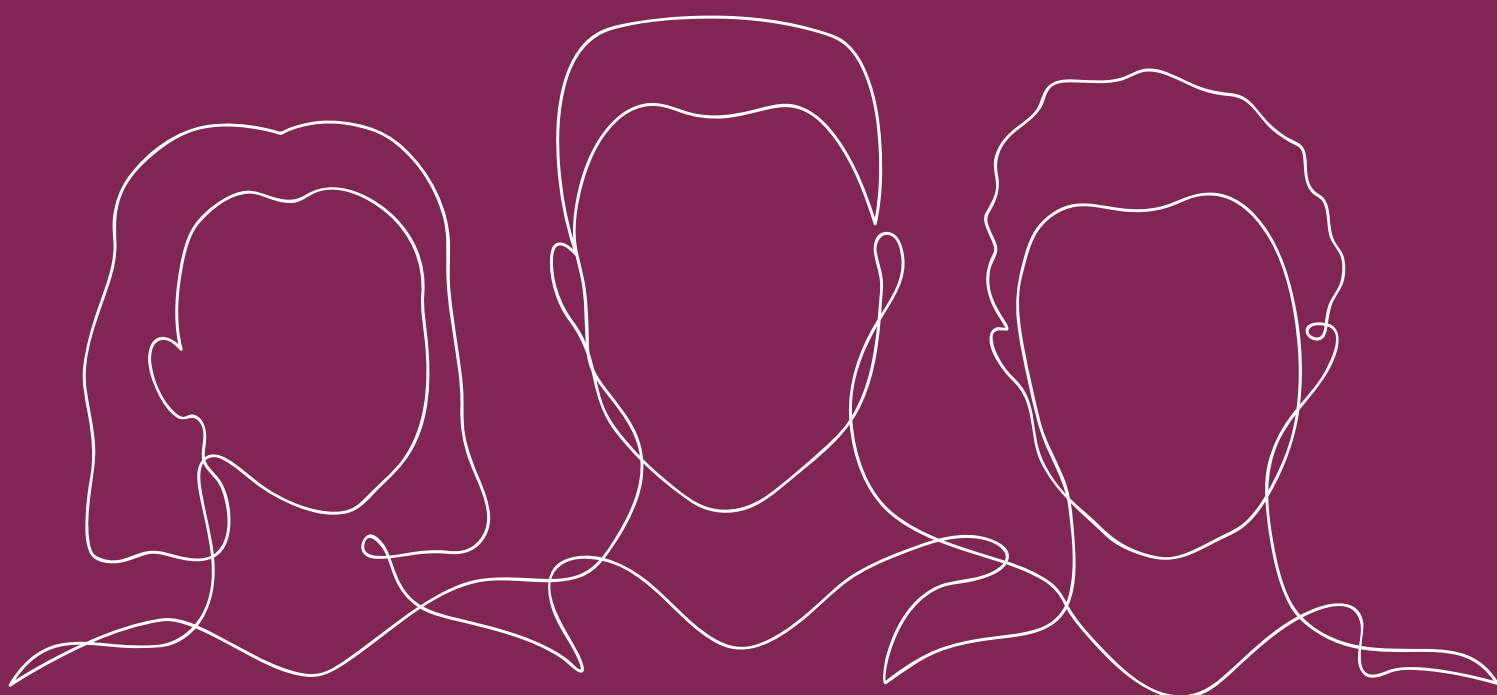


EAPN IRELAND POVERTY WATCH 2021

Achieving Equality in a Time of Recovery: Addressing poverty in Ireland in a post-pandemic society



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Poverty and social exclusion remain key challenges in Europe, and are likely to worsen due to the current crisis. Even before the crisis hit, the positive developments of the preceding period were offset by certain areas of concern arising from uneven developments in income distribution, including increasing depth of poverty.”

- 2020 SPC annual review of the Social Protection Performance Monitor (SPPM) and developments in social protection policies



If 2020 can be described as the year of a dawning international emergency in the form of the COVID-19 pandemic, then 2021 could be described as the year of managing and implementing a COVID-19 recovery.

The recovery period from COVID-19 is expected to last well into 2022 and beyond, with the reverberations from the pandemic likely to be experienced for a long time to come, particularly within our health services.

Ireland has found itself throughout 2021 slowly working towards a complete execution of our national vaccine programme. The development and availability of a vaccine enabled us to envision a time in the immediate future where there is a return to a sense of normality, or even perhaps the emergency of a new normality, that allows us to live beyond restrictions and a cycle of lockdown. As of September 2021, Ireland had fully vaccinated 3.24 million individuals against COVID-19,¹ sadly this coincides with the deaths of 5,209 people in Ireland from the virus² an immeasurable loss and the cause of profound grief experienced by families and communities throughout the country.

When the realisation of the magnitude of the pandemic, its global scale, and the indiscriminate nature of the virus came to the fore, there was an initial sense of an equal-footing-for-all regarding how the coronavirus pandemic would impact on how we live. It is clear however that the repercussions of the pandemic have been most greatly felt by particular groups and the notion that we are all “in it together” has long since passed. The COVID-19 pandemic has primarily come at a cost throughout Europe to those who are most marginalised and low-income households.³ The people who were furthest behind pre-pandemic are bearing the burden of the impacts of successive lockdowns, increased unemployment, and the shutdown of services and supports. We have

seen over the past 18 months extensive evidence of the different forms that poverty can take, including the digital divide for those in low-income households seeking to access online services and education, the lack of permanent legislative protection for those living in the private rented sector, and those in employment within frontline and essential services, working during a pandemic, often on low or minimum wages.

It is important to raise the question, will our recovery from COVID-19 respond to inequality or will it represent a series of disconnected objectives, symbolising an overinflated focus on economic progress at the expense of social inclusion? Will the green and digital transitions, at the core of recovery strategies across Europe, represent a [Just Transition](#) that seeks to address poverty within our communities? Can we say with certainty that the importance of social inclusion is reflected within the policies and strategies aimed at moving us beyond the crisis, ensuring that nobody is left behind?

