



## An Opportunity to Bridge the Gap

The Pre-Budget season is well underway. Television programmes and newspapers refer to possible tax cuts, increased expenditure for health, education etc and to different priorities. The priority of the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice (VPSJ) is simple - a better quality of life for the people in Ireland who struggle to make ends meet - many of whom live in poverty. For many years the VPSJ has provided facts and figures on the goods and services, expenditure and income which households need in order to have a Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL). This is a standard which meets physical, psychological and social needs at a minimum but acceptable level. The VPSJ uses the facts and figures obtained through many years of research and updated annually to measure the adequacy of social welfare payments and the rate for the national minimum wage.

Every increase in social welfare payments improves the standard of living. In low income households, in which there is a large gap between what people need for an adequate standard of living and their actual income, every increase in payments lessens the gap and strengthens the possibility of a minimum essential standard of living for households.

The VPSJ each year at pre-budget time recommends increases in social welfare payments. These increases seem small to households struggling to make ends meet, however it is hoped that they will be seen as implementable by government officials who are responding to many different demands. In its Pre-Budget submission, the VPSJ asks that decisions be made in favour of people who struggle to make ends meet.

This edition of Just.Now gives an outline of what the VPSJ is advocating for Budget 2018. Page four contains some reflections celebrating summer. The Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice wish all our readers a very pleasant and blessed summer with an opportunity to relax and enjoy the beauty of creation.

### Social Welfare in 2017 meets:

**85%**  
of minimum  
living costs



Single Adult

**78%**  
of minimum  
living costs



One Parent, Two Children

**85%**  
of minimum  
living costs



Lone Pensioner  
(Rural)

**83%**  
of minimum  
living costs



Two Parent, Two Child

# The VPSJ Pre-Budget Submission 2017

## INTRODUCTION

Each year the VPSJ updates the cost of a Minimum Essential Standard of Living. The 2017 report on the updated costs provides the basis for the recommendation that the VPSJ will make in its Pre-Budget submission for 2018.

This article puts into context the findings from this year's update and outlines some of the policy measures which the research highlights as crucial to ensuring that everyone in society can have a minimum standard of living.

## MESL UPDATE 2017

The 2017 updated cost of a MESL is used to assess the adequacy of wage rates and social welfare in meeting the minimum cost of living. The MESL data details the cost of a standard of living which members of the public agree everyone should be able to afford. This year the MESL costs have decreased slightly.

This is the third year in a row that households dependent on social welfare have seen an improvement in the portion of their minimum expenditure met by social welfare. It is the first increase in seven years in working age payments and the second year in a row that pensions have increased. However, social welfare continues to fall short of the MESL needs of a household in the majority of over 200 cases examined.

The cost of an MESL varies dependent on household composition and location. The degree of income shortfall varies by

household composition and location. Social welfare meets the greatest proportion of MESL need for the households with younger children. However, the higher expenditure needs of adolescent children results in households with a child in this age-group, having the greatest income inadequacy when reliant on social welfare. Below are three examples of how the MESL data applies to those living on social welfare in Ireland.



### LONE PENSIONER

Ms Murphy lives in a rural village in the west of Ireland.

She lives alone after the death of her husband in a small farmhouse. In 2017 the cost of a Minimum Essential Standard of Living for Ms Murphy is €305.40 per week. However, her weekly income of €258.55 leaves her €46.85 short of meeting the cost of this expenditure each week. In addition to the Contributory Pension, she receives secondary social welfare supports; the Living Alone Allowance, the Fuel Allowance and the Household Benefits Package. However, her income does not provide her with a minimum standard of living and she often skips meals to be able to heat her home.

In order to help Ms Murphy achieve a minimum standard of living the VPSJ will be recommending that the Living Alone Allowance is increased to €11.45 and the Fuel Allowance is increased to €29.



