Ireland

National Social Report 2014

April 2014

CONTENTS

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Competency and procedure for approval of the National Social Report

In Ireland, responsibility for national social policy development and delivery comes within the ambit of several departments and associated agencies. Relevant departments include: Social Protection; Health; Children and Youth Affairs; Environment, Community and Local Government; Education and Science; and Justice and Equality. The Department of Social Protection co-ordinated this National Social Report and it encompasses inputs from all relevant departments. The Report has been approved by the Government of Ireland.

The National Social Report has been prepared in conjunction with the National Reform Programme. It focuses on government policies concerning social protection, social inclusion and health and long-term care. These policies are connected with and supported by the broader economic and employment policies and high level targets set out in the National Reform Programme.

1.2 Progress made against the overarching objectives of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC)

The reforms and initiatives outlined in this report are concrete evidence of the progress being made to meet the objectives of the OMC in the past year in Ireland. Chapter 2 outlines the contribution to tacking poverty and promoting social inclusion. Chapter 3 summarises various actions taken to advance equal access to and participation in the labour market, support children, tackle homelessness and exercise good governance and encompass stakeholder involvement in policy making and implementation. Chapter 4 describes recent reforms to achieve adequate and sustainable pensions while Chapter 5 indicates progress in accessing quality healthcare. Chapter 6 focuses on the arrangements in place to facilitate access to social protection by young unemployed people.

1.3 Structural changes

There have been some significant structural changes in the social policy area over the period covered by this Report. The Education and Training Boards Act 2013 was passed in May 2013 and provides for the dissolution of Vocational Education Committees (VECs) and for the establishment, from May 2013, of the 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs) through a process involving the merger of some of the 33 existing VECs. In addition, the Further Education and Training Act 2013 was signed into law in July 2013. This Act provided for the establishment of SOLAS[1] in October 2013 which will work with the ETBs to support the development of appropriate further education and training programmes and curricula and the

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[1] SOLAS has been established to develop and give strategic direction to the Further Education and Training Sector in Ireland. It is responsible for funding, planning and co-ordinating a wide range of training and further education programmes and has a mandate to ensure the provision of 21st century high-quality programmes to jobseekers and other learners.

sourcing of education and training interventions from the private, public and not-for-profit sectors. This corporate change programme will run for a considerable period beyond the establishment of the new bodies and the transfer of functions.

Arrangements are being advanced to include legislation to strengthen Ireland's robust framework for the promotion of equality and human rights by amalgamating the Equality Authority and the Human Rights Commission to form a new body. The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Bill, published in March 2014, will introduce a positive duty on public bodies to have due regard to human rights and equality, while the new Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission will be empowered to assist public bodies to comply with their obligations in this regard by producing guidelines and codes of practice.

1.4 Overall strategy for social protection and investment

The Irish Government is on course to return Ireland's public finances to a sustainable path. In doing so, it is committed to protecting progress made in key social and economic areas while also achieving its financial targets. Since exiting the EU IMF economic programme, the Government has made a strong commitment to maintain the reform momentum necessary to achieve its goals to support job creation and enhance living standards. The *Medium-Term Economic Strategy 2014-2020* provides a whole of Government framework to drive the development of appropriate sectoral and horizontal principles:

> The Government's goals of ensuring a job-rich recovery and setting Ireland on the path to sustainable prosperity, will provide opportunity for our people, provide high quality public services, and encourage innovation in business and across society. This will enable the building of a fairer Ireland by helping to reduce inequality and improve poverty outcomes across society, with a particular emphasis on child poverty in line with the commitment in the Programme for Government.

Thus, addressing poverty and promoting social inclusion are mainstreamed policy objectives. Furthermore, social protection policies have a key role to play in contributing to and augmenting economic recovery by increasing employment opportunities for those who are distant from the labour market and by freeing up resources for productive purposes.

Investment in social protection will, in the years ahead, promote active inclusion in society through the provision of income supports, access to employment and related services. The key role of social transfers in reducing income poverty is outlined in Chapter 2 of this Report. The Government will continue to develop and implement a programme of reform to underpin the sustainability of the welfare system into the future including State pension provision. In particular, the ongoing policy of transforming the social protection system into one which focuses on maximising employability by providing training, development and employment services side by side with income support will be fully maintained and expanded. This will contribute to the overarching goal of Government to grow the economy and reduce unemployment. Getting people back to work will also assist those at risk of poverty and free up resources for continuing investment in income and other supports in the years ahead.

1.5 Economic context

Following weakness in 2012 and early 2013, there is now evidence that a modest recovery is taking hold in the Irish economy. While the preliminary estimate for Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2013 is a marginal decline (by 0.3%) overall, it is projected to increase by 2% in 2014. However, the domestic economy improved in 2013, with Gross National Product (GNP) growing by an estimated 3.4%. The difference in the two measures of growth is largely attributed to issues relating to patent expiry in the pharmaceutical sector. The contribution from domestic demand is expected to strengthen, which is encouraging. GDP growth is expected to accelerate further to 2.3% in 2015 and 2.8% in 2016.

1.6 Key social indicators

Employment

The employment rate for women and men aged 20-64 was 65.5% in 2013, up by almost 2% from 2012, showing the beginning of an improvement in the labour market after a fall from 74% in 2007 to 71% in 2008 and less than 64% in 2012. The employment rate for men in 2013 was 70.9%, up from 68.1% in 2012. The female employment rate showed a more modest but still significant increase, from 59.4% in 2012 to 60.3% in 2013. The gender gap in employment rates had almost halved from 16% in 2008 to 9% in 2012, but widened slightly in 2013 as male employment began to recover relatively rapidly. The employment rate for young people aged 20-24, rose from 46% in 2012 to 49% in 2013. In terms of reaching the 2020 target of employment rates of 69-71%, the employment rates will have to increase by 0.6% each year. This rate of increase is feasible provided the current recovery is maintained into the medium-term.

Unemployment

The seasonally adjusted unemployment rate is currently 12.0% (January, 2014); while it has fallen from a peak of 15% in early 2012, the rate remains unacceptably high. The male seasonally adjusted unemployment rate of 13.7% compares with a female unemployment rate of 10.3%. While the number who are long-term unemployed has fallen by 21% over the last two years, it is of continued concern that long-term unemployment (defined as being unemployed for a year or more) accounted for over 60% (156,000) of total unemployment at the end of 2013. The level of jobless households also increased significantly over the period, but recent evidence from the QNHS/LFS[2] suggests that the rate turned in 2013 and is now falling in line with unemployment levels.

Youth unemployment

Overall, the under-25 age group had an unemployment rate of 26.77% in 2013 (35.5% for 15-19 year-olds and 24.5% for 20-24 year-olds) down from 30.45% in 2012. This compares to an unemployment rate of 12% for prime age workers (ages 25–54). About 40% of the young unemployed are out of work for more than one year. Despite the high rate of youth unemployment, the absolute number of young unemployed people has fallen – from close to 80,000 on average in 2009 to 57,000 on average in 2013. The most recent figures show youth unemployment down by 10,000 year-on-year to 49,000 in Q4 2013. While some of the fall in youth unemployment has been due to the improvement in the labour market it has also partly been a result of demographic developments arising from birth trends in the 1980s and 1990s,

[2] Quarterly National Household Survey - the Irish version of the EU Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS).

the tendency for some young people to stay longer in education rather than seeking work in a depressed market and the impact of emigration. As a result of this fall, young people now represent 20% of all the unemployed, down from a share of 35% in mid-2008.

