

National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2017

# Report of Social Inclusion Forum 2016

*"Growing an Inclusive Recovery"*



An Roinn Coimirce Sóisialaí  
Department of Social Protection  
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# Section 1

# Introduction

## Section 1: Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction

The Social Inclusion Forum (SIF) was established by the Government as part of the structures to monitor and evaluate Ireland's *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (NAPinclusion)*. The Social Inclusion Division of the Department of Social Protection has been given responsibility by government to convene the Social Inclusion Forum and is assisted in this work by the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) Ireland and Community Work Ireland (CWI). The event provides a forum for engagement between officials from government departments, community and voluntary organisations and people experiencing poverty.

The Social Inclusion Forum was held on the 14<sup>th</sup> September 2016 in the Chartered Accountants House Conference Centre, 47-49 Pearse Street, Dublin 2.

The theme for the 2016 Forum, *Growing an Inclusive Recovery*, echoes the focus of the EU Annual Convention for Inclusive Growth, which brought together policy makers and civil society to discuss what can be done to ensure all citizens reap the benefits of truly inclusive growth.

This report provides a summary of this 12th meeting of the Social Inclusion Forum and includes inputs by guest speakers to the workshops, which provided a contextual framework for the discussions in each of the four parallel workshops. The report captures the discussion and conclusions of each workshop as well as highlighting some common themes which cut across all of the workshops.

The report will be submitted to the Senior Officials' Group on Social Policy and Public Service Reform, the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy and Public Service Reform and both Houses of the Oireachtas.

***The views contained in this report reflect the views of the speakers and participants at the forum and do not necessarily represent the views of the Department of Social Protection.***

## Section 2

# Acknowledgements



## Section 2: Acknowledgements

### 2.1 Acknowledgements

The Department of Social Protection acknowledges the support and assistance of the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) Ireland and Community Work Ireland (CWI) in the organisation of the Social Inclusion Forum and for the preparatory workshops which they jointly organised to enable individuals experiencing poverty to consider the contribution they might make to the work of the Forum.

Sincere thanks and appreciation is also extended to all those who participated and contributed to the Social Inclusion Forum on the day, including rapporteur Aiden Lloyd who compiled this report.

Appreciation is extended to the workshop facilitators Eilís Ní Caithnía, Maria McHale, Nuala Kelly, and Marianne O'Shea. Appreciation is also extended to the note takers for faithfully recording the content of the workshop discussions and to Pierre Klein, ATD, for photography on the day.

The main conference documents and speaker presentations are available online from:

[www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Social-Inclusion-Division.aspx](http://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Social-Inclusion-Division.aspx) and [www.socialinclusion.ie](http://www.socialinclusion.ie)

## Section 3

# Key Points for Policy Makers

## Section 3: Key Points for Policy Makers

### 3. Key points for policy makers

#### 3.1 Background/Context

The 2016 Social Inclusion Forum was held following the updating in 2015 of the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion for the extended period to 2017 to reflect new challenges and current policy responses to poverty. These include a greater focus on modernising the social protection system, improving effectiveness and efficiency of social transfers and strengthening active inclusion policies to address employment and social challenges.

The themes of SIF 2016 included a focus on growing an inclusive recovery, active inclusion and labour market activation measures, which seek to enable every citizen, notably the most disadvantaged, to fully participate in society, including having a job to tackle various challenges including poverty, social exclusion, in-work poverty, jobless households and other inequalities.

Current social inclusion and activation policies are designed to complement the impact of continuing economic recovery to help reverse the increase in poverty that took place during the recession from 2009 to 2013. The latest available data for 2014 indicate that the consistent poverty rate has stabilised. It is anticipated that data for 2015 and 2016, when available, will show further declines in this core poverty measure resulting from the recent sharp fall in unemployment.

Unemployment has fallen from a peak of 15% in 2011 to 7.7% in October 2016. Alongside, positive exchequer returns, which indicate that the economy continues to grow; there is clear evidence that the country is recovering from the worst recession ever witnessed by the majority of workers.

The key issues and conclusions emerging from SIF 2016, as set out in this report, are important in informing the aim of growing an inclusive recovery and achieving the objectives set out in NAPinclusion.

The clear messages that emerged from the event identify how barriers to those aims and achievements can be overcome. While all of the points in the report are important and should be scrutinised by relevant policy makers, there are a number of key points that stand out in particular. **These key points are listed below:**

The 2016 Social Inclusion Forum takes place against a relatively buoyant economic situation with sustained employment growth, but with some concern about the likely impacts of Britain's vote to leave the European Union (Brexit). Despite the relatively positive macroeconomic conditions, poverty levels remain stubbornly high with some small improvement in consistent poverty and little alteration in material deprivation, which has reduced from 30% to 29%. In addition, Ireland continues to have high levels of jobless households, although this is beginning to reduce – from a high of 20.1% in 2012 to 13.2% in 2015. **It is disappointing that the interim reduction target of 4% by 2016, set under the National Social Target for Poverty Reduction will not be met** - the current level being 8%. It also makes the achievement of the 2020 poverty reduction target of 2%, which is in line with Ireland's commitment under the European 2020 Poverty Strategy to take 200,000 people out of at risk-of-poverty or exclusion, all the more difficult to achieve.

### **3.2 Activation**

The fact that the reduction of poverty is policy-linked to employment strategies places great focus on activation as the chosen mechanism by which to achieve both objectives. The quality of activation implementation and the outcomes achieved were key subjects of discussion at the SIF.

While the macroeconomic indicators strongly suggest that a reduction in poverty levels will follow through in due course there was also **a concern to improve the activation model in terms of tailoring the package of activation measures to the individual**. This should serve to ensure the quality, and therefore sustainability, of the jobs which are the intended outcome of the process, addressing some of the anomalies effecting take-up and achieving better synergies between labour market and social welfare measures.

### 3.3 Employment

The rise of non-standard employment in terms of restricted-hours contracts, part-time and casual work questions the assumption that a job is by definition a route out of poverty. Furthermore, and more importantly, poses a fundamental challenge to the security afforded through employment in terms of providing the secure income foundation from which families can be formed and sustained. **The introduction of regulations could perhaps stem the drift to precarious employment**, should that be possible in a modern globalised and competitive economic environment. The reliance on social transfers to lift 20% of the population out of poverty needs to be part of any deliberations around these matters.

### 3.4 Community and Local Development

The need to reinvigorate the community sector, following severe depletion over many years, is of paramount importance. Community organisations have a proven record in moving people closer to statutory and local development services while engaging in collective action to bring about wider institutional change for those experiencing poverty and social exclusion. **The shift of significant responsibility for community development and local development towards local authorities needs to be better matched with adequate resourcing and capacity at local authority level to ensure delivery of their oversight role and provision of meaningful support for the community sector to function effectively at local level.**

### 3.5 Rural Communities

The shortcomings of getting people job-ready in a rural environment with neither employment, broadband nor an adequate transport system to enable them to access jobs in major urban centres was quite apparent in the SIF discussions. This highlights the lack of investment in industrial infrastructure and public services over many decades in rural Ireland, other than in agriculture. **Effective regional development and rural development strategies need to be developed as a matter of priority if meaningful effect is to be given to employment and anti-poverty measures in rural Ireland.**

### 3.6 Urban Communities

The difficulties of endeavouring to address poverty and social exclusion in situations of violence, intimidation and social disruption were apparent in SIF discussions. Such a situation has come about in some urban communities from sustained endemic poverty resulting in the emergence of organised drugs crime and a breakdown in community capacity. **People in poverty do not have the resilience to survive in an environment of crime and gangland culture and often must watch their children succumb to drugs or worse.** The fear which this engenders is paralysing and requires sustained inter-agency collaborations over many years to reverse matters. Lessons can be learned from the current North East Inner City Task Force initiated by the Taoiseach to combat crime and address community fears in areas of inner city Dublin.

### 3.7 Integration

Targeting of certain vulnerable groups can be justified. For example, the particularities impacting on the progression of migrants should feature as a specific focus of labour market strategies, reflecting the realities that migrants are more likely to end up in precarious and exploitative employment. Also, lack of employment opportunities for Travellers, who experience very high levels of unemployment (estimated at 80%) must also be tackled and should be part of such targeting. The restoration of education supports is also necessary as part of a longer term strategy to improve life chances for children from these communities. **Labour market measures should also contribute to general integration strategies, and be inclusive of those leaving direct provision who are particularly vulnerable.** At a more general anti-poverty level there is a need for an intensive set of measures to overcome racism directed at Travellers, Roma and other groups experiencing multiple forms of inequality and discrimination.