## SINGLE ADULT

Richard is in his early thirties, is currently unemployed and has been looking for work for the last few months. He lives in a one bedroom flat in Dublin which is damp and run down but that is all he can afford. The cost of a minimum standard of living for Richard in 2017 is €367 per week, €152 spent on rent. He spends 42% of his income on food and energy costs. He is in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance and Rent Supplement but this leaves him short almost €53.69 per week. In order to make ends meet Richard skips meals and feels isolated as he cannot afford to socialise.

This year the VPSJ will be recommending a €5.00 increase in the Jobseekers Allowance as a first step towards ensuring that a single adult who is unemployed like Richard, can have a minimum standard of living.



## TWO PARENT HOUSEHOLD

The McCarthy family live in the suburbs of Dublin and are in receipt of social welfare. They have two children, Kevin in primary school and Michael in secondary school. Like all families with adolescents they face higher costs than those with younger children and it can be a real struggle to make ends meet, particularly in September when the children go back to school. The family's income is €90.78 short each week of proving for a Minimum Essential Standard of Living.

This year the VPSJ will be asking for an increase of €3.30 to the Qualified Adult

rate and €7.10 to the Increase for a Qualified Child for an adolescent. This will again be a first step in assisting struggling families and recognise the higher cost of living for an adolescent.

## BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS

This year the VPSJ is recommending that:

1. Primary social welfare payments are increased by €5.00 in order to restore the payments to their 2010 value. This includes Jobseekers and the One-Parent Family payment.
2. Low income households are vulnerable to energy poverty and energy prices have increased by an average of 18.1% since 2010. In order to restore the payment to its 2010 levels, the Fuel Allowance should be increased by €6.50 to €29 per week.
3. In order to recognise the greater expenditure needs for an adolescent, increase the main social welfare payment for children, the Qualified Child Increase for adolescents by proportionally higher amount.
4. The full rate of Jobseekers is restored for adults under 26. Adults aged under 26 have the same MESL needs as older adults, requiring the same income.
5. The limits for the Housing Assistance Payments and Rent Supplement should be reviewed, as the affordability of housing is essential in allowing for a minimum standard of living.

*Noreen Moloney, VPSJ.*

## Reflection and Prayer



### The Summer Day

Who made the world?  
Who made the swan, and the black bear?

Who made the grasshopper?  
This grasshopper, I mean-  
the one who has flung herself out of the grass,  
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,  
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead  
of up and down-  
who is gazing around with her enormous and  
complicated eyes.  
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly  
washes her face.  
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.  
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.  
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall  
down  
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,  
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll  
through the fields,  
which is what I have been doing all day.  
Tell me, what else should I have done?  
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?  
Tell me, what is it you plan to do  
with your one wild and precious life?

—*Mary Oliver*

### A Summer Blessing

May you walk with God this summer in  
whatever you do wherever you go.  
Walking with God means... walking with  
honesty and with courage.  
Walking with love, respect, and concern for  
the feelings of others.  
May you talk to God this summer on every  
day and in every situation.

Talking with God means... praying words of praise for  
the beauty of creation.  
Saying prayers of thanks for friends and good times.  
Asking God's help in all your decisions.  
Expressing sorrow when you have failed. May you  
talk with God every day. Amen.

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### Our Responsibility for Creation

Please, I would like to ask all those who have  
positions of responsibility in economic, political  
and social life, and all men and women of goodwill:  
Let us be "protectors" of creation,  
protectors of God's  
plan inscribed in  
nature, protectors of  
one another and of  
the environment."

*Pope Francis*



### Summer Prayer

Creator of all, thank You for summer!  
Thank You for the warmth of the sun and the increased  
daylight. Thank You for the beauty I see all around me  
and for the opportunity to be outside and enjoy Your  
creation. Thank You for the increased time I have to be  
with my friends and family, and for the more casual pace  
of the summer season. Draw me closer to You this  
summer. Teach me  
how I can pray no  
matter where I am or  
what I am doing.  
Warm my soul with  
the awareness of  
Your presence, and  
light my path with  
Your Word and  
Counsel. As I enjoy  
Your creation, create in me a pure heart and a hunger  
and a thirst for You. Amen.

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