**An Roinn Gnóthaí Fostaíochta
agus Coimirce Sóisialaí**
Department of Employment Affairs
and Social Protection

Report of
Social Inclusion Forum
2019

'Collaborative working at local and national level'.

22 May 2019

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Acknowledgements

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Sincere thanks are owed to all the organisations and people who took part in the Forum and offered many important insights and proposals. The DEASP is mindful also of the many people who belong to these communities whose experiences help their organisations to contribute to the work of the forum.

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Disclaimer

The views contained in this report reflect those of the speakers and the participants at the Social Inclusion Forum and do not necessarily represent the views of the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP), the Government or its various departments.

Contents

1. Introduction

The National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) Social Inclusion Forum was established by Government in 2002, and is one of the key ways in which Government monitors progress towards the achievement of the national targets for the elimination of poverty and social exclusion. These targets are set down in the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007 - 2016 (NAPinclusion) and the Updated National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2015-2017 with progress documented in the annual Social Inclusion Monitor.[1]
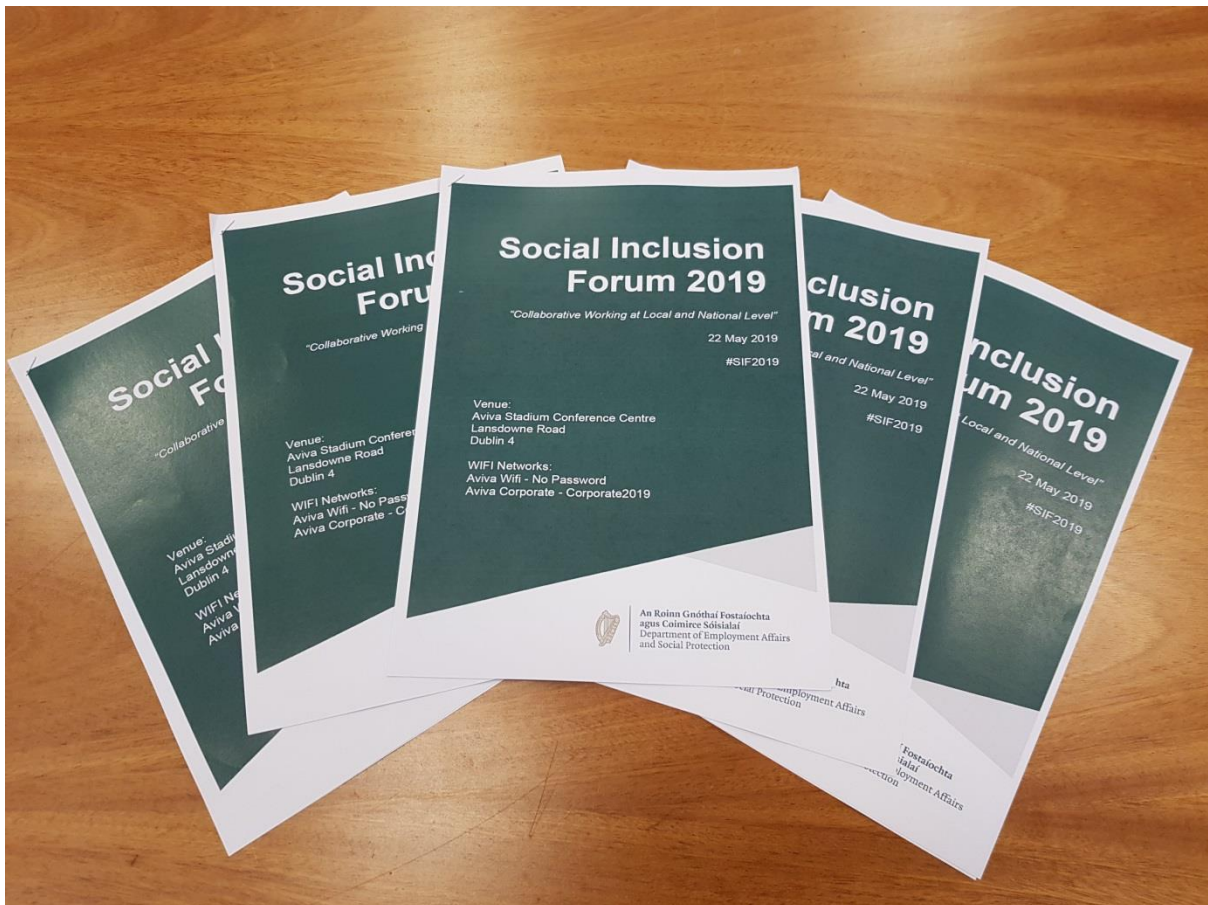
The Social Inclusion Forum is a national event, at which people affected by poverty and social exclusion, as well as the community organisations representing them, come together with officials from relevant government departments and the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

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[1] The Social Inclusion Monitor reports officially on progress towards the National Social Target for Poverty Reduction, including Ireland's contribution to the Europe 2020 poverty target and the sub-target on child poverty. This annual Monitor uses the latest statistical data available from the CSO Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) and from Eurostat to analyse trends in official poverty measures and other supporting indicators.
See https://www.gov.ie/SocialInclusionMonitor2017

It is of particular importance in providing an opportunity for engagement between officials from government departments, community and voluntary organisations and people experiencing poverty. The goals of this process are to enable participants to:

- put forward their views and experiences on key policies and implementations issues relating to poverty and social exclusion;
- identify barriers and constraints to progress and recommendations on how best these can best be tackled; and
- provide suggestions and proposals for new developments and more effective policies in the future.

These discussions help Government learn the extent to which targets for reducing poverty and social exclusion are being met. They also play a role in helping Government assess how much progress it is making towards helping the EU meet its targets for reducing poverty throughout the EU, principally the aim to lift a minimum of 20 million people throughout the EU out of poverty or social exclusion by 2020. To this end, Ireland has set its own National Social Target for Poverty Reduction (NSTPR), as have other Member States.[2]

The day-long Forum is organised by the Social Inclusion Division of the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP), with assistance from the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) Ireland and Community Work Ireland (CWI).

EAPN Ireland is a network of groups and individuals working against poverty; it is the Irish link to the European Anti-Poverty Network, which brings together civil society organisations from across the European Union to put the fight against poverty at the top of the EU, national and local agenda.

CWI (formerly the Community Workers' Co-operative) was established in 1981, and is a national membership organisation that seeks to promote quality community work as a means of addressing poverty, social exclusion and inequality, and contributing to the creation of a more just, sustainable and equal society.

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[2] For more information on the National Social Target for Poverty Reduction (NSTPR) at
https://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Review-of-the-National-Poverty-Target.aspx

1.1 Background to Social Inclusion Forum 2019

The 2019 Social Inclusion Forum took place on 22 May, in the Aviva Stadium conference centre, Dublin. The theme was 'collaborative working at local and national level'. This theme reflects the importance attributed to the inter-departmental approach to tackling poverty and social exclusion, and acknowledges that in order for such an approach to be successful, it needs to be implemented at all levels of policy development and service delivery. The Forum also aimed to capture and highlight initiatives and approaches that are working well, as well as those factors that need to change.

The National Plan for Social Inclusion 2007–2017 (originally 2007–2016) was finished by the time of the 2019 Forum, with the DEASP in the process of finalising a new national action plan for social inclusion. This proved to be an important context for the Forum, as it meant that the Forum represented a final and important opportunity for the community and voluntary sector to be consulted on the new plan. Many participants flagged issues of concern and responded to key features of the plan, as outlined in a presentation by Dermot Coates, Chief Economist of the department. The new action plan also arose in several of the workshop discussions.

Approximately 200 people from government departments, communities and various organisations from around the country attended the 2019 Forum. Six workshops were held, during which participants discussed issues pertinent to the theme of collaborative working: social inclusion at community level; getting more from the data; social inclusion and people with disabilities; housing; the role of employers in social inclusion; and Traveller health and wellbeing.

1.2 Structure of Social Inclusion Forum 2019

The Social Inclusion Forum 2019 comprised two main stages. During the morning session, presentations were made to all participants, including one providing feedback on the regional workshops with people experiencing poverty and the groups working with them, and another on key points of the new forthcoming national action plan on social inclusion. The afternoon was dominated by the six workshops, after which the rapporteur provided a summary of the key themes to emerge within

each workshop.

1.3 Structure of this report

This report provides a written account of the proceedings of the 2019 Forum.

Chapter 2 summarises the key policy themes that arose during the course of the day.

Chapter 3 reports on the general forum presentations – the opening remarks made by Jacqui McCrum, Deputy Secretary of the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, the summary of outcomes from the regional workshops by Paul Ginnell of EAPN Ireland and Ann Irwin of CWI, and an overview of the new action plan by Dermot Coates of the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. Chapter 3 also includes an account of the questions and answers sessions.

Chapter 4 sets out the proceedings of the six workshops, including both the presentations made within each workshop and a summary of the discussions that followed. [3]

1.4 Dissemination of this report

The Forum proceedings will be placed in the Oireachtas library for the information of members of both Houses of the Oireachtas. Copies will also be circulated to senior officials in government departments, relevant agencies as well as to those who attended the Forum by publishing it online.

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[3] Summary report and all available presentations can be accessed at the following link - www.welfare.ie/en/pdf/Report-of-the-Social-Inclusion-Forum-2019-Summary-Report.pdf

2.   Key points for policymakers

This section presents the key points of relevance to policy development that emerged during the 2019 Forum. These were identified through a thematic analysis of the points raised during the questions and answers session, the presentation on the regional workshops, as well as the discussions during the thematic workshops.

2.1 The new national action plan on social inclusion

Participants of the Forum asked a number of **questions** of the new strategy, concerning when it will be published, what its focuses will be, and how it proposes to address the needs of minority groups who are not captured in the main data sources.

Regarding the issue of **funding**, it was asked whether the new plan will be funded across several government departments, in order to facilitate an interdepartmental approach to social inclusion.

Questions also concerned how the new plan proposes to address ongoing barriers to employment faced by **marginalised groups** such as Travellers and people with disabilities.

Participants highlighted that the new plan needs to address issues around quality of employment/precarious work and **in-work poverty**.

It was noted that regarding people with **mental health** issues, an effective inter-departmental approach is needed to provide access to health services for those who need it, and that this is something the new strategy needs to address.

The new strategy needs to have targets for **people with disabilities**.

The importance of an in-built mechanism for **accountability** in the new action plan was highlighted.

It was pointed out that some people had the view that the **consultation process** for the new plan with the community and voluntary sector could have been more extensive. While it may be too late for more in-depth consultation to take place on the new national plan, it was pointed out that the plan itself needs to contain a clear commitment to robust consultation processes.

2.2 Gaps in the research literature

It was agreed that there is an absence of data and research findings regarding certain **'invisible' groups** and niche situations; one example of this is people with a disability who are self-employed or entrepreneurs.

Participants discussed the roles of **administrative and official data**, agreeing that both types of data have an important role and that it is important not to become reliant on one type of data at the expense of others.

The idea was shared that it is important to take account of other factors beyond the items on the current **deprivation list** when measuring poverty. This is in order to get the lived experience of people living in poverty. Among the factors which were highlighted as other factors were: childcare costs; housing costs; hidden legal costs; medical cards and the fear that taking employment may lead to them being removed; and socio-economic discrimination. It was also noted that the list needs to be updated, in order to better reflect contemporary life and provide a more accurate picture of the reality of living in rural areas and the lack of access to services in most areas outside of the large urban areas.

In relation to the above, people shared the view that more **qualitative data** is needed, in order to capture a full picture of the lives of people living in poverty. It was felt that many of the realities of social exclusion and subsequent improvements in people's lives following access to services cannot be captured by purely quantitative data. This form of data can support and inform existing administrative and survey data sources. In this regard, the role of qualitative data needs to be strengthened.

Regarding Travellers, the need for ethical **standardised ethnic identifiers** to be introduced was raised. These should be introduced across all government departments, to clearly identify Traveller data, leading to the availability of reliable statistical data on the Traveller community. These should be linked to any revised Survey of Income and Living Conditions (SILC) survey modifications.

There was a shared sense that poverty and social exclusion have become more **hidden** than ever.

2.3 Marginalised groups and employment

While unemployment figures are going in the right direction, it was noted that certain **marginalised groups** still face challenges. For example, there is a lack of employment opportunities following education schemes in disadvantaged areas.

Regarding **Travellers**, it was felt that discrimination among employers needs to be tackled.

The need to address the issue of **precarious work**, as well as in-work poverty, was raised.

Participants noted that some employers might feel they have addressed both inclusion and diversity by addressing a single, perhaps more visible example of diversity, and that among some, there may be an **unconscious bias**, so that some excluded groups are unlikely to benefit from such measures (for example, someone with a low socio-economic status).

It was noted that **people of African descent** can face particular challenges in trying to enter the Irish workforce; well-skilled people are not getting access to relevant employment. This can have a generational effect, whereby children observe and are discouraged by their parents' experiences.

People with disabilities also face challenges in terms of accessing employment. It was highlighted that people with mobility issues related to their disability can face physical barriers. The attitude of employers was also flagged as a key issue here. Employment levels and poverty rates are not improving for people with disabilities and in some instances are getting worse.

It was observed that there is a tendency among employers to think that the best way to address poverty is by giving someone a job. However, there are **costs involved in returning to the workforce** (like childcare, or risk of losing a medical card, for instance) which also need to be addressed.

Funding should be made available for investment into building the **skills and capacity** of local service providers in supporting people with disabilities.

2.4 Acknowledging the value of the community and voluntary sector

Participants expressed the view that Government needs to acknowledge the value of the work carried out by **NGOs** (including those working in community development).

It is important for the Government to carry out **continuous reviews** of what works and what does not work; in doing so, NGO input could be an important part of the process.

Many participants noted that **community development** needs to be re-energised at local level following the recession and austerity, a process that was seen as playing a key role in increasing social inclusion at local level. In particular, their autonomous development should be fostered, via capacity-building structures to increase the number of people who can participate in structures such as Public Participation Networks.

Many participants noted that **Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) funding** needs to be increased, as it is an essential element of providing a large number of services to often the most vulnerable people in our communities. Another aspect of resourcing that was discussed was about building or maintaining the infrastructure for social inclusion.

It was proposed that there should be greater governmental support for resources for **people with disabilities**, and less of a reliance on grassroots solutions to issues such as development or local transport. The Government should look at the possibility of increasing its funding of resources in such areas.

It was also noted that a greater effort should be made by Government to provide people with disabilities with the **opportunities to participate** in the decision-making process. This point was made particularly with reference to the development of policy documents such as the upcoming strategy document.

2.5 Housing and homelessness

It was strongly felt that the related issues of housing and homelessness need to be prioritised. In particular, the need for **affordable housing** was highlighted as an urgent issue.

In relation to this, it was proposed that housing and homelessness should be included among the **indicators of the new national action plan** for social inclusion.

The housing shortage was related to an increasing **cost of living**, an effect that can make life very unaffordable and drive people into poverty, whether or not they are in work.

The rising cost of **private rented accommodation** was raised, and the need to control rent rates, as was the importance of providing additional social housing. There was a broad sense that the current housing programme is not being adequately implemented.

It was noted that for many of those in receipt of the **Housing Assistance Payment**, the payment is not sufficient.

Travellers are particularly negatively impacted by the current housing crisis.

There was a proposal for the establishment of **a new housing forum**, comprising members from NGOs and government departments (Health; Housing, Planning and Local Government; and Employment Affairs and Social Protection). This could be a useful means of enabling collaboration.

It was agreed that there is a need to overcome the **stigma** that can be associated with **social housing**, as well as local objections.

2.6 Need for cross-departmental coordination

Recent initiatives involving inter-governmental coordination were acknowledged and welcomed, such as Healthy Ireland and work of the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD).

The need for even greater **cross-departmental co-ordination** was raised, particularly in relation to the allocation of social inclusion funding.

Participants shared the view that a **whole-of-government approach** is needed to track, respond and improve social inclusion, health and wellbeing, both for the majority population and for Travellers.

Concern was expressed over whether the focus on collaboration at national level at the Forum would lead to a more **collaborative approach on the ground**. For example, it was noted that programmes, streams of funding and organisations do not tend to align at local level. In some areas, Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) are seen as not enhancing or fostering cross-departmental collaboration at local level. There was a shared perception that LCDCs are failing to

get government departments and agencies to collaborate on locally shared targets in many areas.

The budget for the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) is the only social inclusion budget that enables relevant agencies and government departments to access far greater budgets, yet this is not happening; instead, it was felt that **competitive tendering** and target-setting for SICAP and other programmes have had a damaging effect.

2.7 Need for targeted approaches

While there is a need for universal and mainstream approaches, there is also a real need for **targeted approaches for Travellers**. It was proposed that the successful peer Traveller health worker model should be replicated to respond to other Traveller issues, such as accommodation, education and employment.

There is an urgent need for the **National Traveller Health Action Plan** to be agreed, resourced and implemented. It was suggested that a high-level official should be appointed within each government department to drive this.

The suggestion was made that a high level official responsible for **child poverty** could be established within each relevant government departments to drive targets and actions.

The disproportionate number of **people with disabilities** living in poverty was highlighted; this relates to the additional, often high, day-to-day costs that come with living with a disability. Participants identified the need for these specific issues to be addressed.

2.8 Older people

It was noted that an annual increase of €5 per week in **state pension** can be seen as insufficient, particularly for those reliant on the state pension; also, that older people should not have to wait until March to avail of Budgetary increases.

Concern was also raised regarding the **cost of heating**, and the need for particular services and supports that older people can access; for example, practical supports like seating, and car parking areas.

