



EMIN Context Report Ireland

Developments in relation to Minimum Income Schemes

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What is EMIN?

The European Minimum Income Network (EMIN) is an informal Network of organisations and individuals committed to achieve the progressive realisation of the right to adequate, accessible and enabling Minimum Income Schemes. The organisations involved include the relevant public authorities, service providers, social partners, academics, policy makers at different levels, NGOs, and fosters the involvement of people who benefit or could benefit from minimum income support.

EMIN is organised at EU and national levels, in all the Member States of the European Union and also in Iceland, Norway, Macedonia (FYROM) and Serbia.

EMIN is coordinated by the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN). More information on EMIN can be found at www.emin-eu.net

What is the Context Report?

In 2014 individual Country Reports were produced under the EMIN project which outlined the state of development of Minimum Income Schemes in the country concerned. These reports also set out a road map for the progressive realisation of adequate Minimum Income Schemes in that country. These Country Reports can be found on www.emin-net.eu (EMIN Publications). This Context Report gives an update on developments in relation to Minimum Income Schemes in Ireland since the publication of the Country Report.

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The information contained in this report does not necessarily reflect the official position of the European Commission.

Definitions used in the EMIN Project

Minimum Income Schemes are defined as, income support schemes which provide a safety net for those of working age, whether in or out of work, and who have insufficient means of financial support, and who are not eligible for insurance based social benefits or whose entitlements to these have expired. They are last resort schemes, which are intended to ensure a minimum standard of living for the concerned individuals and their dependents.

EMIN aims at the progressive realisation of the right to adequate, accessible and enabling Minimum Income Schemes.

Adequacy is defined as a level of income that is indispensable to live a life in dignity and to fully participate in society. Adequate Minimum Income Schemes are regularly updated to take account of the evolution of the cost of living.

Accessible is defined as providing comprehensive coverage for all people who need the schemes for as long as they need the support. Accessible Minimum Income Schemes have clearly defined criteria, they are non-contributory, universal and means-tested. They do not discriminate against any particular group and have straightforward application procedures. They avoid:

- institutional barriers such as bureaucratic and complex regulations and procedures and have the minimum required conditionality,
- implementation barriers by reaching out to and supporting potential beneficiaries
- personal barriers such as lack of information, shame or loss of privacy.

Enabling is defined as schemes that promote people's empowerment and participation in society and facilitates their access to quality services and inclusive labour markets.

Contents

Section 1: Evolution in laws and regulations regarding minimum income schemes 5

Section 2: Use of reference budgets in relation to Minimum Income 10

Section 3: Implementation of Country Specific Recommendations on Minimum Income and follow up through the Semester process 11

Section 4: Political Developments impacting on the reference budgets in relation to Minimum Income..... 12

Section 5: Developments in relation to the Irish EMIN Network 12

Section 1: Evolution in laws and regulations regarding national (or regional/local) minimum income schemes

This section indicates changes to the main minimum income scheme in the country since the EMIN1 project ended in 2014, in particular changes to schemes that were dealt with in the EMIN1 project. In countries where several minimum income schemes coexist, please give priority to minimum income schemes for the working-age population. The **country report** from the EMIN 1 project is available at <https://emin-eu.net/emin-publications/>

Changes in the legislation and regulations governing minimum income schemes in your country with regard to

- *Eligibility conditions (lack of sufficient resources, age requirements, residence...)*
- *Conditionality of the benefits (willingness to work, other conditions related to personnel attitude of recipients...)*
- *Levels of payment, uprating*
- *Links with other benefits*
- *Governance of the schemes?*

There have been no significant changes to the minimum incomes since the National Report of 2014, with the exception of an increase in the basic welfare rates of €5 per week in Budget 2017.

*Evolution with regard to **adequacy** of minimum income?*

After many years of rising prices and static welfare levels, Budget 2017 applied a flat rate increase of €5 for all welfare payments. This was a welcome signal of the need for an increase, but not adequate to compensate for the lost real value of payments.

The state pension was raised by €3 a week in Budget 2016.

