

MARCH 16, 2017



COMMUNITY & VOLUNTARY PILLAR SUBMISSION TO IRELAND'S NATIONAL REFORM PROGRAMME

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CONTEXT

The Community and Voluntary Pillar welcomes this opportunity to “assist in the preparation of the NRP” and to comment “on the challenges identified in the Country Report and efforts underway to address them.”¹

In ‘A Programme for a Partnership Government’ it states on page three: “Our ambition is to combine all our different talents to build a strong economy and to deliver a fair society, so that communities thrive, throughout both urban and rural Ireland. We are committed to tackling the most pressing challenges Ireland faces, in areas such as housing and health, while continuing to focus on increasing employment across the country. We will work closely with the Oireachtas, in recognition of the new political reality, to deliver in the interests of all of our people.”

To realise such an ambition the Community and Voluntary Pillar proposes the following initiatives and approaches it believes should be part of a strategic approach to addressing Ireland’s current challenges over the coming period and that the Government should:

- Ensure protection of the vulnerable and promotion of equality are at the core of all decisions made, in line with the State’s international human rights obligations. To this end all relevant policies and strategies should be subjected to a transparent social impact assessment at design and planning stage.
- Bring Ireland’s total tax-take up to European average levels.
- Prioritise investment in infrastructure and services over tax cuts.
- Dramatically increase investment which is essential to generate the decent jobs that are vital if recovery is to last.
- Protect the social infrastructure that has been under severe pressure for some time. This is crucial for services across the life-cycle from children to people of working age to older people to people with disabilities.
- Support the CV sector which among other things provides a wide range of services, engages in advocacy and develops creative initiatives in very difficult situations; however it is currently being undermined by Government’s decisions to cut and/or change the nature of its funding as the demand for its services increase.
- Engage with the Community and Voluntary Pillar to promote social dialogue and good governance. There is a substantial role for civil society in the huge task that Ireland currently faces. Social dialogue is a critically important component of any effective decision-making in a modern democracy. The Community and Voluntary Pillar seeks real, effective, on-going engagement with Government on the key economic, social and sustainability challenges currently facing Irish society –an engagement that reflects the

¹ D/Taoiseach letter to CVP 23.2.17

value of social dialogue and its role in ensuring that resources are used more effectively to realise justice, equality and social inclusion. Integral to such development is the need for good governance which must be characterised by transparency and accountability in all of its aspects. We believe governance along these lines can be developed in Ireland.

Country Report on Ireland

On 22nd February the European Commission published the Country Report on Ireland and in the Executive Summary they noted that:

- Ireland's economic prospects remain bright, but risks have heightened.
- Domestic economic activity has expanded strongly.
- Unemployment has continued to fall but labour market and social challenges remain.
- Insufficient housing supply is a concern for both its economic and social reasons.
- The stability of tax revenues in the medium term is a concern for public finances.
- Although the domestic economy continues to grow at robust rates, there are uncertain times ahead.
- Overall Ireland has made some progress in addressing the 2016 country-specific recommendations.
- Private sector indebtedness remains high.
- Gross government debt is on a firm downward trend, but remains high.
- The net international investment position reversed its path in 2015.
- The stock of non-performing loans remains high.
- Property prices continued to increase.
- Reforms of the fiscal framework have played a key role in repairing Ireland's public finances.
- The Irish economy is sensitive to changes in the international tax environment.
- The situation on the labour market continues to improve but social challenges remain, in particular for low work-intensity households.
- Spatial planning and infrastructure provision have become increasingly important.
- Linkages between multinationals and indigenous firms remain limited.
- Public R&D expenditure remains low.
- The cost-effectiveness and sustainability of the healthcare system continue to pose challenges.

Country Specific Recommendations

On the 18th May 2016 the European Commission published the *Council Recommendation on the 2016 national reform programme of Ireland and delivering a Council opinion on the 2016 stability programme of Ireland*, which contained the following three Country Specific Recommendations.

- *Country Specific Recommendation 1*

Following the correction of the excessive deficit, achieve an annual fiscal adjustment of 0.6 % of GDP towards the medium-term budgetary objective in 2016 and in 2017. Use windfall gains from strong economic and financial conditions, as well as from asset sales, to accelerate debt reduction. Reduce vulnerability to economic fluctuations and shocks, inter alia by broadening the tax base. Enhance the quality of expenditure, particularly by increasing cost-effectiveness of healthcare and by prioritising government capital expenditure in R&D and in public infrastructure, in particular transport, water services and housing.

