



# HUNGRY FOR ACTION

December 2013

## Mapping Food Poverty in Ireland

In 2013, food poverty in Ireland is not the result of inexplicable crop failure, or drought, or earthquake or tsunami. It is a policy-made disaster – the result of austerity, and the attendant collapse in incomes.

In Ireland, food poverty levels have been rising due to the recession, and – according to the most recent figures – one-in-ten people living in Ireland now experience food poverty.

They are households with children struggling to cope with below-the-radar cuts, increased charges and rising prices.

They are the newly unemployed trying to service a Celtic Tiger mortgage on an Austerity Ireland income.

They are the pensioners whose entitlements – for example, to the telephone allowance – are being cut and who, at a time of rising fuel prices, may need to choose between fuel and food.

And they are the low-paid workers: the Minimum Wage workers whose incomes have not increased since 2007, or the part-time workers whose employers refuse to grant them more hours.

As this short report shows, they are in every county in Ireland.

### **They are our neighbours.**

In the short term, we are calling on the Government to make an emergency grant to the organisations struggling to cope with the demand for food relief. In the medium term, we are calling on the Government to introduce a supplementary Budget in 2014 – an Emergency Relief Budget to begin to address the crisis of poverty, and food poverty, in Ireland.

#### **John Douglas**

General Secretary  
Mandate  
President  
Irish Congress of Trade Unions

#### **Jimmy Kelly**

Regional Secretary  
Unite the Union

## I. CONTEXT

The most recent figures on food poverty date from 2010, when one-in-ten people in Ireland – or around 457,000 of our fellow citizens – suffered from food poverty. After falling between 2004 and 2007, the figures have been rising due to the recession, and it is reasonable to assume that they have continued rising since 2010, in the wake of a succession of austerity budgets. The county-by-county figures below, however, are extrapolated from the 2010 data and therefore could represent an under-estimate of the true situation.

Food poverty is defined as suffering from one of the following deprivation experiences:

- Missed a meal in the last two weeks due to a lack of money
- Cannot afford a meal with meat or vegetarian equivalent every second day
- Cannot afford a roast or vegetarian equivalent once a week

The increasing levels of food poverty are reflected in the growing demands on charities providing food relief, whether through food banks (which provide foodstuffs for people to cook at home) or food kitchens (which provide prepared meals). The examples below help illustrate the growing demand for food and other relief, and there are many more.

- Cork Penny Dinners – one of Ireland’s oldest food kitchens, dating back to the Famine, is feeding 1,400 people per week, up 55 per cent in a year. Before the recession, the figure was around 140 a week<sup>1</sup>.
- Crosscare Food Services was established over 70 years ago to deal with the impact of the Second World War. Today it operates food banks to distribute food to other charities, as well as food centres for local groups in need, and breakfast clubs for schools. Today, just one of its food centres – in Portland Row, in Dublin’s North Inner City, feeds over 100 people a day<sup>2</sup>.
- Twist Soup Kitchens, with centres around the country, are serving nearly 2,500 meals per week<sup>3</sup>.
- The Saint Vincent de Paul’s expenditure on cash assistance and help with the cost of energy and fuel to individuals and families in need has almost doubled since 2008,

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1 Irish Examiner, 5 December 2013

2 The Journal.ie, 30 November 2013

3 Irish Examiner, 24 August 2013

<http://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/families-forced-to-feed-kids-at-soup-kitchens-240919.html>; accessed 07.12.13

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and it is spending over €7 million on food each year<sup>4</sup>.

Food poverty is primarily a function of low incomes, and addressing it in the medium and long term will require a concerted strategy to boost the incomes of both social protection recipients and low earners.

In-work poverty is a significant component of overall poverty: nearly one-in-five people at work are officially categorised as deprived. In households where there is only one income from work, the deprivation rate rises to over one-in-four<sup>5</sup>.

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4 Society of St Vincent De Paul, Pre Budget Submission 2013.

5 Unite Economic Comment, October 2013

<http://unitetheunionireland.files.wordpress.com/2013/10/deprivation-october-2013.pdf>; accessed 07.12.13

## II. MAPPING FOOD POVERTY IN IRELAND

'Constructing a Food Poverty Indicator for Ireland', a study published by the Department of Social Protection<sup>6</sup>, found that one-in-ten people experienced food poverty in 2010, or approximately 457,000 people.

The following attempts to estimate the level of food poverty in each county. This is only an approximation as the study does not provide this data. The approximation factors in variations in income level (and assumes that income levels will alter the percentage in food poverty) and 2010 population estimates. Therefore, these figures should be treated as indicative.

### Approximate Number of People Experiencing Food Poverty

State	456,800
Carlow	5,800
Cavan	8,000
Clare	12,400
Cork City and County	50,500
Donegal	18,700
Dublin	112,300
Galway	25,300
Kerry	16,000
Kildare	20,200
Kilkenny	10,500
Laois	8,800
Leitrim	3,400
Limerick	18,500
Longford	4,300
Louth	12,500
Mayo	14,000
Meath	18,900
Monaghan	7,000
Offaly	8,900
Roscommon	6,900
Sligo	6,800
Tipperary	16,300
Waterford	11,800
Westmeath	9,300
Wexford	15,500
Wicklow	14,000

6 Caroline Carney, Nernard Maître, Constructing a Food Poverty Indicator for Ireland

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It should be noted that the above estimates are likely to be conservative. As stated above, these estimates are based on 2010 data. In 2011 (the last year we have data for) general deprivation rose by 8 percent. Further, the ESRI described subsequent budgets as 'regressive'.

The data excludes the homeless, asylum seekers and Travellers - groups which may be more vulnerable to food poverty. Further, the study stated: 'Also the absence of a measure of access to food, and of the quality or nutritional value of affordable food, limited the food poverty indicator used by this research.'

Based on the above, there is a strong possibility that our numbers are an underestimate of the current situation.

## III. PROPOSALS

In the short term, addressing food poverty will require an immediate subsidy to the charities providing food relief. In the medium and longer term, it will require increasing the incomes of social protection recipients and low earners.

### **Unite and Mandate therefore call for:**

- An immediate subsidy of €10 million to be made available to charities providing food relief, to be disbursed through the Department of Social Protection or the Department of Health as appropriate.
- A supplementary Budget, in the form of an **Emergency Relief Budget**, to be introduced in early 2014. Both Mandate and Unite have consistently argued for the reversal of the range of cuts introduced in seven successive austerity budgets, and we continue to do so. The measures proposed below are thus merely examples of measures which would have an immediate impact on poverty alleviation:
  - Increasing social protection rates (e.g. an increase of €6 per week, or 3.2 percent, in basic Social Protection rates at a cost of less than €280 million).
  - Reversal of some of the most egregious cuts to those most at risk of food poverty (e.g. cuts in rent supplement, exceptional needs budget, direct accommodation for asylum seekers, etc.)
- Unite have called for an increase in the Minimum Wage to €9.20 per week. The Minimum Wage has not been increased since 2007 and, taking into account inflation and tax increases, workers have suffered a real pay cut of ten per cent since then.
- Introduce the right of part-time workers to more working hours in compliance with the EU Directive on Part-Time Work. Ireland suffers from the highest rate of under-employment in the EU, and a survey commissioned for Mandate in 2012 showed that 60 per cent of respondents were seeking more hours<sup>7</sup>.

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7 Decent Work? The Impact of the Recession on Low-Paid Workers, Mandate Trade Union, 2012  
[http://issuu.com/mandate/docs/mandate\\_decent\\_work\\_report\\_2012/6](http://issuu.com/mandate/docs/mandate_decent_work_report_2012/6)