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

Report of
Social Inclusion Forum
2018

'Social Inclusion in a Changing Environment'.

10 May 2018

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Social Inclusion Forum

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Section 01

Section 1

1 Introduction

The National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) Social Inclusion Forum, which was established by the government in 2002, is one of the ways in which the government monitors progress that has been made towards the achievement of the national targets for the elimination of poverty and social exclusion. These targets are set down in the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (NAPinclusion). Progress is documented in the Social Inclusion Monitor.

Every year a Social Inclusion Forum is held where people affected by poverty and social exclusion and the community organisations that represent them come together with officials from government departments that have a role to play in delivering the plan and with the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection. The 2018 Social Inclusion Forum (SIF) took place on 10 May, in the Aviva Stadium conference centre, Dublin.

The Forum is of particular importance in providing an opportunity for those at local level who are not directly represented in the social partnership process to be consulted. The goals of this process are to enable them:

- to put forward their views and experiences on key policies and implementations issues relating to the NAPS;

- to identify barriers and constraints to progress and recommendations on how best these can best be tackled; and

- to provide suggestions and proposals for new developments and more effective policies in the future.

These discussions help government learn whether targets for reducing poverty and social exclusion are being met, and how well[1]. They also allow government to assess how much progress it is making towards helping the EU meet its targets for reducing poverty throughout the EU, which are set out in the Europe 2020 Strategy.

The European Poverty Target aims to lift a minimum of 20 million people throughout the EU out of poverty or social exclusion by 2020. Each EU member state sets a National Social

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[1] The purpose of the Social Inclusion Monitor is to report officially on progress towards the National Social Target for Poverty Reduction, including the sub-target on child poverty and Ireland's contribution to the Europe 2020 poverty target. This annual Monitor uses the latest statistical data available from the CSO Survey on Income and Living Conditions and from Eurostat to analyse trends in official poverty measures and other supporting indicators. http://www.welfare.ie/en/downloads/SIM2016.pdf

Target for Poverty Reduction (NSTPR)[2], which lays down what target that particular country will seek to meet, both for the benefit of its own people and as a contribution to the achievement of EU-wide poverty reduction.

In Ireland, the target is set at lifting a minimum of 200,000 people out of combined poverty by 2020[3].

The day-long Social Inclusion Forum was organised by the Social Inclusion Division of the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, with the assistance of the European Anti-Poverty Network and Community Work Ireland.

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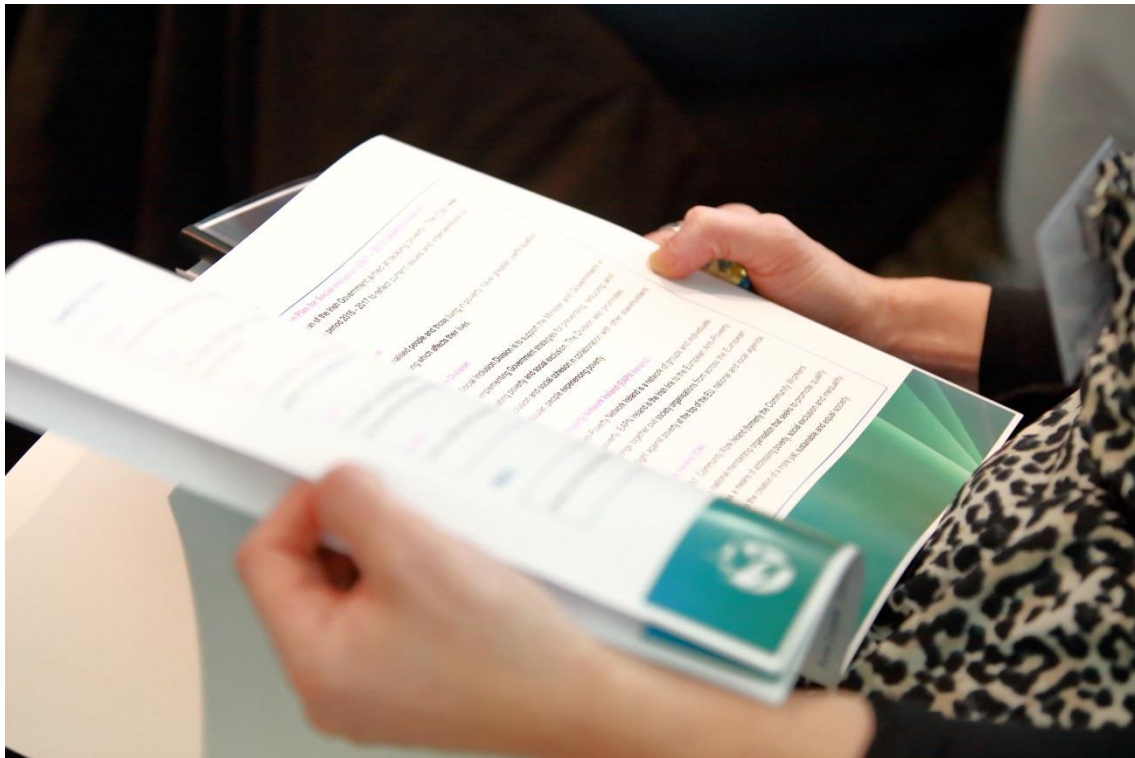
[2] National Reform Programmes and Stability/Convergence Programmes: The programmes detail the specific policies each country will implement to boost jobs and growth and prevent/correct imbalances, and their concrete plans to comply with the EU's country-specific recommendations and general fiscal rules.

[3] Combined poverty: Ireland's contribution to the EU target is based on reducing the population in 'combined poverty'. This is the combination of three indicators – consistent poverty or at-risk-of-poverty or basic deprivation. It is similar to the EU composite measure, 'at risk of poverty or exclusion'.

1.1 Background to 2018 Social Inclusion Forum

The discussions of each Forum focus on a specific theme, which sums up a current stage or phase in Irish society or a challenge that needs to be tackled. The overall theme of the 2018 Forum was 'Social Inclusion in a Changing Environment'. The theme reflected the recovery from the recent economic crisis, the conclusion of the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007–2017 and the plans for a new strategy for the years ahead.

With this in mind, it aimed to examine some of the changes that are influencing policy development and how factors such as the Public Sector Duty, Equality Proofing and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals can be put into force to support the new National Action Plan for Social Inclusion.

The original time span of the outgoing National Action Plan for Social Inclusion had been 2007 to 2016, which was later extended to 2017[4]. This marked the twentieth anniversary of the first targeted national strategy to eliminate poverty, which was launched in 1997.

A significant part of the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007–2017 was delivered at a time of economic crisis, starting in 2008 and worsening from 2011 onwards. During the recession, cuts in government spending severely affected people living below or close to the poverty line, even with a deliberate choice on the part of government to protect core social protection payments.

Over this period, social inclusion policies evolved to include a focus on employment as an important road out of poverty. Measures to encourage and support people to get into or back to employment were added to the tools already in use to tackle poverty and social exclusion.

Some 200 people from communities and organisations around the country attended the Forum and examined specific issues in five discussion workshops and contributed to the general debate. Discussions looked back at the last plan, reviewed successes or failures that had an impact on people's quality of life, and looked forward by identifying some of the existing and new challenges that the next National Action Plan for Social Inclusion would have to address. These findings may help inform the targets for the new plan.

This report sets down the major points that were made by participants. These flagged both ongoing issues that have not been solved yet, heralded new challenges arising from changes in society and, in many cases, shone a light on people and problems that are not being captured in official data such as the Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC). These include undocumented migrants and the effect of poverty traps.

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[4] 'The National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016 was updated and extended to run until 2017 as the Updated National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2015-2017.

The findings of six regional workshops held to prepare for the Forum were reported to the conference also. Workshops were held in Castleblayney, Ennis, Letterkenny, Tipperary, Kilcoole, Co Wicklow, and Cork City.

<u>Structure of Social Inclusion Forum 2018</u>

Two main strands form the core of the Social Inclusion Forum. One is a report, verbal and written, of the issues raised at a number of regional workshops. The workshops support the Forum by identifying issues of concern to people affected by poverty and the organisations that work with them.

The second strand is a series of discussions that take place in themed workshops and in open-forum sessions at the Social Inclusion Forum itself.

The main points and policy proposals that came out of these discussions are set out in this report.

Structure of report

Section 2 summarises the most important points and recommendations made by people at the Social Inclusion Forum.

Section 3 reports the opening remarks made by John McKeon, Secretary General of the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, welcoming people to the Forum. This is followed by a report of the outcomes of six regional workshops and the address to participants by the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Regina Doherty, T.D.

In Section 4, discussions that took place in five themed workshops are reported along with presentations by guest speakers that provided background and context to the subject matter. In 4.1, the main priorities that came out of the five workshop discussions are summarised.

Section 5 details the afternoon's events. These involved two presentations, a roundtable exercise and a discussion on how the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) could be applied in 2018 Ireland. Two presentations, on the SDGs and how government departments are working to implement them, and on how Young Social Innovators are putting them into effect through their projects, are set out, and the discussions that followed. The Forum concluded with some closing remarks from John McKeon. These are noted at the end of section at 5.5.

