

PRE BUDGET SUBMISSION BY THE VINCENTIAN PARTNERSHIP FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

KEY POINTS

- Since 2001 the Vincientian Partnership for Social Justice (VPSJ) has carried out research on the cost of a minimum essential standard of living for household types in urban and rural areas. A minimum essential standard of living (MESL) is a standard of living that meets an individual's/household's physical, psychological and social needs. The adequacy of standard social welfare and minimum wage rates is benchmarked against the minimum needs of these household types.
- The VPSJ is very aware of the financial challenges facing the country; nevertheless, our research demonstrates that many of those in receipt of social welfare transfers are unable to afford a MESL, including pensioners living alone, households with children and unemployed single adults of working age.
- Our research shows that the combined value of Child Benefit and the Qualified Child Increase, the two child income support payments relied on by households in receipt of social welfare, do not meet the cost of a child in 3 of the 4 age groups examined in our research. The reduction in Child Benefit in previous budgets has had a detrimental effect on low income households. The VPSJ is calling on the Government not to make any further reductions to Child Benefit.
- Reverse the cut made in last year's budget to the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance.
- Maintain State Pension Rates and the Household Benefits Package for those who are solely reliant on social welfare transfers with no other source of income.
- Reverse the cut to the Fuel Allowance that was introduced in last year's budget.
- The Living Alone Allowance of €7.70 per week is grossly inadequate. Furthermore, it has not been increased since 1996. The VPSJ is asking the Government to increase this payment to ensure that older people living alone are able to afford a minimum essential standard of living.
- Without social welfare transfers, there would many more households experiencing poverty and social exclusion. In the years when social welfare rates were increased in the early 2000's, our research demonstrated an increase in the number of households that could afford a minimum essential standard of living. It is therefore inevitable that decreases in social welfare rates cannot but create hardship for already struggling low income families. For that reason, the VPSJ is calling on the Government to maintain social welfare transfers at the present rate.

This submission has been prepared by the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice (VPSJ). This submission is divided into the following sections:

1. Introduction
2. Detailed Recommendations
3. Conclusion

Appendix A Background to Minimum Income Standards Research

INTRODUCTION

Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice

The VPSJ was established in 1996 to work for social and economic change, tackling poverty and social exclusion. The VPSJ is a voluntary organization, consisting of representatives of The Society of St Vincent de Paul, Vincentian Congregation, Daughters of Charity and the Sisters of the Holy Faith (www.vpsj.ie). To achieve its goal the VPSJ has focused on two main areas:

- The promotion of Active Citizenship/Voter Education (www.vote.ie)
- The development of budget standards to determine the cost of a Minimum Essential Standard of Living for different households types (www.budgeting.ie & www.MISc.ie)

Minimum income provision is fundamental to national policy on the fight against poverty and social exclusion. In the current economic climate, the need for such a provision is amplified as an increasing number of households are finding themselves without independent financial means and reliant on state support. The need for income supports, as well as services and activation measures, to tackle poverty was recognised in the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007 -2013 and also in the Programme for Government, in which a commitment was given to maintain social welfare rates.

Deciding on an appropriate minimum income and defining the line between an acceptable and unacceptable standard of living is nevertheless a challenge. Thus, Minimum Income Standards have direct policy relevance by contributing to debates and discussions about poverty and, hence, informing the development of policy designed to combat it. The availability of robust minimum income standards research can complement other

Research to Date

2012 The Cost of a Child

2012 Minimum Income Standard Calculator
www.MISc.ie

2012 A Minimum Income Standard for Ireland

2010 Minimum Essential Budgets for Six Households (Rural)

2008 Minimum Essential Budgets for Six Households – Changes in the Cost of a Minimum Essential Standard of Living from 2006-2008

2006 Minimum Essential Budgets for Six Households (Urban)

2004 Low Cost but Acceptable Budgets for 3 Household Types

2001 One Long Struggle – A Study of Low Income Households

poverty measures, by helping to 'ground' them in an informed benchmark of how much income households need to avoid hardship.