2.9 Carers

The need for more **respite support** for family carers was raised; the view was shared that existing supports for carers, in general, are inadequate, and that there is insufficient recognition of their role.

2.10 The new national childcare scheme

The issue was raised of **anomalies in the new National Childcare Scheme** that impact on those not in employment or training. It was noted that those who are not in employment or training will have their entitlement to childcare reduced to three hours per day, down from full-time, as well as a reduction in the rate of subsidy.

2.11 Brexit

The issue of Brexit emerged during a regional workshop held close to the Border. It was felt important to capture how Brexit is impacting more disadvantaged communities. In addition, people shared a '**fear of the unknown'** and a concern over 'returning to the past'.

People expressed concern over issues such as a **lack of investment** in a number of areas, and possible impacts on access to international and different EU funding programmes. Such concerns are all already having a negative impact on communities.

Many supports have been put in place, in terms of business and enterprise, along the Border area. However, there is a need for **supports for communities** themselves and community groups so that they can engage with and address the impacts that are already taking place in relation to the fear of a border, of what will happen in terms of Brexit.

3.   The proceedings: Speeches

3.1   Welcome and opening remarks

Jacqui McCrum, Deputy General Secretary in the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP), welcomed participants to the 2019 Annual Social Inclusion Forum, thanking people for taking the time to contribute, especially those who had travelled to represent the views of others. She said she would also like to thank the Social Inclusion Division in advance, along with their event partners, the European Anti-Poverty Network, Ireland EAPN, and Community Work Ireland (CWI), who had put together what she hoped participants would find to be an interesting and challenging programme.

Ms McCrum noted that the Social Inclusion Forum was established as a forum for engagement between officials from government departments, community and voluntary organisations and people experiencing poverty. The theme of the 2019 Forum was collaborative working at local and national level. Its aim in that regard was to show what work was being done, what was working and what needs to change. The theme also involved a focus on the levels of engagement between local and national organisations and government departments.

Ms McCrum noted that Minister Regina Doherty would be attending the Forum, to talk about the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection's approach to framing the new social inclusion strategy. Ms McCrum said that the Minister would touch on the ambitions and goals of the new strategy and would outline the thematic and governance aspects that will underpin the department's future work. There would also be feedback from regional workshops with people experiencing poverty and the groups working with them and a presentation on some of the key trends and the metrics around social inclusion, as well as how the policies are being developed across Government to promote social inclusion.

She noted that there would be a series of six workshops for the afternoon session. There would be a wide range of topics covered with workshops on social inclusion at a community level; getting more from the data; social inclusion and people with disabilities; housing and social inclusion; the role of employers in social inclusion;

and finally, social inclusion and Traveller health and wellbeing.

Ms McCrum said she hoped the day's proceedings would provide ample opportunity for a meaningful discussion on some of the key social inclusion issues and policies that directly affect the lives of people.

Ms McCrum said she was delighted to be chairing this event, noting that it was the first Social Inclusion Forum that she had attended, having only joined the department in December 2018, and that she was very much looking forward to meeting participants during the day and to hearing the discussions.

3.2   Address by Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection

The Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Regina Doherty, TD, started by welcoming participants and noting that the most important role the department had at the Forum was to listen to what participants had to say and that on this day the department would listen more than talk. She noted it is the job of the department, with the responsibilities that come with it and the variety of the stakeholders it had that they made sure they listened; by that she meant that both she and department officials wished to both hear what participants had to say and to heed what they had to say. She highlighted the importance of the distinction between listening and hearing as hearing implies a more passive role, whereas listening implies both hearing and heeding. When the department representatives at the Forum hear what participants have to say and its importance, their responsibility is to then make sure that it feeds into the policymaking process. She hoped that participants feel that department representatives do listen and that this then feeds into policy. This is hugely important for her as the current Minister, along with the officials and representatives of all the relevant government departments, and she noted that the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection is not the only department that has the ability of making changes that can have a direct impact on people's lives.

The Minister in her welcome to the participants to the Social Inclusion Forum thanked them sincerely not just for their attendance but also for all of the work and the input that they put into the consultation process over the past 12 months. She noted that some of the participants present had already taken part in the regional workshops that were carried out by the EAPN and CWI, which she described as time well spent because while she cannot deliver everything participants ask for each year, she hopes that they will see many issues they raised in the 2018 Social Inclusion Forum did feed into the deliberations. She said she hoped participants noted their positive input, at last year's Forum, in relation to the last Budget. She also noted that the outcomes of last year's Forum were particularly important in relation to the department's development of its new roadmap for social inclusion (the new strategy).

The first social inclusion strategy, the National Anti-Poverty Strategy as it was called at the time, was published in 1997. It was developed at a time when we had a plethora of economic and industrial development strategies, all of which were necessary and individual to the specific team or theme that they had, but all of which missed the point just a little. All of the economic and the industrial development in the world means nothing if the results or the fruits of those developments do not lead to real improvements in the outcomes for the people that we all serve, in particular those who are excluded from economic participation, people with disabilities, people who are rearing their children on their own, people from marginalised communities, carers. All of the people, that Forum participants represent, have to feel real tangible impacts from any economic improvements that a community, a society or an economy creates. If this does not happen, it is a real failing. The 1997 National Anti-Poverty Strategy set out to change that, aiming to calibrate how government policy is evaluated and to reduce poverty rates for the citizens who are most impacted by them, a key objective for every single department across Government. It sought to put the issue of poverty front and central, when new policies were being formulated and decided upon; the main objective arising from that 1997 strategy was to think consistently about the most marginalised people when we think about strategies and policies reaching those people.

The impact of those policies can be seen in the fact that, ever since then, successive governments have developed a series of detailed central plans around food poverty, fuel poverty, disability strategies, all with an eye on the national inclusion profile that we have. The *National Disability Inclusion Strategy, 2017–2021* was probably the best known of all of those (more recent) strategies to emerge from this, though it was not the only one; we also have the *National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy, 2017–2021*, *Better Options, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework For Children and Young People 2014–2020*, *The Migrant Integration Strategy 2017-2020* and the *National Carers' Strategy: Recognised, Supported, Empowered*, as some of the recent examples.

We also now have ministerial posts that reflect responsibilities for children, for equality, for community and rural development. Never at any other stage have we had such direct responsibility and accountability for the issues and the concerns that

are brought to us on a weekly and monthly basis.

The Minister said she hoped that all of this indicates the impact of the first social inclusion plan back in 1997, in terms of reshaping government policies to genuinely impact on the areas that Forum participants represent.

With all of these various dedicated plans, the Minister said that participants might wonder why there is a need for a national strategy on social inclusion, after all, if social inclusion is at the heart of all of those existing strategies, maybe there is no a need for an overarching one. But she said that she believes there is a real need for a social inclusion roadmap. It is the job of the department and the NGO sector to set the agenda, which is clearly being heard by each and every one of the other government departments. The previous week, for example, Dr Katherine Zappone, Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, wrote to the Taoiseach looking for a special cabinet meeting to talk solely about child poverty.

So as much as the work that is carried out by other government departments is valued, Minister Doherty noted that there has to be a leader – an overarching department that will make it a statement of purpose, that will paint the big picture, lead from the front in relation to the new national inclusion strategy, to make sure that targets are met. This will mean that those who are responsible know that they are responsible to those who put their names to the targets, deadlines and commitments in the roadmap. The Minister said we need to establish a statement of ambition to set an absolutely clear and unambiguous roadmap with goals, with specific timelines and, most importantly, with specific responsibilities.

The *2012 Action Plan for Jobs*, launched by Richard Bruton, was 129 pages long and contained numerous goals. But it worked, and the reason it worked was because the people who were responsible for delivering those actions had to sit around a table, to either defend why they had not been delivered or to take the praise when they had been. The Minister noted that it will help all of the government departments who are going to be under the remit of our new social inclusion strategy to understand exactly what they need to do to deliver for the people being served, when they need to do it by and what they need to do to make sure that they meet

their time commitments.

Various government departments are now beginning to 'sound the right tunes' in terms of social inclusion. However, every orchestra needs a conductor, in this case the Social Inclusion Division of the Department of Employment and Social Protection. The new Roadmap for Social Inclusion is due to be brought to Government, after which it will be launched. It will have a very clear statement of ambition, which we will achieve – the ambition of reducing consistent poverty. It will also go beyond that, by making a statement that Ireland will be the most socially inclusive Member State of the European Union. It is going to set out real commitments and real timelines, so that the department can be held to account regarding key dates and outcomes. These ambitions and commitments reflect the views and inputs raised during the recent consultation processes (such as the 2017 and 2018 fora).

The Minister noted that a total of 6,500 people work for the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, on the frontline in the main, assisting and

helping all recipients from across all of the department's schemes. Like them, it is the Forum participants who hear the real people's real, emotional stories, the situations in which they live. It is for that reason, she said, that the feedback from Forum participants' is so important to the department, in helping those concerned as they work towards shaping policies.

The feedback through all channels has identified a broad range of themes of concern, including: the assurance of rates of social welfare payments; the provision of good quality, affordable services; and the importance of supports regarding education and entering the labour market.

The statistics on poverty show things are going in the right direction, particularly in relation to long-term unemployment, which is now down to 1.7%.[4] But the people behind that 1.7% still face real barriers to achieving employment. It is the job of the department to make sure that those barriers are addressed. Currently, they are considering approaches for the next generation, taking into account that some of the social issues that people are dealing with today did not exist ten, twenty or thirty years ago.

The Minister said she felt confident that the new Roadmap for Social Inclusion has and will include all of the input made by Forum participants, including those who made personalised recommendations. She encouraged all those present to share their views; that the Forum represented a final opportunity to make an input into the new strategy. The department's role that day, she said, was to listen more than to talk, noting that the word 'listen' is also an anagram for the word 'silent'.

The Minister concluded by thanking participants once more for attending the Forum and noting that she was looking forward to hearing and reflecting on their views.

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[4] figure as provided by CSO for Q2 2019
https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/lfs/labourforcesurveylfsquarter22019/

3.3   Feedback from regional workshops

Ann Irwin of Community Work Ireland (CWI) and Paul Ginnell of the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) Ireland gave a joint presentation on feedback from a series of regional workshops and focus groups with people experiencing poverty and the people working with them, which were held throughout the country (in Dublin, Dundalk, Castlerea, Tralee and Waterford). Throughout the presentation, participants of the regional workshops present at the Forum made individual contributions.[5]

Ann Irwin began the presentation, expressing her gratitude for the opportunity to speak. CWI and the EAPN organise and facilitate the participation of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion in the Social Inclusion Forum, which she sees as a very important element of the Forum. This year, Ann noted that they conducted one focus group and five workshops across the country, with the aim of achieving a balance between rural and urban experiences, as well as a range of issues, including Brexit, which she noted is almost absent in the dialogue around community work, community development, poverty and social exclusion in Ireland.

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[5] These are in textboxes. Quotes taken from the regional workshops are included within the main text.

Poverty levels

'Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is manmade and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings'. This quote of Nelson Mandela sets out an important statement – that poverty is not acceptable and that poverty should be eradicated. In that light, Ann welcomed the ambition that Ireland will be the most socially inclusive state in the EU by 2025, as well as the retention of the 2% target regarding consistent poverty, for which she noted the sector has fought hard, and the fact that the new strategy will include goals, timelines and responsibilities.

She also welcomed the reduction in poverty levels over the last number of years, noting that there has been quite a significant reduction in consistent poverty between the last two SILC periods, or the last two for which there is a report. However, during the regional workshops participants all around the country said they still feel that poverty levels are unacceptably high. They also feel that policy responses share an emphasis on addressing the symptoms, rather than the real structural causes of poverty. Such changes would be difficult to achieve, involving income redistribution, possible changes in tax rates and real changes in terms of investment and in services. But participants of the workshops felt that such changes are necessary. People felt that the cost of living, especially in terms of housing, is unacceptably high.

They also wished to highlight a consistency of inequality. Year after year, the SILC data show that it is the same groups and communities of people that are suffering from poverty and continue to suffer the highest levels of poverty and social exclusion. Participants said that many groups and communities, including Travellers and other minorities do not feature in the key data sources (such as SILC). This makes it very difficult to understand the issues and barriers faced by these groups. People were very clear that poverty and social exclusion are now more hidden than ever, that they are not concentrated in specific areas, but rather are dispersed throughout communities, including those that might be regarded as affluent areas. One reason for this is that some people on rent allowance can find themselves renting accommodation in a more affluent area.

The new strategy

Regarding the new strategy, it was pointed out that there is a view that the consultation process with the community and voluntary sector could have been more extensive. For example, a draft copy of the strategy was never made available for comment. What is essential is commitment to consultation and an understanding that consultation makes for better policy making. It is too late for consultation on the new national strategy, so what is needed is a clear commitment to robust processes built into the implementation of the strategy.

> *"How many years are we waiting for the new national action plan? Is it really going to be presented without any real consultation?"*

Measuring poverty

In relation to measuring poverty, people felt that the 11 deprivation measures (with those identifying two or more identified as living in deprivation), need to be updated. These measures need to better reflect contemporary life; they also need to reflect more accurately the reality of living in rural areas and the lack of access to services in most areas outside of the large urban areas.

> *"People are really struggling but it is not always visible. The Resource Allocation Model and the targets that are set preclude us from working with people that really need it. There are a large number of refugees living in [name of area] but the Index indicates this is an affluent area – work we do there is not counted by the system."*

Implementation and accountability

Ann noted that Ireland has a good record in relation to monitoring implementation of strategies, and accountability. Nonetheless, workshop participants still felt that there is a gap in terms of the implementation of policies and strategies. For example, people felt that the monitoring mechanisms for progress on poverty and social exclusion need to be reviewed and given additional status. In that regard, CWI has already acknowledged and welcomed that recently there has been a much more coherent effort to re-establish a social inclusion responsibility within each relevant government department. In the absence of a strategy over the last number of years,

that accountability has slipped; the forthcoming publication of the new strategy will mean that those concerned can track progress on specific targets. On this point, both CWI and EAPN and the participants feel that the Social Inclusion Forum needs to be re-established as a robust mechanism for accountability on progress.

> *"How do we get the words on the pages of the national report into action? Do these forums work? Does anything change?"*

Collaborative working at local and national levels

In terms of collaboration and working at national levels, both workshop participants and organisers welcomed the recent concerted efforts to enable working across government departments. Good examples of this include Healthy Ireland and work that has been rolled out by the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD). Despite this improvement at national level, however, participants felt that existing mechanisms at local level, such as the Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs), are not reaching their full potential; that they are failing to get government departments and agencies to collaborate on locally shared targets in many areas. The budget for the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) is the only social inclusion budget that enables relevant agencies and government departments to access far greater budgets, yet this is not happening. Instead, people felt that competitive tendering and target-setting for SICAP and other programmes have been damaging.

'Community organisations now find themselves competing with each other for resources and they are getting quite territorial. We are all too familiar with the signing sheets and the number counting exercises for programme funding. We need to go back to basics, to using the bottom-up approach, to build capacity in our communities instead of working just for the programme.'

Emma, regional workshop participant

Community development

Across all workshops and focus groups, the issue of community development was very much up-front and centre. People felt that community development plays a critical role in addressing poverty and social exclusion, yet it has been decimated

over the past number of years by policy decisions and funding cuts.

Besides the independent Traveller organisations, some women's organisations and a few other notable exceptions, community development has just become one arm of the SICAP programme. People felt that in order for it to be effective, it needs to be autonomous and it needs a programme of its own.

> *"Community development has been decimated – we really need autonomous infrastructure and programmes if we are serious about collaboration and making a real impact on poverty and social exclusion."*

Getting more from the data

In terms of data and information, people welcomed the shift away from a focus on income poverty alone to an approach that also includes measures of wellbeing. However, they felt that data and information sources currently being used are problematic, for a number of reasons. Firstly, the main sources of data, such as the EU-SILC, fail to capture minorities, including Travellers, which leads to the experiences many people living in poverty not being reflected in study findings. Secondly, people felt that there was an over-reliance on quantitative data, which can fail to capture the experiences and real lives of people living with poverty and in social exclusion. In order to address this, people felt that there is a need for a greater focus on qualitative data. Thirdly, the over-reliance on income as a measure of poverty fails to reflect more comprehensive notions of wellbeing. Finally, people raised the fact that there is a lot of data in secondary, administrative sources. For example, all the Local Development Companies and community development organisations have access to a lot of data and information, yet these data sources are not being used.

Issues for people with disabilities

Paul Ginnell of the EAPN continued the presentation of findings from the regional workshops and focus groups. He began by acknowledging that there have been some positive developments recently in relation to social inclusion for people with disabilities.

Patrick spoke on this issue.

> *'In 2017, the Irish government recognised Irish sign language as the third official language of Ireland, so hopefully from now on, we will be able to see the government implement this Sign Language Act from 2017.'*
>
> Patrick, workshop participant

However, the disproportionate number of people with disabilities living in poverty was highlighted, which relates to the additional day-to-day costs of living with a disability, a point raised by workshop participants.

Geraldine spoke on this issue.

'There is an additional cost for people with disabilities, specifically when you think of their own household and basic health and safety, things that they need; for example, fire alarms, baby alarms, possibly burglar alarms. These are often more expensive as they need to be adapted for people with disabilities, who are expected to afford this on top of all the other costs that they need for technology in their home. So I feel that that is a very important issue to raise – the additional cost of disability.'

Geraldine, workshop participant

People with disabilities also face challenges in terms of accessing employment. It was highlighted that people with mobility issues related to their disability can face physical barriers, and that there needs to be a clampdown on negative behaviour in public areas, such as blocking footpaths, which can inhibit people with disabilities. Barriers relating to entrepreneurship and the need for support in this area also arose.

