

Successor to the Road Map for Social Inclusion

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**Society of St Vincent de Paul
National Office
91/92 Sean McDermott St.
Dublin 1**



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Introduction

The Society of St Vincent de Paul (SVP) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of a successor to the Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020–2025. As Ireland’s largest charity of social concern, SVP has over 10,000 volunteers and 800 staff working in every county, offering practical assistance and a compassionate presence to individuals and families experiencing poverty, social exclusion, and disadvantage.

This submission is grounded in the lived experience of those we support and the volunteers who walk alongside them. Over the past two years alone, SVP has received more than 500,000 requests for help. In 2024, we responded to over 248,000 calls for assistance — a 45% increase from 2020, when we received 171,000 calls. This sharp rise reflects the growing number of households struggling to meet basic needs, despite the efforts made under the current Roadmap.

In 2023, SVP provided €43.67 million in direct support through home visitation, including financial assistance, food, education costs, fuel, and help with utility bills (up from €37.7 million in 2022). These figures underscore the scale of need and the critical role of community-based support in addressing poverty.

Since the adoption of the current Roadmap, Ireland has faced a series of overlapping crises — the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, a deepening housing emergency, inflationary pressures, and a severe cost-of-living crisis. These events have exposed and exacerbated long-standing inequalities, revealing the fragility of household incomes, particularly for those reliant on social protection, working in low-paid or insecure employment, or living in inadequate housing.

The Roadmap’s target to reduce consistent poverty to 2% or less has not been achieved. On the contrary, deprivation and consistent poverty have increased across

several population groups. Children in one-parent families, older people living alone, disabled individuals, and those experiencing housing exclusion continue to face disproportionately high levels of poverty. The widening gap between social welfare rates and the Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) further undermines the financial security and dignity of many.

SVP's frontline experience confirms these trends. Our members report increasing levels of distress, hardship, and social isolation — particularly among lone parents, older people living alone, migrants, and working families who are unable to make ends meet. Many turn to SVP as a last resort, having exhausted all other options, struggling to put food on the table, heat their homes, or afford essential education costs.

This submission draws on data and recommendations from SVP's *Social Protection Priorities 2025, Pre-Budget Submission 2026*, and the lived experience of our members. It responds directly to the Department's ten consultation questions and calls for systemic reform rather than piecemeal measures.

The next strategy must be:

- **Ambitious in scope** – addressing the root causes of poverty and exclusion.
- **Accountable in delivery** – with clear targets, timelines, and mechanisms for monitoring progress.
- **Grounded in dignity and adequacy** – ensuring that income supports, public services, and participation measures work in tandem to reduce poverty and build a more inclusive society.

Ireland must commit to a future where no one is left behind — where every individual and family can live with dignity, security, and hope.

Question 1:

What progress has been made and what has worked well under the roadmap?

The current roadmap has delivered some notable progress, especially in relation to targeted in-kind supports, school-based services, and a more agile response to

emerging social needs. While these advances have not reversed underlying poverty trends, they have nonetheless mitigated hardship for many, particularly children and families on low incomes.

1. Expansion of School Meals and Free Schoolbooks

The rollout of **hot school meals** and the **universal provision of schoolbooks** at primary level has had a visible impact. SVP members report a reduction in back-to-school requests from struggling families, indicating that these initiatives have lessened the financial burden of education. The nutritional and social value of school meals is particularly significant for children from food-insecure households. However, there remains a need for expansion to secondary level and for ongoing evaluation of nutritional standards and delivery quality¹.

2. Improved Responsiveness During Crises

Government departments and agencies demonstrated commendable responsiveness during the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent cost-of-living crisis. Measures such as the Pandemic Unemployment Payment, additional Fuel Allowance payments, and targeted supports for carers and people with a disability were implemented at speed. This ability to coordinate and deliver rapid interventions must be retained and mainstreamed, particularly considering future economic or climate shocks².

3. Household Benefits and Energy Support Measures

The **Household Benefits Package** remains a critical support for older people and those with disabilities. Its continuation throughout the crisis period helped prevent deeper utility arrears for many low-income households. SVP also welcomed extensions to the **Fuel Allowance scheme**, including shorter qualifying periods. We are pleased to see that the Programme for Government includes a plan to extend the eligibility for those on Working Family Payment. Members report that many

¹Society of St. Vincent de Paul. (2025). *Social Protection Priorities 2025*.

² SVP. (2025). *Pre-Budget Submission 2026*; Internal Volunteer Reflections, 2024.

households still fall through the cracks — it is concerning to see that the household benefits package is still unavailable to one parent households³.

4. Food Poverty Initiatives and Casework Models

The establishment of a **Food Poverty Working Group** and the **pilot caseworker model** reflect a more strategic approach to addressing food insecurity. These initiatives acknowledge that food poverty is not simply about access to food but linked to inadequate income and high living costs. Members have seen first-hand the difference a tailored, relational support model can make, particularly when it is coupled with broader financial advice and referral pathways⁴.