Since 2001 the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice (VPSJ) has been researching Minimum Income Standards for Ireland and the cost of a minimum essential standard of living for different household types. A Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) is derived from a negotiated consensus on what people believe is a minimum with inputs from experts to ensure nutritional and home heating standards are met. It is a standard of living which meets an individual's / household's physical, psychological and social needs. This is calculated by identifying the goods and services required by different household types in order to meet their minimum needs.

The Minimum Income Standard (MIS) is the second side of the consensual budget standards research. The MIS defines the gross income a household needs in order to reach their MESL. It takes full account of the potential tax liability and social welfare entitlements of the household in question.

The outcome of this research is a robust and detailed set of data on the minimum needs of individuals and households across the entire lifecycle; from children to pensioners and the gross income that these households need to achieve their MESL. Therefore, this research provides a vital benchmark grounded in the lived experience of people; one which complements other poverty measures, and has the ability to assist and contribute to the formation of income support policies to tackle poverty and enhance social inclusion at each stage of the lifecycle.

It is in this context that the VPSJ welcomes the opportunity to make this submission putting forth our findings which clearly demonstrate that for particular household types in certain situations social welfare transfers are inadequate to meet the cost of a minimum standard of living. This submission focuses on three household types covered by our research which are primarily dependent on social welfare transfers and are unable to afford a minimum essential standard of living. The three household types are:

- Households with Children
- Pensioners Living Alone & Reliant on the State Pension
- Single Adults of Working Age, Living Alone

This submission is based on the expenditure and income data adjusted to March 2012. Further information on the research may be found on www.budgeting.ie and www.MISc.ie

Detailed Recommendations

Households with Children

In June of this year the VPSJ published 'The Cost of a Child'¹. This study, using consensual budget standards methodology, demonstrated the direct cost of a child in 2011 at four key stages of childhood; infancy; pre-school; primary school and second level. Up until the publication of this report there had been no up-to-date research on child costs in Ireland. Indeed, this point was recognised by the Department of Social Protection in 2010 when it stated:

'In order to better understand policy development into the future...the Department of Social Protection should seek to ensure that estimates around the cost of a child are updated using the direct budget standards method...and therefore provide a better understanding of the extent to which Child Benefit provides assistance with child raising'.²

The results from this report have now been updated to March 2012 to take into account changes in inflation in the intervening period, and also a review of the minimum essential standard of living baskets that was undertaken by the VPSJ earlier this year³.

The data highlights that no single figure can define the cost of a child. Costs tend to be high in infancy, before declining at pre-school age and then gradually rising as children grow older. Table 1 demonstrates that the cost of a child varies by age, location and by parental employment status and the subsequent need for childcare.

Table 1 The Direct Weekly Cost of a Child in a two parent household March 2012⁴

	Infant <i>Excluding Childcare</i>	Infant <i>Including Childcare</i>	Pre-school <i>Excluding Childcare</i>	Pre-school <i>Including Childcare</i>	Primary School <i>Excluding Childcare</i>	Primary school <i>Including Childcare</i>	Secondary School
Urban							
Per week	90.28	298.97	46.56	225.34	77.80	130.37	124.92
CB per week	32.31	32.31	32.31	32.31	32.31	32.31	32.31
% met by CB	36%	11%	69%	13%	42%	25%	26%
Rural							
Per week	89.93	260.28	44.99	180.81	78.73	131.34	121.18
CB per week	32.31	32.31	32.31	32.31	32.31	32.31	32.31
% met by CB	36%	12%	71%	18%	41%	25%	27%

¹ Mac Mahon, Weld, Thornton & Collins, 2012. Available on line at www.budgeting.ie

² Department of Social Protection, 2010, p 112. *A Policy and Value for Money Review of Child Income Support and Associated Spending Programmes.*

³ Further information on the review process can be found on www.budgeting.ie

⁴ The cost given for each child age group is a child in a two parent household. The direct cost of food for a child in a one parent household is different due to lower economies of scale and therefore food costs are higher in a one parent household. The costs given also exclude entitlement to Secondary Benefits such as a medical card and therefore are inclusive of all health care costs and private health insurance.