Eddie spoke on this issue.

'I am a disabled business owner. Unfortunately, there is no support available to me. Wage assistance can be availed by an employer from employing a disabled person, yet there is no support for the self-employed business owner. Entrepreneurship support makes a lot of sense for people with disabilities, as they can tailor their hours to suit their disability and, more importantly, it builds self-worth and social acceptance. Entrepreneurship is not for everyone but is an option. However the lack of support has led to certain disabled people not reaching their full potential.'

Eddie, regional workshop participant

Housing and homelessness

Another issue that arose from the workshops was that of housing and homelessness, which was identified as one of the key issues facing people in Ireland today. The housing shortage can drive the cost of living upwards, thereby making life very unaffordable and driving people into poverty, whether they are in work or not in work.

The rising cost of private rented accommodation was raised; on this point, the need to control rent rates was flagged. The importance of providing social housing was seen as another key challenge here. There was a broad sense that the current housing programme is not being adequately implemented.

Also on the theme of housing, it was noted that for many of those in receipt of the Housing Assistance Payment, the payment is not sufficient. This leads to people having to contribute to this cost from their already inadequate income, thus driving people deeper into poverty.

Regarding homelessness, it was noted that women living in refuges are not counted in homeless statistics.

The issue of Traveller accommodation was raised, specifically the issue of homelessness among Travellers, which was noted to be a growing concern, while at a time that many local authority budgets for Traveller accommodation are being returned unspent.

Employment and social inclusion

Another area that was discussed was the issue of the role of employers in relation to social inclusion. It was noted earlier in relation to people with disabilities that the attitude of employers is a key issue. This is also important for other people who are trying to access employment. Travellers, people from minorities and other groups face barriers from employers and discrimination from employers in accessing employment; this issue needs to be tackled head-on.

Those who are in employment but on a low income face many challenges in relation to the costs of living. Morufat spoke on this issue.

> *'Talking about poverty, there is a belief that it is the people on the street, begging for food, who are poor. My point is that for working parents, there is a black spot that we ignore. That people who are working, bringing food to the table, are actually poor. Parents on a low income try to balance their time with the kids [but] sometimes they lose that. They do not have time for their children. There is a gap there that we*

ignore, because parents want to work full-time and children are really missing out. Those children are poor. … School is free but sport activities are not free. I'll give an example. Three kids are talented, maybe one in camogie, one in basketball, one in football and the parents are on a low income. "How do we balance this because the bills have to be paid?" One way or the other, some children are ignored because Mother cannot balance them both. So in that home there is poverty, if you all agree with me, there is a poverty that we ignore. How do we address this? So that parents who are working feel that … their kids are not missing out.'

Morufat, workshop participant

Travellers

Another topic that was raised during the regional workshops was that of Travellers and Travellers' health and wellbeing. This issue was also raised during workshops and at the Forum in previous years. But although we are aware of these issues, many remain unaddressed. Mary Brigid spoke on this issue.

'In our workshop, a lot of issues came up around the Travelling community [including] huge discrimination that Travellers are facing in Ireland around employment and huge accommodation problems. At the moment, Travellers count for 15% of the homeless crisis here in Ireland and there has always been a huge problem with Traveller accommodation. There has been some under-spends with some of the local authorities in relation to Traveller accommodation. No Traveller-specific accommodation has been built. Overcrowding is a huge problem in some of the sites that we work with, in the Finglas and the Blanchardstown area, and in our area at the moment, we have 50 houses but over 65 families, because young couples are getting married, can't afford private or rented accommodation and have a very low income. Because of the family support or the family networks and the importance of the extended family, they would want to stay with their extended family. … The cost of rent is huge for some younger [Traveller] people, as it is for the general population. Just a couple of weeks ago, the local authority sent a letter out saying that right across the board, everybody's rent was going up by €2. When I questioned it, they said it went up €2 for everybody, not just Travellers. There was a €5 increase in social welfare a couple of weeks ago. Another letter comes out

saying, "Your rent has gone up because you have gotten an increase of social welfare". So what you get in one hand, you have to give back in another hand.

When you apply for your fuel allowance, you are told that only one person within a household can be entitled to fuel allowance. But if there are two separate homes, two separate incomes, two separate families [within one housing site], this results in a huge cost to younger people because small caravans can be much colder than a house and it is more expensive to keep them heated.

On the basis of the All-Ireland Health Study in 2008, we had a lot of consultations around the country, with Travellers giving their time towards this, with a view to developing an action plan for Travellers. But there has been a holdup somewhere along the line. Sometimes, Travellers' health is not being given a priority across all the departments. We got a lot of support from the Minister for Health, Simon Harris last February, who said the action plan can go ahead and that everything would go ahead in it.

Around the employment, yesterday on the news it was reported that employment rate has gone up. I would like to say, "Well, where is the Traveller bit in it?" Because we know that 81% of Travellers are still unemployed in our community; there is huge discrimination that Travellers are facing.

The issue of medical cards has come up around the primary healthcare projects. For 25 primary healthcare projects, the women are on the minimum wage, yet some are losing their medical cards. In the future, we will probably lose some of our primary healthcare budget, which would be a huge pity, because some of the Travellers we interviewed were saying that they would get their information from their Traveller groups and Traveller organisations and not particularly from their primary healthcare projects.

Mary Brigid, workshop participant

Brexit

One of the workshops was held close to the border, because of the issue of Brexit and how it impacts more disadvantaged communities; it was important to try to capture that. As with a lot of people, participants shared a fear of the unknown, of what it might mean if there is a return of the border, and a concern over 'returning to

the past'. There was a sense that the possibility alone of a return to the border has already had a chilling effect. People expressed concern over issues such as a lack of investment in a number of areas, and possible impacts on access to international and different EU funding programmes. Such concerns are all already having a negative impact on communities.

Many supports have been put in place, in terms of business and enterprise, along the border area. However, there is a need for supports for communities themselves and community groups so that they can engage with and address the impacts that are already taking place in relation to the fear of a border, of what will happen in terms of Brexit.

Other issues

A number of other issues were raised during the workshop process.

- Rural isolation and cost-of-living related factors: those on low incomes can be prevented from accessing services because of the extra (travel) costs in doing so.
- Refugees and asylum seekers: Issues raised included problems accessing services, the time it takes to get refugee status, and in relation to applying for Irish nationality.
- Older people: Concern was raised regarding the cost of heating, and the need for particular services and supports that older people can access; for example, practical supports like seating, and car parking areas.
- Carers: Many people in Ireland are carers and it was felt that existing supports for them are inadequate; and that there is insufficient recognition of the importance of that role and the costs involved.

Conclusion

To conclude, and returning to where we began, it was felt that poverty levels are still unacceptably high. They are higher than they were before the economic crisis started and before the current targets were set. Some communities remain extremely marginalised and fear being left behind. That risk of being left behind has led to a lot of frustration in some communities; there is a perception that their issues are being ignored.

The new strategy outlined is therefore extremely important; it must address the structural causes of inequalities that those communities face. It is important to make sure that those communities have a voice and those they are heard in terms of the issues that they are raising and that they will experience. It is also important that they have a voice in terms of the decisions that are being made to address those issues. Otherwise, that frustration will grow. People need to know that they are being heard and that their issues are being addressed.

3.4   Key points of the new strategy

Dermot Coates, Principal Officer and Chief Economist at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, began by noting that, as we move towards the advent of a new strategy, it is worth taking time to look at the context of where we are now with regard to social inclusion and more general recent economic developments. Acknowledging that there is a current time lag in the data – the most recent SILC data is for 2017 – he reviewed some of the key recent trends in social inclusion data.

Recent trends in social inclusion in Ireland

Previous strategies, over the last 22 years, have set a number of ambitious targets with regard to the consistent poverty, child poverty, combined poverty and various other metrics. But against the backdrop of the financial crisis, it is clear that for a period a lot of those figures moved in the wrong direction following 2010, with consistent poverty climbing quite steeply.

However, from 2012–2013 onwards, as the economy began to move in the right direction, general (positive) macroeconomic developments have been reflected in poverty targets, so there certainly is causality between the two. It is important to bear this in mind when considering how far the economy has come since 2010.
We still may not be meeting the targets set regarding poverty, but we are now getting much closer to them. It is likely that measures introduced under the past two budgetary cycles will contribute to further improvements. Moreover, the labour market backdrop has continued to improve – employment is now at its highest level, at 2.316 million by Quarter 1 of 2019, according to labour force statistics published by the CSO. These statistics also show that the number of people in employment jumped by 81,000 in just the last four quarters which means the number of people in paid employment is at its highest figure ever since the series commenced.

Commenting that the unemployment rate has now moved back towards 5%, Dermot said it is hard to conceive of such a turnaround given that the figure was moving closer to 15% only a number of years ago. Again, this is because the economy has found itself to be quite dynamic. Unemployment is now towards what we would consider its natural rate.

Progress towards the national social target for poverty reduction

In the immediate aftermath of the financial crisis, we saw very severe pressures in terms of the Exchequer finances as tax revenues were reduced. That put pressure on government departmental budgets and initiatives. We saw unemployment begin to rise very rapidly.

And as time went on, we saw that the consistent poverty rate actually moved up towards 9.1% by 2013, rather than down towards the 2016 interim target of 4%.

From 2013 onwards, however, the figures for consistent poverty began to fall again. The most recent data (from 2016 to 2017) shows that it fell by more than 1%. While we may not reach the 2020 target of 2% for consistent poverty, we will certainly be much closer to it than one might have anticipated even five or six years ago.

Consistent poverty rates in Ireland, 2010 - 2017

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Rate	6.3%	6.9%	8.5%	9.1%	8.8%	8.7%	8.2%	6.7%			2.0%
Nos. ('000s)	287	317	376	413	383	394	390	321			
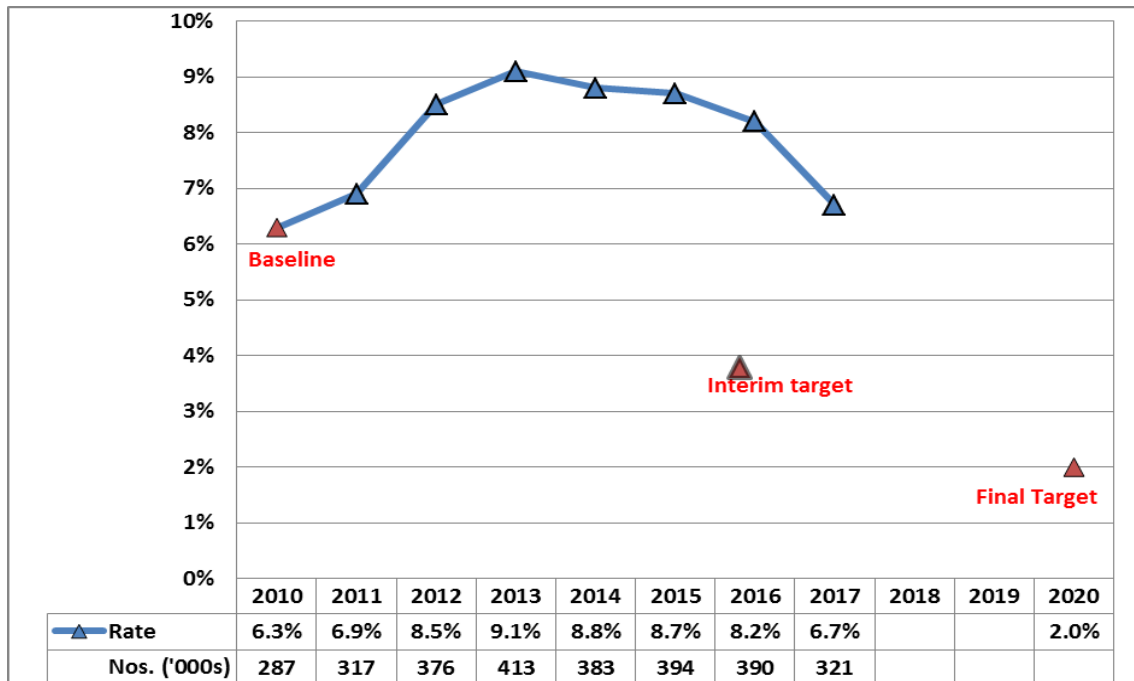
Source SILC, CSO

Regarding child poverty, the previous target was to lift 70,000 children out from consistent poverty by 2020. Over the six-year period of 2011–2017, we saw a net fall of only 2,000, but this was largely a consequence of the recession; between 2013 (when the economy began to improve) and 2017, we actually saw a fall of 45,000.

Consistent poverty rates for Children (0-17) in Ireland, 2010 - 2017

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Children ('000s)	99	107	121	150	143	132	130	105			37
Children (%)	8.8%	9.3%	10.4%	12.7%	12.0%	10.9%	10.9%	8.8%			
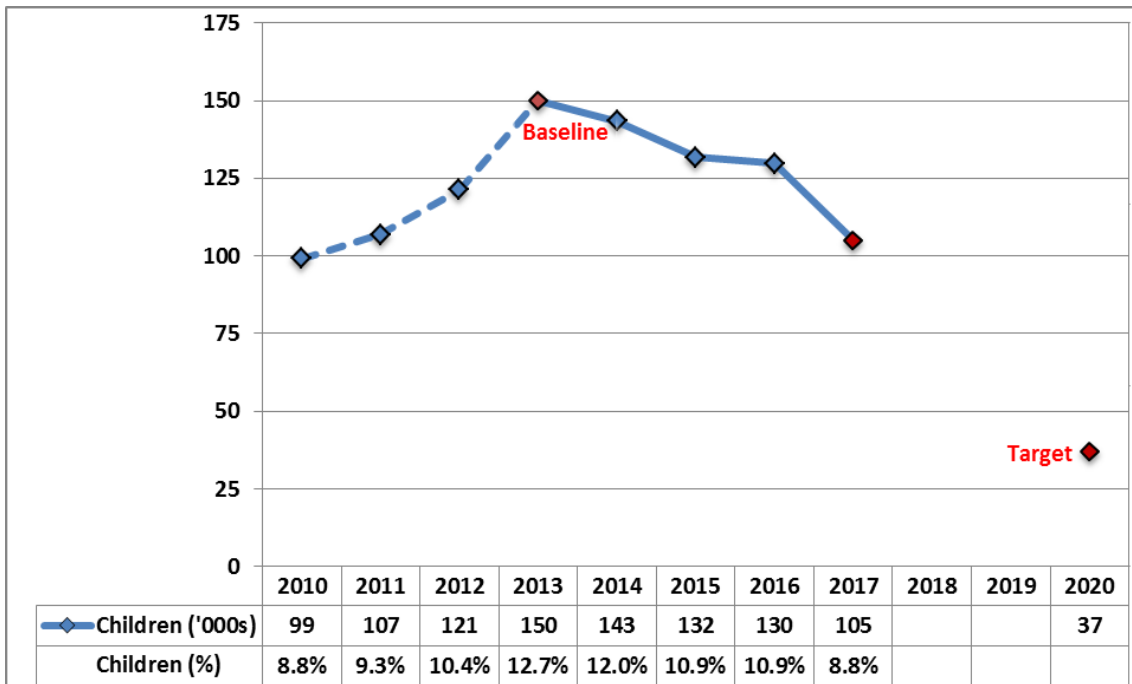
Source SILC, various years

Moreover, the budgetary changes from 2018 and 2019 are not reflected in these figures. If the downward trend continues with the same momentum, reflecting the way in which continued improvements in the economy feed into the lived experience of households and communities, we will probably get a lot closer to the target than one might have realistically have been able to imagine only a few years ago.

Measuring social welfare expenditure

Turning to social welfare expenditure over the period in question, Dermot presented the most recent data, which showed that we are spending approximately €20 billion in terms of transfers through the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection's budget, with approximately two million beneficiaries. The question is therefore, how much is being redistributed through the social welfare system? As we typically conceptualise the 'welfare spend' as a proportion of GNP, this would give an approximate figure of 8.5%. But Dermot suggested that that traditional measure – expenditure as a portion of GNP – underestimates the redistributive nature of the Irish economy and government policies over a number of decades.

In 2016, the CSO convened an Economic Statistics Review Group, which looked at the very distorting, distortionary impacts of the globalised nature of the Irish economy and how to really conceive of the true Irish economy – its real size and trends. In doing so, they identified a new measure called 'gross national income', or what we would typically refer to as 'modified GNI'. This measure separates out a lot of very strange and interesting, but distortionary, aspects; for example, flows of intellectual property, aircraft assets and contract manufacturing, as well as many other factors. When you strip out those distortionary factors, GNI gives you a much more accurate view of the real size of the Irish economy. If we take GNI as the metric, we are actually distributing about 11.5% of the economy, which amounts to €19.9 billion (with 1.983 million beneficiaries).

Non-income measurements of poverty

Dermot noted that feedback from the community and voluntary sector to the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection has included a real concern over using income-related measures as a sole measure of poverty or deprivation and social exclusion, with people identifying other factors that can influence an individual's lived experience of poverty, whether that is to do with childcare, healthcare, access to housing, or broader inequalities within Irish society. In light of this, Dermot noted that this point has been reflected in the department's thinking regarding the new strategy should be framed. Drawing from CSO and Eurostat data, Dermot said that there are some interesting data available on non-income aspects of poverty, which show both how we perform compared to our European partners and also how our performance has changed since the recession.