1.7 Consultation of national stakeholders

A consultation event on the National Social Report and the poverty component of the National Reform Programme was held on 3rd March 2014 with national stakeholders and representatives of Government departments and agencies, with a particular emphasis on areas of responsibility within the Department of Social Protection. Over 50 people attended the event and comments from panel discussions were fed back to other Government departments. In addition, national stakeholders were consulted in the context of other structural and policy changes. For example, in the context of the reform of the One-parent Family Payment scheme, groups representing lone parents were consulted in advance of the implementation of the new arrangement. Another example concerns the meeting of the Apprenticeship Review Group with relevant stakeholders who provided over 70 submissions on how best to improve the current apprentice system in order to discuss their individual submissions further. The draft National Social Report was circulated to stakeholders prior to its presentation to Government for approval.

1.8 Social innovation supporting relevant initiatives

Social innovation is concerned with developing new ideas, services and models to better address social issues. This Report outlines two particular initiatives in Chapter 3: the Intreo service which is a single point of contact for all employment and income supports; and the Area Based Childhood (ABC) Programme which is designed to deliver prevention and early intervention programmes; where the social innovation approach is applied to enhance service delivery and supports to people of working age and children, respectively.

Chapter 2

A Decisive Impact on the Eradication of Poverty and Social Exclusion

2.1 National social target for poverty reduction

Following a review in 2012[3], the Government agreed a revised and enhanced national social target for poverty reduction, which is to reduce consistent poverty (overlap of at-risk-of-poverty and basic deprivation) to 4% by 2016 (interim target) and to 2% or less by 2020, from the 2010 baseline rate of 6.3%. The target is supported by a wide range of actions across diverse policy areas in the *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016*. More recent measures which address the social impact of the crisis are set out in the annual updates of the National Reform Programme.

The Social Inclusion Monitor is an official report on progress towards the national social target and associated indicators. The inaugural monitor for the period 2011 was published in March 2013, using data from SILC[4]. The monitor was developed in conjunction with a Technical Advisory Group on poverty indicators and data. The monitor also reports on supporting indicators which capture key dimensions of poverty and on contextual indicators relating to lifecycle and vulnerable groups. The monitor for 2012 will be prepared following the publication by the Central Statistics Office of the results of SILC 2012. It is planned to add a section to the monitor outlining the spatial distribution of poverty.

2.2 Irish contribution to the Europe 2020 poverty target

The national social target includes the Irish contribution to meeting the Europe 2020 poverty target, which is to reduce by a minimum of 200,000 the population in combined poverty i.e. consistent poverty, at-risk-of-poverty or basic deprivation. In doing so it captures a similar percentage of the population as the EU 'at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion' measure. There is an overlap of approximately 80% in the populations captured by either measure.[5] The population using the Irish combined poverty measure is 35.7% in 2012, compared to 33.6% in 2011. This equates to 1.6 million people. This higher figure reflects an increase in both basic deprivation (+ 2.4% to 26.9%) and at-risk-of-poverty (+ 0.5% to 16.5%). Nominally, this represents an increase of 95,000 in the Europe 2020 target population. This upward trend in the Europe 2020 target population highlights the social impact of the economic crisis in Ireland (see Figure 1).

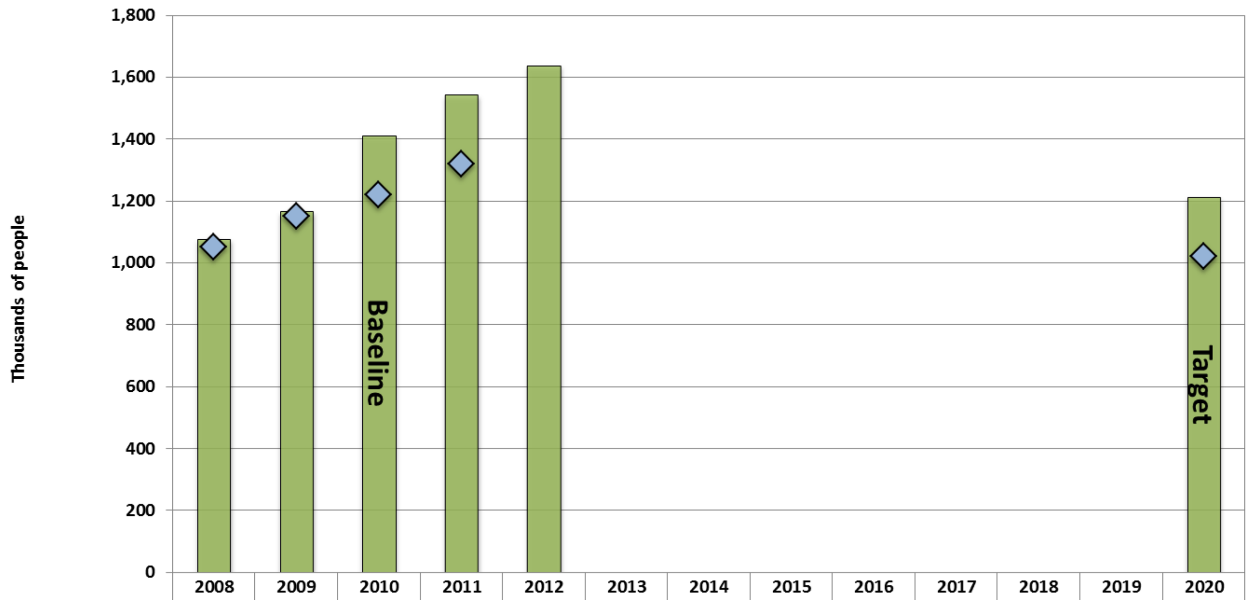
The latest (2012) data show no statistically significant change in the rate of consistent poverty at 7.7%, from 2011. Spatially, the Border Midland and Western region had the highest rate at 9.4%, compared with 7.1% in the Southern and Eastern region. The consistent poverty rate in rural areas was 7.3%, compared to 8% in urban areas. Changes in the at-risk-of-poverty rate reflect different dynamics: one, the fall in the 60% median income threshold as household incomes have declined since the economic crisis; and, two, the cushioning effect through

[3] Ireland's former headline target: to reduce the number experiencing consistent poverty to between 2-4% by 2012, with the aim of eliminating consistent poverty by 2016, which will lift at least 186,000 people out of the risk of poverty and exclusion.
[4] Survey on Income and Living Conditions.
[5] Source: National Reform Programme 2013 Update.

increasing performance (poverty reduction effectiveness) of social transfers, in reducing pre-social transfer at-risk-of-poverty rates.

A significant impact of the crisis is registered in rising basic deprivation rates, increasing from 14% in 2008 to 22.6% in 2010 and 26.9% in 2012. The risk of being deprived has spread to groups that are not income poor, reflecting the social impact of the crisis for the Irish population as a whole. A supporting indicator, vulnerable to consistent poverty, has been developed that captures those whose income is between 60% and 70% of the median and who are experiencing basic deprivation.

Figure 1 Progress towards the Europe 2020 national target for the reduction of poverty and social exclusion 2008-2012 (IE and EU indicators)



	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
IE combined poverty	1,076	1,165	1,412	1,542	1,637								1,212
EU AROPE ('000s)	1,050	1,150	1,220	1,319									1,020
IE combined poverty %	24.0%	25.7%	31.0%	33.6%	35.7%								26.6%
EU AROPE %	23.7%	25.7%	29.9%	29.4%									25.0%

Source: CSO SILC
Note: For further analysis of the two methodologies, see Watson, D and Maître, B (2012) *Technical Paper on Poverty Indicators*, Dublin: Department of Social Protection.
The EU AROPE target figure in 2020 is indicative. The percentage targets are also indicative and based on 2010 population figures.

