

# Society of St Vincent de Paul

## Pre Budget Submission 2014

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Society of St Vincent de Paul

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## Introduction

The Society of St Vincent de Paul (SVP) sees at first hand the impact that the economic crisis has had on struggling households, both those experiencing long term disadvantage and those experiencing need for the first time. The SVP's expenditure on direct assistance to households has increased by 56% between 2008 and 2011. In 2011 SVP spent over €22 million on food and cash assistance, and over €10 million was spent on helping households with their energy costs.

Those who were least well off before the economic crisis remain so, and their struggles have been worsened due to cutbacks to the supports and services on which they rely. Those who have lost jobs, had business failures, seen significant falls in their income or are affected by over-indebtedness require short term and medium to longer term supports to ensure that they are prevented from falling into long term unemployment and poverty (NESC, 2013).

Our Pre Budget Submission 2014 is being made on behalf of the volunteer members of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, our donors and supporters, and the many thousands of individuals and families we assist.

The cumulative impact of austerity measures to date on individuals, families and communities has been devastating. **The SVP strongly opposes any further reductions in social expenditure as the people we assist and those who are struggling throughout Ireland have suffered enough.** It is the responsibility of Government to lead and make the choices which will tackle Ireland's budget deficit in a fair and equitable way. Alternatives to cutting social expenditure in order to meet the budget deficit targets have been proposed by various commentators. Government can choose to close the gap between Ireland's revenue and expenditure while protecting vulnerable people and the services they rely on.

**Further cuts to the budgets of Government Departments which impact negatively on the services needed by individuals, families and communities are unacceptable to the SVP.**

**SVP asks Government to find the resources and the best approaches to protect social services and supports. The state needs to seriously examine the alternative options available in the areas of stimulating growth, improving efficiencies in the provision of public services and generating revenue from sources including business, corporations and those with higher incomes and assets that can afford to make a greater contribution to Ireland's recovery.**

The plan to put in place an economic programme to run up to 2020 announced by Minister Noonan must include a roadmap for recovery for all of Irish society so that people are protected and can retain their hope and optimism for the future. An economic plan is not enough, it must be accompanied by a social plan which outlines how government will allocate the resources necessary to tackle unemployment, poverty, social exclusion and disadvantage. SVP members report a severe intensification of the poverty experienced by individuals and families over the past twelve months. Too many people, the services they rely on, and their future opportunities, have been sacrificed in the name of economic recovery. Impossible demands have been made of those with the lowest incomes and least resources. Any plan for Ireland must address these issues so that those who are struggling are reassured that we are heading towards a positive future.

## Summary of Recommendations for Budget 2014

### Department of Social Protection

It is not possible to further reduce the budget of the Department of Social Protection as the supports and services provided are a lifeline for the people we assist. Further cuts to the Department's budget which impact directly on individuals, families and communities are unacceptable to the SVP.

#### **A living income in and out of work:**

- Protection of social welfare rates, eligibility for payments and associated secondary benefits
- Family Income Supplement must be retained, the assessment must continue to be based on net income, the withdrawal rate, the rate of payment and the thresholds for qualifying for the payment must all be maintained.

#### **Reduced child poverty and increased child well-being:**

- Child Income Support payments must be reformed in a way that protects the incomes of families who are struggling and makes Family Income or a better alternative, available to all low waged working families, both now and in the future.
- Maximise the potential of the School Meals Programme in addressing food poverty

#### **Better energy affordability for low income households**

- Protect Fuel Allowance and Household Benefits Package
- Engage with Ministers Rabbitte and O'Sullivan to progress the Warmer Homes Strategy

### Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources

- Increase PAYGo rollout and ensure that landlords with tenants on rent supplement, including approved housing bodies, allow for the installation of PAYGo meters where there is no physical barrier to doing so
- Engage with utilities to make repayment / instalment plans fairer and more sustainable
- Facilitate the regular collation and analysis of arrears to inform policy
- Set out an implementation timeframe for efficiency standards for the rental sector
- Secure the resources required for the National House Conditions Survey
- Ensure sufficient resources are protected in Budget 2014 to adequately fund the implementation of the area-based approach to retrofitting in units housing those on low income
- Improve budgeting options for lower income households who depend on oil fills for their central heating

