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wheel**

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THE WHEEL'S SUBMISSION TO THE CONSULTATION ON THE SUCCESSOR TO THE ROADMAP FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION

June 2025

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About the Charity, Community and Voluntary Sector

The community, voluntary, charity, and social enterprise sector is involved in every community in the country, providing health and social supports, services, and advocacy on behalf of people with disabilities, older people, young people, children, people experiencing poverty and disadvantage, and people at every stage of their lives.

In addition to its societal contribution, the sector makes a major contribution to the economy. It comprises approximately 35,000 organisations, involves almost 76,500 volunteer trustees, directly employs 281,250 people in charities alone (1 in every 8 employed people), and manages income of €25 billion per year. These organisations raise almost half of this income themselves, majorly subsidising the cost of public services in Ireland. When direct, indirect, and induced impact is considered, the sector had €32.1 billion in expenditure in 2022, and supported 321,000 jobs.¹

The breadth of the community and voluntary sector in Ireland is far reaching. Organisations provide vital services and supports in areas such as health and social care, community development, children and family services, and integration. They are at the forefront of the work to address the climate crisis and to advocate for human rights. The sector is integral to meeting the most important societal challenges and providing essential public services. For example, nearly 70% of all disability services are provided by voluntary organisations funded under Section 38 or Section 39 of the Health Act 2004.

Successor to the Roadmap for Social Inclusion

1. What progress do you feel has been made in reducing poverty and social exclusion since publication of the *Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020–2025* in January 2020?

The development of the Roadmap to Social Inclusion 2020–2025 was itself a significant acknowledgment of the importance of addressing these major societal inequalities in a coherent way, as well as reflecting a more agile response to emerging social needs. The development of the Roadmap has also improved both public and political awareness of issues such as income adequacy, the cost of disability, and the importance of universal access to services.

The current roadmap has also delivered some notable progress through targeted in-kind supports for groups of people most at risk of poverty. These have had a marked impact on poverty reduction and the most recent SILC data shows that, without these, 31% of the population would have been living in poverty in 2024.

While these advances have not reversed underlying poverty trends, they have nonetheless mitigated hardship for many, particularly children and families on low incomes, and disabled people. Successes include: the expansion of school meals and free school books; the Households Benefit Package and extensions to the Fuel Allowance Scheme; the establishment of a Food Poverty Working Group and the pilot caseworker model.

2. In your experience, what has worked well in reducing the number of people in Ireland experiencing poverty and social exclusion?

See answer above.

3. In your experience, what has not worked so well or is challenging in reducing the number of people in Ireland experiencing poverty and social exclusion?

While the Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020–2025 provided a useful framework for coordination, it has not achieved its central ambition: reducing consistent poverty to 2% or less. Almost 830,000 people experienced deprivation in 2024 and consistent poverty rates increased to 5% compared to 3.6% in 2023. Many indicators have worsened — particularly for groups already at the margins. Structural shortcomings in income support, housing, energy policy, and disability inclusion remain unresolved.

Cost-of-living measures and one-off payments in recent budgets provided some short-term relief, but did not address systemic poverty and inequality or the impact of inflation and rising costs in energy, housing, and the cost of living. The increased overall poverty rate between 2023 and 2024 clearly demonstrates this.

The Programme for Government makes a strong commitment to “Ensuring our communities thrive and making our villages, towns and cities safer; to support a caring society; and to continue the focus on addressing poverty and social exclusion.” A cross-Governmental approach will be essential to achieving the eradication of consistent poverty in Ireland. All people in Ireland need access to safe and affordable housing, appropriate healthcare that is free at point of access and meaningful community supports.

Income Inadequacy

In The Wheel’s Pre-Budget Submission 2026, we recommend benchmarking core social welfare rates to average earnings and making the commensurate increases in social welfare rates that this requires. The failure to benchmark social welfare payments against a recognised measure of need — such as the Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) — is among the most persistent shortcomings of the Roadmap. Since 2020, the MESL basket of goods has increased by 16.8%, while energy costs alone have risen by 64.5%, yet core welfare rates have failed to keep pace. Research from Social Justice Ireland and the Vincentian MESL Centre continues to highlight this growing gap.

The absence of automatic indexation has led to politically negotiated, and often insufficient, increases. The Wheel supports SVP’s proposal for the establishment of an independent commission, akin to the Low Pay Commission, to guide welfare adequacy. Without such a mechanism, people reliant on social protection remain exposed to inflationary shocks and budgetary discretion.

Inequality and Persistent Poverty

Despite the Roadmap’s commitment to vulnerable groups, the consistent poverty rate remains disproportionately high for particular cohorts, according to the most recent SILC data: children in one-parent families (11%); disabled people (over 13%); older people living alone (5.2%, up from 2.2% in 2020).

The continued absence of a Cost of Disability Payment, the inadequacy of Child Support Payments, and the lack of targeted supports for lone parents are clear contributors to this trend. We recommend introducing a recurring Cost of Disability payment of €2,600 per year, or €50 a week, as an interim measure to build on and replace the Disability Support Grant.