2.3 A child-specific poverty target

As part of the review of the national poverty target, the Government agreed to set specific sub-targets.[6] In recognition of the higher risks and life-long consequences of child poverty, a

[6] Agreement on a sub-target on jobless households is pending the completion of further analysis on this issue, including investigation of the apparent discrepancy between SILC and QNHS measurements of jobless households in Ireland. In the meantime, the National Reform Programme 2014 contains a number of references to jobless households, both under the employment target and the poverty targets, reflecting its policy priority.

new child-specific poverty target is set in *Better Outcomes: Brighter Futures – the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020*. The target is: to lift over 70,000 children out of consistent poverty by 2020, a reduction of at least two-thirds on the 2011 level. This target will include reducing the higher consistent poverty risk for households with children as compared to non-child households (8.8% vs. 4.2%), and for children as compared to adults (9.3% vs. 6%). The National Policy Framework is broadly in line with a multi-dimensional social investment approach and seeks to improve children and young people's lives and life chances, addressing child poverty and social exclusion and promoting wellbeing and well-becoming.

2.4 Experiences and challenges going forward

Ireland has long experience in setting national poverty targets, beginning in 1997 with the first *National Anti-Poverty Strategy – Sharing in Progress 1997*. It has had successes in meeting and even exceeding these targets to date. However, there is a significant challenge in meeting the current target. Using the baseline year of 2008 to set the Europe 2020 poverty target has proved especially challenging for Ireland. Poverty rates have been increasing since that year. From the period 2010 to 2012 the target population has increased by 225,000 people. Looking ahead, a coordinated implementation of targeted policies across all policy areas and all Government departments is required to ensure progress on the poverty target.

Chapter 3

Recent Reforms in Social Inclusion Policies

3.1 Ensuring adequacy of benefits

In 2013, the Department of Social Protection spent over €20 billion in providing income support to 1.5 million recipients with a further 750,000 beneficiaries. In accordance with the *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion*, ensuring welfare adequacy is a key concern. In the 2000s, the Government greatly increased the welfare payment rates well ahead of both inflation and wages. Since 2011, the Government has continued this redistributive policy by maintaining the nominal value of the main weekly welfare payments, despite the requirements for significant welfare savings as part of the national fiscal consolidation strategy.

For children, the *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016* commits to maintain the combined value of child income support measures at 33%-35% of the minimum adult payment rate. Despite reductions in child benefit, the commitment to an adequate income for poorer children continues to be met, with basic child income supports stabilising at €60 per week (child benefit and qualified child increases) in 2014.

For people with a disability, one of the lifecycle groups in the *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016*, there are a number of actions to address adequate income, access to services and employment and participation.

A recent report[7] shows that social transfers are particularly effective at reducing the pre-social transfer at-risk-of-poverty rate. This poverty reduction effect increased from 53% in 2004 to 71% in 2011, thereby lifting almost 40% of the population out of at-risk-of-poverty in 2011. Ireland is now at the top of the range of EU-15 countries with an overall effectiveness of 90% in reducing the poverty gap through social transfers. The report shows the poverty reduction effectiveness for children and for jobless households was also high at 87%, respectively.

3.2 Activation measures

The Irish Government's *Pathways to Work* strategy, launched in February 2012, introduced, in its first phase, a new integrated employment and support service involving the transformation of the social welfare local office network into a 'one-stop-shop' service called Intreo.[8] This major structural reform of the local service facilitates jobseekers to access their entitlements and get help with planning their return to work. A second iteration of *Pathways to Work* began in July 2013. While the initial concentration of reform had been on interaction with the newly-unemployed, under this phase a renewed focus is given to targeting activation places to the long-term unemployed and good progress was made in implementing key elements of the approach over the past year. Examples include:

[7] Watson, D, and Maître, B (2013) Social Transfers and Poverty Alleviation in Ireland: An Analysis of the CSO Survey on Income and Living Conditions 2004 - 2011, Social Inclusion Report No. 4. Dublin: Department of Social Protection and Economic and Social Research Institute.

[8] Intreo is a single point of contact for all employment and income supports and offers practical, tailored employment services and supports for jobseekers and employers.

- JobsPlus - a recruitment subsidy, launched in the second half of 2013, encourages employers to recruit long-term unemployed people and is payable monthly in arrears, over a 2-year period. There are two levels of incentive: €7,500 for recruits unemployed for more than 12 but less than 24 months and €10,000 for recruits unemployed for more than 24 months.
- Gateway - a local authority labour activation scheme, launched in late 2013, provides short-term work and training opportunities for long-term unemployed people who have been on the Live Register for over 2 years. There are 3,000 places available under this initiative in 2014.

In 2013, as part of the Government's *Action Plan for Jobs*, the Department of Education and Skills committed to approximately 51,000 places for long-term unemployed participants across the range of its further and higher education and training provision.[9] The estimated participation in 2013 was 59,530 or 27% of total starters. This represents 115% of the 2013 target. In addition, €20 million has been committed under the Momentum programme to providing a range of quality, relevant education and training interventions. In 2013, this programme provided over 6,500 education and training places for people who are long-term unemployed. Momentum also had a dedicated theme to address the specific needs of those who were under 25 years of age.

Together, all these measures, along with the growth of the economy are having a positive effect on long-term unemployment in Ireland. The *Pathways to Work* Target for 2013 was to move 20,000 people from long-term unemployment into employment. That target was exceeded – with 26,611 moving into employment. A more ambitious target of 22,500 has been set for 2014.

The Advisory Group on Tax and Social Welfare was established in June 2011 to address a number of specific issues and make cost-effective proposals for improving employment incentives and achieving better poverty outcomes, particularly child poverty outcomes. The Advisory Group is currently considering the issue of working age income supports. In particular the Group is considering how employment incentives might be addressed and what role in-work benefits, such as the Family Income Supplement, might play in supporting employment and encouraging people to move from welfare into work by smoothing the progression into employment and ensuring that work pays. In this examination it is also considering the position of other working age adults, such as qualified adults, lone parents and those with a disability.

The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme, introduced in July 2013, will transfer responsibility for recipients of rent supplement with an established social housing need from the Department of Social Protection to local authorities. Payments under the scheme will be based on the local authority differential rent means test under which the full-time employment restriction does not apply and therefore will remove a key barrier to persons on social welfare in getting back to work. This will benefit families as well as individuals.

[9] The *Action Plan for Jobs*, published in 2012, is the Government initiative to rebuild the economy and create jobs. The Plan aims to improve supports for job-creating businesses and remove barriers to employment-creation across the economy.

3.3 Improving access to education and other interventions

The Department of Social Protection redeployed significant resources to case work during 2013. As a result, the number of case officers doubled with some 300 staff being re-trained to fulfil that role. This has enhanced the Department's capacity to prioritise and enhance jobseeker access to appropriate progression interventions.

As part of Budget 2014, €15m was provided to support the establishment of book rental schemes in primary schools which do not currently operate them. This money is to be used as seed capital to allow primary schools to set up such book loan schemes. In 2013, more than 80% of all primary schools indicated they have a book rental scheme in operation.

3.4 Access to integrated employment and social services

The establishment of Intreo, a locally delivered, fully integrated single public employment and benefits service, has been progressed over the past year. The service has been introduced to 44 local offices to date with the remaining 16 expected to be delivering the service by the end of 2014. A key relationship in the development of the Intreo service is that with the newly established ETBs with the aim of ensuring good quality provision of information, referral procedures, guidance and course recruitment to comprehensively address the needs of jobseekers. In 2013, over 130,000 people attended group engagement meetings where new jobseekers were given information on the employment supports available to them. This was a significant increase from the 2012 figure of 68,600. Also, 156,700 people attended initial one-to-one interviews with case officers and a further 136,900 follow up one-to-one interviews were also completed.