#### Department of Health

- Begin the delivery of free access to GP care
- Protect critical community public health services from further rationing
- No further increases to the Drugs Payment Scheme
- Withdraw the €1.50 per item prescription charge for medical card holders
- Prioritise delivery of the long awaited commitment to Primary Care
- Facilitate older people to remain at home as long as possible by maintaining supports such as Home Help and Home Care Packages
- Resource the Special Action Group on Obesity to enable it to achieve its brief
- Resource better integration and coordination of nutritious food for school going children
- Introduce minimum pricing for alcohol
- Protect funding to both adult and children’s mental health services and prioritise appropriately configured and resourced community mental health services over acute sector funding

#### Department of Education and Skills

- No further capitation cuts at both primary and second level
- Maintain support for school book rental schemes at current levels while conducting a feasibility study on the merits and costs of seed funding schools to start up book rental schemes
- Educational e-books should not be priced at hard copy prices
- Educational e-book digital content should not attract VAT at 23%
- Reconsider decision regarding allocation of Guidance Counsellors
- Protect the chronically under resourced NEPS from further cuts
- Prioritise funding to upskill teachers to improve literacy and numeracy of students
- Resource better integration and coordination of nutritious food for school going children
- Prioritise implementation of National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy
  - No further restrictions to eligibility for the various support schemes aimed at low income students who wish to avail of second chance, further and third level education opportunities
  - End the unfair anomaly whereby the children of non-EU migrant workers resident in Ireland for

many years are excluded from accessing free fees and student supports for third level education
<b>Department of Children and Youth Affairs</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No cuts to the current free Pre-School Year and extend this year to 48 weeks while making the funding to providers conditional on adherence to the quality frameworks</li> <li>• Prioritise the roll out of both Aistear and Síolta to all early years settings (both lower and higher capacity providers)</li> <li>• Allocate dedicated budgets to support the upskilling of the profession to achieve the benchmark figure of 60% graduate workforce in early years settings</li> <li>• A dedicated budget to be allocated for 2014 to ensure that the Afterschool Care Strategy is produced and moves to implementation as soon as possible</li> <li>• Funding for School Completion Programme remains intact</li> <li>• Resource better integration and coordination of nutritious food for school going children</li> <li>• Allow children and families living in Direct Provision to exercise their right to live a life with dignity, free from poverty and exclusion</li> </ul>
<b>Department of Justice and Equality</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• End the enforced poverty and exclusion of people seeking asylum living in direct provision accommodation.</li> </ul>
<b>Department of Finance</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-ordinate efforts across departments in order to source sufficient levels of revenue to fund existing social services and supports</li> <li>• Utilise a portion of our cash reserves to stimulate growth in the delivery of vital and strategic physical and social infrastructure, generating jobs in these sectors</li> <li>• Consider various options available to Government in the tax treatment of wealth and assets, and of higher income earners and corporations, to close the gap between national income and expenditure</li> <li>• A free to use payments / transaction account or Basic Payment Account should be operational and promoted among the financially excluded across the state by the beginning of 2014</li> </ul>
<b>Department of Public Expenditure and Reform</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gender, equality and poverty proofing of measures must be undertaken end the situation of particular household types (for example households with children) being disproportionately affected by cuts.</li> <li>• Ensure that every department provides a Social Impact Assessment of the measures which are taken in Budget 2014</li> <li>• Government should fulfil its commitment to eliminating waste, reducing non-core costs and improving efficiency in the public sector</li> </ul>

## Department of Social Protection

### A living income in and out of work

- Protection of social welfare rates, eligibility for payments and associated secondary benefits:

The Society of St Vincent de Paul welcomes the commitment in the Programme for Government to protect social welfare rates of payment. In addition to the protection of welfare rates, eligibility criteria for social welfare supports must not be eroded further. The rates, means tests, earnings disregards, income disregards, the universality of child benefit, income limits/thresholds for payments such as Family Income Supplement, Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance, conditions for retention of secondary benefits on taking up employment (e.g. medical card, fuel allowance), conditions for signing on for credits, contributions required for Jobseekers Benefit and the maximum time limit for receipt of Jobseekers Benefit should not be changed. We ask for no further reduction in the earnings disregard for the One Parent Family Payment so that lone parents who rely on the payment are supported to take up employment opportunities which have the potential to lift their families out of poverty. We also ask that the minimum contribution for tenants receiving rent supplement remains unchanged in Budget 2014.

- Family Income Supplement (FIS):

Employment is critically important in tackling child poverty. FIS is an in-work benefit support specifically designed to make even low-waged work pay. Although means tested, it provides greater income support for families who are working than those who are not. This feature is essential in preventing employment and poverty traps for low paid workers. FIS is not without problems: not all families who need, or are eligible for FIS, receive support; indeed it has been estimated that it is claimed by only 40% of those eligible. Addressing these problems could have a significant impact on child poverty. The elimination of Family Income Supplement, as proposed in the report of the Advisory Group on Tax and Social Welfare on Child and Family Income Support is strongly opposed by the Society of St Vincent de Paul and the End Child Poverty Coalition.

Reductions in the earnings disregard and changes in eligibility for the One Parent Family Payment mean that lone parents in employment have seen and will continue to see significant falls in their incomes. Family Income Supplement will be vital in supporting working lone parents to make the transition from the One Parent Family Payment and will cushion the impact of reductions somewhat.

Family Income Supplement must be retained, the assessment must continue to be based on net income, the withdrawal rate, the rate of payment and the thresholds for qualifying for the payment must all be maintained.

### Reducing child poverty and increased child well-being

Households worst affected by the measures in Budget 2013 were those with children, in particular lone parent families (Department of Social Protection, 2013). This pattern must not be continued in Budget 2014.

- Child income supports:

Child Income Support payments must be reformed in a way that protects the incomes of families who are struggling and makes Family Income or a better alternative, available to all low waged working families, both now and in the future. The position paper of the End Child Poverty Coalition on the reform of Child Income Supports provides more information.

The Qualified Child Increase must be retained for children in full-time education aged 18-22, and there must be no further cuts to the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance (BSCFA), nor should eligibility for the BSCFA be reduced. Families with children aged 19 who are still in second level education have seen Child Benefit removed, leaving them only with the Qualified Child Increase and the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance. These payments help families to meet the costs associated with education in third level and further education, and are important in keeping children and young people in education, giving them better opportunities and life chances in the future.

- School meals:

SVP believes that a cross departmental approach is most likely to achieve better nutritional outcomes for children and tackle the childhood obesity epidemic. Given that there is already an infrastructure in schools and a programme funded by the Department of Social Protection (School Meals Scheme) it makes sense for the potential of this programme to be leveraged to achieve more.

To achieve the best outcomes for the School Meals Programme in addressing food poverty and to provide children with a quality, nutritious meal each day, more effective coordination is needed between the School Meals Programme, the School Completion Programme and health promotion. SVP asks that all relevant departments (Social Protection, Education, Children and Youth Affairs and Health Promotion within the Department of Health) contribute towards a dedicated budget to resource better integration and coordination of the various departmental approaches to supporting healthy nutrition for school going children.

### **Better energy affordability for low income households**

Supports such as the Fuel Allowance and the Household Benefits Package are a key part of the plan to tackle energy poverty, and a valued support to households struggling to manage the cost of energy. We urge the Minister for Social Protection to engage with Ministers Rabbitte and O'Sullivan to work together to progress the important income support and housing elements of the Warmer Homes Strategy, without which the plan will not adequately address the scourge of fuel poverty among the families and people we assist.

## Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources

### Regulatory considerations:

- Increasing PAYGo rollout beyond current quotas set by CER
- Engaging with utilities to make repayment / instalment plans fairer and more sustainable by increasing the length of time for repayment plans to operate, thereby reducing the weekly / monthly repayment burden on top of the current bimonthly bill repayment
- Facilitating the regular collation and analysis of arrears to inform policy, possibly by CER

### Thermal efficiency and housing conditions:

- If not already completed by 2013, identifying an implementation timeframe for efficiency standards for the rented sector, using BER as a benchmark and placing clear obligations on landlords in a series of staged measures
- Ensuring that landlords with tenants on rent supplement, including approved housing bodies, allow for the installation of PAYGo meters where there is no physical barrier to doing so
- Securing the resources required for the National House Conditions Survey, working with the Department of the Environment so that this initiative is progressed and implemented
- Ensuring sufficient resources are protected in Budget 2014 to adequately fund the implementation of the area-based approach to retrofitting in units housing those on low income

### Non-Regulated Energy Suppliers:

- Supporting and resourcing the exploration of oil budgeting systems with domestic suppliers, community and voluntary bodies to improve budgeting options for lower income households who depend on oil fills for their central heating and to discourage the expensive and hazardous practice of buying smaller oil drums

We urge the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources to engage with Ministers Burton and O'Sullivan to work together to progress the important income support and housing elements of the Warmer Homes Strategy, without which the plan will not adequately address the scourge of fuel poverty among the families and people we assist.

## Department of Health

Our vision for Ireland's health system is one founded on the core principle of equal access to equal care for equal need. While very cognisant of the risk of the HSE ending the year with a deficit we cannot accept the recent postponement of the free access GP care commitment and the raft of cuts to critical services such as Home Help hours and Home Care Packages. The Society acknowledges the severe strain in the health system. Despite and indeed because of this pressure we request that the protection of critical health services to those most vulnerable in our society, namely those with the least means to provide for their own care is prioritised.

### **Inadequate access to critical community based services**

Even before recent cuts and rationing access to many key community health services such as ophthalmic, speech & language therapy, occupational therapy, audiology and orthodontic/dental treatment was problematic. This has now been exacerbated by the flight from private health insurance which is putting more pressure on the poorly resourced public health system. In some parts of the county waiting lists for vital health services, as listed above, are long and lengthening. This is unacceptable as timely intervention, diagnosis and treatment, particularly for children, is critical. Community public health services must be protected at a service level which allows those with most need to access them in a timely manner. SVP is particularly conscious of the need to continue to provide oral health services to medical card patients and their children.

### **Child & Adolescent Mental Health**

Given that adolescence is the period when 75% of mental health problems emerge it is worrying that only 63 out of the proposed 107 Child and Adolescent Mental Health teams have been delivered to date. SVP also notes that of the current 63 teams not all have their full complement of professionals, with the national figure standing at just 38% of the *Vision for Change* recommendation on staffing composition.

### **Cost of health care**

We ask that the Drug Payment Scheme threshold remain at its current level of €144 a month. SVP knows that the current ceiling of €19.50 a month for prescription items charged to medical card holders is causing problems for vulnerable people and ask that this charge be withdrawn for those with serious need as the consequences of lack of compliance with medication is more costly in the longer term.

### **Services for older people**

SVP notes with concern that since 2007 the number of Home Help hours have decreased from 54,736 to 50,002 in 2013 which is cause for concern. The short term decision making within the HSE whereby home care packages are rationed has resulted in the Older Persons Clinical Care Programme's Special Delivery Units transitional wards (where older patients are kept in beds only as long as it takes to develop a care plan) being less effective as it should be. We see this development as short sighted given that it is stated Government policy to facilitate older people to remain at home as long as possible. SVP asks that savings are found from less critical areas of the health budget, such as administration, travel & subsistence to protect vital core services which help vulnerable people retain their dignity and quality of life.

## **Obesity**

Since primary care settings are where 95% of illness can be treated adequate resources must be allocated to support the detection and treatment of obesity and General Practitioners, in particular, must be incentivised to detect and treat obesity as early as possible. The Special Action Group on Obesity has a critical role to play and we ask that resources are ringfenced to protect its budget and ability to achieve the outcomes it has set itself.