There were increases in secondary benefits during this period. Examples are: the Living Alone Allowance (+ €1.30 per week in Budget 2015) child benefit (+ €5 per week in Budget 2016), incremental restoration of cuts to the 'Christmas Bonus' to the extent that it is now up to 85% of previous levels; increased cost of education allowance (€50 per annum), rent allowance for those under 26 on minimum income.

*Evolution in terms of **coverage** or **take-up** of benefits?*

There have been no major changes, despite Government report in 2006 suggesting changes to the conditions for asylum seekers.

*Evolution with regards to the **linkage** between minimum income schemes, (inclusive) **labour markets** and (quality) **services**?*

The systems put in place in the period just before the 2014 report have been fully rolled out, so that most payments are now conditional on engagement with employment and/or educational programmes.

The current conditions for the main payment, Jobseekers' allowance, are as follows (from Citizensinformation.ie)

Conditions for jobseeker's payments

To qualify for a jobseeker's payment you must be under 66 years of age. You must be 18 years or over to claim Jobseeker's Allowance. People under 18 do not qualify for Jobseeker's Benefit.

You must also be:

- Unemployed (you must be fully unemployed or unemployed for at least 4 days out of 7)
- Capable of work
- Available for work
- Genuinely seeking work

While you are getting a jobseeker's payment you must attend meetings and take part in appropriate employment schemes, training or work experience if requested by the Department of Social Protection (DSP). See 'Sanctions for not meeting the conditions of your jobseeker's payment' below.

Unemployed

To get a jobseeker's payment you must be unemployed for at least 4 days out of 7. This means that you can work for up to 3 days in a 7-day period and still qualify for a jobseeker's payment for the days you are not working. You can also take up to [two weeks' holiday in a year](#) and continue to get your payment.

However, some people work the equivalent of full-time hours by doing intensive shifts. It is usual for the Department of Social Protection to treat people who work 36 hours or over in a week as being in full-time employment. However, people who work a lower number of hours (perhaps as low as 30 hours depending on the job) in a week may also be treated as being in full-time employment. People in full-time employment do not qualify for a jobseeker's payment.

Part-time work

If you can only find part-time work or if your employer reduces your days at work to 3 days a week or less, you may get a jobseeker's payment for the other days. You must meet the other conditions that apply to the payment, for example, you must continue to look for full-time work. In the case of Jobseeker's Allowance, any income from work is assessed in the means test. Read about:

[Jobseeker's Allowance and work](#)

[Jobseeker's Benefit and work](#)

Retained firefighters and jobseeker's payments

If you are employed as a part-time retained firefighter, you may qualify for a jobseeker's payment. People who are working as part-time fire fighters do not have to sign off for the days they are on call, firefighting or training. This means that you can be paid a jobseeker's payment for days that you are on call, firefighting or training. Retained firefighters must live within 1.5 miles of the fire station and commit to being ready for firefighting duties in 5 minutes. This requirement in itself is not considered a restriction on your availability for work, so long as you are satisfying the conditions of the scheme. The Department of Social Protection requires you to be available for full-time work and you must not

restrict your search for employment to the 1.5 mile limit.

If you are claiming Jobseeker's Allowance the income you receive will be assessed in the normal way and any means will be set against your payment.

If you had a previous Jobseeker's Benefit claim you can requalify for JB once you pay 13 PRSI contributions assuming you satisfy all the other conditions. The substantial loss condition does not apply to the employment as a firefighter. However, if you have other employment then the substantial loss condition applies to that other employment.

Voluntary work

You may be able to do voluntary work and continue to get a jobseeker's payment. You must continue to satisfy the conditions of the payment, which means that you must be available and looking for full-time work. You must also get permission from a Deciding Officer at your Intreo Centre or Social Welfare Branch Office. Find out more about [voluntary work and social welfare payments](#).

On strike

If you are on strike, you will not be considered unemployed and will not get a jobseeker's payment. However, if you are out of work as a result of a strike, for example, you have been laid off because of the strike you may get a jobseeker's payment. You may get a jobseeker's payment if you are "not participating in or directly interested in the trade dispute which caused the stoppage at work". If you are on strike your family may get [basic Supplementary Welfare Allowance](#).

