

Living in Poverty in Ireland: A Gender Perspective

Presentation to the Citizens' Assembly on
Gender Equality

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Society of St. Vincent de Paul

1. GENDER AND POVERTY: WHAT ARE THE LINKS?

Headline poverty figures are broadly similar
(but women have higher deprivation rates)

BUT three factors increase women's risk of poverty:

- **Caring responsibilities:** One parent families, which are mostly headed by women, have very high poverty rates
- **Underemployment & low paid work:** women more likely to work part time/insecure and minimum wage roles
- **Age:** 25% of women over 65 at risk of poverty compared to 15% of men

2. THE EXPERIENCE OF THE SVP

SVP's Response

 **€12.5m**
on food

 **€5.1m** on direct
financial support
to households

 **€4.3m** on fuel
& electricity

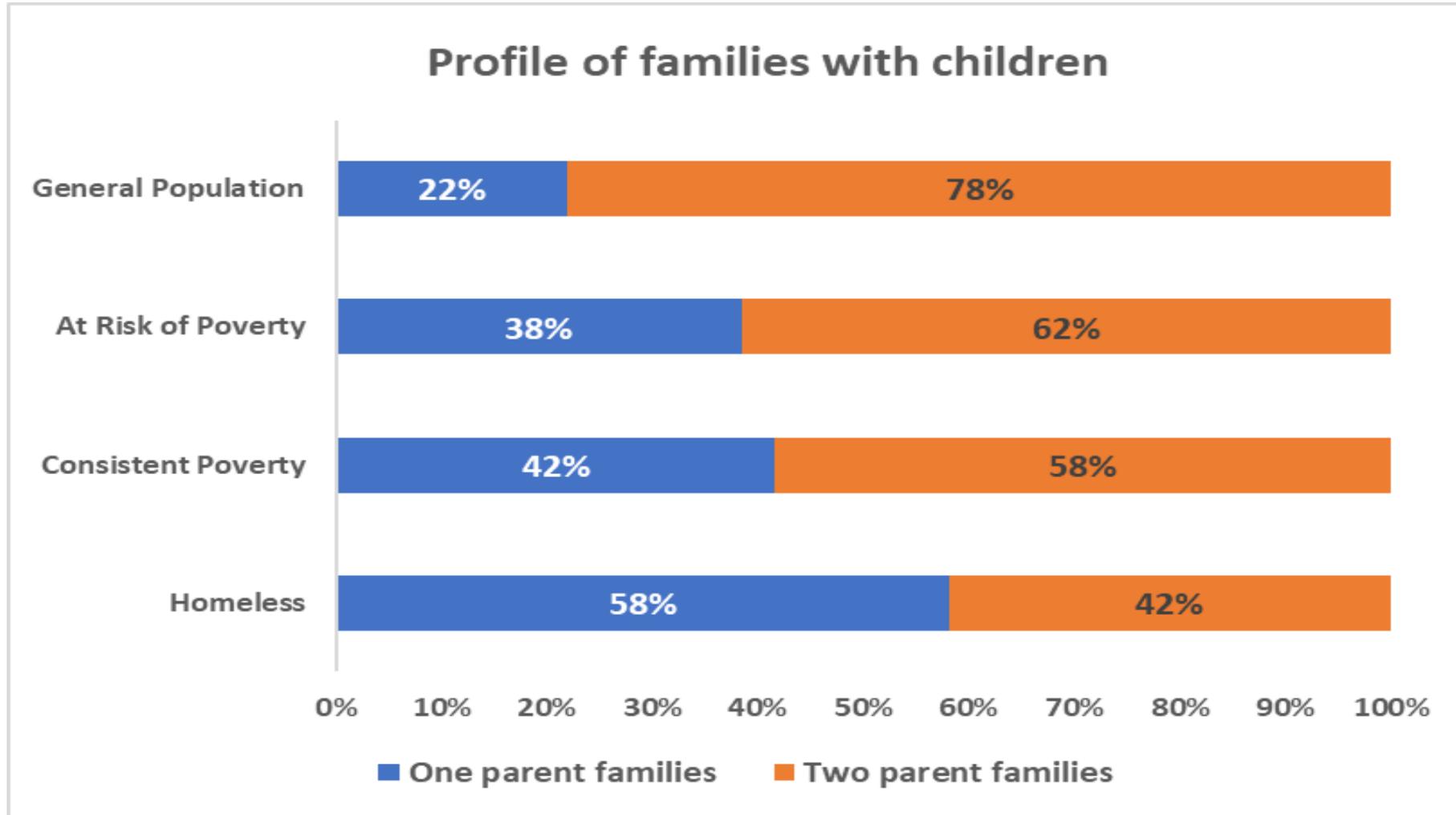
 **€3.7m**
on education

 **€1m**
on clothing
& furniture

 **€0.6m**
on holidays
& outings

- 160,000 requests for assistance in 2019
- Largest group requesting assistance: households with children, in particular one parent families
- Multifaceted issues and needs