The current rate of Child Benefit is €140.00 (for the first and second child) per month or €32.31 per week and remains static regardless of the age of a child. As a consequence, the contribution that this payment makes varies according to the age of a child. While it meets approximately 70% of the cost of a child of pre-school age (without childcare), it only meets 26% of the cost of an adolescent and only approximately 11% of the cost of an infant in full-time childcare. Obviously, the provision of services such as affordable childcare, free primary health care or school book rental schemes would impact on the cost of a minimum essential standard of living and therefore impact on the contribution that income supports make to the cost of raising a child.

Further analysis of child income support payments demonstrates that the combined weekly value of Child Benefit and the Qualified Child Increase are inadequate in meeting the cost of a child at three of the four child age groups examined. The combined weekly value of Child Benefit and the Qualified Child Increase only meets the cost of a child of pre-school age. For the three other age groups, the two principal child income support payments received by people on social welfare, do not meet the minimum direct needs of a child. As these two payments remain static, the shortfall in income is particularly pronounced for a child of secondary school going age with the gap between income and expenditure being in the region of €50 per week.

Table 2 Comparison between the direct cost of a child including entitlement to a medical card, and the combined value of Child Benefit and the Qualified Child Increase⁵

	Infant	Pre-school	Primary School	Secondary School
	<i>Excluding Childcare</i>	<i>Excluding Childcare</i>	<i>Excluding Childcare</i>	<i>No Childcare</i>
Urban				
Cost Per week	81.94	38.29	69.38	116.14
Combined value of CB & QCI per week	62.11	62.11	62.11	62.11
Shortfall/discretionary income	-€19.83	+€23.82	-€7.27	-€54.03
Rural				
Cost Per week	81.83	37.04	70.77	113.15
Combined value of CB & QCI	62.11	62.11	62.11	62.11
Shortfall/Discretionary Income	-€19.72	+€25.07	-€8.66	-€51.04

This point is further exemplified by examining a two parent, two child household age 10 & 15; living in social housing and paying €45.00 per week in rent. If one parent is seeking employment and the other is engaged in stay at home duties, this household is solely reliant on social welfare transfers for its income. Child Benefit and the Qualified Child Increase account for 28% of the household’s weekly income. An examination of this household’s total weekly income and minimum essential expenditure points to a considerable deficit in income for a household in this situation as demonstrated in Table 3.

⁵ If a household is in receipt of the Qualified Child Increase they are may in all likelihood be in receipt of a full medical card

Table 3 Two Parents & Two Children; age 10 & 15 in Receipt of Social Welfare Transfers

URBAN	Total Weekly Cash Income⁶	Total Weekly Minimum Expenditure* **	Weekly Shortfall
	€444.71	€537.73	- € 93.02
RURAL	Total Weekly Cash Income	Total Weekly Minimum Expenditure	Weekly Shortfall
	€444.71	€598.67	- €153.96

Child Income supports are an essential and much needed income source for a household in this particular situation. Reducing social welfare payments will have a detrimental effect on children living in such households, putting a minimum essential standard of living further beyond their reach.

Furthermore, at a time when many low income families are struggling, the decision in last year’s budget to reduce the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance by €55 and €50 (depending on the age of the child) disproportionately targeted those on a low income. The research of the VPSJ on the cost of a minimum essential standard of living demonstrates that the cost of education far exceeds the rate at which the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance is paid. Figures from our research show that the annual cost of education for a child of secondary school going age in an urban area is €779, while for a child at primary school is €347. The Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance is a vital payment for low income families. The VPSJ is asking the Government to reverse the cut made to the payment in last year’s budget and restore the payment to the rate at which it was paid in 2011.

Inadequate income is at the problem’s core, yet it is the knock-on effects – exclusion from participation in everyday activities like education and play, poor quality housing and delayed access to healthcare and other services that are detrimental to a child’s future. It is argued, that the longer a child is poor, the greater the deprivation he or she is likely to experience in later life. Poor children become poor adults and the cycle continues, influencing the life chances of the next generation and the one after that (End Child Poverty Coalition, 2011)⁷.