The report will be placed in the Oireachtas library for the information of members of both Houses of the Oireachtas.
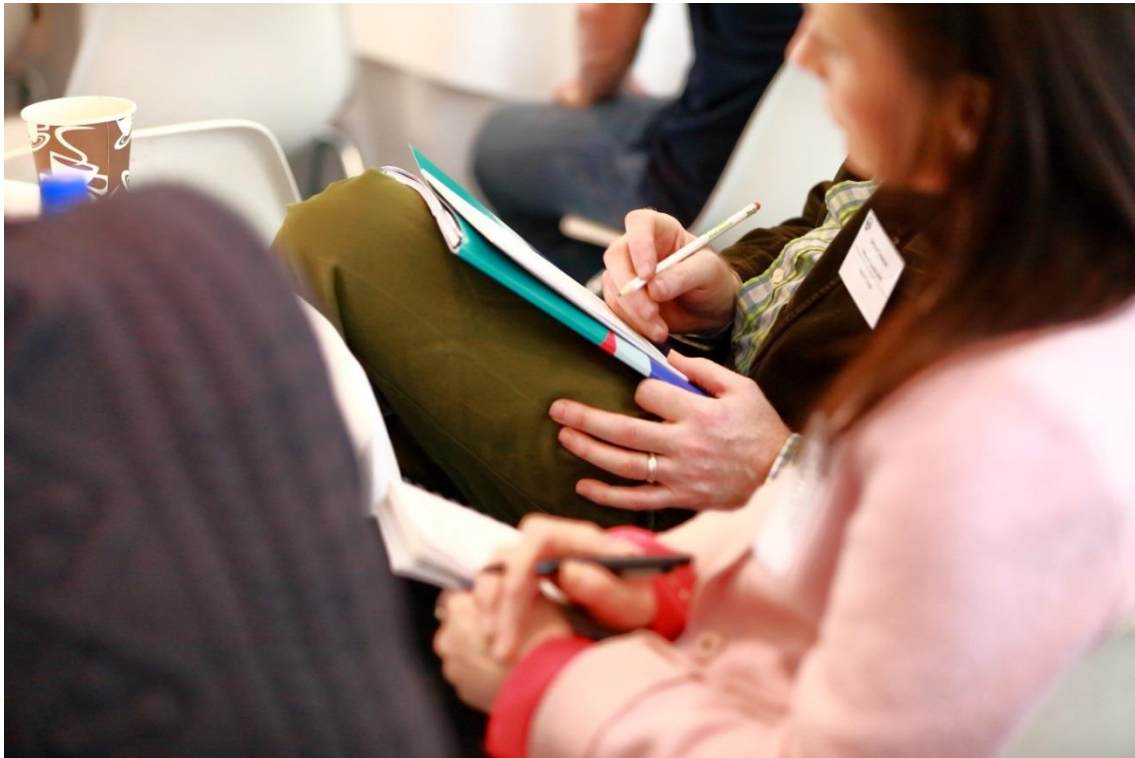
The views contained in this report reflect those of the speakers and the participants at the Social Inclusion Forum and do not necessarily represent the views of the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

1.2 Acknowledgements

The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection wishes to acknowledge the European Anti-Poverty Network and Community Work Ireland for their support and assistance in the organisation of the annual Social Inclusion Forum and for facilitating the six regional workshops. These workshops bring people together to prepare their contribution to the work of the Social Inclusion Forum.

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

Appreciation is extended to the workshop facilitators and note-takers: Nuala Kelly, Peter Trainor, John Mark McCafferty, Shay Conway, Eilis Ní Chaithnía, Mairead Reilly, June Tinsley, Máire Bríd O'Dea, Hugh Frazer and Sharon Keane.

Sincere thanks is also expressed to the Rapporteur, Peigín Doyle, who compiled this report and Dean Kelly for the photography on the day.

Section 02

Section 2

2 Key points for policymakers

Below is a summary of the key issues and recommendations that participants raised during the discussion sessions. Since they were agreed at many or all discussions, they form the most pressing conclusions of the 2018 Social Inclusion Forum (SIF).

Poverty

- Poverty levels are still unacceptably high.

- Inequality persists for those groups that have the highest rates of poverty. These groups include children, lone parents, people with a disability and unemployed people.

- The current data often fails to reflect or analyse the effects of intersecting poverty when many different issues work together to affect people who are at risk of poverty or socially excluded. Living in a rural area with poor transport and little access to jobs can worsen the effect of low income, for example.

- Discrimination is a daily problem for many people who may face barriers to jobs, accommodation and even frontline services. Some groups are particularly badly affected, such as people who are part of ethnic minorities, people with disabilities migrants, and people who are poor.

Homelessness

- Homelessness and housing were named as perhaps the greatest issues facing the country. There are many aspects to homelessness, including lack of social and affordable housing, temporary accommodation, overcrowding and sub-standard housing.

- Housing policy should be rights-based. Housing should be built by local authorities, who should provide for sustainable communities, with community facilities, youth services and schools. Suitably equipped social housing is needed for older people.

- There should be reforms in the private rental sector, including rent caps, rent controls related to income and living costs and improved security of tenure.

- The Housing Assistance Payment should be reviewed.

Traveller community

- A specific focus is needed on tackling the discrimination and problems faced by Travellers and Roma. They face many issues including lack of accommodation, discrimination and lack of secure employment, lack of resources to support Traveller children in school and barriers to accessing services. There should be a focused initiative to ensure that appropriate accommodation is made available.

- Travellers and Roma experience many health problems, including mental health issues, as a result of discrimination, poverty and inequality.

Data collection

The European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions is a voluntary household survey carried out annually in a number of EU member states allowing comparable statistics on income and living conditions to be compiled. In Ireland, the Central Statistics Office (CSO) has conducted the survey since 2003. The results are reported in the Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC).

- Certain groups of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion are not quantified in the Survey on Income and Living Conditions, due to the statistical sample size that is used. Research should look for those who are 'not there', such as undocumented migrants, and not just the most obvious groups or those that are easy to measure[5].

- Data on ethnic inequality needs to be collected, in a human rights-compliant way, in order to set targets and map progress. The data that is collected locally by community development organisations should be recognised and used at national level.

- Equality proofing should be extended beyond gender to address broader social inequality[6].

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[5] In the Survey on Living Conditions (SILC), members of about 5,200 households are surveyed each year. The survey figures are mathematically 'weighted' to make sure that the sample is representative of the whole population. https://www.cso.ie/en/methods/surveybackgroundnotes/surveyonincomeandlivingconditions/

[6] The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform is currently piloting an equality budgeting initiative with a focus on gender equality, assisted by the Parliamentary Budget Office. https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/how-parliament-is-run/houses-of-the-oireachtas-service/parliamentary-budget-office/
https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/parliamentaryBudgetOffice/2017/2017-11-20_note-on-gender-budgeting_en.pdf
https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/parliamentaryBudgetOffice/2018/2018-02-27_the-gender-and-equality-budgeting-pilot-in-the-revised-estimates-for-public-services-2018_en.pdf

Migration

- The direct provision system should be ended and asylum-seekers should be given the right to work, in good-quality jobs.

- Many immigrants work on the minimum wage and cannot get access to higher education or the opportunities they need. Changes and resources are needed to tackle discrimination against migrants and support their greater involvement in the community.

- Undocumented immigrants need to have their status regularised. Better co-ordination is needed among government agencies that are responsible for migrant documentation to ensure effective supports are in place.

Disability

- People with a disability face many difficulties from inadequate income, through lack of jobs and loss or cuts in entitlements to routine failure of many services to make provision for them. They face frequent reviews of their entitlement to payments or services. People with disabilities who are working to improve things on the ground have to do so as volunteers and are limited in the amount of working time they are able to give to it.

- There is a failure to provide children who have a disability or special needs with all the supports that would enable them play a full part in school and integrate with community-based activities.

Lone parents

- Lone parents move off the One Parent Family payment when the child reaches the age of seven onto the Jobseeker's Transition (JST) payment. Entitlement to JST ends when the youngest child reaches 14 years. After this, the parent moves onto the appropriate payment depending on her/his circumstances with all conditions applying irrespective of caring duties[7].

- Many work in minimum-wage jobs because of lack of training or affordable childcare. Return to education is seen as almost impossible due to lack of grants and the need to work to support children. Grants for part-time courses and study costs could help lone parents to return to education.

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[7] Guidelines on the One-Parent Family Payment and Jobseeker's Transitional payment are available at:
http://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/OFP-Changes.aspx

National Action Plan for Social Inclusion and Social Inclusion Forum

- The role of the Social Inclusion Forum (SIF) is to create a vision for the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion. To do this, it needs to be independent and robust.

- The Public Sector Duty should be an integral part of processes and plans within the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion framework in order to develop a culture of respect and rights. Training in human rights and equality should be provided at all levels. The Public Sector Duty should be a condition of any procurement process for the receipt of public funding for service delivery.

- Collective work such as community work, strengthening the voice of the people and building community capacity should be part of the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion.

- There needs to be regular, two-way communication between people that take part in the Social Inclusion Forum and central government. People should be informed regularly of what actions or changes have taken place as a result of their contributions and given an overview of the links between national actions to tackle poverty and exclusion and changes in their own communities.

Implementation of National Action Plan for Social Inclusion

- Strong political will and investment and resources will be needed to deliver on the plan if there is to be real change.