# Section 4

## Welcome and Opening Remarks

## Section 4: Welcome and Opening Remarks

### 4.1 Welcome and Opening Remarks

**Anne Vaughan, Deputy Secretary, Department of Social Protection**, welcomed everyone on behalf of the Department of Social Protection.

The Forum is organised by the Social Inclusion Division of the Department in partnership with the European Anti-Poverty Network Ireland and Community Work Ireland. Ms Vaughan thanked both partners for their support and expertise in framing and organising today's event, in particular the preliminary regional seminars held around the country.

The Social Inclusion Forum was established by the Government as part of the structures to monitor and evaluate the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016. The aim of the Forum is give people who are directly affected by poverty and social exclusion and those who work with them a voice in the development of the policies that directly affect them, and in the ways that the policies are implemented.

It also provides a welcome opportunity for those responsible for policy-making and its implementation to get together with members of community and voluntary organisations at national and local level and with people experiencing poverty, to listen to each other and share information.

Since 1997 Ireland has developed national anti-poverty strategies to provide a strategic framework in which to tackle poverty and social exclusion. The current strategy, the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion, identifies a wide range of targeted actions and interventions to support the overall objective of achieving the national social target for poverty reduction.

The Plan was recently updated for the period 2015 - 2017 to reflect the current issues and interventions to tackle poverty. There is a greater focus on modernising the social protection system, improving effectiveness and efficiency of social transfers and strengthening active inclusion policies. The Updated Plan contains



reformulated goals which include a focus on early childhood development, youth exclusion, access to the labour market including measures for people with disabilities, migrant integration, social housing and affordable energy.

Monitoring the implementation of these policies is an important priority. The fifth biennial Social Inclusion Report 2013 and 2014 was published in September 2015 as part of the monitoring mechanisms under the national action plan. These reports outline progress on implementation of national policy commitments to tackle poverty and social exclusion during those years. They are available on the Department's website.

The Social Inclusion Monitor (SIM) is published annually to report on progress towards the national social target for poverty reduction. The latest key findings are:

- 2014 saw the key poverty targets stabilise. Consistent poverty fell marginally to 8% (from 8.2% in 2013). However, the national social target for poverty reduction remains challenging with a gap of 4 percentage points to be bridged to meet the interim target of 4% by 2016.
- Looking at the supporting indicators, basic deprivation fell by 1.5 percentage points to 29%, the first reduction since 2007. While the at-risk-of-poverty rate increased by 1.1 percentage points to 16.3%. This was mainly due to a rise in real median disposable income of 3.5%, driven by higher direct income from employment.
- The social welfare system continued to play an important role in alleviating poverty. Social transfers (excluding pensions) lifted over a fifth of the population out of at-risk of-poverty, representing a poverty reduction effect of 56%. Ireland was among the best performing EU member states at reducing poverty.
- The improvement in the poverty rates was driven by the continued recovery in economic growth and a further fall in unemployment of about 2 percentage points. We expect these positive trends will have continued in 2015.

The full impact of the strong economic recovery and employment growth was not yet reflected in the 2014 figures. The unemployment rate was 11.3% in 2014 on average, but has since fallen to 8.3% in August 2016. As unemployment is strongly linked to poverty, we can expect further decreases in poverty as the figures for 2015 and 2016 become available. It is envisaged that 2015 data will be released by the CSO in early 2017.

Ireland also contributes to EU initiatives to tackle poverty and to promote social inclusion by participation and inputs into various activities, including:

- The Social Protection Committee which reports on the European social situation and fosters policy co-ordination. Work is underway on the 2016 Annual Report, Social Europe, which analyses the social situation particularly the progress towards the Europe 2020 poverty target. It outlines recent social policy developments, assesses the latest common social trends to watch and identifies key social challenges for the EU. It is due for publication in autumn 2016.
- The recent adoption of a Council Conclusion on developing an integrated approach to combat poverty and social exclusion by combining adequate income support, access to quality services and inclusive labour markets, while ensuring equal opportunities for women and men. Comprehensive, continuous and coordinated interventions throughout the life-cycle and co-operation among all stakeholders are central to this approach.
- In March, I attended the first Annual Convention for Inclusive Growth along with other delegates from Ireland. The Convention brought together participants from civil society organisations, national authorities, the EU institutions and other key stakeholder bodies to examine what the EU can do to ensure all of its citizens reaped the benefits of truly inclusive growth. The focus of the Convention has informed the theme of this year's Forum.

The workshops later this morning provide you with an opportunity to hear about and discuss the situation and policy response across four areas:-

- In-work poverty/quality of work;
- Poverty and rural communities, rural isolation and social exclusion;
- Poverty and urban communities/contributing social issues;
- Intergenerational joblessness and jobless families.

In the afternoon, the rapporteur will present a summary of the workshop outcomes. The Minister for Social Protection, Mr Leo Varadkar will address the plenary. This will be followed by presentations, roundtable discussions and inputs from an expert panel on tackling poverty through labour market activation and related measures. Ms Vaughan said she looked forward to hearing participant's deliberations on these important topics throughout the day.

## 4.2 Feedback on the Outcomes of Regional Preparatory Workshops

**Robin Hanan EAPN Ireland** and **Anne Irwin CWI** presented a summary of the themes emerging from a series of regional workshops and a focus group held in the weeks prior to the SIF. These were underpinned by short inputs by participants from the regional workshops.

Considerable concerns emerged in these workshops about the gap between social inclusion policy commitments and visible progress in the implementation of these commitments, including the impact of budgets on social inclusion objectives and the effect this has had on lone parents and children.

The lack of employment opportunities, especially for Travellers, migrants and those parenting alone was also highlighted in these workshops. Other concerns included the lack of continuity in social employment schemes, the inadequacy of payments to

defray additional participation costs (childcare, transport etc.) and the growth of precarious employment bringing in-work poverty.

The requirement to take up poor quality jobs under labour market activation to avoid sanctions being imposed and a determined application of a 'work first' strategy was criticised. Current interventions such as JobPath, JobBridge and JobsPlus were also singled out for criticism on the basis that they deflected the focus away from the quality and sustainability of jobs.

Childcare was widely regarded as a major barrier to employment take-up. Transport, especially in rural areas, was another deterrent in terms of availability, cost and accessibility. Those living in rural areas outlined the lack of services, isolation, crime and the fear of crime, and the absence of any visible indication of economic recovery as exacerbating factors in the levels of poverty endured by rural dwellers. In urban areas intergenerational unemployment, low education levels, drugs and poor services were key concerns.

Joblessness and poverty in families were identified as significant problems in both urban and rural areas, with associated issues of isolation and motivation. There was a call for more creative means to encourage people back to work and there was agreement that coercive methods are unacceptable and should not be applied.

Some cross-cutting themes also emerged in relation to migrants, asylum seekers, Travellers and young people. These included the need for supports for those leaving direct provision, the deep racism that affects all aspects of Travellers lives, including education and employment and the impact of welfare cuts applied to young people which prevents them leading an independent life.

The impact of the housing crisis was a primary concern for many people in or on the periphery of poverty. The scale of homelessness in many areas continues to peak, even in rural areas where it may be less visible. The plight of single people in trying

to access the housing list, overcrowding and the overall lack of social housing were primary concerns. Traveller accommodation plans are still not being implemented despite the availability of funding.

The reality that debt is a recurring theme was brought home in the workshops where the important work of the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) and the credit unions was noted. The significant increase in mental health issues and the lack of appropriate services was also noted. The importance of maintaining older people in their homes and the burden placed on older people in subsidising their offspring's mortgages and providing childcare, and other caring duties, was highlighted. The prohibitive cost of education was identified as a major concern for people in poverty. There was a consensus that third level should be free of charge to everybody, including the children of asylum seekers.

Finally, there was a widespread concern about impacts arising from the demise of the Community Development Programme and the severe cuts imposed on other vital community support projects. Many of these organisations are dealing with the fall-out from diminished public services. Other factors impacting negatively on community activity have been the local government reforms and the shift towards contracting which has undermined the independence and well-being of the community sector.

# Section 5

# Workshops

## 5. Workshops

Participants chose one of four parallel workshops to discuss key issues under a set of themes reflective of the objectives of the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion, the social inclusion and employment targets of the Europe 2020 Strategy and the ambition to achieve an inclusive recovery and growth that benefits all citizens within both Ireland and the broader European Union. A number of questions were posed by facilitators to trigger the discussion, although responses tended to cut across or encapsulate elements of each of the questions. For reason of coherence and flow, responses are set out under the sub-themes that emerged.