To conclude to this section, since 2008 children have suffered as a consequence of reductions in child income support payments and also changes to eligibility criteria for payments. The data from our research clearly demonstrates that there are children living in households with an income that falls far short of what they need for a MESL.

⁶ When calculating the Net cash income for each income scenario, income from all entitlements is taken into accounts e.g. Jobseekers payment, Child Benefit, Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance etc. Eligibility for medical card also considered. (applies to urban and rural scenarios)

*Less healthcare costs where applicable (applies to urban and rural scenarios).

**Includes a weekly social housing cost of €45.00 per week (applies to urban and rural scenarios)

⁷ End Child Poverty Coalition, April 2011. *Child Poverty: Ireland in Recession*. Published on line, accessed 19th August 2011: <http://www.endchildpoverty.ie/publications/documents/EndChildPovertyCoalitionChildPoverty-IrelandinRecession.pdf>

The need for this research was recognised in the *Review of Child Income Supports* in 2010. The VPSJ has provided the Government with a robust and detailed set of figures on the cost of a child at four distinct age groups and the extent to which child income support payments provide assistance with child raising. The findings of this research are abundantly clear. There should be no further cuts to child income support payments. It is for this reason the VPSJ is asking the Government to protect children in Budget 2013 and maintain the current rates of Child Benefit and child income support payments.

Recommendation: Protect children in Budget 2013 by making no further cuts to child income supports and reverse the cut made to the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance in last year's budget.

Pensioners Living Alone

Pensioners living alone are one of the groups most exposed to poverty and social exclusion. Since 2006 when the VPSJ began charting the cost of a minimum essential standard of living (MESL), our research has repeatedly demonstrated the precarious financial situation of this household type. Whilst the most recent budgets have protected State Pension rates, a move which the VPSJ very much welcomed, it is nevertheless evident from our data that pensioners living alone continue to live on an inadequate income. For rural pensioners, the need for a private car due to inadequate public transport, the higher costs of household fuel (oil in rural areas as opposed to gas in urban areas) and the lack of readily available low cost shopping outlets results in a far greater shortfall in income for rural dwellers compared to their urban counterparts⁸.

The shortfall in income experienced by pensioners living alone underscores the vulnerability of this household to changes in social welfare rates or entitlements. The example given in Table 4 of an urban pensioner living alone and in receipt of the Contributory Pension, Household Benefits Package, free travel pass and full medical card, demonstrates this. This individual has a mere €0.09 cent above what they need for a MESL. If the State Pension rate or the Household Benefits package is reduced in 2013, an individual in this situation will no longer be able to afford a minimum standard of living. Pensioners have very little, if any scope, to increase their income in retirement. In other words, retired people living in poverty can do very little to avoid poverty. It is for this reason that the VPSJ is calling on the Government to maintain pension rates in Budget 2013 and the Household Benefits Package.

⁸ The full report on the cost of a *Minimum Essential Standard of Living for Six Rural Households* can be found at http://budgeting.ie/images/stories/Publications/Minimum_Essential_Budgets_for_Households_in_Rural_Areas.pdf

Table 4 Pensioner Living Alone; age 70+

URBAN	Income Expenditure Scenario	Total Weekly Cash Income	Total Weekly Minimum* Expenditure	Weekly Shortfall/ Discretionary Income
Pensioner Living Alone	Contributory Pension/ no car	248.00	247.91**	discretionary income €0.09cent
Pensioner Living Alone	Non-Contributory Pension/ no car	236.70	247.91**	shortfall 11.21
RURAL				
Pensioner Living Alone	Contributory Pension/ car owner	248.00	327.43**	shortfall 79.43
Pensioner Living Alone	Contributory Pension/ car owner	236.70	327.43**	shortfall 90.73

**Includes rent of €30.00 per week for social housing

From the data it is also evident that the shortfall in income experienced by this household type could be somewhat alleviated by an increase in the Living Alone Allowance. At present, the Living Alone Allowance is paid at the rate of €7.70 per week and underestimates the additional costs of living alone. A comparison of minimum expenditure between an urban pensioner couple and a pensioner living alone highlights the similarity in the cost of certain categories of expenditure for both households as demonstrated in Table 5.