- *Country Specific Recommendation 2*

Expand and accelerate the implementation of activation policies to increase the work intensity of households and address the poverty risk of children. Pursue measures to incentivise employment by tapering the withdrawal of benefits and supplementary payments. Improve the provision of quality, affordable full-time childcare.

- *Country Specific Recommendation 3*

Finalise durable restructuring solutions to lower non-performing loans, to ensure debt sustainability of households and to encourage lenders to reduce the debt of excessively leveraged yet viable businesses. Accelerate the phasing-in of a fully operational central credit registry covering all categories of lenders and debtors.

Europe 2020

Under *Europe 2020*, five key headline targets at the European and national level and of particular interest to the Community and Voluntary Pillar are Targets 1, 4 and 5.

- *Target 1: Employment*

Ireland's Headline Target: To raise to 69-71% the employment rate for women and men aged 20-64, including through the greater participation of young people, older workers and low-skilled workers, and the better integration of legal migrants, and to review the target level of ambition in 2014, in the context of a proposed mid-term review of the Europe 2020 Strategy.

- *Target 4: Education*

To reduce the percentage of 18-24 year olds with at most lower secondary education and not in further education and training to 8%; to increase the share of 30-34 year olds who have completed tertiary or equivalent education to at least 60%.

- *Target 5: Poverty*

To reduce the number experiencing consistent poverty to 4% by 2016 (interim target) and to 2% or less by 2020, from the 2010 baseline rate of 6.3%. The Irish contribution to the Europe 2020 poverty target is to reduce by a minimum of 200,000 the population in combined poverty (either consistent poverty, at-risk-of-poverty or basic deprivation).

CVP COMMENTARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

EMPLOYMENT

The Country report on Ireland it notes that *"Ireland's economic prospects remain bright, but risks have heightened · Domestic economic activity has expanded strongly · Unemployment has continued to fall but labour market and social challenges remain."* To date Ireland's National Reform Programme target has been to raise the employment rate to 69-71% by 2020 for people aged 20-64. Working off the most recent Quarterly National Household Survey the employment rate for this age group is now 71.2%. The target at the European Level is 75% and in the opinion of the Community and Voluntary Pillar it is time for Ireland to adopt this target.

It is equally important for the Government to make serious progress on addressing the employment and unemployment rates facing younger people; older people; people from ethnic minorities including Travellers; people with disabilities; people parenting alone; people who are long-term unemployed. According to the latest Live Register statistics, February 2016, 60% of the people who are on the register for more than a year are on it for over three years.

To make progress on these issues of structural inequality sub-sets of the national target must be set. For example, the Employment target talks about 'the employment rate for women and men': so from a male perspective, not only has the national target been achieved so has the European one as their employment rate is 77.7%; however, looking at this target from a female perspective, the employment rate is 64.8%, somewhat off either target. While for other groups the gap is even greater. According to Census 2011 and cited in the ESRI report *'A Social Portrait of Travellers in Ireland'* the employment rate for Travellers was 11%². The most recent data available from Government (end October 2016) indicates that of the 32,106 young people in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance or Benefit, 13,559 or 42% have been doing so for 12 months or more³. It is disappointing three years on from the initiation of the EU Youth Guarantee in Ireland that so many young people are in long term unemployment. These figures do not include the 16,941⁴ and 9,828⁵ young people in receipt of Disability Allowance and the One Parent Family Payment respectively.

² <http://www.esri.ie/pubs/RS56.pdf> citing the Census 2011.

³ Parliamentary Question 393, November 15th 2016 <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2016-11-15a.1021>

⁴ Parliamentary Question 395, November 15th 2016 <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2016-11-15a.1027&s=%22under+26%22#g1028.q>

⁵ Parliamentary Question 393, November 15th 2016, <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2016-11-15a.1030&s=%22under+26%22#g1031.q>

According to the *Action Plan for Jobs 2016*⁶ “People with disabilities are only half as likely to have a job as the population at large.” (p34) While in 2017 the ESRI published *Employment Transitions among People with Disabilities in Ireland* which highlighted

- 31% of working-age people with a disability were at work compared to 71 per cent of those without a disability.
- Overall, the odds of employment entry are nearly 4 times lower for people with a disability.
- Across the period, people with a disability were more likely to exit than enter employment. For those without a disability, the rate of job entry picked up in the recovery period and the rate of exit dropped. However, there was little sign of a recovery for people with a disability by 2015.
- Policy actions should focus both on employment entries and exits.