### 5.1 Workshop 1: In-work Poverty/Quality of Work

The expectations of participants in this workshop were focused on managing a household through low paid employment, the need for targeted approaches to people's different situations, such as disability, and the need for cross-government responses to in-work poverty.

**Brid O'Brien Head of Policy and Media, Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (INOUE)** outlined the need for future National Action Plans for Social Inclusion to address the issue of quality of work/in-work poverty.

She referred to the complexity of issues impacting on the take-up and sustainability of employment - active inclusion measures; challenges facing the applicant or new entrant; education, skills and experience; quality and security of employment; income supports; childcare and transport costs. All of this complexity needs to be set against the expectation that employment will provide the primary household income. In respect of this, it will be challenging to meet the Programme for Government commitment on the minimum wage given the recent increase recommended by the Low Pay Commission.

She spoke of the need for a cross-governmental approach capable of addressing different labour market conditions in rural and urban areas. Such an approach needs to address the lived experience of those struggling to get a job or surviving in low paid insecure jobs, trying to cover the cost of living.

Ms O'Brien pointed to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) highlighting the importance of improving people's prospects/job progression through life-long learning. She argued it would be useful to reflect on what actions are required to deliver on the SDGs ; and in particular to deliver on SDG 8 which aims to "promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all."

Welcoming the broadening of *Pathways to Work* to include other groups, Ms O'Brien called for greater consideration of the knock-on effect of precarious work on a range of other matters - housing and childcare being obvious examples. In respect of this, she urged government to give careful consideration to the focus of the proposed Working Family Payment - should the State be subsidising employment or ensuring employers pay a decent wage?

## **Discussion**

### **Barriers to employment**

The main barriers for people in poverty trying to access employment were identified by participants as poor education levels, especially deficits in basic literacy and numeracy, together with a resulting lack of confidence.

Other identified barriers related to people in homeless hostels who cannot access employment because they have no permanent address; and people with disabilities who may prefer to take-up employment but are reticent to do so because of fears of secondary benefit losses.

The need to regularise migrant worker's status to counter their exposure to exploitation and precarious work was also mentioned.



Participants highlighted the situation facing young people such as the high rate of youth unemployment, the need for Jobseeker Allowance to be restored, and for more investment in the Youth Guarantee. Questions were also raised about what will replace the JobBridge scheme.

Childcare was widely identified as such an immediate issue that short-term responses need to be considered, while more consideration is applied to developing a comprehensive longer term strategy. Examples were cited from Canada and Portugal to address short-term needs.

### **The activation approach**

The activation approach was criticised by participants on the basis that its focus was solely about getting people into work and there was a lack of attention on the tailored supports to help people to progress, including supports or alternate pathways for those who struggle with formal interview processes. There was a shared belief by participants that a person-centred approach would utilise both universal and tailored supports at different stages along the way.

The need for more transitioning supports was identified by many people in the workshop. An example was cited concerning the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) which provides basic support in terms of community development as well as employment activation support, but provided very little for those in transition between the two. A further criticism of SICAP was that it is target driven, with a focus on bottom-line figures with little scope to accommodate personal needs.

Particular issues were raised which effect those parenting alone who are on Jobseeker's Transitional Payment (JST). The start time of Education and Training Board (ETB) courses clashing with dropping children to school can result in deductions for arriving late/leaving early to care for children. The lack of affordable childcare and after-school care compounds this problem, not just for those parenting alone.

The need for a more comprehensive cross-government support framework was strongly supported by participants in this workshop.

### **Information**

Participants identified the provision of information as important, believing that it should be provided in a proactive rather than responsive manner - letters from local authorities and the Department of Social Protection, including payment letters, were particularly highlighted in this respect.

The consensus of participants was that information should be provided in a clear and understandable way – using plain English, simplified letters (in terms of font size etc.) and applied in all communication formats. An innovative example identified was the school welcome pack for new children, which provides information about accessing back-to-work childcare support.

### **In-work issues**

Low paid jobs, zero or variable hours contracts and other forms of precarious employment were raised, with participants concluding that legislation is required to address many of these matters.

Participants identified issues with employers keeping their costs down by offering low pay and variable hours in certain industries such as hotels/catering and childcare. Participants were of the view that an appropriate State response would be: negotiated sector-wide legislated wage agreements; new qualification systems with raised qualifying and delivery standards across sectors; and expanding apprenticeship schemes.

Participants raised the gender dimension of part-time and insecure work, where women are disproportionately represented. It was noted that a greater number of those in low paid lower grades within the civil service are women.

Participants believed that eligibility criteria for in-work supports should be revisited especially in relation to jobless households - for example, a skilled/qualified adult not able to access activation supports even though they may be the most job-ready member of the family. Migrant workers were mentioned as another group that may not be eligible for the necessary literacy and other supports required to prevent employment exploitation.

Finally, participants said that greater recognition should be given to people with apprenticeships not only on those with more formal qualifications. Employers should be encouraged to provide ongoing training and development to their staff.

### **Innovation**

There was a view among participants that some recognition of the informal economy could be useful in creating employment initiatives targeting specific groups such as ex-prisoners who face particular difficulties in accessing employment, or those with addiction problems. This would require the removal of punitive approaches in areas, including rural areas, where there is a lack of formal work and the establishment of social enterprises which can capitalise on available EU funding.

### **Community development and participation**

There was a widespread call for the reinvigoration of community development work by the restoration of funding which had been much reduced over recent years. There was an equally strong view by participants that the replacement of pre-existing community infrastructure by Public Participation Networks (PPNs) is not working and is incapable of leveraging the same level of effective support for those in poverty and unemployment.

Participants were unanimous in stating that community development provides communities with a voice and an ability to participate. This can yield positive outcomes, especially for those who are most marginalised - for example community development organisations can effectively advocate for the regulation of undocumented migrants.

There was a strong view that community activity puts a value on voluntary participation as well as mobilising people in providing supports and services in their communities.

### **Evaluation**

The importance of evaluation was stressed by many participants for its contribution to improving payment and employment support initiatives. For instance, there is a commitment to undertake a review of Jobseeker's Transitional Payment next year and many participants were of the view that this might provide some insights into the impact of the One Parent Family Payment Reform. The initial case management data shows an increase in employment levels but it's too early to be definitive about this. The analysis needs to factor in the low starting base following earlier reforms to the conditionality of Community Employment and the One Parent Family Payment.

### **Frustration**

There was a strong opinion by participants that many of the same issues have been repeatedly identified at successive SIFs but little progress has been made in addressing them. While it was acknowledged that poverty is a deeply rooted structural problem there was also a frustration expressed at the lack of progress over many years. Questions were raised by participants as to whether this arose from a lack of political or administrative will and how this can be changed.

Finally, the high cost of living in Ireland - childcare, transport and housing being mentioned in particular - was cited by many participants as something that needs to be factored into future policy responses.

## 5.2 Workshop 2: Poverty and Rural Communities: Rural Isolation and Social Exclusion

**Dr Áine Macken-Walsh, Sociologist, Teagasc**, said that employment does not in and of itself determine absence of poverty or social inclusion. A person may experience poverty and feel socially excluded and isolated even when employed. The consequences of employment - be they positive or negative - are determined to a large extent by whether or not employment provides a sense of belonging.

Rural areas are generally limited in terms of diversity in employment, with a subsequent lack of opportunity. Teagasc and other organisations focus on creating economic and occupational diversity within agriculture and within the rural economy more generally.

She said that traditional sectors, such as inter-generational farming and fishing, can be occupationally very meaningful to people. This sense of social and cultural meaningfulness can be an important factor compelling people to continue in agriculture and small-scale fishing – even when not economically meaningful. She said that this may not be sustainable in the long term and is likely to pose considerable policy challenges and economic costs if these important ‘social inclusion anchors’ are removed.

Access to diverse social networks is crucial for the well-being of socially isolated people because these networks provide ample scope for people to find their own sense of belonging. These social networks are more readily available in urban areas but can be forged at the local levels, perhaps supported by broadband.

Availability of affordable transport and of course, money, also arises. Profitability is low in agriculture – many dry-stock farmers do not make the average industrial wage - and the ensuing poverty can make access to social networks impossible, cutting people off from the opportunities and networks that ultimately determine their social inclusion.

Access to diverse networks is even more important for marginalised groups. Many mainstream social networks can be exclusionary – research has found that women have been found to be marginalised from many agricultural institutions.

## **Discussion**

### **Regional investment**

The need to address the lack of investment in rural areas was widely regarded as the core issue. Participants believed that investment should target both hard and soft (social) infrastructure. They believed that finance is at the heart of many poverty related issues because the costs of providing services are higher in rural areas than in urban areas.