Capable of work

You must be capable of work to qualify for a jobseeker's payment. You are considered capable of work unless you can produce medical evidence to prove that you are not able to work. If you have spent some time incapable of work you must produce a final medical certificate to prove that you are now fit for work.

If you are ill and incapable of work you may be entitled to [Disability Allowance](#) or [Illness Benefit](#). If you are pregnant you are considered to be capable of work unless you have complications during your pregnancy or you are ill. You can read more in our document on [pregnancy and social welfare payments](#).

Available for work

You are considered available for work if:

You state that you are available for work

You do all that is asked to show compliance with this availability condition

There is no evidence to suggest the contrary

Essentially the Department of Social Protection considers that you are available for work if you are prepared to accept any offers of suitable employment immediately. In addition, the employment must be suitable, having regard to your age, sex, physique, education, normal occupation, where you live, rate of pay offered and your family circumstances.

However, you can be regarded as not being available for work and therefore not entitled to a jobseeker's payment if you put unreasonable restrictions on the following:

The nature of the employment

The hours of work

The rate of pay

The duration of the employment

The location of the employment

If a Deciding Officer thinks that you have placed unreasonable restrictions, you will be interviewed and given the opportunity to respond. Note that if you refuse a suitable offer of work you can be disqualified from a jobseeker's payment.

For example, you are considered unavailable for work in the following circumstances:

You are looking for a particular type of work only.

You state that you are looking for part-time work only. However, if you cannot get suitable full-time employment, you can still accept part-time work.

You are only available during hours which are not typical of the employment you are looking for, for example, looking for clerical office work in evenings only.

You are unwilling to take up an offer of reasonable short-time employment, for example, relief work or employment under a short-term contract.

You move to a location where your prospects of getting suitable employment are significantly reduced. However, the reasons for the move will be taken into account.

You are placing unreasonable restrictions on the distance which you are willing to travel to find work. However, access to public and private transport is taken into account.

You may also be asked about your responsibilities at home, for example, who is looking after your child dependents. This question must be asked of both male and female applicants.

If you are looking after a sick or older person and are not available for work you may be entitled to a [career's payment](#).

You can read more about the available for work condition in the Department of Social Protection's Operational Guidelines for [Jobseeker's Allowance](#) and [Jobseeker's Benefit](#).

Genuinely looking for work

You must also show that you are genuinely looking for work. A day is not treated as a day of unemployment unless on that day you are genuinely seeking suitable full-time work. If you are in part-time employment and getting a jobseeker's payment you must show that you are trying to get full-time employment on the days you are not working.

You must be able to show that you are making genuine efforts to secure employment. You need to provide examples of such steps. Steps which would indicate that you are considered to be genuinely seeking work may include:

Making oral or written applications for work

Looking for information on the availability of employment from employers, advertisements and employment agencies

Taking up reasonable training opportunities

Acting on the advice given by a DSP Case Officer or other placement agency such as the Local Employment Service (LES)

Taking positive, well advised steps towards establishing yourself in self-employment such as researching possible areas of self-employment

Preparing business plans for a self-employment project

Attending relevant "start your own business" courses or seeking information, advice or guidance in relation to any of these steps

You can read more about the genuinely looking for work condition in the Department of Social

Protection's Operational Guidelines for [Jobseeker's Allowance](#) and [Jobseeker's Benefit](#).

Sanctions for not meeting the conditions of your jobseeker's payment

You can be *refused* a jobseeker's payment if you do not meet all the conditions that apply to the payment. You can be *disqualified* from a payment for a period of time in certain circumstances. You can also have your *payment reduced* (and subsequently stopped altogether for a period of time) if you do not attend meetings or participate in appropriate employment schemes, training or work experience.

