



Society of St. Vincent de Paul

# Delivering an equal and inclusive Ireland

## SVP's Proposals for the next Programme for Government

November 2024



# Why We Work for Social Justice

## Poverty<sup>i</sup>



**913,000**  
**people**  
going without basics.

**One in five**  
**children**

in the state is now living  
in enforced deprivation.

## Housing<sup>ii</sup>



**Over 13,500**  
**people**  
living in emergency  
accommodation.

**More than**  
**4,000 children**  
without a home.

## Education



'Voluntary' contribution  
requests between  
**€30** and **€550**.<sup>iii</sup>

Average cost of going  
to college including  
rent is  
**€11,766**.<sup>iv</sup>

## Income



**37% of**  
**households**  
don't have any money  
left to save.<sup>v</sup>

**€48**  
gap between core social  
welfare rates and the  
cost of an MESL.<sup>vi</sup>

## Energy<sup>vii</sup>



Households unable to  
afford adequate heat  
**doubles from**  
**2021 to 2023**.

**546,000**  
went without heating  
in 2023 due to cost.

## SVP experiences<sup>viii</sup>

**A quarter**  
**of a million**  
calls to SVP.



**€40 million**  
spent on direct  
assistance to  
households.



Expenditure on  
support with utilities  
**almost doubled**  
**in one year**.



## Introduction

With the high cost of living, the housing and homeless crisis and a large number of people living on incomes unable to meet their most basic needs, it is clear our economy is not working for everyone and many are being left behind. Currently, there are 913,000 people going without the basics in Ireland today. Almost 1 in 5 children are living in deprivation. Our next Government must become serious about ending child poverty.

In 2023, over a quarter of a million calls to SVP were received. Almost 30,000 people reached out to SVP for the first time, many of whom are working in low paid jobs unable to make ends meet. The cost of living crisis continues for people living in poverty – low pay, lack of adequate income supports, rising housing costs and homelessness, deprivation among refugees and asylum seekers, unaffordable childcare and lack of transport are just some of the challenges people are facing.

The latest data from the Vincentian MESL Research Centre shows that 71 household cases included in their analysis are in income inadequacy and 92 in deep income inadequacy. We need our social protection system to move in line with other European countries and use a benchmarking approach to make sure it provides a decent standard of living and prevents poverty.

There is an unprecedented level of funding and resources available to the next Government to tackle poverty and inequality. With the right policies, the right amount of resources and importantly a whole of Government approach, poverty eradication is possible.

The next Government must show leadership based on the values of human dignity, social justice, equality and the collective good of society. These values must be the cornerstone of the next Programme for Government.

### **SVP Vision for 2030:**

An Ireland where everyone can live a life free of poverty and is guaranteed an adequate income and access to all the services we need to thrive.

### **We call on the next Government to:**

- Enact a Poverty Act making Government targets legally binding and place poverty proofing of all Government policy on a statutory basis.

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- Introduce socio-economic status as a ground in Equality legislation.

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- Retain the Child Poverty and Well-Being Office and create a dedicated ringfenced children's budget.

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## Summary of Key Recommendations for next Government

### Ambition on ending poverty

1. Enact a Poverty Act to make targets and poverty proofing legally binding.
2. Introduce socio-economic status as a ground in Equality legislation.
3. Retain the Child Poverty and Well-Being Unit and create a ringfenced Children's Budget.

### Income and employment

1. Set up a Social Welfare Commission to recommend annual increases and benchmark social welfare rates to a Minimum Essential Standard of Living.
2. Establish a statutory system of child maintenance and remove from Family Courts.
3. Commit to a public model of Early Years Education and Care and appoint a junior minister for Early Years.

### Housing and homelessness

1. Increase the size of social and cost-rental housing to 20% of all housing stock.
2. Place homeless prevention on a statutory footing and ringfence funding to Local Authorities.
3. Establish a Migration Agency dealing with all International Protection matters.

### Education

1. Expand and effectively resource the Equal Start model for early years.
2. Commit to a full funding review of schools to deliver genuinely free education.
3. Review and reform SUSI to make it fit for purpose.

### Energy and climate justice

1. Set a new target to reduce energy poverty and develop a strategy on a statutory footing.
2. Incorporate private rented tenants into retrofitting plans with a focus on HAP tenants.
3. Mainstream and resource a national community energy advice service.

### Disability and supports for children with additional needs

1. Co-produce a new system of disability payments with Disabled Persons.
2. Expand in-school therapeutic services to all primary and post-primary schools.
3. Set up a special taskforce to address waiting lists for children with additional needs.

## Income and employment



### Long term vision – next Programme for Government

#### Our vision for 2030:

**Everyone has an income that meets their basic needs and allows them to live with dignity.**

1. Social welfare payments should be separated from the annual budgetary cycle and instead set on a multi-annual trajectory as part of the remit of new Social Welfare Commission with a goal of moving towards adequacy based on a Minimum Essential Standard of Living.
2. Establish a statutory child maintenance system to help address child poverty and remove the issue of child maintenance from the adversarial family court system which contributes to poverty among children in one parent families.
3. Commit to a publicly funded model of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), ensuring free access for all low-income households and appoint a Junior Minister for ECEC, within the Department of Education.