A high percentage of working age people with a disability are not at work, nearly 70%, so efforts to increase their employment must consider this group: their profile is similar to the long-term unemployed in having low levels of education and being older; and the development of labour market skills will be important.

Government has introduced a number of measures to address the issue of unemployment and an increased focus on long-term unemployment in some of these recent measures is to be welcomed. However, the resources allocated and their focus are insufficient to address the exclusion from Ireland’s labour market facing so many people of working age. This risks, in particular, leaving large numbers of long-term unemployed people, people with disabilities and people with low levels of skills and literacy, behind as the economy recovers. The structural nature of these issues, the subsequent skill deficits, under-employment and precarious work issues have been given limited attention.

Changes made in recent years in the One-Parent Family payment involve greater conditionality linked to activation measures aimed at the unemployed. But conditionality and activation measures alone do not address mismatches between skills sets and available jobs nor indeed do they address gaps in basic educational and literacy levels amongst long-term unemployed people that prevent them entering today’s jobs market. The issue of child-care is also a significant barrier to employment for many lone parents.

As recovery emerges, it is important that policy focuses on those furthest from being able to enter or re-join the labour market and that it also assists those within employment but

⁶ Full document available at: <https://www.djei.ie/en/Publications/Publication-files/Action-Plan-for-Jobs-2016.pdf>

struggling to make ends meet. A job is only an answer to poverty if it is a decent and sustainable job.

With this in mind we recommend that Government adopt a more ambitious national target relative to employment in the 2017 NRP and a range of more ambitious measures aimed at reaching that target. These measures include:

- Launching a major investment programme focused on creating employment and prioritising initiatives that strengthen social infrastructure.
- Strengthen legislative and other policy measures to ensure that all jobs are of decent quality and can provide a living wage.
- Resourcing the up-skilling of those who are unemployed and at risk of becoming unemployed through integrating training and labour market programmes.
- Maintaining a sufficient number of active labour market programme places available to those who are unemployed.
- Adopt a person centred approach to employment supports and activation programmes, so that they assist the people to make real progress in their lives. This should involve an integrated active inclusion approach addressing adequate minimum income, quality services and an inclusive labour market with decent jobs.
- Renewed commitment to deliver on the objectives of the EU Youth Guarantee Programme, where all young people unemployed for 4 months or more are offered a quality education, training and/or work experience opportunity. There should be a focus on measures to address youth unemployment in disadvantaged areas. In particular, these should include education and literacy initiatives as well as retraining schemes.
- Acknowledge and address inequalities in the labour market including those facing older unemployed people; women; people with disabilities; Travellers; people living in disadvantaged areas, both rural and urban. Areas of specific importance to people with a disability include:
 - ♦ Retention of medical cards when they move into employment
 - ♦ Support for the additional costs of disability itself, which needs to be individually assessed
 - ♦ Flexibility in how jobs are structured including in hours and job tasks
 - ♦ Ensuring equal treatment in access to services such as health, transport and financial services, as well as in access to (and retention of) employment.

CHILD CARE

Ireland has the second highest Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) costs in the European Union, and the highest costs for one parent families⁷. Budget 2017 announced the delivery of an Affordable Childcare Scheme (ACS) from September 2017. The ACS is a scheme of financial support for parents, which aims to make ECEC and School-Age Childcare (SAC) services more affordable for parents through universal and targeted subsidies.⁸ Its development is welcome, as is its prioritisation by Government, being at pre-legislative stage in February 2017. The ACS has the potential to support children's access to care and education services all-year round, and to facilitate parents to work, potentially impacting positively on high child poverty rates in Ireland. The Semester Process should encourage and monitor the implementation of the ACS, and ensure that it delivers on its promise of affordability. The CV Pillar will monitor the extent to which the ACS, when implemented, reduces the costs of ECEC services for parents, It is welcome that Government proposes to pay the ACS subsidy directly to ECEC providers rather than to parents, supporting the State's control and oversight of quality in services and accountability for public funds⁹.

