



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



Tithe an
Oireachtais
Houses of the
Oireachtas

**An Comhchoiste um Choimirce Shóisialach,
Forbairt Pobail agus na hOileáin**

Tuarascáil maidir le dul chun cinn na
Spriocanna Forbartha Inbhuanaithe 2023

Nollaig 2023

**Joint Committee on Social Protection,
Community and Rural Development and the Islands**

Report on the progress of the Sustainable
Development Goals 2023

December 2023

Committee Membership



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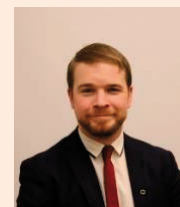
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Cathaoirleach Foreword



In September 2020, motions were passed in Dáil and Seanad Éireann instructing Departmental Committees to include consideration of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in their respective work programmes. The Joint Committee on Social Protection, Community and Rural Development and the Islands understands the importance of the SDGs and included consideration of the SDGs in its 2023 work programme.

There are five strategic objectives in the National Implementation Plan for the Sustainable Development Goals 2022-2024. The first of these is “To embed the SDG framework into the work of Government Departments to achieve greater policy coherence for sustainable development.”

As the work of this Committee shadows that of the Departments of Social Protection and Rural and Community Development, which is responsible for the islands, we engaged with Stakeholders to see how they feel these Departments are progressing with the relevant SDG targets. The [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), published by the United Nations, acknowledges the essential role of national parliaments in ensuring accountability for effective implementation of our SDG commitments.

In its scrutiny of the Sustainable Development Goals, the Committee held meetings with officials from the Department of Social Protection and the Department of Rural and Community Development, Coalition 2030, Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann and Social Justice Ireland. The Committee appointed the Leas-Chathaoirleach, Deputy Ó Cathasaigh, as rapporteur, to deliver this report, which includes productive recommendations for these Departments to take on board.

I would like to thank all Officials and Stakeholders for their valuable engagement with the Committee, and Members for their hard work, and our rapporteur, Deputy Ó Cathasaigh. I would also like to acknowledge the assistance of the Committee Secretariat in preparing this report.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Denis Naughten', written over a horizontal line.

Denis Naughten TD

Cathaoirleach to the Committee

December 2023

Rapporteur Foreword



The Sustainable Development Goals, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, are a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and planet, a roadmap for how we might all, as a global community, live better together on an equitable basis. They commit us to tackling poverty, hunger and inequality while promoting sustainable prosperity in a way that respects our planetary boundaries and the shared natural world that sustains us. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), underpinned by 169 targets, are a pledge to leave nobody behind while reaching the furthest behind first.

Ireland played a central role in the negotiation of the SDGs in 2015 and again in the agreement of the Political Declaration in September of this year. In his speech to the UN, the Taoiseach recommitted Ireland to Agenda 2030, saying ‘It must become more than a piece of paper – as Leaders it is our solemn responsibility to breathe life into it.’

The National Implementation Plan for the Sustainable Development Goals 2022-2024 lays out a Policy Map that assigns for each of the 169 targets a lead department, and in relevant instances, stakeholder departments.

This report details the work of this committee in holding our respective departments to account in their progressing of those goals and targets assigned to them in the Policy Map. We hope that this will be part of a repeated and iterative process whereby we strengthen and embed the role of the Sustainable Development Goals as a tool for effective and cross-cutting policy-making, not just in the Departments of Social Protection and Rural and Community Development and Islands, but across government.

Marc Ó Cathasaigh T.D.

Leas-Cathaoirleach to the Committee

December 2023

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Introduction and Witnesses

The purpose and aim of the Sustainable Development Goals are set out by the United Nations as follows:

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries - **developed and developing** - in a global partnership. They recognise that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests.¹

With a central pledge to leave no one behind included in its preamble, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognises and attempts to balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental. In doing so, it sets forth 167 sub-targets across 17 Goals with the stated aim of achieving those goals by 2030.

The Committee recognises the central role played by Ireland, in co-chairing discussions along with Kenya, in the formulation and the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015.

The responsibility for leading the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals within the Irish context lies with the Department of the Environment, Climate Change and Communications. The National Implementation Plan for the Sustainable Development Goals 2022-2024, however, sets out a whole-of-government approach, with the SDG Policy Map identifying a lead department and any relevant stakeholder departments with respect to each of the 169 sub-targets.

While this committee regards the SDG Policy Map as instructive, it does not view it as exhaustive and is of the opinion that policies enacted either by the Department of Social Protection or the Department of Rural and Community Development and the

¹ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

Islands should be informed by and should attempt to further any of the 169 sub-targets relevant to and affected by those policies.