Income inequality

Income inequality is what we would refer to as the quintile share ratio. It looks at the income held by the highest-income 20% of households within a state as a ratio to the lowest income 20%. In this regard, Ireland performs relatively well; doing better than our EU partners and with a downward trend from 2014 onwards. More recent figures do show it increased slightly between 2016 and 2017, but it will be interesting to see how it continues to fare in the longer term.

At-risk-of-poverty rates

Another example is the at-risk-of-poverty rates after social transfers. Here, Ireland recorded a very significant reduction in 2017. Indeed, since 2010 we have typically recorded a lower rate than our EU28 partners, when taken as an average. Presently, the Irish rate here is at 15.6% now, compared to the EU average of 16.9%.
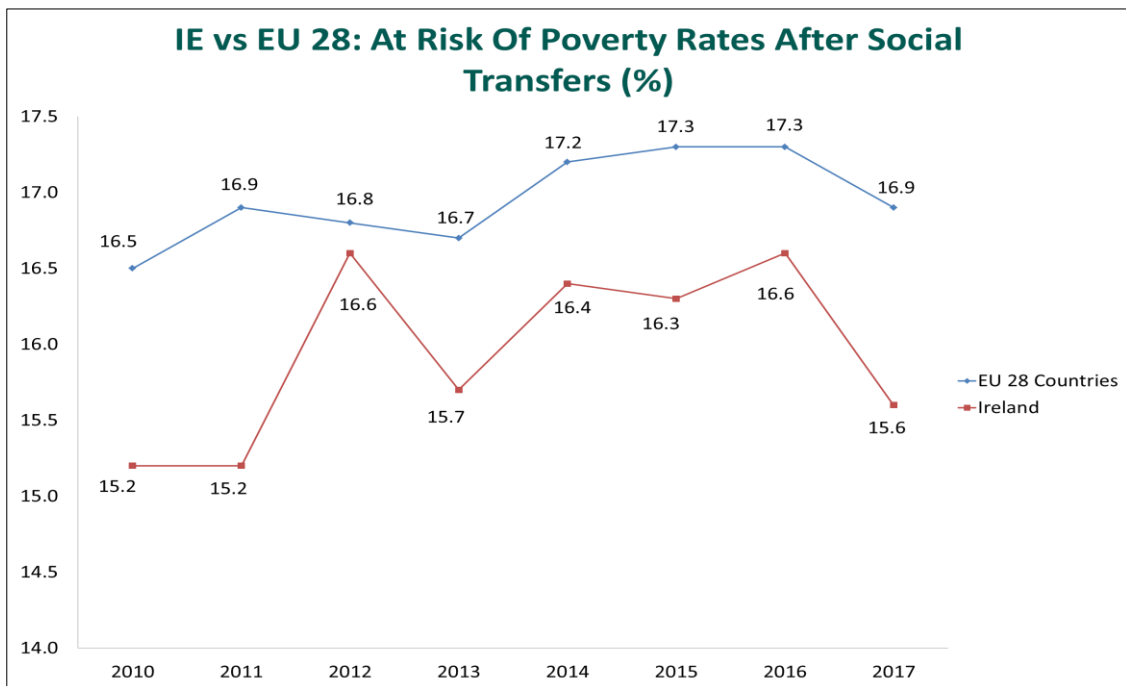
Source: Eurostat, various years

Health

The Irish performance in relation to health has remained relatively stable over time, specifically regarding the proportion of the Irish population over 18 years reporting their health status as very good. Despite a couple of slight increases (see in 2012 and 2017), we have outperformed the EU average every year on this issue.
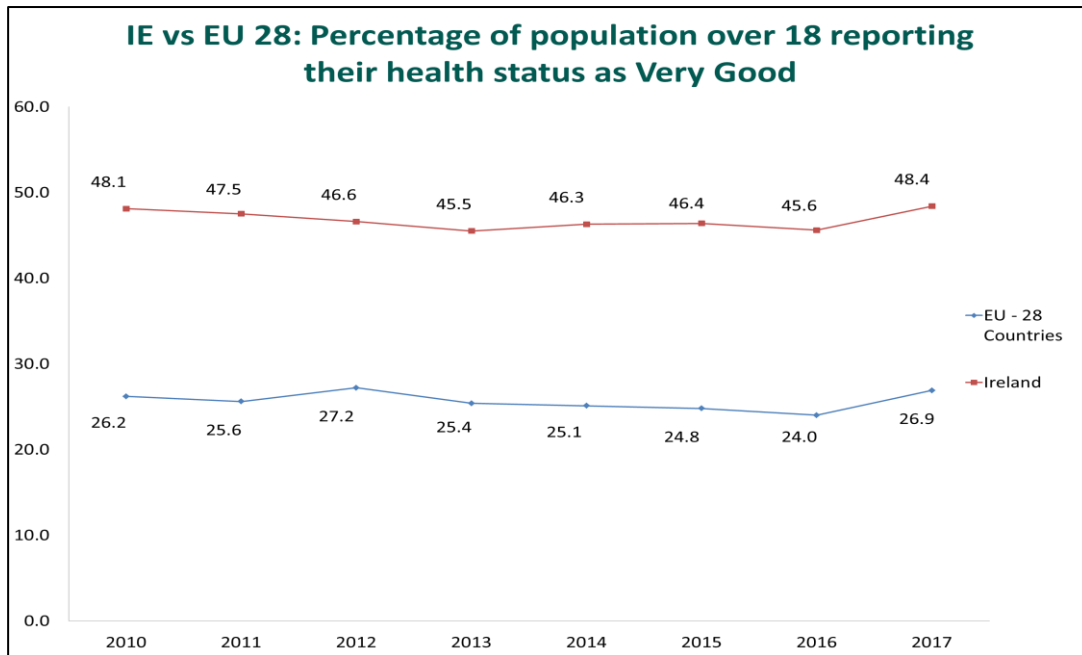
Source: Eurostat, various years

Low work intensity

Ireland has had a high rate in the EU28 regarding low work intensity, for people of all working ages; currently, Ireland's rate remains higher than the EU average. However, since 2013–2014, the incidence of very low work intensity has fallen drastically in Ireland, as the macro economy recovered, from 23.9% to 15.4% in the most recent set of data. This reflects greater availability of work and a fall in under-employment.

Outline of the new strategy

Dermot explained that in the first instance the focus is on **building social inclusion**. This will involve an expanded approach that looks to move beyond a traditional focus on income poverty alone – while retaining reduction of income poverty as a key headline objective. The department proposes to retain a specific target in terms of consistent poverty and some sub-targets, but to place them within a broader context where they would draw on Eurostat data, so that the focus is not purely income-centric, but includes other factors such as health, childcare and housing.

Secondly, there will be **annual action plans** outlining the specific, key actions for each year allocated to each agency or government department, which will cover all aspects of social inclusion. This has tended to be the way government strategies

have developed in more recent years, an approach that has been quite successful. It means that actions will be programmed out over time, so that people can see what is working and what is not working.

Thirdly, this will be a **six-year strategy** covering up to 2025, but with a mid-term review in 2022, to facilitate an evaluation of impact. The idea is that the mid-term review will be independent, enabling stakeholders to take stock. At that point, it is likely that some targets will be closer to being met than others. This approach will enable an evaluation of what is working and recalibration of targets and metrics, if required.

Finally, implementation will occur through an **ecosystem of collaboration, learning and evaluation**, which will be supported by stretching relevant and achievable targets. Dermot noted that the department does not simply want a static strategy that is published and we revisit in six years and see did it work.

We want to know much earlier in the process whether things are working or not working, what needs to change. If there are targets that we are getting very close to much quicker in the life cycle of the strategy then we can flex the system and try to go further faster. There is also the idea of mission-based innovation that all parts of the system need to learn from one another. This is the idea of a system where we are collaborating, learning and evaluating the realistic and achievable targets but with the capacity to stretch the system to see how far it can go in making progress.

Using metrics to support target-setting and evaluation

In the new plan, specific poverty targets will be used. These will be domestically orientated targets, but they will be put in a broader context by using standard EU-wide metrics from Eurostat published and reported on by Eurostat in its annual *'Living Conditions in Europe'* report – living condition metrics, in essence. These metrics will be used in terms of both target-setting and evaluation. This approach will make it possible to assess the level of progress in terms of improvements, while also assessing Ireland's relative position compared to other EU Member States. On this point, Dermot noted that it is useful to approach this by acknowledging that we do not work or live in isolation; if we can see that other countries are performing better

than Ireland relative to specific targets, it will be worth asking, 'What are other countries doing that we could adopt as practice here?' The objective is not to reinvent the wheel but to learn from our partners in terms of what works.

The 18 Eurostat living condition measures will become our targets, but our overall target will be to become the most socially inclusive Member State in the EU. The aim will be to move into the top five Member States regarding these measures, and further if possible. Again, these metrics are not purely income-orientated.

Dermot emphasised that these EU standard metrics present a more comprehensive view of living conditions. Income-based metrics alone cannot adequately capture the multifaceted nature of social inclusion and exclusion; for that reason, it is proposed that 18 targets will be used, allowing for Ireland's performance to be tracked against an EU-wide setting. The idea is to set targets based on improving our ranking over the period of the strategy, reviewing progress and recalibrating if necessary in 2022. A variety of dimensional measures reflect the multifaceted nature of social exclusion, like income distribution, housing quality, social aspects and social participation integrations such as volunteering and participating. Taking a core of those 18 possible measures to show how Ireland has performed, we find that in some cases we do better than the European average, while in other cases we do worse.

The idea is to improve across all 18 of those spheres and to try to move upwards in terms of how we rank relative to other countries.

- Headline measure: share of people who are at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE)

- Dimensional measures: income distribution; housing quality; socio-economic aspects of living conditions; social participation and integration.

Targets of the new plan

Dermot then set out the targets of the new plan. One key target will be to retain the reduction of consistent poverty in 2020 to 2% or less. That will be over the lifetime of the strategy, so it will be up to 2025, earlier if possible. A second key target will be for Ireland to be the most socially inclusive Member State in the EU across the

broader set of 18 metrics, which are not just income-focused. Again, he mentioned that the strategy itself will be structured thematically so each chapter will set out supports, initiatives and targets for specific cohorts of people across Irish society; for example, people with disabilities and older people.

What will be different in the new strategy?

Dermot concluded by outlining the key aspects of the new strategy. In doing so he noted that it is important that to recognise the fact that, unlike in 1997, other government departments have their own strategies and plans, and many of those specifically address social inclusion.

Regarding the new strategy, or the new roadmap, the approach will be to set the overall context and the governance process for such pre-existing plans. In that sense, it will seek to cast out a broader net, thus putting everything under one broader framework. He also noted that the new strategy has been developed over a considerable period, with a lot of complication of engagements. The new strategy:

- sets out a clear ambition with specific goals and commitments with responsibility identified and timelines set;
- was developed following a process of consultation and engagement – including through last year's SIF;
- recognises that other government departments have their own strategies and plans, with the role of the new roadmap for social inclusion to set the context, ambition and governance process;
- uses an expanded set of measures to assess progress based on EU's *Living conditions In Europe* report;
- sets out a programme of work to examine what currently works, to take place in its first three years; and
- will involve a mid-term review to allow for a detailed examination of progress and provide the opportunity for re-calibration if required.

3.5   Questions and answers

Jacqui McCrum introduced the questions and answers proceedings, inviting and

moderating questions from participants towards all parties from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection on the panel. This section presents all questions and answers that arose during this session, in the order in which they were made.

Question/Comment

There has been a restructuring of the mechanisms we use to address poverty and social exclusion, one of the pillars being the PPN. The experience of some community groups has been that this in some ways has led to an extension of the power to local authorities and it has restricted or minimised the power of local community groups – the driving force behind change. Is this an experience that would be accepted and if it is, what would be the plan to close the gap between the promotion of the existing structures and the challenges and frustration of those on the ground?

John Conlon

We will cover our strategy around a six-year period, over which period of time we will be urging government to ensure that there is a continuous review of what works and what does not work. You are identifying a weakness, so I think your input, in terms of making things work better, would be important and it's something that we would reflect on during the process of the plan itself, once it gets put into place. From a governmental perspective, we would then be urging the government to address issues involving weaknesses and identify what could be done more effectively.

Question/Comment

Could we get more insight into how many of the 18 indicators will focus on housing and homelessness, and how the plan is going to address homelessness in Ireland?

Dermot Coates

This is a very relevant question; housing, the dysfunctional housing market and homelessness are key proxies for social exclusion more broadly. From memory, of the 18 indicators, three revert to housing. They look at the cost of housing and, very specifically around homelessness; the objective is to have a target around

homelessness. This involves bringing together the work of various other government departments, within this broader roadmap.

Question/Comment

It is great to hear the commitment to child poverty here this morning. We are working with the Irish Times on a campaign to combat child poverty. It's called the No Child 2020 Campaign and it focuses around five key asks of food, health, housing, education and participation.

The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection play a very important role in combatting child poverty, but we need other departments involved as well. One idea we had is the establishment of a director to combat child poverty, who might sit co-located across the three key departments, or under the Department of the Taoiseach, to meet targets regarding child poverty. This approach has worked in other countries. We are interested in hearing your views on this idea.

Dermot Coates

One of the things that we are trying to achieve in the new strategy is to strengthen cross-governmental approaches to issues like child poverty. We wish to work towards getting the government to agree to have people at management board level within each department responsible for actions and targets in their focus of responsibility and, more importantly, to work cross-governmentally.

In this way, we aim to achieve the desired outcomes, and to have them reviewed very consistently and regularly over the lifetime of the plan. These individuals would take active responsibility and to report back to cabinet committees and senior official groups on outcomes and actions, very regularly. That is one way the objective you mentioned might be achieved.

Jacqui McCrum

I have only been working with the Minister since December, but she is somebody who understands this point and who pushes us to our limits. We have a weekly meeting with her and she pushes very strongly on this whole area of social inclusion.

Question/Comment

As speakers have noted earlier, employment and unemployment figures are going in the right direction. However, certain groups such as Travellers and people with disabilities still face barriers to employment, particularly in urban and rural areas of disadvantage. How is this issue going to be addressed in the new plan?

Dermot Coates

One thing I have found in my brief time so far with the department is that it is a very data-rich environment, yet many groups are entirely invisible within the data. That may be because, according to statisticians, there are insufficient responses within specific groups. We are acutely aware that this is a real problem; if we cannot see groups within the data, it will be extremely difficult to set metrics or specific targets, or to monitor outcomes.

One of the things we are looking to do within the strategy is to have a very specific focus on the data and, where gaps are identified, plan how to address them, so that targets can be set for specific groups, such as Travellers. I am aware that different organisations representing specific groups will know far more of what data sets exist at local levels than we might necessarily know. There is much learning to be done – effectively a data strategy, which sits within the overall strategy. If we get to 2025 and we have not explored how to overcome those issues, then that would be an indicator of failure. On this issue, we have to take our lead from bodies like Eurostat and CSO and I certainly do not seek to overpromise. All we can say is that we do recognise this is an issue – some groups are effectively invisible in some of the datasets. It is something that the strategy has a strong focus on, which I think you will see in the coming weeks.

John Conlon

The more activation [measures] within these invisible groups the better; Government can create targets and measurements for them. We will be doing some further work, which we have started internally, in relation to updating our Pathways to Work strategy and we should have some focus in that area as well at division and at local level.

Question/Comment

We welcome points made about high level inter-departmental working groups and looking beyond data measurements, because people with disabilities are completely underrepresented in the statistics. I would also like to point out that employment levels have not improved for people with disabilities. Poverty is getting worse, despite the National Disability Implementation Strategy and the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities. I am quite concerned to hear these two strategies being mentioned as beacons of light in terms of the methodologies used to actually put this roadmap together. I think we need to look beyond it and we need to look at the NGO sector and the civil society being partners and collaborating around how this government does its business in actually addressing these targets in a more real way. This should go beyond just listening; listening to concerted action and a shared sense of purpose about what we are doing here.

Jacqui McCrum

Within our own department, this is an area that we take extremely seriously. When we had our recent jobs fair, in March in Tullamore, for example, 4,500 people on

disability allowance were invited to attend. There were specific information points for people with disabilities. In total, 700 people attended with their carers. We received very interesting feedback from them; people said it was the first time they had been invited to such an event.

Within the department, we have established a group at a senior level to address how we can actually activate and get people with disabilities into employment. We are very committed to this and we hope that this time next year, we will be able to share some output from that work.

Question/Comment

I wonder if you would forward a request to the Minister on our behalf. Recently, Dr. Katherine Zappone, Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, introduced the National Childcare Scheme, which is aimed at children in childcare. Unfortunately in that plan, those who are unemployed will have the hours that they are entitled to, reduced to three hours per day from full-time.

In addition, the rate of pay is being reduced to €475. This is going to lead to further exclusion for those families most in need. I would respectfully request that you might ask Minister Regina Doherty to speak to Dr Katherine Zappone and explore that particular anomaly in her plan so that we are not further excluding very vulnerable children.

This point was acknowledged.

Question/Comment

I am in the North inner city and I see a lot of homelessness affecting mothers and their children; a daily routine in hostels, hotels, trying to do school runs, trying to get up in the mornings. I also see derelict buildings, homes that are boarded up, all over the north inner city. I know that there is not going to be a solution any time soon but is there any kind of progress or is there any kind of plans in place?

On that clear disequilibrium of seeing rising rents alongside derelict properties, it is worth bearing in mind that the public sector has picked up some momentum in trying

to tackle those issues, in terms of surcharges on unused properties and those increasing over time to incentivise owners to bring properties back into use.