While the Government is trying to tackle ECEC service affordability in 2016/7, they have been less than successful in the area of quality. It is vital that the State invest in good quality ECEC as it will impact positively on children's cognitive, physical and socio-emotional development¹⁰ and outcomes in adulthood such as educational attainment, particularly for children whose home learning environments may not support their development¹¹. Children's early years from zero to six are vital in support good child development. Poor quality is bad for child development.

Introduced in 2010, the Free Pre School Year entitles all children aged between three years and two months and four years and seven months to free access to ECEC for 15 hours per week, 38 weeks per year. Between 1 September 2015 and 31 August 2016, 73,964 children benefitted from the programme.¹² Budget 2016 extended the FPSY to children for a second year, and 85,000 children were registered in September 2016¹³, as acknowledged by the EU Commission in its latest country report. Approximately 95 per cent of eligible children participate in the FPSY

⁷ Council Recommendation 2016/328/ EC of 18 May 2016 'on the 2016 national reform programme of Ireland and delivering a Council opinion on the 2016 stability programme of Ireland' COM(2016) 328 final 7.

⁸ Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 'Budget 2017: Q&A on the Affordable Childcare Scheme' <<http://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/earlyyears/20161018Budget2017FAQDoc.pdf>> 6 February 2017.

⁹ Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 'Policy Paper on the Development of a new Single Affordable Childcare Scheme' (October 2016) 88 <<http://bit.ly/2h4tNrx>> accessed 6 February 2017.

¹⁰ Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care, *Proposal for Key Principles of a Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care: Report of the Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care* (European Commission 2014) 13, 14.

¹¹ Barnara Janta, Janna van Belle, Katherine Stewart, *Quality and Impact of Centre-Based Early Childhood Education and Care* (RAND Europe 2016) 4.

¹² Pobal, *Early Years Sector Profile 2015-2016* (Pobal 2016) 12, 13.

¹³ Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 'Thousands Of Extra Children Joining Free Pre-School' (13 October 2015) <[Www.Dcy.gov.ie/Viewdoc.Asp?Docid=3953&Catid=11&Mn=&Startdate=01+January+2016](http://www.Dcy.gov.ie/Viewdoc.Asp?Docid=3953&Catid=11&Mn=&Startdate=01+January+2016)> Accessed 6 February 2017.

and have done so from the outset¹⁴. However, it is inadequately subsidised and there has been no national systematic assessment of the service quality received by children.

The Irish Government introduced two-week statutory Paternity Leave and the Paternity Benefit payment in September 2016, which was very welcome, and was noted positively by the EU Commission Ireland Country Report (published 22/2/17) on the Government's progress in meeting its CSRs. This would allow a parent and child to spend the first 12 months together. The forthcoming Irish draft legislation to consolidate current family leave legislation provides an opportunity to provide for additional paid parental leave. That the European Commission is to develop a work-life balance package in March 2017 that could include proposals on parental leave, carers' leave and flexible working arrangements as well as non-legislative proposals (e.g. policy guidance, financial support, etc.) also suggests that the time is opportune for the Irish Government to act on parental leave¹⁵.

There are two issues that the Government should focus in the 2017/2018 Semester Process to assure and enhance quality, 1) conduct an audit on the extent of quality in early years services, 2) invest directly in ECEC services so that they have the capacity to deliver quality.

- In Budget 2016, the Government announced an audit to assess the quality of ECEC in Ireland¹⁶ 'A Programme for a Partnership Government' also committed to this audit. The DCYA plans to procure this an audit tool and process from an independent external agency and anticipates that the audit will be clarified and finalised within the first quarter of 2017.¹⁷ We have little knowledge on the quality of services and the impact of the services on children's outcomes, and the extent to which public spending to date an improved service quality;
- There are challenges for ECEC services, 65 per cent of which are for-profit private providers and 35 per cent are non-profit community services (Pobal, 2015 Annual Report), to find the resources to meet statutory Regulations and quality standards (Early Childhood Ireland, Doing the Sums (Dublin 2016). While services are expensive for parents, the 4,500 services are barely breaking even and there are questions around sustainability. While the ACS aims to improve affordability for parents, the level of State resources going directly into the services themselves to meet regulation and quality standards, or exceed the standards, is very low. The Free Preschool Years subsidised by the Government do not allow services to charge parents for the time the children are receiving this service. The capitation grant provided to services by the State is inadequate to meet the costs of provision (ECI 2016). The majority of Early Years

¹⁴ Pobal, *Early Years Sector Profile 2015-2016* (Pobal 2016) 13.