In particular, this committee notes the specific case of the Islands, which fall under its remit. Progress across many of the Sustainable Development Goals on our islands continues to be challenging by virtue of their geographical remove from the mainland. Many of the goals and subtargets assigned to other departments in the Policy Map could be very usefully applied to the Islands, and the committee acknowledges that the Strategic Objectives in the Our Living Islands policy are directly linked to the Sustainable Development Goals. However, these objectives should be more specifically grounded in individual subtargets rather than referencing only the broad goal.

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that reporting on the progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals on the Islands should be conducted as a separate exercise, with consideration to the broader range of goals and targets that might be applicable in this setting.

The National Implementation Plan explicitly references the important role to be played by Oireachtas Committees in Section 3.1.6. This role in monitoring and overseeing the progress on the SDGs is also underpinned by Standing Order 100(4) relating to the work programme of committees which states each Committee's annual work programme include:

“(c) progress on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals set out in the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as are within the scope of the Committee's orders of reference as set out in Standing Order”

This committee recognises the ongoing work of the Working Group of Committee Chairs in exploring how best this function of Oireachtas Committees might be discharged and welcomes the Library & Research Services' Briefing Paper on the matter of May 2023.

In discharging its own responsibilities with respect to oversight of progress on the Sustainable Development Goals, the committee held the following meetings:

Date	Witnesses
1 March 2023	<p><i>Department of Rural and Community Development</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr JP Mulherin, Assistant Secretary General (acting) – Corporate Affairs and Strategic Development • Ms Clodagh McDonnell, Principal Officer – Organisational Development and HR. <p><i>Department of Social Protection</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr Ciarán Lawler, Assistant Secretary General – Corporate Affairs • Mr Paul Norris, Assistant Principal Officer – Social Inclusion Division • Ms Roshin Sen, Chief Analyst
28 June 2023	<p><i>Coalition 2030</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr Johnny Sheehan, Membership and Regional Manager, The Wheel • Ms Louise Lennon, Policy and Media Officer, Irish Rural Link • Ms Meaghan Carmody, Coordinator • Mr Paul Ginnell, Director of the European Anti-Poverty Network Ireland • Mr Tim Hanley, Policy and Communications Officer, European Anti-Poverty Network Ireland <p><i>Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms Aisling Moran, Development Worker Sherkin, Long and Heire Islands • Mr John Walsh, Coordinator Bere Island Project Group • Ms Tuuli Rantala, Community Development Inishbofin

Social Justice Ireland

- Ms Colette Bennett, Economic and Social Analyst
- Ms Susanne Rogers, Research and Policy Analyst

Recommendations

Recommendations

1. The Committee recommends that reporting on the progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals on the Islands should be conducted as a separate exercise, with consideration to the broader range of goals and targets that might be applicable in this setting.
2. The Committee recommends that particular focus be given to the area of Lifelong Learning in order to increase participation rates.
3. The Committee recommends continued focus on the roll out of rural broadband to bridge the digital divide, with particular attention paid to the issue of fibre connectivity to the mainland as it pertains to the islands.
4. The Committee recommends the specific actions are undertaken to address skills deficits that persist among certain groups, older people and those with lower educational attainment in particular, to prevent the widening of the digital divide and ensure equitable access to the benefits of digital participation.
5. The Committee recommends that the expanded possibilities presented by digital connection and satellite education be explored with a view to

providing a broader range of subject choice at secondary level for students attending smaller rural or island schools.

6. The Committee recommends that delivery and the vindication of the Sustainable Development Goals are given a central position in the second National Social Enterprise policy.

7. The Committee recommends continued investment in remote working facilities in rural areas and on the islands to promote productive activities and job creation in those areas.

8. The Committee recommends that the government continue to support the creation of jobs in the Green Economy and further explores the potential for job creation in the Blue Economy.

9. The Committee recommends that research be undertaken to identify how the effective separation of waste streams can be improved in order to support the development of the Circular Economy.

10. The Committee recommends that adequate training and support be provided to those community structures, Tidy Towns, PPNs and Town Teams among them, who play a role in communicating the SDGs to our communities in order for them to discharge that role more effectively.

11. The Committee recommends that the provisions in the Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities five-year strategy as they relate to the communication and implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals be implemented in full.

12. The Committee recommends that social welfare rates should be benchmarked against a minimum standard such as the MESL and indexed to preserve the spending power of people on fixed incomes over time.

13. The Committee recommends that the CSO present more disaggregated data to make clearer the progress being made in tackling poverty across particular groups in our society to ensure that we are achieving a key priority in the SDGs of reaching the farthest behind first.

14. The Committee recommends further research be conducted on the topic of income adequacy among those on fixed incomes in rural areas, with specific attention given to the issues of transport deprivation and fuel poverty.