My understanding is that the new land development agency is rolling out a strategy, looking at inner cities in Dublin, Cork and Limerick for example, which identifies such buildings as social resources to be brought back into use and which puts in place broader plans to tackle the issue of dereliction. So while it might not sit comfortably within the idea of the Roadmap for Social Inclusion, it is worth restating that idea that progress is being made, albeit quite slowly.

Question/Comment

What can get missed when we look at issues such as unemployment and accommodation is the impact on people's physical health and mental health. We can have the best strategies on paper, but if they are not implemented, the situation worsens, for Travellers and for everyone. Mental health is a serious issue in our community and across the board and the government needs to stand up and not only hear but act on what's being said from different groups.

This point was acknowledged.

Question/Comment

My question is around promoting social inclusion among people with or at risk of mental health difficulties. Extensive research shows that poverty and social exclusion increase the risk of mental health difficulties, that they can be both a cause and a consequence of mental health difficulties and that they have a detrimental effect on both adults and children. In that context, it is fundamental that there is an effective inter-departmental approach to ensuring appropriate employment, education and housing supports, and to ensuring that people have appropriate and timely access to not only mental health services but health services overall. We also need to ensure that we are strengthening our communities to foster and promote positive mental health and wellbeing. I am very keen to get a sense of how the strategy is going to address those issues.

Dermot Coates

We see the new strategy as a net covering all relevant departments. Very specifically, we want to see what each one is doing that is relevant to social inclusion and social exclusion, and bring that under the ambit of the broader roadmap. As part of that, my colleagues and I have been engaging quite intensively with our peers in the Department of Health to identify specific issues they are looking at and programmes and initiatives they have planned, as well as targets they have in place, so that we can bring all that under the ambit of the roadmap. There will be specific actions on those targets, touching on some of the issues you referred to regarding mental health and social exclusion, wrapped into the broader roadmap.

Question/Comment

We are looking forward to the publication of the strategy. One of the concerns that we have, which has been coming up more and more among our members and the people we assist, relates to the issue of people who are in work but on a low income, who are living below the poverty line. We know that there has been a very welcome decrease in the overall risk of poverty, but what we saw between 2012 and 2017 was the at-risk-of-poverty rate among working lone parents actually doubled. Those are the households that we are very concerned about, because employment is seen as the solution to poverty. What do we do about the issue of low paid work and people who are in jobs but living below the poverty line?

Dermot Coates

The Future Jobs Ireland strategy has a number of initiatives and targets regarding precarious and unsustainable employment. Regarding the new strategy, the broad theme is 'making work pay' and it includes a series of measures and some initiatives, as well as potential legislative measures.

John Conlon

Those in work but on a low pay often have low skills levels. One of the drivers for future work must be to ensure we identify those low-skilled workers in employment and set actions to reskill or upskill them, so that they are better prepared for work transfer or to gain better-paid employment. It is important that we focus on upskilling.

Question/Comment

We welcome the increase in employment but it is important to get under some of the statistics; some of the increase in employment is due to an increase in part-time rather than full-time work. We also see that there is still a big problem of underemployment, whereby people want to work extra hours but are not being afforded those by their employer. This goes to the issue of whether it is quality of employment or if this is, in some instances, a poverty trap, whereby people become stuck in low-paid jobs. I echo the question regarding how the new strategy is going to capture quality of employment and in-work poverty, which traps people into precarious situations.

This point was acknowledged.

Question/Comment

When will we see the strategy? Also, you mentioned it includes a chapter on people with disabilities. Can you give an idea of the other chapters? Finally, how are you going to include Travellers and other minorities that are not yet captured by the existing data sources?

Jacqui McCrum

We have received significant feedback [on the new strategy]. It still has to go through a few checks and balances. It will certainly be hoped to have published it this side of the summer.

John Conlon

We would hope to get it published during June but it has to go through the process of going to a senior officials group and through the cabinet process, so we would be reliant on that happening and hopefully have it published during the June period.

Dermot Coates

We recognise that in some cases, in some data sets, we can see Travellers in the

data, but that this is not always the case. We want to put in place an outline structure, or strategy, regarding the data. The first task is a scoping exercise, to identify which datasets have specific indicators and which do not, and if not the underlying reason for the absence of certain indicators. We will then set targets, over a given period of time, to identify progress would look like on this issue – what it is that we are trying to achieve. It is about recognising that a problem exists and trying to put in place a plan to address it. In doing this, so we need to work with other departments and the CSO, as well as organisations such as Pavee Point.

Question/Comment

I am in a very privileged position to work with data. Since coming back from the UK, where I studied, I have noticed that the silo mentality has reduced an awful lot in the last couple of years [in Ireland]. I have to applaud the work of the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection in reducing those siloes and allowing people like me in the HSE to use data that before we could not access. … I am in the HSE and I am available to Pavee Point, I am available to the National Disability Authority … to show you the data. There is good data out there, not the best data but … we can use what is called "fuzzy logic" to identify groups. … We have done a very big study on risk factors and protective factors at the population level in Ireland; the amount of people with four or more risk factors has reduced considerably in Ireland over the last 20 years. … But we are making a difference. … We are narrowing that gap. I think because we all work in siloes, we see our own problems, but if we could all work together and identify those programmes that have been effective.

Jacqui McCrum

Thank you very much. I think it would be a good idea if you and Dermot and Ann (CWI) and Paul (EAPN) connect. That would be very helpful, thank you very much for that contribution.

Question/Comment

We are from the north inner city. We are on a community employment scheme, through which we get education and further training/ We are grateful for this and we all avail of it. But where do we go after it? The CU scheme might take two to three

years, and then we are back out, on the dole again. We are trying to better ourselves. We are taking advantage of anything that we can get and our scheme was brilliant. But where do we go after?

This point was acknowledged.

Question/Comment

A lot of issues raised here today would be of concern to older people but there is one issue that I would like to raise and that is in relation to the state pension. We have become accustomed, over the last number of Budgets, to a €5 increase, which does nothing for older people, particularly those who do not have an occupational pension. They would rely solely on the state pension. There is a misconception out there that older people have a nest egg or money stashed away, but for many during the austerity years, that was used to keep a roof over their family's heads. In addition, older people have to wait until March to benefit from an increase to the state pension. That is discrimination; everyone else receives their benefits straight away whereas older people have to wait for months.

This point was acknowledged.

Question/Comment

In relation to what was said about working in silos, when government departments allocate money towards social inclusion, do they communicate with each other? Within the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme, which is one of the programmes I have been looking after in Monaghan, the funding is lower than it had been in previous programmes prior to the start of SICAP. It is not going to increase as far as we are aware until this programme runs out in 2022. That means you spend a lot of time chasing money from other funds to try and make a difference. And in the meantime, sometimes, you would see funding being given to the local authorities to get out in a hurry to beat a spending deadline. Maybe if departments were talking to each other, when they are allocating out money, they might be able to coordinate it a little bit better.

This point was acknowledged.

Question/Comment

The Minister, Regina Doherty, spoke of the importance of what we say and the importance of why we say it. For me, that means that policy and the language contained within these policies should reflect those the policy is going to affect. That does not seem to be there. Regarding the interaction between services and service recipients, further training is required, because a lot of the people I work with say that the initial interaction between the service and themselves can be off-putting and the continuation of the service afterwards can be very demeaning to the individual concerned.

A person from SAOL was talking about the lack of options available after a training course. To me, that screams a lack of investment in people; resources are being wasted because there is no investment in them, there is no engagement in them, there is no participation because there is no partnership.

This point was acknowledged.

Question/Comment

In terms of a roadmap for social inclusion, it would be vital to include a commitment and resources for autonomous community development. If we want to get to the root causes of social exclusion, we need to ensure that resources are there for community work that supports people to articulate their issues and make suggestions regarding how policymakers should be addressing those issues around poverty, inequality and human rights.

This point was acknowledged.

Question/Comment

We are the national support organisation for people who care for family members at home. That could be parents caring for a child, a spouse caring for a spouse with a lifelong illness or someone caring for elderly parents. There is also what is referred

to as "the sandwich generation" – people who are having children later in life and are maybe caring for a child or children with disabilities while also caring for elderly parents. The inter-departmental idea is relevant because everyone is this room as probably cared for someone at some stage in their lives.

Family carers get caught. They don't think of themselves. Instead, they think of the person they are caring for. For this reason, it is difficult for them to even self-identify as a carer. We try to encourage carers to view themselves as community groups as much as anything, with the same ideas and the same wants and needs as everyone else.

A family carer cannot care all the time. Speaking of mental health issues, a carer might want to work, or to engage in training for example, but they cannot do so without respite, the availability of which depends on whereabouts in the country you live. We call this a postcode lottery.

If the person being cared for passes away, the carer suddenly find they are later in life themselves. They have had no opportunity for education or employment, and can therefore be at a total loss. The main reason I am here today is to try and ensure that family carers are recognised as a socially excluded group.

This point was acknowledged.

4.   The proceedings: Workshops

4.1   Workshop 1: Social inclusion at community level - enhancing collaboration

Workshop 1 focused on social inclusion at community level and how to enhance collaboration. Juan Carlos Azzopardi of Limerick City Community Development Fund who facilitated the workshop opened proceedings, and was followed by Paul Geraghty from the Department of Community and Rural Development (DRCD), who spoke about the importance of the Social Inclusion Forum in terms of hearing feedback from the community and voluntary sector and discussing key issues. He noted that while collaboration is extremely important – something that everyone recognises – it is difficult to carry it out. He noted that government departments can be good at pushing out strategies but do not follow up on implementation. For that reason, he intended to allow the participants voice their ideas in the workshop and listen to what they had to say, with the aim of bringing points raised back to the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection and Department of Community and Rural Development in order to shape how they design and make policy.

Joe Saunders on Irish Local Development Companies

Joe Saunders of the Irish Local Development Network (ILDN) then made a presentation on the evolution of Local Development Companies (LDCs) and the network itself. He began by providing the following description of Local Development Companies: not-for-profit, multi-sectoral partnerships that deliver community and rural development, labour market activation, social inclusion and social enterprise services across the country. There are 49 LDCs (35 rural, 14 urban) across the country, thereby providing local delivery while having a 'national footprint'. LDCs take a bottom-up approach, focused on community-led local development. They seek to provide an integrated, wrap-around service.

Every year, more than 15,000 communities or groups and 173,000 individuals engage with the LDCs, which run programmes on behalf of government departments and agencies to the annual value of €330 million. Programmes include: Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP); LEADER; Rural Recreation and Walks Schemes; Rural Social Scheme; employment supports; education;

childcare; public health; and social enterprise. Irish Local Development Network CLG (ILDN) is the representative body of LDCs.

Integration and collaboration

The integrated nature of LDCs was identified as a key enabler, regarding their work and impacts. LDCs have a capacity to offer a wraparound, holistic service. So for example, while an individual service user might present as a jobseeker, they have access to an integrated range of supports including training, childcare, self-employment, mental health, enterprise, recreational and personal development initiatives. In a similar way, communities can access capital, training, capacity-building, advocacy, environmental enhancement and social enterprise supports based on their own needs, through an integrated planning process. By responding to real needs on a local level, silos do not arise. Integration was identified as a key strength, but Joe noted that more integration was needed. In particular, he said that LDCs cannot and do not operate alone, and that important partners include the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD), the Department of Employment and Social Affairs (DEASP), local Enterprise and Training Boards, the HSE/Tusla, local community development committees (LCDCs) and other community partners and government departments.

Issues

Joe noted that attracting people to the boards of Local Development Companies is an increasing challenge due to the increased burden of compliance and regulation. The Local Development Companies try to work collaboratively both internally and externally but it was noted that this can also be challenging, due to the diversity of actors involved in community development. The structures of government departments are often programme-led but the types of supports that the local companies deliver are wraparound services, which try to look across programmes. The importance of capacity building was highlighted, to enable sustainable development work.

LDCs in action

Joe provided some examples of how the Local Development Companies support individuals by linking up services from different departments.

Case study 1 (urban, individual)

A woman from a migrant background attended one of Southside Partnership's (Dun Laoghaire Rathdown) regular International Women's Breakfasts in a local community centre. She asked a staff member to help her sign up for English language classes, funded by SICAP, and began attending the weekly classes in a local community centre. In addition, an employment guidance officer suggested to her that she could benefit from a 12-month placement on a Tús programme, which would help her apply for employment opportunities. The Tús team leader then secured her a placement in a local charity shop, which gave good retail experience and allowed the woman to practice her English. She also received a small top-up to her Jobseeker's Allowance each week for this. At the end of her Tús placement, the woman will return to an employment guidance officer in the Local Employment Service for support in progressing into paid employment.

Case study 2 (rural, individual)

A woman (north Kerry) was assisted by her local development company, North, East and West Kerry Development (NEWKD), to move from unemployment to self-employment under the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance (BTWEA) and the Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP). She successfully applied to NEWKD for a LEADER enterprise grant, which enabled her to upgrade and develop land for her flower business. She now collaborates with NEWKD as a host farm under the Kerry Social Farming Project that facilitates the personal development of local people with intellectual disabilities. This programme is also supported by the Rural Social Scheme. This woman's journey has brought about huge impacts, not just in her own, life but in the wider community in north Kerry through her participation in five integrated programmes managed by NEWKD.

Case study 3 (rural, community)

Ballyduff's Coast Road Community Café (north Kerry) is a social enterprise which recently received the 2017–2019 Community Vibrancy Recognition Award. The café serves fresh food to the local community at its premises. It is also a hub of social inclusion and environmental activity. The independent living of less mobile residents is supported by the delivery of several hundred meals per week. NEWKD provide information services through the Rural Social Scheme and outreach services from

their Listowel Jobs Club and Tralee Local Employment Service. They also provide development supports, capacity-building and training under SICAP and linkages to other agencies such as the weekly Men's Breakfast morning, which links to the Men's Shed.

Workshop discussion

Three key themes emerged from the discussion held by participants of Workshop 1:

- the translation of the focus on collaboration at national level to the local level;
- the importance of autonomous community development; and
- resourcing community development.

Focus on collaboration: from national level to local level

Participants noted that, while there had been a lot of discussion at the Forum about high level interdepartmental working groups and collaboration, their concern was about whether this would really translate into a more collaborative approach on the ground. For example, when a client seeks one service from a local development company they often are directed to many more services and programmes; this is how a wraparound service should be delivered. However, an obstacle to this approach was highlighted: funding applications for and monitoring tools of grants and other supports require those completing them to strictly define the specific outcomes of a specific programme. This may not be the best approach as community development can work by different programmes contributing to a single outcome. Programmes, streams of funding and organisations are not aligning at local level. SICAP is allowing a lot of other government initiatives to be achieved but it is not adequately funded. Moreover, in some areas, Local Community Development Committees (LCDC) are not enhancing or fostering cross-departmental collaboration at local level. Participants asked about plans for funding the new social inclusion strategy: for example, whether funding would be provided across several government departments in order for them to work together.

It was noted by representatives from the DRCD that work is being done on how to improve the performance and collaborative role of the LCDCs. In relation to this, Paul Geraghty said that a senior officials group is planned, comprised of

representatives from the Department of Justice, the Department of Health, the DRCD and the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, the aim of which is to open up the conversation about on-the-ground collaboration. Participants asked about how the performance of LCDCs is monitored and assessed. Representatives from DRCD noted that work is being done on this issue and that their concerns are being heard.

Autonomous community development

A very important message that emerged from this workshop was the importance of autonomous community development. Many participants noted that this needs to be re-energised at local level, following the period of austerity, during which funding for the sector was significantly reduced. It was noted that the community development sector is the key channel to increasing social inclusion. There was agreement that in order to allow communities to foster this autonomous development, capacity-building structures need to be put in place to increase the number of people who can participate in structures such as the Public Participation Networks (PPN). Alongside this, it was highlighted that there needs to be greater recognition of the role and value of qualitative data. Many of the realities of social exclusion and subsequent improvements in people's lives following access to services cannot be captured by purely quantitative data.

Resourcing community development

Another important theme that emerged from this discussion was that of resourcing community development. Many participants noted that SICAP funding needs to be increased; that this is an essential element in providing a large number of services to often the most vulnerable people in our communities. Another aspect of resourcing that was discussed related to building or maintaining the infrastructure for social inclusion. This may not involve huge amounts of funding; for example, it might involve the relatively low costs in keeping a community centre open or building a youth club. It was noted that these spaces can provide platforms for communities to work together and support each other.

The workshop was closed by thanking all participants for their input. Both Paul and Joe noted the positive developments that have occurred over the last number of

months and the real commitment to build on these.

Key policy points

- Efforts need to be made to ensure the focus on collaboration at national level will lead to a more collaborative approach on the ground. This might involve changes to funding requirements of grant schemes, and funding the new action plan across relevant government departments.

- Community development needs to be re-energised at local level.