With regard to obesity in school aged children SVP knows that poor nutrition during the formative school years is likely to have long-term effects in later life. Having a nutritious diet in childhood yields many long term health gains. SVP supports a cross departmental approach to achieve better nutritional outcomes for children and tackle the childhood obesity epidemic. Given that there is already an infrastructure in schools and a programme funded by the Department of Social Protection (School Meals Scheme) it makes sense for the potential of this programme to be leveraged to achieve more.

To achieve best outcomes for the School Meals Programme in addressing food poverty and in providing children with a quality, nutritious meal each day more effective coordination is needed between the School Meals Programme, the School Completion Programme and Health Promotion. SVP asks that all relevant departments (Social Protection, Education, Children and Youth Affairs and Health Promotion within the Department of Health) contribute towards a dedicated budget to resource better integration and coordination of the various departmental approaches to support healthy nutrition for school going children as per *Healthy Ireland's* recommendation.

## **Alcohol abuse**

Coping with alcohol-related harm costs the health service an estimated €1.2 billion a year - one twelfth of the health budget - and takes up 2,000 hospital beds a night. SVP supports minimum pricing for alcohol including a social responsibility levy. We note that restoring excise duties on alcohol to 2009 levels would yield €150 million a year, which could be channelled towards prevention initiatives and treatment and support services for individuals, children, families and communities.

## Department of Education and Skills

Education is a critical enabler out of exclusion and is the essential policy instrument which can deliver growth and job creation. Given its central role in Ireland's long term recovery SVP considers that the education cuts made since 2009 make no social or economic sense, have been made reactively and lack long term strategic intent. These cuts serve to highlight the social gradient whereby those with more disposable income can access educational resources progress further and achieve better outcomes. It is of no surprise to us that early school leaving is linked very closely to poor employment prospects, high risk of poverty and exclusion and poorer health.

### Participation costs of education

SVP is very exercised by the long term consequences to the growing numbers of families who simply cannot afford to maintain their children in education. We have contributed our views both in written and oral form to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Social Protection and Education and await the forthcoming report on the costs of education with anticipation. We have been heavily involved in facilitating a process which produced a guide to help school Boards of Management to review their uniform policy to reduce costs for parents. We, along with Barnardos and the National Parents Council Post Primary secured the full endorsement of the education leader, management and representative bodies which are now disseminating the guide to schools.

SVP members understand at first hand the stresses parents face struggling to afford the year round participation costs of school for their children. The volume of households struggling on inadequate incomes can be seen from the just released statistic that 40% of Junior Certificate and 33% of Leaving Certificate students are availing of the exam fee waiver this year due to their financial circumstances.

### Impact of cuts on pupils

An Asti survey of school principals conducted in Spring last year found much concern regarding the amalgamation of class levels, dropping exam subjects and overcrowded classrooms. This survey - which offers but a snapshot of retrenchment replicated across the country - have had to make the following adjustments because of cutbacks:

83% of schools surveyed lost teaching posts

69% restricted the Leaving Cert Applied Programme

64% dropped more than one subject

55% dropped school events, trips, tours, extra curricular activities

SVP is very worried that the recently launched Action Plan on Bullying and Mental Health Guidelines have been launched at a time when schools are finding it harder than ever to provide counselling and vocational support to students.

Given the fact that:

- Almost 1 in 5 children are at-risk-of-poverty
- About half of families rely on social welfare or low paid work
- 1 in 3 children are deprived of basic necessities
- 1 in 10 children live in severe poverty
- A quarter of children live in jobless households

we suggest strongly that efficiencies must be found within the education budget which do not put parents of school going children under further pressure to contribute any more towards the participation costs of educating their children. These families simply cannot afford any extra costs.

### **Support schemes for third and further level students**

Given the poorer educational outcomes for lower income students in both getting to further/third level education and staying there, SVP is very concerned at the continued reduction in third level student supports and worsening eligibility criteria for vocational supports.