15. The Committee recommends that the Connecting Ireland policy is accelerated in order to tackle the issue of transport deprivation among people living in rural areas, thereby increasing their access to a range of other essential services.

16. The Committee recommends that further financial supports be made available to counteract the additional transport costs of living on an island, from personal transport to freight and carriage costs.

17. The Committee supports the expansion of the Hot School Meals programme as an effective anti-poverty measure.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) under the remit of the Department of Rural and Community Development

The committee acknowledges the work of the Department of Rural and Community Development in explicitly incorporating the Sustainable Development Goals across a broad range of its policies, including *Our Rural Future*, *Town Centres First*, *Our Living Islands* and *Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: A Five-Year Strategy to Support the Community and Voluntary Sector in Ireland*. For the purposes of this report, however, the committee will focus on those goals and sub-targets specifically assigned to the department under the SDG Policy Map.

Goal 4 – Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

The Department of Community and Rural Development is listed as a stakeholder department for two of the subtargets under Goal 4, Target 4.2 and Target 4.6.

Target 4.2

By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.

Lead Department – Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

Stakeholder Department – Department of Community and Rural Development

Target 4.6

By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy.

Lead Department – Department of Education

Stakeholder Department – Department of Rural and Community Development

Relevant National Policy: Our Public Libraries 2022: Inspiring, Connecting and Empowering Communities.

Department officials pointed to the role of our public libraries in delivering on the above targets, with Mr. Mulherin stating:

“The *Our Public Libraries* strategy is an important contributor to Goal 4, which is to “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”.

Mr. Mulherin further detailed the role played by libraries in marking SDG Week in 2022, bringing together the work undertaken across local authorities, the LGMA and DECC.

When asked about whether there was collaboration with the Dept. of Education on the reuse of schoolbooks and recycling of school uniforms, Mr. Mulherin indicated that “that is the responsibility of the Department of Education. I am not aware of our department having engaged with that Department on that directly, nor do I think the libraries would have a particularly direct role in the schoolbooks provided to educational establishments.”

Witnesses acknowledged the generally high rates of education in Ireland relative to our obligations under the Sustainable Development Goals, but identified areas of educational disadvantage that persist, particularly within economically disadvantaged communities. It was noted also that further work is needed in the area of lifelong learning and with respect to the development of an integrated skills strategy.

Digital literacy and the availability of the physical infrastructure in terms of high speed broadband connectivity were mentioned as potential causes of digital exclusion, particularly among older people, rural areas and the Islands. The inability to access services, now increasingly being made available online, either through lack of connectivity or a deficit in skills, was seen as a key risk to be addressed in

counteracting a digital divide. This was seen to be particularly important in the context of e-health services and enabling people to age in place.

Ms Tuuli Rantala of Comhdháil Oileáin na hEireann raised specific challenges in terms of education provision on our offshore islands. Only 5 offshore islands currently have second-level education facilities, with children on other islands having to travel to the mainland to access secondary education. Ms. Rantala believes that this issue ‘could be easily solved through satellite education, the digital technology available at the moment and collaboration between schools.’ Access to adequate childcare and pre-school provision also present particular challenges in an island context.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that particular focus be given to the area of Lifelong Learning in order to increase participation rates

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends continued focus on the roll out of rural broadband to bridge the digital divide, with particular attention paid to the issue of adequate broadband connectivity as it pertains to the islands.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that specific actions are undertaken to address skills deficits that persist among certain groups, older people and those with lower

educational attainment in particular, to prevent the widening of the digital divide and ensure equitable access to the benefits of digital participation.

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that the expanded possibilities presented by digital connection and satellite education be explored with a view to providing a broader range of subject choice at secondary level for students attending smaller rural or island schools.

Goal 8 – Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.

The Department of Community and Rural Development is listed as a stakeholder department for two of the subtargets under Goal 8, Target 8.3 and Target 8.4.

Target 8.3

Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services.

Lead Department – Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment

Stakeholder Department – Department of Rural and Community Development

Target 8.4

Improve progressively through 2030, global resource efficiency in consumption and production and endeavour to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation, in accordance with the 10-year framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production, with developed countries taking the lead.

Lead Department – Department of Environment, Climate and Communications

Stakeholder Department – Department of Rural and Community Development

Relevant National Policy: National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland 2019-2022

The Department are strongly of the view that social enterprises are inherently contributing to the sustainable development goal agenda. The SDGs are mainstreamed into the national social enterprise policy, with the department currently working towards the second national social enterprise policy, with 'lots of discussion happening at the moment about how the SDGs will inform the development of that policy,' according to Mr. Mulherin. The department has also participated in discussions at OECD level around how social enterprises and the social economy can contribute to the development of the SDGs and contributed to an OECD statement to bring a focus on the role of social enterprise in delivering the Sustainable Development Goals. The implementation of this policy is opening new opportunities for social enterprises to address social and environmental challenges, and thereby contribute towards the SDGs, particularly SDG 8, decent work and economic growth.

