

IRISH CITIZENS DESERVE EQUAL SOCIAL JUSTICE

Something is fundamentally wrong with the development path Ireland has been taking, and due to the current housing situation and other factors, many Irish citizens are facing the prospect that their children's standard of living will not equal that of their own, writes Dr Seán Healy, CEO of Social Justice Ireland.

While much of the last decade has been very hard for many Irish people, the economic recovery of the past few years has been strong. Most of Ireland's economic fundamentals have been on a positive trend for several years now.

Consumer spending remains strong, unemployment continues to fall and there are more people employed in Ireland now than ever before. The export growth of recent years is expected to continue, though at a slower pace. Indeed, Ireland's economy – regardless of fanciful GDP growth rates and so-called 'leprechaun economics' – has been among the fastest growing in Europe for several years now.

However, measurements of Ireland's social wellbeing have been far less impressive. Roughly one in six in Ireland (more than 750,000 people) and one in five children (almost a quarter of a million) live at risk of poverty. Public services remain stretched, with new record-highs of people waiting on trollies in Irish hospitals.

The number of homeless people in Ireland has risen dramatically in the last few years, and Irish people face a housing supply crisis, both in the public and private sectors, with rents now well beyond boom-time levels. It is clear that Ireland's recovery has not been experienced by all equally.

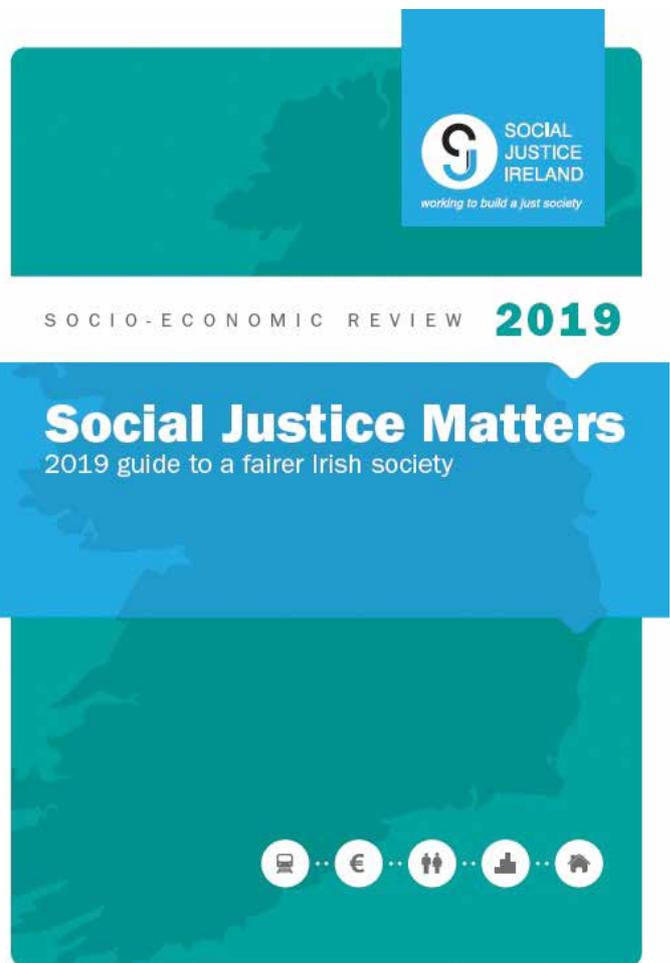
'Ireland 2040' – the National Planning Framework – has set out a plan for developing the infrastructure that will underpin the social and economic fabric of Ireland over the next quarter of a century. It is the first coherent attempt in well over a decade to develop a long-term integrated plan to deliver the social infrastructure and public services that Irish people, as citizens of a wealthy Western country, expect and deserve.

DECENT STANDARD OF LIVING

However, it does not provide sufficient detail about the standard of living that can be expected in 2040, the type of society being worked towards, or how government is going to deliver and fund those services that will deliver a decent standard of living for all.

Social Justice Ireland has a vision for an Irish society that we believe most Irish citizens would aspire to living in. This vision and a model for its development and achievement are outlined in our recently-published annual socio-economic review entitled 'Social Justice Matters: 2019 Guide to a fairer Irish society'.

