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Campaign's plea over social welfare cuts

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Leading NGOs and trade unions have teamed up to lobby against potential cuts to social welfare payments and the minimum wage, it emerged today.

The Poor Can't Pay Campaign claimed the most vulnerable in society did not cause the recession and should not be forced to bear the brunt of cutbacks.

Age Action, Siptu, St Vincent de Paul, Barnardos, Cori Justice and Focus Ireland are among the groups taking part.

John Mark McCafferty, SVP, said society must do all its power to protect the less well off.

"We hear all the time from many commentators who say it is inevitable that basic social welfare payments and the minimum wage must be cut," he said.

"This campaign aims to highlight that most people in Ireland do not accept this view and they actually believe that we must do all we can to protect the most vulnerable people in our society."

Mr McCafferty said cuts to welfare will mean people will go without food and essential healthcare, while children and pensioners will be the worst hit.

"We all need to ask ourselves as a nation: Are these the people who should be forced to pay the cost of the economic crisis?"

Finance Minister Brian Lenihan indicated a cut to the minimum wage would be considered if it proved a hindrance to attracting jobs.

However, Mr McCafferty said those on the minimum €8.65 per hour pay cannot afford to take a cut.

He also called for the Government to reverse the budget decision to end the Christmas welfare payment.

"It's important to stress that the Christmas welfare payment is not a "bonus".

"It is a key part of the income of the poorest households.

"If the Government does not make this payment it represents a real cut in income to the families and single people who can least afford it, adding to their hardships," Mr McCafferty said.

The campaign was launched as a joint initiative by Age Action, Barnardos, CORI Justice, EAPN, Focus Ireland, INOU, Mandate, National Women's Council of Ireland, SIPTU and SVP.

Organisers are now calling on other NGO's and trade unions to sign up and support the campaign by logging on to www.thepoorcantpay.ie



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