- The Minister for Finance and representatives of the Department of Finance should attend the Forum to hear the issues and discuss budgets.

- Stronger structures and methods will be needed at both national and local level. The local government structures of Local Community Development Committees and Local Economic and Community Plans will need to be greatly strengthened if they are to be effective tools to monitor and co-ordinate the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion at local level. There should be County Action Plans for Social Inclusion that will drive the implementation and co-ordination of national actions at local level.

- Sanctions should be applied when plans and policies or the Public Sector Duty are not delivered on.

- The time line for implementing and reviewing National Action Plan for Social Inclusion targets is too long.

- The gap that can arise between local needs and what is funded, when funding is controlled centrally by government departments, should be addressed.

<u>Community development in the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion</u>

- Community development work is essential for making progress on persistent poverty and social exclusion and should be an integral part of the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion. Outreach work to help communities develop and deliver solutions needs to be recognised and supported. Government departments should use designated staff with experience of community development work in order to operate in partnership with community development groups.

- Funding for community development groups needs to be multi-annual and more flexible. Present funding methods can inhibit groups from working to a long-term vision or testing new initiatives on a small scale.

<u>Health and mental health</u>

- Living with the many aspects of poverty and social exclusion can affect a person's mental health. If poverty and related inequalities were tackled, a lot of problems with mental health related to quality of life would be addressed.

<u>Childcare</u>

- The developmental aspect of early years childcare was stressed. In this respect, the emphasis on childcare as a way of enabling parents to work is an issue.

- Investment in an affordable childcare system is preferable to tax cuts.

- In the Affordable Childcare Scheme, the 15-hour cap on children whose parents are neither working nor in education or training should be scrapped as it marginalises them even further.

<u>Rural and urban</u>

- People living in rural areas can be affected by geographic disadvantages, such as isolation and lack of services, which can worsen the effects of poverty and social exclusion. Affordable transport that enables access to services and jobs is a pressing need for many rural dwellers.

- When planning for poverty, housing and related issues, what works in the city will not work in the country. Different plans are needed. Government plans should be 'rural proofed'.

Section 03

Section 3

3 Welcome and opening remarks

Welcoming participants, John McKeon, Secretary General, Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, started by paying tribute to Ann Vaughan, Deputy Secretary, who had chaired the conference in recent years and was now retiring, having been 'a great champion in the Department and in the public service generally for hearing and articulating the voice of people on the front line'.

Mr. McKeon said he would like to set out the context for the theme of the Social Inclusion Forum - 'Social Inclusion in a Changing Environment'. In discussing that theme, it is asked what social inclusion is and what is changing at this time that might influence our policy and service design choices. A lot of discussion in an ideological and theoretical context asks, 'is it about equality of opportunity or equality of outcome'.

In his view, ideology informed policy but did not determine it. Policy was formed by experience, it evolved and changed over time and it evolved in a pragmatic way; it could perhaps be best understood in an historical context.

Looking back at the development of the social welfare system since the nineteenth century, its evolution may have looked a bit chaotic but there was a discernible pattern and logic. There had been three broad phases of development, starting with the period from the enactment of the Poor Law Act in 1838. It is not coincidental that the workmen's compensation schemes, labour exchanges, outdoor relieving officers, and old age pensions were all developed at or around the same time that the writings of Dickens and Marx in the UK reflected the squalor of their times. A squalor that resulted from the fact that early industrialised society didn't value people who couldn't contribute through their labour or their capital to the productive effort. As a consequence people could fall into destitution. Systems of relief or welfare were then developed in order to, in effect, square the circle between the liberal market economic model and liberal social values/conscience. Until the mid- twentieth century this system of social welfare was, in many respects, minimalist – just enough welfare to treat destitution and allow people to subsist.

In the second phase from the mid-1950s up to the 2000s, the role of welfare expanded. Building from the UK Beveridge report it was recognised that welfare had a role to play in improving equity in society, in managing the distribution of income and in building a more inclusive and cohesive society. In Ireland particularly from the 1970s on to the early 2000's we saw a significant increase in the range of welfare schemes. Schemes for lone parents, for carers, for people in work as well as people out of work (FIS) were all introduced as were

supplementary schemes such as telephone allowance and household benefits. In addition the monetary value of payments was increased significantly above the rate of inflation (in most cases by a factor of more than 5 in real terms). Arguably this expansion in the range and value of benefits paid a real dividend in the economic crisis when welfare transfers were not only very effective in reducing poverty and inequality but also in helping to sustain economic activity.

We have since moved on to a third phase which could be broadly associated with the publication of the Developmental Welfare State report by the NESC in 2005 - where the emphasis is not just on inclusion but on "active inclusion" recognising that a good welfare safety net shouldn't substitute for active participation in society or in the productive economy. Instead it should, where possible, act as a stepping stone to such participation. Examples of this change in focus included the introduction in 2011 of explicit links between entitlement to a jobseeker's payment and co-operation with activation/employment services and the publication of the plan for the establishment of the National Employment and Entitlement Service leading to the establishment of Intreo in 2012. Other examples included the introduction of JobsPlus recruitment incentives, the Jobseeker's Transitional payment for lone parents and the Back to Work Family Dividend. The introduction of Paternity Benefit starting in 2016 and the development of the 'Make Work Pay' approach for people with disabilities were further examples of a focus on active inclusion rather than a system of purely passive income supports.

This recognition of the intrinsic link between the world of welfare and the world of work is now reflected in the fact that the remit of the Department has expanded to include employment rights. This reflects the fact welfare isn't just confined to circumstances where a person is out of work but is also concerned with the benefits that people can derive when in work and can accrue from work. It also reflects the fact that welfare is of benefit to employers as much as it is to workers. For example the fact that a worker can access a state pension in retirement or a state illness benefit when sick confers a benefit not just on the worker but also on the employer. The value of these benefits is often, but not always, incorporated into the remuneration and other employment conditions offered to workers.

Looking to the future a common claim being made today is that the welfare of workers while in-work and the value of social welfare entitlements that they could accrue from work were threatened by an increase in the prevalence of so-called precarious employment.

In fact the available data did not support the thesis that precarious employment was as widespread as people assumed or that it was increasing in prevalence. In fact all of the data

indicated a reduction in the proportion of the workforce that reported working arrangements (temporary, part-time, variable hours etc.) indicative of precarious employment. If anything, it seemed from the data that more people than ever before were working longer hours in full-time permanent jobs.

Looking at income poverty and deprivation the data indicated that children and young people, particularly those in single parent families, were most at risk of poverty whereas older people and particularly pensioners were better safeguarded by social transfers.

While pensioners were shielded at present an obvious challenge was that, if current trends continued, the ratio of the number of people working to the number of people in receipt of a pension would fall from 4:1 to 2:1. This would create obvious funding challenges given that we were starting from a position where we already pay-out approximately €1.11 in social welfare for every €1 received in income tax.

This funding challenge would be made more complex by the fact that labour's share of net national product was falling; this would challenge the current approach to funding and providing access to social insurance benefits. Funding of social welfare benefits is derived at present from people in employment and their employers paying taxes and social insurance contributions and in return earning or accruing rights to benefits to be paid to them when unemployed, sick or retired. If labour's share of income continues to fall, and if people increasingly secure income from other sources (for example rents) this model of funding and entitlement is likely to come under pressure.

These were the challenges in the landscape we had to think about for the medium to long-term.

At present and for the immediate future the key indicators of social inclusion were trending in the right direction and continued improvements in the key metrics of unemployment, basic deprivation and at-risk-of-poverty rate were expected in the next two to three years.

For example the 2016 Survey of Income and Living Conditions showed some progress in reducing poverty. Consistent poverty dropped from 9.1 per cent in 2013 to 8.3 per cent in 2016. The percentage of people suffering deprivation had dropped from 30.5 per cent to 21 per cent in the same period. Further improvement since 2016 was expected, with unemployment down from nine per cent to six per cent in 2018 and 120,000 more people at work. However, we were still falling short of reaching the target for consistent poverty of four per cent in 2016 and two per cent by 2020.

With regard to the next National Action Plan for Social Inclusion[8].Mr McKeon said it was possible that there would be two key elements in the Action Plan:

1) A focus on reducing the percentage of people in consistent poverty

2) Specific actions, delivered by named departments, with clear indicators and timelines for delivery over a four-year period 2018–2021

Mr McKeon urged people not to get fixated on translating legitimate aspirations and ambitions, which we would all share, into unrealistic targets that none of us could achieve within the timeframe of the next plan. To do so he argued would undermine the credibility of the plan and actually damage rather than secure the support and commitment of the organisations and agencies that were tasked with delivery. He added that it was not just about metrics but about the lived experiences of people and that it was this first-hand experience rather than any blind focus on hitting target metrics than could best inform policy and service design. The key experience was the experience of people in the room today. He hoped today to get some ideas and solutions.

[8]Grotti, R., Maître, B., Watson, D. and Whelan, C. *Poverty Transitions in Ireland: An Analysis of the longitudinal Central Statistics Office (CSO) Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC), 2004 -2015.* Social Inclusion Technical Paper No. 8, Dublin: Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

Watson, D., Maître, B., Grotti, R., and Whelan, C.T. (2018) *Poverty Dynamics of Social Risk Groups in the EU: An analysis of the EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions, 2005 to 2015*, Social Inclusion Report No. 7. Dublin: Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection and the Economic and Social Research Institute.

