



Society of St Vincent de Paul

Investing in measures to end poverty

SVP Election 2020 Priorities



Why ending poverty needs to be a priority

Every week members of the Society of St Vincent de Paul (SVP) see first hand the daily struggle for people, both in and out of work, who simply don't have enough income to meet outgoings. It is when this struggle becomes overwhelming that a family often requests SVP's help for the first time. Last year, we received over **150,000 requests for assistance** and our **11,000 members** continued to provide support to thousands of families and individuals in need including help with essential household spend such as food, fuel, electricity and education.

Living on a low income is very stressful and emotionally draining and can have a major impact on physical and mental health. The longer it goes on, the more difficult it is for people to see a way out. **Poverty restricts people's options**, leaving them in impossible situations like choosing either to heat their home or pay their rent. Although poverty rates are falling, with **rising living costs**, the **housing crisis** and the **high number of people living on low incomes**, our economy is holding people back and stopping people from choosing a different path.

Poverty not only holds individuals and families back, it also holds back the economy. Dealing with the fallout from poverty, leads to increased spending on health, education and justice. We know that **eradicating poverty will require significant investment in supports and services that help break the long-term cycle of poverty** and its consequences, but making the right investments now will bring much greater longer-term social and economic benefits.

Poverty is not inevitable and its eradication is possible but it requires well designed targeted and universal policies, resources and political will. **We are asking that the 33rd Dáil and 26th Seanad commit to making the fight against poverty a key priority.** This will require an integrated, whole of government approach which enhances our social infrastructure and allows everyone to access an adequate income and quality affordable services.

Our vision for Irish society is one where everyone can **live with dignity and free from poverty**. In this document we outline **SVP's five priorities for the next programme for Government** that we hope every party will sign up to.



1. Introduce A Poverty Reduction Act

SVP are asking that the Irish Government follows the example of the Canadian, Scottish and New Zealand Governments and introduces a Poverty Reduction Act. The purpose of this Act would be to make the ambition of the *Sustainable Development Goal of No Poverty (Goal 1)* by 2030 legally binding and would require the Government of the day to:

- Resource and implement annual cross-governmental action plans to ensure Ireland reaches the target of reducing consistent poverty to 2% or less by 2025.
- Set a new ambition child poverty target for 2025.
- Establish a well-resourced parliamentary oversight committee to monitor action on poverty reduction.
- Place the process of poverty and equality proofing of all Government policy on a statutory basis.
- Report each budget day on how the budget will reduce poverty and how the Government is progressing towards its targets.

2. Ensure affordable, secure, good quality housing is accessible for all

- Publish a new longer-term and more ambitious housing strategy to succeed *Rebuilding Ireland* which seeks to meet 70% of all housing need through built local authority or Approved Housing Body units by 2030.
- Develop a national affordable 'cost rental' option for lower income households, to address the affordability gap for certain households between the social housing sector and market rental.

3. Improve opportunities by supporting access to education

- Provide genuinely free primary and secondary school education for all children by investing an extra €230 million annually into the public education system.
- Invest €90 million in supports for students at third level by reversing the cuts to the SUSI grant, restoring the adjacent grant qualifying distance rate to 24km and by extending eligibility to SUSI to students studying part-time to encourage more second chance learners back to education.



4. Make sure everyone has an adequate income to meet their basic needs.

- Benchmark social welfare payments against the cost of a Minimum Essential Standard of Living and introduce a Living Wage. Move towards progressively realising this goal by 2025 through increases in income support and the national minimum wage and by implementing the policies set out in this document aimed at reducing the cost of living for individuals and families.

5. Help address the climate emergency by investing in measures to tackle energy and transport poverty

- Commence and finance a deep retrofit programme for all local authority housing with an initial annual investment of €200 million.
- Introduce minimum energy requirements for the private rented sector and set a target for all properties to reach a C BER rating or higher by 2030. Proposed legislation should be balanced with incentives to support landlords to reach new energy efficiency standards, in conjunction with enhanced security of tenure for tenants.
- Establish a service of community energy advisors working in partnership with the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland to engage and inform hard to reach energy users who would most benefit from energy efficiency upgrades across all tenure types.
- Invest an additional €50 million annually into the Rural Transport Programme, increasing the range of public transport options, promoting social inclusion for those in rural areas, and incentivising greater public transport usage.



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