5. Public Awareness and Political Discourse

Finally, the Roadmap has helped elevate the national discourse on poverty and social exclusion. Terms such as “consistent poverty” and “unmet need” have become more commonly understood in policy spaces. SVP welcomes the growing political recognition of issues such as **income adequacy**, **cost of disability**, and the **importance of universal access to services** — although concrete reforms have not always followed rhetoric.

While these areas show progress, they remain **insufficient to offset the structural drivers of poverty**. The next question turns to those enduring barriers and persistent failures that must be addressed.

Consultation Question 2:

What has not worked well under the Roadmap?

³ Vincentian MESL Research Centre. (2025). *Minimum Essential Standard of Living 2025*.

⁴ SVP Member Consultations (2024–2025), Internal Casework Feedback.

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**. Instead, many indicators have worsened — particularly for groups already at the margins. Structural shortcomings in income support, housing, energy policy, and disability inclusion remain unresolved.

SVP members report growing desperation and isolation among people they assist — not just from economic hardship, but from **systems that are rigid, inaccessible, and inadequate**. The reliance on temporary or once-off supports has papered over, rather than addressed, these core problems.

1. Income Inadequacy and Lack of Indexation

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. 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 pace⁵. Research from Social Justice Ireland and the Vincentian MESL Centre continues to highlight this growing gap⁶.

The absence of **automatic indexation** has led to politically negotiated, and often insufficient, increases. SVP strongly supports 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.

2. Over-Reliance on Once-Off Payments

Recent years have seen an over-reliance on **once-off, universal supports** such as energy credits, lump-sum payments, and bonus Child Benefit. While these measures provided welcome short-term relief, they have not created stability or lifted people out of poverty. Many of those SVP assists report that such payments disappear immediately into arrears or unavoidable costs, without improving financial resilience⁷.

3. Eligibility Gaps and Policy Inertia

⁵ Vincentian MESL Research Centre. (2025). *Minimum Essential Standard of Living 2025*.

⁶ Social Justice Ireland. (2024). *Poverty Focus 2024*.

⁷ SVP. (2025). *Social Protection Priorities 2025*.

Many social protection schemes have outdated income thresholds, rigid eligibility criteria, or overly narrow definitions of household need. This includes schemes such as the **Fuel Allowance**, **Living Alone Allowance**, and **Working Family Payment**. The **medical card income threshold** remains well below the poverty line for working families with children⁸.

SVP members frequently assist people who are **excluded by design** — people in low-paid work, private renters, carers, lone parents transitioning from full-time care to part-time work, and migrants with limited entitlements. These structural exclusions create “hidden hardship” among groups technically above the welfare threshold but far below adequacy.

4. Persistent Poverty Among High-Risk Groups

Despite the Roadmap’s commitment to vulnerable groups, the consistent poverty rate remains disproportionately high for:

- Children in one-parent families (11%)
- Disabled people (over 13%)
- Older people living alone (5.2%, up from 2.2% in 2020) ⁹

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. For example, research by the ESRI estimates that households with a disabled member face additional costs ranging from €9,500 to €12,300 per year¹⁰ — none of which is meaningfully compensated for in the current system.

5. Unmet Needs in Housing and Energy

Housing-related poverty — especially among HAP tenants paying unaffordable top-ups — remains one of the most pressing issues reported by SVP. These households are often classified as “supported” despite living in poverty after housing costs. Similarly, over **440,000 households are now in energy arrears**, and self-disconnection among prepay meter users is rising¹¹.

These failures are not only financial but deeply human. SVP members describe families skipping meals, children unable to participate in school trips, and older

⁸ Mangan, D. (2024). *Access to Health Care and Medical Card Eligibility in Ireland*. Irish Journal of Social Policy

⁹ Central Statistics Office. (2025). *SILC 2024: Survey on Income and Living Conditions*.

¹⁰ Indecon. (2021). *Assessing the Cost of Disability in Ireland*.

¹¹ Commission for Regulation of Utilities. (2025). *CRU Winter Energy Report 2024–25*.

people rationing heat in winter. These are not edge cases — they are **endemic consequences of an inadequate and inflexible system.**

Consultation Question 3:

What more can be done to tackle child poverty, including child poverty in specific groups?

Despite long-standing commitments and initiatives, child poverty in Ireland remains stubbornly high. According to **SILC 2024**, the **consistent poverty rate among children stands at 6%**, and rises to **11% among children in one-parent families**¹². SVP members across the country consistently highlight the unmet needs of children living in poverty — from inadequate clothing and poor nutrition to educational exclusion, digital inequality, and social isolation.