Gray & Rooney 2018. *Supporting Low-Income Families: Enabling Resilience.* Dublin. The project was funded by the Irish Research Council in collaboration with the Department of Social Protection under the Research for Policy and Society Programme 2015, Strand 2 Department of Social Protection Research Innovation Award, Grant Number RFPS/2015/26.

He concluded his address by thanking European Anti-Poverty Network Ireland and Community Work Ireland for their work in facilitating the regional workshops.

3.1 Feedback from regional workshops[9]

Participants at the regional workshops sent two overriding points to the Forum:

- Poverty levels are still unacceptably high.

- The success of a new national action plan will depend on setting high-level, 'ambitious' goals coupled with well-resourced community work among marginalised communities.

Discussion at these workshops also highlighted other aspects of people's experiences and made proposals for how to tackle them. The conclusions are reported below.

Understanding and addressing poverty

Inequality persists among the groups and communities that have the highest rates of poverty. These include children, lone parents, people with a disability and people who are unemployed.

Certain groups may not be visible in poverty data gathered through the Survey on Income and Living Conditions because the survey size does not allow a detailed breakdown for small sub-groups. This may result in an absence of poverty reduction targets for them.

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[9] http://www.eapn.ie/eapn/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Summary-of-SIF-Preparatory-Meetings-2018.pdf

Current research often fails to uncover or analyse the cross-cutting nature of poverty, how the same people are affected by several different problems or obstacles. The voices and needs of people who are not counted at present would need to be clearly represented in framing and delivering policy.

Healthcare and reproductive health are not included in the definition of poverty though people in many communities face health inequalities. Traveller life expectancy is far below the average in society.

Many people, including those in low-paid employment, do not have enough income to live with dignity or have incomes that put them below the poverty line. The direct provision system forces into poverty people who have to live within it. Social protection payments can put people below the poverty line if their payments are cut when their life situation changes but their living costs remain the same.

To ensure that older people do not fall into poverty, greater planning for sustainable, publicly-funded pensions is needed as people live longer.

- Research studies need to pay more attention to documenting and understanding the poverty experienced by people who are currently 'invisible' and the way in which many different issues combine to affect people at risk of poverty. The value of data collected by local organisations should be recognised and used at national level to gain a more holistic understanding of poverty.

Delivering a new Action Plan for Social Inclusion

Strong political will and a committed follow-through will be needed to make inroads into the current high levels of poverty and exclusion. There needs to be a seamless progression from quality consultation to visible, transparent outcomes, aided by regular oversight and clear sanctions for failure to deliver.

In implementing a new National Action Plan for Social Inclusion, robust structures and methods will be needed both at national and local level.

- County Action Plans for Social Inclusion that mirror the national plan will be needed to drive implementation and better co-ordination among local agencies.

- The present local government structures of Local Community Development Committees and Local Economic and Community Plans could play a role in monitoring and co-ordinating at local level but they need to be strengthened greatly if they are to be effective.

Community development is essential for making progress on persistent, ongoing poverty and social exclusion. Delegates said community work was not valued enough and its contribution was often overlooked. They pointed out the complex nature of the issues that community work tries to address. Funding should seek to empower and enable local communities but it is currently controlled by government departments, leading to a gap between local needs and what is funded. Joined-up thinking and working are lacking.

The community development sector is perceived to be under-resourced especially in regard to its core funding needs. Community organisations struggle to comply with regulations and paperwork, especially smaller groups with few resources. The workload is making it difficult to recruit and retain volunteers while such voluntary input often is not recognised or valued.

- Community development should become an integral part of a new plan.

- A return should be made to partnership methods whereby local communities identify their needs and what should be done to address them, with the state supporting this work, rather than having programmes designed at national level without reference to local needs.

- The need for outreach work that would help communities engage in finding and delivering solutions, as well as helping people to access services, should be recognised and supported. Government departments need to designate staff with experience of core community development work in order to operate in real partnership with community development groups.

The policy focus on work activation needs to broaden to include community work to address social exclusion. There is an emphasis on a person getting any kind of work but no focus on finding or developing good-quality jobs. At local level, more investment is needed in community services and in providing community spaces where people can get the employment information and supports they need or where programmes can be run. Local councils should own and run these centres and make them accessible, as many communities find it hard to run them.

Housing and accommodation

Housing and homelessness were named as possibly the greatest issues facing the country. The lack of housing, including social and affordable housing, temporary accommodation, sub-standard accommodation and lack of refuges for people experiencing domestic abuse are all significant issues. Hidden homelessness, including for Travellers, and overcrowding in response to a lack of housing, are part of the wider problem.

Participants highlighted that once a person was defined as having a roof over their heads, there was no real chance of getting on the housing list.

There was criticism of the dependence on the private rented sector, especially in light of rent increases and the refusal of some landlords to take on tenants who are on the Housing Assistance Payment and Rental Accommodation Scheme.

There is a particular issue of failure to provide appropriate, Traveller-specific accommodation, including halting sites. A growing number of Travellers are living in mobile homes on the side of the road with no access to housing or services. Parallel to this, some local authorities are returning their Traveller housing money unspent to the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government each year. Living with such housing shortfalls can affect a person's mental health.

- People called for a rights-based approach to the provision of housing with housing policies that are holistic and take far-reaching impacts into account. There should be reform of the private rental sector, with rent caps, rent controls related to income and living costs and greatly improved security of tenure. The Housing Assistance Payment scheme should be reviewed.

- Local authorities should build housing, which would include planning for sustainable communities with community facilities, youth services and schools. Local authority staff should be trained to enable them deal with the issues that arise. Where plans and policies are not carried through, sanctions should be applied. Overall, government should implement the plans that are already in place.

Issues in Rural Areas

People living in rural areas can suffer geographic disadvantages that worsen the effects of poverty and social exclusion. They may be cut off both socially and from employment opportunities and public services through the absence of an affordable, public transport service. The cost of existing transport services, both public and private, is an issue also. Access to work or even basic facilities can require people to run a car, which is an additional cost. The situation can be even worse for people with a disability.

Some people cannot get adequate dental care and in Donegal some health services are not available at all. People with mental health issues, including young people, face long waiting lists before they can access services.

Many people and areas are not 'near full employment' and more supports are needed. With a lack of development or job opportunities in rural areas, many rural dwellers feel ignored by government. There are fears that Brexit will worsen the situation.

- People in the regional workshops called for greater investment and the 'rural' proofing of all plans. They recommended that technology be used to help people in remote areas to play a role in national fora and discussions.

- Accessible, affordable transport for rural areas and for people with disabilities is necessary to enable people to participate fully in society.

- There should be more investment to develop good-quality jobs in rural areas. The DEASP should be more flexible for micro-businesses in disadvantaged areas.

Childhood Care and Education

Two basic problems relate to Early Childhood Care and Education. These are the emphasis on childcare as a means of getting people into the workforce and the lack of investment in an affordable childcare system with supports in place to ensure workers get proper training, pay and working conditions. Affordability is a major issue for parents.

Many see the new affordable childcare system as flawed and falling below the standard for a modern European society. There is concern that parents will have to find out for themselves what they are entitled to under the Affordable Childcare Scheme and that these entitlements will be restrictive.

Many workers in childcare are badly paid and cannot get welfare benefits. They are expected to pay for their own training. Low pay makes it hard to retain staff. In the case of community childcare, groups may depend on community employment workers to provide their services but there is no training scheme for them and it is hard to recruit people.

On the other hand, childcare providers have no supports in facing the demands of red tape and reporting requirements. Many leave the market as a result.

- Participants called for a review of the new childcare policy and its possible unintended results. There is a huge need for more investment and for improved capital grants for community-based childcare. More places, and more flexible services, are needed including drop-in childcare and places for children less than two years of age. Such a service would enable many parents to go back to work.

- A funded training programme is needed to ensure workers have adequate training. Issues of low pay, sick pay and holiday entitlements also need to be dealt with.

The lack of resources to support Traveller and Roma children to deal with the school-based obstacles they face that prevent them from making progress in their education was highlighted. In the case of children with disabilities, there is still a failure to provide enough

support to enable students with special needs to thrive within the school system. For many children, this can lead to mental health issues.

- School autism units should not just be built but should be resourced. A transfer plan to help children make the transition from early years to school and on to third level is also needed.

Work

There was consensus that the current policy focus on getting people in poverty into the labour market needs to be expanded to include community work that addresses wider social exclusion. Unpaid carers should get more recognition and support. Not everyone in need of employment is at the same starting point and some need a good deal more support than others to get into employment.

People with disabilities need more tailored supports to move into employment. There needs to be strategies and supports, including subsidies, to help companies support disabled people coming into their workplace.

Further, the emphasis is strongly on getting a person into any employment but there is no focus on ensuring there are 'decent jobs'. Jobpath is seen as punitive and that some of the staff are not properly trained to support people.

Voluntary work and CE schemes do work that is government's responsibility but there are no opportunities for full-time jobs, no training or progression plan for people.

