critique government policy, raise new ideas in the public square, keep key issues on the political agenda, and promote our policy proposals and values.

Key Action: Engage in discourse with other actors in civil society to shape and consolidate the issues and proposals being fed into the civil service and political sphere.

Each year, we will develop a comprehensive annual plan that gives expression to this strategic plan which sets out specific operational targets, concrete actions and indicators of progress.

In determining priorities in our annual plans, we will distinguish between the strategic value of the range activities open to us by applying the following categories in our planning:

- Mission Critical
- Mission Supportive, and
- Mission Neutral.

Our Strategic Goals for 2026-2030

Research and Policy Analysis

Goal 1: To produce coherent, independent, evidence-based social analysis and prepare feasible policy proposals consistent with a just and sustainable society.

For the duration of this strategic plan the framework underlying our analysis will be the following:

A Vibrant Economy	Decent services & Infrastructure	Just taxation	Good governance	Sustainability
Financial stability and sustainable economic growth	Quality accessible services & social infrastructure	An adequate tax-take closer to EU average	Open transparent & accountable structures	Increased environmental protection
Secure employment with good condition, & decent wages	Adequate public investment and population based planning	Increased equity in taxation & reduced income inequality	Social dialogue with all sectors in deliberative process	New indicators of progress & new Satellite National Accounts
A more just economic structure	Minimum social floor	Broader tax base	Real participation & deliberative democracy	Climate Justice and a Just Transition
Harness the digital revolution	Realise seven Social, Economic & Cultural rights	Good tax governance	Reformed policy and budget evaluation	Balanced regional development

To achieve this goal, we will:

- Underpin policy proposals with robust, evidence-based research.
- Undertake, commission and tender for high quality research, which adds to the evidence base at a national and international level. We will:
 - Publish an annual *Socio-Economic Review*, an annual *National Social Monitor* and regular *Policy Briefings* on relevant topics
 - Lead a Budget project which includes the *ex ante* analysis and *ex post* critique of Government's annual Budget
 - Organise a regular social policy conference on a relevant topic with broad participation from across a wide range of sectors

- Undertake policy analysis and develop proposals in relation to poverty and employment, income distribution and taxation, sustainable development and a Just Transition, and wellbeing metrics
- To improve our policy analysis and policy development processes and practice.
- To strengthen our strategic foothold in budgetary, poverty and income distribution, and taxation policy.
- To play a greater role in the emerging focus on a Just Transition.

Influencing – Communicating, Advocacy and Engaging

Goal 2: To influence public policy by communicating our analysis and policy proposals to inform the public, academia and politics, to advocate for a just and sustainable society with all relevant local, national and international policy makers and social partners, and engage with all policy making advisory forums and consultations.

To achieve this goal, we will:

- Be an effective, coherent, credible and respected voice in all that we do.
- Present an achievable message in language that can be espoused by others.
- To improve our advocacy and communication processes.
- Refine and resource a communications strategy focused on increasing our impact on policy and being the 'go to' voice on social justice.
- Continue to publish policy analysis through a range of media, from academic publications, to social media platforms, podcasts, and appearances on national and local media on topical issues.
- Identify strategies to achieve a wider and longer dissemination of our core bodies of work.
- Develop campaigns around achievable outcomes.
- Engage with Government and other relevant bodies on policy issues as appropriate.
- To secure and maintain representation on a range of public stakeholder policymaking and advisory forums.
- To cultivate relationships with key policymaking stakeholders.
- Facilitate events in support of these strategic objectives.

Empowerment

Goal 3: To empowering other societal actors, by sharing our policy analysis, building civil society capacity to engage with policymaking and the budget process, and by working in partnership with citizens, organisations and institutions which share our goals.

To achieve this goal, we will:

- Retain and deepen our strategic partnerships with a number of civil society and social partner organisations.
- Take a leading role in supporting the community and voluntary sector with policy analysis and development of policy proposals.
- Strengthen our involvement with European and international Networks.
- Educate and train people in social justice policy so that they can play an effective role in policy analysis and development, in particular by delivering the MA in Social Justice and Public Policy programme in conjunction with South East Technological University.
- Support the development of Public Participation Networks and strengthen their capacity to engage with policymaking and the budget processes at the Local Authority level.
- Promote a spirituality of justice that supports and underpins the development of our vision of a just society.

Organisational Development

Goal 4: To improve our organisational efficiency and ensure the long term organisational and financial sustainability of *Social Justice Ireland*

To achieve this goal, we will:

- Maintain a cohort of highly qualified salaried staff, with complementary skill sets, to carry out our work.
- Avail of the support of volunteer specialists to contribute to our work.
- Ensure we operate to best practice in human resource management.
- Enhance our productivity by increasing our technical expertise and exploiting technological developments.
- Develop a fund, as a percentage of the overall salary bill, to support continuous professional development for staff.
- Secure sufficient and sustainable funding to ensure we can roll out our plans for 2026-2030 and beyond:

- To review all funding streams to ensure we are maximising potential income
 - Seek to increase our paying membership
 - Maintain and develop ongoing financial support from the religious orders and congregations
 - Seek funding for specific policy analysis projects
 - Continue to explore avenues to develop new streams of income
 - Leverage staff competencies and experience to deliver values-aligned revenue outcomes
- Better cultivate and engage with our membership.
 - Ensure that *Social Justice Ireland* is a model of good practice in all areas of governance, including training as relevant, for all new or existing Board members to assist in the discharge of their duties.
 - Continue to host an Advisory Academic Council which will meet from time to time to advise the Board on research and related matters being undertaken by the organisation.
 - Retain offices appropriate to the delivery of this Strategic Plan.
 - Continually monitor and evaluate the output and impact of the work undertaken by the organisation to enable us to be more accountable to members, donors and supporters and to demonstrate impact.
 - Produce an annual report setting out what we have achieved under our various goals.