Ending child poverty must be a national priority under the next Roadmap. This requires a shift away from once-off or short-term supports toward **permanent, targeted, and rights-based interventions** that address both income adequacy and public service provision.

1. Strengthen and Recalibrate Child Income Supports

While Child Benefit remains a vital universal payment, it does not adequately target those most at risk. SVP welcomes the government's continued commitment to tackling child poverty and exploring ways to strengthen income supports for families.

However, we have concerns about the proposed second-tier child benefit in its current form. Notably, the model does not appear to reflect the higher costs associated with older children, as evidenced by the MESL research. This raises questions about the adequacy and equity of the proposed support. We believe that any reform to child income supports—whether through a second-tier payment or a recalibration of the existing Child Support Payment—must be grounded in evidence and designed to meet the real needs of families. Benchmarking payments to a proportion of the primary welfare rate—such as 45% for children under 12 and 55%

¹² Central Statistics Office. (2025). *SILC 2024: Survey on Income and Living Conditions*.

for those aged 12 and over—would help ensure a more adequate and predictable level of support¹³. Importantly, this support should be indexed and removed from **budgetary uncertainty** to protect families from real-term losses. Special attention must also be paid to **child payments in Direct Provision**, where current supports only meet **49% of MESL requirements** for children. It is important that the previously agreed monthly payment for children in Direct Provision is introduced as a matter of priority.

2. Address the Disproportionate Poverty of One-Parent Families

Children in one-parent families face the highest consistent poverty rates of any household type. Income inadequacy is compounded by high housing costs, unaffordable childcare, and cliff edges in social welfare eligibility. SVP recommends:

- Raising income disregards for the **One-Parent Family Payment (OFP)** and **Jobseeker's Transitional Payment (JST)** to support lone parents in work.
- Extending the **Living Alone Allowance** to lone parents
- Ensuring **child maintenance** is treated appropriately in income assessments, with clear statutory oversight¹⁴.
- Ensure greater enforcement of Child Maintenance Orders.

In many of these households, the SVP is often contacted for help with **school-related costs, household bills, or child nutrition** — underlining the financial precarity even among those in employment.

3. Embed Hot School Meals Universally with Nutritional Oversight.

The rollout of **hot school meals** has had a measurable positive impact on child wellbeing and educational participation. SVP members have noted a drop in food poverty referrals and back-to-school hardship requests where meals are available.

This programme should be:

- Expanded to all primary and post-primary schools
- Subject to **ongoing nutritional evaluation and standards**

¹³ Vincentian MESL Research Centre. (2025). *Minimum Essential Standard of Living 2025*.

¹⁴ One Family. (2023). *Child Maintenance and Lone Parents in Ireland: A Policy Review*.

- Accompanied by investment in school infrastructure where necessary¹⁵.

4. Amend the eligibility criteria for the Jobseeker's Transitional Payment (JST) to allow lone parents who are engaged in employment, education, or training to remain on JST until their youngest child completes second-level education.

The current cut-off for JST at age 14 creates a financial disincentive for lone parents who are already participating in work or education. Transitioning to the Working Family Payment (WFP) often results in a net income loss, despite no change in circumstances or capacity to increase hours.¹⁶ This undermines the policy objective of supporting labour market and educational engagement. There is no evidence-based rationale for withdrawing JST at age 14, particularly when older children incur higher costs¹⁷. Extending JST for parents who are actively engaged outside the home would incentivise participation, reduce child poverty, and support long-term economic independence. It would also ensure that lone parents are not penalised for doing exactly what the system is designed to encourage.

5. Invest in Holistic, Child-Centred Public Services

Reducing child poverty requires more than income transfers. It must also ensure access to **affordable early years education, mental health services, digital access, and secure housing**. Children living in emergency accommodation or substandard private rentals are particularly exposed to educational disadvantage and poor health outcomes¹⁸.

Holistic measures to reduce poverty must centre on **the lived experience of the child** — their right to dignity, inclusion, and full participation in society. This means building wraparound services that recognise families' multiple needs and respond accordingly. Ultimately, we want every child to live in a secure, quality home and until that ambition is achieved, we must do everything to mitigate against long term negative impacts, due to housing precarity.

¹⁵ Department of Social Protection. (2024). *Hot School Meals Scheme: Monitoring Report*.

¹⁶ Citizens Information. Jobseeker's Transitional Payment. <https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/social-welfare/unemployed-people/jobseekers-transitional-payment/>

¹⁷ Department of Social Protection. Operational Guidelines – Jobseeker's Transitional Payment. <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-social-protection/publications/operational-guidelines-jobseekers-transitional-payment/>

¹⁸ ESRI. (2023). *The Impact of Housing Instability on Children's Outcomes in Ireland*.

Consultation Question 4:

What should be the priority target groups in the next strategy?