It must be acknowledged that while this society is eminently



Social Justice Ireland's vision and a model for its development and achievement are outlined in its latest annual socio-economic review.

deliverable, it will cost money. This requires an acknowledgement from Government and from people that Ireland's current model of revenue generation does not provide the resources necessary to deliver the public services and social infrastructure that Ireland needs in order to be compared favourably with our peer countries in the EU-15.

Decisions must be made about whether this cost is to be met

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by increasing taxation, by imposing or increasing charges, by increasing efficiency, or through the private sector. Social Justice Ireland is of the view that a broadening of the tax base will be required together with an increase in the total tax-take towards the European average.

POLICY FRAMEWORK OUTCOMES

Most Western European Governments provide a far more comprehensive programme of public services and social infrastructure. Many are much closer to the ideal described herein than Ireland is. Therefore, if we wish to emulate these countries, we must secure a level of revenue similar to these countries.

To achieve the vision we set out, we propose a policy framework that identifies five key policy outcomes and sets out key action areas under each of the following:

1: We seek a vibrant and sustainable economy, required to generate the resources needed to deliver the society we desire. This outcome requires fiscal and financial stability and sustainable economic growth. Adequate public investment is also required – something which will aid in the development of a more just economic model.

2: We aim for decent services and infrastructure, at a level equivalent to our European peer countries. This requires action aimed at strengthening social services and social infrastructure, delivery of adequate levels of quality employment, and a commitment to quantitative targets to reduce poverty and inequality.

3: We propose in our framework for fair taxation, a key requirement of which requires an increase in the overall tax-take, moving us closer to the European average. Such an increase must be implemented equitably and in a way that reduces income inequality. It would also require that a fair share of corporate profits would be paid in tax.

4: Good governance requires the promotion of deliberative democracy, as well as new criteria in policy evaluation and the

continued development of a social dialogue process involving all sectors of society (see Chapter 10).

5: Sustainability would require the development of policies focused on creating a sustainable future through the introduction of measures to promote climate justice, protect the environment, and generate balanced regional development. New economic and social indicators to measure progress are also required, alongside traditional national accounting measures such as GDP, GNP and GNI.

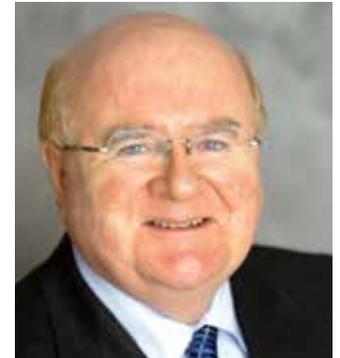
Ireland has for too long been afflicted by a state of affairs whereby we understand the issues, we know what needs to be done to improve matters, yet we find ourselves failing to take the correct steps. It is time to change that.

It is time, too, to acknowledge that the model of development being pursued is producing unacceptable levels of poverty and deprivation, inferior quality public services, environmental degradation, and an unsustainable future.

In our ‘Socio-Economic Review for 2019’ Social Justice Ireland presents a comprehensive framework setting out the current situation and the issues we face, the goals that we wish to reach as a society, and the policy changes needed to attain them.

Having set out a vision for Ireland and presented a policy framework for a just society the publication provides some details of the policy initiatives required under each of its five pillars. It may be accessed free of charge on www.socialjustice.ie/.

ABOUT SOCIAL JUSTICE IRELAND: Dr Seán Healy, SMA, is Chief Executive Officer of Social Justice Ireland – an independent think tank and social justice advocacy organisation. According to Dr Healy, they provide independent social analysis and evidence-based policy proposals,



PROPOSED POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR IRELAND

Vibrant Economy	Decent Services and Infrastructure	Just taxation	Good Governance	Sustainability
Fiscal, financial stability and sustainable economic growth	Secure, well-funded public services and social infrastructure	A tax-take closer to the EU average	Deliberative democracy and PPNs	Increased environmental protection and climate justice
Adequate public investment	Reduced unemployment and underemployment	Increased equity in taxation and reduced income inequality	Social dialogue – all sectors in deliberative process	Balanced regional development
A more just economic structure	Seven social, economic and cultural rights to be achieved	A fair share of corporate profits for the State	Reformed policy and budgetary evaluation	New indicators of progress and Satellite National Accounts