The committee notes that the Department of Rural and Community Development sits on the Roadmap for Social Inclusion Steering Group.

Digital disadvantage was mentioned by Suzanne Rogers of SJI as an inhibiting factor in achieving Target 8.3. The expansion of broadband connectivity should be

combined with the necessary upskilling of people in digital literacy to allow all people to access the opportunities for entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation afforded by internet access. Ms. Rogers also noted the tension between the extensive roll-out of broadband technologies and the pressure this places on energy supply. Mr. John Walsh, Co-ordinator of Bere Island Project Group, likewise emphasised the importance of broadband connectivity, advocating that fibre-optic cable be the optimum standard for broadband provision onto the islands to provide the necessary capacity to future-proof the technology.

Ms. Tuuli Rantala of Comhdáil pointed to the great possibilities for sustainable growth on the islands, welcoming in particular the creation of remote working facilities and emphasising the potential to capitalise further on trends in remote working and working from home that the provision of fibre optic cable connections would afford. She highlighted also the work in the renewable energy sector that is happening on a number of islands as an example of sustainable economic development. Developments in the blue economy, with emerging fields such as seaweed farming and marine biotechnology, were also referenced as potential areas of economic growth.

In relation to Target 8.4, the particular challenges around waste collection in both rural and island settings were mentioned as barriers to sustainable consumption, the effective separation of waste streams and engagement in the circular economy. The potential remunicipalisation of waste services was referenced in this context.

Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that delivery and the vindication of the Sustainable Development Goals are given a central position in the second National Social Enterprise policy.

Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends continued investment in remote working facilities in rural areas and on the islands to promote productive activities and job creation in those areas.

Recommendation 8

The Committee recommends that the Government continue to support the creation of jobs in the Green Economy and further explores the potential for job creation in the Ble Economy

Recommendation 9

The Committee recommends that research be undertaken to identify how the effective separation of waste streams can be improved in order to support the development of the Circular Economy.

Goal 12 – Ensure Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns

Target 12.8

By 2030, ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature.

Lead Department – Office of Government Procurement, Department of Environment, Climate and Communications

Stakeholder Department – Department of Rural and Community Development

Relevant National Policy: Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities. A five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland 2019-2024.

The work of the department with respect to this subtarget centres on increasing awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals themselves within our communities.

The relevant national policy, *Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: A Five-Year Strategy to Support the Community and Voluntary Sector in Ireland* includes specific actions to build the understanding and awareness of the SDGs and to build the capacity of the sector to incorporate the SDGs into their operations, and has as a stated objective to ‘build capacity in communities and community organisations to engage with Climate Change strategies, to implement the Sustainable Development Goals, and meet Public Sector Duty obligations.’

The committee acknowledges the role played by the SuperValu Tidy Towns competition, which is administered by the Department of Rural and Community Development, in promoting the awareness and understanding of the Sustainable Development Goals. The SDGs have been aligned to each of the eight competition categories and a specific SDG award was introduced for 2021, thus helping to build a practical understanding and awareness of the SDGs in almost 1,000 communities throughout the country.

As referenced above, the Department of Community and Rural Development also supports the role played by libraries in marking SDG Week in conjunction with local authorities, the LGMA and DECC.

Ms. Tuuli Rantala argued that islands are ideal test beds for climate action and showcasing sustainable solutions, stating that “the SDGs can show where the challenges are but, in the case of the islands, they also show where there is great potential,’ giving the example of sustainable fishing practices and food production on

islands as instances that showcase best practice of coexistence between people and their surroundings both on land and in the surrounding waters.

Ms. Louise Lennon of Irish Rural Link highlighted the need to communicate the SDGs more to people in rural areas, ensuring that they are brought in through the public participation networks, PPNs, and that the latter are aware of them and have up-to-date knowledge on them. The development of town teams as envisioned under the Town Centres First policy are other opportunity to embed the SDGs in local structures and to communicate the relevant information easily accessible and plain language.

Recommendation 10

The Committee recommends that adequate training and support be provided to those community structures, Tidy Towns, PPNs and Town Teams among them, who play a role in communicating the SDGs to our communities in order for them to discharge that role more effectively.

Goal 16 – Promote peace and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels.

Target 16.7

Ensure responsive inclusive, participatory, and representative decision making at all levels.

Lead Department – Department of Rural and Community Development

Relevant National Policy: Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities. A five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland 2019-2024.