Poverty in Rural Areas

The new Roadmap should also include specific provision for addressing poverty in rural areas. This should include a focus on transport provision, which remains a key issue impacting rural

poverty, which disproportionately affects marginalised groups such as older people, disabled people, migrants and refugees, people seeking International Protection, one-parent families, children and young people. The lack of public transport prevents many from fully participating in society and impacts access to education, healthcare childcare and employment.

4. Does consistent poverty remain the most appropriate primary target for the new anti-poverty and -social exclusion strategy?

While measuring consistent poverty is essential, the target should be its eradication not reduction. There should also be a significant emphasis placed on social cohesion and in providing access to public services and supports for everyone living in Ireland. For the successor strategy to deliver sustained social inclusion, it must commit to ambitious but measurable targets underpinned by accurate, disaggregated data and independent accountability mechanisms. Echoing other organisations in the sector, we recommend that headline indicators go beyond employment figures to reflect real lived experience of deprivation, exclusion, and income inadequacy.

The Wheel supports SVPs recommended indicators for the new Strategy. These include: poverty and deprivation rates with improved breakdowns across household types (e.g. one-parent, disability, migrants), geographic spread, and tenure types (private rental, social housing, homelessness); MESL benchmarking; access to public services. We also recommend inclusion of housing cost burden, cost of disability and living alone, and energy poverty.

5. What is the most appropriate timeframe for the new anti-poverty and -social exclusion strategy?

To achieve meaningful change, it is important that the objectives are reviewed regularly, in meaningful partnership with relevant community and voluntary sector organisations, regardless of the length of the Strategy.

6. Which groups in society should the new anti-poverty and -social exclusion strategy focus on?

Options: Unemployed people; People with Disabilities; Children; Lone-parent families; Older people; Migrants; Travellers/Roma community – option to add other groups

To ensure that the successor to the Roadmap for Social Inclusion delivers real, measurable impact, it must prioritise groups experiencing the most persistent, deep-rooted, and multidimensional poverty. Groups should be identified from data sources such as SILC 2024 and MESL research. The Wheel's Pre-Budget submission also contains multiple case studies from organisations across Ireland who support those already experiencing poverty and social exclusion. It is also important that no one who needs assistance is excluded from the Strategy, even if they fall outside groups identified.

- **Young people and older people:** By age group, persons aged under 18 years (15.3%) had the highest at risk of poverty rate in SILC 2024, followed by those aged 65 years and over (13.3%)
- **Unemployed:** 2.4% of persons described their PES as unemployed, while these unemployed persons represented 7.0% of those who were at risk of poverty and 9.0% of those in consistent poverty.
- **Disabled people:** Persons who describe themselves as unable to work due to long-standing health problems, represented 4.0% of persons in SILC 2024, while these persons represented 11.0% of those who were at risk of poverty and 15.0% of those in consistent poverty
- **Children in one-parent families:** Children remain among the most vulnerable in Irish society. According to SILC data, the overall consistent poverty rate for children is 8.5%, but it rises to 11% among children living in one-parent families.
- **Migrants and people seeking international protection:** Migrant households, especially those in Direct Provision, are disproportionately affected by poverty and exclusion and face restricted access to supports, poor housing conditions, and limited entitlement pathways.
- **Low-income working families:** Many people are in low-paid work but are not earning enough to meet the cost of living. These families are frequently caught just above the income thresholds for supports, creating a cliff-edge effect where any small increase in earnings leads to large losses in entitlements.

It is also important that Travellers, young carers and other marginalised groups are included in SILC data going forward to properly inform the next Roadmap.

7. Are there any actions you would recommend to focus on reducing poverty and/or social exclusion among these specific groups?

As representative body for more than 2400 community and voluntary organisations across Ireland, we recommend meaningful partnership and co-design with those organisations working at the coalface. We also recommend that Government

- Fully implement commitments made in the Programme for Government, especially the multiple references to cross-governmental and inter-agency working
- Introduce a recurring Cost of Disability payment of €2,600 a year, or €50 per week (€592 million); address social benefit traps that create barriers for disabled people entering the labour market without losing their benefits
- Commit to benchmarking core social welfare rates to average earnings and make the commensurate increases in social welfare rates that this requires
- Review and increase the Living Alone Allowance (LAA) to ensure MESL is reached
- Ensure utility affordability through Household Benefits and Fuel Allowance reform
- Ensure children in Direct Provision receive a monthly child payment equivalent to child benefit; extend access to school meals and educational supports
- Protect migrants from destitution during transitions in legal or employment status
- Index eligibility thresholds to inflation and wages including the medical card
- Extend Fuel Allowance to those in receipt of Working Family Payment
- Reform the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) model to reduce rent burdens.

