

Election 2016

For Whom and for What Will You Vote?

An opportunity to work for a more just and inclusive Ireland

During the past weeks we have been bombarded by election promises, debates and campaign manifestos. For the most part, little attention has been paid to the situation of that large section of our population which is experiencing poverty in all or some of its many forms, including lack of access to much needed services. There is an emphasis on tax reduction without consideration of the consequent reduction of resources for the more adequate funding of essential services such as housing, healthcare, public transport and childcare.

Twenty one years ago the VPSJ was established to work for social and economic change tackling poverty and exclusion. As a small organisation it had to narrow its focus to promoting an adequate income for all and greater participation in elections by people whose voices are still unheard.

In months previous to the election we saw statistics on income distribution. They tell us that the gap between the rich and the poor continues to widen. But people, unlike figures in the paper or on a computer screen, cannot be filed away. This edition of JustNow focuses on the present and less acknowledged reality of facts and figures and on the hopes of some of 2016's first time Voters. We hope that our readers when deciding for whom to vote, will give priority to the needs of people struggling with poverty and/or social exclusion.



Just because
I've got Down syndrome
doesn't mean I won't

**use my
VOTE**



Down
Syndrome
Ireland
National Leadership Local Support

Back our campaign today
www.downsyndrome.ie
Call: 1890 374 374

Follow us on **facebook**.



The Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice consists of
The Society of St. Vincent de Paul, The Vincentian Congregation, The Daughters of Charity and The Sisters of the Holy Faith. *Working for social and economic change, tackling poverty and social exclusion*

Our Contact Details

Ozanam House
53 Mountjoy Square
Gardiner Street
Dublin 1

T: 01 8780425

vpj@eircom.net

www.justicematters.ie
www.budgeting.ie
www.vote.ie
www.misc.ie
www.livingwage.ie

Election 2016 - The Less Acknowledged Reality

People Living Below the Poverty Line -
Defined as having a disposable income below 60% of average (median) income in Ireland. People in this situation are described as 'at risk of poverty'. In reality most of them are living in actual poverty. In 2014 over $\frac{3}{4}$ of a million people (755,570), including 213,656 children and 55,145 adults aged 65 years and over were living with an income below the poverty line in Ireland.

Deprivation

A person is said to be deprived if they cannot afford at least two items from a list of eleven basic necessities.

In 2014 1.3 million people were in deprivation, including about $\frac{3}{4}$ million people without heat at some point in the last year and $\frac{1}{2}$ million who cannot afford new clothes.

People Living In Consistent Poverty

The 2014 CSO figures show over $\frac{1}{3}$ of a million people (370,832) are in consistent poverty. This is where their income puts them below the poverty line and they are experiencing deprivation.

This includes over 1 in 10 children (11.2% or 128,653 children) living in households with inadequate income and going without basic necessities.

People Who Are Homeless

In December 2015 there were 5,241 homeless people including 2,564 adults without children and 775 families consisting of 1,061 parents and 1,616 children.

People on Hospital Trolleys

On the 2nd February 2016 there were 456 patients on trolleys in our hospitals.

People in Direct Provision

The rate of direct provision allowance for asylum seekers is €19.10 per adult and €9.60 per child per week. Apart from meals, accommodation and limited assistance with clothing costs for some families, this is the total disposable income for people in the asylum process.



A Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) for All – Why Not?

A Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) is a standard which no one should be expected to live below. It is the minimum needed to live and partake in Irish society today, meeting the physical, psychological and social needs of individuals and households. It is a minimum standard for everyone, not just those in poverty, and identifies the cost of a dignified standard of living which allows participation in the norms of Irish life. An income below the MESL threshold means individuals and households must do without some essential goods and services.

In 1999 the VPSJ began to work to establish the expenditure and income necessary for a MESL. For most households income needs are met through employment (wages/salaries). For a significant number income is met by social welfare transfers or by a combination of social welfare transfers and a wage. The VPSJ facts and figures throw light on the adequacy of both social welfare transfers and wages in meeting the costs of a MESL.

The following illustrates the situation of two household types dependent on social welfare transfers: a single adult of working age living alone in rented accommodation and a two parent, two children household living in social housing. The weekly cost of a MESL is based on the weekly cost of all goods and services required by the household which range from the weekly cost of furniture to perishable food items.

Single Adult:

Weekly cost of MESL= €340.68

Weekly income from social transfers= €276.00

Weekly Shortfall= €64.68

Two Parent, Two Children Household:

Weekly cost of MESL= €477.00

Weekly income from social transfers= €438.94

Weekly shortfall= €38.06

Depending on whom we vote for, election 2016 will have either a negative or positive impact on the living standard of low income families.



The Active Citizenship/Voter Education Programme leading up to the General Election 2016



It is important to vote. The act of doing so is empowering regardless of the outcome. Voting, as we all know, is the cornerstone of a democracy and part of good citizenship, but sadly, many people in Ireland are alienated from the democratic system and are not voting. This reality is being ignored by our political thinkers and very little is being done to recognise and deal with this low voter turn-out.

The Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice is responding to this alienation and low turn-out by facilitating the Voter Education Programme with groups throughout the country and by training Trainers to facilitate the Programme. The Programme emphasises the importance of voting and is increasing participation in the democratic process. The programme which is non-party political explores with people why to vote, explains how to register and complete a ballot sheet, to identify issues of concern, develop a position on the issues and how to choose a candidate who might pursue their issues of concern.