Previous global pandemics, such as the flu pandemic of 1918, have resulted in seismic societal change, providing the basis on which we have many of our public services, including investment in universal public health services, public housing, improved working conditions for employees, and housing standards for health, safety, and hygiene.⁴ It is imperative that Governments across Europe ensure the learnings from the COVID-19 crisis translate into real change for the benefit of us all, especially those in society who were furthest behind prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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- 2.1 Recovery and Resilience Facility
 - 2.2 Irelands Economic Recovery Plan 2021
 - 2.3 The Action Plan for the Implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights
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- 3.1 Community Development
 - 3.2 Decent work
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01

What do we
mean by poverty?



Poverty is a complex issue with no single measure fully capturing the extent of its social, economic and personal impacts, yet it is consistently agreed, regardless of definitions formed, that particular groups in society are more likely to experience poverty than others. This includes lone parents, their children, households without anyone in paid work, people with disabilities, Travellers and members of marginalised groups such as Migrants.

In Ireland a definition of poverty, (which is included in the current Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025) originated from the National Anti-Poverty Strategy 1997:

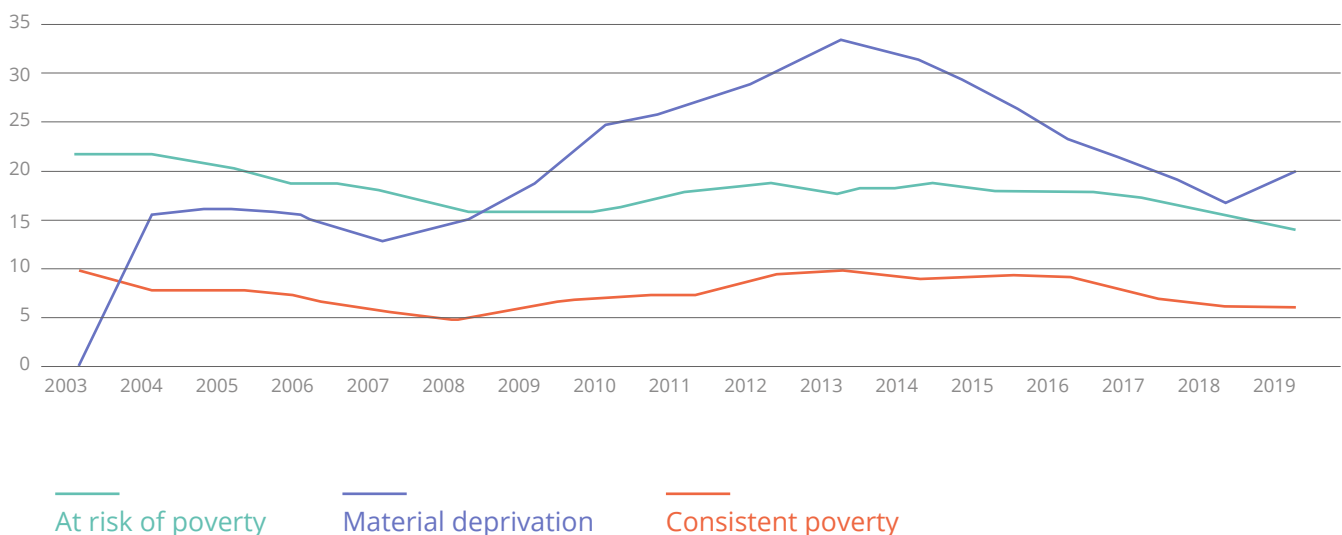
“People are living in poverty if their income and resources (material, cultural and social) are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living which is acceptable by Irish society generally. As a result of inadequate income and resources people may be excluded and marginalised from participating in activities considered the norm for other people in society.”⁵

Poverty is not a natural state of being, a condition people indiscriminately catch, nor is it a character

flaw on the part of those bearing its weight. Too often the public narrative around poverty actively focuses on personal circumstances and decisions, to the exclusion of the wider societal framework that forces people into poverty, facilitates intergeneration poverty, and prevents people from moving forward in life. Poverty is the result of poor policy development and implementation, and an absence of political will to address the issues in an in-depth and long-term manner.

In Ireland poverty levels are officially measured using three main measurements: at-risk of poverty, material deprivation and consistent poverty (see below).

Poverty Data for 2003-2019 (Survey of Income and Living Conditions)



RELATIVE POVERTY/AT RISK OF POVERTY

Anyone with an income which is less than 60% of the median (or middle) income is referred to as being either relatively poor or 'at risk of poverty'. Incomes in households are weighted depending on the number of adults and children to arrive at the disposable income⁶ for each individual. In 2019, **12.8%** of the population were living below the poverty line (at risk-of poverty) of **€14,723 per annum** or **€275.72 per week**.

CONSISTENT POVERTY

Consistent poverty refers to those who are both at risk of poverty and who experience material deprivation. Consistent poverty in Ireland in 2019 was **5.5%**.

MATERIAL DEPRIVATION

Not being able to afford **at least two** of the eleven goods or services considered essential for a basic standard of living. Material deprivation levels increased from **15.1% in 2018** to **17.8% in 2019**. The current 11 indicators are:

1. Two pairs of strong shoes
2. A warm waterproof overcoat
3. Buy new not second-hand clothes
4. Eat meals with meat, chicken, fish (or vegetarian equivalent) every second day
5. Have a roast joint or its equivalent once a week
6. Had to go without heating during the last year through lack of money
7. Keep the home adequately warm
8. Buy presents for family or friends at least once a year
9. Replace any worn out furniture
10. Have family or friends for a drink or meal once a month
11. Have a morning, afternoon or evening out in the last fortnight, for entertainment

[The Roadmap for Social Inclusion](#) is the strategy which sets out the Government's ambition for Ireland to become one of the "most socially inclusive States in the EU"⁷. It is important to acknowledge that this strategy was developed pre-pandemic, nevertheless its aim is to reduce consistent poverty in Ireland to 2% or less by 2025, the same target it had for 2020 and failed to meet.