Participants spoke of the need to address the lack of enabling infrastructure which requires this investment alongside a joined up government approach. There was a strong belief that rural proofing, equality proofing and cross border harmonisation needs to be an integral part of planning and policy formation. Finally, there was a warning from some participants that Brexit could have a major negative effect, worsening matters for everyone, but especially those living in poverty.

### **Basic infrastructural issues**

Workshop participants readily identified transport and broadband as being of the utmost importance in combatting social exclusion, but both need significant improvement. There was a widespread recognition by participants that Local Link and travel passes are very important factors along with accessibility in the provision of rural transport and the maximising of social benefit.

Appointment scheduling was a particular issue identified by participants arising from the infrequency of bus services. It was suggested that statutory bodies need to be sensitive to transport limitations. Car insurance is costly, making the option of travel by private car unaffordable for many.

### **Providing security and basic services**

Safety was an issue raised by participants, who spoke of people feeling even more insecure in their homes because of telephone allowance cuts. Flooding also brought insecurity and hardship, with many in fear of, or having to move out of, their homes. This was particularly hard for people living in or close to poverty.

There was shared agreement by participants on the need for health and welfare services in rural areas, especially for older people and people with addiction, mental health and people with disabilities.

It was strongly felt within the workshop that creative ways of sharing services can be found – for example, using school buses to transport people to medical appointments - but all of this requires the building of capacity, which is difficult to put in place without resources. It was suggested that the new LEADER programme coming through the Department for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs with a €250m National Action Plan for Rural Ireland may be a means to fund some of the innovative rural schemes outlined above.

### **Targeting severe disadvantage**

Participants agreed that rural homelessness may be invisible but is nonetheless present and needs to be tackled. Rehousing people from institutions is a particular need and is a contributing factor in homelessness.

### **Labour market measures**

There was a strong feeling by participants that an increasing government focus on activation is leaving other matters aside – there are limited job opportunities in rural areas but this problem appears to have been set aside.

Participants expressed a strong view that activation, in terms of moving people towards the labour market, is a good objective but a successful outcome is dependent on a balance of education/skills development, employment preparation and social supports.

There was a widespread belief by participants that activation measures need a commitment to income adequacy as a central objective. Participants believe that Community Employment is an important measure in moving towards this objective but changes to the scheme have had a negative impact in this respect. It was pointed out that participation in activation schemes can carry additional costs for people in rural areas.

There was a consensus that, for understandable reasons, activation is less community focused and capacity oriented and a belief that SICAP should be concentrated on providing these pre-activation and capacity supports.

### **Economic development**

A view was expressed that economies can be redesigned by tapping into declining (in terms of labour) activities such as farming, shifting the local economy towards high value goods such as cheese making and other organic produce. Walking and cycling products were advanced as another possibility. Participants felt that distance working could also be enabled with good broadband coverage.

### **Impacting on policy**

Three ways to impact on policy were identified by participants within this workshop:

1. Through the SIF and through regional meetings held by EAPN/CWI;
2. There will be an opportunity to feed into the National Action Plan for Rural Ireland. That process is being finalised;
3. The PPN - through the municipal districts structure – although opportunities have been reduced through the closure of Community Development Projects (CDPs).



### 5.3 Workshop 3: Poverty and Urban Communities/Contributing Social Issues

**John-Mark McCafferty, Society of St. Vincent de Paul (SVP)**, gave an outline of issues gathered from SVP volunteers affecting urban communities.

Housing is a huge issue due to lack of supply in both private and social sector. He outlined the difficulties in each sector such as lack of security in relation to tenancy, poor quality of housing and families too long in emergency accommodation. Other difficulties include people living in unsafe communities where there is fear in the community due to crime, drugs and gangs.

Gangland killings and armed Gardaí on the streets are other features of inner city areas of disadvantage.

He said that living life on a low income creates many difficulties and problems for people in relation to education, wellbeing and developing and sustaining relationships. Living in poverty makes it difficult to develop the resilience and coping skills that everybody needs, especially in the context of drugs and an accompanying gang culture.

**Joe Donohoe, Fatima Groups United**, gave a presentation on the housing and regeneration of Fatima Mansions from the 1980s to 2003. He outlined the stages involved and the learning that emerged from the regeneration process.

He focused on community safety issues which came to a head in 2013. At this time there was a clear link between the activity of drugs gangs and increasing fear in the community. As a result a Community Impact Statement was developed in 2016 - a solution to crime which advocates a measured response to crime, which is applied when needed.

Economic opportunities for the Fatima community began to emerge with the decision to locate the new National Children's Hospital adjacent to the nearby St James Hospital. The Fatima community actively sought to maximise opportunities for local employment. It is likely that this endeavour will deliver dividends as the construction gets underway.

Negotiating community benefit from projects of this scale is both difficult and complex, and there are lessons to be learned. He made a particular point in relation to pursuing potential employment related benefits, believing that a community benefit clause should be included in contracts for developers in which they have to stipulate what benefits will occur. This is important because once it is stipulated in the contract there is no breach of European competition law. For that same reason, local labour clauses don't work because they are unenforceable and likely to contravene European law.

## **Discussion**

### **Consultation**

Participants in this workshop were agreed that better outcomes can be achieved if consultations are meaningful. In this respect, the SIF consultation was perceived as ineffective by some participants who called for new mechanisms to ensure 'listening with intent', especially to those experiencing poverty; to provide accountability; and, to monitor the implementation of recommendations. There was also an acknowledgement within the workshop that many good policies and strategies have been devised, but the implementation of strategies has not happened in many cases, hence the need for monitoring.

Many participants spoke about the important role of local authorities in terms of their responsibilities on key matters impacting on poverty, while noting the dearth of local authority participation in SIF. There was widespread agreement by participants that local authorities should engage and listen to communities but there were concerns about the Public Participation Network (PPN), which many communities either regard as unsuitable or choose not to participate.

### **Activation and the labour market**

There was agreement by participants that labour activation measures need to target identified needs and to incentivise rather than penalise people (especially lone parents) to participate in responses to these needs. Participants agreed that support measures should include crossing-cutting measures covering mental health, literacy,

English language, dual diagnosis and quality childhood care. Mental health issues were described by participants as being an enormous issue for many people who have suffered greatly in the recession.

The need for employers to change their attitudes to older job seekers was flagged by participants. It was said that older people cannot get work even after doing all sorts of upskilling, often to degree level. Participants were agreed that the solution is not to require older people to do more courses but to combat ageism.

### **Safety**

Safety in communities in inner city Dublin was described by participants as a huge issue. There was agreement that the state needs to adequately resource the social, economic as well as physical development of people by providing housing, Gardaí and mental health services to ensure community safety and wellbeing. It was strongly suggested by participants that state agencies should work together to find solutions to safety problems.

Many participants said that agencies should be working directly, from within, with people in these communities. It was pointed out by one participant that there haven't been any evictions for people terrorising their communities, only for rent arrears.

### **Difficulties facing migrants**

The lack of linguistic services was identified in this workshop, including forms which could be easily translated for people for whom English is their second language. This results in migrants not achieving their employment potential, with a likelihood of ending up in oppressive employment.

It was generally agreed within the workshop that migrants and their children are disproportionately affected by poverty and social exclusion, highlighting the need for a Migrant Integration Strategy, which has been promised but not yet delivered.

## 5.4 Workshop 4 Inter-generational Joblessness and Jobless Families

**Helen Johnston, National Economic and Social Council (NESC).** In 2014, following publication of *Jobless Households: An Exploration of the Issues*, it was proposed that NESC would examine the role of services in meeting the needs of jobless households by initiating an in-depth qualitative study into how the various agencies and relevant organisations are responding to the needs of jobless households. Specifically, it is a study of jobless households and the services with whom they interact. The field work began in early 2016, and all interviews with households are now complete. Interviews with service providers will begin shortly. The project will report in 2017.

Dr. Johnston outlined the issues in relation to jobless households as:

- The cost of joblessness to households, and to the social welfare system
- There are many children in Irish jobless households, raising implications for their future outcomes
- Barriers and traps to employment, both real and perceived, due to particularities in the welfare and tax systems
- The availability of jobs
- The influence of household decision-making

The reasons for unemployment included:

- The economic crash - one third of interviewees had lost their jobs
- For many older women and lone parents having a family was the reason for leaving employment
- Illness - either the person interviewed or a member of their family
- Literacy difficulties, e.g. dyslexia and also English language not being the first language.

Interviewees had a wide range of work experience. Four migrants had previously worked in high skilled jobs but could only get a low skilled job in Ireland. African applicants had applied for jobs but were not getting called for interviews. Twenty people (most of the interviewees) had worked in low skill jobs and often for a number of years.

