



COMMUNITY PLATFORM

CHALLENGING POVERTY & INEQUALITY

Four Tests for Budget 2015

People on low incomes, women and minorities, who gained least in the boom years, have suffered most in the recession. Over a quarter of the population are now officially counted as experiencing deprivation, including many who are working, because of unemployment and service and welfare cuts. Budget 2015 must urgently address the widespread suffering reported by our members and the people they represent and work with and signal a medium term strategy to build a more equal and inclusive Ireland. Community Platform members will judge Budget 2015 particularly in terms of the following four tests.

Test 1: Will Budget 2015 redistribute income towards the poorest 20% of the population and Compensate those who have lost most over the last six years ?

The Community Platform believes the Government should:

- Make the tax system more progressive, closing loopholes which undermine the effective rates of corporation tax and of income tax at the higher levels.
- Over the next five years, begin the process of increasing all basic social welfare payments towards the level necessary to achieve a Minimum Essential Standard of Living, beginning with a minimum €5 increase in Budget 2015 to address the immediate increase in the cost of living.
- Restore full social welfare payments for those under 26 years.
- Reverse the decision to introduce the next phase in the reduction of the income disregard for lone parents on the One-Parent Family Payment in 2015.
- Give Child Benefit to all children, including children of asylum seekers, regardless of nationality or status. Anyone resident in Direct Provision for 6 months or more, should be given the right to work and replace direct provision accommodation with a rental allowance or housing assistance payment and a cash allowance that will ensure an adequate standard of living.
- Increase the Living Alone Allowance by €3.80 per week in order to restore its real value.
- Reinststate the Telephone Allowance in order to allow older people to remain secure in their home, address the issue of isolation and provide much needed support for those on lower incomes.
- Introduce a refundable tax credit system for people on low incomes.

Test 2: Will Budget 2015 strengthen access to quality employment?

The Community Platform believes the Government should:

- Ensure that the Public Employment Service develops the capacity to respond to the needs of all people of working age seeking employment and that access to programmes is based on wider criteria than a person's Live Register status.
- Change the criteria for access to Jobseekers' payments and base them on hours rather than days
- Maintain in-work income supports such as Family Income Supplement, reduce the hours requirement to 17.5 hours and increase the earnings threshold for access. Reform FIS so that those who qualify for it automatically receive it.
- 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.
- Ensure minimum wages are reviewed and adjusted in line with growth and inflation

Test 3: Will Budget 2015 provide the funding needed to restore and strengthen services which are of particular importance to people on low income?

The Community Platform believes the Government should:

- Put in place measures to immediately increase access to housing, especially social housing and strengthen rent regulation and control.
- Immediately review Rent Supplement levels across all local authorities to ensure they are sufficient for all social welfare recipients to access rental accommodation.
- Tackle the homeless crisis through increasing resources.
- Increase the resources available to support the provision and expansion of a comprehensive and affordable early years and after-school care infrastructure in Ireland, including investment in training and improved pay scales for childcare providers.
- Increase provision of and access to public childcare supports for those seeking to access activation or training programmes, including Qualified Adults.

Test 4: Will Budget 2015 put in place mechanisms to ensure that all areas of policy, including the budget itself, work to reduce poverty and inequality?

The Community Platform believes the Government should:

- 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 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 areas of policy.

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

Community Platform

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 Workers Co-operative
- Cairde
- Debt and Development Coalition
- European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) Ireland
- Focus Ireland
- Gay & Lesbian Equality Network
- Immigrant Council of Ireland
- Irish Association of Older People
- 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 Network of Women's Refuges & Support Services
- National Traveller Women's Forum
- National Women's Council of Ireland
- Older Women's Network
- Pavee Point
- Rape Crisis Network Ireland
- Simon Communities of Ireland
- Threshold
- Voluntary Drug Treatment Network
- Vincentian Partnership for Justice
- Women's Aid.

*c/o EAPN Ireland, Equity House, Upper Ormond Quay, Dublin 7, Ireland; Phone: +353 (0)1 8745737
email: communityplatform@eapn.ie Website: www.communityplatform.ie*