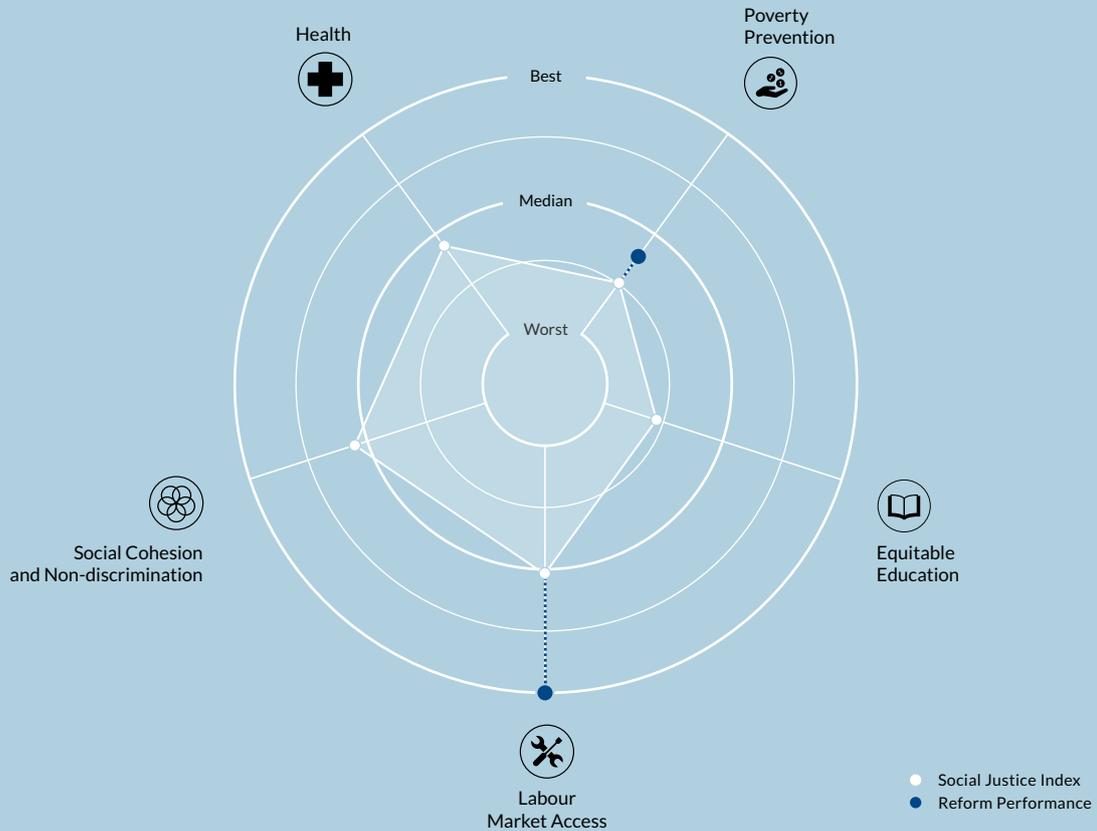


Findings by Country



Ireland

How does the country rank in the EU?



Dimension Findings

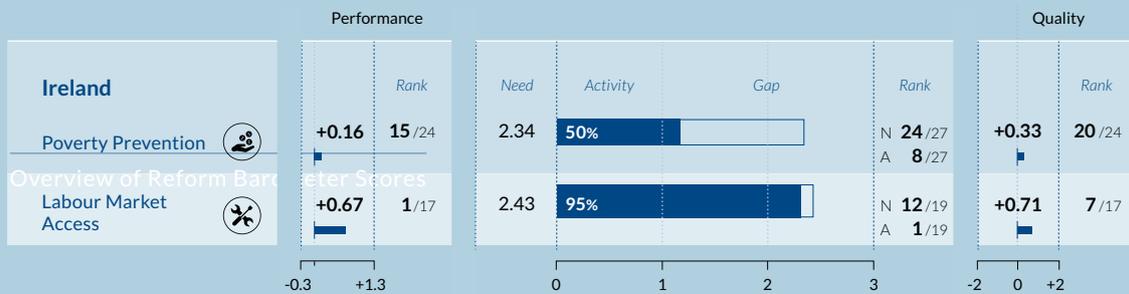
Poverty Prevention

Need The overall need to reduce poverty is 2.34, ranking Ireland 24th out of 27 countries. This clearly reflects Ireland's rather poor performance in the 2015 Social Justice Index (SJI), where the country ranks 21st in the dimension of Poverty Prevention. While the experts see a rather modest need to tackle poverty among the total population and senior citizens (1.5 each), the need to improve the situation is much more pressing for other societal subgroups, such as children (3.0), single parents (2.83), the foreign-born population (2.4) and refugees (2.8).