While statistics can provide us with valuable information on the levels of poverty in Ireland, statistics alone cannot capture all the nuances that represent what is it to live below the poverty line. The poverty figures for Ireland represent a national average however the SILC report ([Survey of Income and Living Conditions](#)) does not encompass particular groups

that are amongst those most likely to experience poverty, including homeless people, people living in direct provision, migrant communities, and Travellers. Research conducted by the [European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights](#) found that 40% of Travellers live in households that have great difficulties making ends meet, considerably higher than for people generally in Ireland.⁸

The need for poverty to be examined through the lens of the COVID-19 crisis is vital, in order to capture the real time impacts and the intricacies that lie within the experiences of people living in poverty. Below we examine the current Government's approach to Ireland's recovery from the economic and social ramifications of COVID-19.

02

Irish and European policy in a time of recovery

2.1 Recovery and Resilience Facility

2.2 Irelands Economic Recovery Plan 2021

2.3 The Action Plan for the Implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights



2.1 Recovery and Resilience Facility

Over the past decade the EU has coordinated the European Semester process. The European Semester process was the annual cycle which focused on the coordination of economic policy across the EU, and in particular monitoring countries in the EU to ensure their finances are complying with the deficit and debt rules. While still dominated by economic concerns, the process evolved over time and has slowly become a more balanced process for coordinating of economic, social and environmental policy. The EU Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy (ASGS) for 2021 announced that major changes would be made to the European Semester process for 2021, whereby the focus of the process would revolve around dispersing the €672.5 billion Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF). The RRF includes loans and grants which the EU is making available to support measures undertaken by Member States to address the economic and social impact of Covid-19, including a minimum of 37% of the expenditure dedicated to climate and other environmental objectives and 20% for supporting a digital transition.

The [Recovery and Resilience Plan](#) for Ireland was published by the Government in June 2021. Ireland will receive approximately €915 million in grants from the Recovery and Resilience Facility to support investments between now and mid-2026.

An inclusive digital transition is an important aspect of our post-covid progress, and the urgent need for an extensive green transition is beyond any doubt”.⁹ However a sustainable recovery for all will only occur when we see social and economic policies work in-sync to directly address social exclusion including income adequacy and investment in a range of public services and supports.

37%

Dedicated expenditure to climate and other environmental objectives

€915m

Grants to be received by Ireland in grants

The plan from the Irish Government focuses on a jobs-led recovery from COVID-19, the three priorities leading the plan include:



1: Advancing the Green Transition



2: Accelerating and Expanding Digital Reforms and Transformation



3: Social and Economic Recovery and Job Creation

2.2 Irelands Economic Recovery Plan 2021

The [Economic Recovery Plan](#) will operate alongside the National Recovery and Resilience Plan as part of wider Government policy and strategy assisting Ireland's economic recovery, this plan will also focus on Ireland's green transition and digital transition, with an emphasis on the importance of a "jobs rich" economic recovery. It also encompasses a broader remit, monitoring and ensuring robust public finances as well as examining taxation and welfare policy over the longer term and supports for small to medium sized business and enterprise.

The pillars of the Economic Recovery Plan in Ireland include:

1 Ensuring our public finances are sustainable for a lasting recovery

2 Helping people back into work by extending market supports and through intense activation and reskilling and upskilling opportunities, driven by Pathways to Work 2021-2025

3 Rebuilding Sustainable Enterprises through targeted supports and policies to make enterprises more resilient and productive

The Economic Recovery Plan expresses ambition to improve living standards, reduce regional economic discrepancies and references the aims within the Roadmap for Social Inclusion as part of achieving "a balanced and inclusive recovery". However, it remains to be seen as to whether either of Ireland's recovery strategies view addressing poverty as a fundamental and intrinsic part of a long-term sustainable recovery.

2.3 The Action Plan for the Implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights

As we approached 2020, the question was raised within the EU, what would replace the EU 2020 strategy, and provide a template for a social Europe over the next decade? It is recognised that the poverty targets within the EU 2020 strategy, to lift 20 million people out of poverty and social exclusion, were not met. As a result, in recent times, the strategy has been discussed more in terms of how the EU has failed to meet the objective for a more socially inclusive Europe. It is in this context that we must consider the revised and less ambitious 2030 poverty targets proposed by the [Action Plan for the Implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights](#).

Developed to strengthen the living and working conditions of people living in Europe, in 2017 Ireland signed up to the commitments within the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#). The primary targets within the implementation plan for the European Pillar, to be achieved by 2030, include:

1. The number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion should be reduced by at least 15 million, at least 5 million of these should be Children.
2. At least 78% of people aged 20 to 64 should be in employment.
3. At least 60% of all adults should participate in training every year.

A revised Social Scoreboard will track Member States' trends and performances, enabling the Commission to monitor progress towards the implementation of the Social Pillar principles.

EAPN has welcomed the focus on the reduction of child poverty, but regrets that no further sub-targets, for example on homelessness are included. The aim of reducing the number of people at-risk-of poverty



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We must ask, can Governments across Europe be convinced to view these headline targets as a minimum basis for what needs to be achieved in order to address inequality.

or social exclusion by at least 15 million by 2030 is a significant scaling back of the ambition of the Europe 2020 target of 20 million, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the anticipated increases in poverty as a result.

We must ask, can Governments across Europe be convinced to view these headline targets as a minimum basis for what needs to be achieved in order to address inequality? The issues for the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights over the next decade arise if the headline targets do not accurately reflect or respond to the magnitude of need within the EU in relation to social exclusion. If by 2030 Europe has not met the current targets within the action plan, are we looking at further scaled back ambitions to address inequality up to 2040? It must be ensured that the aims within Europe around poverty reduction and securing the rights of all who live there, are not undermined or diminished to a point where they no longer have any

basis in reality. This would be in opposition to the establishment of objectives that are aligned with the actual levels and numbers of people experiencing poverty across Europe, and the development of strategies and policies that offer meaningful solutions to the structural causes of poverty within the EU.