¹⁵ Source of EU package piece - <http://www.tasc.ie/events/2017/02/23/lunchtime-seminar-ger-gibbons-siptu-prospects-and/>

¹⁶ DCYA website

¹⁷ Ibid

practitioners earn little above the hourly minimum wage, and over 6,500 have to access social welfare payments for 14 weeks of the year as the public funding for the Free Preschool Year only runs for 38 weeks. Although it should be acknowledged that the State invests in quality support services such as Better Start, the National Quality Improvement Service.

In the 2017-2018 Semester Process, the Irish Government should meaningfully progress the Programme for a Partnership Government commitment to introduce paid parental leave for up to one year, which could be taken after maternity leave (which lasts six-months) by either parent.

EDUCATION

In 2012, almost 10 per cent of 18-24 years olds had left school early. The same percentage of those who entered second level education in 2007 who would have sat their final school exams (leaving certificate) in 2012-2013, had left school. Only 3 per cent of the same group did not complete their junior cycle of post-primary school.^[16] In disadvantaged communities, this doubles to 20 per cent – an improvement from 33 per cent of those who entered second level education in 2001.^[17] As noted in the EU Commission Country Report for Ireland the rate of young people “not in education, employment or training” is 2.3% above the EU average.¹⁸

Education is widely recognised as crucial to the achievement of both national objectives and those of the Europe 2020 strategy such as ‘smart growth’ and ‘inclusive growth.’ However, the overall levels of public funding for education in Ireland are out of step with these aspirations, particularly as regards under-funding of early childhood education and care, and in the areas of lifelong learning and second-chance education – the very areas that are most vital in promoting greater equity and fairness.

The National Reform Programme should set targets in the following areas:

- Early School Leaving: Set a more ambitious national target of 5% for reduction of early school leaving.
- Adult Literacy: Adopt a more ambitious adult literacy target to reduce the proportion of the population aged 16-64 with restricted literacy to 5% per cent by 2020; and to 3% by 2025.
- Lifelong Learning: Adopt a 15 per cent target for participation in lifelong learning (for consistency with Irish National Skills Strategy 2025).

^[16] Department of Education and Skills (2014) *Retention Rates of Pupils in Second Level Schools, 2007 Entry Cohort*, Dublin: Department of Education and Skills, p.3.

^[17] Ibid, p.3.

¹⁸ <https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2017-european-semester-country-report-ireland-en.pdf> p7

HOUSING

There are currently 91,600 households on the social housing waiting list¹⁹, 55% with children.²⁰ Levels of hidden homelessness – cases where families and children are living in or sharing unsuitable and inappropriate accommodation – remain unknown. While family homelessness is at an all-time high and the number of families living in State-funded emergency accommodation continues to increase with 1,205 families with 2,505 children entering homeless accommodation in December 2016.²¹ This compares to 775 families with 1,616 children in December 2015.²² While the majority of these families are based in Dublin, in December 2016 there were 177 families with 409 children living in emergency accommodation outside Dublin.²³

The quality and standard of emergency accommodation is often inappropriate for family life given that whole families have to live in a hotel bedroom in overcrowded conditions. The lack of cooking facilities, recreational spaces for children, lack of access to transport and living at a distance from school have all been identified as issues that impact on families with children in particular.²⁴ A mapping exercise under *Rebuilding Ireland* will identify the number of families who are homeless and match them with available services in an area and identify any gaps in service provision.²⁵

Food poverty and unhealthy eating have been identified as particular issues in emergency accommodation²⁶ and there are concerns that the way in which families are provided with food may lead to unhealthy overeating or spending limited resources on expensive fast food.²⁷

Complaints to Dublin Region Housing Executive have highlighted a number of serious issues with the standard of accommodation used to accommodate homeless families with children. Some families are living in unhygienic and unsafe conditions with used syringes left in bedrooms, insect infestations, mould and damp causing respiratory issues, significant overcrowding and children being kept awake due to noise from surrounding pubs and clubs.

¹⁹ Housing Agency, *Summary of Housing Needs Assessments 2016: Key Findings*, (Housing Agency 2016) 5.

²⁰ *ibid* 14.

²¹ Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, 'Emergency Accommodation Figures, December 2016' <<http://bit.ly/2keOobm>> accessed 4 February 2017.

²² Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, 'Homeless Persons – December 2016' <<http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/other/homeless-persons-december-2015>> accessed 4 February 2017.

²³ Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, 'Emergency Accommodation Figures, December 2016' <<http://bit.ly/2keOobm>> accessed 4 February 2017.

²⁴ Government of Ireland, *Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness* (Government Publications 2016) 36.

²⁵ Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government *Rebuilding Ireland, Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness; First Quarterly Report* (DHPCLG 2016).

²⁶ Dr Kathy Walsh & Brian Harvey, *Family Experiences of Pathways into Homelessness* (Housing Agency 2015) 31.

²⁷ Breaking News, 'Food poverty highlighted as key issue facing homeless children living in emergency accommodation' (7 July 2016) <<http://bit.ly/2lcIKw>> accessed 3 February 2017.

The Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government Traveller Accommodation Count for 2015 shows that there are over 534 families on unauthorized sites in Ireland while 862 families are sharing housing²⁸. There is a need for an independent Traveller Accommodation Agency to oversee the provision of appropriate and quality accommodation, including Traveller specific accommodation that meets the needs of all Traveller families in a reasonable timeframe.

The Government reiterated in the *Programme for Government*²⁹ that decongregation is a key priority and this was referenced again in the new Rebuilding Ireland Strategy.³⁰ But, at the envisaged rate of deinstitutionalisation/decongregation of approximately 150 to 180 people per year, it would take another 15 years before everyone is relocated to housing in the community. The *Rebuilding Ireland Strategy*, the main Government policy on tackling the housing crisis, did not identify the then almost 4,000 people with disabilities who were on the social housing waiting list since 2013. Furthermore, there are over 1,000 people with disabilities, under the age of 65, inappropriately living in nursing homes for older people,³¹ due to the lack of accessible housing and community supports. Also, the *Rebuilding Ireland Strategy* pushed out the operating period of the *National Housing Strategy for People with Disabilities* for a further four years to 2020. However, in a 2016 Leader Forum Housing Report by the Centre for Independent living,³² identified ongoing problems relating to a number of issues, including waiting times and inaccessible application processes for both the Housing Adaptation Grants and Social Housing. Other problems identified included finding accessible rented accommodation, in particular somewhere rent allowance was accepted.

Moreover, despite the lack of appropriate housing for people with disabilities, a new Universal Design initiative by the Department of Housing was launched solely in the context of addressing housing for older persons.³³ This is despite the fact that the definition of Universal Design is set out in the National Disability Authority Act 1999,³⁴ as providing environments, including buildings, which are accessible to “persons of any age or size or having any particular physical, sensory, mental health or intellectual ability or disability”, and despite the creation of the Centre for Excellence in Universal Design within the National Disability Authority.³⁵

²⁸ Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government. Annual Count of Traveller Families in 2015 in all categories of Accommodation

http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/total_number_of_traveller_families_in_all_categories_of_accommodation-2016-02-05_table_2.pdf

²⁹ p. 72,

http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/eng/Work_Of_The_Department/Programme_for_Government/A_Programme_for_a_Partnership_Government.pdf

³⁰ p. 55, http://rebuildingireland.ie/Rebuilding%20Ireland_Action%20Plan.pdf

³¹ Per HSE data. In particular, as of August 2015, 1,047 people under the age of 65 are in receipt of NHSS funding (i.e. are in nursing homes)

³² <http://www.dublincil.org/userfiles/files/CIL%20Leader%20Forum%20Housing%20Report%202016%20.pdf>

³³ Homes for Smart Ageing Universal Design Challenge, <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/smart-ageing-universal-design-challenge/>

³⁴ Article 19A, as inserted by Article 52 of the Disability Act 2005

³⁵ Article 19B of the National Disability Authority Act 1999 as inserted by Article 52 of the Disability Act 2005

POVERTY

Ireland is a very long way away from its Europe 2020 poverty target, and indeed from its new sub-target relative to childhood poverty. Overall poverty levels are still extremely high with consistent poverty now at 8.7%. The Commission's Country report states that 'achieving the national target remains ambitious'. This means that tackling these high rates of poverty and income inequality require greater attention and a multifaceted approach with action on many fronts including healthcare and education, accommodation and quality employment. However, the most important requirement in tackling poverty is the provision of sufficient income to enable people to live life with dignity, whether they are in or out of work.