Activity According to the experts, 80 percent of the reform need to reduce poverty among young people has been addressed; for senior citizens and single parents, the activity rates are about 50 percent. Activities mentioned by the experts are increases in child benefits, state pensions and the minimum wage. On the other hand, the experts report that only a quarter of the relevant reform need related to the foreign-born population and refugees has been tackled.

Overall Reform Performance Ranking

Overview of Reform Barometer Scores



Quality The experts expect the reforms concerning poverty among elderly people (0.48) and children (0.33) to have slightly positive effects. With regard to the total population, they do not expect the reforms to change anything at all (0.0). One expert criticises the fact that “the state decided that it was more important to develop a policy of austerity to pay off the private debt of banks and bondholders. Even if they felt they had to make private debt the responsibility of the state, the burden should have been placed on the better-off rather than on the poorer sectors of society.” Another one thinks that “the welfare changes for lone parents have created a new poverty trap.”¹

✂ Labour Market Access

Need The overall need to improve Labour Market Access in Ireland is quite pressing (2.43, rank 12/19). In contrast to many other countries, the experts not only see an urgent need to improve job opportunities for specific sub-groups of the labour market, such as young people (3.0), the long-term unemployed (3.0) and the low-skilled (2.75), but also for the population in

¹ Robin Hanan, European Anti-Poverty Network Ireland, Dublin

general (3.0). This reflects Ireland's performance in the SJI, where it ranks 20th with regard to (un-)employment levels of the total population. Only a little less pressing is the need to increase employment levels for women (2.25), while the need to improve labour market access for elderly people is rather modest (1.67). The need to tackle in-work poverty is quite high in absolute terms (2.33) but lower than in many other countries (rank 9).

Activity According to the experts, the activity rate in this dimension is 95 percent, ranking Ireland 1st in this regard. For the policy objective 'increase employment/reduce unemployment', the activity rate is 90 percent (rank 2); for 'in-work poverty', it is 100 percent (rank 1). The experts report that the government launched 'Pathways to Work 2016–2020' in February 2016 as a follow-on to Pathways to Work 2012–2015, which "presents a detailed strategy to increase activation of unemployed, reduce the transition from short- to long-term unemployment, reduce disincentives to work and roll out the Youth Guarantee scheme. Main target groups are the unemployed, the long-term unemployed and young people."

The core of these pathways is an action plan for the 2016–2020 period, which includes six strands: enhancing engagement with unemployed people of working age; increasing the employment focus of activation programmes and opportunities; making work pay by incentivising the take-up of opportunities; incentivising employers to offer jobs and opportunities to unemployed people; building organisational capability to deliver enhanced services to people who are unemployed; and building workforce skills. One expert explains: "The government has also started to contract out unemployment services, specifically to assist long-term unemployed individuals to find suitable employment/training, to the private sector. This initiative is called Job Path."

With regard to in-work poverty, one expert reports "improved income support for people in work on low incomes". Another expert reports that a 'Low Pay Commission' was established in 2015 with the objective of assisting and guiding the government in introducing policies and measures to address in-work poverty.

Quality The experts expect the reform initiatives to have quite positive effects on (un-)employment levels in Ireland (1.0, rank 2/19). One expert comments: "I expect many of the reforms to be successful (evidence to date suggests that they are successful). The question of priorities remains: for example, refugees or older workers have not been targeted solely because they are not seen to be important, and so any relative changes for these groups will be accidental, at best." Another expert thinks "over the period of the (first) Pathways to Work programme (for 2012–2015), unemployment fell from 15 percent to less than 9 percent. Long-term and youth unemployment also fell, and more rapidly than total unemployment, but both still remain unacceptably high." With regard to youth unemployment, one expert sees a "need to accelerate the reform of the apprenticeship system and extend it to non-traditional areas (i.e. beyond construction and manufacturing to ICT and services) in order to provide for young people who do not succeed in traditional education."