During recent months the emphasis has been on Training Trainers, who in turn can facilitate the Programme with groups in their own areas of work. The Adult Literacy Organisers of the ETB (formerly known as the VEC) organised Training for 20+ Adult Education Teachers in Ennis. All found the training and the resources available from the VPSJ excellent and accessible. They felt encouraged and ready to facilitate the programme with the unemployed, parents, early school leavers, new communities, literacy groups etc. and to go forward with the task of encouraging others to vote for a more just and equal society.

The Primary Health Care Project in the mid-west HSE organised Training for a number of Traveller Primary Health Care workers in Limerick, who in turn shared this learning with members of their own communities. "Community Health Care Matters" is now covering the topic on local Radio in Limerick. Many decisions on Education, Employment, Health Care, Transport, Housing and Environment that affect the health and wellbeing of the Traveller and the wider community are made by politicians. Travellers by adding their voices, hope to be part of the movement to create a more equal society, so it is important to vote for the best representatives.

The DFI, Disability Federation of Ireland, the national support organisation for voluntary disability organisations, who provide services to people with disability and disabling conditions, organised Training in January 2016 for their services in Dublin, Limerick and Galway. Some people travelled from Kerry and Cork to be part of the training in Limerick and they will share their learning with their own groups. It is their hope to make disability a priority in the new programme for Government.

The Programme was also facilitated with Traveller Groups in Sandyford and Cashel and with community groups in Clonmel and Tipperary, where local TDs and local Co. Councillors joined the groups to participate and inform themselves regarding the Groups' issues and concerns. Two groups, the elderly and people with intellectual disability, in Newbridge and Kildare town found the Programme interesting, empowering and enjoyable. Following the completion of the Programmes, group leaders from four of the groups attended a Training session and are now ready to facilitate the Programme in their own particular services.

It's February and the Elections and campaigning are under way. Nonetheless the Voter Education Programme is in demand. On Mondays I facilitate the Programme with Sunbeam House Services in Bray for people with disability and on Tuesdays, with The Moore Abbey services in Monasterevin, for people with disability. A Traveller group in Castlebar hopes to fit in the Programme before the Election takes place on 26th February. People have enjoyed the programme, found it informative, practical, motivational and engaging. They also liked the interaction within the groups and the time for discussion. They are now more aware of the power of their vote and are convinced about the importance of actually going out to vote. Having developed a stance on their issues, they feel empowered and are looking forward to interacting with the candidates on their doorsteps. They have also learned how important it is to remain actively involved, long term, with their representatives, after the election, so that real change can take place.

Prayer and Reflection for Election Time

As the election approaches we are being bombarded with promises. The focus of many of these promises and much of the campaign literature is on tax reduction and economic growth. Relatively little attention is being paid to the inadequate funding of essential services such as housing, health, welfare or to the number of people who continue to live in poverty.

During the past twelve months we have all seen the statistics. They tell us that the gap between the rich and poor is growing. But statistics are faceless. They deal in numbers not people, and are easy to ignore. But people, unlike figures on paper or a computer screen cannot be filed away. Their presence is real just as Christ's presence is real. We encounter him in the faces behind the statistics. We need to continue to work for a change of priorities for an Irish society where the needs of people who are powerless or in poverty come before the needs of the rich and powerful. We need to remember when we make our everyday choices (how we shop, what we say, how we vote) how they will affect the people who struggle to exist.

Poverty and hunger are not inevitable; they are the outcome of society's choice to favour the rich over those in poverty. As the prophets of old challenged the rich to think of the needs of those in poverty, we too are challenged by those who live in poverty to change. We can make a difference through the way we vote, our actions, our attitudes and our prayers.

"The people in extreme poverty tell us over and over again that the greatest misfortune of all is to know that you count for nothing, to the point where even your suffering is ignored.
Joseph Wresinski

"If I'm not working to make dignity a reality in the lives of people whose dignity has been taken away or undermined by the way they're treated in society then my faith is just simply empty words or hypocrisy."
Father Peter McVerry

"In a country well governed, poverty is something to be ashamed of. In a country badly governed, wealth is something to be ashamed of."
Confucius

"If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor." Desmond Tutu

"A way has to be found to enable everyone to benefit from the fruits of the earth, and not simply to close the gap between the affluent and those who must be satisfied with the crumbs falling from the table, but above all to satisfy the demands of justice, fairness and respect for every human being."
Pope Francis

Then the good will answer him, "Lord when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

Prayer

Lord, make us instruments of hope and encouragement in the run up to the elections. Where there is pressure to vote for a particular candidate, let us sow seeds of integrity; where there is indifference, let us sow seeds of care and concern; and where there is despair in the electoral process, let us sow seeds of hope.

O Lord, grant that we may not so much think of our selfish motives when we vote.

Instil in us a deep sense of communal solidarity in our critical choice of candidates.

Enlighten us to elect men and women that embody the true spirit of public service in their moral consciousness and a sense of the common good.

For it is in voting responsibly that we receive the fruits of true democracy. And it is in dying to our selfish needs that we witness your love. *Amen*

<http://frjessie.wordpress.com>

Matthew 25: 37- 40



Your Vote Counts!