- SICAP funding needs to be increased.
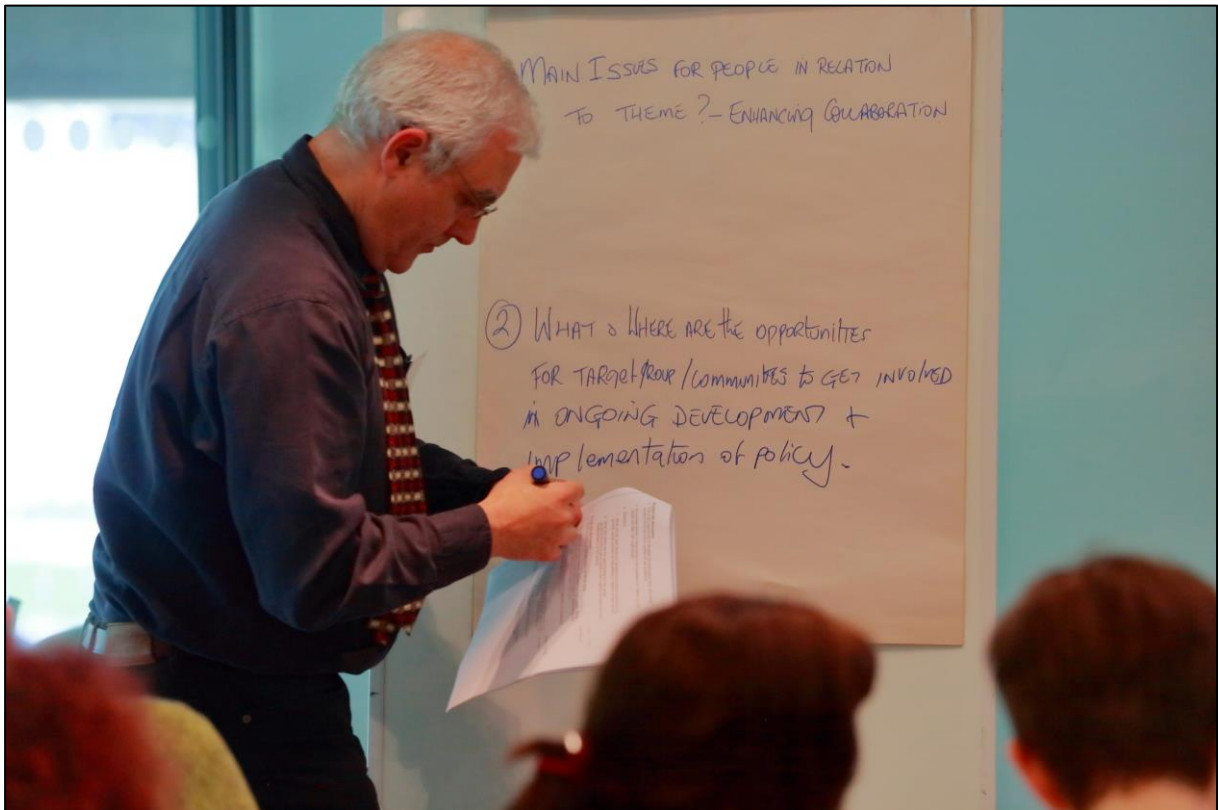
4.2   Workshop 2: Getting more from the data: how to develop a more nuanced understanding of poverty and social inclusion in Ireland

Workshop 2 focused on existing data sources in Ireland that relate to poverty and social inclusion. It was opened by Claire Keane of the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) who noted the emphasis was on data restrictions and identifying missing information sources regarding poverty and social inclusion in Ireland.

Eamonn Murphy on data collection and social inclusion policy

The first presentation was given by Eamonn Murphy of Social Justice Ireland. He began by outlining some key points in relation to data collection and policy relating to social inclusion.

- Good use of data is crucial to the policymaking process; for this reason, 'good data' is imperative.
- We can only create evidence-based policy on what we can measure.
- The question is which measure of poverty best enables policymakers to target scarce resources most efficiently?

Persistent poverty

At present, there is a range of current measures of poverty (such as income poverty and consistent poverty), but what is missing is a measurement of persistent poverty – one that captures those experiencing a sustained exposure to poverty. Persistent poverty is a measurement of the proportion of people in society who are living below the poverty line in the current year, as well as at least two of the three preceding years (in other words, three of the last four years, including the current year).

Eamon emphasised the value of such data. He noted that the CSO can measure persistent poverty but the current sample sizes are too small for the data to be sufficiently robust. Yet there is a need to know, for example, the proportion of those who are at-risk-of-poverty (16% of the total population) that is in persistent poverty. This is because some cases of poverty may be temporary, caused by a loss of job or other impermanent problem. Such information would enable us to target those who are particularly vulnerable. People with sustained exposure to poverty suffer most.

The unavailability of these data is regrettable, though Eamonn noted that there are ongoing moves by the CSO to address this issue. He said that Social Justice Ireland believe it should be the primary basis for setting targets related to poverty, and monitoring changing poverty status. Should the CSO require greater resources to augment their sample to a point where persistent poverty can be captured, then this should be granted. Social Justice Ireland requests in its budgetary submissions that the CSO be provided with additional funding to measure persistent poverty rates.

Housing costs overburden rate

The housing costs overburden rate refers to the percentage of the population living in households where the total housing costs represent more than 40% of their disposable income. This rate is surprisingly low in Ireland. Social Justice Ireland believes that this is the result of certain factors, which skew the data – specifically, owner-occupied homes with no mortgage involved, and adults living with their parents. There is a need to disaggregate these figures by age and tenure type in order to identify the cohort we need to focus on.

Hugh Cronin on administrative data

Hugh Cronin (DEASP) gave the second presentation for this workshop. He started with an outline of the history of social protection in Ireland (and the data involved).

History of Social Protection in Ireland
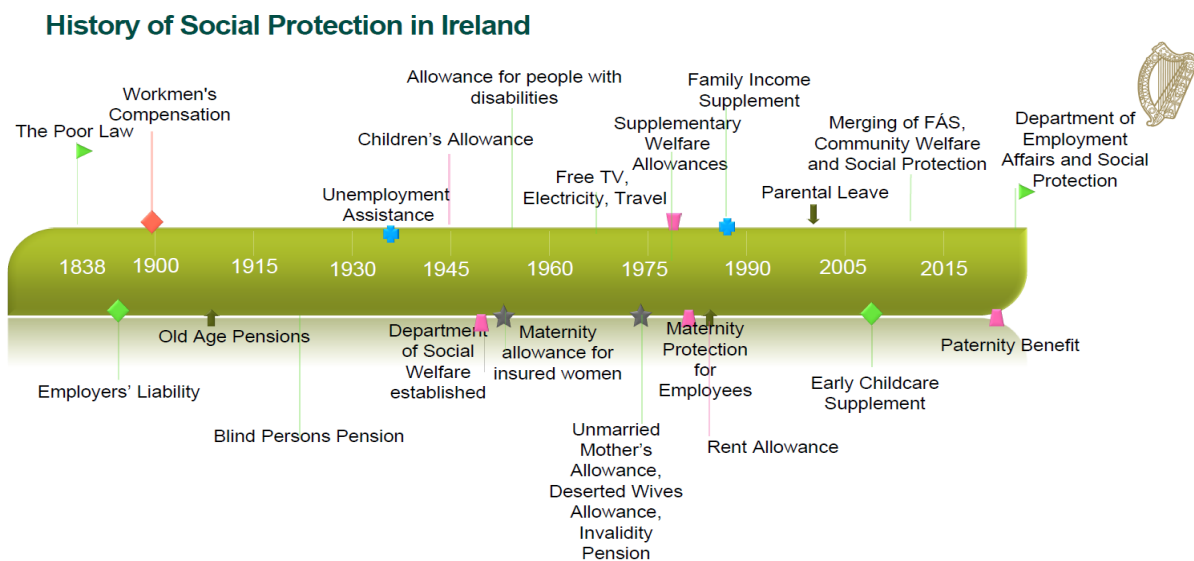
Hugh noted that with every new social policy development come new data sources. Administrative data are captured as a by-product of policy changes and new processes. They differ to survey data, which are collected for a specific purpose. Administrative data are more comprehensive, can generate a longitudinal view and provide 'here and now' data. Data protection must be considered when analysing administrative data, however, as it was not generated for analysis purposes. A significant amount of data cleaning is needed for administrative data.

Benefits of administrative data

- Captured through day-to-day provision of public services.
- Comprehensive, involving populations, not samples.
- Longitudinal dimension (when correctly constructed).
- Facts, not opinions on what happened and why.
- Provides good basis for prediction.
- Institutional structure matters – understanding the data requires understanding how things worked in practice.

Challenges and future improvements of administrative data

- Data protection.
- Created for purposes other than analysis.
- Cleaning /recoding (in contrast, SILC/LFS are created as research datasets).
- Input error (is it correlated in some systematic way with a particular variable?).

Gaps in administrative data

The following gaps in existing administrative data sources were identified.

- Flows from either work or other schemes to illness and disability.
- Education (which is essential in explaining variance in labour market outcomes).
- Programme-specific data (regarding content and completion rates, for example).
- Better earnings data (frequency and granularity).
- More efficient ways to clean, link and produce results from the data.
- Open source software (code repositories and sharing).

Example of administrative data for research: Labour market outcomes of jobseekers of African origin

Action 42 of the current Migrant Integration Strategy (*The Migrant Integration Strategy – A Blueprint for the Future*) states that, 'An analysis will be undertaken to assess the extent to which the level of joblessness among jobseekers of African origin exceeds that of other groups and determine what action, if any, is required to address any evidence that people of African origin face higher barriers to exit unemployment'. This analysis was conducted using the Jobseeker Longitudinal Database (JLD) and published Live Register data (from 2016). Data cleaning was required to remove credit claimants and casual claimants. The analysis showed that jobseekers of African origin fare worse in terms of labour market outcomes.

Table: Data sources used

Administrative data 31 Dec 2016	N
All JLD episodes	273,034
Less credited contributors	243,377
Less casual jobseeker claimants	188,247

Published Live Register Dec 2016	N
All classes	276,502
Less credited contributors	246,394
Less casual jobseeker claimants	186,486

Age profile of jobseeker claims
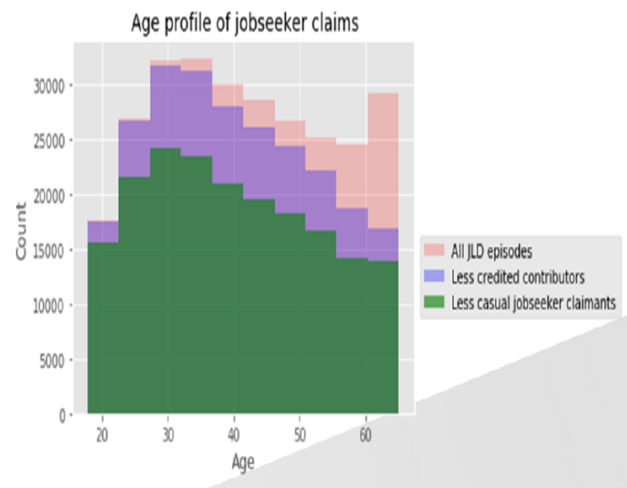
Table: Labour market outcomes at 12 months, by nationality group

12 month outcome	IE	UK	EU13	EU15-26	ROW	Africa	N
Closed off LR (other)	0.17	0.17	0.17	0.16	0.17	0.12	31,037
Educ, training or emp placement	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.05	**0.08**	6,281
Emp/Self-emp support	0.02	0.03	0.04	0.05	0.03	0.02	5,055
In employment	0.21	0.16	0.34	0.25	0.17	**0.13**	40,004
On LR (casual worker)	0.03	0.03	0.04	0.05	0.07	0.06	6,939
On LR (credits only)	0.01	0.01	0.01	0	0	0	2,365
On LR (excluding casual)	0.52	0.55	0.36	0.46	0.51	**0.58**	96,566
All outcomes	1	1	1	1	1	1	188,247

Michelle Reilly on survey data

Michelle Reilly (DEASP) gave a presentation on survey data. She began by outlining the main benefits of the Irish data from EU-wide studies such as the annual EU Statistics on Living and Working Conditions (EU SILC), the Labour Force Survey and the European Health Interview Survey (EHIS). These include:

- data quality (as it must meet the European code of practice standard).
- comparability across the EU.
- monitoring capabilities – nationally and internationally.
- type of data – data we cannot otherwise obtain, breadth of data, insights.

She also noted the value of various Irish surveys, such as the longitudinal studies Growing Up in Ireland and The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA), as well as Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection customer surveys. Michelle then went onto look at some of the key relevant findings from recent survey-based research in Ireland, compared to the EU as a whole.

For the full presentation please see http://www.welfare.ie/en/pdf/Workshop-2-Hugh-Cronin-Michelle-Reilly(DEASP)Presentation.pdf

Workshop discussion

The importance of reliable data

Regarding the information being gathered via survey data in Ireland, an attendee from the CSO explained that European regulations require the CSO to provide certain headline indicators and that they are now legally bound to produce a persistent poverty measure, which the CSO methodology unit is currently developing. New regulations for the SILC survey, which are to be published in the calendar year, may cause a break in the time series. The consumption survey and household budget survey are to be linked; in addition, SILC is being analysed to add consumption questions. He also noted that across the board, survey response rates have been dropping; for this reason, it is important that every question on a questionnaire is necessary, to avoid 'research fatigue'/further drops in response rates.

Claire from the ESRI noted that funding is dependent on the requirement for data being proven. Administrative data can and does address some data needs; it is particularly important to link administrative and survey data whenever possible. An attendee from the DCYA noted on this point that there has been a huge growth in administrative data in recent years, which creates an opportunity to link data. However; there is room for improvement here; Claire Keane noted that in other countries, such as France, medical card scans are recorded at every visit, whereas in Ireland, medical costs and visits are not recorded.

A representative from the HSE noted that in relation to administrative data, issues remain regarding linking data, due to data protection concerns. If data are anonymous and cannot be linked to an individual, people tend to be happy for data to be used for the common good.

One person pointed out that data and statistics can be used in a misleading way. The attendee from the CSO agreed that the equivalised household income measure can be misleading. Claire Keane also noted that the bottom income decile is a diverse group, and that not all within it are in persistent poverty. It was noted that there is a need to establish who is in the bottom income decile; for example, the percentage of self-employed people in poverty is very significant, though it was also noted that self-employed are beginning to receive more social welfare entitlements.

During this discussion around administrative versus survey data, it was agreed that both types of data have their advantages and disadvantages and that it is important to not become reliant on one type of data at the expense of others. It was considered to be of particular importance to link administrative and survey data whenever possible.

The need to move beyond the standard measure for poverty

Participants of this workshop spoke of the importance of improving the way in which we measure poverty. An attendee from ATD Ireland noted that their (international) organisation recently published a report undertaken with six countries via the OECD about the hidden dimensions of poverty. He commented that statistics do not show

the suffering and difficulties experienced by people living in poverty – what it really means to be in poverty. He proposed that statisticians should use this new dimension (from the ATD study) to create new indicators for poverty. This point was endorsed by a member of the NESC, who added that there is a stigma associated with poverty, which needs to be acknowledged. The cost of childcare, disability and housing, need to be considered when measuring poverty. Debt also needs to be factored in. Measures need to be adjusted to make a difference to people's lives.

It was agreed that it is important to take account of other factors beyond the items on the current deprivation list when measuring poverty in order to get the lived experience of people living in poverty. Factors that should be considered include childcare and housing costs. Another factor is that of hidden legal costs – people are not entitled to free legal aid to appeal a refusal of social welfare payments; as one person noted, 'These people are left out of the conversation.'

Another factor related to deprivation is that of medical cards, specifically the fear of losing a medical card upon taking up employment. On this point, it was noted that there are no data on how often medical cards are used, making it difficult to establish the cost of not having the card. Claire Keane noted the medical card is an understated measure of poverty. A person's entitlement to a medical card is assessed every three years. It was noted that the Department of Health are working to make the medical card form easier to understand and complete. There was a belief among some of the participants that medical cards should be permanently available to those with a long term disability or illness.

Finally, socio-economic discrimination was identified as another potential factor in the experience of deprivation. On this point, it was noted that the Equal Status Acts do not acknowledge people who suffer from socio-economic discrimination.

The representative from the HSE health intelligence unit noted that resource allocation needs to be examined, and that the environment, as well as income levels, needs to be considered when allocating resources; relevant environmental factors could include populations per area and access to services, for example. Prevalence of mental health issues, disability and education levels in an area can help to

determine what resources should be given to the area. In the UK, a weighting system is applied by area to help identify the resources needed within a specific area.

The need for qualitative data

Strongly related to the above point, it was felt that qualitative data are needed in order to capture the complex reality of the lives of people living in poverty. This form of data can support and inform existing administrative and survey data sources that are already out there. Funding needs to be made available to undertake such research. Qualitative research could also contribute to the development of new indicators of poverty.

Key policy points

- It is important to not become reliant on one type of data at the expense of others. It is of particular importance to link administrative and survey data whenever possible.
- The current deprivation list needs to be expanded in order to capture the lived experience of people living in poverty to include childcare costs; housing costs; hidden legal costs; medical cards and the fear that taking employment may lead to them being removed; and socio-economic discrimination.
- More qualitative data are needed to get the full picture of the lives of people living in poverty.
- The need to have an agreed and robust Persistent Poverty Rate/Indicator.

4.3   Workshop 3: Social inclusion and people with disabilities

Workshop proceedings began with facilitator Sarah Lennon (Inclusion Ireland) introducing the format of the workshop and the target of identifying three to four key points.

Marion Wilkinson on the National Disability Inclusion Strategy

Marion Wilkinson from National Disability Authority (NDA) began by giving a brief history of the NDA, highlighting their role as an independent state agency, funded by the Department of Justice and Equality. The NDA was described as 'the independent state body providing expert advice on disability policy and practice to the Minister, and promoting Universal Design in Ireland'.

The next stage is reviewing: the NDA keeps up-to-date on the impact of their advice, asking what has improved, and what has gotten worse? In some instances, they are asked to measure the progress of government departments in terms of making improvements happen.

Marion noted that policies for people with disabilities are changing. Ireland is now committed to helping people with disabilities live ordinary lives in ordinary places. This means people with disabilities can make choices about where to live, what to do and what kinds of help they need each day. The NDA is working on lots of different projects to help make this goal a reality; a key instrument in this is the National Disability Inclusion Strategy.