A combination of personal factors and external factors inhibited people from taking up employment. Personal factors included not having the qualifications to get a job, lack of work experience and no transport to get to work. External factors included a lot more competition for jobs, some people on social welfare payments that limited the hours they could work and some interviewees felt they were discriminated against because they were older. NESF also found that interviewees in local authority housing felt more secure than those in private rented accommodation and this was also part of the personal decision making process.

The over-riding issues coming from the study are:

- People's situations are diverse and complex - no one solution fits all;
- The employment/welfare/ (family) relationship;
- What are rational/reasonable choices?
- Connections to, and between, services;
- Various barriers;
- Community supports and kinship networks are important.

## Discussion

### Response to the presentation

It was generally felt by workshop participants that much of what was presented was unfortunately familiar. The view of participants was that this piece of research by NESF was very useful in terms of documenting quite a complex issue and it succinctly pulled together the many issues that people were experiencing on the ground, including:

- Is it worthwhile to go out work? It costs money to go to work - e.g. travel and childcare - and taking up additional work may result in a loss of some benefits. People have to weigh up the options;
- The quality of the work is pivotal. There was a sense that people are being pushed into jobs that are low paid and precarious;
- Certain groups (see below) face additional barriers and these need to be factored into responses.

### Lone Parents

Participants were strong in expressing the view that the particularity of issues affecting those parenting alone is not sufficiently acknowledged and that Ireland continues to lag behind other European countries on the issue of childcare – an important issue for those parenting alone, and others. Participants thought it unreasonable and illogical to expect lone parents to go into the workforce without childcare being in place. They were of the view that childcare is a huge part of the problem and it is why there are a high number of jobless households with children. There was a consensus that DSP should do the following:

- Increase the earnings disregard for the *One Parent Family Payment* and the Jobseekers Transition payment;
- Broaden access to *Family Income Supplement* through reduction of the FIS 'hours worked' threshold;
- Make the *Back to Education Allowance (BTEA)* and the SUSI maintenance grant payable together to lone parents who are undertaking an educational or training course.

## **Travellers**

Participants pointed to cutbacks in Traveller education supports which, they said, had led to less young Travellers progressing through the education system.

There was agreement by participants that the 80% unemployment rate in the Traveller community is unacceptable.

One participant said that a number of Traveller Healthcare workers have had their hours reduced to 12 hours and, as a result, have lost their Family Income Supplement entitlement. Participants agreed that this is an important issue for a community that experiences such poor health outcomes. Participants were convinced that continuing entitlement to the medical card would ensure the considerable skills and knowledge capital accumulated will not be lost.

## **Young People 18-35**

A number of contributing factors were considered by participants to be important because of their impact on young men's employment/unemployment. These include the lack of a role model in the home, an absence of structure in their lives and a prevailing lack of self-esteem and negativity. Participants also noted that there are additional issues for some people - addiction, dealing with probation services, etc. An example of good practice was cited by one participant whereby Southside Partnership worked intensively with a group of 12 young people for a number of weeks with positive outcomes. This pilot scheme, funded by DSP, demonstrated the value of this type of 'wraparound services' approach and its success in building up the capacity of young people.

## **Asylum Seekers**

There was overwhelming agreement within the workshop that people in the direct provision system should be allowed to work, as happens in other EU countries. It was felt that the current practice is counterproductive and very damaging at a personal, familial and societal level.

## Long Term Unemployed Men

Particular self-esteem issues for long term unemployed men were identified by participants. It was thought that this group needed a safe environment in which to articulate their concerns and needs.

## Labour market

There was an acknowledgement by participants of the huge number of changes in the department introduced over the last few years - including the integration of FÁS, Pathways to Work, the roll out of Intreo and JobPath, etc., - which need to be borne in mind in questioning the responsiveness of the department.

There was criticism by many participants of the 'work first approach' being taken by DSP, with no account taken of the range and complexity of personal factors that are preventing people taking up employment, increasing their hours etc. Participants felt that when making decisions about employment, people take into account the overall finances of the household as well as the needs of others in the household, in particular children. There was agreement in the workshop that the vast majority of people want a job, but participants stressed that having a job is not a route out of poverty for everyone and that having a job is about more than money but also important for self-esteem and self-worth reasons.

## Suggested improvements

The following items were identified by participants as problematic and needing improvement:

Changes to the eligibility criteria for Tús were cited by participants as an issue for some community organisations who were struggling to keep frontline services going.

A participant from FLAC (Free Legal Aid Centre) who deal with many social welfare matters specifically mentioned the following:

- Almost 60% of the total appeals decided in 2015 were successful, which indicates a potential problem with decision-making on initial applications, highlighting the need for better overall accountability;



- The length of time of social welfare appeals is a problem, while the situation has improved, it should be better;
- The need for a social welfare appeals database was identified, on the basis that without a database appeals staff are making decisions in isolation, resulting in inconsistencies in decision-making;
- The need for Deciding Officers to have flexibility and to apply common sense in decisions. However, this was countered by a view that too much discretion may lead to discrimination;
- Interviews should be recorded for both quality and training purposes.

### **Cross departmental issues**

Participants said that cuts to the community sector have impacted negatively on services and supports to people on the ground - this is happening at a time when there is more demand for services and also at a time when the overall lack of investment in public services during austerity continues to impact.

The need for an integrated, multi-dimensional, cross-departmental response was identified by participants, some of whom said that policy from one department should not be undermined by a conflicting policy from another department.

The need for affirmative action policies to be applied as appropriate was identified by some participants, an example being the new National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy, which is looking at introducing positive public service recruitment in order to train and employ Traveller and Roma staff in public services. An interdepartmental pilot carried out with a group of young Travellers a number of years ago was cited by one participant as a model. There was also agreement in the workshop on the clear need for budget proofing to be applied from both a human rights and equality perspective.

There was a strong view within the workshop that government needs to deal with the private rented accommodation sector as matter of urgency. This relates back to the NESF study outlined at the start of the workshop which highlighted the importance of

housing security as part of the decision making process of people moving into employment or increasing their earnings from employment

Participants agreed that responses must also be mindful of the need to develop a capacity to provide tailored services that respond to people's different needs and circumstances. Such services include: adult literacy, family supports, addiction services, disability services, housing, quality childcare and after-school supports, education and training as well as engagement with employers.

# Section 6

## Concluding Section

## Section 6: Concluding Section

### 6.1 Summary of Workshop Discussions

**Aiden Lloyd, Conference Rapporteur** presented a summary of the workshop discussion conclusions, highlighting the issues, concerns and recommendations from each workshop.

#### **In Work Poverty/Quality of Work**

This workshop emphasised the **importance of information** in facilitating a positive and beneficial engagement with the activation process. Participants highlighted the need for a more proactive approach to the provision of information, especially by local authorities and the Department of Social Protection in relation to payment letters and other matters affecting income and secondary benefits. They recommended that information should be provided in a clear and meaningful manner using plain English, suitable font size and simple formats and that this should apply to all communication formats, including social media, as appropriate.

Access to meaningful interventions, supports and services for individuals in progressing through the life-course stages was another important matter raised.

**Person centered services are required to identify and meet diverse needs**, including literacy/numeracy, confidence building, drug issues and the needs of those in caring roles.

Participant in this workshop believed that **policies should be inclusive of all people**, including migrant workers who often end up in precarious and exploitative employment, and people with disabilities for whom there may be particular concerns about loss of secondary benefits. They also emphasized the centrality of education and training as a key element of the intervention package because access to better paid work is difficult without the higher education/training qualifications that many experiencing in-work poverty require.

Participants spoke of **the importance of community development in moving people closer to services** and how it has been an important mechanism in supporting people to voice their needs and develop a capability to participate in labour market responses. Cuts to this sector over many years have had a detrimental effect on communities with high levels of unemployment. These supports for community development need to be reinstated.

This workshop highlighted the importance of **measuring impacts in ways that capture the full effect on people**. This means taking both a qualitative and quantitative approach to evaluation, especially in relation to groups such as those parenting alone – for instance determining the impact of reforms to the One Parent Family Payment. The workshop conclusion was that while quantitative data is important, initiatives that are target-driven, such as SICAP, tend to focus on bottom line figures without an accompanying narrative and do not capture the impact on the individual.

Finally, this workshop concluded that greater attention needs to be placed on **bridging the gap between earnings and the high cost of living**, raising issues relating to people on low pay who cannot meet the cost of living. The question was asked: who pays the shortfall between wages and costs – the employer or the state? And should the state continue to provide income supports to address issues of in-work poverty, or should employers be compelled to pay an adequate wage?