8. Any additional indicators (data sources) we should be aware of?

- [National-Housing-Strategy-for-Disabled-People-2022-2027.pdf](#)
- <https://www.housingagency.ie/sites/default/files/2023-08/National-Housing-Strategy-for-Disabled-People-2022-2027.pdf>
- [Child-Related Benefits Lift Over 150,000 Children Out of Poverty in Ireland | ESRI](#)
- <https://www.esri.ie/news/child-related-benefits-lift-over-150000-children-out-of-poverty-in-ireland>
- [Spinning Plates, liffey partnership report published last week - Search](#)
- [mesl 2025.pdf](#)

9. What are the current issues impacting people experiencing poverty and social exclusion?

The social and economic landscape in Ireland and globally has shifted significantly since the original Roadmap was launched in 2020. Organisations across the community and voluntary sector respond to need. Below are several critical emerging challenges that must shape the next strategy or risk deepening structural inequality.

- Housing-Related Poverty and Hidden Homelessness

The current housing crisis is now a poverty crisis. In January 2025, 15,286 people accessed emergency homeless accommodation, of which 4603 were children, figures that have risen since 2024. The official poverty rate significantly underestimates the lived experience of poverty after housing costs, especially among renters, yet housing costs remain excluded from official poverty reporting, masking the real burden.

- Households in HAP or Rent Supplement face unaffordable top-ups.
- Lone parents and low-wage workers are priced out of secure accommodation.
- SVP has recorded a growing number of requests for emergency accommodation, rent arrears support, and food from families who are working full-time.
- Nearly 3,500 people under 65 years of age are living in congregated settings or nursing homes. Sustainable progress for disabled people will only be possible if we address the root causes of inappropriate placements, and this requires a cross-departmental approach. These include a lack of rehabilitative services, insufficient access to community supports such as personal assistance and home care, and a critical shortage of accessible housing options.

- Persistent Inflation and the Withdrawal of Temporary Supports.

Despite falling headline inflation, the cost of essentials — food, housing, energy — remains high. Many low-income households are struggling even more now than at the height of the pandemic or energy crisis, due to the expiry of once-off measures (e.g. energy credits, double welfare payments); ongoing high costs in key areas like energy (+64.5% since 2020); core welfare rates still falling short of the Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) benchmark.

- Loneliness

An [EU-wide survey](#) showed that more than one in five respondents reported feeling lonely most or all of the time, making Ireland the loneliest country in the EU. The survey also showed that the rate of loneliness decreases with different factors such as age, income, and education, and increases with major life events such as separation, job loss, and finishing studies. Access to services and infrastructure has a significant impact on loneliness.

The Programme for Government references the need to “invest in social programmes and befriending services to address isolation.” However, across the lifecycle of an individual, there is

a need for more. Tackling loneliness will not only improve mental health but will also foster social cohesion. The Loneliness Taskforce, of which The Wheel is a member, made a series of recommendations, many of which intersect with the objectives and remit of the Roadmap.

- Intersectional disadvantage

Some groups face multiple overlapping disadvantages, requiring more tailored, intersectional responses. These include: people with disabilities in lone parent households; ethnic minority families in Direct Provision or overcrowded accommodation; Travellers experiencing compounded housing exclusion and discrimination. The Roadmap must include targeted, data-informed responses for these intersecting vulnerabilities, as generic interventions often fail to address them effectively.

- Energy Poverty and Self-Disconnection.

An unprecedented number of households are now in energy arrears — [440,000](#) as of early 2025. Community and voluntary organisations who provide supports regularly report:

- Households on PAYG meters self-disconnecting due to lack of credit
- Children doing homework in unheated homes
- Older people skipping meals to cover utility costs

This is no longer seasonal but a year-round reality. The strategy must recognise energy poverty as a chronic issue, not just a winter concern.

10. Any other comments?

There is a need for better monitoring of this Roadmap, including in-person engagement and co-design with relevant organisations prior to publication.

It is also vital that a cross-governmental approach is taken for the Roadmap, as poverty intersects with a range of policy areas such as housing, health, rural and community development, equality, climate and children/youth affairs. The previous strategy often stood apart from broader economic planning. We recommend full integration with the national policymaking architecture — both horizontally (across departments) and vertically (from budget to service delivery).

In particular, the Roadmap should align with the National Economic Dialogue, Budget Process, and Spending Reviews, so that social inclusion is treated as a core economic priority, not a social afterthought. Other strategies of central importance to poverty reduction include Sláintecare, Housing for All, the Climate Action Plan, the Child Poverty and Wellbeing Programme Office, the National Disability Strategy, the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy and the new five-year strategy for the community and voluntary sector being developed by DRCD. The Wheel supports specific recommendations made by SVP for how these can be integrated with the Roadmap.

The Wheel is Ireland's national association of charities, community groups and social enterprises. Our membership includes thousands of nonprofit organisations of all types and sizes, including most of Ireland's leading charities.

As a representative voice, we provide leadership to the charity and community sector and we advocate on behalf of our growing community of members.

As a supportive resource, we offer advice, training and other opportunities to people working or volunteering in the charity and community sector.

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