Disqualification from a jobseeker's payment

You may be disqualified from getting a jobseeker's payment for up to 9 weeks if you:

- Left work voluntarily and without just cause

- Lost your job through misconduct

- Refused or failed to engage with activation measures where a penalty rate applied (see below)

You can be disqualified from Jobseeker's Benefit if you are aged under 55 and get a redundancy payment of more than €50,000. The exact length of your disqualification (up to 9 weeks) will depend on the amount of redundancy payment you receive.

You can also be disqualified from a jobseeker's payment if you do not co-operate with the [Department of Social Protection's identity checking procedures for issuing you with a Public Services Card](#).

You can appeal [a decision to disqualify you from a payment to the Social Welfare Appeals Office](#).

Reduction in payment

When you apply for a jobseeker's payment you will be asked to sign a [Record of Mutual Commitments \(pdf\)](#) which explains your rights and responsibilities while you are getting your jobseeker's payment from the Department of Social Protection.

Depending on your personal profile, you may be given an appointment for a further meeting with a DSP Case Officer. At this meeting your Case Officer will discuss your options with you and agree your Personal Progression Plan to prepare you to find employment. You will get ongoing advice and support to help you meet the goals in your Personal Progression Plan. You can read about the [employment services the Department of Social Protection offers to jobseekers](#).

If you do not keep to the steps agreed in the Record of Mutual Commitments and the other conditions of your jobseeker's payment, your payment can be reduced and eventually stopped altogether. Specifically you can be paid a *penalty rate* of JA or JB if you refuse or fail to:

- Attend meetings requested by the DSP or

- Participate in an appropriate employment support scheme, work experience or training

If you have been placed on a penalty rate and you continue not to meet the conditions you can be disqualified from your jobseeker's payment for up to 9 weeks. You cannot be disqualified immediately – a penalty rate must apply first for at least 21 days.

Section 2: Use of reference budgets in relation to Minimum Income and/or poverty measures

Reference budgets or budget standards are priced baskets of goods and services that represent a given living standard in a country.

In this section you will find information in relation the recent evolutions of the construction and use of reference budgets in Ireland. Information is also given on the usefulness of these reference budgets for policy making or for awareness raising campaigns.

For further information on Reference Budgets see: Storms, B., Goedemé, T., Van den Bosch, K., Penne, T., Schuerman, N., and Stockman, S., Review of current state of paly on reference budget practices at national, regional and local level, pilot project for the development of a common methodology on reference budgets in Europe, Brussels, European Commission, 2014 <http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=12544&langId=en>

Recent initiatives to develop reference budgets or to adapt existing reference budgets?

- *For what purposes are they developed or used? By whom?*

The Minimum Essential Budget Standards (MEBS) Research Centre was established by the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice (VPSJ) in 2016, as the next step in over 17 years of income adequacy research (of which 15 years focused on budget standards research). The VPSJ has pioneered the use of the Consensual Budget Standards methodology in Ireland and its application to establishing minimum expenditure and income needs.

The VPSJ's MEBS research centre continues to be the only organisation carrying out this work in Ireland. The distinctive strength of the research approach is its grounding in reality and lived experience of people.

Through this research the VPSJ plays an active role in trying to ensure a fairer society for all.

The minimum standards data is widely used in the policy debate across government departments, in analysis by NGOs, contributes to the annual Budget process, and at a practical level it is used by organisations working directly with people such as SVP and MABS. Furthermore, the research forms the basis of the ISI's reasonable living expenses and the Living Wage calculations.

The role of the MEBS Research Centre is to continue this crucial research, providing evidence to inform policy on the income and supports required to overcome poverty and social exclusion.

From <https://www.budgeting.ie/>

The development of MEBS approaches is supported by government financially and at public fora but is not actually used within government to assess minimum income standards (as EMIN 'Ireland has advocated)

- *What actors were involved in the construction? Were people experiencing poverty part of the process? Have focus groups been used?*

MEBS/MESL (Minimum Essential Standard of Living) uses a panel approach. The project was initiated by a religious NGO, VPSJ, and involves academics, trade unions and NGOs, it works closely with EMIN Ireland.