EAPN Europe has proposed a new [2030 European Strategy against Poverty](#) containing an “integrated person-centred approach” which links together the Green Deal, Digital Europe, the social pillar implementation plan, the digital and environmental aims of the Recovery and Resilience Plans, and represents the coherence required to address poverty and achieve social inclusion in EU member states. It is important that we look beyond the poverty targets contained within the Implementation Plan for the European Pillar of Social Rights.

03

How can we address poverty and social exclusion?

- 3.1 Community Development
- 3.2 Decent work
- 3.3 Income inadequacy and meeting basic needs
- 3.4 Housing
- 3.5 Health
- 3.6 Socio-economic Discrimination



3.1 Community Development

It is estimated that between 2008 and 2011 cuts were made by the Government to the community and voluntary sector in Ireland, estimated at between 35 to 41%, far higher than cuts made to other sectors, (of approximately 7%).¹⁰ Marginalised communities and those living in poverty must be able to participate in decisions that impact on their lives. This requires sustainable and autonomous community development. This ensures a long-term response to social exclusion and poverty, enabling communities to identify their needs and mobilise a collective response to relevant policy development processes. Below is testimony on the importance of social inclusion and Community Development for disadvantaged areas from a Community Development worker and person of experience

***Paula Haverty**

"I live in Balgaddy in North Clondalkin in Co Dublin, an area that experiences high levels of deprivation. I am involved in Community Development because I want to see change in my community. I am conscious that it's difficult to convey what social exclusion is to those who have no such experience but I will try! Social exclusion has a material basis, for example, in Killinarden in Dublin, 7% of the population have 3rd level qualifications. The National figure for Ireland is 42%. Many people in the area live on welfare or on the minimum wage and experience material deprivation, the result of this is a lack of warm clothes, the ability to have a night out with friends, the ability to purchase and cook nutritious food. Housing in the area is often of poor standard and in need of refurbishment. If people on low incomes find themselves in an emergency situation, for example having to purchase a fridge or do some kind of repair on their house, it is a financial disaster. COVID-19 has impacted most severely on disadvantaged areas. I am aware that it has affected everybody, but poor families really are taking on a lot of the burden and people are starting to worry about what might happen

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People in our community, we need to be heard, to matter. We need a voice in planning and decision making, through our groups and other structures. We want to be supported to establish these structures. We know what the problems are, we struggle through them on a daily basis, and that gives us an insight into what the solutions are.”

when it comes to paying the COVID bill, where will the cuts be made? Who will the state come after in order to pay the COVID bill?

Social exclusion impacts on people's mental health, causing depression which can often lead to suicide tragically. In the Ballyfermot and Clondalkin area of Dublin, a HSE research report showed that the suicide rate is 3 times the national average. People can turn to drugs and alcohol to mask the pain, the struggle that they are going through. There is a high level of crime and drug use in our community and there is a constant fear and anxiety that your child will succumb to this and get sucked into that lifestyle.

People in our community, we need to be heard, to matter. We need a voice in planning and decision making, through our groups and other structures. We want to be supported to establish these structures. We know what the problems are, we struggle through them on a daily basis, and that gives us an insight into what the solutions are. There is a need for investment in infrastructure, services and supports in our community.

In particular we need investment in Community Development. It is crucial at this point in time so we can build a community and foster ownership. There is loads of evidence that tells us that Community Development works. It strengthens communities. There needs to be a clear understanding of what social exclusion is. Society is much better off when everybody is included and people feel they are a part of a decent functional society. The cost of social exclusion is much more expensive, in the long-term much more costly, than social inclusion. "

EAPN IRELAND RECOMMENDATIONS

Fast-track the implementation of the commitment to a new national programme which provides adequate and sustainable core funding for autonomous community development organisations as per the aims of the 2019 Government strategy "Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities"- a 5-year strategy to support the Community and Voluntary Sector.

3.2 Decent work

"In addition to the youth, the crisis has disproportionately affected women, and the disadvantaged groups such as, low skilled people and people with disabilities and people with a minority racial or ethnic background. This will require substantial efforts to facilitate their access to the job market."

-EU Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy 2021

Decent work is represented by a job that provides an income that meets the cost of living, consistent hours with secure terms of employment, including a safe working environment where the rights of employees are respected and enacted.

According to Government policy, including the Economic Recovery Plan and the Recovery and Resilience Plan, a core part of Ireland's recovery from COVID-19 will revolve around jobs creation and assisting people back into employment. [The Pathways to work Strategy for 2021](#) will be a key part of Ireland's national economic recovery. This strategy will focus on range of employment activation measures, including 50,000 additional places in further and higher education, as well as increases in funding to support an extra 3,000 places for those facing labour market disadvantage, including members of the Traveller and Roma communities and people with disabilities.¹¹

A body of research is beginning to emerge regarding the groups that have been most negatively impacted by the ongoing pandemic, specifically around unemployment rates, for women, young people and migrant communities. We already know that the employment rate for people with disabilities in Ireland is well below the EU average.¹² It is also important to recognise the intersectionality of issues such as gender, race, disability, ethnicity, sexual and socio-economic discrimination, that contribute to an increased likelihood of experiencing poverty and inequality. Below are examples illustrating how the pandemic has affected some of the groups that have been most impacted by high levels of unemployment during the pandemic.