### **Poverty and Rural Communities**

This workshop called for a vision for rural development that is cognisant of features of the rural context that impact on poverty, stating that rural communities are not homogenous but there are shared features, including the low level of investment in capital and community infrastructure.

This workshop stressed that addressing issues of rural development and rural poverty requires a commitment to a *public good* outcome that encompasses economic and social development, including a commitment to income adequacy across the life cycle.

The need for **rural proofing and equality proofing to be part of all government policies** to ensure a positive impact on poverty levels was also emphasised. Border harmonization was identified as a matter to be factored into rural proofing as was Brexit, which could introduce particular complicating factors to rural towns and hinterlands.

The workshop participants believe that transport and broadband could be compensating factors effecting employment in rural areas, but both transport and broadband need commitment and increased investment.

Finally, this workshop called for **community participation at all stages of the planning process** in the belief that there are opportunities to make a significant impact on rural poverty if target groups and representative groups are involved in planning processes. Consultation is the means for effecting long term process-driven change, but community involvement needs to continue through the planning, monitoring and accountability stages.

### **Poverty and Urban Communities: Contributing Factors**

This workshop was critical of the effectiveness of consultations, which were not working. They called for **new mechanisms to hear the voices of those experiencing poverty**. There was a widespread belief that the Public Participation Networks are not working as a mechanism for dialogue with local authorities. Listening with intent is an important aspect of consultation requiring commitment from the state's side.

This workshop echoed the belief that participation needs to extend to enforcement and accountability in order to ensure success.

**Incentivising labour market interventions to target identified needs** was identified as a priority in this workshop. The imposition of penalties when there are mitigating factors was deemed to be not useful and acts as a disincentive. The need for greater emphasis on cross-cutting supports on mental health, literacy, English language and quality childcare was highlighted.

The centrality of the state in **resourcing the social, economic and physical development of people** was regarded as a priority, with safety and well-being regarded as key concerns in this respect. Providing housing, better policing and mental health services would ensure community safety and create better conditions to address poverty. Finally, there was a call for recognition that migrants and their children are disproportionately impacted by poverty and social exclusion emphasising the need for the promised Migrant Integration Strategy to be delivered.

### **Intergenerational Joblessness and Jobless Families**

This workshop was clear on the need for an individualised approach as the pivot in a system of supporting 'wrap around' services. They stressed the need to accommodate diversity of need, which poses problems in relation to a '*work first approach*' where an individually tailored pathway - which may require a more circuitous route to achieve a good outcome - is appropriate.

This was regarded as especially important for particular groups such as those parenting alone, because of the complexity and interrelationship of main and secondary/additional benefits. It was also regarded as central to vulnerable groups such as Travellers, 80% of whom are unemployed.

**The important role of pre-development interventions** by community organisations, in terms of capacity building and pre-development, was highlighted for its proven ability to prepare people to benefit from mainstream services. Cuts to the community sector have impacted negatively on these services and supports to people on the ground.

The workshop was clear that community projects provide an immediate and familiar entry point giving personal support, information and a pathway to more intensive and specialized services. The workshop was clear that resources to community organisations need to be reinstated. This is especially necessary at a period when there is more demand for community services as a result of lack of investment in mainstream services during austerity.

### **The need for an integrated, multi-dimensional cross-departmental response**

capable of countering the silo effect of departments and agencies has been articulated for many years. This workshop concluded that this is still an issue, although some good practice has been demonstrated. There was a strong contention that policy from one department should not be undermined or compromised by a conflicting policy from another department, thus blocking the potential of an otherwise good initiative. Childcare, which is big issue for many women entering employment, especially those parenting alone, demonstrates the need for better policy coordination.

### **Tackling Poverty through Labour Market Activation and Related Measures: Facilitated Discussion**

**Helen Johnston, NESc**, set the context for the following round table discussions in her presentation *Tackling Poverty through Labour Market Activation and Related Measures*. She said that Ireland has a high level of families where no one is in paid work and that many of these families contain children.

A NESc qualitative in-depth study of families where no-one is in paid work, has taken place in a disadvantaged suburb of Dublin.

The study has interviewed and analysed 33 households, 10 front-line service providers and 8 employers to date. The intention is to interview some more front line providers and employers as well as relevant council staff, national service providers and policy makers.

The conclusions of the study to date are that the vast majority of people want a job, but accessing a job is not necessarily a route out of poverty for everyone and having a job is more than just about the money.



The study found that people's situations are diverse and complex, so there is a need for standard systems, with tailoring to address mismatches between system requirements and people's circumstances.

The study found that income support is important, but so are good services. Community supports and kinship networks were also important. Engagement with employers was also regarded as beneficial.

**Terry Corcoran, Principal, Social Inclusion Division, Department Social Protection** outlined the link between the level of unemployment and rates of 'at risk of poverty' and deprivation, explaining that the main contributor to lowering poverty and deprivation is successful macro-economic policy, which leads to growth, higher employment and lower unemployment. Therefore, improvements in economic performance will impact on poverty and deprivation levels, but there will be a lag factor. He said that activation programmes/policies also have a role – to the extent that they can be shown to improve employment outcomes for participants by preparing people for opportunities as they arise. The record on this is somewhat mixed, so the activation approach needs to be constantly evaluated and this is now under way.

He said that current policy is mainly focused on unemployed welfare recipients and conditionality is a factor for this group. However, a wide range of activation measures is available to others, including Back to Work Education Allowance (BTEA), JobBridge and Solas training for those unemployed.

Exceptions tend to be where the original government introduction of a scheme was conditional on a welfare saving while participating (e.g. CE) or was specifically targeted (as with Tús) as part of the conditionality regime of Jobseekers Allowance<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> While there are a wide range of activation measures available there are exceptions on some schemes for example BTEA participants cannot work full-time or engage simultaneously on Community Employment, Tús: the community work placement initiative, the Rural Social Scheme, Gateway Programme, SOLAS/ETB (former FÁS)

Mr Corcoran outlined that next steps under Pathways to Work 2016 -2020 include examining the possibility of extension of measures (currently targeting the long term unemployed) to other qualified groups. Issues that will need to be considered include:

- Are there welfare savings?
- Should access involve conditionality (e.g. for adult dependants)?

Finally, he concluded by stressing the need for continuing evaluations to ascertain the scope for improvements in programmes/outcomes.

## 6.1 Follow-up Discussion

The follow-up discussion was categorised under the three questions posed:

Q1: *How well are current activation measures reducing poverty?*

Q2: *How well is activation impacting on jobless households?*

Q3: *How well are activation and labour market interventions reducing poverty and social exclusion?*

### Q1. How well are current activation measures reducing poverty?

There was strong view from the round tables that **activation measures are not reducing poverty** because:

- **There is a fear factor, which sets up the engagement on a negative tone** and disincentivises the individual;
- The approach is too short term and not person centered. Eligibility/access criteria for some social employment schemes are a barrier to progression;
- The quality of schemes varies. There is no uniform framework model that can be tailored at regional/local level for the individual;
- It is regarded as cheap labour to support community services;

- People are unaware or unclear on the regulations. There should be more information and clarity on the rights of people and the expectations of the activation intervention. An improved communications strategy needs to be developed;
- Childcare and access to after-schools care are key factors determining participation, as is transport (especially in rural areas).

Many participants said that income **adequacy and job stability** needs to be factored into the overall approach - the primary motivational factor is to gain access to a decent job that meets the individual's income needs. There was a view that long term sustainability in the labour market needs to be a parallel objective. Revisiting apprenticeships and training was suggested by participants as a means to realise this ambition.

There was a wide subscribed view that the **approach should be equality proofed and gender proofed** and there should be a **targeted approach in disadvantaged areas** with better utilisation of community provided training supports.

There was a shared belief among participants that **the activation approach should be holistic and framed as an action plan for the particularities of the target group/individual concerned**. There was also a view that effective supports for those experiencing homelessness, migrants with language needs and groups such as Travellers, Roma and others, requires issues of discrimination to be factored into the approach. Particular attention was drawn to the need for measures to enable migrant's qualifications to be adjusted and recognised as part of the progression framework for this group.

There was a view that **upskilling opportunities could be better exploited** and there could be more intensive, tailored supports on job seeking - ideally a single system, but with tailoring to the needs of the individual.

**Progression was identified by many participants as the key indicator of success**, therefore people need to have confidence that the follow-up supports to assist the transition into jobs following programmes such as Tús are in place.