The committee heard that the Department of Rural and Community Development has been working with stakeholders to develop a guide to inclusive community engagement in planning and decision-making, working with organisations to identify best practice in terms of engaging with marginalised communities. A number of pilot projects are underway in four local authority areas dealing with particular issues around Travellers, older people and LGBTQ+ people.

Ms. Colette Bennett pointed to the policy proposals put forward by Social Justice Ireland in relation to SDG 16, including ensuring the national economic and social dialogue of partnership includes all five pillars, restoring funding to the community and voluntary pillar, ensuring adequate funding for civil legal aid and greater transparency of lobbying activities and establishing dialogue forums in every local authority area that will involve local authorities and the public participation networks, PPNs. Ms. Rogers of the same organisation highlighted the importance of subsidiarity as a principle in achieving Target 16.7 and pointed to the relatively centralised nature of decision-making in Ireland as an impediment to the achievement of this target.

Mr. Johnny Sheahan of The Wheel drew attention to specific provisions in the Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities five-year strategy which make mention of strengthening and building understanding and capacity to support the implementation of the national implementation plan for the SDGs. The strategy makes a number of commitments, including developing programmes to implement and raise awareness of the goals among local community development committees, local authorities and Departments. It discusses supporting capacity for the goals at local level and providing supports, including funding, to all sectors to implement them. Mr. Sheahan questioned how much progress is being made, giving the example of organisations that are asked to map what they do with regard to the sustainable development goals but are not required to make out plans for further progress.

Mr. Sheahan further noted the potential role of the Public Participation Networks that exist in every Local Authority Area in furthering progress on the Sustainable Development Goals but argued that the role of the PPNs needs to be adequately resourced to support implement of the goals at the local level. He also gave examples of networks of local community and voluntary organisations, environmental organisations and organisations working on social inclusion that directly address the delivery of the goals which need adequate resourcing to effectively discharge that role. Mr. Sheahan welcomed the fact that the Department of Rural and Community Development has developed guidance on the values and principles for partnership and collaboration with the community and voluntary sector but argued that producing guidance is not enough in and of itself.

Recommendation 11

The Committee recommends that the provisions in the Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities five-year strategy as they relate to the communication and implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals be implemented in full.

Sustainable Development Goals under the remit of the Department of Social Protection

Goal 1 – End poverty in all its forms everywhere

The Department of Social Protection is listed as the lead department for two subtargets under Goal 1, Target 1.2 and 1.3.

However, much of the evidence heard by the committee with respect to this Goal 1 was broader in scope than what is strictly delineated under those targets alone. Meaghan Carmody of Coalition 2030 identified what she termed “a serious communication error” in how our progress on Goal 1 has been communicated in Ireland’s Voluntary National Report (VNR) process which, if not addressed, in her opinion risks misrepresenting our SDG progress. Setting the basic floor to the eradication of extreme poverty at \$1.25 a day as set out in Target 1.1 is not a

measure that applies domestically to any developed country and should not be applied as a metric of our progress in relation to the SDGs. Collette Bennett of Social Justice Ireland argued that there are shared metrics available across the EU-14 and the OECD that make for better comparators among peer nations in the measurement and reporting of poverty. Mr Paul Ginnell of the European Anti-Poverty Network Ireland made specific reference to the MESL, the minimum essential standard of living, a metric proposed by the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice, as a potentially useful tool in this regard in measuring the government's progress with regard to the SDGs.

Target 1.2

By 2030, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions.

Lead Department – Department of Social Protection

Stakeholder Department – Department of Children, Inequality, Disability, Integration and Youth

Target 1.3

Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable.

Lead Department – Department of Social Protection

Stakeholder Department – N/A

Relevant National Policy: Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020 – 2025

Target 1.2 relates to reducing poverty as nationally defined. In Ireland, the national social target for poverty reduction is to reduce consistent poverty to 2% or less. Progress on this target is assessed using SILC, or the survey on income and living conditions. Consistent poverty is a measure that combines those who are both at risk of poverty and experiencing material deprivation. According to SILC figures presented by the department, the rate of consistent poverty in the 2020 survey was 4.7%, reducing to 4% in the 2021 survey and increasing to 5.3% in the 2022 survey. Department officials noted that these figures were a marked improvement from the 2013 peak of 9%. However, they also expressed caution in interpreting the latest figures against a volatile period when the Covid pandemic had a significant impact on incomes, with the full impact of the pandemic not likely to become apparent through the SILC data until the 2024 survey.

Target 1.3 relates to implementing social protection systems with substantial coverage of the poor and vulnerable. In the view of the department, Ireland continues to have one of the most effective systems of social transfers in the EU for poverty prevention. In the 2022 survey, the at risk of poverty rate before social transfers would have been 36.5%. After social transfers, it was 13.1%, which is a poverty reduction impact of 64%. It is important to note that the proportion of the population at risk of poverty in the 2020 survey, which is based on pre-pandemic 2019 incomes, was 13.2%. Accordingly, the at risk of poverty rate was broadly the same in 2021 as in 2019, despite the significant adverse impacts of the pandemic and the consequent large-scale disruptions to businesses and employment.

