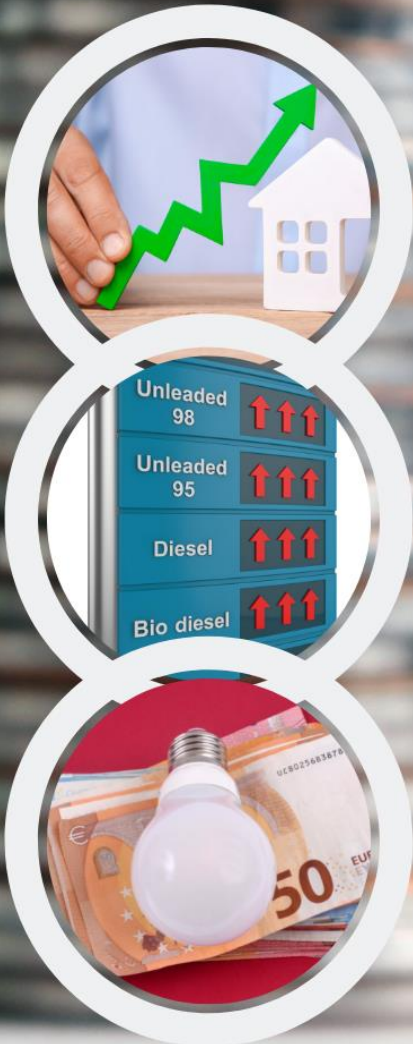


SUBMISSION

The Minimum Wage and Men's Health in Ireland



**Men's
Development
Network**

The Minimum Wage & Men's Health in Ireland
– A Submission to the Low Pay Commission on
the National Minimum Wage 2023



**Men's
Development
Network**



**White Ribbon
Ireland**

Men Ending Gender-Based Violence

The Minimum Wage & Men's Health in Ireland
– A Submission to the Low Pay Commission
on the National Minimum Wage 2023

Published

22 March 2022

Website

www.mensnetwork.ie

Email

info@mensnetwork.ie

CRO No.: 307175 | CHY No.: 13634 | RCN: 20042974

Introduction

As a national organisation which advocates for transforming masculinities, a feminist and intersectional approach to advance the changing of norms and behaviours and to promote gender equality,¹ Men's Development Network have produced this short submission for the Low Pay Commission on the rate of the minimum wage for 2023.

Based on our 25 years of practice in engaging men and boys in relation to their health and wellbeing² and in supporting the drafting and adoption of Ireland's National Men's Health Policy,³ it is our view as an organisation that a **decent minimum wage is a human right that is critical for the realisation of the right to health and wellbeing.**

This position is presented through the context of the National Men's Health Policy and in light of current rates of inflation. While this submission does not state what the rate of minimum wage should be, Men's Development Network's submission also highlights the International Labour Organisation (ILO) instruments on minimum wage fixing which should be considered in setting minimum wage levels.

National Men's Health Policy 2008-2013

In accordance with National Men's Health Policy adopted by the Department of Health and Children, Ireland applies a social determinants approach to defining men's health by recognising that health status *"is more than simply a consequence of biological, physiological or genetic functioning, but that it is also affected by much broader economic, social, cultural and environmental factors"*.⁴ Social and economic factors such as poverty are recognised in Irish policy as a key social determinant of men's health.⁵

Therefore, decent minimum wages are vital for ensuring access to healthcare for men, given that Ireland's National Men's Health Policy recognises cost as a barrier to men's more frequent and prompt use of healthcare services.⁶ The Policy highlights men from lower socio-economic groups often display poorer health-related behaviours than the general male population.⁷ Income inequality is among the interrelated factors leading to poorer health outcomes for men in Ireland.⁸

Taking a concrete example of the minimum wage in practice, in accordance with the means testing rates applicable for receipt of medical cards as of March 2022, the income limit for a single person living alone is €184 per week.⁹ A single man working 40 hours a week on the existing rate of minimum wage which is €10.50 earns €420 at the end of the week before PAYE, PRSI and USC. This income is further eroded by the rising cost of living, including rent,

¹ For further information, see: <https://mensnetwork.ie/> accessed March 21st, 2022.

² Men's Development Network is the Managing and Coordination Partner of the Engage National Men's Health Training Programme. See: <<https://mensnetwork.ie/mens-health/>> and <<https://engagetraining.ie>> accessed March 21st, 2022.

³ 'National Men's Health Policy 2008-2013' (Department of Health and Children, 2008) <<https://www.mhfi.org/menshealthpolicy.pdf>> accessed March 21st, 2022.

⁴ 'National Men's Health Policy 2008-2013' (Department of Health and Children, 2008) at page 20.

⁵ National Men's Health Policy 2008-2013' (Department of Health and Children, 2008) at page 68.

⁶ National Men's Health Policy 2008-2013' (Department of Health and Children, 2008) at page 4.

⁷ National Men's Health Policy 2008-2013' (Department of Health and Children, 2008) at page 4.

⁸ National Men's Health Policy 2008-2013' (Department of Health and Children, 2008) at page 34.