- *How would you evaluate the development and/or current use of the reference budgets in your country? Are they useful tools for policy purposes? For public campaigning and awareness raising?*

MESL (the most used Irish reference budget system) is a very important point of reference for campaigning work and for raising awareness of poverty issues and of both minimum income and of the 'living wage' at work.

Several EMIN Ireland members, including the lead agency EAPN Ireland, refer to MESL in all major submissions relating to MI schemes, including submissions to annual budgets, responses to budgets and discussions on the new National Action plan on Inclusion.

The AGM of the Irish National Organization of the Unemployed, in June 2017, passed a motion calling for minimum income schemes to move towards a level which brings them in line with both the 60% at-risk-of-poverty level and the MESL.

The Government does not use reference budgets in relation to MI, but the think tank responsible for developing them is given space regularly at seminars and discussions led by the Department (Ministry) of Social Protection.

The specific reference budgets for workers also developed by the same organization has been used as the basis of a campaign for a living wage by trade unions and NGOs. Under the last Government, there were proposals to use this as a benchmark for development of a higher Minimum Wage.

The only official use of the MESL methodology was in relation to indebted household, in calculating what they need to live on in the context of insolvency.

Section 3: Implement Country Specific Recommendations on Minimum Income and follow up through the Semester process.

As part of the EU Semester process, a number of countries have received **Country Specific Recommendations (CSR)** on their MIS or more generally on poverty. **Country Reports** can give interesting indications for countries performance with regards to Minimum **Income**. Evidence can also be found in EAPN's assessment of **National Reform Programmes 2016**. In some countries under a Macroeconomic Adjustment Programme; the **Memorandum of Understanding** has reference to MI. In this section you find information about developments in response to these reports and recommendations as well as information on how EU funds are used to support developments in relation to Minimum Income Schemes.

Policy responses to the CSR, initiatives to implement them and to improve the MIS, if there are new evolutions in this respect in your country. Other developments in relation to Minimum Income Schemes as part of the Semester Process, please add them here.

The CSRs for Ireland have referred to poverty but not specifically MIS.

Has EU funds being used to support developments in relation to Minimum Income Schemes Not that we are aware of (apart from participation in study grants)?

Section 4: Social and Political Environment and its impact on the fight against poverty and the evolution of Minimum Income Schemes

In this section there is a brief sketch of the 'mood', the atmosphere that exists in relation to poverty, people living on minimum income, and the impact on some specific groups such as migrants, Roma/Travellers, growing nationalist sentiments etc.

What kind of social and political environment exists within which the EMIN project will operate?

Supports for community development to give voice and agency to poor people have been severely cut back. There are public attacks in the media on people on welfare and a worrying public advertising campaign under the slogan 'welfare cheats cheat us all'.

Section 5: Developments in relation to the Irish EMIN Network

In this section you provide information in relation to the state of development of your National EMIN Network. In particular describing social dialogue/partnership with public authorities and other stakeholders.

Is there a formal or informal steering group for your National EMIN Network (who is involved)?

Informal and soon to be formalised. NGOs, trade unions, think tank

Disability Federation, Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed, Society of St Vincent de paul, Irish Congress of Trade Unions, SIPTU Union, EAPN Ireland, VPSJ

Have there been any contacts with potential partners that can help to build alliances for the improvement of the MIS in your country?

Early contacts only

Has any activity been organised with regards to MI? Communications or public awareness raising, since the completion of the EMIN1 project?

There has been a lot of media debate and a workshop at the 2017 Social Inclusion Forum led by two EMIN Ireland partners.

Most work is by individual EMIN members, including EAPN Ireland, the lead agency. EMIN Ireland held a workshop after the EAPN Ireland AGM in June 2017 to discuss how to progress the debate on welfare rights and minimum Income. This included a presentation on EMIN 2 and the challenges it raises by Robin Hanan, EMIN 2 Ireland coordinator, a presentation from NUJ Manchester and Salford (UK) on their project 'Reporting Poverty' (visit financed by the NUJ – National Union of Journalists) and a discussion and brainstorm on how we can strengthen the debate on minimum income in Ireland during the period of EMIN 2.