Table 5 Expenditure comparison between a pensioner living alone and a pensioner couple

Cost Per Week	Household Energy	Household Goods	Communications
Pensioner Living Alone	€36.56	18.27	8.78
Pensioner Couple	€38.24	19.72	8.67

While a pensioner couple household reliant on the State Pension has either two pensions or a pension and Qualified Adult payment to meet living costs, pensioners living alone receive the State Pension and the Living Alone Allowance. This payment, which has not been increased since 1996, does not adequately compensate for the additional financial costs of living alone and should be substantially increased to reflect the real costs of living alone. The upcoming budget presents an opportunity to increase the Living Alone Allowance to a rate that truly reflects the additional financial costs faced by those who live alone.

Furthermore, the cut to the Fuel Allowance by six weeks in Budget 2012 should also be reversed. Fuel poverty affects many households in Ireland, particularly pensioner households. The context of this recommendation is the persistent problem of fuel poverty in Ireland contributing to up to 2,000 excess winter deaths annually. Insufficient income is obviously at the core of this problem and given that natural gas has risen by 22.5% and home heating oil by 6.7% in the period July 2011 to July 2012, many more pensioner

households will be forced to forgo basic necessities such as heating because they are unable to afford it. The number of weeks the Fuel Allowance is paid should therefore be restored to 32 weeks a year.

When people reach retirement they should be guaranteed an income that insures their basic needs are met. They should not have to make a choice between feeding themselves or heating their home. They should not have to worry about their financial security. The State Pension and Household Benefits package provides security for pensioner households. The Fuel Allowance at least helps them cover a proportion of the cost of heating their home. These payments are vital to older people who do not have private pensions, and therefore have no other source of income. It is imperative that these payments, which act as barriers against poverty and social exclusion, are set at a level that allows older people to have a standard of living that meets their physical, psychological and social needs.

Recommendation: *Protect Social Welfare rates and the Household Benefits Package for those who live alone and substantially raise the Living Alone Allowance to help older people living on their own meet their minimum essential expenses.*

Reverse the cut to Fuel Allowance that was made in Budget 2012.

Single Adults of Working Age, Living Alone

Ireland's high rate of unemployment is the defining hallmark of the current economic recession. The standardised unemployment rate in July 2012 was 14.8%, which equates to 460,323 people on the live register (CSO, 2012)⁹.

The Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice is asking the Government to protect those who are unemployed. It is clear that there is a need not only for policies and programmes to encourage people who are unemployed to up-skill and retrain, but there is also a need to recognise that currently there are very few jobs available in Ireland, and those who cannot find a job, must have a minimum income set at a level that reflects the cost of a minimum essential standard of living in Ireland.

Our research demonstrates that the rate at which the basic social welfare payment is set falls short of what some individuals' need, particularly those who are unemployed and living in the private rented sector. Data from our research indicates that a single adult in receipt of Jobseekers Benefit, living in the private rented sector (urban location), paying €475 a month in rent (rent supplement ceiling for a single person living alone in Dublin) and receiving Rent Supplement of €77.61 per week, would need an additional €47.74 per week to be able to afford a minimum essential standard of living.

Table 4 Urban Single Adult of Working Age

Weekly Income	Weekly Expenditure	Weekly Shortfall
€265.51	€313.55	- €47.94

⁹ Further information on the Live Register can be found on line at http://cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/labourmarket/2012/lreg_jul2012.pdf

It is obvious that the present rate of Jobseekers Benefit is inadequate. The Government in the *Programme for Government* made a commitment to protect social welfare rates. The VPSJ are calling on the Government to honour that commitment. This is imperative because while the basic rate of social welfare was not reduced in last year's budget, the Government implemented cuts to many other payments and changed the eligibility criteria for others. For example, the decision in last year's budget to increase the Rent Supplement contribution by €6.00 per week targeted those already struggling to make ends meet. The VPSJ is calling on the Government to make a concerted effort to protect those who are unemployed. It is evident that individuals in this situation cannot cope with further reductions in income.