Our Core Policy Expertise

Social Justice Ireland provides analysis across eleven policy areas, bringing to bear the core value of fairness and a focus on the deployment of resources in our analysis. Based on our analysis, we articulate policy objectives for each policy areas. We will continue to undertake analysis that integrates all areas of policy with a focus on policy coherence, sustainable development and wellbeing.

Over the next five years, *Social Justice Ireland* will prioritise four areas of policy for focused analysis and endeavour to develop insightful policy proposals. The four priority areas are: Poverty and Income Distribution; Taxation; Work and Employment; Sustainability and a Just Transition.

Priority Areas

Poverty and Income Distribution

To provide a sufficient income to live life with dignity. This would require enough income to provide a minimum floor of social and economic resources in such a way as to ensure that no person in Ireland

falls below the threshold of social provision necessary to enable him or her to participate in activities that are considered the norm for society generally.

Taxation

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

Work and Employment

To ensure that all people have access to meaningful work.

Sustainability and Just Transition

To ensure that all development is socially, economically and environmentally sustainable, and to promote a Just Transition.

Other Areas

Housing and Accommodation

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

Healthcare

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

Education

To provide relevant education for all people throughout their lives, so that they can participate fully and meaningfully in developing themselves, their community and the wider society.

Public Services

To ensure the provision of, and access to, a level of public services regarded as acceptable by Irish society generally.

People and Participation

To ensure that every person has a genuine voice in shaping the decisions that affect them and that every person can contribute to the development of society. In this context, to ensure that all people from different cultures are welcomed in a way that is consistent with our history, our obligations as world citizens and with our economic status.

Rural and Regional Development

To achieve balanced regional development, with a particular emphasis on providing the sustainable public services and employment opportunities required. To secure the existence of substantial

numbers of viable communities in all parts of rural Ireland where every person would have access to meaningful work, adequate income and social services, and where infrastructure needed for sustainable development would be in place.

The Global South

To ensure that Ireland plays an active and effective part in promoting sustainable development in the Global South and to ensure that all of Ireland's policies are consistent with such development. At all times seek to inculcate the core values of human dignity, sustainability, equality, human rights and the common good in all public policy decisions and to promote structures which enable these values to be developed in public policy.

Our Priorities for 2026-2030

Working with other organisations, *Social Justice Ireland* aims to influence public policy to create a new society and economy that respects people and the environment, and in which everyone has a share in our nation's prosperity. By putting the common good at the heart of public policy we can harness the benefits of our strong economic position to deliver the transformative change required to build a thriving Ireland for all. Our priorities are:

The Common Good and a New Social Contract

To develop a new social contract that prioritises the conditions necessary to foster the common good, to protect the vulnerable and to develop a better future for all. This should be underpinned by seven basic economic, social and cultural rights: sufficient income to live life with dignity; meaningful work; appropriate accommodation; relevant education; essential healthcare; cultural respect; and real participation in society.

Poverty and Social Exclusion

To end poverty by revising our welfare and tax systems and developing methods of providing every person with a sustainable income. For much of the hundred years since our independence, Ireland has struggled to escape grinding economic stagnation, deprivation and forced emigration. But the economic transformation of our country over the past 30 years, imperfect and uneven though it has been, has brought about prosperity unparalleled in our history. We must now take the next step in the transformation of our society to end poverty and social exclusion. This requires ambitious anti-poverty targets, indexation of social welfare rates, a living wage, and a recognition of all forms of work.

Resourcing our Future

To harness the wealth at our disposal to adequately resource our social services and infrastructure to meet the demand of a growing and ageing population. To do so by broadening the tax base and securing sustainable, recurring revenue sources. We must be clear about what types of services and infrastructure deficits presently exist, and what types of services and infrastructure people and communities will need in the future, how much this will cost, and how this will be funded. This requires

a new tax-take target, an annual review of tax expenditures and reform of taxation in the interests of fairness and sustainability.

Infrastructure and Services for Vibrant and Resilient Communities

To invest in well designed, accessible and well-resourced services and infrastructure to foster vibrant and resilient communities. Despite the economic gains of the last three decades or so, substantial deficits remain in areas such as housing, water, healthcare, public transport and energy. An end to homelessness, increased participation, a better standard of living, and communities with the capacity to adapt to change are among the benefits of decent services and infrastructure. This requires an increase in social housing, enhanced planning and investment in healthcare to serve the needs of an ageing population, and investment in capacity building for our communities.

The Environment and a Just Transition

To significantly reduce our carbon emissions and to restore and enhance our natural environment, while leaving no people, communities, economic sectors or regions behind as we transition to a low carbon future. Climate change is one of the most pressing challenges we face. How we adapt, mitigate and manage this transition will, in large part, determine the type of world in which future generations will live. When adapting to meet this challenge, we must also grasp the opportunity to address social and economic challenges that already exist. This requires that climate adaptation and natural capital accounting be integrated into the annual budgetary process and our national accounting systems, that green budgeting and social impact assessment of climate proposals are part of the policy making process, that investment is especially targeted at rural communities.

Strengthening Our Democracy Through Participation

To enhance participation in our communities and our democracy. A coarsening of public discourse, alienation from the political process, increased aggression and the rise of hard right sentiment have highlighted how anxiety about the negative consequences of change is already affecting our communities. Deepening participation, particularly at local level, is essential. This requires adequately resourced Public Participation Networks (PPN) for participation at Local Authority level, greater dialogue at Local Authority level, and an enhanced social dialogue process at national level.