⁹ < 'Medical card means test: aged under 70'

https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/health/medical_cards_and_gp_visit_cards/medical_card_means_test_under_70s.html> accessed March 21st, 2022.

groceries, petrol/diesel, home heating and electricity. Thus, in line with the experience underpinning the National Men's Health Policy, a GP visit when the man falls ill could be seen by him as a luxury due to the cost in relation to his income. Given that the National Policy recognises cost as a barrier to men engaging with health services, it becomes vital that minimum wages are adequate to in relation to the cost of living. From an economic perspective, the National Men's Health Policy also recognises that healthy workers are crucial for a healthy economy.¹⁰

International Evidence of Income as a Social Determinant of Men's Health

International scholarship highlights that income and poverty are directly related phenomenon and are social determinants of men's health.¹¹

The European Union/OECD Report *Health at a Glance: Europe 2020* notes that socio-economic status, irrespective of whether it is measured by education level, income or occupational group, produces large inequalities in life expectancy.¹² In the context of health and wellbeing, the WHO in its 2003 publication entitled '*Social Determinants of Health, The Solid Facts*' detail how a public duty exists to eliminate absolute poverty and inequality and that *minimum income guarantees and minimum wage legislation*' is an essential measure.¹³ Among factors influencing men's health and wellbeing, the World Health Organisation Regional Office for Europe have noted that in countries with higher income equality, boys have lower mortality rates and better health. Links also exist between men with lower levels of education being in low paid work and having higher mortality rates. Income is also a factor which affects post-retirement health and wellbeing of men.¹⁴

Minimum Wages and Inflation – ILO Convention No.131 and Recommendation No.135

ILO Convention No.131 outlines the two factors to take into account when setting minimum wage levels:

*(a) the needs of workers and their families, taking into account the general level of wages in the country, **the cost of living**, social security benefits, and the relative living standards of other social groups;*

(b) economic factors, including the requirements of economic development, levels of productivity and the desirability of attaining and maintaining a high level of employment.¹⁵

¹⁰ National Men's Health Policy 2008-2013' (Department of Health and Children, 2008) at page 87.

¹¹ Demetrius J. Porche, 'Poverty and Men's Health' (American Journal of Men's Health, 2007) Vol.1, No.4 at page 241.

¹² 'Health at a Glance: Europe 2020: State of Health in the EU Cycle', (OECD Publishing, 2020) at page 114 <<https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/a920746c-en.pdf?expires=1647617737&id=id&acname=guest&checksum=ECADEF03396AF000027183886A299FC7>> accessed March 18th, 2022.

¹³ Richard Wilkinson and Michael Marmot, '*Social Determinants of Health, The Solid Facts*' (WHO, 2003) at page 17 <https://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/98438/e81384.pdf> accessed March 18th, 2022.

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ Article 3 of the Minimum Wage Fixing Convention No. 131 (1970) <https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C131> accessed March 21st, 2022.

These factors are further elaborated in ILO Recommendation No.135, which also notes that *“Minimum wage rates should be adjusted from time to time to take account of changes in the cost of living and other economic conditions”*.¹⁶

In this context, it is critical to note that Ireland is currently experiencing record levels of inflation. Inflation is at its highest level in 21 years,¹⁷ with the European Commission expecting inflation in Ireland to rise by 4.6% this year.¹⁸ According to Daft’s report for Quarter 4 of 2021, the average rent in Ireland was €1,524 per month.¹⁹ The average electricity cost in Ireland per month as of March 2022 is €106 per month by direct debit.²⁰ With this in mind, it is vital that the Low Pay Commission ensure that the rate of the minimum wage keeps pace with the rising cost of living in Irish society.

Conclusion

A decent minimum wage is a human rights issue for the health and wellbeing of the population. In the context of the National Men’s Health Policy, Ireland applies a social determinants approach in relation to men’s health and wellbeing. This means that social and economic factors, including poverty, are factors which affect men’s health and wellbeing. Healthy workers are crucial for a healthy economy and in the absence of decent minimum wages which keep pace with the cost of living, there are negative impacts on men’s health and wellbeing in Irish society.

International scholarship and reports from the EU and OECD indicate the need for a social determinants approach in relation to men’s health and wellbeing. Measures which seek to eradicate poverty and promote prosperity, including the adoption of adequate minimum wage levels are essential for men’s health and wellbeing.

To conclude, the adoption of that rate of minimum wage requires expert economic analysis and although this submission does not provide a rate, it recommends adoption of principles in ILO Convention No.131 and Recommendation No.134 in establishing what that rate of minimum wage should be in Ireland for 2023.

¹⁶ Paragraph 11 of the Minimum Wage Fixing Recommendation No.135 (1970) <https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:12100::NO:12100:P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:312473#:~:text=Minimum%20wage%20fixing%20should%20constitute,2.> accessed March 21st, 2022.

¹⁷ Dominic McGrath, ‘Inflation in Ireland hits highest level in 21 years’ (Irish Mirror, 2022) <<https://www.irishmirror.ie/news/irish-news/inflation-ireland-hits-highest-level-26436231>> accessed March 21st, 2022

¹⁸ Charlie Taylor and Joe Brennan, ‘European Commission now expects Irish inflation to rise by 4.6% this year’ (Irish Times, 2022) <<https://www.irishtimes.com/business/economy/european-commission-now-expects-irish-inflation-to-rise-by-4-6-this-year-1.4798763#:~:text=The%20Irish%20economy%20is%20expected,according%20to%20the%20European%20Commission.>> accessed March 21st, 2022.

¹⁹ ‘The Daft.ie Rental Price Report’ at page 7 <https://www1.daft.ie/report/2021-Q4-rental-daftreport.pdf?d_rd=1> accessed March 19th, 2022.

²⁰ ‘How Much is the Average Electricity Bill in Ireland?’ (Money Guide Ireland, 2022) <<https://www.moneyguideireland.com/much-average-electricity-bill.html>> accessed March 19th, 2022.