To meaningfully reduce poverty and social exclusion, the next strategy must prioritise groups who experience **the deepest, most persistent, and often intersectional forms of deprivation**. Data from **SILC 2024**, **MESL research**, and frontline SVP experience all point to the same populations who are chronically underserved and overexposed to hardship.

These are the groups for whom poverty is not a temporary phase but a **prolonged and entrenched reality** — often compounded by poor service access, administrative exclusion, and structural inequality.

1. Children, Especially in One-Parent Families

Children remain the most at-risk group in Ireland, and consistent poverty rates are more than **twice as high** in one-parent families (11%) as in two-parent families (6%).¹⁹ Lone parents face systemic challenges including unaffordable childcare, limited housing options, and inflexible income supports. Policies must be tailored to address:

- Inadequate Child Support Payments.
- Income loss when youngest child turns 14.
- Employment barriers due to income thresholds and loss of supports.
- Housing precarity for families exiting homelessness or Direct Provision

¹⁹ Central Statistics Office. (2025). *SILC 2024: Survey on Income and Living Conditions*.

SVP volunteers frequently support lone parents in choosing between heating, food, and education costs. These decisions are **not marginal—they are structural**, rooted in policy gaps.

2. People with a Disability

People with a disability face higher rates of consistent poverty (**19%**) and deprivation, even after accounting for supports²⁰. Additional costs — such as transport, assistive technology, home modifications, and specialist health needs — are not adequately met through current welfare provisions.

Priority measures must include:

- Introduction of a **non-means-tested Cost of Disability Payment**
- Expansion of supports that recognise part-time employment as a sustainable model
- Access to energy efficiency schemes and housing adaptations

SVP's frontline teams report repeated encounters with individuals who, despite receiving core disability payments, remain far below the Minimum Essential Standard of Living²¹.

3. Older People Living Alone

Consistent poverty among older people living alone has **increased from 2.2% to 5.2%** between 2020 and 2024²². Rising energy prices, healthcare costs, and digital exclusion all contribute to this trend.

Key reforms include:

- Reviewing and increasing the **Living Alone Allowance (LAA)** to ensure MESL is reached.
- Ensuring utility affordability through **Household Benefits** and **Fuel Allowance reform**
- Supporting digitally excluded older people to access online services and entitlements

²⁰ Indecon. (2021). *Assessing the Cost of Disability in Ireland*.

²¹ Vincentian MESL Research Centre. (2025). *Minimum Essential Standard of Living 2025*.

²² CSO. (2025). *SILC 2024*.

SVP's Home Visitation Conferences regularly encounter older people who are **self-rationing heating, isolating socially**, or failing to seek medical help due to cost concerns.

4. Migrant Families and International Protection Applicants

Migrant households — especially those in Direct Provision or with restricted welfare access — face disproportionate poverty and often experience **barriers to accessing basic services** such as banking, housing, and employment.

While broader reforms to the international protection system are needed, the strategy should:

- 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 status²³.

5. Working Poor and Families Just Above the Threshold

Many of the people SVP assists are **in employment but not earning enough to meet basic needs**. These “threshold households” often lose entitlements — such as medical cards or Fuel Allowance — once they marginally exceed income limits. A new strategy must:

- **Index eligibility thresholds** to inflation and wages. The medical card thresholds have not increased since 2006 and many households on minimum wage income, are no longer entitled to the card.
- Extend **Fuel Allowance** to those in receipt of **Working Family Payment**
- Reform the **Housing Assistance Payment (HAP)** model to reduce rent burdens

²³ Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC). (2023). *Monitoring Adequate Housing for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Ireland*.

Without changes, those in low-income work will continue to be **excluded by design** from the supports needed for a decent life.

Consultation Question 4:

What should be the priority target groups in the next strategy?

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**. Data from **SILC 2024**, the **Vincentian MESL**, and the lived experience of SVP members and volunteers point consistently to those most exposed to cumulative disadvantage and systemic neglect. These groups are not simply “at risk” — they are already **living in poverty**, often for prolonged periods and across generations, with inadequate state support.

1. Children, Especially in One-Parent Families.

Children remain among the most vulnerable in Irish society. The overall consistent poverty rate for children is **8.5%**, but it rises to **11%** among children living in **one-parent families**²⁴. In comparison, **children in two-parent households** experience a significantly lower consistent poverty rate of **6%**.

This gap reflects both **income inadequacy** and **unequal access to services**, including affordable childcare, secure housing, and educational supports. SVP members frequently meet lone parents making impossible choices between heating their homes, buying food, or paying school-related costs. These are not isolated crises — they reflect long-term structural exclusion.

To address this, the Roadmap must:

- Expand income disregards for **One-Parent Family Payment (OFP)** and **Jobseeker’s Transitional Payment (JST)**, enabling smoother transitions into work.