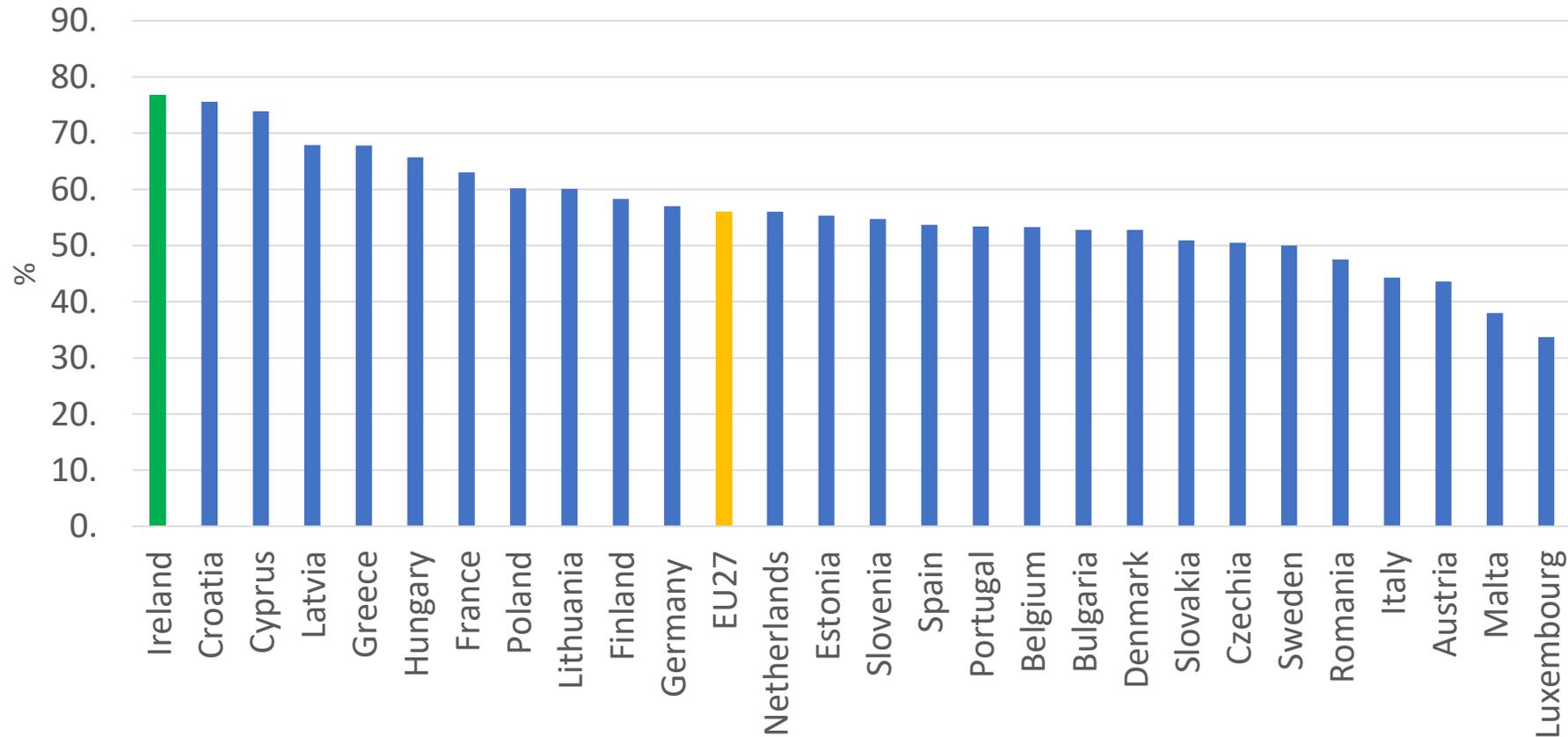
3. POVERTY AMONG ONE PARENT FAMILIES



Source: CSO Survey of Income and Living Conditions & Department of Housing Homeless Statistics

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One Parent Families Unable to Afford an Unexpected Expense
European Countries (2019)



Source: Eurostat Survey of Income and Living Conditions

4a. THE STORIES BEHIND THE NUMBERS

'It's the hardest job in the world':

Research with one parent families
assisted by SVP (2014)

Interviews with 61 one parent families



Well when I had her last year,
I was getting 140 (euro), now
I'm getting 130 (euro). I know
it doesn't sound a lot but
that 10 euro would have
bought two packs of nappies.
It would have fed us for the
day...

4b. THE STORIES BEHIND THE NUMBERS



“

I've noticed how I think about the future has changed a lot...In the past I had kinda like five or ten year plans...I still have hopes for the future...dreams maybe...but there is still a bit of ambition there but...now you just think so much in the short term...You don't have the luxury of planning a future because so much effort is put into just getting by

5. THE ADEQUACY OF SOCIAL WELFARE

- Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice MESL Data: a minimum essential standard of living
- The costs of essential goods and services in Ireland
- Current social welfare rates inadequate for:
 - single adults
 - One parent families
 - families with older children.



6. LIFE ON A LOW INCOME: CASE STUDIES

Stories of Struggle (SVP and VPSJ, 2018):
Interviews with 30 families living below a
Minimum Essential Standard of Living

"Michelle's story":