- People should stay longer on CE and Tús schemes but should have greater supports, clear progression plans and training budgets to open up long-term employment.

Migrants and integration

The needs of migrants and refugees are not being met. The resettlement programme for refugees only gives one year of support. Asylum-seekers leaving direct provision are often de-skilled and face discrimination while there is a lack of courses for people in direct provision.

- Direct provision needs to be ended and asylum-seekers given the right to work in accessible, good-quality jobs.

- Changes are needed to tackle discrimination against migrants and enable them to get employment. More funding is needed for migrant integration and to support their greater involvement in the community. These funding could come from public or private sources.

- Undocumented migrants need to have their status regularised. Better co-ordination between and within government agencies responsible for migrant documentation is needed to ensure effective provision of support and centralisation of data.

Presentation of regional workshop outcomes

Paul Ginnell, European Anti-Poverty Network Ireland, and Ann Irwin of Community Work Ireland presented the results of the six regional workshops to the Social inclusion Forum. A detailed written report was also provided.

One of the key points from the regional workshops was that poverty levels continued to be unacceptably high. The consistency of poverty was another key issue. The same people remained in consistent poverty, including children, lone parents and unemployed people.

Some people were left out of the national statistics collected by the Survey of Living Conditions (SILC), such as Travellers, migrants and low-income farmers. People who lived in direct provision must be supported, were other main points.

Ann Irwin noted that one point that came from all workshops was the importance of keeping the links between community work on the ground and in the goals of the new action plan.

Housing was a significant issue in the discussions, from social housing to Traveller accommodation and homelessness.

Individuals and communities that had taken part in the regional workshops also gave their personal viewpoints.

<u>Karen Christine Wise (National Council of People with Disabilities)</u>

- People who have disabilities want equality in approach and the non-penalising of people who reject housing that is not suitable to their needs. Every person should be treated with dignity and respect in the services they are receiving from the State.

<u>Michael Mackey (Simon)</u>

- We know the government has a plan to end homelessness and we know it is not working. I suggest that all the people who are involved, stakeholders, get around the table together.

- Why is the government not giving the councils money and funding for housing for life? All the homeless people were not the cause of homelessness and with funding they would be able to get out of the situation.

<u>Kate Hagan (Donegal Travellers Project)</u>

- Members of Traveller and Roma communities experience high levels of discrimination and unemployment. There is discrimination in accessing private rented accommodation under the Housing Assistance Payment, which is institutional racism. This needs to be addressed and challenged.

<u>Kathleen Sherlock (Mincéirs Whiden)</u>

- We are calling on the government to implement a National Traveller Accommodation Agency. Traveller accommodation has not been addressed even though funding had been allocated to local authorities to spend and has been sent back in budgets. Now there is a crisis in Traveller accommodation. It needs to be taken out of the hands of local agencies. There is a need to ring-fence funding to concentrate on actions in the National Traveller Strategy[10] where a budget has not been allocated.

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[10] National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017–2021.
http://justice.ie/en/JELR/National%20Traveller%20and%20Roma%20Inclusion%20Strategy,%202017-2021.pdf/Files/National%20Traveller%20and%20Roma%20Inclusion%20Strategy,%202017-2021.pdf

Patrick Daly (National Learning Network)

- Disability and access are important. I have a disability, I am deaf. People with a disability are looking to get work but it is so hard.

Emma O'Brien (Lone parent)

- I am the sole parent of a seven-year-old on the working family payment. I was on the One-Parent Family payment until my child turned seven. Once your child reaches seven you are moved to Jobseeker's Transition payment. Your income is reduced based on what you earn, including loss of fuel allowance and Christmas bonus. Or you move onto Jobseeker's Allowance where, in one single day, whether you work one hour or eight hours you lose Jobseeker's payment for that day. As a parent you try to work around your children if you can or when they are at school.

- One in four of families are lone parents; 80 per cent are female and 40 per cent are at risk of poverty.

Angela O'Leary (Donegal Travellers Project)

- Many people in the Traveller community experience health inequality. Life expectation for Traveller men is 15 per cent lower than the average population; for women it is five per cent lower than the average.

- The rate of suicide is 6.6 per cent higher for Traveller men than the average and accounts for 11 per cent of all deaths in the Traveller community. Childhood death is 6.6 per cent higher in the Traveller community. Traveller health must improve. We must work to improve these statistics. We need to address the social determinants of illness, including improving education.

Stephanie Lord (Free Legal Advice Centre)

- To ratify the UN Convention, the rights of people with disabilities need to be inserted into the Irish constitution. People with disabilities need to be in charge. Choices have to be for people with disabilities ourselves. The UN Convention guarantees the rights of people with disabilities to be involved at all levels. 'Nothing without us, by us, for us.'

Paul Ginnell, EAPN Ireland, said that many people in rural areas felt socially and economically excluded by the policies of government. Policies needed to be rural and equality proofed.

Transport cost was an issue for many people in rural area who needed affordable transport to get to where they needed to go or to access public services. There was still discrimination for some people, social discrimination on economic grounds. Many people at the regional workshops had highlighted the problems of accessing work and of low pay and poor quality of work available in rural areas.

People were concerned that childcare was still driven a lot by economics and getting people into work. They believed a wider focus was needed. Working conditions for staff were an issue also. There is a need to ensure people that are working in this area were not low paid. We also needed to address the time and work that was involved in dealing with paperwork in this sector.

There was a risk of unintended consequences [in the Affordable Childcare Scheme]. There was a concern that parents would have to find out for themselves what they were entitled to under the scheme and that this would be hard for some people. There was a need to make sure that they could find out what their entitlements were.

Referring to some of the questions that had been discussed in the themed workshops, he noted the Public Sector Duty might prove to be a useful tool but there was no evidence yet of where it had been used to make a difference. It would take some time to see its effects. We should invest in and monitor its implementation and put sanctions in place for non-compliance.

The Social Inclusion Forum had been there for 14 years and it was important to review how it operated. It needed to declare a vision and to hold government to account for how policies on poverty and social inclusion were implemented.

The first National Anti-Poverty Strategy was in 1997. The initial document had set out a high level of ambition in what it wanted to achieve, it set out high ambitions.

In a key way it stressed that it was about structural causes of poverty and it stressed the changes that needed to take place if it was going to have an impact. It was about ambitious targets and how they were going to be achieved.
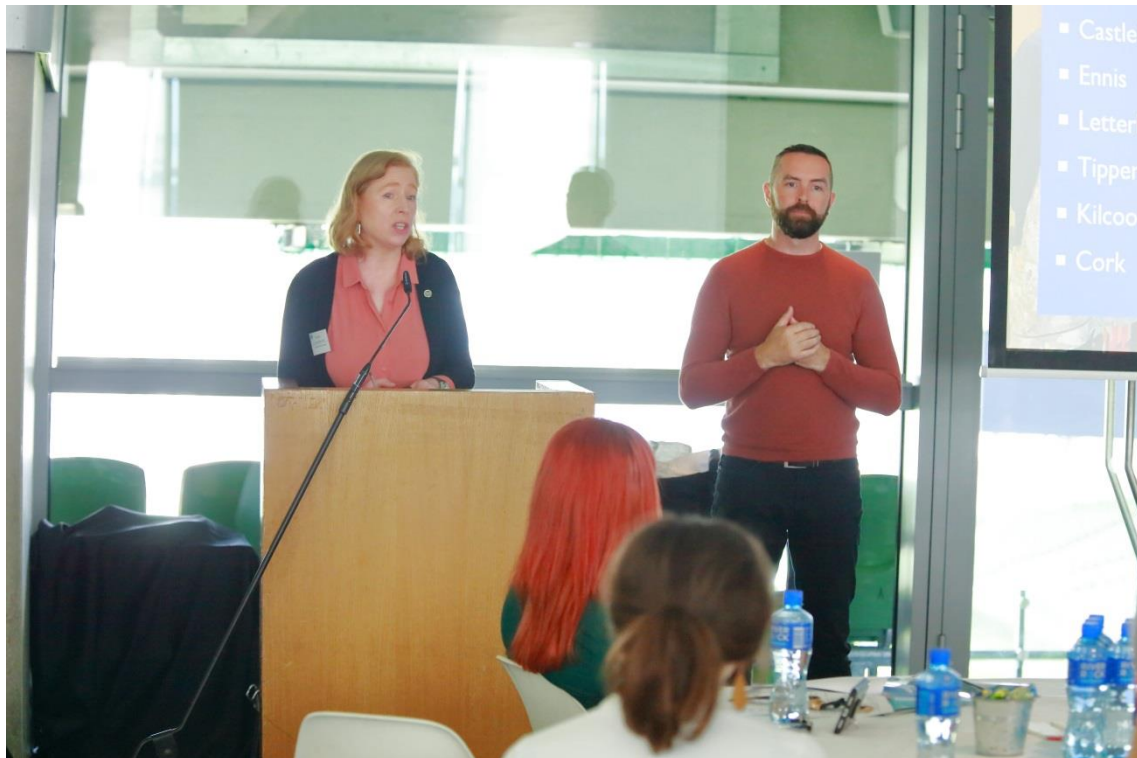
Ann Irwin, CWI, then referred to John McKeon's suggestion about setting poverty targets in terms of reality, saying the reluctance of people to let go of targets was because of the importance of maintaining ambition.