Child poverty remains unacceptably high: the *EU Survey of Income and Living Conditions* (EU SILC), published in January 2016, shows that in 2015, 7.7% of two-parent families were in consistent poverty. More than 215,000 lone parent families live in Ireland³⁶ and they experience disproportionate rates of poverty compared with other family types.³⁷ More than a third of lone parent households are at risk of poverty, more than a quarter live in consistent poverty and almost 60% experience two or more types of deprivation.³⁸ This compares to an overall consistent child poverty rate of 11.5%³⁹ meaning that children of lone parents are more than twice as likely to live in consistent poverty as the general child population. Income disregards are an important mechanism to support lone parents in work as they mean that a certain portion of a person's earned income will not be considered when a person is means-tested for a social welfare payment. Budget 2017 increased the income disregard for parents in receipt of One Parent Family Payment (OPFP) and Jobseeker's Transition Payment (JST) by €20 per week. From January 2017, lone parents can earn up to €110 per week and still qualify for their full social welfare payment. There are more than 14,000 OPFP recipients in employment, and of 14,500 JST recipients, 5,000 recipients work.⁴⁰ The Family Income Supplement is also an important support for working parents with approximately 27,000 lone parents in receipt of the payment. Of the approximately 56,000 lone parents in receipt of OPFP or JST, 34,700 are not engaged in employment and so remain below the income poverty threshold.⁴¹

The *Social Impact Assessment of Budget 2017* found that non-earning households benefitted most, with non-earning single parent households experiencing a 4.5% increase in their income.⁴² Other measures that have been taken to support working lone parents in receipt of

³⁶ Central Statistics Office, *Census 2011: Profile 5 – Households and Families* (The Stationery Office 2012) 22.

³⁷ Fran McGinnity et al., *Winners and Losers? The Equality Impact of the Great Recession in Ireland* (Equality Authority and ESRI 2014).

³⁸ Central Statistics Office, 'Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2015 Results' (CSO 2017)

<<http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/silc/surveyonincomeandlivingconditions2015/>> accessed 2 February 2017.

³⁹ Communication received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the Central Statistics Office, 2 February 2017.

⁴⁰ Communication received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the Department of Social Protection, 23 January 2017.

⁴¹ Department of Social Protection 'Who are the children living in consistent poverty?'

⁴² Department of Social Protection 'Social impact assessment of the welfare and income tax measures in Budget 2017' (November 2016) <<https://www.welfare.ie/en/downloads/SocialImpact2017.pdf>> accessed 31 January 2017.

payments include an exemption from the requirement to seek full-time work, making supports available for longer periods of time, targeted engagement with lone parents with children between the ages of seven and 14 years, and ensuring that lone parents in education are not subject to a means-test for the Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) grant.⁴³ However, while these supports are welcome they do not restore the cuts made to the One Parent Family Payment supports during the term of the previous Government.

The reference to an announcement of a sub-target relative to jobless households in the National Reform Programme for 2014 was welcome, but the delay in introducing it is regrettable. Actions intended to reduce the numbers of jobless households must take account of the issues highlighted by the National Economic and Social Council (2014). These include the need for participation and activation measures to include responses such as adult literacy, child development, family supports, addiction services, disability services, housing, education and training, public employment, community employment, and so on, as well as engagement with employers.

Overall, current trends in Irish public policy are in direct contradiction to the promotion of 'inclusive growth,' which is one of the three key priorities which underlie the Europe 2020 Strategy. Inclusive growth is not just about fostering a high-employment economy, it also aims to deliver social cohesion – it is integral to the Europe 2020 strategy and needs to be integral to the response of the Irish Government.

The Irish Government should develop an integrated strategy to address poverty and social exclusion. As part of this they should carry out in-depth social impact assessments when developing budgets or policies in order to ensure that they contribute toward the delivery of the national poverty target and at a minimum ensure that the position of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion is not worsened by the measures being pursued. The National Reform Programme should adopt the following updated targets on poverty:

- Ireland Headline Target: To reduce by 2020 the consistent poverty rate to 2%; the at-risk-of-poverty rate anchored in time to 8%; and the at-risk-of-poverty (only) rate to 7%.
- These headline targets should be accompanied by subsidiary poverty targets for vulnerable groups with higher levels of poverty moving them towards the overall average.

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⁴³ Communication received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the Department of Social Protection, 23 January 2017.