## **Q2: How well is activation impacting on jobless households?**

**The need to change attitudes in jobless families** was identified by participants together with a belief that this should start much earlier - prevention and early engagement is more effective and children are better motivated if they see a family member in work as they grow up.

**There was a strongly expressed view that consultation that is inclusive of the target group and community provider groups affords an opportunity to develop a good system that lifts jobless households out of poverty.** Participants also believe that these same groups should be involved in designing the consultation framework. It was suggested by participants that regular feedback would ensure the input of those consulted is considered. In respect of this, it was strongly suggested that resources should be put into capacity building to ensure that excluded categories can meaningfully participate in the planning of measures targeting jobless households.

**The anomalies/complexities of the welfare system** were identified as an issue for jobless households in terms of welfare traps and loss of secondary benefits such as housing and health supports. Allowances for transport and childcare as well as Family Income Supplement (FIS) and the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance (BTWEA) were also identified by participants as critical matters affecting participation.

**Participants said that linking in to communities and employers is helpful** in drawing in community supports and helping employers to appreciate that work does not always pay. It was agreed by participants that trade unions and the self-employed should also be drawn into the process, alongside employers.

**There was concern from some participants about the plethora of supports and services** and a call to reduce the complexity arising for the client - questions were raised about JobPath in this regard.

**Participants agreed that activation measures need to be clear and realistic.**

Questions were raised by some participants about the effectiveness of activation supports such as Tús. Do they continue to activate the client once the programmes end? There was also a call from rural based participants for consideration to be given to the relative dearth of employment opportunities in rural areas.

**Q3: How well are activation and labour market interventions reducing poverty and social exclusion?**

Participants believed that **diversity and personal circumstances** need to be taken into account and that labour market actions need to be tailored to the individual's need – these need to extend beyond skills and training alone. Greater English language support, where needed, was urged by participants - this to be applied at all stages of the life cycle. Issues related to child poverty/lone parent family poverty were also raised, which sometimes involves lone parents having to chase former abusers for maintenance. It was agreed that such maintenance matters needs to be sensitively managed in the interest and safety of the family.

There was a consensus by participants that **labour market interventions alone cannot address poverty**, there is also a need for services and income adequacy across the life cycle. For instance, availability of accessible, affordable, quality childcare requires a parallel investment package.

**Sanctions need to be appropriate** and proportionate according to participants, who believe that participation needs to be incentivised with an emphasis on voluntary access to supports. There was also a belief by some participants that conditionality should be removed.

**Incentivising employers to encourage retention of staff** following a scheme was regarded as useful by many participants, with many believing that contracts for internships would prevent exploitation. Participants suggested that transport costs also need to be considered in this scenario.

**There was a strong expressed view on the need for joined up thinking and collaboration between departments** and a programme of upskilling of DSP and Intreo workers to ensure consistency and best practice development. Participants said that staff should also be skilled in protecting social insurance funds. Participants also considered the need to protect vulnerable workers against rogue employers and that this should also be a training focus for staff. Cross departmental awareness of the implications for benefits such as the medical card would be enhanced by this training, adding that the risk of this could be ameliorated if a transition process was put in place.

Quality of work was considered by participants to be a big challenge, with many believing that **the focus should be on the quality of work**, providing security of income and regular hours. Participants suggested that an inclusive and integrated approach is required which recognises the need for income support and income adequacy, access to services and active inclusion.

A call was made by participants for **greater diligence about bogus 'self-employment'** in order to secure labour market transition, thus avoiding:

- Contributing to increased levels the 'working poor';
- Social security contribution impacts down the line;
- Sub contractual jobs;
- Employment that's not genuine employment.

**Adopting a regionalised approach** was a call from rural participants which would allow differentiation between urban and rural needs by providing a tailored service to individuals in the areas they are credibly able to work in.

There was a strong view that **inclusiveness needs to be an integral part of labour market responses**. Travellers, Roma and other groups experience discrimination, asylum seekers need to be included in responses in order to escape poverty. Ageism was also cited by participants as an issue for older and younger people. It was stated that undocumented workers suffer disproportionately from in-work

poverty and labour exploitation and therefore need to regularise their status to be protected.

Some participants pointed to the failure to grant recognition of international qualifications, forcing migrant workers into low pay and losing skilled workers to the economy. Finally, participants raised the need for people with disabilities to have equal access to labour market responses such as JobBridge.

Participants recognised that **evaluation is an important mechanism to adjust and refine the effectiveness of activation** in addressing poverty and social exclusion. Some participants were of the view that the target driven approach and the quantitative focus taken should be part of this review. There was a view from some participants that impact assessment is not effective and a revised process needs to be introduced. There was agreement among participants that consultation and feedback from participants on activation and labour market preparation programmes should be included in the evaluation process.

**In her response to the questions posed Kara McGann, Ibec** said that it is difficult to be exact around how current activation measures are performing as the lack of robust evaluations of labour market programmes makes it hard to judge, and even when we do evaluations, often we don't like the results. She said that Ibec would also like to see administrative data being connected across the systems such as the DSP evaluation programme which is making efforts in this regard, in particular using data from the Jobseekers Longitudinal Dataset. Overall, the key indicator is long term unemployment and it is going in the right direction which is very positive as structural long term unemployment is at risk of being the real legacy of the crisis unless we get it right.

Ms McGann said that we need to understand the reason for joblessness – there are not necessarily generic jobless households. For example if it is a lone parent – we may be looking at a childcare issue and we have significant

issues in that space around the availability and affordability of quality childcare. So we need to understand the reasons better.

McGann said it is essential to embed the links between Intreo and activation etc. with employers and get to where the Intreo service is the first port of call for the employer trying to meet a skills need. The addition of case managers will help this, but this is not currently where we are overall. Significant reforms have taken place but now we need a period of consolidation. We need to remember not to take the current situation for granted in light of things like Brexit, which needs to be a policy priority consideration for all.



## 6.3 Address by the Minister for Social Protection, Leo Varadkar TD

Chairperson, ladies and gentlemen,

I am very pleased to have the opportunity to address this 12<sup>th</sup> gathering of the Social Inclusion Forum.

I am aware that this event has provided a useful forum for an exchange of views and ideas that is welcomed by participants and has endured for many years. This annual event aims to give people who are directly affected by poverty and social exclusion and those who work with them a voice in the development of policy, and in the ways that policies are implemented.

I believe the effectiveness of the Forum down the years is very much related to the fact that you, the participants, represent or work directly with, people experiencing poverty and social exclusion. At the outset, therefore, I wish to thank you sincerely for attending and for sharing your views and experiences.

The key points Aiden presented from your workshop discussions highlight the challenges we face in tackling poverty and social exclusion, most of all the challenge of making the right short and long-term policy choices to deliver a sustainable social and economic recovery.

### **Growing an Inclusive Recovery**

The theme of today's conference is 'Growing an Inclusive Recovery'. This follows directly from the European Union's first Annual Convention for Inclusive Growth held in May of this year. This conference replaced the previous Annual Conventions of the European Platform against Poverty signalling a shift in focus on to the solution to poverty – inclusive growth – rather than the fact of poverty itself.

It is also a recognition that economic recovery or growth will not of itself deliver a more equal or inclusive society. The choices that we make as a society about how

we use the gains from economic activity - how much we reinvest into the economy to stimulate further growth, how much we take for ourselves through wages and salaries, how much we use to improve public services and how much we redistribute through tax and social welfare will determine our progress as a society. And the choices we have to make are not straightforward and do involve trade-offs. We have to be careful not to take steps that improve social welfare in the short term but undermine the sustainability of that welfare in the long term. Similarly actions that promote economic growth and stability in the short term but at the expense of deepening social exclusion are to be avoided. That is why events such as today's are hugely important; they provide an opportunity for us all to discuss these issues and choices. Even if we can't reach a consensus, developing a shared understanding of the issues can only improve policy making and service delivery.

### **Current socio-economic context**

You are all probably tired of hearing that following a period of economic crisis Ireland has returned to strong economic growth. I like other politicians tend to look at the big picture and take encouragement from the evidence that shows that incomes are up and unemployment is down – most recently to about 8.3%. However, I am also acutely aware that for people who are unemployed or who are experiencing poverty, that experience is not 8.3%, it is 100%. And if you are one of those people there is little solace to be had in hearing that others are doing better and that if you wait long enough the good times will reach you too. It is my job and that of my Government colleagues not to lose sight of these facts and to remain resolute in our determination to ensure that the benefits of the recovery this time around reach all of our citizens.