²⁴ Central Statistics Office. (2025). *SILC 2024: Survey on Income and Living Conditions*.

- Amend the qualifying criteria for JST.
- Extend the **Living Alone Allowance** to lone parents
- Benchmark **Child Support Payments** to reflect the age and needs of the child, linked to a percentage of the primary social welfare rate
- Ensure statutory reform of **child maintenance** policy, removing inconsistencies and gendered burdens²⁵

2. People with a Disability.

The consistent poverty rate for **people with a disability** is **19%**, nearly four times the national average. SVP members routinely assist people with a disability who face a stark mismatch between their fixed incomes and high additional costs — including transport, assistive equipment, therapies, and accessible housing.

Without a **Cost of Disability Payment**, the social protection system fails to acknowledge or compensate for these additional pressures. As found in the **Indecon Report**, extra costs can exceed **€9,500 to €12,300** per year²⁶.

Policy priorities must include:

- A **non-means-tested Cost of Disability Payment** as a core component of income adequacy
- Ensuring access to housing and retrofitting schemes
- Recognising part-time or flexible work in secondary benefit eligibility

3. Older People Living Alone.

Poverty among older people living alone has risen from **2.2% in 2020 to 5.2% in 2024**²⁷. This demographic is particularly vulnerable to energy poverty, social isolation, and digital exclusion. SVP members often report older individuals reducing heating use in winter, skipping meals, or avoiding medical care to cope with financial constraints.

Essential supports should include:

- Reform and expansion of the **Living Alone Allowance (LAA)**
- Improved access to the **Household Benefits Package** and targeted energy supports

²⁵ One Family. (2023). *Child Maintenance and Lone Parents in Ireland: A Policy Review*.

²⁶ Indecon. (2021). *Assessing the Cost of Disability in Ireland*.

²⁷ Central Statistics Office. (2025). *SILC 2024*.

- Greater outreach for digitally excluded older persons to support entitlement access

4. Migrant Families and International Protection Applicants.

Migrant households, especially those in **Direct Provision**, are disproportionately affected by poverty and exclusion. SVP has seen growing requests for assistance from people who, despite working or studying, face **restricted access to supports**, poor housing conditions, and limited entitlement pathways.

Recommendations include:

- Providing a **monthly child payment** for children in Direct Provision, equivalent to Child Benefit
- Ensuring all school-age children have access to **free school meals**, schoolbooks, and educational support
- Ending the use of emergency accommodation without access to basic services or kitchen facilities²⁸.

5. Low-Income Working Families and the “Working Poor”.

Many people assisted by SVP 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.

Strategic reforms must:

- **Index income thresholds** for schemes such as the Fuel Allowance and Medical Card
- Extend the **Fuel Allowance** to recipients of **Working Family Payment**
- Improve the adequacy of the **Housing Assistance Payment (HAP)** to reduce unaffordable rent top-ups and associated poverty risks

²⁸ Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (2023). *Monitoring Adequate Housing for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Ireland*.

Consultation Question 5:

What should be the headline targets and indicators in the next strategy?

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. SVP strongly recommends that headline indicators go beyond employment figures to reflect **real lived experience** of deprivation, exclusion, and income inadequacy.

1. Poverty and Deprivation Rates

- *Goal:* Reduce consistent poverty to **below 2%** within the lifetime of the strategy
- *Intermediate Target:* Reduce child consistent poverty from **8.5% to under 4%** within 3 years.

These must be tracked using **CSO SILC data**, but with improved breakdowns across household types (e.g. one-parent, disability, migrants), geographic spread, and tenure types (private rental, social housing, homelessness).

2. Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) Benchmarking

- *Goal:* All core welfare payments to meet or exceed the MESL by 2030
- *Indicator:* Annual independent review of income adequacy (e.g. MESL benchmarking against welfare rates).

Without income that meets the cost of a minimum standard of living, people cannot participate in society with dignity. SVP continues to see families falling into debt and seeking crisis help simply to meet basics — food, heating, housing — all symptoms of long-standing income shortfalls.

3. Access to Public Services

- *Goal:* Ensure 100% of children in DEIS schools have access to free school meals
- *Goal:* All households in Direct Provision to receive child payments, school meals, and educational support within 6 months

Education and nutrition are foundational to long-term social inclusion. SVP supports thousands of requests annually for school costs, books, meals and uniforms — highlighting service gaps especially for low-income, migrant and lone-parent households.

4. Housing Cost Burden and Poverty after Housing Costs

- 📌 *Goal:* Reduce the share of HAP households in poverty after housing costs to **below 10%**

- 📌 *Indicator:* Regular publication of "poverty after housing costs" metric in national reporting

SVP frequently encounters HAP tenants paying unsustainable rent top-ups, with little left for essentials. Unless housing costs are included in poverty metrics, policy interventions will miss this hidden crisis.

