

COPE Galway welcomes the opportunity to submit our opinion on the National Minimum Wage. COPE Galway is a local charity that provides a range of services to some of the most vulnerable and isolated people in Galway. The services we provide are across three main areas:

- Homeless Services
- Domestic Abuse Services for Women and Children
- Services for Older People

Homelessness

COPE Galway operates services for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. This includes emergency and transitional accommodation, resettlement and tenancy support services for people who are homeless and moving on from homelessness, and services to prevent homelessness.

Domestic Abuse Services for Women and Children

COPE Galway Waterside House provides Refuge accommodation and Outreach support to women and their children experiencing Domestic Violence. Supports include;

- One-to-one information and safety planning,
- 24hr telephone support, parenting advice,
- Direct support for children from qualified childcare workers,
- Referral to play therapy for children and adult counselling for women,
- Advocacy with regard to entitlements such as Housing, Social Welfare and Immigration status,
- Court preparation and accompaniment
- Outreach support in Galway City and County.

In addition, the service provides Training and Awareness on Domestic Violence to a range of statutory and voluntary agencies and carries out preventative and education work with students at both second and third level.

Older People

QUALITY OF LIFE IN A HOME OF YOUR OWN

Homelessness - Domestic Abuse - Senior Support

COPE Galway CLG, Registered Office: Calbro House, Tuam Road, Galway.
CRO No. 248134 CRA No:20011314 Registered Charity No. CHY6339
Board of Directors: E. Bradshaw (Chair), A. Callanan, P. Cunningham, P. Dilger, C. Healy, H. Kiely,
S. Lennon, Fr. J. Roche, J. Royleston, S. Silke, D. Squires
Patron: Sabina Coyne Higgins

COPE Galway's Older People's services support older people to continue living independently at home through the provision of a range of supports in the community including Meals-on-Wheels, lunch clubs, a Day Centre and Community Support Projects, all of which provide practical supports which help ensure older people continue to live in their own homes in the community.

Submission.

According to the OECD, Ireland has one of the highest rates of low-paid employment in the OECD; at 23% and 2nd highest behind only the United States¹. According to the Central Statistics Office in the final quarter of 2018, 7.6 % (137,200) of employees earned the National Minimum Wage or less². Over half (51.5%) of employees earning the minimum wage or less usually worked less than 30 hours per week. A further 32.7% of employees earning the minimum wage or less worked between 35-44 hours per week³. There are almost 680,000⁴ people in Ireland living in poverty, with just over one fifth of Ireland's adults with an income below the poverty line were employed⁵.

Research by Threshold found that 48% of those surveyed who were in receipt of HAP, pay a "top up" directly to the landlord, ranging from €20 to €575 a month with the average top-up being €177. This is in addition to the rent contribution they pay directly to the Local Authority⁶. Importantly, as well as those in receipt of social welfare, working households, whether part-time or full-time, were paying "top-ups"⁷. Thresholds research found that of those paying a top up, 45% stated they that as a result of the "top up", they struggled to pay other bills. The majority of respondents struggled to pay utility bills, buy groceries and cover the childcare and school costs. Almost 80% of tenants cited utility bills as a major concern⁸.

This research mirrors the experience of COPE Galway staff who support households to move into properties secured through HAP. In the case of families however paying unsustainable top ups, there is a concern that due to costs of living, these households may be forced into a poverty trap. It is also important to note that employment does not protect a person from homelessness, with COPE Galway providing a number of individuals who are in employment with emergency accommodation.

The current living wage is currently €12.30 per hour 40 cent over the rate of €11.90 announced in July 2018. The housing crises, and increases in rent levels, are the main driver of the increase⁹.

¹ OECD (2020), Wage levels (indicator). doi: 10.1787/0a1c27bc-en (Accessed on 04 March 2020)

² <https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/labourmarket/lfsnationalminimumwageestimates/>

³ <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/lfsnmw/lfsnationalminimumwageestimatesq42018/>

⁴ Based on 2018 figure.

⁵ Healy, S. Bennett, C. Murphy, E. Murph, M. Reynolds, B. Socio-Economic Review 2020. Social Justice Matters.47-48

⁶ Threshold(2019) Topping Up-The Cost of HAP.8

⁷ Threshold(2019).9

⁸ Threshold(2019).10

⁹ Living Wage(2019) Living Wage Update 2019.1

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COPE Galway firmly believes that wages must protect individuals and families from poverty and homelessness and recommends that the Low Pay Commission begins the process of moving towards Living Wage¹⁰. COPE Galway recommends that a five-year timeframe to equalise the minimum wage and the Living Wage should be set¹¹.

¹⁰ For more on a Living Wage see <https://www.livingwage.ie/>

¹¹ As recommended by Social Justice Ireland (2020) Election 2020 Briefing, Employment and Work.2

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