For years we have been lobbying and engaging directly with your Department, the HEA and some of the previous grant administrators regarding long delays which some students experience before receiving their maintenance grants. The SVP Dublin office, in particular, has for years been literally subsidising huge volumes of students who did not get their grants approved in a timely manner. SVP members have seen many students unable to continue their course as they simply did not have the means to survive financially until the grant came through. While SVP recognises that applications need to be complete and made in a timely manner we note the hardship and struggle of low income families who have been unable to fund their studies while waiting for the grant to be processed. We also note the review of SUSI which shows that inadequate planning and resources impacted negatively on this body's ability to operate effectively.

On the issue of the assessment system for maintenance grants, SVP notes the HEA research which shows that 40% of students from farming families and 50% of the self-employed cohort secure maintenance grants while only 17% of the lower professional workers get help towards their studies.

SVP members witness the sacrifices and stresses parents endure to provide for their children's third or further level education and know that any further cuts or further eligibility restrictions will deny many low income young people the life changing chance of continuing their studies and contributing to Ireland's recovery. We expect this Government to show the leadership required to ensure that, in the interests of equity, the assessment process for deciding eligibility for student supports includes a capital assets component.

### **Our priorities for the Department of Education and Skills for Budget 2014 are as follows:**

#### **Schools**

- No further capitation cuts at both primary and second level as the impacts on pupils, teachers and parents are both deep and long term
- Maintain support for school book rental schemes at current levels while conducting a feasibility study on the merits and costs of seed funding schools to start up book rental schemes rather than continuing the current piece meal and inadequate funding model

- Educational e-books should not be priced at hard copy prices
- Educational e-book digital content should not attract VAT at 23%
- Reconsider decision regarding allocation of Guidance Counsellors as the impact on pupils in poorer areas is disproportionate
- Protect the chronically under resourced NEPS from further cuts
- To build on the advances made in the Children's Literacy and Numeracy Strategy we ask that funding is prioritised to upskill teachers to improve literacy and numeracy of students, particularly in disadvantaged areas
- Contribute to a dedicated budget to resource better integration and coordination of nutritious food for school going children via an enhanced School Meals Scheme supported by Departments of Health (Health Promotion), Children and Youth Affairs and Social Protection to combat childhood obesity

### **Disadvantaged Adult Learners**

SVP welcomes the commitment to legislate for the establishment of an adult National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy

- We ask that the implementation of this strategy is prioritised and resourced

SVP knows that education is the ultimate enabler out of exclusion and poverty. We also note that the majority of expenditure in the education budget goes on the wages bill for the sector. Given the key role that various support programmes play in facilitating disadvantaged students access education we ask that there are:

- No further restrictions to eligibility for the various support schemes aimed at low income students who wish to avail of second chance, further and third level education opportunities
- End the unfair anomaly whereby the children of non-EU migrant workers resident in Ireland for many years are excluded from accessing free fees and student supports for third level education

## Department of Children and Youth Affairs

**SVP's priorities for the Department of Children and Youth Affairs are as follows:**

### Early Years

SVP has long been a champion of the need for quality early years care and education through its advocacy work and contribution to the National Economic and Social Forum ECCE report. Evidence clearly shows that investment in ECCE reaps rewards particularly for disadvantaged children if they have access to quality care. The Society wants sustained commitment to both investment and quality in the sector as this is the best way to achieve long term gains for children. SVP asks Government to commit to achieving the international standard of 1% of GDP investment in ECCE by 2024, reaching 0.7% of GDP by 2018.