Recommendation: *Maintain social welfare rates at current levels and support and protect those who are unemployed.*

Conclusion

The research of the VPSJ shines a light on the income that is needed for a minimum essential standard of living across a spectrum of household types spanning the lifecycle. It demonstrates that many households in situations of reliance on social welfare live with insufficient income. Income inadequacy and poor service provision means that many households live below a level which has been defined as socially acceptable by members of the Irish public.

Failure to ground social welfare transfers in a tangible measure of adequacy, such as defined in the consensual budget standards research means that poverty and social exclusion will continue to be a reality in Ireland.

When a household has a manifestly low income, which is considerably less than that required for a minimum essential standard of living, there can be no justification for measures which plunge them deeper into poverty and debt. Other choices are possible. The VPSJ is asking the Government to make the right choice in Budget 2013, one that protects people currently experiencing poverty and social exclusion from greater hardship and prevents an increase in their numbers.

Appendix A

Background to the Minimum Income Standards Research

The official measure of poverty in Ireland is consistent poverty, which is a composite measure of at-risk-of poverty and basic deprivation. The work on Minimum Income Standards complements these measures by using a consensual budget standards approach, to identify the expenditure required for an acceptable standard of living and the income necessary to afford that standard.

What is a Minimum Essential Standard of Living?

A Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) is derived from a negotiated consensus on what people believe is a minimum. It is a standard of living which meets an individual's / household's physical, psychological and social needs. This is calculated by identifying the goods and services required by different household types in order to meet their minimum needs. A Minimum Essential Standard of Living is not a poverty standard, or a standard for particular groups in society. It is a standard that is based on needs not wants and represents a level below which nobody should be expected to live.

What does it include?

There are over 2,000 items in the baskets, both goods and services, which are then compiled into 16 categories of expenditure. The 16 areas of expenditure are listed below:

Food	Personal Care	Household Goods	Communications
Education	Housing	Personal Costs	Insurance Costs
Health Related Costs	Savings & Contingencies	Household Services	Social Inclusion & Participation
Transport	Clothing	Household Fuel	Childcare Costs

How is the MESL expenditure standard arrived at?

The totals of each of the 16 categories of household budgets show the expenditure required to enable a minimum essential standard of living. The final weekly expenditure figure is the cost of all the goods and services broken down over the lifespan of each item and contains everything from shampoo to household furniture.

What is the Minimum Income Standard?

The Minimum Income Standard (MIS) is the second side of the consensual budget standards research. It is derived from the MESL expenditure budget. The MIS defines the gross income a household needs in order to reach their minimum essential standard of living. It takes full account of the potential tax liability and social welfare entitlements of the household in question.

To whom does it apply?

Two parent & one parent families with up to four children, single adults of working age, pensioner couples and pensioners living alone.

When and how is it being updated?

The original research began in 1999 and findings were presented in 2001, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010 and 2012. The present phase of work began in 2006 with the publication of *'Minimum Essential Budgets for Six Households' (Urban)*. Since 2006 the material has been updated annually taking into consideration changes in inflation rates. The appropriate CPI sub indices rates are applied to each category. Updating annually allows changes in the cost of goods and services to be tracked over time and provides up-to-date information on the cost of a minimum essential standard of living.

In 2012, in order to keep the data up to date and to ensure its policy relevance into the future, the VPSJ conducted a focus group led review of the minimum essential standard of living baskets. This data is now available on line on www.budgeting.ie and also on our minimum income standard calculator www.MISc.ie. Whilst some changes were made to the baskets such as the addition of the internet for households with people of working age and households with children, the norms established in 2006 for a minimum essential standard of living remain largely unchanged despite the recession. Members of the public still believe that a minimum standard of living is more than survival and should allow for meaningful participation in society.