Migrants

Migrants have been particularly vulnerable to impacts of the recent pandemic due to the nature of work in which they are typically employed, sectors such as accommodation and food where non-Irish nationals are more than twice as likely to work than Irish nationals.¹³ These sectors are often seasonal, part-time and subject to low pay, (on or close to minimum wage, which is €10.20 per hour in Ireland.) This means members of the migrant community in Ireland are more likely to be at risk of poverty. Pre-pandemic,

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The experiences of migrant communities must be acknowledged within the policies and initiatives developed in response to our post COVID-19 recovery, this is especially true given the intense focus on employment activation measures.

research also showed that African nationals had significantly higher unemployment rates than Irish nationals (12% to 5% respectively).¹⁴

The experiences of migrant communities must be acknowledged within the policies and initiatives developed in response to our post COVID-19 recovery, this is especially true given the intense focus on employment activation measures. The part that racism and discrimination play in excluding people from fully participating in Irish society must be of primary consideration in the construct of policies and initiatives developed to target migrant communities. What systems, structures, and attitudes are enabling and facilitating the prejudice that hinders the social and economic progress of particular communities? The current Government has committed to the meaningful reform of the system of Direct Provision, the asylum-seeking process in Ireland, which has come under intense scrutiny in recent years for the inhuman, inappropriate, and restrictive conditions under which people seeking asylum in Ireland have been expected to live (some for as long as 10-12 years). We must examine and acknowledge the place such systems have in perpetrating discrimination and negative attitudes towards people seeking asylum in Ireland, who are primarily from countries within Africa and Asia.

The Pathways to Work Strategy 2021-2025 acknowledges the barriers people from migrant communities in Ireland can face in accessing employment, and commits to respond to some of these issues through measures such as an increase in further education and training opportunities, and an extension to subsidies focused on the recruitment of minority groups. However, it is clear that all policies and strategy aimed at members of migrant communities, including the upcoming [National Action Plan Against Racism](#), must be updated in light of the negative impacts experienced by specific communities during the COVID-19 crisis. The ongoing barriers particular groups face when accessing services and supports must be also be recognised in the wider policy development process, including issues around access to the housing market, education, and income adequacy. This must occur alongside a discussion on how we can as a nation ensure the contribution of all communities who live in Ireland is valued and actively encouraged as we seek to undertake and establish a post-pandemic society.

Women

It has become increasingly apparent over the past 18 months that there has been a gendered impact to the economic consequences of COVID-19. The evidence of this was apparent early on in the crisis, with the Department of Social Protection in Ireland revealing that the initial recipients of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment in May 2020 were more likely to be women.¹⁵ Research reveals that women were more likely to experience job losses, particularly women from migrant backgrounds, due to a higher level of representation within sectors most affected by COVID-19 lockdown measures, including retail, leisure, and services industries.¹⁶ We also see that new women and children experiencing domestic violence accounted for 29% and 24% respectively of all those looking for support from a domestic violence service during the first wave of the COVID-19 crisis, with an increase of 25% in help line calls on previous years.¹⁷ Pre-pandemic, women on average spent twice the number of hours on house work per week compared to men.¹⁸ The social and economic fallout of the pandemic, and subsequent lockdowns, have ensured that women have borne a disproportionate personal and financial burden and increased responsibilities relating to household and care duties as a result. Year after year, we see that women are amongst the groups most likely to be living in consistent poverty (including single parent households, which can be led by either sex, but in the majority of cases are headed by women). The pandemic has only served to increase gender inequality.

29%

New cases seeking help from domestic violence services during the first wave of the pandemic



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Any ambitions to address gender inequality and reverse the damage cause by the pandemic must be adequately funded, resourced, and rigorously monitored, and respond to core issues.

The European Parliament has called on EU countries to incorporate targeted actions to improve gender equality in their national recovery and resilience plans. Previously, it was highlighted that Ireland has a gender employment gap above the EU average.¹⁹ Ireland is also the second worst performing EU country in relation to the affordability of childcare, particularly for lone parents.²⁰ The under-employment of women as a result of a lack of affordable childcare left women vulnerable to poverty pre-pandemic. This has been further amplified due to COVID-19. The Government response as part of our economic recovery acknowledges the need to assist women back to the work place, via commitments within the Pathways to Work strategy 2021-2025, including consideration of the specific circumstances of lone parents in the assessment of welfare supports such as the Working-age Payment, as well as investment in childcare funding programmes.

Any ambitions to address gender inequality and reverse the damage cause by the pandemic must be adequately funded, resourced, and rigorously monitored, and respond to core issues, for example access to affordable quality childcare, investment in domestic violence supports, income adequacy, that serve as legitimate solutions to gender inequality and the consistent poverty experienced by women in Ireland.

Young People

The impacts of COVID-19 on young people throughout Europe and across the world cannot be underestimated. Alongside social isolation from their peers and the closures of other relevant outlets, young workers (under 25) were amongst those most likely to experience unemployment during lockdown. Young workers are more likely to work in the retail, hospitality, and leisure industries, sectors disproportionately affected and most likely to experience long-term closures in a bid to stem the spread of the Coronavirus. Research reveals there were 112,000 fewer 15–34-year-olds in paid work in Ireland in the final quarter of 2020 than a year earlier, this is compared to 93,000 fewer workers over the age of 24.²¹

In recognition of the economic impact on younger people, the Irish Government has announced measures aimed to assist under 25s to engage with the labour market, including ringfencing approximately 4,000 places for young people under the [Work Place Experience Programme](#), announced as part of Ireland's Economic Recovery Plan.

Pre-pandemic younger people were already bearing the brunt of social and economic conditions in Ireland. Similar to other marginalised groups (Migrants, Travellers, People with Disabilities, single parent households) younger people have found themselves falling victim to the hostile and dysfunctional housing market in Ireland, with homeownership collapsing amongst younger groups (60% of those born in the 1960s lived in a home they or their partner owned by age 30, this had fallen to 39% for those born in the 1970s and 32% for those born in the early 1980s.)²² This leaves them exposed to some of the highest rents to be found globally within the private rented housing market.²³

The policies designed to help us progress past COVID-19 must be developed beyond the provision of employment services with set numerical targets. The relationship between decent quality employment opportunities, income adequacy, and access to affordable public services, provides a sustainable route out of poverty for all, particularly people at risk of poverty, and in the long run represents the essence of what a true economic and societal recovery represents.

