



COMMUNITY PLATFORM - CHALLENGING POVERTY & INEQUALITY

a network of 29 national organisations working to address poverty, social exclusion, and inequality

Four Tests for the Budget 2017

People on low incomes, women and minorities, who gained least in the boom years also suffered most in the recession. Almost three in ten of the population experience deprivation, because of unemployment, inadequate services and welfare supports and low quality jobs.

Budget 2017 must have a progressive impact and the additional resources available to the Government must all be used to invest in adequate social welfare supports and critical public infrastructure. It must signal the beginning of a delivery on this Government's commitment to social repair and the building of an inclusive recovery. Community Platform members will judge Budget 2017 particularly in terms of the following four tests.

Test 1: Will Budget 2017 redistribute income towards the poorest 20%

The Community Platform believes the Government should:

- **Make the tax system more progressive** and equitable by closing tax loopholes and ending all tax-breaks which cannot demonstrate a social benefit
- **Immediately restore social welfare rates** to their pre-cut purchasing power (€204), and subsequently increase them in a planned way to a level which is above the at-risk of poverty line and will provide households with a Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL). At a minimum Budget 2017 should increase adult personal rates (Jobseekers, One-Parent Family Payment, etc.) by €5.70 per week, with commensurate increases to the qualified adult and child rates, and a commitment to subsequent increases in 2018 and 2019.
- **Recognise the additional minimum needs of older children** with the introduction of a higher rate of Qualified Child Increase (QCI) for children in second level education.
- **End the unfair and inadequate reduced rate of Jobseekers payments for younger adults** under 26.
- **Grant Child Benefit to all children irrespective of the migration status of the parents** and grant the right to work to asylum seekers resident in Direct Provision for 6 months or more. Replace direct provision accommodation with Housing Assistance Payment and a cash allowance that will ensure a minimum essential standard of living.
- **Develop a measure of minimum adequate income** that is responsive to the extra costs associated with living with a disability, and ensure that people with disabilities are granted an income that allows them to live with dignity.

Test 2: Will Budget 2017 strengthen access to quality employment?

The Community Platform believes the Government should:

- **Incrementally increase the National Minimum Wage** towards Living Wage levels. The current rate of the National Minimum Wage (€9.15) is 80% of the Living Wage rate.
- **Examine the hours requirement and withdrawal rate for Family Income Supplement** particularly recognising the growth in part-time and low hour employment in recent years.
- **Enable one parent households with children over the age of 7** to qualify for both Family Income Supplement and Job Seekers Transition.
- **Resource the public employment service** to a level which allows it to provide those accessing the service with the time to receive quality engagement and supports.
- **Change the criteria for access to Jobseekers payments** from one based on days to one based on hours.
- **Ensure that people who are unemployed and have literacy and numeracy needs** and or low education attainment have access to a specific intensive programme at QQI level 3 which includes a work placement.
- **Increase provision of and access to quality public childcare supports** for those seeking to access activation or training programmes, including Qualified Adults.

Test 3: Will Budget 2017 restore and strengthen public services which are of particular importance to people on low income?

The Community Platform believes the Government should:

- **Recognise that the provision of quality services** as part achieving the goal of an adequate minimum essential standard of living for all.
- **Move towards a 'Living Rent' system**, ensuring access to adequate housing, security of tenure, and a rent which is based on a household's income and ability to pay, applying a consistent differential rent scheme across the country.
- **Offer any adult with literacy, numeracy and basic ICT needs** or less than a Leaving Certificate or equivalent qualification, a guaranteed universal system of second chance education.
- **Increase the resources available** to support the provision and expansion of a comprehensive affordable and quality early years and after-school care infrastructure in Ireland, including investment in training and improved pay scales for childcare workers.
- **Ensure that transport costs** are factored into the costs of disability and supporting access to employment and further training and education training programmes.

Test 4: Will the impact of Budget 2017 be assessed to ensure that all provisions reduce poverty and inequality?

The Community Platform believes the Government should:

- **Ensure that policy measures** to improve the position of those on the lowest incomes do not have adverse unintended consequence and review all means tests and income thresholds for vital public services and income supports as a matter of course following any measures which may change household income.
- **Carry out comprehensive and transparent poverty, gender and equality impact assessments** of all relevant taxation and spending decisions, including but not confined to welfare and public services, and take action on the findings.
- **Set aside funding to support the process of designing and adopting the national 2030 Agenda Strategy** and its action plan for sustainable development in Ireland and globally. Relevant means should be available for the Government Departments concerned as well as for civil society and community organisations at large to contribute to this process.
- **Set aside funding for pilot projects** with the aim of developing long-term participatory processes in which people with experience of poverty and their organisations could contribute to the assessment and monitoring of policy.
- **Assess the budgetary implications** of a regularisation scheme for undocumented migrants in the State, taking into consideration that a lack of legal status is a key factor pushing families into poverty.

NOTE: Details of Community Platform proposals are in the Pre-Budget submissions of the Platform members.

The Community Platform

*c/o EAPN Ireland, 100 North King Street, Smithfield, Dublin 7, Ireland; Phone: +353 (0)1 8745737
email: communityplatform@eapn.ie Website: www.communityplatform.ie*

The Community Platform is a network of 29 national networks and organisations in the community and voluntary sector working to address poverty, social exclusion and inequality.

- Age Action Ireland
- All Together in Dignity (ATD) Ireland
- Community Action Network
- Community Work Ireland
- Cairde
- Debt and Development Coalition
- European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) Ireland
- Focus Ireland
- Gay & Lesbian Equality Network
- Immigrant Council of Ireland
- Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed
- Irish Penal Reform Trust
- Irish Refugee Council
- Irish Rural Link
- Irish Traveller Movement
- Migrant Rights Centre Ireland
- National Adult Literacy Agency
- National Collective of Community-based Women's Networks
- National Traveller Women's Forum
- National Women's Council of Ireland
- Pavee Point
- Rape Crisis Network Ireland
- Safe Ireland
- Sign Language Interpreting Service
- Simon Communities of Ireland
- Threshold
- Voluntary Drug Treatment Network
- Vincentian Partnership for Justice
- Women's Aid