Meaghan Carmody of Coalition 2030 referenced the Government target for poverty reduction outlined in the Roadmap for Social Inclusion reduce consistent poverty to 2% or less. In her contribution, she cited the following figures:

Overall, the percentage of people at risk of poverty increased from 11.6% in 2021 to 13.2% in 2022. Some 17.7% of Ireland's population is in deprivation, which is an increase from 13.8% in 2021, and the levels of people in consistent poverty are 5.3%, up from 4%. This is far from the Government's target for consistent poverty to be 2% or less by 2025.

She further identified specific groups at relatively greater risk of poverty, including renters, those precluded from work through ill-health, older people, those living in one-parent families and members of the Traveller and Roma communities. Mr. Ginnell of EAPN emphasised the importance of disaggregated data to ensure we are not leaving anyone behind in terms of our ambition and how we measure our progress, and that generalised progress with respect to the SDGs doesn't mask a lack of progress in certain sections of our society. Colette Bennett of Social Justice Ireland also argued that poverty is on the increase, stating that there are 671,000 people in poverty, more than 188,600 of whom are children. She recommended that the Department of Social Protection fund research on the impact of recent cost-of-living increases on low-income households. Mr. Ginnell of EAPN emphasised the importance of disaggregated data to ensure we are not leaving anyone behind in terms of our ambition and how we measure our progress, and that generalised progress with respect to the SDGs doesn't mask a lack of progress in certain sections of our society.

Coalition 2030 also raised the impact of income inadequacy for people living in rural areas, especially for those in receipt of core social welfare payments and in low-paid or minimum wage employment. The relative lack of a decent public transport system in rural areas can create instances of transport deprivation, which disproportionately affects older people and disabled people. Limited opportunities to switch to cheaper fuels sources as well as the relative age of rural building stock can also place rural households at greater risk of energy poverty. Ms. Louise Lennon of Irish Rural Link also identified transport and home heating costs as key contributors to higher levels of income inadequacy experienced by people living in rural areas. The progress being made under the Connecting Ireland strategy in improving rural public transport was noted, but further work is needed. Ms. Lennon referenced work being pursued by Irish Rural Link and Social Justice Ireland around just transition and wellbeing in rural communities, with equitable access to transport being identified as a key enabler to accessing many other services. She pointed to a 'lack of emphasis on poverty and equality' in the Our Rural Future policy.

"If Connecting Ireland is going to connect, it has to connect people and ensure the people left furthest behind, older people or people with disabilities who

cannot make the journey to the bus stop by walking or by bicycle, have a choice and an option to use the transport available to them.”

These issues are further exacerbated in the case of our island communities, with *Cohmdáil Oileáin na hÉireann* highlighting the additional cost of access to basic commodities arising from transport onto the islands and the lack of availability of basic services such as education, healthcare and childcare. Under the current system, costs to islanders for freight can be more than 250% higher than to those on the mainland. Practical measures to counteract these additional costs could include a ferry and freight subsidy system to keep costs as low as possible, reducing the additional financial expenses of islanders.

With respect to Target 1.3, the importance of basic services in underpinning appropriate social protection systems was noted. As referenced above, equitable provision of transport services was seen as a key enabler in accessing other basic services, particularly in rural settings. The expansion of the Hot School Meals programme was also recognised, particularly for schools and preschools in disadvantaged areas and those with a high concentration of homeless children or children living in direct provision who do not have their own cooking facilities. Likewise, equitable access to medical services is seen as essential in counteracting the impacts of poverty. Ms. Bennett of SJI pointed to the fact that Ireland is an outlier in not providing universal access to primary care and called for investment in community healthcare networks and primary care networks.

Recommendation 12

The Committee recommends that social welfare rates should be benchmarked against a minimum standard such as the MESL and indexed to preserve the spending power of people on fixed incomes over time.

Recommendation 13

The Committee recommends that the CSO present more disaggregated data to make clearer the progress being made in tackling poverty across particular groups in our society to ensure that we are achieving a key priority in the SDGs of reaching the farthest behind first.

Recommendation 14

The Committee recommends further research be conducted on the topic of income adequacy among those on fixed incomes in rural areas, with specific attention given to the issues of transport deprivation and fuel poverty

Recommendation 15

The Committee recommends that the Connecting Ireland policy is accelerated in order to tackle the issue of transport deprivation among people living in rural areas, thereby increasing their access to a range of other essential services.