EAPN IRELAND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Ensure that employment services developed under the new Pathways to Work strategy are community based, adequately resourced, and non-profit, adopting a holistic, and person-centred approach with a specific focus on marginalised communities and groups most distant from the labour market, leading to quality jobs and a living wage.
- Adapt an integrated and whole of Government approach to updating and developing strategies and policies specific to communities and groups at risk of poverty, focusing not only on access to employment but also on the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on women, young people, and marginalised groups.
- Develop policies via consultation that seek to dismantle the barriers experienced by marginalised groups in their engagement with services and supports, that help address and prevent poverty and social exclusion, such as access to the housing market, income adequacy, health inequalities, domestic violence supports, education, for groups and communities at greatest risk of poverty.
- Ensure the full implementation of recommendations within The Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities.

3.3 Income inadequacy and meeting basic needs

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A single parent is struggling day in day out on very little income. It can arrive Thursday by Monday its gone, gone on baby products, food, household stuff, clothes etc., the basics not luxury items. You can feel discriminated against because you are a young parent struggling, dominated by the system and you can feel you can't stand up to it, feeling lower down the pecking order to others who are better off. This can and does lead to discrimination, the consequences can be very damaging, leading to depression, poor health, stigma and guilt. This can have a negative effect on a child, that child could be open to bullying at school, feel less important than others, it takes so much strength for that parent not to break down. This is the cycle of poverty.”

- Gavin*

At the end of 2020, EAPN Ireland established the Basic Necessities Working Group, consisting of national, regional and local organisations working within the Community and Voluntary Sector, with the intention of developing a [briefing note](#) examining the increasing demand for basic necessities as provided by the Community and Voluntary Sector. It has been observed within the sector that the demand from households for food and other basic necessities such as food, heating, and hygiene products, to name but a few, increased significantly during 2020. Research has found that 85% of those finding it difficult to manage prior to COVID-19 reported experiencing at least one form of financial strain (i.e. cutting back on basics or falling behind on bills or regular payments) compared to 23% of those who were living comfortably prior to COVID-19.²⁴ However, it is important to highlight that the increasing demand for basic essentials existed prior to the COVID-19 crisis. Not being able to afford basic essentials represents absolute poverty and a deep-rooted inequality that has no place in Ireland in 2021. Annual research conducted by the Vincentian Partnership

for Social Justice has consistently revealed that low-income households, those living on social welfare and minimum wage jobs, cannot afford to meet the [Minimum Essential Standard of Living \(MESL\)](#). MESL represents the cost of living in Ireland and the standard of living below which nobody should have to live. The research methodology establishes the basket of goods and services required for households to meet all of their basic physical, social, and psychological needs. The MESL research reveals that despite social welfare payments gradually moving closer to adequacy in the past number of years, payments are still inadequate for many, with specific households, such as one parent households, experiencing long term “deep inadequacy”, meaning “a consistently inadequate income, doing without what is required to meet basic needs, to take part in normal activities, and to participate in society.”²⁵

In order to meet the demand for basics, community groups have found themselves repurposing funding to provide necessities such as food and care packages to local communities. We now have a situation where Government funding originally



intended for the purposes of promoting equality and social inclusion, empowering communities through locally led long-term initiatives, has been redirected to the provision of food and other essentials. We cannot equate this with an impactful or sustainable response to poverty. If we normalise foodbanks and other related supports where then lies the ambition or aspiration for the creation and implementation of anti-poverty policies and initiatives that address the underlying structural causes of social exclusion throughout Ireland?

Income supports initiated as part of the Government's COVID-19 response such as the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) are now being tapered off. In our previous poverty watch in 2020, [Rethinking a more Inclusive and Equal Ireland](#), EAPN Ireland highlighted the discrepancies between the levels of social welfare received prior to COVID 19 and the higher level of payment available via the Pandemic Unemployment Payment. The PUP payment, initially set at €203 per week in line with the level of other working age welfare payments, was revised to €350 per week, in response to an outcry over the inadequacy of the payment. As of yet, there is no indication that this obvious

inequality will influence the direction of welfare policy moving forward, with no clear commitment expressed within Government on the need to benchmark social welfare rates to adequacy. Perhaps there is an opportunity to form a response to income inadequacy within the recently established Commission on Taxation and Welfare, referenced within the National Economic Plan, which is due to provide a long-term blueprint to the Government to inform the direction of taxation and welfare policy in Ireland.

The Government has also agreed to the introduction of a [Living Wage](#) as well as piloting of a Universal Basic Income scheme (initially aimed at the arts sector). However, the question remains, for whom will these income measures be adequate for and how will they be calculated? We must develop welfare and income policy in tandem with one another, on the basis of adequacy, in order to ensure people can achieve a Minimum Essential Standard of Living. In addition to this, the European Commission is working on the proposal for a Council Recommendation on Minimum Income (known as social welfare in Ireland) as part of plans to contribute to a more inclusive recovery through less income inequalities and more

quality employment. This is a far cry from initial plans to introduce a Directive on Minimum Income, (meaning a legislative act that sets out a goal that EU countries must achieve), a plan which did not receive the sufficient support required from member states, in order to ensure its implementation across the EU. Currently the EU is working on a [Directive on Minimum Wages](#).

There can be no economic recovery if households cannot afford to purchase basic necessities. It will not be possible for Ireland to meet its anti-poverty commitments (European Pillar of Social Rights, Global Sustainable Development Goals) if income adequacy is not a central policy concern as part of the post-pandemic recovery process.

EAPN IRELAND RECOMMENDATIONS

Develop social welfare policy that focuses on income adequacy as a means of preventing poverty including a commitment to benchmarking social welfare payments at a level that is adequate to lift people above the poverty line and provide them with a Minimum Essential Standard of Living.

