



## Can we make poverty history in Ireland?

*"People are living in poverty if their income and resources (material, cultural and social) are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living which is regarded as acceptable by Irish society generally. As a result of inadequate income and other resources people may be excluded and marginalised from participating in activities which are considered the norm for other people in society."* - **The Irish Government's definition of poverty in its *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016***

Ireland is a relatively rich and prosperous part of the world. Nevertheless, it is estimated that around 192,000 people (5% of the population) lived in consistent poverty.

More than 862,000 people (almost 22% of the population) lived on less than €164 per single person per week. Children in Ireland are almost twice as likely as adults to be poor. By EU standards, Ireland has amongst the highest rates of child poverty, even though it has fallen in recent years.<sup>1</sup>

Living with poverty means different things to different people. It can mean not being able to pay the rent, mortgage or utility bills. It can mean going without proper meals, heating or clothing.

It may also mean having to cope with poor housing – and in the worst cases, homelessness – along with limited job prospects.

What is more, poorer people often have to live with debts they cannot pay off because they have to borrow to make ends meet. Even people in work may have to deal with poverty-related problems if their wages are too low to provide an adequate living.

People who are poor also have to cope with limited access to education, training and leisure facilities. A lack of access to health care and key social support services is also a problem for many.

## EU action

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<sup>1</sup> [Nolan et al (2002) Monitoring Poverty Trends in Ireland : Results from Living in Ireland Survey. Dublin : Economic and Social Research institute. Combat Poverty Agency 2002]



Over the past decade, the EU has been developing a strategy which seeks to eradicate poverty. This commitment now forms a key part of the Community's renewed social agenda.

The goal is to provide a framework which will help Member States implement their own actions to deal with poverty and social exclusion. Along with national governments, NGOs and other social partners make valuable contributions to the EU's policy-making process.

Common objectives have been adopted that provide a clear focus for action in areas such as eradicating child poverty, making the jobs market more inclusive, and fighting discrimination and tackling indebtedness.

The EU has developed a plan to help Member States deliver "active inclusion" policies. Active inclusion aims to help marginalised people off the dole queue while providing adequate levels of social provision for those who cannot work.

The EU also promotes the development of common indicators and the exchange of good practice so that policy makers can better understand the issues and find out what works best in terms of combating poverty.

As well as raising public awareness about poverty and social exclusion, the European Year promises to provide extra impetus to the actions of the EU and its partners.

In addition, the European Social Fund (ESF) spends €10 billion a year on projects across the EU to boost the employment prospects of excluded groups. The ESF provides training and education opportunities to the likes of disabled people, older workers and the long-term unemployed – often in very deprived areas.

It is also worth noting that the EU's equality and anti-discrimination legislation will help those experiencing poverty and social exclusion by providing a level playing-field when it comes to accessing the labour market and essential services.

### **The impact of recession**

More than 5 million Europeans have lost their jobs due to the recent economic crisis and many households have seen their incomes drop – difficulties which make more people vulnerable to poverty.

There are currently 455,000 on the Live Register in Ireland this represents



13.8% of the population. The numbers on the Live Register have increased by 313,000 since May 2007

Young and older workers, those on contracts and migrants have suffered most from the economic downturn. However, a report<sup>2</sup> for the EU's Social Protection Committee and the Commission makes the point that most Member States' social protection systems have been deployed to limit the impact of the recession.

The EU has agreed specific measures to deal with the crisis, including delivery of a €200 billion recovery package. It is also providing early and easier access to payments from the ESF.

#### **Associated links**

- [Europe's social agenda](#)
- [The economic crisis](#)
- [Diversity and discrimination](#)
- [The European Social Fund homepage](#)

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<sup>2</sup> *Second joint assessment by the SPC and the European Commission of the social impact of the crisis and of policy responses.*

<http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/09/st16/st16169-ad01.en09.pdf>