Further research was also undertaken in 2012 to individualise costs for each household member and to allow for households of one or two parents with up to four children. In previous research the data comprised of composite household expenditure and only extended to households with two children. The research now covers approximately 81 % of Irish households.

Research Outputs

A Minimum Income Standard for Ireland (2012)

In 2012, the VPSJ and Trinity College Dublin published *'A Minimum Income Standard for Ireland'*. For this study, costs were individualised for each household member and the dataset was extended to include an infant, an unemployed 19 year old living in the family home, and a female single adult of working age. This report uses a consensual budgets standards methodology to provide data on the essential living requirements of individuals and households across the entire lifecycle; from children to pensioners.

Building on this analysis, the report also establishes the minimum gross income required by these individuals and households to afford the expenditure necessary to meet this standard of living. By establishing this Minimum Income Standard the report provides a new benchmark grounded in the lived experience of people.

Minimum Income Standard Calculator www.MISc.ie (2012)

Now that the scope and flexibility of the MESL expenditure budgets have been extended, a web based calculator application has been developed, which makes the data readily available and accessible to a wider audience. The Minimum Income Standard Calculator allows a user to specify a household type of their choosing, and in return be provided with a breakdown of the minimum expenditure such a household would require to enable a minimum essential standard of living. In addition, the Calculator also provides information on the MIS for that household in an employment scenario specified by the user, indicating any possible eligibility for social welfare transfer payments, e.g. Family Income Supplement.

The Cost of a Child (2012)

Building on from the individualisation process undertaken for 'A Minimum Income Standard for Ireland' this report presents the direct costs of a child at four key stages of childhood: Infancy; Pre-school; Primary school and Second level. This report focuses on the direct costs of children i.e. costs that can be solely attributed to a child such as food, clothing, childcare and education etc.

Having established the direct expenditure children need for a minimum essential standard of living, the report demonstrates the contribution of three principal child income supports to the cost of raising a child, namely Child Benefit, the Qualified Child Increase and Family Income Supplement.

Other research outputs include:

- Minimum Essential Budgets for Six Rural Households (2010)
- Minimum Essential Budgets for Six Households – Changes in the Cost of a Minimum Essential Standard of Living from 2006-2008 (Urban) (2008)
- Minimum Essential Budgets for Six Households (Urban) (2006)
- Low Cost but Acceptable Budgets for 3 Household Types (2004)
- One Long Struggle – A Study of Low Income Households (2001)

Vincentian Partnership For Social Justice

Outcomes from the Research

The research continues to be used by the VPSJ itself in a variety of ways, and also by both statutory and other agencies working in the areas of poverty and social exclusion. The work of the VPSJ has also been recognised at EU level and the VPSJ has developed close working relationships with a number of organisations and institutions also involved in the development of Minimum Income Standards in Europe.

The research has consequently led to a number of outcomes:

- The VPSJ research presents data on the actual cost of a minimum essential standard of living and provides a useful contribution to the debate on minimum income standards. The detailed minimum essential budgets, which are updated annually, and all publications can be found on www.budgeting.ie
- The web based Minimum Income Standard Calculator (www.MISc.ie) makes the work readily accessible to Government, policy makers and organisations working to combat poverty and social exclusion. The data is also available to the general public to assess what is the gross income their household needs for a minimum essential standard of living.
- The VPSJ has, for the last number of years, been invited to make a presentation to the Department of Social Protection at the Pre-Budget Forum.
- The VPSJ was invited to make a presentation to the Office of the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights.
- The VPSJ has met with officials from the Department of Finance and the Central Bank to discuss how the research can be used with regard to income retention and debt resolution, in the context of households with mortgage and loan arrears.
- The research is being used by a number of organizations such as MABS, the Society of St Vincent de Paul, Age Action and FLAC who are involved with people experiencing poverty, social exclusion and debt.
- The VPSJ has been involved with the development of minimum income standards at EU level and has recently been invited by a French statutory agency to contribute to the development of minimum income standards for France.
- The VPSJ was nominated by the Department of Social Protection to participate in an EU peer review of Minimum Income Standards.