'If there are going to be targets set, there is a need to look at the long-term two per cent target.[11] There is a need for all policy to build on people's experiences. It will be better policy for that. There is a need for targets to implement action plans and that those plans are progress driven.'

Quoting Nelson Mandela, who had stated: 'Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is person-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings'.

Action plans should be based on rights and use a whole-of-government approach. It would require serious investment in resources. There is a need for policy to ensure all plans were delivered on target, she concluded.

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[11] The National social target for poverty reduction' is to reduce consistent poverty to 4% by 2016 (interim target) and to 2% or less by 2020, from a baseline rate of 6.3% in 2010. A policy briefing on the National Social Target for Policy Reduction can be found at: https://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Review-of-the-National-Poverty-Target.aspx

3.2 Address by the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Regina Doherty, T.D.

Addressing the participants, the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Regina Doherty, T.D., said it was the first time she had attended the Social Inclusion Forum and it was an extreme pleasure to be there. The Forum was really valued in the Department and she knew how successful it was as a consultation model.

To make informed choices on policy that could deliver tangible benefits, we needed to listen to the people who would be most affected by them, even if it did not sit well with 'official' views.

She cautioned that we could not meet everyone's expectations and some people would be disappointed with the choices made. Balancing aspirations with reality was a challenge.

The forum would provide an excellent opportunity for an interesting and sometimes robust exchange of views on the social climate in Ireland today. She was proud of the Department's commitment to meet and talk with people through various fora, such as the Community and Voluntary Pillar, the Disability Consultative Forum and the Pre-Budget Forum, as well as the Social Inclusion Forum. Thanking people for coming, she said she would welcome their illuminating and realistic views.

She thanked also the people from the regional workshops who had highlighted the challenges we needed to face in short-term responses and long-term policy.

Minister Doherty said there was a lot of interest internationally, in Ireland's system of consultation fora on social policy. She had been asked to speak about this at an upcoming Social Policy Forum organised by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The panel discussion there would consider challenges for social policy and how to promote citizens' engagement with policymakers.

The international interest in Ireland's approach made her hugely proud not just personally but because people were genuinely interested in our system of fora like this one.

The theme of the Forum was 'Social Inclusion in a Changing Environment'. It was important to reflect on where we are, where we came from and where we wanted to go as a country in setting out to improve the quality of life for all the people in Ireland. It was important, also, that the services that would be delivered would hit the mark, quantitatively and qualitatively.

We had moved from recession and were seeing the effects of recovery. Unemployment was below six per cent for the first time in 10 years. The economic recovery allowed the government to start increasing the supports for those who were most in need and vulnerable.

She had brought in improvements to social welfare schemes in the last Budget, with a rise in weekly payments for social welfare recipients. The income disregards for working families and lone parents had improved, to help them move from welfare to employment. The government had raised the minimum wage to €9.55 per hour, provided the telephone support allowance and extra fuel allowance.

'A lot of you here today will reflect on changes in the last Budget and will say it is not enough, not fast enough, and I get that, totally, but sometimes small, incremental increases are better than large increases that can be rolled back if the economy changes, small increments that reach as wide a number of people as possible,' she told her audience.

Discussing some of the challenges in trying to deliver services to so many people, that to provide even small amounts to so many people would cost so much that it might curtail what could be given to specific people or groups. Balance in the budget was important.

The government's priority had to be to underpin the sustainability of the welfare system in the future and continue to focus on the policy of transforming the social welfare system into one that sought to maximise employability through training, development and employment services with supports for those who could not work or find work.

Referring to the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion, there had been a lot of changes since the [first] 1997 Action Plan. The new plan would have to reflect the changes in the country and the economy in recent years and implement changes that addressed these

challenges. The Department was drawing up a plan that would implement not just the goals in the original plan but would set us on a path that would bring about real changes.

She stressed her commitment and the government's commitment to the new plan. She was determined it would ensure that everyone in Irish society would benefit from the effects of the economic recovery.

'A rising tide will lift all boats. I believe that is where we are today and that is a good thing. It means whatever vast swathes of people who are in need, we want to make sure that everybody benefits from the recovery,' the Minister continued.

In the development of the plan, her Department wanted to genuinely address the numbers of children who were living in consistent poverty, all the families in homelessness and the high numbers living in poverty.

She knew how big that challenge was. The 2016 Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) data was stark, 8.3 per cent were in consistent poverty, 16.5 per cent at risk of poverty, 21 per cent experienced basic deprivation and 11.1 per cent of children were in consistent poverty.

'All these figures mean nothing if we do not put in place a plan that has all these numbers with dates and names attached for delivery'.

'It is very much my job to see that these numbers go down and that they are going down fast enough. My other aim and goal is that, when this report is developed and owned by each one of us, every one of the targets is delivered on'.

She was encouraged by the fact that the figures were decreasing, even though at a slow rate, and that the social transfers provided by her Department significantly reduced the at-risk-of-poverty rate from 33.6 per cent to 16.5 per cent.

'But we have to do better and we will do better'.

The Forum provides us with an opportunity to hear people's voices on how we could do better, their views on policies that were being implemented and to learn from people's experience.

When the report of the forum was delivered to government, Minister Doherty said the stories and viewpoints at the Social Inclusion Forum would be heard at the highest level by people who make the decisions on where the money is going.

'We want to bring the Irish people with us in what we are going to do. We want to see a decent standard of living for every Irish person living in this country and not just money but

services that we wrap around it, health services, Garda services, all these services that we wrap around need to be timely and delivered to all the people'.

She promised that she would listen to what people said at the forum and that people would see she did listen and would deliver on the targets in the action plan.

Several speakers responded from the floor to the Minister's speech. Breda O'Sullivan from Wexford raised the problems caused by requiring lone parents to go to work when their child reached seven years and the loss of the lone parent payment when the child reached 15 years.

She spoke of lone parents' reduced income and the difficulty they, and their children, had in going to college.

People with disabilities were being cut off or having their payments reduced, she went on. She stressed the need for ministers to listen to what people at the Forum were saying.

Speakers from the Travelling community raised the extreme discrimination that Travellers and Roma faced. Eighty-four per cent of Travellers were unemployed although vast numbers were looking for work. Accommodation was very poor and not getting better. They were being left homeless because they could not have their own caravans or live at the side of the road but there were no halting sites or houses for them.

They had problems getting welfare increases, with rising rents and with moneylenders. Travellers were the most disadvantaged people in the country.

Responding to these points, Minister Doherty said that the lone parent policy had got a bad reputation because it had been brought in at a time of cutbacks. In the years of recession, the government had 'nearly two hands and one leg tied' and were only now able to start addressing the challenges caused by economic cutbacks.

But the policy had been brought in because they had wanted to improve the standard of living of lone parents and the quickest way out of poverty was employment.

'We wanted to get people a job, a better job, and a career. We wanted to use those years when the child was seven years in childcare to get education, training, childcare so that, when that child reached 14 years, the parent did not just get a job in McDonalds – or used a job in McDonalds as a start'.

She appealed to people who were being forced into being self-employed rather than direct employment to declare themselves so they could get the social benefits they were entitled to and that the Revenue Commissioners could collect the employer's tax liability.

Minister Doherty assured people that the disability programmes and the EmployAbility service for disabled people were entirely voluntary and that the contribution made by people with disabilities was recognised.

The Minister mentioned the possibility of having an additional workshop to address concerns of the Traveller Community however due to the available space and time this was not a possibility on the day. The Minister stated that she was available to discuss the issues with the Traveller Community and she made a commitment to engage with them in looking at the issues.[12]

She thanked all the speakers for making their points.

'Everybody needs the wisdom and experience of people who are living and working on the ground'.

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[12] The Equality Division of the Department of Justice and Equality has overall responsibility for monitoring and co-ordinating the implementation of Government policy to promote equality and inclusion in Irish society of the Traveller and Roma communities and to implement the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (2017-2021). http://justice.ie/en/JELR/National%20Traveller%20and%20Roma%20Inclusion%20Strategy,%202017-2021.pdf/Files/National%20Traveller%20and%20Roma%20Inclusion%20Strategy,%202017-2021.pdf

Section 04

Section 4

4 Workshop discussions

Five discussion workshops took place at the 2018 Social Inclusion Forum. These examined the following issues:

1. Tools for Change: how does the Public Sector Duty relate to poverty and social inclusion policies?

2. Strengthening the voice of the Social Inclusion Forum: what role should the Forum play in the new National Action Plan for Social Inclusion?

3. Equality-proofing public expenditure: lessons for poverty proofing

4. Childcare policies: supporting participation and early childhood development

5. Community work at local level: its contribution to understanding and responding to poverty and social exclusion.

To help focus discussions, people were asked to consider the workshop theme and to draw on their own experiences in the light of two questions:

    i.   What are the main issues for people/communities experiencing poverty, social exclusion and inequalities in relation to the theme of the workshop?

    ii.   What and where are the opportunities for the target group or community to get involved in the ongoing development and implementation of the policy?

Workshop 1: Tools for change: how does the Public Sector Duty relate to poverty and social inclusion policies?

Background

The workshop opened with a presentation by Jacqueline Healy, Human Rights and Equality Officer of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission. Nuala Kelly, of Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre, facilitated discussions.