3.5 Reducing gender segmentation in the labour market

Creating inclusive labour markets that take account of gender dimensions is especially important to ensuring that work pays for all. In this context, a comprehensive review of the system of apprenticeships was published in January 2014. Among the recommendations of the review was recognition of the need for a proper gender balance in apprenticeships. Previously, the focus on apprenticeships has been in areas like construction that is pre-dominantly seen as a male route into the workforce. The Department of Education and Skills will engage with relevant departments and agencies as well as representatives of business, trade unions and education providers to begin the process of how best to implement this recommendation.

It is proposed to merge the Equality Authority and the Human Rights Commission into a newly established Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission. Under this new arrangement, public bodies within the further education and training sector, including the ETBs, can seek assistance from the new Commission to ensure that they comply with their positive duties. Where relevant, they can work with the Commission, for example, with regard to guidelines, codes of practice, performance measures, operational standards and preventative strategies around further education and training policy and practice to ensure that they comply with equality legislation.

Under Article 7, promotion of equality between men and women, of the European Social Fund (ESF) Regulations for the 2014-2020 period Member States and the Commission shall promote equality between men and women through mainstreaming throughout the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the operational programmes and support specific targeted actions within any of the investment priorities. The objective is to increase the sustainable participation and progress of women in employment, thus combating the feminisation of poverty, reducing gender based segregation, combating gender stereotypes in the labour market and in education and training, and promoting the reconciliation of work and personal life for all as well as the equal sharing of care responsibilities between men and women. All current ESF activities provide detailed disaggregated data on male/female participation and detailed monitoring of compliance with the equal opportunities legislation is a fundamental obligation for all bodies under the current operational programme.

3.6 Supporting dual parent labour market participation

In Budget 2013, the Departments of Social Protection and Children and Youth Affairs announced an initiative to provide subsidised after-school child care places for low-income families who enter employment. The purpose of the After-School Child Care (ASCC) scheme is to help to offset some of the after-school child care costs that are associated with availing of an employment opportunity in a bid to encourage more individuals to take up employment. The scheme was piloted in a small number of locations from May, 2013, and, following the results of the pilot, the eligibility criteria for the scheme have been reviewed and amended in order to open it to a wider group. From October, 2013, the scheme was introduced nationally and it is expected that, in 2014, the scheme will provide 800 subsidised after-school child care places at a cost of €2 million.

3.7 Improving take-up and coverage of benefits and services

The Family Income Supplement (FIS) is a weekly tax-free top-up payment for employees on low pay with children. At present, more than 44,000 working families with more than 98,000 children benefit from the scheme. The 2014 budget for the scheme of more than €280 million represents an increase of 25% since 2012, when the total FIS spend was €224 million. These increases have been assisted by operational improvements and enhancements in the publicity of the scheme.

3.8 Improvement of social services, specifically child protection

In July 2013, the Government approved the publication of sectoral implementation plans under *Children First*, the national guidance for the protection and welfare of children. The plans set out the mechanisms in place, or to be put in place, to support the continued implementation of *Children First* guidance at sectoral level. In addition, the Government published the Children First Bill in April 2014 which will put elements of the national guidance on a statutory footing.

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs is developing a new strategy for children and young people. *Better Outcomes: Brighter Futures – the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020* is being developed in a way which will encompass the continuum of the life-course from infancy through to early and middle childhood, adolescence and early adulthood. It will be the overarching framework under which policy and services for children and young people will be developed and implemented in the State.

The Framework will provide the basis for more detailed strategies including a new youth strategy.

The Area Based Childhood (ABC) Programme is designed to deliver prevention and early intervention programmes. The programme involves interventions and services covering a broad range of areas, including parenting, early education, speech and language therapy, pro-social behaviour and programmes that have been tested in an international context. Recently, the Government and Atlantic Philanthropies, through their respective processes, have been able to release nearly €30m in funding for the implementation of the Programme for the period 2013-2016. As well as ensuring continuing funding for the existing three Prevention Early Intervention Programme (PEIP) sites this has allowed nine additional sites to be invited to enter the design stage of the Programme, and for a tenth to be supported as an element of another proposal. The approach will seek to mainstream the lessons from successful early intervention programmes into existing services for children and families.

3.9 Targeted support to single parent and large families

Reforms to the One-parent Family Payment (OFP) scheme introduced in 2013 are aimed at recognising parental choice with regard to the care of young children while, at the same time, having an expectation that parents will not remain outside of the workforce indefinitely. In June 2013, the Department of Social Protection introduced the Jobseeker's Allowance (JA) transitional arrangement, which caters for OFP recipients who lose their entitlement to the OFP payment, who have a youngest child aged under 14 years, and who are entitled to the Jobseeker's Allowance (JA) payment. These beneficiaries are exempt from the conditions that require them to be available for, and genuinely seeking, full-time work. This exemption from the conditionality will remain in place until a recipient's youngest child reaches the age of 14 years.

3.10 Implementing strategies to prevent, confront and measure homelessness

A Government Homelessness Policy Statement, published in February 2013, states the aim to end long-term homelessness by the end of 2016. The Statement emphasises a housing-led approach which is about accessing permanent housing as the primary response to all forms of homelessness. The Homelessness Oversight Group, established in February 2013, submitted its first report to the Minister for Housing and Planning in December 2013 and among the main recommendations made are the establishment of a high-level implementation team, to be charged with achieving the goal of ending long-term homelessness and the incidence of rough sleeping by 2016. Also, the Pathway Accommodation and Support System was implemented nationally in 2013. This homelessness bed management and data system assists housing authorities to manage and report on the dynamics of homelessness as it is addressed. In 2013, €45 million was provided to housing authorities towards the operational costs of homeless accommodation and related services and this sum was maintained for 2014. Housing authorities also provide funding from their own resources.

3.11 Improving quality and access to social, health and other targeted services for the homeless

The Health Service executive (HSE), in collaboration with key partners, plays an important role in addressing the health and care needs of homeless people by providing a coordinated and integrated response to the delivery of homeless services. In excess of €30 million is provided annually for health and personal social care related supports.

3.12 Improving access to adequate, affordable housing, including social housing

In July 2013, the Government approved the introduction of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme. The scheme is being piloted in one local authority area with further rollout to other local authorities planned for later in 2014. The general scheme of a Housing Bill which will provide the legal framework underpinning the scheme was approved by Government in December 2013.

3.13 Reforms to housing benefits/support

The HAP scheme is being designed so as to bring all of the social housing services provided by the State together under the local authority system; with local authorities being responsible for all households with an established housing need. This will facilitate the removal of existing disincentives to employment posed by the receipt of rent supplement by allowing HAP recipients to remain on the scheme if they gain full-time employment.

3.14 Reforms concerning measures and services to better prevent evictions/loss of permanent accommodation

The Residential Tenancies (Amendment) (No. 2) Bill is expected to complete its passage through the Oireachtas[10] and become law by mid-2014. This legislation will extend the remit of the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 to tenancies in the Approved Housing Body sector. The amending legislation will: provide improved security of tenure for approved housing body tenants; provide access for both tenants and landlords to an independent dispute resolution service; prohibit the charging of rents in excess of market levels and set out fair procedures for the termination of tenancies with mandatory notice periods linked to the duration of a tenancy. In addition, the legislation will extinguish a landlord’s automatic right of termination in the first 6 months of certain tenancies.