5. Cost of Disability and Living Alone Indicators

- 📌 *Goal:* Publish an annual cost-of-disability benchmark

- 📌 *Goal:* Reduce consistent poverty among people with a disability and older people living alone by 50% by 2030

Current data shows that 13.1% of people with a disability and 5.2% of older people living alone are in consistent poverty. Headline targets must directly address the unmet costs of disability, loneliness, and service inaccessibility.

6. Energy Poverty

- 📌 *Goal:* Eliminate involuntary self-disconnection from energy within 5 years

- 📌 *Indicator:* CRU and CSO to publish disaggregated PAYG arrears data by household type

Energy poverty has become a routine feature of SVP casework. With 440,000 households in energy arrears and rising fuel deprivation, particularly among lone parents and older people, targeted measures are essential.

Recommendations for Monitoring and Evaluation.

- **Annual Progress Report** published by the Department of Social Protection, with public engagement.
- **Independent Oversight Body** (e.g. through IHREC or a strengthened Social Inclusion Forum).
- Ensure all data is disaggregated by **household composition, age, disability, gender, and migration status**.

Consultation Question 6:

What structures should be put in place to oversee the implementation of the strategy?

The original Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020–2025 suffered from weak implementation and oversight structures. While it offered a cohesive vision, progress monitoring was inconsistent, and cross-departmental delivery often lacked coordination and urgency. To ensure the successor strategy is **deliverable, accountable, and effective**, SVP recommends a significantly strengthened implementation architecture.

1. Independent Oversight and Evaluation Body.

📌 *Proposal:* Establish an **Independent Social Inclusion Commission**, akin to the Low Pay Commission or Fiscal Council.

This body would:

- Monitor delivery across departments against agreed targets
- Publish **annual progress reports** and recommend policy adjustments
- Ensure **data transparency** through integration of CSO, ESRI, MESL, and administrative datasets
- Engage with stakeholders, including NGOs, service users, and academics

Such a commission must have statutory standing and operate independently of departmental priorities or election cycles.

2. Named Departmental Leads with Cross-Government Mandates.

📌 *Proposal:* Assign designated **Social Inclusion Leads** across all key departments (Social Protection, Health, Education, Housing, Children, and Justice).

These leads must be:

- Senior civil servants with dedicated budgetary oversight
- Accountable for their department's Roadmap targets
- Required to report bi-annually to the Oireachtas and the Oversight Commission

This will transform social inclusion from a siloed issue into a shared, enforceable responsibility.

3. Strengthened Role for the Social Inclusion Forum.

📌 *Proposal:* Expand the Forum's role from consultation to co-monitoring.

SVP and other civil society organisations welcome opportunities to input into national planning. But lived experience and frontline insight must be more than anecdotal supplements — they should inform strategy design, target setting, and course correction.

We propose:

- A **co-produced Monitoring Framework**, including lived experience indicators
- Use of qualitative data (e.g. case studies, testimonies) alongside statistical outcomes
- Dedicated feedback loops from NGOs, advocacy groups, and service users

4. Disaggregated and Frequent Data Reporting.

Progress can only be measured when **robust data** is available, timely, and comparable. SVP recommends:

- Annual publication of **poverty and deprivation data** by household type, region, gender, disability, and migration status and age.
- Integration of **after housing cost indicators** into all official poverty statistics.

- Expanded use of MESL data for income adequacy tracking.

5. Transparency and Public Communication.

Accountability also requires **public engagement and clarity**. The Roadmap's implementation must be visible and understood by the people it affects.

We propose:

- A **public online dashboard** tracking all targets and outcomes.
- Yearly "State of Inclusion" address to the Oireachtas.
- Inclusion of civil society and those with lived experience on advisory panels.

Consultation Question 7:

How should the new Roadmap align and integrate with other key Government strategies?

To be impactful, the successor Roadmap must act as a **binding framework across all areas of public policy**, embedding poverty reduction and social inclusion targets into housing, education, health, employment, and climate policies. The previous strategy often stood apart from broader economic planning. SVP recommends full integration with the national policymaking architecture — both horizontally (across departments) and vertically (from budget to service delivery).

1. Align with the National Economic Dialogue, Budget Process, and Spending Reviews.

Social inclusion must be treated as a **core economic priority**, not a social afterthought. SVP recommends:

- Embedding Roadmap priorities into the **National Economic Dialogue**, Departmental Spending Reviews, and pre-budget submissions
- Requiring all departments to **poverty-proof new spending** and to outline how budget decisions impact core poverty indicators

- Linking welfare and tax policy decisions directly to **Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL)** benchmarks, to ensure adequacy is a measurable, cross-cutting goal

2. Embed in Housing, Health, and Climate Policy.

The roadmap should operate as a **social floor** for the following strategies:

- **Housing for All:** Address poverty after housing costs through reforms to HAP and Rent Supplement. Ensure that social housing allocation prioritises people exiting homelessness.
- **Sláintecare:** Use Roadmap targets to drive **universal primary care**, medical card access reform, and reductions in unmet healthcare needs for low-income households.
- **Climate Action Plan:** Protect vulnerable households during the green transition by expanding the reach of energy efficiency schemes and reducing self-disconnection among PAYG energy users. Ensure the **Just Transition** includes **energy-poor households** in the private rental sector — currently excluded from retrofit schemes.