## Housing and homelessness



### Long term vision – next Programme for Government

#### Our vision for 2030:

**Ensuring everyone has access to secure and affordable homes, within sustainable and resourced communities.**

1. Increase the provision of social housing stock and affordable cost rental homes for low-income households to represent 20% of total housing stock in line with the Housing Commission recommendation. Develop a comprehensive approach to ensure that targets are reached and based on the actual number of households affected by housing exclusion.
2. Introduce a dedicated homeless prevention budget including the provision for a prevention support worker in each Local Authority and a Rent Arrears fund to support private tenancies experiencing financial difficulty and develop legislation to place homeless prevention on a statutory footing.
3. Establish a Migration Agency in the Department of An Taoiseach dealing with all International Protection matters. As part of this remit, create a taskforce under the responsibility of the Department of Housing, to ensure the need of refugees and asylum seekers are reflected in long-term housing and services planning.

## Education including early years



### Long term vision – next Programme for Government

#### Our vision for 2030:

An adequately funded education system promoting participation and inclusion for all, that uplifts those living in financial disadvantage.

1. Commit to enhancing and resourcing effectively the Equal Start model for early years to ensure every child gets the best start in life.
2. Give every child and young person what they need to access and thrive in their school day by removing the cost of education entirely on families. Conduct an independent review of the education funding structure for schools and review the actual cost of running all different school types, commit to redesign based on meeting the cost of the school day so that they can thrive in a genuinely free system.<sup>1</sup>
3. Make learning in third level and community education possible by developing an independent review and consultation of the true cost, funding structure and process of further and higher education.<sup>2</sup>

## Energy and climate justice



### Long term vision – next Programme for Government

#### Our vision for 2030:

Everyone in Ireland should have access to enough clean, affordable energy to stay warm and well at home.

1. Set a new ambitious target for energy poverty and develop a strategy on a statutory footing with focussed actions for groups at highest risk of energy deprivation.
2. Incorporate private rented sector tenants into energy poverty retrofitting plans with a focus on HAP tenancies. This must include progress on energy efficiency standards in the sector and an extension of retrofitting grants to households in receipt of the Housing Assistance Payment.
3. Mainstream and resource a community energy advice service in every local authority.

1 Independent review should include - complete removal and regulation of parental payments to schools, regulation of uniform costs, remove all costs of state examination including mocks, funding in ICT for devices for students living in poverty, access to the Gaeltacht for low-income families, funding for low-income students to support access to extra-curricular activities, and fully fund transition year costs.

2 Independent review should include – student contribution charge, SUSI income thresholds and holiday earnings cap, adjacent distance to 24km, support for those in direct provision to access SUSI, increase grant in line with the cost of living, review SUSI guidelines for repeat students and abolish cost of resitting exams and replace with a loan scheme.

# Disability and supports for children with additional needs



## Long term vision – next Programme for Government

### Our vision for 2030:

Every adult, child or young person with a disability or additional needs has their rights recognised and upheld and the means to live with dignity, with access to support services when they need them.

1. Develop a co-produced review and reform of social protection payments with Disabled Persons Organisations and in line with the UNCRPD. This should include an additional, non-means tested payment to counter the additional costs disabled people face, and a focus on services to reduce the unacceptably high rates of poverty and deprivation amongst disabled people.
2. Expand the in-school model of therapeutic services and supports to all primary and post-primary schools.
3. Set up a special taskforce with an allocated budget to address long waiting lists for children with additional needs. This should focus on increased funding for targeted recruitment and retention measures for Children's Disability Network Teams to ensure no child is left waiting for vital supports.

## References of infographic

### Poverty

- i Central Statistics Office (2024) Survey of Income and Living Conditions <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-silced/surveyonincomeandlivingconditionssilcenforceddeprivation2023/>

### Housing

- ii Focus Ireland (2024) Homeless Figures <https://www.focusireland.ie/knowledge-hub/latest-figures/>

### Education

- iii Society of St Vincent de Paul (2023) Closing the Gap: What is needed to end voluntary contributions [https://www.svp.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Closing-the-Gap\\_-What-is-needed-to-end-Voluntary-Contributions\\_-Report-2023.pdf](https://www.svp.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Closing-the-Gap_-What-is-needed-to-end-Voluntary-Contributions_-Report-2023.pdf)
- iv Zurich (2023) The Cost of College Education in Ireland 2023 <https://www.zurich.ie/savings-and-investments/education-costs/college/>

### Income

- v Central Statistics Office (2024) Survey of Income and Living Conditions <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-silced/surveyonincomeandlivingconditionssilcenforceddeprivation2023/>
- vi Vincentian MESL Research Centre (2024) MESL 2024 <https://www.budgeting.ie/publications/mesl-2024/>

### Energy

- vii Central Statistics Office (2024) Survey of Income and Living Conditions <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-silced/surveyonincomeandlivingconditionssilcenforceddeprivation2023/>

### SVP experiences

- viii Society of St Vincent de Paul (2023) Financial Summary 2022 <https://www.svp.ie/structure-finance-governance/financial-summary/>

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## SVP's Proposals for the next Programme for Government



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