Fast track the introduction of the Living Wage as per the Programme for Government and the Economic Recovery Plan. This must meet the standard of the Living Wage Technical Group which is €12.90 in 2021-2022 for a single person working full time.

3.4 Housing

Over the past decade the Irish Government has, on a policy level, distanced itself as a central provider of social and affordable housing units for low-income households, this is despite an extensive legislative history indicating the contrary. Instead, the private market has been facilitated to maintain its grip over housing provision regardless of household income or personal circumstances. The new Government housing strategy [Housing for All](#) was launched on September 2nd 2021 and represents the direction of social and affordable housing provision in Ireland up to 2030. Certainly, the aim to work towards ending homelessness by 2030 and focus within the plan to increase social housing supply and affordability of housing is welcome. This is especially true at time when the narrative around Ireland's post-COVID recovery is emerging simultaneous to a surge in house prices and rent. In the past 12 months we have seen an increase in house prices in Ireland of 13%²⁶ nationally alongside scarcity of housing supply. We also see that year-on-year rents grew by 4.5% in the first quarter of 2021. This growth rate is higher than that of Q4 2020 (3.3%).²⁷ Homelessness figures show there were 8,132 homeless people (including adults

and children) as of July 2021 across Ireland. This figure represents an increase of 232% since July 2014 when the monthly figures started being published.²⁸

Alongside the newly published Housing for All, the past year has seen the introduction of new housing legislation in Ireland including the [Affordable Housing Act 2021](#) and [The Land Development Agency Act 2021](#). We have also seen policy developments relevant to the provision of social and affordable housing, including the [European Declaration on Combatting Homelessness](#), which represents the Irish Governments agreement to implement a number of housing initiatives, including access to permanent housing and the provision of support services to the homeless; as well as support for housing policy measures through adequate funding and, when appropriate, make use of EU funding as a means of addressing homelessness.

The concern remains however that the Government continues to place the private market at the forefront of the delivery of social and affordable housing. It is beyond doubt that the private market

in Ireland cannot and will not respond to the level of housing need across the country. Questions have rightfully been raised regarding the central role private landlords and private developers will play as part of the Housing for All strategy and the Land Development Agency Act. There are also ongoing concerns regarding the possibility of further increases to house prices due to the Shared Equity Scheme within the Affordable Housing Act. This perspective is backed up by research conducted by UK Controller and Auditor General regarding the impact of a similar scheme on the UK housing market and how it has led to an increase in profits for private developers.²⁹

Where does this leave the groups in society that are most likely to live in poverty? Households currently dependent on the Housing Assistance Payment? Households excluded from homeownership and access to the necessary income and finance required in order to engage with the unregulated system that dictates the housing market in Ireland? A tiered approach to housing in Ireland, for example where there is a disproportionate policy focus on housing provision for moderate earners to the exclusion of those on much lower incomes, will only serve to exacerbate inequality as has already happened within Ireland's health service.

In April 2021 the moratorium originally in place to prevent evictions during Ireland's lockdown period expired. Will these groups remain at the mercy of a private rented sector that has already proved to be a pathway to homelessness for families, particularly lone-parent families, in Ireland?³⁰ It is not apparent that the level of funding required to meet the ambitions of Housing for All will materialise. It is also highly questionable that the targets set for the direct provision of social housing can meet the demand for social housing, (and not just tenancies within the private rented sector), as per the social housing needs assessment figures within each Local Authority.³¹

The need for the Government to invest in social housing with a differential rent (that is a rent based on household earnings) and move away from provision of low-income housing via the private sector has been backed up by the ESRI (The Economic and Social Research Institute) who have stated that Ireland will not meet the demand for housing unless the Government moves to borrow an additional 4 to 7 billion Euro a year.³² It is essential that the Government invests in the construction of social and affordable housing by Local Authorities and Approved Housing Bodies, at levels proportionate to the number of households assessed as being in housing need, and does so for the entire duration of the Housing for All strategy. If Ireland wants to achieve an inclusive sustainable recovery, then housing must be accessible to everyone, with a dedicated focus on secure permanent housing provision for those who are homeless and communities and groups at risk of poverty.

EAPN IRELAND RECOMMENDATIONS

Increase investment for the provision of direct build social and affordable housing with a differential rent, for the entire duration of the Housing for All plan, as provided by Local Authorities and Approved housing bodies, for the benefit of households most likely to be at risk of poverty and experiencing homelessness.

Ensure that Housing Assistance Payments are aligned with market rent increases.

Ensure a poverty and equality impact assessment on Housing for All and recent relevant housing legislation and policy to prevent against unintended negative consequences for those in society most marginalised.

3.5 Health

In 2020 EAPN Ireland published its research Report [Giving Health Inequality a Voice](#). This report brought together individuals from communities experiencing disadvantage and inequality, including health inequalities, to learn from the experiences within these communities around accessing appropriate services and supports in relation to physical and mental health needs. The research highlighted the barriers faced by people experiencing poverty and those in marginalised groups, including Travellers, migrant communities, socio-economically disadvantaged, and rural communities, when accessing health services. The report also emphasised how the social determinants of health, that is the conditions into which people are born, grow, work, live, and age, and the wider set of factors shaping the conditions of daily life, have on the health and wellbeing outcomes of the general population.

For those in disadvantages communities, health inequalities are fuelled by gaps in the provision of the services and supports that constitute the social determinants of health, ensuring a shorter life expectancy and a higher propensity to experience serious disease such as cancer within specific communities.³³ An ESRI analysis of EU SILC 2013 data found that 4% of the population had an unmet health need, with 59% citing the cost of care as the reason they did not access the care they needed. This research found that women, Travellers, lower income groups and people with poorer health status were most likely to have an unmet need for health care.

In Ireland there is no explicit right to healthcare enshrined in our constitution or in Irish legislation. Ireland has however signed up to the European Pillar of Social Rights, which states that “everyone has the right to timely access to affordable, preventive and curative health care of good quality”. In 1989 Ireland also ratified the [UN Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights \(ICESCR\)](#). Article 12 provides

“

Equal access to equal care for equal need is not a reality for people in the Irish public health system. Life expectancy is poorer for people with low incomes, for those living in deprived areas and for Travellers in particular, than for the general population.”

