

What is Social Policy?

Social issues refer to those conditions which have a negative effect on a social group or individuals within that group. The work of the Social Policy Representative is to highlight social issues within their diocese.

Social Issues include: Poverty, homelessness, social inequality, domestic violence, child abuse, exploitation, unemployment, ageism, racial violence and discrimination, disability rights, climate change, hate crime, gender-based violence, immigration and health care.

Mental Health

Depression can develop very slowly, and often someone who is experiencing it might not even realise it. Often it is a partner, family member or carer who first realises that help is needed. They may encourage their friend or relative to see their GP or find some other source of support.

If someone is suffering from depression you may notice they have:

- has lost interest in doing things they normally enjoy,
- seems to be feeling down or hopeless,
- feels tired or does not have much energy,
- is overeating or has lost their appetite,
- is sleeping more than usual or is not able to sleep,
- has trouble concentrating on everyday things.

For more information and advice about your mental health and wellbeing visit:
<https://www2.hse.ie/mental-health/my-mental-health-plan/>

The Church of Ireland's MindMatters team is highlighting Flourish, an initiative on suicide, developed by the mental health charity Lighthouse Ireland, the Churches' Community Work Alliance (Northern Ireland), and clergy from across the churches.

Cost of Living Crisis

Are you, or someone you know, struggling to make ends meet? If the answer is YES, then there is help out there. In Northern Ireland contact the 'Make the Call' service to check if you are getting all the benefits, services and support you are entitled to. Freephone 0800 232 1271. The lines are open Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm (network charges may apply). <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/contacts/make-call-service>

In Southern Ireland for information and advice about supports, including help with energy costs, help for families and children, help for older people, and help with housing, contact www.citizensinformation.ie/en/money-and-tax/cost-of-living/help-with-cost-of-living/ The Church of Ireland offers lots of information for everyone on: www.ireland.anglican.org/parish-resources/659/responding-to-the-cost-of-living.

Food poverty is defined as "the inability to afford or have reasonable access to food which provides a healthy diet". Much of the cheapest, processed food on the market is high in saturated fats, sugars and salt, and data has shown that those on lower incomes have a diet predominantly based around such foods. Food poverty has emerged as a public health issue throughout the island of Ireland in the last decade. Dietary patterns have reflected the increasing numbers at risk of or living in consistent poverty. Children are particularly affected by food poverty, with 1 in 5 having reported going to school or bed hungry, because of a lack of food at home.

On-going Social Concerns

The housing and homelessness crisis continues to feature in the headlines and is a real concern for many people. Without a home it is extremely difficult to participate fully in society and to reach one's potential. Homelessness is at record levels. Recent figures (January 2024) show that in the Republic there are now 13,531 people living in emergency accommodation, with 4,027 of them being children.

In Northern Ireland 'Homelessness Connect' (July 2023) statistics state that 8,531 households have presented as homeless to the Housing Executive, with 3,532 of them being children.

A letter template has been distributed to all DP's, which includes homelessness figures for the Republic, and members are asked to send it to their national and local government representatives. This letter could be easily altered for use by NI members too if they wish to use it.

Refugees and Asylum Seekers: The Republic of Ireland is now accommodating over 104,000 people between those fleeing Ukraine and International Protection applicants. Figures released in March 2024 show that 1,159 single adult males (IP) are awaiting an offer of accommodation. While demand continues to outstrip supply, the Department is ensuring that all single adult women, families and children have been accommodated.

In Northern Ireland there are currently more than 3,000 people seeking asylum, while approximately 1,000 Ukrainian refugees have made the region their home.

Environmental Issues

The 'Let's Join the Dots Together' conference, was held in Belfast in January. Mothers' Union was represented on the day by All Ireland President June Butler, Zonal Trustee Iris Suitor, and Social Policy Northern Rep. Cathy Doig. Faith groups from all denominations, along with several sporting organisations, met together to explore a joint approach to addressing various environmental challenges.

The key-note address was given by Dr Lorna Gold, CEO of FaithInvest. This organisation has a focus on mobilising all faiths to put their own resources to work – especially their financial investments – to help shift the economy towards greater sustainability.

What is Climate Change? Climate change refers to the change in the average surface temperature on Earth. The average temperature on our planet has been 15°C, but the past few years have seen drastic variations in the same, both up and down. Scientists say that temperatures are rising at a faster pace than ever.

Eco-Congregation Ireland encourages Christians to adopt an eco-approach to worship, lifestyle, property and finance management, community outreach and contact with the developing world.

The All-Ireland Pollinator Plan each year aims to raise awareness of pollinators on the island of Ireland, the challenges they face, and how to help them. For more information about the key messages across the year please see: www.pollinators.ir or www.ecocongregationireland.com (Messages and Campaigns).

Some easy projects to get involved with are:

- No Mow May
- Lit It Bloom June
- Help Them Fly July
- August's Seed Feed Next Years Bees

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