



European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) Ireland

GENERAL ELECTION MANIFESTO 2024

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POVERTY IS A HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATION AND ENDING POVERTY IS A POLITICAL CHOICE

This General Election Manifesto sets out the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) Ireland priorities for the next Government. It outlines actions the next Government must take if it is serious about addressing poverty, social exclusion and inequality, and contains a range of commitments we are calling on all candidates and political parties to adopt and deliver should they form the next Government. The eight key areas covered are:

- SYSTEMIC CHANGE
- INCOME ADEQUACY
- INCLUSIVE LABOUR MARKETS
- ACCESS TO ESSENTIAL PUBLIC SERVICES
- COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE
- AUTONOMOUS COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
- SUSTAINABLE FUNDING FOR SOCIAL INVESTMENT
- POVERTY PROOFING & MAINSTREAMING

The next Government must commit to eradicating, not just alleviating, poverty. This will involve a high level of political will and ambition. Addressing the underlying structural and systematic causes of poverty, social exclusion and inequality must be prioritised. This can only be achieved in any effective way through the implementation of a genuinely integrated strategy across all Government policy, underpinned by sustainable investment, and financed by progressive and redistributive taxation. This must involve a commitment to ensuring everyone has access to an adequate income, quality essential services and the opportunity to access a decent job. It must also involve proofing all relevant policy for its impact on poverty and giving an effective and meaningful voice to people experiencing poverty in how policies are developed and implemented.

ADDRESSING SYSTEMIC CHANGE

- Develop and implement a successor to the Roadmap for Social Inclusion in the form of a whole-of-government anti-poverty strategy based on the objective of eliminating consistent poverty by 2030 with a range of policy and administrative measures adequate to ensure this target is achieved. This strategy should:
 - Be based on and address the multidimensional nature of poverty;
 - Be comprehensive, human rights-based, person-centred, and integrated;
 - Address poverty, social exclusion and inequality for all and through the life course;
 - Include mechanisms for coordination and accountability, clear and measurable targets, and the allocation of adequate resources for its implementation.
- Enshrine economic, social and cultural rights in the Irish Constitution as justiciable rights. Adopt all legislative, policy, administrative and other measures to give full effect to and incorporate the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights into Irish law, and ratify the Optional Protocol.
- Expedite the review process of the Equality Acts, and add socio-economic status as a ground of discrimination under Ireland's equality legislation.
- Commit to establishing an autonomous and adequately resourced Future Generations Commissioner for Ireland, to oversee and safeguard cross-government action to protect the rights and well-being of future generations from environmental, economic, and social risks.[1]

ADDRESSING INCOME ADEQUACY

Income adequacy for all must be prioritised by the next Government, and a key pillar of the next Programme for Government. Ensuring income adequacy for all is a fundamental means of addressing and preventing poverty and social exclusion, and is crucial for the fulfilment of Ireland's anti-poverty commitments. The next Government must commit to ensuring everyone has access to an adequate income, whether from work or social welfare, or a mix of both.

- Benchmark all social welfare rates and pensions against a level that is adequate to lift people above the poverty line and provide them with a Minimum Essential Standard of Living based on the MESL data.[2]
- Progress the introduction of a living wage based on the cost of living, as calculated by the Living Wage Technical Group.[3]
- Take measures to ensure that the minimum/living wage applies to all workers, all sectors and all forms of employment, including by repealing the following sections of the Employment Equality Act: 34 (6), which provides for age-related remuneration, and 35 (1), on different rates of remuneration for disabled people.
- Introduce a permanent Cost of Disability payment to adequately address the additional costs faced by disabled people.
- Implement an International Protection Child Payment for children living in Direct Provision at the same rate as the Child Benefit payment, and increase the rate of the Daily Expenses Allowance (DEA) for adults living in Direct Provision in line with inflation, in order to address the levels of income inadequacy faced by children and families living in Direct Provision.

ADDRESSING INCLUSIVE LABOUR MARKETS

In addition to a living wage, the availability of 'decent work' must be addressed in the context of preventing and addressing poverty. Decent work includes appropriate and safe working conditions, where the rights of employees are respected and enacted, and regular and consistent hours. Despite record employment levels, many of the most marginalised and disadvantaged groups continue to experience unemployment and underemployment. The next Government needs to do more, including via targeted supports, to address the multiple barriers to employment experienced by vulnerable and marginalised groups in society.

- Review employment policies to address the root causes of unemployment for under-represented and marginalised groups and people distant from the labour market, including through an action plan with time-bound goals, and measures to support these groups and overcome structural and institutional barriers hindering participation and access to the labour market.
- Adequately resource and fund effective public employment services and supports to ensure a respectful culture and the provision of enabling services which takes a holistic approach to identifying the specific needs of individuals and developing person-centred pathways.
- Strengthen standards on decent work, including by guaranteeing fair, safe and healthy working conditions for all workers in all sectors.

ADDRESSING ACCESS TO ESSENTIAL PUBLIC SERVICES

Ireland's historical under-investment in essential public services has resulted in a situation where there is inadequate provision and a high cost for many public services. The ongoing reliance on the private sector to provide public services leads to an inefficient use of state resources and an inability of the state to own, manage, control and ensure equitable and affordable access to quality public services, particularly for those on the lowest incomes. Investment in and reducing the cost of our public services would contribute to reducing the cost of living for all. The next Government must commit to ensuring universal access to quality, affordable and sustainable essential public services and supports for all people, based on need and without discrimination of any kind.