The Public Sector Duty requires all public service bodies to be inclusive and non-discriminatory in all their policies at all levels. It was introduced in November 2014. People in this workshop discussed the potential of this duty to work effectively as a tool to tackle poverty and social exclusion.

Nuala Kelly of Pavee Point, who facilitated the workshop, noted that the Public Sector Duty (PSD) was one of the wider changes that can influence the development of public policy and which the new plan has to take account of. She stressed that the PSD has the potential to build a different culture based on human rights and equality and there is a need to develop greater awareness of this among staff delivering public services.

Jacqueline Healy, Human Rights and Equality Officer of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC), summarised the Public Sector Duty as a legal obligation on public bodies 'to systematically plan and address human rights and equality in everything it does,' in a proactive way.

Ms Healy works as part of the Public Sector Duty team to support public bodies in planning for and putting this legal duty into effect. She gave a short opening presentation setting out the legal framework and some ways in which the PSD could act as a 'tool for change'.

IHREC was set up under the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 to be an independent, non-government body, which reported directly to the Oireachtas. It is made up of 15 human rights and equality experts who are appointed by the President after an open competition. IHREC is Ireland's national equality body under EU directives.

The Public Sector Duty is set out in Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 as follows:

42. (1) A public body shall, in the performance of its functions, have regard to the need to –

> *(a) eliminate discrimination*

> *(b) promote equality of opportunity and treatment of its staff and the persons to whom it provides services, and*

> *(c) protect the human rights of its members, staff and the persons to whom it provides services.*

There were three essential steps a public body had to take in planning how to address its PSD. These were:

> Assess and list all the human rights and equality issues it believed were relevant to its functions and purpose as a public body and set these out in a strategic plan

> Address the issues it had identified by putting into its strategic plan all the policies, plans and actions that were in place or were proposed to do this

> Report in its annual report on what actions it had taken to deliver on policies and measures in its strategic plan and what had been achieved through this to address the human rights and equality issues. All these plans and reports had to be accessible to the public.

A public body could identify equality and human rights issues by examining its own statements of strategy or national-level action plans, such as The Migrant Integration Strategy[13] or the National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020[14]. It could also refer to

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[13] Department of Justice and Equality 2017. The Migrant Integration Strategy: A Blueprint for the Future. http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Migrant_Integration_Strategy_English.pdf/Files/Migrant_Integration_Strategy_English.pdf . Dublin.

IHREC reports submitted to United Nations committees on international commitments such as the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural rights (ICESCR) or the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). It could draw on Concluding Observations from UN Committees also.

She summarised the major points relating to the PSD.

- Organisations were required to apply the duty in a proactive way and plan a strategy to address human rights and equality in everything it did.

- It was a legal duty.

- It covered both equality and human rights.

- It applied to all functions of an organisation.

- There was a duty to support both staff and the service users of that organisation.

- The duty is developed and achieved over time as part of the strategic planning process.

The PSD applies to bodies such as government departments, local authorities, the Health Service Executive, third-level colleges, education and training boards (ETB) or any other body or scheme set up under statute by the government.

Any body or person financed by money provided by the Oireachtas might be deemed a public body for purposes of the PSD by the Minister for Justice and Equality in consultation with IHREC. This included a company financed by or on behalf of a government minister or whose majority shares were held on behalf of the government. The defence forces were excluded.

- IHREC may give guidance to public bodies in developing policies of, and exercising, good practice and operational standards in relation to, human rights and equality and may issue guidelines or prepare codes of practice.

Under Section 42 (5) of the IHREC Act 2014 IHREC can invite a public body to review its performance and help it to prepare and carry out an action plan to deliver on its PSD.

Public bodies are not always starting from scratch and might already have policies or provisions for human rights and equality.

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[14] National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020.
http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/National_Strategy_for_Women_and_Girls_2017_-_2020.pdf/Files/National_Strategy_for_Women_and_Girls_2017_-_2020.pdf

She cited the example of the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP), whose Statement of Strategy set down the following commitments:

- Aim: reduction in consistent poverty rates and improvement in other social inclusion indicators

- Develop a new Integrated Framework for Social Inclusion, to tackle inequality and poverty

- Implementation of DEASP commitments in the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for people with disabilities

- Implement Pathways to Work 5-Year Strategy for long-term unemployed

- Implement Action Plan for Jobs as the best way to reduce child poverty

- Support increases in the Disability Benefit and Allowance, Carer's Benefit and Allowance and Blind Person's Pension

- Review the Farm Assist Scheme, recognizing challenges facing farmers on low incomes

- Review the Fish Assist Scheme for fishermen in financial difficulties

- Commitment for information written in plain language, available in versions appropriate for people with disabilities, and incorporate features to make the website accessible

- Engagement with the public and service users.

Good practice

Five public bodies had worked in partnership with the IHREC to pilot delivery of the public sector duty in different contexts in order to develop examples of good practice. These were Monaghan County Council, Cork City Council, University College Cork, Irish Prison Service (focusing on Women in Prison) and the Probation Services. In the case of the two local authorities, the pilot had included the following steps:

1. Leadership and implementation structure, such as a working group or equality committee

2. Developing a shared understanding of human rights and equality

3. Initiating an equality and human rights assessment across the functions of an organisation.

4. Preparing an action plan to address equality and human rights issues raised across these functional areas

Relating back to the theme of the workshop, Ms Healy gave examples of how some commitments under various national strategies might be a 'tool for change'. The application of the PSD can support Departments to meet commitments already made under various national strategies and in the Programme for Government. It supports breaking down a commitment into short and long term actions so progress can be achieved over time and looking at a commitment across the core functions of an organisation.

She cited commitments in the Migrant Integration Strategy which, in the delivery of services, would see:

- Information to migrants given in the appropriate language

- Information on how to complain about racist behaviour by a staff member or other customer

- Addressing migrants' needs on gaining skills and employment

- Setting up a working group to examine gaps in data on migrant needs

- Intercultural training for frontline staff

- Filling a migrant or minority ethnic employment target in the civil service

- Measures to ensure that the Habitual Residence Condition (HRC) legislation is applied correctly and consistently.

She spoke about the potential of rights holders to use the Duty to advance their rights. Community Action Network (CAN) are a social justice NGO which have facilitated drugs service users to identify the human rights issues that affect them when accessing HSE drugs treatment services. IHREC supported a pilot project to develop a grassroots approach to implementing section 42, by encouraging rights-holders to present their issues to the relevant public bodies. The rights holders of this project are called the Services Users Rights in Action Group (SURIAG). IHREC worked with CAN to facilitate service-users to present their issues to the HSE, which in turn assists the HSE in assessing its human rights issues in the delivery of services. The project steering group held dialogue events, conducted service-user led research through interviews of service-users, compiled a report on the issues identified and met with Department of Health and HSE officials. SURIAG launched their report 'Our Life, Our Voice, Our Say' in April 2018.

Ms Healy went on to detail the points made by people working in the public service who had been asked for their views on what positive differences implementing the PSD would make. They were:

- Enhanced awareness among staff and service users of equality and human rights, leading to a culture of respect and inclusion

- Culture of equality and human rights embedded in the organisation

- More inclusive and accessible services

- Increased training and capacity on human rights and equality

- Service delivery informed by listening to service users, leading to greater trust and transparency

- Staff valued and supported, with greater diversity in the staff profile

- An evidence-based approach.

Discussion

In the discussions that followed, Nuala Kelly said there had been few channels to discuss the PSD although it had been a legal obligation since 2014. There was a need to link up people in the public service in relation to changing the culture on people having a right to services. The National Action Plan for Social Inclusion should link across all government strategies.

Participants decided to focus on the aspect of Question 2 about 'opportunities for target groups to get involved in the ongoing development and implementation of the policy'. Within this, a number of themes emerged.

Staff of public service bodies

A number of points were made about the attitudes of staff to service users or to their own work. Staff attitudes influenced how service users perceived their services. Public sector staff could come across as blocking rather than helping and that information and training were equality issues. People in one-parent families were segregated by 'exceptionalism' and a spirit of inclusivity could make for common cause.

In relation to service users, Nuala Kelly said there was an inherent power imbalance between staff and service users and there was a need to put a human face on people who were excluded or disadvantaged.

Paul Fortune (Inclusion Ireland[15]) said that when people needed support, choice was removed and they got what staff wanted, for example, when bed times and eating times were set. He questioned how the amount of support hours for a person was calculated.

Tigh Kirwan (Dublin City Council) said staff who dealt with frontline services for too long tended to become cynical and did not want to stay there.

Jacqueline Healy said that the PSD applied equally to staff and its implementation would support staff to respond more effectively to service users. It is a self-assessment process by public bodies. Staff knew the issues and would bring them to the assessment, however, in the case of the service provider saying everything was fine or if an NGO had a different opinion on the service provider's assessment? In that case, IHREC may, in certain circumstances, invite public bodies to carry out a review in relation to the performance by that body of its functions and prepare and implement an action plan in relation to the performance by that body of its functions, as per Section 42 (5) of the IHREC Act 2014.

Consultation and feedback

Jacqueline Healy also spoke of the need for consultation with staff and service users as part of a public body's assessment and for the issues arising in the consultations to be fed into the assessment and action plan under Section 42. Nuala Kelly said consultation had to be meaningful and participants needed to see the results. A speaker from the Simon Community said homeless people should be involved in organisations that dealt with them.