3. Coordinate with Children's, Disability and Equality Strategies.

The Roadmap must intersect with strategies focused on groups facing specific disadvantage:

- **Child Poverty and Wellbeing Programme Office:** Synchronise child poverty reduction targets, e.g. aligning CSP reform and access to free hot school meals with the Programme Office's goals.
- **National Disability Strategy:** Incorporate a Cost of Disability Payment into the Roadmap's core deliverables, ensuring this is treated as a rights-based income guarantee.
- **National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy:** Include ethnic equality indicators and ensure adequate funding is routed through local implementation structures to reduce educational and income disparities.

4. Strengthen Local Implementation through SICAP and LCDCs.

Frontline delivery of anti-poverty programmes happens at **local level**. SVP recommends:

- Greater resourcing and mandate for **Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs)** to implement Roadmap objectives
- Incorporate Roadmap targets into **SICAP (Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme)** monitoring frameworks
- Ensure consistent engagement with **voluntary and community organisations**, who are best placed to identify local need and design appropriate responses

5. Human Rights and Equality Mainstreaming

The Roadmap must align with:

- **Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty**, as required by Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014
- Ireland's commitments under the **European Pillar of Social Rights** and **UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

Integration with these frameworks will ensure that social inclusion is viewed not just as a policy outcome but as a **fundamental right**.

Consultation Question 8:

How can the strategy best support local delivery and community involvement in tackling poverty and social exclusion?

Effective anti-poverty strategies are built from the ground up. SVP, with its 11,000+ volunteers embedded in communities across Ireland, has long witnessed how policy success or failure is ultimately tested at **local level**. The next Roadmap must **mobilise local capacity, resource frontline services, and prioritise lived experience** as a key input into design and delivery.

1. Fund and Empower Community-Based Organisations (CBOs).

Local voluntary and community groups are **early responders** to poverty. They are often the first to identify emerging needs, especially among hard-to-reach groups such as:

- Migrant families in Direct Provision
- Lone parents struggling to re-enter employment
- Older people living alone and socially isolated
- Families in hidden homelessness

To maximise this capacity, the Roadmap must:

- Provide **multi-annual, core funding** to CBOs to ensure continuity and sustainability
- Include these organisations in **local decision-making structures**, such as Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) and Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSCs)
- Recognise that organisations like SVP, which are not State-funded but deeply engaged, bring unique value through **volunteer-led, dignity-based assistance**

2. Strengthen the Role of SICAP in Poverty Reduction

The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) should be reconfigured as a key delivery arm of the Roadmap. SVP recommends:

- Expanding the definition of “disadvantage” to include energy poverty, food insecurity, and digital exclusion
- Using SICAP structures to **embed income adequacy education**, support service access, and promote awareness of rights and entitlements
- Ensuring SICAP providers have adequate resources and flexibility to respond to local needs in real time

3. Promote Co-Production and Lived Experience Engagement.

SVP volunteers have highlighted a significant policy blind spot: **the people most affected by poverty are rarely involved in decision-making**. This is a missed opportunity and an ethical failure.

To address this:

- **Co-production** must be embedded in all local implementation plans, with processes to involve service users meaningfully
- Public consultations should include **accessible formats**, childcare and transport supports, and safe spaces for marginalised voices
- The Roadmap should fund **peer-led engagement models**, including those designed and led by people with disabilities, lone parents, and those with lived experience of homelessness or addiction

4. Data and Monitoring at Local Level

National strategies often fail to capture **regional and local variations** in poverty. SVP volunteers in rural areas, for example, report different needs around transport, isolation, and access to services than urban branches.

We recommend:

- Regular publication of **county- and LEA-level poverty statistics**, including deprivation, housing stress, and service access.
- Local authorities to be resourced and mandated to collect **qualitative feedback** on Roadmap delivery.
- Public dashboards or visualisation tools to allow citizens to track progress in their own area.

5. Whole-of-Community Approach to Inclusion.

Social inclusion is not only a matter of income — it is about **connection, dignity, and belonging**. The Roadmap must support:

- Intergenerational programmes (e.g. older volunteers mentoring younger people)
- Community cafés and social hubs in disadvantaged areas

- Local energy partnerships and food redistribution networks, where people in poverty can be involved as active participants — not just service recipients.

Consultation Question 9:

What are the new and emerging issues that the next strategy should take into account?