- No cuts to the current free Pre-School Year and extend this year to 48 weeks while making the funding to providers conditional on adherence to the quality frameworks
- Prioritise the roll out of both Aistear and Síolta to all early years settings (both lower and higher capacity providers)
- Allocate dedicated budgets to support the upskilling of the profession to achieve the benchmark figure of 60% graduate workforce in early years settings

### School Age Children

Quality after school care is a very underdeveloped aspect of public service provision in Ireland, yet it has the potential to play a pivotal role in facilitating family life by offering quality care to school going children while enabling parents to work. SVP asks for:

- A dedicated budget to be allocated for 2014 to ensure that the Afterschool Care Strategy is produced and moves to implementation as soon as possible

SVP knows, through its deep links with disadvantaged communities, how effective the flexible, inclusive and innovative nature of the various School Completion initiatives (targeting hard to reach young people at risk of early school leaving) can be. We ask that:

- Funding for School Completion Programme remains intact

Given the epidemic of obesity in school age children (1 in 4 nine year olds obese or overweight), leveraging current Government programmes to support, develop and optimise healthy eating outcomes for children while at school must be prioritised. SVP sees superior outcomes, efficiencies and better integration if the Department of Children and Youth Affairs:

- Contributes to a dedicated budget (along with Departments of Health, Education and Social Protection) to resource better integration and coordination of the current School Meals Scheme to become a more proactive, enhanced programme to combat childhood obesity, educate parents and children about healthy eating and secure healthier outcomes

### **Children of asylum seekers resident in Direct Provision accommodation**

There are approximately 4,700 people living in direct provision centres presently. 70% of these residents have lived in these institutions for more than two years and 33% have lived in direct provision for over 5 years. 38% of the residents are children.

Families live in a room. There is little choice when it comes to food and eating times. During their stay in direct provision asylum-seekers receive €19.10 and €9.60 for children per week. Children do not receive Child Benefit nor the qualified child increase. School going children attend a local school, however some families have been moved from county to county thus making the children's lives more unpredictable and stressful.

We urge you to persuade your colleagues Minister Shatter and Minister Burton to allow children and families living in Direct Provision to exercise their right to live a life with dignity, free from poverty and exclusion, through the following actions:

- **Short-term:** Increase the rates of payment to €65 for adults and €35 for children. Give asylum seeking children the right to child related payments.
- **Medium-term:** Provide self-catering accommodation for residents in direct provision after 6 months (step-down processes and accommodation must be made available to those who have experienced residency for over 2 years).
- **Long-term:** Ensure a robust asylum process without inordinate time delays that protects the full legal rights of individual applicants.

## Department of Justice and Equality

Our Pre-Budget submission in particular calls on Governmental spending to ensure that people in the community are left with a modicum of comfort in their lives. However, for asylum-seekers living in direct provision the issue is not just of improving their financial situation, it is about their basic human right to equality and dignity.

### Direct Provision

The State has operated a 'direct provision' system of institutional living for asylum-seekers since 1999. People living in direct provision centres are obliged to remain in the system until their asylum applications are finalised. There are approximately 4,700 people living in direct provision centres presently. 70% of these residents have lived in these institutions for more than two years and 33% have lived in direct provision for over 5 years. 38% of the residents are children.

**No. of Months spent by persons in RIA accommodation centres, 11<sup>th</sup> April 2013**

0 > 6	400	8.4%
6 > 12	453	9.6%
12 > 18	333	7.0%
18 > 24	218	4.6%
24 > 36	481	10.2%
36 > 48	557	11.8%
48 > 60	724	15.3%
60 > 72	621	13.1%
72 > 84	475	10.0%
84+	473	10.0%
Total	4735 persons	

<http://oireachtasdebates.oireachtas.ie/debates%20authoring/debateswebpack.nsf/takes/dail2013041600086?opendocument#WRKK01925>

During their time in direct provision asylum-seekers undergo the application process for refugee status. Asylum-seekers are not entitled to work and have limited training or educational opportunities. For individuals the accommodation is dormitory style, there is no choice with whom you reside. Families live in a room. There is equally little choice when it comes to food and eating times. During their stay in direct provision asylum-seekers will receive €19.10, and €9.60 for children per week. Parents are not entitled to child benefit or the qualified child increase. School going children will attend local schools, however some families have been moved from county to county thus making the children's lives more unpredictable and stressful. Children and adults in these circumstances are being institutionalised.