3.15 Combatting discrimination

Under the *Action Plan for Jobs* in 2014, the Equality Authority will promote the employability of groups that have experienced labour market disadvantage related to discriminatory grounds. This will include specific streams for developing the equality

[10] The Irish National Parliament (Oireachtas) consists of the President and two Houses: Dáil Éireann (House of Representatives) and Seanad Éireann (the Senate).

capacity of employers, vocational education and training providers and labour market providers.

3.16 Mainstreaming of social inclusion policies

A new policy tool of social impact assessment (SIA) is being developed to assess the impact of policy on poverty and related social inequalities, as a way of ensuring greater policy coordination in the social sphere. The social impact of a range of potential welfare and tax measures were assessed as part of the deliberative process for Budget 2014. The application of SIA to Budget 2014 was published in March 2014.

Over time, there is considerable potential to incorporate different impact assessments (e.g. health, housing, gender, equality) into the policy tool of social impact assessment, but this is dependent on resources, data quality and capacity.

3.17 Governance and reporting

The *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion* provides for a comprehensive monitoring and reporting process, the key element of which is the preparation by the Department of Social Protection of a biennial Social Inclusion Report. The most recent Report, published in November 2013, incorporates Annual Reports for 2011 and 2012 and was prepared with support from relevant Government departments and agencies. It shows that across diverse policy areas, progress is reported on many targets/actions associated with the Plan's high level goals.

A number of other national, cross-cutting strategies (some in development) include actions that relate to anti-poverty and social inclusion objectives. These include the *National Women's Strategy 2007-2016*, the *National Traveller and Integration Strategy 2011*, the *Better Outcomes: Brighter Futures – the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020* and the *National Disability Strategy 2013-2015.*

3.18 Involvement of stakeholders

The involvement of stakeholders in developing policies across a range of areas is outlined in Chapter 1. In addition, the Social Inclusion Forum is a national consultative event convened by Government to review the implementation of the *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion.* It includes participation of national and local stakeholders, including those experiencing poverty. The report of the 2013 Social Inclusion Forum has been published. The 2014 Forum took place on April 1st.

Chapter 4

Recent Reforms to Achieve Adequate and Sustainable Pensions

4.1 Early retirement

There is no statutory retirement age in Ireland and the age at which an individual retires is a matter for agreement within each contract of employment and the employer/employee relationship.

4.2 Pensionable age

In order to provide for sustainable pensions and to facilitate a longer working life, the State Pension Transition (SPT) scheme was abolished on the 1 January 2014 and State pension age standardised at age 66. The State pension age will be increased to 67 in 2021 and 68 in 2028. The existence of the SPT scheme was related to the qualifying age for the State Pension (Contributory) (SPC) scheme which, up until the early 1970s, was 70 years of age. SPT (known then as the Retirement Pension) was introduced at that time to bridge the gap for employees who had to retire at 65. The qualifying age for SPC was subsequently reduced over time to 66 years, which left SPT effective for just one year. Encouraging longer working is part of the Government strategy to address the issue of adequacy and sustainability of the State pension scheme. The SPT scheme had an associated retirement condition which was considered a barrier to working after retirement. No such obstacle exists with the SPC scheme.

From 1 January 2014 those aged 62 and over who have left work before reaching the State pension age of 66 and who wish to claim a jobseeker's payment will be required to prove unemployment once a year. While they may avail of employment supports, they will not be subject to activation-related sanctions.

The age for qualification for the State pension is 66 for both men and women. In Ireland, the Homemakers Scheme makes qualification for the SPC easier for those who take time out of the workforce for caring duties. This scheme took effect from 1994 and allows up to 20 years spent caring for children under 12 years of age or incapacitated adults to be disregarded when a person's social insurance record is being averaged for pension purposes. This can be beneficial for women who have taken time out of the workforce for homemaking purposes.

In relation to supplementary occupational and private pensions, both the labour market participation rates and supplementary pension coverage of women have improved greatly over the last number of years, reflecting the development of Irish society. This will reduce the pensions gender gap for future retirees. In 1987, female participation was 35% whereas in 2012 this was 52.4% (compared to 67.3% for men). In early 2002, 45% of females and 57% of male workers had a private pension. By end 2009, the rate for female workers had increased to 49% and the rate for male workers had decreased to 53%.

4.3 Contributory period

The minimum number of paid contributions for entitlement to a SPC was increased from 260 to 520 for claimants reaching pension age on or after 6th April 2012. This measure was originally provided for in legislation in 1997.

From 1st September 2012, additional rate bands were introduced for State Pension Transition/Contributory to more fairly reflect the proportionality of attachment to the workforce by the claimant. The pre-existing SPC (yearly average) rate band of 20–47 was replaced by 3 bands; 20-29, 30-39 and 40-47. The pre-existing SPT (yearly average) rate band of 24-47 was also replaced by 3 bands; 24-29, 30-39, and 40 - 47.

4.4 Level of pensions

The maximum weekly rate of the SPC is currently €230.30 per week and this rate has remained unchanged since 2009 when it was increased from €223.30. The maximum rate is payable to people with an average of 48 or over contributions per year. Those who have between 40-47 yearly average contributions receive €225.80 per week; between 30-39 yearly average contributions €207.00 per week; between 20-29 yearly average contributions €196.00 per week; between 15-19 yearly average contributions €150.00 per week; and between 10-14 yearly average contributions €92.00 per week. The State Pension (Non-Contributory) may be paid from age 66 to people who do not qualify for a SPC. This is a means-tested scheme with a maximum weekly rate payable of €219.

4.5 Pension indexation

There is no formal indexation of the State Pension in Ireland. The level of annual increase, if any, in payment rates is decided by Government in the context of the annual budget.

4.6 Funded pensions

The Pensions Act was amended in 2013 to strengthen the powers of the Pensions Board to provide the power to wind up a pension scheme. This power can only be exercised where a scheme is underfunded and the trustees and the employer are not in a position to adopt a funding proposal or where the trustees of a scheme fail to comply with a direction from the Pensions Board to restructure scheme benefits. Governance changes were also approved to restructure the Pensions Board and amalgamate the Pensions Ombudsman and the Financial Services Ombudsman. These changes are aimed at strengthening regulation and ensuring greater consumer involvement and opportunities to input into matters of pension policy.

Defined benefit schemes are pooled funds funded by the contributions of the employer and members. When a defined benefit scheme winds up at present and if it is underfunded, under previous legislation pensioners were 100% protected, often at the expense of current and former employees who receive little of their promised benefit. The Social Welfare and Pensions (No. 2) Act 2013, signed into law in December 2013, provides for a fairer and more equitable distribution of scheme assets in the event of the wind up of an underfunded scheme. It also facilitates a greater sharing of the risk when a scheme is underfunded between all the beneficiaries, while still providing for priority protection of pension benefits.

Work is underway in the Pensions Board to address issues in relation to defined contribution pension provision. A consultation on defined contributions has recently been completed by the Board.

4.7 Addressing the budgetary implications of ageing

Ireland faces considerable short-term challenges due to the continuing impact of the financial and economic crisis and the resulting effects on the labour market and unemployment levels. Government policy is intended to support a structural reform of the labour market and a move away from the accepted cultural norms around retirement. Employers, trade unions, workers and other sectoral interests will take a lead from public policy in terms of establishing employment practices which are considered ‘the norm’ over the longer term.

The structural reform of the labour market through encouraging longer working lives and active participation in the labour force has been accepted at a national and international level as being a key policy reform. It is required to alleviate the impact of rapid population ageing on long term growth prospects and to improve the sustainability of public finances. The reforms to the State pension have been recognised as an imperative to cope with some of the challenges posed by population ageing.