- Deliver a universal, accessible, public system of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), including through increased investment to 1% of national income by 2030.
- Prioritise and expedite the implementation of Sláintecare, with adequate investment and resources, as part of ensuring a single-tiered universal health care system to facilitate affordable, quality, and efficient access to health services, with a focus on reducing health inequalities so everyone can access the care they need, when they need it, in their own communities.
- Introduce adequate measures to prevent and address digital poverty, ensuring digital services and digitalisation are optional rather than compulsory, and guaranteeing accessible, affordable and quality physical services available to all.

- Recognise and resource a statutory right to Personal Assistance Services (PAS) to ensure the necessary support for the full, active participation of disabled people in society.
- Prioritise and increase investment in the expansion of public transport and active travel infrastructure, with emphasis on rural transport, reducing costs, and making transport safer, more accessible and low carbon.
- Implement the recommendation of the Housing Commission to increase the size of the social and cost-rental housing sectors to 20% of total national housing stock.
- Prioritise and adequately resource comprehensive prevention and early intervention measures to prevent homelessness from occurring and reoccurring.
- Ensure all housing meets adequate standards of habitability, accessibility including universal design, cultural appropriateness, energy efficiency, location and availability of services, facilities and infrastructure.
- Introduce legislative and other measures to improve protection for tenants and ensure security of tenure, including regulations on rent levels and other housing-related costs in the private sector, increasing Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) and Rent Supplement rates, and the delivery of sufficient cost-rental housing.
- Urgently address barriers to the adequate provision of Traveller specific accommodation.
- Hold a referendum to enshrine the right to housing in the Constitution, including a stand-alone amendment with a recognition of a directly enforceable right to housing and a separate statement of the State's obligation to realise that right.

ADDRESSING COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE

The most effective decisions are made when those most impacted and with direct knowledge and expertise are involved. The next Government must develop and implement meaningful and effective engagement mechanisms and strategies that go beyond information and consultation models to ensure and promote the full, effective and meaningful participation of people, groups and communities experiencing and most at risk of poverty and social exclusion, and the organisations working with them, in the design, implementation, monitoring and assessment of policies, programmes and legislation.

- Implement the proposals made in the Community Platform Discussion Paper, *Towards a Progressive Model for Collaborative Governance*, to strengthen collaborative governance, particularly to establish a Collaborative Governance Advisory Body, led by the Department of the Taoiseach, to oversee the implementation of a consistent and effective process of collaborative governance across Government.
- Ensure all strategies, policies and programmes related to disadvantaged and marginalised individuals and groups are developed in partnership with those individuals and groups and receive sufficient financial, human and technical resources, including through the effective application of the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty, and that their implementation is regularly monitored and evaluated through oversight by relevant social partners.

ADDRESSING AUTONOMOUS COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Autonomous community development is essential in addressing poverty, social exclusion and inequalities. The next Government must invest in sufficient and adequate funding for autonomous community development and community development infrastructure, including specific support and resourcing through autonomous community development organisations to facilitate direct engagement of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion to have a full say in informing the development and implementation of policies that impact on their lives.

- Significantly increase investment in and resourcing of local autonomous community development including scaling up and mainstreaming the Community Development Programme, and expedite the establishment of a network of autonomous community development projects in and with marginalised communities.
- Evaluate how the Community and Voluntary sector could be better resourced and introduce more multi-year funding to allow organisations to effectively plan long term.

ADDRESSING SUSTAINABLE FUNDING FOR SOCIAL INVESTMENT

Ensuring sustainable funding is crucial to address the challenges facing Ireland and for the delivery of essential public services and supports, such as health, housing, education, transport, childcare, social care, and social protection. In order to ensure the requisite capacity and resources are available to sustainably fund social investment in a manner that tackles income and wealth inequality and does not negatively impact people experiencing poverty or on lower incomes, the next Government should:

- Broaden the tax base in a progressive and sustainable manner which is fair and redistributes income, wealth and resources.
- Continue to increase the Pay Related Social Insurance (PRSI) contribution rates, in a fair and progressive manner, in order to replenish the Social Insurance Fund.
- Tackle wealth inequality by introducing reforms to our taxation system in order to better tax wealth, including a progressive wealth tax on Irish millionaires and billionaires.
- Ensure tax changes, including proposals to reduce tax revenue, are poverty and equality proofed.

ADDRESSING POVERTY PROOFING & MAINSTREAMING

Effective and transparent poverty and equality proofing in all policy development and implementation is crucial to ensure policy decisions do not lead to more people experiencing poverty and help achieve commitments to reduce poverty, social exclusion and inequality.

- Ensure that the eradication of poverty is mainstreamed as a priority across Government departments, and made a central issue at the heart of all relevant policy development, implementation and monitoring, including the annual Budget process.
- Develop and implement a process to effectively poverty, gender, and equality proof all policies (including social, economic, fiscal, equality and environmental policies) to ensure they protect the rights of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion and contribute toward Ireland meeting its anti-poverty commitments.
- Ensure the full inclusion of socio-economic status and poverty are prioritised as part of equality budgeting.

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1. <https://coalition2030.ie/press-release-coalition-2030-urges-irish-government-to-establish-a-future-generations-commissioner/>
 2. www.budgeting.ie
 3. www.livingwage.ie/
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The European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) Ireland is a network of almost 160 local, regional and national anti-poverty organisations and individuals. It is the Irish national network of the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN), which links groups fighting for the eradication of poverty across Europe. The Mission of EAPN Ireland is to put the eradication of poverty at the top of the Irish and European policy agenda and empower groups working to end poverty to understand and influence policy-making.



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