- EAPN Ireland research report
[Giving Health Inequality a Voice](#)

a comprehensive article on the right to health in international human rights law, recognising “the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.” The primary underlying factor in the existence of health inequality in Ireland is the operation of a two-tiered health system which makes us an outlier in Western Europe. In addition, Ireland also has the longest waiting lists for public patients in Europe.³⁴ It is clear we cannot ignore how interconnected poverty is to the outcomes of poor physical and mental health within Irish society, especially when low-income households are far more likely to depend upon public services.

Throughout the COVID-19 crisis people across the world have lived the reality of what it is to depend upon access to universal healthcare as the only realistic hope of ensuring an advance beyond the global health emergency. The importance of our health service has never been more evident and the return to a two-tiered health care system seems at odds with the measures taken to address the COVID-19 emergency in Ireland, including the integration of private and public health care, at great cost to the exchequer of over €300 million.³⁵

EAPN Ireland welcomes the ambitions within the Sláintecare Implementation strategy for 2021 to address health inequalities³⁶ as well the recently

published [Social Prescribing Framework](#), which seeks to link people, including those from marginalised groups, to relevant local supports and services within the Health Service Executive (HSE) and the Community and Voluntary sector. We have seen over the past year how the vaccination programme in Ireland has gone from strength to strength, providing an efficient and effective service to all sections of society and communities. This ambition and sentiment must be carried through post-pandemic as a means of addressing health inequalities and in recognition of the fundamental need for an accessible health service for all, based solely on need and not the ability to pay.

EAPN IRELAND RECOMMENDATIONS

Accelerate the implementation of Sláintecare, with adequate investment and resources, as part of ensuring a single-tiered universal health care system that aims to facilitate affordable, quality, and efficient access to health services, with a focus on reducing health inequalities for those on low incomes and within marginalised communities.

3.6 Socio-economic Discrimination

EAPN Ireland, along with other organisations, as part of the #Addthe10th Alliance, has been persistent in advocating for the inclusion of socio-economic status within Irish equality legislation as the 10th ground for discrimination. Socio-economic discrimination represents prejudice towards a person based on a range of factors, including a person's background, such as their lower income level, employment status, education level, address, or accent. It can be intersectional and promotes stereotypes and stigma, preventing people from engaging in employment and accessing services, leading to social exclusion and poverty. Below we are provided with an insight into one woman's personal experience of socio-economic discrimination.



"I was a drug addict for years and feeling unworthy of anything in life. 4 years ago, I walked into a recovery home and changed my life around. 4 years ago, I met my husband and I was still taking methadone but he accepted me and believed in me. We got pregnant with my daughter who is 3 years old now but it wasn't easy, and I didn't think my past could ever come back to haunt me til the day I was in hospital only after giving birth to my child when a social worker walked in, I'll never forget

it, I pulled my baby girl up off the bed and held her so close to my chest, because unfortunately when we hear the words social worker what's the first thing we think, well I thought she was coming to take my baby away from me. It turned out because of my history and being in a methadone clinic, she had a right to make sure my daughter had a safe home to live. She called into my mother's home and saw it was more than okay for my child and closed the case. See I thought I was doing the

right thing by going into a clinic to make sure I didn't backslide on drugs, but in the end a social worker still came after me. I had nightmares for weeks that my child was being taken off me, not a nice experience for a new mam.

Do you think that was the right way to go with a new mother, moments after giving birth? What did I do wrong? I want a society that doesn't treat my children the way I was. I hope there is an end to discrimination. I'm sharing my story, I'm standing up for my kid's futures. Those days were meant to be the best of our lives as a new family, not days filled with fear and the type of discrimination many other mothers don't face. As a mother we want what is best for our kids, sometimes there's things we can't give them, material things don't matter to me, the best thing you can give your child is love and support, whatever they want to do, because it's their dreams not ours."

- Lorraine*

*With thanks and sincere gratitude to people of experience, Community Development worker Paula Haverty and Noreen Byrne of North Clondalkin Community Development Programme, Dann Kenningham of [ATD Ireland](#) and ATD Ireland community activists Gavin, Andrew and Lorraine, for facilitating and sharing their personal experiences and insights.

EAPN IRELAND RECOMMENDATIONS

Fast track the introduction of socio-economic status as the 10th ground for discrimination in Irish equality legislation.

In conclusion

This publication highlights only some of the areas of concern relating to poverty and social exclusion, poverty is, for those experiencing it, multi-dimensional by nature with many of the issues interlinked and interdependent. We see how an absence of or dysfunction within any one aspect relating to essential service provision, alongside income inadequacy and discrimination, increases the likelihood of social exclusion and inequality for many groups and communities across Ireland. As we progress to a point beyond COVID-19, the Government must now fully acknowledge the commitments Ireland has made to our active participation in addressing and reducing poverty, through the Roadmap for Social Inclusion and the European Pillar of Social Rights, within our national policy development process. In order to address poverty and its root causes, we will not only need effective action across the range of issues highlighted in the report, but a whole-of-Government integrated approach to addressing social exclusion while also ensuring that all social, economic and environmental policy is developed in a way which takes account of their impact on poverty.

Poverty comes at a cost to human dignity, decency and represents the wasted and underutilised potential of all those who wish to engage with and contribute to society but are prevented from doing so due to social exclusion. There can be no doubt that long term investment in anti-poverty policies and measures comes at a cost that is significantly less to society than the devastating impacts of poverty and inequality. Moving forward we must ask ourselves what represents our shared values as a society and how can these values translate in policies and initiatives that encourage the participation of all people living in Ireland? The lessons that we have been taught by a global pandemic since March 2020 must not be in vain but instead lay the foundation for an Ireland that promotes equality and social inclusion above all else.

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