Chapter 5

Accessible, High-quality and Sustainable Health Care and Long-term Care

5.1 Health system reform

In 2012, the Government published *Future Health* outlining how it would reform the health system across four strands – health and wellbeing, structural reform, services reform, and financial reform. The Department of Health is currently progressing an ambitious reform programme.

In March 2013, the Government published *Healthy Ireland - A Framework for Improved Health and Wellbeing 2013-2025* which is designed to bring about real, measurable change through addressing the broad determinants of health and therefore making a significant contribution to tackling the uneven distribution of the risk factors associated with many chronic diseases.

5.2 Stewardship of health care systems

The development of policy proposals for health structures legislation is planned for the first half of 2014. A Health Reform Board, a Programme Management Office in the Department of Health and a Systems Reform Group in the Health Service Executive (HSE) have been established to drive implementation of the Health Reform Programme.

Two reports on hospital groups: The 'Establishment of Hospital Groups as a Transition to Independent Hospital Trusts' and 'Securing the Future of Smaller Hospitals' were published in May 2013. Work is now focused on progressing the implementation of hospital groups. The full complement of chairpersons has been appointed and the Department is proceeding with the appointment of Chief Executive Officers.

The Health Service Executive (Governance) Act came into operation on 25 July 2013. The Act abolished the HSE Board and provided for a Directorate to be the governing body for the HSE in place of the Board.

The HSE National Service Plan 2014 has, for the first time, taken on the management of reform as a key part of the Plan. From the establishment of a Patient Safety Agency to the roll out of the 'Money Follows the Patient' initiative, the HSE is implementing the building blocks of reform that will provide for the post HSE era in the health services, with the establishment of Universal Health Insurance.

5.3 Health service delivery

The following initiatives highlight ongoing work in the area of health service delivery:

The White Paper on Universal Health Insurance (UHI) was published on 3rd April 2014. UHI will introduce a fair system of healthcare where everyone pays according to their means, where good performance is encouraged and bad performance is addressed and improved.

A Complete review of the Nursing Homes Support scheme is due to be completed in the coming months. The Department of Health will make a recommendation on a national standard assessment tool for people with disabilities, following completion of the National Disability Authority's work on this matter in 2014. This will promote high quality and safe care.

Work on the National Children's Hospital is progressing. The National Paediatric Development Board and the Children's Hospital Group are working closely together in driving the project forward. The relocation of the National Maternity Hospital, Holles Street to the St. Vincent's University Campus at Elm Park was announced in May 2013. A project team has been appointed and a design team is expected to be appointed shortly. This is a major capital development and it will lead to an improved and safer service.

The Special Delivery Unit continues to work with hospitals to improve the efficiency of the Irish hospital system. One area of particular focus is that of patients waiting on hospital trolleys for admission. There were fewer patients waiting on hospital trolleys with an overall 13% reduction in patients in 2013.

Approximately 380,000 children aged under 6 years will be able to access a general practitioner service without paying a fee at the point of use. It is planned to introduce a new general practitioner contract with greater emphasis on chronic disease management by mid-2014.

The HSE and the National Women's Council of Ireland worked together to pilot gender mainstreaming within the health service and, in March 2014, produced *Gender Matters* which is a gender mainstreaming toolkit for health service providers.

The report of the Tobacco Policy Review Group *Tobacco Free Ireland* was published and launched in October 2013, and contains 60 recommendations towards making Ireland Tobacco Free by 2025. This along with the Health and Well-being Strategy will reduce demand for health services by persons with tobacco related illnesses and improve access to services for others.

A Review of the Emergency Aeronautical Support Service Pilot Project found significantly reduced transport times for seriously ill patients and recommended that the service be established on a full-time basis.

The Department of Health is also progressing a number of important pieces of legislation to improve the health of citizens and the health system. The following health-related legislation is being progressed or being implemented:

- The Health Identifiers Bill 2013 was published in December 2013 and provides the legal basis for individual health identifiers for health service users and unique identifiers for health service providers. While individual health identifiers are primarily about patient safety, they will also help in managing our health service more efficiently. The Bill is currently being progressed through the Oireachtas.
- The Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act 2013 was signed into law at the end of July 2013 and was commenced on the 1st of January 2014. The Act restates the general prohibition on abortion in Ireland. It provides a legal framework on an already existing

narrow provision – set down by the Supreme Court in 1992. The Act outlines the circumstances in which a rare but life-saving termination may be permitted.

- A General Scheme for the Public Health (Standardised Packaging of Tobacco) Bill 2013 was approved by Government in November 2013. The Bill will make it mandatory for tobacco to be sold in standardised packaging which will greatly increase the health warnings and reduce the ability of tobacco manufacturers to promote their brand.
- The Public Health (Sunbeds) Bill 2013 was published in December 2013 which will allow legislation to prohibit operators of sunbed premises from allowing anyone under 18 years of age to use a sunbed on their premises and to prohibit the use of sunbeds in unsupervised premises. This Bill is before the Oireachtas.

5.4 Investing in health care, cost containment and cost-sharing

The Health budget has decreased from €14.043 billion in 2012, to €13.164 billion in 2014. (€13.708 billion if the Child and Family Agency which now comes within the aegis of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs is included). A Finance Reform Board has been put in place and a Chief Financial Officer to the HSE Directorate has been appointed for 2014. A new financial and cost management system has been identified and is being costed prior to acceptance and implementation.

Funding for selected hospitals under the ‘Money Follows the Patient’ initiative commenced in 2013 which is being implemented on a phased basis from 1st January 2014.

The Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013 was commenced in June 2013 which will result in the greater use of generic medicines and the consequent reduction in costs of medicines for both the State and patients.

Phase two of a review of costs in the private health insurance market is expected to be completed by mid-2014, which will include a status report on the implementation of phase one, and further analysis of drivers of costs and how they can be addressed.

5.5 Enhancement of access to services and of patient’s choice

Costed proposals have been developed for the implementation of a universal GP service without fees for all children aged under 6 years in 2014. Regulations to allow for the registration and inspection of residential services for people with disabilities were signed in October 2013. The Health Information and Quality Authority is now empowered to register, inspect and monitor such services.

A redress scheme for women who had been excluded from the 2007 Lourdes Hospital Redress Scheme on age grounds alone was agreed in 2013, and is being implemented by the State Claims Agency. A research report on symphysiotomy ‘Symphysiotomy in Ireland, 1944 – 1984’ was submitted to the Department of Health in May 2013. Following consideration of the report, the Minister for Health appointed a member of the judiciary in November 2013 to assist in finding closure for women who have been affected by a symphysiotomy procedure. This assisted in improving patient safety and the delivery of appropriate patient care.

Chapter 6

Thematic Focus: Access to Social Protection for Young Unemployed Persons

6.1 Introduction

The Government recognises the need for measures to underpin access to social protection of young unemployed persons, and particularly to facilitate their access to education, training and employment. Such measures range across a number of departments and agencies and this Chapter summarises the arrangements, spanning policy to service delivery, in place to reinforce the social protection of this particularly vulnerable cohort of society.

6.2 Minimum income schemes/social assistance

Supplementary Welfare Allowance

In Ireland, the statutory Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA) scheme, administered by the Department of Social Protection, is the '*safety net*' within the overall social protection system in that it provides assistance to eligible people in the State whose means are insufficient to meet their needs and those of their dependants. The main purpose of the scheme is to provide immediate and flexible assistance for those in need who do not qualify for payment under other State schemes. Support from the scheme can consist of a basic primary weekly payment and/or a weekly/monthly supplement in respect of certain expenses a person may not be able to meet. It can also consist of a payment to help with the cost of any exceptional needs of a once-off nature. There is no statutory minimum age for receipt of payment under the scheme. However eligible parents or guardians who have the care of young people under 18 years of age will receive a qualified child allowance payment in respect of such young persons. Young people who are not in the care of eligible parents or guardians come within the care of the Health Service Executive (HSE). Apart from a number of excluded categories, anyone in the State who satisfies a habitual residency condition and a means test, has registered for employment, and can prove unemployment, may qualify for a weekly payment under the scheme.