### **National Action Plan for Social Inclusion**

Our determination to tackle poverty and social exclusion and the approach that we are taking was set out most recently in the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion for the period 2015 – 2017 and in the Pathways to Work strategy for 2016 – 2020. Both of these plans focus on modernising the social protection system, improving effectiveness and efficiency of social transfers, improving access to employment opportunities, and extending and strengthening active inclusion.

## **Social protection system & the impact of social transfers**

These plans are built on a solid platform - Ireland's social protection system plays an important role in alleviating poverty and income inequality. The latest (2014) data show that social transfers lifted over a fifth of the population out of poverty, reducing the at-risk-of-poverty rate by 56%. This is an improvement on pre-recession levels - in 2004, for example, the poverty reduction effect was 41%. Ireland is the best performing EU member state at reducing poverty through social transfers and our poverty reduction effect was almost twice the EU norm in 2014. This success however points to another challenge - that of reducing the dependence on welfare transfers as a mechanism for alleviating policy and instead look to the world of work and employment to provide a higher standard of living for us all.

## **Inclusive labour markets**

Growing employment and providing access to the labour market is important for tackling poverty, particularly in welfare-dependent households. The new Pathways to Work 2016 - 2020 Strategy is designed to consolidate the improvements made in recent years that help jobseekers to access good quality work, training and education opportunities. In addition, it starts the process of extending the employment supports and services available from the Department of Social Protection to other people of working age – lone parents and people with disabilities.

I am confident that the package of activation measures that we have in place will continue to produce results and help people back to work. However, we still have a lot of work to do and are lagging behind several other EU countries.

The level of unemployment and particularly long-term unemployment is still too high. We could and should be making more progress in assisting those who became unemployed following the crisis, and have been unable to find work since, those for whom unemployment has become entrenched and in particular those for whom unemployment is already, or is threatening to become, inter-generational. That is why I will continue to work with the Labour Market Council and other experts, on the development of an Action Plan for Jobless Families. The views you expressed at today's workshops will inform our thinking on this issue.

## Poverty in rural / urban areas

Research tells us that Ireland is becoming a more urban country. The preliminary Census figures show the change in the population levels varying widely across the country, with higher population growth in urban centres and the commuter belts surrounding them. Poverty and social exclusion impact us regardless of where we live, though our experience of it may be different.

Poverty and unemployment in rural areas has traditionally been linked to lack of transport and other services, high dependency levels and isolation. Poverty in urban areas is more associated with concentrations of poverty, and poor environmental and social infrastructure.

This morning's workshops provided you with an opportunity to discuss your experiences of poverty and social exclusion in rural and urban areas, reflecting on the social determinants impacting on them and the policy responses needed. I took note of the key points Aiden outlined from your workshops and look forward to reading your detailed views in the Forum's proceedings.

## Conclusion

In closing I would again like to thank you sincerely for attending the Forum and for sharing your views and experiences.

I would particularly like to acknowledge the **European Anti-Poverty Network** and **Community Work Ireland** for their support and expertise in organising this and related events.

The report of today's Forum - which will be made available to Government, various stakeholders and the public generally - is a major outcome of the process. It is designed to ensure that the insights, conclusions and recommendations of the Forum are fed into the policymaking process and are available to all stakeholders. I look forward to reading this report in due course.

The focus over the coming period will be on the Budget. Difficult choices will need to be made to deliver a sustainable economic and social recovery; to ensure the impact of the recovery is felt by all. This will be a challenge given the variety of competing needs along with the extra resources required to meet rising demands, such as the increasing number of people of pension age. The key challenges you identified in your workshops will be extremely useful in informing these choices.

Finally let me repeat that 'Growing an Inclusive Recovery' is about sustainable economic and employment growth that delivers a fairer and more inclusive society. A society where all people have the opportunity to prosper through their own efforts and where that opportunity is not restricted to people in certain income brackets or denied to people with the 'wrong' postal code. The economic recovery that has begun is not an end in itself; what is critical is that it enables us to secure a social recovery, a recovery that benefits the daily lives of individuals, families and communities across the country.

## 6.4 Closing Remarks by Chair

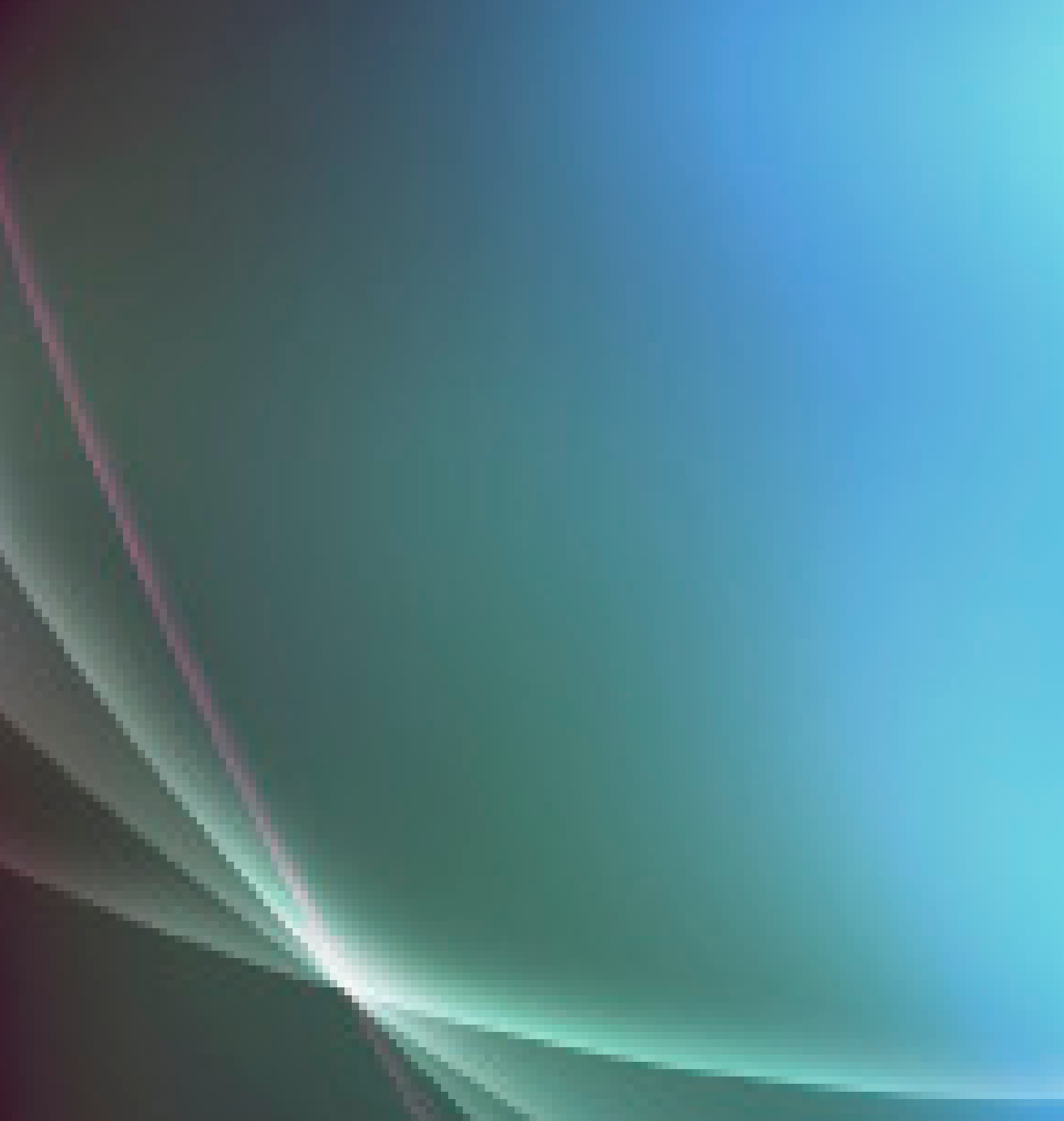
Anne Vaughan thanked the Minister before bringing the proceedings to a close. She thanked all of the participants for their valuable contributions during the day and for the constructive discussions and outcomes.

Thanks were also extended to all staff of Social inclusion Division who organised the event and to the staff of Chartered Accountants House and caterers for their contributions to the smooth running of the day.

Special thanks were expressed also to the people who attended the preliminary regional preparatory workshops in the period leading up to the event who could not be here today. Their contributions are appreciated.

A full report of the day's discussions and conclusions will be compiled by the rapporteur. The finalised report will be laid before the Oireachtas, published on the Department's website and circulated to all interested parties. The report will also be brought to the attention of the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy and Public Sector Reform.





Foilsithe ag An Roinn Coimirce Sóisialaí, Áras Mhic Dhiarmada, Sráid an Stórais, Baile Átha Cliath 1



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