SVP acknowledges that there are many reasons as to why such extended stays in direct provision have come to pass and that for many the lengthened process is due to legal processes. However, and outside of the merits of any individual legal processes, the human toll of such a large group of people cannot be ignored by the State nor civil society.

### Our priorities for the Department of Justice and Equality are as follows:

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul calls on the Department of Justice and Equality as an act of social justice to remedy this situation. This can be achieved by:

- **Short-term:** Increase the rates of payment to €65 for adults and €35 for children. Give asylum seeking children the right to child related payments.
- **Medium-term:** Provide step-down processes, supports and accommodation for people who have experienced direct provision residency for over 2 years.
- **Long-term:** Ensure a robust asylum process without inordinate time delays that protects the full legal rights of individual applicants.

## Department of Finance

The plan to put in place an economic programme to run up to 2020 announced by Minister Noonan must include a roadmap for recovery for all of Irish society so that people are protected and can retain their hope and optimism for the future. An economic plan is not enough, it must be accompanied by a social plan which outlines how government will allocate the resources necessary to tackle unemployment, poverty, social exclusion and disadvantage. SVP members report a severe intensification of the poverty experienced by individuals and families over the past twelve months. Too many people, the services they rely on, and their future opportunities, have been sacrificed in the name of economic recovery. Impossible demands have been made of those with the lowest incomes and least resources. Any plan for Ireland must address these issues so that those who are struggling are reassured that we are heading towards a positive future.

### **Our priorities for the Department of Finance as they relate to raising revenue are as follows:**

- Co-ordinate efforts across departments in order to source sufficient levels of revenue to fund existing social services and supports
- Utilise a portion of our cash reserves to stimulate growth in the delivery of vital and strategic physical and social infrastructure, generating jobs in these sectors
- Consider various options available to Government in the tax treatment of wealth and assets, and of higher income earners and corporations, to close the gap between national income and expenditure

### **Our priorities for the Department of Finance as they relate to financial inclusion are as follows:**

- A free to use payments / transaction account or Basic Payment Account should be operational and promoted among the financially excluded across the state by the beginning of 2014, as per the commitment made to the European Commission by the Irish authorities in 2010
- The above account should form the keystone of a wider financial inclusion strategy in Ireland, which over the medium term will include the provision of appropriate products to facilitate:
  - access to appropriate financial services and protection from irresponsible lending
  - a sufficient 'buffer' of savings to cushion the financially excluded against external shocks or unexpected events; and affordable insurance products in the longer term
  - services and supports to help develop the skills and knowledge of people who are financially excluded so that they can better deal with their personal finances, and make informed choices

## **Department of Public Expenditure and Reform**

The plan to put in place an economic programme to run up to 2020 announced by Minister Noonan must include a roadmap for recovery for all of Irish society so that people are protected and can retain their hope and optimism for the future. An economic plan is not enough, it must be accompanied by a social plan which outlines how government will allocate the resources necessary to tackle unemployment, poverty, social exclusion and disadvantage. SVP members report a severe intensification of the poverty experienced by individuals and families over the past twelve months. Too many people, the services they rely on, and their future opportunities, have been sacrificed in the name of economic recovery. Impossible demands have been made of those with the lowest incomes and least resources. Any plan for Ireland must address these issues so that those who are struggling are reassured that we are heading towards a positive future.

### **Our priorities for the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform are as follows:**

- The cumulative impact of measures taken in Budget 2014 must be considered. Gender, equality and poverty proofing of measures must be undertaken and the situation of particular household types (for example households with children) being disproportionately affected by cuts. The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform is well placed to ensure that where cuts made by several different departments accumulate for particular groups in society, that they are prevented from being implemented.
- Ensure that every department provides a Social Impact Assessment of the measures which are taken in Budget 2014, along the lines of that provided by the Department of Social Protection after Budget 2013. This will enable the impact of reduced budgets on services to be fully understood and should inform future decision making.
- Government should fulfil its commitment to eliminating waste, reducing non-core costs and improving efficiency in the public sector, to ensure that the needs of citizens and service user are met flexibly and efficiently.