Michelle, one parent family, two children

Michelle was working as a Carer but wasn't getting enough hours and couldn't afford the travel or childcare. She is "always worrying" under "terrible stress", she "can't sleep" because her "mind is racing." She feels as though the "walls are closing in on [her]"

"Ruth and Mark story":

Ruth and Mark, two parent family, two children

Mark has poor mental health and receives Disability Allowance, Ruth works part-time in a warehouse. They can never pay for a "treat or nice clothes for their children" and feels "guilty."

7. CAUSES OF POVERTY

Low incomes:

- Social welfare adequacy – currently not benchmarked against the cost of living
- Minimum Wage vs Living Wage – work that pays enough to live on

High costs:

- Housing – high housing costs pull people into poverty
- Childcare – lack of affordable, accessible childcare limits access to work
- Transport- households in rural areas
- Education- cost often cited a barrier to returning to education

"More women like me would work full-time if there was free or more accessible childcare, especially during the summer holidays, if there was a proper childcare scheme for low-income families"

8. CONSEQUENCES OF POVERTY

Individual consequences

- Impact on mental and physical health
- Choosing between essentials
- Inability to plan for the future

Societal consequences

- Cost of Poverty research shows that preventing poverty could save the state €4.5 billion a year.

“Life’s not easy... I can’t see a way out.. When I get paid I immediately pay rent, bills and anything that is urgent.. When I’m struggling, which is most of the time, I feel down, sad and depressed.”