The social and economic landscape in Ireland has shifted significantly since the original Roadmap was launched in 2020. SVP's frontline work, alongside national and international evidence, identifies several critical emerging challenges that must shape the next strategy — challenges that risk deepening structural inequality and leaving entire cohorts behind unless adequately addressed.

1. Persistent Inflation and the Withdrawal of Temporary Supports.

Despite falling headline inflation, the cost of essentials — food, housing, energy — remains high. SVP has seen a **45% increase in requests for assistance** since 2020, with **248,000 calls in 2024 alone**²⁹. Many low-income households are struggling even more now than at the height of the pandemic or energy crisis, due to:

- Expiry of once-off measures (e.g. energy credits, double welfare payments)
- Ongoing high costs in key areas like energy (+64.5% since 2020³⁰)
- Core welfare rates still falling short of the **Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL)** benchmark

“The removal of temporary supports didn't make life normal again — it made it harder. People feel like they've been abandoned just when things are at their worst.”

– SVP Volunteer, Dublin Region

²⁹ Society of St. Vincent de Paul. (2025). *Social Protection Priorities 2025*.

³⁰ Vincentian MESL Research Centre. (2025). *Minimum Essential Standard of Living 2025*.

2. Housing-Related Poverty and Hidden Homelessness

The current housing crisis is now a **poverty crisis**. The official poverty rate significantly underestimates the lived experience of poverty **after housing costs**, especially among renters:

- 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**.

Yet housing costs remain **excluded** from official poverty reporting, masking the real burden.

3. Energy Poverty and Self-Disconnection.

An unprecedented number of households are now in **energy arrears** — **440,000 as of early 2025**³¹. SVP volunteers 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.

4. Digital Exclusion and the Cost of Connectivity

Increased digitalisation of services has improved efficiency but created **barriers for low-income households**, especially those:

- Lacking devices or broadband
- Dependent on public spaces for Wi-Fi
- With literacy or language barriers preventing service access

“Everything’s online now – medical cards, housing, social welfare. But if you don’t have a laptop, you’re invisible.” – *SVP Member, Midlands Region*

³¹ Economic and Social Research Institute. *Energy Poverty and Deprivation in Ireland*. <https://www.esri.ie/publications/energy-poverty-and-deprivation-in-ireland>

5. Mental Health and Social Isolation.

Anecdotal evidence from SVP members suggests an **alarming rise in mental health concerns**, particularly among:

- Lone parents balancing care, work, and income precarity
- Older people living alone in rural areas
- Young people with limited access to education, employment, or safe housing

These issues intersect with poverty and must be addressed in an integrated manner through both income and service responses.

6. 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.

Consultation Question 10:

If you could make one recommendation for the next strategy, what would it be?

Recommendation: Anchor the next Roadmap in a legally mandated commitment to income adequacy, human dignity, and inclusive participation — underpinned by data, lived experience, and structural reform.

Poverty is not inevitable. It is a product of policy choices. The next Roadmap must shift from treating poverty as a symptom to addressing its structural roots — income inequality, discrimination, and inadequate public services. Without an explicit commitment to **income adequacy**, no anti-poverty strategy can succeed. This requires:

- **Indexation of social welfare rates** to the **Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL)**.
- **Equity in access to supports** across all household types, including lone parents, people with a disability, and working poor families.
- A formal **benchmarking mechanism**, such as an independent Social Welfare Commission, to ensure adequacy is sustained over time.

But beyond income, the strategy must support **inclusive social cohesion**, particularly in the context of **Ireland's changing demographics**. Between 2016 and 2022, the number of non-Irish citizens in Ireland increased by approximately 18%, rising to 631,785 people—accounting for 12% of the population³². The population is more ethnically, culturally, and religiously diverse than at any point in its history.

This presents both a challenge and an opportunity. The Roadmap must:

- Recognise the particular risks of **social exclusion, racism, and material deprivation** among migrants, asylum seekers, and ethnic minorities
- Ensure public services are **interculturally competent**, accessible in multiple languages, and responsive to diverse needs.
- Support **community cohesion initiatives** that foster mutual understanding, inclusion, and participation in civic life.

As SVP members across the country have observed, **social fragmentation grows where needs are unmet**, and where people feel excluded from the benefits of social and economic progress.

“People don’t want handouts — they want fairness. And when they feel shut out, it doesn’t just hurt them. It hurts the whole fabric of our communities.”

— *SVP Volunteer, South-West Region.*

³² <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpp5/censusofpopulation2022profile5-diversitymigrationethnicityirishtravellersreligion/citizenship/>

The successor Roadmap must be more than a policy document. It must be a **national compact**: to guarantee dignity for every person, to build solidarity across difference, and to invest in the public goods — income, housing, education, healthcare — that allow all people to belong.