Recommendation 16

The Committee recommends that practical financial supports be made available to counteract the additional transport costs of living on an island, from personal transport to freight and carriage costs.

Recommendation 17

The Committee supports the expansion of the Hot School Meals programme as an effective anti-poverty measure.

Goal 8 – Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.

The Department of Social Protection is listed as the lead department for one subtarget under Goal 8, Target 8.6, and as a stakeholder department for Target 8.b.

Target 8.6

By 2020, substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training.

Lead Department – Department of Social Protection

Stakeholder Department – Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment

Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science

Department of Education

Target 8.b

By 2020, develop and operationalise a global strategy for youth employment and implement the Global Jobs Pact of the International Labour Organisation.

Lead Department - Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment

Stakeholder Department - Department of Social Protection

Relevant National Policies:

- Pathways to Work; Future Jobs Ireland

- Various Youth programmes and Youth Employability initiative

The Department of Social Protection is the lead department on sub-target 8.6, which is to substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training. Department officials noted that there was a sharp increase in the rate of youth unemployment in 2020 coinciding with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, that trend has been reversed from the beginning of 2021, with youth unemployment figures showing a steep and continuing decline. Ireland's rate is at the time of reporting was well below the European average, standing at 6.8% and 8.4% at quarter 3 2022 for 15- to 24-year-olds and 15- to 29-year-olds, respectively.

The Department is also the co-lead on target 8.b on developing a youth employment strategy. Pathways to Work 2021–2025, the national employment services strategy, contains a number of measures to support young people into training, education and employment, many of which have been delivered. The recent labour force survey referenced by department officials reports a youth unemployment rate of 9.1%, significantly below the pre-pandemic average of 12.5%.

Ms. Carmody of SJI argues that the policy map is too narrow in how it ascribes responsibilities to the Department of Social Protection under Goal 8 and that the Department should have more responsibility for achieving target 8.5 as the department responsible for the roll-out of the Pathways to Work strategy, Strand 4 of which is “Working for All - Leaving No One Behind.”

Goal 10 - Reduce inequality within and among countries

The Department of Social Protection is listed as the lead department for one subtarget under Goal 10, Target 10.1.

Target 10.1

By 2030, progressively achieve and sustain income growth of the bottom 40 per cent of the population at a rate higher than the national average.

Lead Department – Department of Social Protection

Relevant National Policies: Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020 – 2025

Under goal 10, the Department is responsible for target 10.1, which is to increase the incomes of the bottom 40% of the population at a higher rate than the national average. In this regard, looking at the SILC data and as outlined in the briefing, there has been progress on this target. The average weekly equivalised income at the fourth decile increased by 8.8% from the 2020 survey to 2022, which is higher than the national increase of 7.9% for the same period.

Conclusion

The Committee has considered the Sustainable Development Goals as requested by the Working Group of Committee Cathaoirligh and has made 17 recommendations for both departments within its remit and across the whole of government. The Committee would welcome a response to this report from both the lead departments and the key stakeholder departments as referenced throughout this report. The Committee will also issue a copy of this report to the Working Group on Committee Cathaoirligh for their information.

APPENDIX 1 – Orders of Reference

Scope and Context of Activities of Committees (DSO 84 and SSO 70)

DSO 94

- 1) The Joint Committee may only consider such matters, engage in such activities, exercise such powers and discharge such functions as are specifically authorised under its orders of reference and under Standing Orders;
- 2) Such matters, activities, powers and functions shall be relevant to, and shall arise only in the context of, the preparation of a report to the Dáil/and or Seanad;
- 3) The Joint Committee shall not consider any matter which is being considered, or of which notice has been given of a proposal to consider, by the Committee of Public Accounts pursuant to Standing Order 186 and/or the Comptroller and Auditor General (Amendment) Act 1993;
- 4) The Joint Committee shall not consider any matter which is being considered, or of which notice has been given of a proposal to consider, by the Joint Committee on Public Petitions in the exercise of its functions under Standing Order 111A; and

The Joint Committee shall refrain from inquiring into in public session or publishing confidential information regarding any matter if so requested, for stated reasons given in writing, by—

- (i) a member of the Government or a Minister of State, or
- (ii) the principal office-holder of a body under the aegis of a Department or which is partly or wholly funded by the State or established or appointed by a member of the Government or by the Oireachtas:

Provided that the Chairman may appeal any such request made to the Ceann Comhairle, whose decision shall be final.

- 5) It shall be an instruction to all Select Committees to which Bills are referred that they shall ensure that not more than two Select Committees shall meet to consider a Bill on any given day, unless the Dáil, after due notice given by the Chairman of the Select Committee, waives this instruction on motion made by the Taoiseach pursuant to Standing Order 28. The Chairmen of Select Committees shall have responsibility for compliance with this instruction.