From January 2014, there are three separate age-related personal rates of SWA:

- €100 per week from 18 to 24 years of age;
- €144 per week for 25 year olds;
- €186 per week in respect of those aged 26 years and over.

Beneficiaries aged 18 to 25 years of age with children are paid at the rate of €186 per week. Young people leaving HSE care at age 18 after being in such care for the previous 12 months are entitled to the full rate of SWA - €186 per week.

The Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme also provides short-term support to eligible people living in private rented accommodation and whose means are insufficient to meet their accommodation costs, and who do not have accommodation available to them from any other source. To qualify for payment a person must have been residing in private rented accommodation or accommodation for homeless persons or an institution (or any combination of these) for a period of 183 days within the preceding 12 months of the date of claim for the payment. Also, a person must be assessed by the housing authorities as being eligible for, and in need of, social housing support in order to be eligible for consideration for a payment.

Jobseeker’s Allowance
Jobseeker's Allowance, which is a means-tested payment, is available to persons over 18 years of age who, *inter alia*, are unemployed and have an income need and are available for, capable of and genuinely seeking full-time work. As part of targeted measures to encourage young persons to engage in education and training, lower rates of Jobseeker's Allowance are paid to certain young persons under the age of 26 if they do not engage in approved development programmes - where these young people engage in such programmes higher rates are payable (€160 per week subject to means). There are three separate age-related personal rates of Jobseeker’s Allowance:

- €100 per week for those aged 18 to 24 years of age;
- €144 per week for 25 year olds;
- €188 per week in respect of those aged 26 years and over.

Beneficiaries aged 18 to 25 years of age with children are paid at the rate of €188 per week. Young people leaving HSE care at age 18 after being in such care for the previous 12 months are entitled to the full rate of Jobseeker’s Allowance - €188 per week.

One-parent Family Payment
The One-parent Family Payment (OFP) is a weekly allowance paid to both men and women aged under 66 years who are bringing up a child/children without the support of a partner. In order to get this payment, a person must first meet certain qualifying conditions and satisfy a means test. The maximum personal weekly rate is €188 and a qualified child increase of €29.80 for each eligible child. A claimant must be either widowed, a surviving civil partner, separated, divorced, have a dissolved civil partnership, be unmarried or be a person who is not party to a civil partnership. They must also:

- have main care and charge of at least one child who is residing with them;
- not be co-habiting; and
- have made efforts to seek maintenance.

The OFP scheme is undergoing substantial reforms including reductions in the age limit of the youngest child at which a recipient’s payment ceases. The age of the youngest child is being reduced to seven years of age on a phased basis. Lone parents who lose entitlement to OFP from July 2013 and whose youngest child is under 14 years of age and subject to them meeting other eligibility criteria, are entitled to the Jobseeker’s Allowance transitional arrangement. Under this arrangement these persons are exempt from having to be genuinely seeking and available for full-time employment. However, they are required to actively engage with the Department of Social Protection’s activation process. In addition, there is no restriction on the number of days they can work, provided that they satisfy the Jobseeker’s Allowance means test. These transitional arrangements last until the lone parent’s youngest child turns 14 years of age at which point the recipient is required to meet the full Jobseeker’s Allowance conditionality.

Disability Allowance
Disability Allowance is a weekly allowance paid to people with a disability from the age of 16. The maximum personal weekly rate is €188. To qualify for the allowance, a person must have an injury, disease or physical or mental disability that has continued or may be expected to continue for at least one year, and be substantially restricted in undertaking work that would otherwise be suitable for the person’s age, experience and qualifications. Eligibility for the scheme is also subject to a means test.

6.3 Social insurance coverage and acquisition of pension rights

In Ireland, most employees who are aged 16 or over and under pensionable age, whether full-time or part-time earning €38 or more per week, are liable for Pay-Related Social Insurance (PRSI) contributions. However, where weekly earnings are between €38 and €352, an employee has no liability to pay such contributions while the employer pays 8.5%. Earnings between €352 and €356 per week attract a PRSI rate of 4% for the employee and 8.5% for the employer. Earnings in excess of €356 per week require the employee to pay 4% and the employer 10.75% resulting in the payment of a combined 14.75% rate per employee under full-rate PRSI Class A. This level of social insurance coverage gives employees access to the full range of social insurance benefits, provided they fulfil qualifying conditions, including short term benefits such as Jobseeker's Benefit and Illness Benefit.

In order to ensure continuation of coverage, insured workers may be awarded 'credits' if they claim a social welfare payment because they are out of work, or they are ill or incapacitated, or if they are engaged in certain training or educational courses. Credits are social insurance contributions designed to protect the social insurance entitlements of insured workers who have a previous social insurance record but who are not in a position to make PRSI contributions. For example, if entitlement to Jobseeker's Benefit has been exhausted and a person qualifies for Jobseeker's Allowance, he/she must have paid or credited PRSI contributions in either of the last two tax years to receive credits while in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance. Credits can also be awarded where an unemployed person takes part in either the Back to Education Allowance Scheme, a Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme or a SOLAS training course.

The State Pension (Contributory) is paid to people from the age of 66 who have sufficient social insurance contributions paid to qualify under the yearly average contribution bands outlined in Chapter 4.

6.4 Unemployment benefits

In the Irish social welfare system, support for persons of working age who are unemployed and have paid social insurance contributions prior to becoming unemployed is primarily provided through the Jobseeker's Benefit scheme. Like Jobseeker's Allowance, there is a requirement that the person be available for, capable of and genuinely seeking full-time work. To qualify for Jobseeker's Benefit a person must, *inter alia*, be under 66 years of age and have paid reckonable social insurance contributions, have suffered a substantial loss of employment and be working for not more than three days per week. A person can begin to pay reckonable contributions at 16 years of age and must have at least 104 reckonable contributions paid in order to qualify for payment. Other criteria also apply which can, in part, be satisfied by credits granted to all persons when they commence paying employee social insurance. The personal rate of Jobseeker's Benefit is €188 per week.

If a person does not qualify for benefit or their benefit has exhausted they may qualify for Jobseeker's Allowance subject to a means test. A key benefit of this approach is that poorer individuals facing the contingency of unemployment can access financial supports equal to those available to benefit recipients who may have substantial means. In this way the Irish system does not, in general, use the Jobseeker's Assistance scheme as a fall-back 'safety net' but, subject to means, affords all unemployed persons similar levels of support.

6.5 Health care services

Eligibility for healthcare in Ireland is based on residency. Any person who is accepted as being ordinarily resident in Ireland is entitled to either full eligibility (category 1) or limited eligibility (category 2) for health services. Persons in category 1 are medical card holders and they are entitled to a full range of services without charge. Persons in category 2 (non-medical card holders) are entitled, subject to certain charges, to all in-patient public hospital services in public wards including consultant services and to out-patient public hospital services including consultant services. Persons in this category, but with an income below a certain threshold, may be entitled to a general practitioner visit card. In addition, a number of schemes exist which provide assistance towards the cost of medication for persons in category 2.