The National Disability Inclusion Strategy, 2017–2021

Marion highlighted the importance of the current National Disability Inclusion Strategy (NDIS). The NDIS holds the government accountable for showing results of actions taken to assist and provide for better employment opportunities for those with disabilities. It is a whole-of-government commitment to improving the lives of persons with disabilities. Launched in July 2017, it extends to end 2021. It is the primary instrument for delivering progressive realisation of Ireland's commitments under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

- Dept. of Justice is the **coordinating body** for the NDIS.

- There is a steering group comprised of departmental officials and the Disability Stakeholders Group who oversee progress and delivery, chaired by Minister of State, Finian McGrath.
- The NDA has a role to carry out independent assessment of progress, including through measurement of suite of agreed indicators.

NDA recent work: Employment

NDA has actions in the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015–2024 to make sure people with disabilities are supported to find and keep jobs if they want to work. The NDA reports on activity regarding this strategy, and has recommended areas for further activity. Key aspects of this strategy relate to:

- Part 5 monitoring – 3.6% of public sector employees are people with disabilities.
- Research on international practice in Vocational Rehabilitation.
- Participation in Make Work Pay group.
- Research on transitions in and out of employment based on QNHS data.
- Research on good practice in employment of people with disabilities in the public sector.
- Facilitation of working group on CES Action 5.1.

The NDA is helping to develop a policy to make sure even people with very high support needs can get the help they need to find work. It is also advising Enterprise Ireland on ways to support people with disabilities to become entrepreneurs.

Key facts and figures

Marion concluded with some key facts and figures regarding people with disabilities in Ireland. For further details in relation to Marion's presentation please access the presentation at http://www.welfare.ie/en/pdf/Workshop-3-Marion-Wilkinson-(NDA)-Presentation.pdf

Joan O'Donnell on poverty among people with disabilities

Joan O'Donnell of the Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI), which represents over 120 groups related to supporting people with disabilities, focused on the experience

of poverty among people with disabilities. She highlighted that people with disabilities continue to experience the highest rate of consistent poverty in Ireland of any group: 154,351 people on the Disability Allowance (24%) live in consistent poverty, compared to 6.7% of the rest of the population, and compared to 1.4% of those in work.

Joan highlighted the issue of cost of living, noting that those who have disabilities and are on Disability Allowance and in employment are not being given enough allowance or adequate services in line with a good standard of living; they therefore suffer significant health inequalities (physical and mental). Almost half of people with disabilities have extra living costs. People with disabilities are being left behind and more often now forced into debt and subsequent levels of poverty.

Joan noted that work does not immunise people against poverty, especially if they have a disability or chronic condition. It is a concern that almost 12% of those at risk of poverty are in work in the context of encouraging people with disabilities to engage in work. The cost of disability means that the outcome is unlikely to be any better for those with disabilities.

Complex issues

Joan discussed the complexity of the experience of poverty among people with disabilities. She made the case that we need to look at the issue of social inclusion from many angles: one size does not fit all, and no one person or organisation has the 'right answer'. Poverty is designed by a structure but is experienced on a personal level. Disability is also complex, and there is no single definition of disability. People are different and the range of disabilities and chronic illnesses, are vast and individually experienced. Even two people with the same condition may have different identities: one may say they have a disability, the other person might not.

Disability is a fact of life. It is not something that can be solved or cured. It is part of the human condition. It is an ongoing facet of our humanity. It is difficult to generalise about disability as no one response will work for everyone. People's needs are often contradictory, and they may have changing needs that are often difficult to recognise. They may have multiple disabilities.

Information is often missing or incomplete in any one policy response. Moreover, every response is a one-shot operation: there is no opportunity to learn by trial and error as people's health and quality of life is on the line. This makes every intervention significant. Joan added on this point that there are no 'off the shelf' solutions; often the response needs to be designed as a person's life evolves. Each person with a disability has multiple identities and lives within a context: considering responses needs to take the wider realities into account, including political, economic and cultural realities as well as values.

The way in which disability is framed hugely determines the response. It is often characterised by uncertainty and ambiguity. Policymakers have no right to be wrong. People with disabilities have rights under the UNCRPD; responses must get it right for people with disabilities and be accountable to them. At the same time; there is no definitive right or wrong response. The consequences that arise from interventions are often difficult to predict.

Example of good practice

Joan concluded her presentation by highlighting Community Participation Network Mayo as a good example of an organisation successfully working across boundaries and developing relationships. This model actively supports and encourages participation through community development methods and relationship building. Joan's full presentation is available at http://www.welfare.ie/en/pdf/Workshop-3-Joan-O'Donnell-(DFI)-Presentation.pdf.

Workshop discussion

Code of practice on mental health

The question was posed to both Joan and Marion: has there been any sense of completion of the codes of practice for mental health[6]? Marion advised there are 13 expected codes of practice given to mental health information and that these are expected by the end of the summer (2019). Joan highlighted mission-led innovation is needed as a robust way of approaching social initiatives. She stressed the need

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[6] For more information see: https://www.mhcirl.ie/DSS/

for unified and collaborative efforts that will coalesce into effective actions; a singular vision based on collaborative effort and collective responsibility.

Barriers for entrepreneurs with disabilities

One person who has their own business spoke of barriers and lack of independence for business owners and entrepreneurs with disabilities. He highlighted the need for guidance on tackling niche backgrounds that are not supported and spoke of a sense of continued inaction from Government. On this point, it was noted that data and research are lacking for certain invisible groups and niche situations, such as those with a disability who are self-employed or entrepreneurs.

Existing grants were mentioned as posing partial responses to the issues raised around people in 'niche' situations, such as entrepreneurs with disabilities: the partial capacity grant and the workplace adaptation grant. However, it was noted that there was a strong perception, among those in this situation, that the Government gives low priority to helping people with 'complex, niche' support needs.

Need for greater consultation with people with disabilities in policy development

It was agreed that Government should make a greater effort to consult with and enable the meaningful participation of people with disabilities in the decision-making process, specifically in the development of accessible and effective policies. An obvious example of where this ought to happen is the upcoming national action plan on social inclusion. Participants shared concern over gaps in the National Disability Inclusion Strategy, as well as other government policies. It was agreed that policies need to focus more on self-advocacy.

Need for increased funding and capacity building

Participants agreed that there should be less of a reliance on grassroots solutions to issues such as development and transport for people with disabilities. Government should increase resources as a foundation on which to build further support.

There is a need to build skills and capacity among local service providers regarding working with and supporting people with disabilities.

Key policy points

- Attendees feel there should be a greater effort made by Government to provide people with disabilities opportunities to participate in the decision-making process.
- Participants shared concern regarding gaps in the National Disability Strategy and other relevant government policy documents.
- There should be less of a reliance on grassroots solutions to issues such as development or local transport.
- There is an absence of data and research findings regarding certain 'invisible' groups, such as those with a disability who are self-employed or entrepreneurs.
- Funding should be invested into building the skills and capacity of local service providers in supporting people with disabilities.

4.4   Workshop 4: Housing and social inclusion - how far have we come and how far have we to go.

This workshop was chaired by Caroline Fahey of the St Vincent de Paul, who opened the workshop and introduced the two speakers: Alan Byrne of the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (DHPLG) and John-Mark McCafferty of Threshold.

Alan Byrne on collaborative action in housing provision

Alan Byrne of the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (DHPLG) gave the first presentation, in which he focused on collaborative working at government departmental level. He explained that the role of the DHPLG involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of local authorities in addressing housing at local level. Its primary focus has been on delivering homes for households in the lowest income brackets.

Alan noted that in the DHPLG, there is a strong focus on collaborative delivery across the public service to ensure ambitious targets are met. He outlined six stages of successful collaboration providing examples of each using the provision of housing services for older people as the context. The six stages are:

- Government policy.
- Collaboration based on shared goals.
- Agree the purpose.
- Agree the scope.
- Stakeholder involvement.
- Set realistic timelines.

Based on these there were some key actions and lessons learned.

Key actions

The policy document *Rebuilding Ireland – Action plan for housing and homelessness* (2018) commits €6 billion to meeting the housing needs of over 137,000 households by 2021, through the provision of 50,000 social housing homes and 87,000 supported secure tenancies in the private sector.

Out of a total of 40 actions, 23 related to housing, 12 to health and five were shared. All are to be delivered in 2019–2020. The housing actions address:

- An increase in housing adaptation grants.
- Rightsizing schemes, social and private.
- New funding mechanisms to encourage private sector involvement.
- The funding of new housing models, such as home-sharing and house-splitting.
- 'Developer's blueprint'.
- More Universal Design homes.
- Improved planning and targeting of houses to meet older people's needs.
- Ensuring that all local authorities have access to Age Friendly housing advisors.

Learning

Alan identified some points of learning throughout this process of policy to action – changes that may have assisted in the process:

- A dedicated resource within each collaborating organisation.
- Greater awareness of other pressures on collaborators.
- Strong terms of reference when establishing a large stakeholder group.

For further details in relation to Alan's presentation please access the presentation at: http://www.welfare.ie/en/pdf/Workshop4-AlanByrne(DHPLG)Presentation.pdf

John-Mark McCafferty on preventing homelessness

John-Mark McCafferty of Threshold gave the second presentation, on homelessness, in which he emphasised the importance of prevention of homelessness. He described Threshold's services as being about 'prevention, prevention, prevention'.

John-Mark remarked on the failings of successive governments, since the 1980s, to adequately address social housing supply, and the over-reliance since then on the private rented sector to house lower income households in particular. The issues

affecting society were presented and how collaboration and best practice between all the stakeholders could lead to progress in the reduction of homelessness.

Key housing issues

John-Mark outlined the following key housing issues in Ireland.

- Evictions: Sale, renovation, landlord's family moving in, section 34(b) – 'no reason' evictions, affordability.
- Ongoing: Deposit Protection Scheme, Standards / Repairs, High Rents emerging since 2013–2014.
- Housing Assistance Payment – top-ups; refusal to accept it, which compounds existing discrimination.
- The lack of social housing and over-reliance on the private rented sector, which is problematic given issues raised.
- The need for affordable, secure, good quality housing.

He also noted that minimum standards and better regulation overall are needed for the private rented sector.

Need for collaboration

John-Mark went on to emphasise the importance of a collaborative approach in addressing the housing issue in Ireland.
This should involve:

- Training for NGOs and local statutory organisations, including the Citizen's Information Board.
- Greater scope for outreach services among local organisations.
- Joint support for clients, regarding legal, income and sustainment issues.
- Joint advocacy work with like-minded NGOs on single themes, or one-off pieces of work as well as ongoing work regarding homelessness policy.
- Greater connection or traction with certain local authorities.

Regarding local homeless fora, he noted there have been very varied experiences.

Best practice

A number of features of best practice were described. One was advice – specifically, information provided by the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) Ireland) – as well as outreach. Threshold's Tenancy Protection Service was also highlighted, as was the existing protocol with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection regarding rent supplement; regarding the latter, it was noted that a similar protocol was needed regarding the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP).

Other examples of good practice highlighted were:

- Representation at RTB Ireland and Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) hearings.
- Joint advocacy work with like-minded NGOs, drawing on Threshold's policy and legal work, both one-off and ongoing projects.
- Threshold's promotion of housing issues among NGOs (local and national) and statutory bodies, including local authorities, the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE), the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection and the Departments of Housing, Planning and Local Government (DHPLG).

John-Mark concluded by noting that all the training schemes, job activation programmes, participatory networks and similar initiatives will do little to reduce or eliminate poverty if a person cannot secure a home – at a rent they can afford.
For further details in relation to John-Mark's presentation please access the presentation at: http://www.welfare.ie/en/pdf/Workshop-4-John-Mark-McCafferty(Threshold)Presentation.pdf.

Workshop 4 discussion

Over-reliance on the private sector in housing provision

One participant made the point that the Land Development Agency is giving public land to private developers to build social housing and that the government is relying too much on the private sector. In 2007, there was an oversupply of housing but no social housing being built. Another person agreed, noting that the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government has failed miserably by relying on the

private sector. He stated that the solution is not private profit to landlords; rather, the solution is the social housing being built by the Government.

Dermot Coates (DEASP) proposed that investment landlords might be good landlords as they are less likely to evict tenants for a number of reasons allowed by law, such as a family member moving in or for refurbishment or sale of the property. It was noted that investment landlords look upon tenants as the asset rather than the building. John-Mark McCafferty was somewhat agreeable but made the point that Threshold clients cannot afford Real Estate Investment Trusts (REIT) apartments.

Co-living schemes

An attendee asked John-Mark McCafferty to agree that the new co-living schemes being developed were going to be the tenements of the future and another noted that our laws are not sufficient to deal with cases which may arise from tenants in the future. John-Mark answered by saying that small budgets necessitate co-living but that a longer-term approach needs to be looked at as the tenants move though different stages of their lives, including raising a family. There may be suspect reasons why developers are drawn to the idea of co-living and the question has to be asked – why not build houses and apartments instead?

Barriers to housing for people with a disabilities

Another attendee pointed out the discrimination faced by disabled people when they apply for a mortgage and the difference in the Irish and Belgian legal system. It is rare in Ireland to receive your deposit back whereas it is normal in other countries. That person requested that policy be introduced to make it easier for people with a disability to get a mortgage.

A person pointed out that when his clients (who suffer from intellectual disability) apply for a house, their condition is often not factored into the accommodation they are offered; when his clients investigate such an offer, they find that it is unsuitable because of the lack of supports available. The HSE is reluctant to get involved unless it is a crisis situation. He said that proper information is not being collected off clients, or provided to them initially.

The point was raised that building regulations are out of date regarding advancements of technology to help children with disabilities; this has meant that some children have not been able to take up new accommodation because their electric wheelchairs have not been compatible with the accommodation offered. Many houses that have had to be reworked after completion could have been constructed with the needs provided for initially, had the building regulations been changed. This was due to a lack of communication.

Barriers to housing for Travellers

It was noted that sites on the outskirts of Dublin, located beside Traveller accommodation sites, are providing social housing but that Travellers have not been offered places in them. Travellers make up 0.7% of the Irish population but 15% of the homeless population. The point was made that there are local authorities who receive funding to provide Traveller accommodation, who consistently return unspent funds at the end of each year without providing any accommodation for Travellers. They would like this practice investigated.

It was also noted that there were cases where land has been provided for a Traveller family but then no money is provided to buy a caravan. It was added that there are residential standard caravans available and that providing these would have a significant, positive impact on the proportion of Travellers (77%) who are currently in energy poverty.

Inadequacy of emergency accommodation

Attention was brought to the inadequacy of emergency accommodation through the example of a family with three children living in one room for a period of three years. An attendee said that such a situation is wholly unsuitable and degrading for a family. She stated that there is a need for a change in legislation and that timelines should be put on the maximum amount of time a family is to be housed in temporary accommodation before being offered permanent accommodation.

Young people experiencing homelessness

An attendee stated she wants reform around young people experiencing homelessness. The reduction in social welfare payments introduced a few years ago

means that they have little or no hope of affording their own home and that this has life-long impacts for this vulnerable group. She asked if the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection is monitoring this policy.

Impact of increasing housing costs on social inclusion

It was pointed out that the Minimum Essential Budget Standards (MESL) Research Centre promotes social inclusion. The person pointed out that other things suffer when the cost of housing increases. Noting that the two most expensive costs are housing and childcare, she said the Government should focus its attention in developing policy in these areas to provide a way out of poverty and into employment for the vulnerable members of our society.

Key policy points

- Greater training and communication needs to take place for NGOs, front-line government staff and customers.
- A new housing forum comprising members from NGOs and government departments (Health; Housing, Planning and Local Government. Employment Affairs and Social Protection) should be established. This could be a useful means of enabling collaboration.
- The need for affordable housing was highlighted as an urgent issue.
- There is a need to overcome the stigma that can be associated with social housing, as well as local objections.

4.5 Workshop 5: The role of employers in social inclusion: offering opportunity; accommodating difference; flexibility in employment patterns; and corporate responsibility

This workshop was facilitated by Bríd O'Brien of the INOU, who welcomed participants and introduced the two speakers: Siobhan Lawlor Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) and Linda O'Sullivan from Business in the Community Ireland.

Siobhan Lawlor on addressing unemployment

Siobhan Lawlor outlined her current position in the Employer Relations division in the department, as well as her previous position as divisional manager for the north Dublin area. She stated that she had close knowledge and experience of assisting jobseekers in getting payments/entitlements and activation.

Dermot Coates had set out many of the challenges facing the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, which include (among other things) very low unemployment rates and a smaller pool of jobseekers. In relation to this, Siobhan noted that there is a need to adopt the right strategies – ones that will lead to employment for people and that will give employers the right people for available jobs. There is a need now to look beyond the Live Register, to find new ways of identifying people for jobs, as well as jobs for those who are still on the Live Register.

Measures in relation to education, training and employment need to be directed towards outcomes. Not every outcome is necessarily employment; rather, they must include positive self-development. This point was made in relation to the issue of people leaving Community Employment (CE) schemes, for example, but not going on to full-time work; Siobhan emphasised the importance of a tangible outcome for CE scheme participants – that such schemes should not be 'box ticking' exercises.

Over the last five years, the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection has built up various jobs schemes, including Intreo, Jobs Plus, YESS, and JobBridge. The latter (JobBridge) may have received criticism but it is important to note that 65% of participants of this initiative went on to gain full-time employment. During this period, Jobs Ireland was also established – an online recruitment service

that matches jobs with jobseekers.

Siobhan said that we know that work defines us; what we do defines us. We therefore need to enable people to define themselves. The available statistics show that there are 2.3 million people are in employment, but 108,000 people are looking for more work; there is a need to engage with this cohort and with employers. There is also a need for a more segmented approach to employment.