Functions of Departmental Committees (DSO 84A and SSO 70A)

- 1) The Select Committee shall consider and report to the Dáil on-
 - a. such aspects of the expenditure, administration and policy of a Government Department or Departments and associated public bodies as the Committee may select, and
 - b. European Union matters within the remit of the relevant Department or Departments.
- 2) The Select Committee may be joined with a Select Committee appointed by Seanad Éireann for the purposes of the functions set out in this Standing Order, other than at paragraph (3), and to report thereon to both Houses of the Oireachtas.
- 3) Without prejudice to the generality of paragraph (1), the Select Committee shall consider, in respect of the relevant Department or Departments, such
 - a. Bills,
 - b. proposals contained in any motion, including any motion within the meaning of Standing Order 187,
 - c. Estimates for Public Services, and
 - d. other matters

as shall be referred to the Select Committee by the Dáil, and

- e. Annual Output Statements including performance, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of public moneys, and
 - f. such Value for Money and Policy Reviews as the Select Committee may select.
- 4) Without prejudice to the generality of paragraph (1), the Joint Committee may consider the following matters in respect of the relevant Department or Departments and associated public bodies:
- a. matters of policy and governance for which the Minister is officially responsible,
 - b. public affairs administered by the Department,
 - c. policy issues arising from Value for Money and Policy Reviews conducted or commissioned by the Department,
 - d. Government policy and governance in respect of bodies under the aegis of the Department,
 - e. policy and governance issues concerning bodies which are partly or wholly funded by the State or which are established or appointed by a member of the Government or the Oireachtas,
 - f. the general scheme or draft heads of any Bill
 - g. any post-enactment report laid before either House or both Houses by a member of the Government or Minister of State on any Bill enacted by the Houses of the Oireachtas,
 - h. statutory instruments, including those laid or laid in draft before either House or both Houses and those made under the European Communities Acts 1972 to 2009,
 - i. strategy statements laid before either or both Houses of the Oireachtas pursuant to the Public Service Management Act 1997,
 - j. annual reports or annual reports and accounts, required by law, and laid before either or both Houses of the Oireachtas, of the Department or bodies referred to in subparagraphs (d) and (e) and the overall performance and operational results, statements of strategy and corporate plans of such bodies, and
 - k. such other matters as may be referred to it by the Dáil from time to time.

- 5) Without prejudice to the generality of paragraph (1), the Joint Committee shall consider, in respect of the relevant Department or Departments—
 - a. EU draft legislative acts standing referred to the Select Committee under Standing Order 114, including the compliance of such acts with the principle of subsidiarity,
 - b. other proposals for EU legislation and related policy issues, including programmes and guidelines prepared by the European Commission as a basis of possible legislative action,
 - c. non-legislative documents published by any EU institution in relation to EU policy matters, and
 - d. matters listed for consideration on the agenda for meetings of the relevant EU Council of Ministers and the outcome of such meetings.
- 6) Where the Select Committee has been joined with a Select Committee appointed by Seanad Éireann, the Chairman of the Dáil Select Committee shall also be the Chairman of the Joint Committee.
- 7) The following may attend meetings of the Select or Joint Committee, for the purposes of the functions set out in paragraph (5) and may take part in proceedings without having a right to vote or to move motions and amendments:
 - a. members of the European Parliament elected from constituencies in Ireland, including Northern Ireland,
 - b. members of the Irish delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and
 - c. at the invitation of the Committee, other members of the European Parliament.
- 8) The Joint Committee may, in respect of any Ombudsman charged with oversight of public services within the policy remit of the relevant Department or Departments, consider—
 - a. such motions relating to the appointment of an Ombudsman as may be referred to the Committee, and
 - b. such Ombudsman reports laid before either or both Houses of the Oireachtas as the Committee may select: Provided that the provisions of Standing Order 111F apply where the Select Committee has not

considered the Ombudsman report, or a portion or portions thereof, within two months (excluding Christmas, Easter or summer recess periods) of the report being laid before either or both Houses of the Oireachtas.

APPENDIX 2 – Links to Submissions and Opening Statements

Submissions

Name of organisation		
1	Coalition 2030	Available here
2	Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann	Available here
3	Chambers Ireland	Available here
4	Development Perspectives	Available here

Opening Statements

Name of organisation		
1	Meaghan Carmody, Coordinator, Coalition 2030	Available here
2	Tuuli Rantala, Community Development Inishbofin, Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann	Available here
3	Colette Bennett, Economic and Social Analyst, Social Justice Ireland	Available here
4	JP Mulherin, Assistant Secretary General (Acting), Rural and Community Development	Available here
5	Ciarán Lawler, Assistant Secretary General, Department of Social Protection	Available here

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