Young persons aged 16–25 years are entitled to a medical card (full eligibility - category 1) where their weekly income is derived solely from social protection allowances/benefits or Health Service Executive allowances, which are in excess of the income guidelines (either at first application or on renewal). These include recipients of Jobseeker's Allowance and Jobseeker's Benefit or where they are dependants of medical card or general practitioner visit card holders. Young persons can also, in cases of undue hardship or where it would be unduly burdensome to provide general practitioner or medical and surgical services, be granted a medical card and, if they are financially independent[11] with means that are within the medical card/general practitioner visit card guidelines, they can be granted a medical card. Where a young person is an applicant returning to work or involved in Government approved/sponsored employment incentive schemes, he/she will continue to retain entitlement to the medical card or general practitioner visit card for three years provided he/she is moving to full or part-time employment after being unemployed for 12 months. If a young person is participating in a Government approved/sponsored scheme, he/she can retain the card for the duration of the scheme.

6.6 Tackling youth unemployment

During the Irish Presidency in 2013, agreement was reached on the Recommendation on an EU-wide Youth Guarantee. Ireland published its Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan in January 2014. The Plan identifies measures to build on services and initiatives already in place and to increase their impact by tailoring them to address the particular challenges of youth unemployment.

It is intended that young people aged 18-24 years who become unemployed (whether on loss of a job or while seeking a first employment) and register with the integrated employment service, and who subsequently remain unemployed for four months, will be provided with assistance to secure work or alternatively with a quality offer of training, education or work experience. Given the fiscal constraints facing Ireland, a gradual implementation approach is being adopted. As a result, the Youth Guarantee will be delivered on a phased but continually widening basis. The approach is to prioritise the support of individuals most at risk of long-term unemployment first before dealing with lower risk groups. Elements of this initiative are

[11] Financially independent means they have income equivalent to or greater than the current medical card income guideline for a single person, living with family.

being piloted in an area with a particularly high rate of unemployment. In summary the national Youth Guarantee will involve:

- Developing the Intreo activation process to ensure earlier and more intensive engagement with young people;
- Delivering opportunities to young people through education and training programmes;
- Earmarking a quota of places/opportunities on employment schemes for young people;
- Varying the eligibility conditions for access to these schemes by young people so that they can access places/opportunities after 4 to 6 months of unemployment rather than the general requirement of 12 months' unemployment;
- Expanding the number of opportunities currently availed of by young people in the form of internships, subsidised private-sector recruitment, and supports for self-employment;
- Introducing new options for young unemployed people in particular in the area of youth entrepreneurship and international work experience and training.

Expenditure on programmes providing employment, training and further education opportunities for young people will be in excess of €500m in each of the years 2014 and 2015. As part of this overall provision for 2014, and as an initial step towards preparing for implementation of the Guarantee, provision was made in the 2014 Budget for:

- Reducing the threshold, in terms of duration of unemployment, for JobsPlus scheme eligibility from 12 months – to 6 months or less – in the case of persons aged less than 25 years;
- An additional intake of 1,500 young people on to the successful JobBridge intern scheme;
- Ensuring that 1,000 places on the Tús scheme are targeted at young people;
- Developing a pilot programme to support young unemployed people to take up opportunities under schemes such as Your First EURES Job;
- Ring-fencing a minimum of 2,000 training places for under-25s by the Department of Education and Skills, under a follow-up to the successful Momentum programme that operated in 2013, with income support for participants being provided by the Department of Social Protection;
- Making €2.5m available to young entrepreneurs via Micro Finance Ireland and other business start-up schemes.

6.7 Education and training supports

The education and training system will support the Youth Guarantee through providing quality training and education opportunities. A particular focus of the education sector will be on early school leavers. Early school leavers in Ireland are defined as young people aged 16-21 without upper secondary certificate qualifications and facing difficulties in entering the labour market. Further education and training provision is available to all with particular programmes targeted at those at risk of leaving school early and those distant from the labour market. As a result, Ireland has raised the numbers of young people staying on to complete second level education and now has one of the highest rates in Europe. Inevitably, there will always be some young people who leave school early. SOLAS and ETB Community Training work in partnership with 38 Community Training Centres in the provision of training and related services in a professional, supportive and inclusive manner to support such early school leavers. Also, the Youthreach programme, which is an integral part of the national programme of second-chance education and training, is directed at unemployed young early school leavers aged 15-20 and offers participants the opportunity to identify and pursue viable options within adult life. It provides two years of integrated education, training and work experience for unemployed early school leavers without any qualifications or vocational training who are between 15 and 20 years of age. There is a strong emphasis on personal development, on the core skills of literacy/numeracy, communications and IT, along with a choice of vocational options and a work experience programme. Learners on the Youthreach programme are entitled to receive training allowances and additional allowances for meal, travel and accommodation are also available.

The Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) scheme, administered by the Department of Social Protection, is a second chance education opportunities scheme designed to remove the barriers to participation in second and third level education by enabling eligible people on social protection payments to continue to receive a payment while pursuing an approved full-time education course that leads to a higher qualification than that already held. The number of places on the scheme is not limited although a person has to satisfy a number of conditions such as being at least 21 years of age; in receipt of a prescribed payment for a specified time period; be pursuing a full-time course of study leading to a recognised qualification in a recognised college; and progressing in the level of education held with reference to the national framework of qualifications. Young persons in receipt of One-parent Family Payment and jobseeker`s payments can qualify at 18 years of age provided they are out of formal education for at least 2 years. In addition, participants who are previously on age reduced payments of €100 per week for 18-22 year olds and €144 for 23-26 year olds will be up rated to €160 per week (subject to means) when they commence the scheme. This represents a weekly increase of €60 for 18-22 year olds and €14 per week for 23-26 year olds and provides this group with a strong financial incentive to engage in education or training or to take up employment.

6.8 Youth strategy

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs is committed to bringing a youth policy perspective to the issue of youth employment and social inclusion. This has been manifested through the Department's work as chair of the EU Youth Council during the Irish Presidency of the European Union in 2013 which resulted in the adoption of Council Conclusions on maximising the potential of youth policy in addressing the goals of the Europe 2020 Strategy and the contribution of quality youth work to the development, well-being and social inclusion of young people.

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs holds responsibility for youth policy and youth work provision and in 2013 provided funding of €53.175m to the youth work sector. The youth work infrastructure supported by the Department offers, and indirectly supports, many of the best practice responses to youth unemployment identified in recent reports on this theme (Eurofound (2012); OECD (2013); ESRI (2013)).[12] Its work complements the twin

[12]Eurofound (2012), NEETs – Young people not in employment, education or training: Characteristics, costs and policy responses in Europe, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/htmlfiles/ef1254.htm

strategies of the *Action Plan for Jobs* and *Pathways to Work* and supports the implementation of the *Youth Guarantee* in Ireland and Ireland's *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion* by providing access to quality youth services. Through its programmes and services, youth work organisations and services enhance the employability of young people. They are contributing to other education, training, skills and labour activation initiatives and strategies through their focus on skills and competencies and diverse programme provision, all of which serve to enhance young people's preparedness and progression to employment, education or training and as a means to their social inclusion.

A key component of *Better Outcomes: Brighter Futures – the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020* is a youth strategy which will focus on ensuring greater coordination in policy and provision across government for young people. It will aim to: enhance the development, participation and support of young people in this age cohort; be responsive to current and emerging issues such as youth employment; and provide greater coordination in youth provision and related services for young people across departments, agencies and the youth sector.

OECD (2013), The OECD Action Plan for Youth: Giving youth a better start in the labour market. http://www.oecd.org/els/emp/Youth-Action-Plan.pdf

ESRI (2013), The Impact of the Recession on the Structure and Labour Market Success of Young NEET Individuals in Ireland, ESRI Working Paper 465, Dublin: ESRI.

http://esri.ie/publications/latest_working_papers/view/index.xml?id=3809