People are living longer. Women have an average life expectancy of 83 years, while for men it is 78 years. Yet once someone reaches their mid-fifties, people start asking them when are going to retire or start to wind down. It is important that we ensure there is no ageism; that people of all ages are given the opportunity to work. We have a working population made up of baby boomers and millennials and everything in between; both ends of that spectrum could learn from each other. There is an opportunity here for intergenerational learning.

Regarding female participation, Siobhan noted that, according to the CSO, a total of 58,000 women are available to work but are not working. There is a need to find ways to engage this group. Women are 3.5 times more likely to work part-time than men; there is a clear need for more flexible ways of working. This issue of flexible working is also relevant to carers, particularly those caring for both children and older parents – the so-called 'sandwich generation'. At the same time, there is a need to avoid 'gender clustering'; we need to ensure there are equal opportunities for all, across all locations.

Siobhan spoke about the 'new Irish' or immigrants to Ireland, who are often highly educated but working in occupations that do not reflect their education. African nationals have the lowest employment and highest unemployment rates in the country. Their capacity is not being accessed or utilised.

Finally, Siobhan raised the question of how young people on the Live Register might best be supported in accessing employment. At present, over 20,000 young people are on the Live Register. In this regard, she noted that many people who have gone into business themselves after availing of supports from Department of Employment

Affairs and Social Protection can be unwilling to take on people from the Live Register, especially young people via the YESS scheme.

Linda O'Sullivan on employers addressing social inclusion

Linda O'Sullivan from Business in the Community (BITC) began with a short description of BITC –a not-for-profit organisation that has been in business for over 20 years. BITC works to harness the power of businesses for positive social impact. It works with employers in all areas of corporate social responsibility (CSR), and seeks to encourage employers to be more inclusive in employing people. BITC works with employers to help find employment for people who are marginalised or who have significant barriers to employment, such as physical problems, mental health issues or homelessness. Some examples were provided:

- An initiative whereby employers are matched with a DEIS school to help students in transition year gain work experience.
- A legal company that has two transition year placements specifically for students from DEIS schools.

Linda spoke of the importance of encouraging companies doing something beyond business; beyond mere employment. She emphasised that many employers feel the best way to move people out of poverty is to give them a job, while in fact moving people out of poverty can involve a lot more than provision of a job. There are many invisible barriers to be overcome.

There is a need for companies to provide a statement of intent regarding inclusion. Many of the big companies understand the notion of diversity but the concept of inclusion can be more challenging.

It is important to encourage recruiters to commit to employing or at least targeting, a specific to percentage of their staff from the Live Register. In this regard, employers need to think differently. CSR and human resources (HR) are usually two separate sections within a company; in order to address inclusion, they need to come together.

Everyone should have a realistic chance of employment once they are qualified for a role. Employers need to open the door, in order to be inclusive. They need to think about the next step. The issue of retraining people is also relevant; flexibility is key here.

Finally, Linda asked whether employers are doing enough for people with disabilities, or are some companies reluctant to take on someone with a disability or special needs.

Workshop 5 discussion

Bird O'Brien of the INOU acted as facilitator for this workshop discussion.

Precarious work

It was noted that people working in big companies tend to be reasonably well protected in terms of employment. However, people who are unskilled or on precarious contracts are not given the same level of protection as other employees. The representative of a lone parent organisation noted the need for workplace representation. Responding to this point, Linda O'Sullivan noted that her organisation is actively trying to get work done on precarious hours. She noted that many employers with a high number of employees (with particular reference here to the construction industry) tend to outsource or sub-contract some work. The challenge is making sure that those sub-contractors take on the same corporate responsibilities as the main company.

Linda also noted that if companies are looking for new business, they need to be asked about their corporate social responsibility and practices relating to precarious hours. On this issue, it was commented that the legislation we have regarding zero hours contracts is ground-breaking but that it needs to be implemented. It was noted on this point that there is a 'fear factor' at the workplace level regarding this zero hour contract legislation.

The point was made that there seems to be no 'plan' in place for people on Disability Allowance, some of whom could be employed in voluntary or community work.

The concept of a universal basic income was raised by a participant, which he said seems to overcome the 'traps' of a social welfare income, while protecting a person's dignity at all times. However, he said that no one in Ireland to date seems to have taken up this approach seriously.

Lack of affordable childcare as barrier

It was pointed out that affordable childcare is still a huge barrier to taking up employment, especially for lone parents who fear losing their benefits and medical card. People are organising their work to allow them to keep their welfare payments. There needs to be more flexibility (from the department) on this issue, as it is resulting in people deciding to work less.

Siobhan Lawlor of Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection responded by noting that people should be encouraged to use the 'Benefit of Work Estimator' on welfare.ie, which calculates the exact impact on welfare benefits, rather than assume they will lose all benefits.[7] INTREO office staff can also help people to work out these costs. It was acknowledged it is important that people can calculate their exact earnings, for the purposes of future financial planning, saving for a mortgage or other costs.

Flexible employers

It was said that employers need to step up. Others echoed this. One person stated there is a need for employers to be flexible about remote working, because of housing costs in urban areas and in support of a good work–life balance. Enforcement of the legislation is a key issue, she said; people need security of income to be socially involved in communities.

Barriers for carers

A member of the workshop noted that regulations regarding the Carers' Allowance allow a carer to work up to 15 hours per week; working any length of time over that will mean losing the allowance. He argued that carers should be able to work at least 19.5 hours per week, similar to the Community Employment (CE) scheme.

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[7] See http://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Ready-Reckoner.aspx

They also asked what happens to an individual being cared for if their carer is working. He suggested it would be helpful of funds were provided for respite, such as through a matched funding scheme whereby Government provide a portion of the funding, and the remainder is paid by the carer's employer.

Discrimination as a barrier

Another participant spoke of how some people can be discriminated against because of their socio-economic background, which is not one of the nine groups that cannot be discriminated against. Efforts are being made to change this. He noted that people are changing addresses in order to get interviews with some people being turned down because of their accent, even though they are qualified. On this point, a representative of the organisation Ruhama said that she had previously worked for a large company in the private sector, but that she now works in the voluntary sector. She noted that there is a lot of goodwill in the private sector but that the challenge there is a lack of awareness about what it is like to be from a marginalised group. Another participant noted that the private sector is 'all about profit'; employers 'just want the job done'. They noted that people who are marginalised are not prepared to enter the jobs market; they need greater support in preparing for a job interview.

A person noted that many Black African immigrants are already highly skilled when they come to Ireland and some do well in some sectors of employment, such as social work and nursing. However, there may be a societal bias (conscious and/or unconscious) against African immigrants among some employers. This can act as a barrier to employment. Moreover, this bias is trickling down to the younger generation, who see their parents facing this barrier. Another participant agreed, noting that there are many qualified immigrants, yet the next generation – children – are asking why their (qualified) parents are working in unskilled employments. Why are they not getting work here? One of the visitors from the Swedish Employment Service said she works with employers to see if they will interview migrants for positions. She said this works well in larger organisations, but less well in small-to-medium organisations unless the owner is also a migrant.

It was asked why people are not getting jobs, with employers saying they have jobs they cannot fill. It was said that the Equality Authority needs to run more campaigns

on this. There is a need to tackle the employers and ask them why they are not employing migrants.

Responding to the point on unconscious bias, Siobhan Lawlor spoke of her experience training staff on this issue, from the customer/employer point of view. She said the training was well received. She also emphasised the importance of talking about this type of bias, in order to address it effectively. Siobhan spoke of the need to flag discriminatory behaviour and suggested that a collaborative approach (between the private sector and Government) might be useful in addressing this.

Linda O'Sullivan of Business in the Community agreed, highlighting the importance of organising training on unconscious bias, in order to ensure people understand the concept. It is important that this does not get reduced to a 'box ticking exercise'.

Opening doors to the workplace

One attendee spoke of the need to look at getting older people into the workforce and retaining them there. He also spoke of prisoners, especially those who finish a long-term sentence with no skills, suggesting there may be value in considering provision of apprenticeships for prisoners, who need skills to gain employment when they are released.

Supporting people at work

People shared experience of good working models. For example, one person said that he previously worked for the National Council for the Blind in Italy, where there were supports in place to help people with disabilities to access the workplace. Some participants spoke positively of a mentor or coaching support for people in work. For example, one attendee spoke of the value of having a mentor or coach in the workplace to support people with disabilities noted that public employment services have a buddying programme – someone a person with a disability could turn to during the day.

There was a discussion about the importance of 'taking the fear out of work' for some. An example was given of case officers helping to prepare people for interviews.

Public sector employment

There was a brief discussion around public sector employment; Siobhan Lawlor of the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection noted that the Public Sector is a good employer but this is not the general perception; that the private sector is generally seen as better. Someone else noted that the public sector recruitment process is too complicated.

Key policy points

- Among some employers there can be an unconscious bias, so that some excluded groups (such as those with a low socio-economic status) are unlikely to benefit from any measures aimed at improving their inclusivity.
- People from Africa can face particular challenges in trying to enter the Irish workforce; well-skilled people are not getting access to relevant employment. This can have a generational effect, whereby children observe and are discouraged by their parents' experiences.
- Employers need to look beyond employment alone as a means of lifting someone out of poverty, to consider other factors such as the cost of childcare and risk of losing a medical card.

4.6   Workshop 6: Social inclusion and Traveller health and wellbeing

This workshop was facilitated by Josephine Fogarty, of the HSE's Traveller Health Unit Mid-West. Its expert contributors were Ronnie Fay and Mary Brigid McCann of Pavee Point and Philip Watt of Cystic Fibrosis Ireland.

Ronnie Fay and Mary Brigid McCann on Traveller health

Ronnie Fay began with a brief outline of the work of Pavee Point. It is an NGO committed to the attainment of human rights for Irish Travellers and Roma, with a specific focus on the right to health. It works at community, service and policy levels; representing issues at local/regional and national levels.

The work of the organisation includes: the primary health care Traveller project; men's health; the violence against women project; mental health; the Roma project; and the drugs and alcohol project. Pavee Point coordinates the Eastern Region Traveller Health Network (ERTHN), the Traveller Health Unit (THU) and the National Traveller Health Network (NTHN). It also ensures the mainstreaming of Travellers and Roma in new health service developments.

Finally, Pavee Point supports the development of key performance indicators and facilitates the collation and analysis of data in health services. Pavee Point advocates a social determinants approach to health in line with Action 73 of the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS, 2017–2021) which states, 'the Health Service Executive will develop and implement a detailed action plan, based on the findings of the All-Ireland Traveller Health Study, to continue to address the specific health needs of Travellers, using a social determinants approach'. However, this action health action plan has not yet materialised.

Traveller health in context

Ronnie and Mary Brigid drew from findings of the All-Ireland Traveller Health Study (2010) to provide an overview of the health status and needs of Travellers in Ireland.

These included a number of issues of which they provided details on such as:

- Traveller mortality.

- Mental health and Travellers.
- Discrimination in health services and in general.

Challenges and solutions

Ronnie identified the key challenges facing the Traveller community, and then outlined possible solutions. For further details in relation to Ronnie's presentation please access the presentation at: http://www.welfare.ie/en/pdf/Workshop-6-Ronnie-Fay-(Pavee-Point)-Presentation.pdf

Recommendations from a national consultation exercise

Ronnie concluded by summarising the key recommendations from a national consultation (including four regional workshops) held to inform the development of the NTHAP as committed to in the NTRIS. The key recommendations identified were the need for:

- An institutional mechanism to be established to work in partnership with the Department of Health, the HSE and Traveller organisations to drive the implementation and delivery of the forthcoming NTHAP.
- There should be a named individual with responsibility for Traveller health within the Department of Health and the HSE, whose role it is to prioritise Traveller health needs and ensure Traveller health is mainstreamed within all divisions and policies of the Department of Health. This is required, and given greater urgency now, given all the health changes coming under Sláintecare. Traveller health inequalities need to be prioritised within the regional integrated community organisations (RICO), community healthcare organisations (CHOs) and the work of chief officers. These roles also would involve supporting the work of the proposed Planning Advisory Body for Traveller Health (PATH).
- A 'SMART NTHAP' has to be developed, underpinned by community development, inclusive of timelines, ring-fenced resources and a strong monitoring and evaluation framework.

Ronnie stated that unfortunately the recommendations identified through the consultation process are not reflected in the current draft NTHAP.

Ronnie finished her presentation by urging those responsible to take action: 'Besides talking the talk, let's walk the walk!'

Philip Watt on the new health action plan for Travellers

Philip Watt, CEO of Cystic Fibrosis Ireland, made ten key points relating to the draft National Health Action Plan for Travellers (NTHAP).

- Health problems for Travellers need a decade of resources and actions in order for them to be adequately addressed and resolved.
- We need to build on previous experience and work. In this regard, noted a range of positive outcomes regarding healthcare initiatives for Travellers. For example, it has been found that 98% of pregnant Traveller women availed of maternity services. One-quarter (25%) of Traveller women get cancer screening, which is above national average. Similar proportions (23%) of Traveller women have obtained the cervical smear test, as compared to 12% of the general population. There has also been a reduction in the size of Traveller families, due to acceptance of contraceptive advice.Despite these positive developments, only 3% of the Traveller population is aged over 65 years.
- There is a need to address a negative mind-set prevalent in society; that 'Travellers don't deserve health care', that their 'problems are of their own making', that 'we have tried without success'. Funding is needed.
- A whole of government approach is required; for example, education is important in relation to uptake of health services.
- The new plan must respond to the high rates of mental health problems and homelessness among Travellers; 10% of Travellers are homeless, and the rate of suicide in the Traveller population is very high rate.
- There is a need for dedicated staff to drive the new action plan; without this, the plan will not be effectively implemented. (The original plan was ambitious but has been edited.)
- Sláintecare is an important resource. Looking to at UK, there have been no improvements in delivery of the healthcare (the National Health Service) to

Travellers and gypsies in the UK. This highlights the importance of Traveller participation in developing the action plan.

- Resources are required.
- Service providers are asking, 'Tell us how to do it'. We need to provide guidelines and develop good practice models as resources for service providers.
- We need to be strategic in the prioritisation of key issues.

Workshop discussion

Josephine Fogarty summed up this part of the session by identifying the need for leadership within the Traveller community. She pointed out how peer involvement in healthcare had shown good results, and asked how this approach might be used throughout the forthcoming plan.

Loss of expertise in the public sector

John Conlon of the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection spoke of how public service was losing a lot of experienced staff through ongoing retirement. Josephine Fogarty also commented on this loss of expertise and institutional memory through retirement and staff movement. She said there was goodwill among staff but that this was similar to the previous generations of service providers helping 'the deserving poor'. However, Ann Irwin (CWI) stated that the plan's implementation cannot be solely reliant on individuals within the public sectors.

Need for drivers for the Traveller health plan

A member of Pavee Point spoke on the need for policy drivers in the various administrative departments and primary health care. This point was echoed by participant, who said that there were no drivers of the plan in the Traveller Health Care Unit. He asked where the plan got lost, and emphasised the need for implementation. Another person restated that there was a need for drivers to move the plan forward. She also wanted to know why the draft plan had been edited. Ronnie Fay said that it was frustrating putting efforts into work that seemed to be opposed.

Need for whole-of-government approach, from local to national levels

Josephine Fogarty said there needs to be a whole-of-government approach to this issue. Taking this point to local level, A member of Waterford Area Partnership spoke of SICAP funding and how funding should not come from just one government department. She asked what happens at local level and stressed the need for local bodies to work with Traveller groups.

Public service duty

Another person asked who implements the duty in relation to discrimination. She also pointed to the need to learn from experiences that work regarding Travellers, on this issue.

Other points raised

- Participants also flagged the need for the collection of ethnicity data in research, so the experiences of Travellers can be studied.
- It was noted that the new mental health strategy should address provision of genetic counselling that is Traveller friendly.
- It was spoken of the need to benchmark improvements.

Key policy points

- A whole-of-government approach is needed to track, respond and improve Traveller social inclusion, health and wellbeing. A high-level official should be appointed within each government department to drive this.
- Traveller data are masked in most current statistical sources. There is a need for standardised ethnic identifiers to be introduced across all government departments to clearly identify Traveller statistics. These should be linked to any revised Survey of Income and Living Conditions (SILC) survey modifications.
- While there is a need for universal and mainstream approaches, there is also a real need for targeted approaches to be implemented. Peer Traveller health workers have provided a good model that has proven to be effective; this should be replicated to respond to other Traveller issues such as accommodation, education and employment.

- There is an urgent need for the draft National Traveller Health Action Plan to be agreed, resourced and implemented.

5.   Closing remarks

Jacqui McCrum, Deputy General Secretary, brought the day's proceedings to a close. She thanked the Minister and everyone else who had contributed to the Forum, including all of those who had taken part in the regional workshops organised by European Anti-Poverty Network Ireland (EAPN) and Community Work Ireland (CWI), as well as EAPN Ireland and CWI themselves for organising those workshops, and for reporting back to the Forum on the key issues raised. She also thanked those from the audience who contributed to that presentation, for sharing their personal experiences. Ms McCrum thanked the staff of the Social Inclusion Division of the Department of Employment and Social Affairs who organised the conference, as well as the staff of the Aviva Stadium Conference Centre.

Ms McCrum concluded by noting that the conference proceedings, including all workshop discussions, would be prepared as a report by the rapporteur. This report will then be submitted to the Senior Officials' Group on Social Policy and Public Service Reform and the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy and Public Service Reform and will be placed in the Oireachtas library for the information of members of both Houses of the Oireachtas.

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