Dermot Sreenan from the National Traveller MABS found the rate of change in the four years since the PSD legislation was passed 'frustrating'. The nature of change was that it came from top down and he asked if organisations had an opt-in clause.

Communication and information

People spoke about different aspects of communication by public bodies. Helen Ryan (National Adult Literacy Agency) said use of language that was unclear put up a barrier to people understanding issues. The question was, 'how would you talk to your mother if she came in looking for services'. She recommended training for staff in this regard; pointing out that Intreo staff had done literacy training. There was an issue of poor accessibility and navigation on the websites of public bodies also, which made it difficult for people to find information.

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[15] The National Association for People with an Intellectual Disability

Dermot Sreenan said that often a Freedom of Information request was the only way to get information.

Patrick Daly (National Learning Network) noted that vulnerable people do not understand their basic human rights. Public bodies should reduce their documents to a manageable size. Yvonne O'Sullivan (Inclusion Ireland) also spoke of the importance of giving information that was easy to read.

Orla McCabe (Irish Deaf Society) said that Irish Sign Language (ISL) had been recognised only recently. Public service bodies had begun to request ISL interpreters but she asked how community and voluntary groups could implement policy in other bodies.

Procurement and PSD

The HSE model for Budget and Procurement when funding large charitable organisations for service delivery needed to be looked out. Any group that received public money for service delivery should have to implement the PSD as a condition for funding or contract.

Ethnicity and equality

Speakers examined the question of measuring access to services by people from minority ethnic groups. Real numbers were needed and the use of ethnic monitoring was suggested. Nuala Kelly welcomed the fact that SICAP, the national Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme, monitors whether it reaches people from ethnic minorities.

This raised the question as to whether such monitoring or asking people to declare their ethnicity would be racist or would comply with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Nuala Kelly said that it is essential to ask the ethnic identifier question in a way that is compliant with people's human rights which means that providing answers has to be on a voluntary basis. She recommended that questions to identify ethnic background should be based on the question on ethnic background used in the national Census as the best current approach. The SICAP Good Practice Guidelines for Ethnic Data Collection can be found on Pavee Point and on Pobal (SICAP) websites.

Workshop 2: Strengthening the voice of the Social Inclusion Forum: what role could SIF play in the new National Action Plan for Social Inclusion?

Background

The workshop opened with a presentation by Sarah O'Halloran, of the Social Inclusion Division of the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP), followed by Bríd O'Brien, of the Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (INOU) and Danielle McLaughlin, of Crosscare. John Mark McCafferty, Threshold, facilitated discussions.

Ms O'Halloran's presentation gave the background of the Social Inclusion Forum. It was set up as one of the structures used to monitor and evaluate the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007–2016 (NAPinclusion). Through the Forum, officials from government departments, community and voluntary groups and people experiencing poverty could come together and discuss National Action Plan for Social Inclusion policy and progress.

The Forum made it possible for non-government groups and people to give their views on progress in implementing the plan and feed back their experience on key policies, delivery issues and barriers to progress. They could put forward suggestions on how blockages could be removed and make proposals for new initiatives and more effective policies.

Ms O'Halloran referred to the findings of an EU Peer Review of the Social Inclusion Forum, which was carried out in 2007[16]. It found that the Forum:

- Created better understanding of each other's position

- Linked directly different types of stakeholders

- Was part of a larger consultation process

- Showed recognition of NGOs and grassroots organisations

- Brought together different government levels and sectors with NGOs, which was unique

- Had a strong political commitment

- Was based on continuity

- Dialogue was of high quality and constructive, with openness and trust.

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[16] http://www.socialinclusion.ie/publications/documents/EUPeerReviewSynthesisreport.pdf

[The peer review had been carried out by government officials and NGO experts from Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Hungary, the Slovak Republic, Spain and the United Kingdom, who had attended the 2007 Social Inclusion Forum meeting in Dublin. Representatives from the European Anti-Poverty Network, ATD Fourth World, the EU Commission's Directorate for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities and the Irish Social Inclusion Forum had also attended the peer review[17].]

The Peer Review report made a number of suggestions for events like the Social Inclusion Forum. They should:

- Keep an appropriate balance between participation of government and civil society representatives

- Organise it as a joint initiative of government and civil society organisations as this could be more motivating

- Take care of possible consultation fatigue

- Consider the legitimacy and representability of participants. The review pointed, as an example, to the distinction between types of NGOs such as service NGOs and representation NGOs

- It should think of the private sector as an actor.

Other feedback on the effectiveness of the Forum had come from a number of Forum reports from which Ms O'Halloran quoted.

'The absence of adequate and appropriate feedback to participants in consultation exercises was reported. It was claimed that such feedback has always been absent and there is a real need for feedback to participants on the outcomes of the deliberations of the Social Inclusion Forum.'   2010 Social inclusion Forum report

 'Participants suggested that 'a more vigorous and effective monitoring and evaluation process could be undertaken' if the Annual Report on Social Inclusion and the end of year Survey of Living Conditions (SILC) report were made available for the Social Inclusion Forum meeting.' 2011 Social Inclusion Forum report

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[17] Peer Review report p2 http://www.socialinclusion.ie/publications/documents/EUPeerReviewSynthesisreport.pdf

'A particular call coming from the meetings was for a report on progression on previous Forum recommendations to be an integral part of proceedings.' 2014 Social Inclusion Forum report

'The Forum was 'the most important gathering of officials and community groups to talk about poverty and to strategize for change'. However, there was 'deep frustration at the lack of feedback and progress reporting on issues highlighted in the past by participants.' 2015 Social Inclusion Forum report

Ms. O'Halloran also referred to points made in 2008 by the then director of the Social Inclusion Division that many other factors had an influence on policy. Suggestions made at the Forum might not be adopted although full account would be taken of them. Referring to the economic crisis at the time, the director had noted that the softening effect on what might otherwise have been harsher measures had not been always visible. In measuring the impact of the Social Inclusion Forum, government did not always change at the same pace as calls for change urged. Forum calls for immediate change might only be implemented over time.

The question of feedback on Social Inclusion Forum proposals was also discussed by Bríd O'Brien, of the Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (INOU), who said people needed to hear back on their proposals and concerns, what had happened and why it had or had not happened. There was good preparation in advance of the Social Inclusion Forum and good workshops during it but no feedback after from the DEASP.

People needed to feel that a space had been created in which they could have a say on the impact of policy. They needed to be active players in policy design, implementation, feedback and redesign.

Dialogue, she said, could not 'disappear into a DEASP black hole'.

Dealing with the reality of exclusion on people's daily lives, that certain groups continued to suffer year after year, a fact highlighted through the Survey on Income & Living Conditions (SILC). Developing this point, while broad national targets were good, sub-targets that reflected the reality of life for small groups were needed. They did not want the current economic recovery to leave people behind as the last one had.

Summarizing her points, Ms. O'Brien said they had to ensure that people felt their issues were being named, that they were active players in the plan and that they had the means to enable them to participate.

Danielle McLaughlin, of Crosscare[18], said the Social Inclusion Forum was a tool to monitor progress on the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion strategy. The Forum was unique in that it was the only annual forum for social inclusion across government and gave organisations and people in the community and voluntary sector an opportunity to play a part in policy on social inclusion. She welcomed the willingness of the DEASP to engage with representative voices from the community and voluntary sector.

Front-line community work was hugely important to the work of the DEASP. The community and voluntary sector did not operate independently of government departments or agencies and so needed to work closely with them. It was critical that feedback from discussion workshops would be included in the final report to government. She hoped that people's views would be reflected in the new plan.

While welcoming the openness of the DEASP to the community and voluntary sector, she urged people and organisations to look for other opportunities and fora in which they could play a part also.

She also praised the contribution made by the EAPN and CWI and their feedback from the regional workshops. This gave a nationwide perspective but with a personal voice and impact, which reminded departments and the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection how policy decisions affected people personally.

Ms. McLaughlin noted that the DEASP statement of strategy was broad, with high-level objectives that included reducing the rate of consistent poverty.

Referring to the Migrant Integration Strategy, a consultative forum had been included, which acted as a useful monitoring tool to measure actions and indicators and report on progress. She proposed that something similar be included in the new National Action Plan for Social Inclusion so that it could be reported on at the Forum.

Ms. McLaughlin then examined how the Social Inclusion Forum did its work. A packed agenda and high attendance meant time demands could be a challenge and some voices might go unheard. Certain voices could dominate if facilitated groups were not helped to prepare their contribution for the Forum. She expressed a wish to invite service users to the Forum so that they could take part, see how things worked and how people advocated on their behalf.

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[18] Crosscare is the Social Support Agency of the Catholic Archdiocese of Dublin and provides a range of social care, community and youth work services across the Dublin Archdiocese. www.crosscare.ie

<u>Discussion</u>

Workshop facilitator John Mark McCafferty, Threshold, suggested that participants share their experiences of previous Social Inclusion Fora and then put forward solutions that could strengthen the Social Inclusion Forum with a view to influencing the role it could play in the new plan.

<u>Feedback</u>

A good deal of discussion centred on weakness in communication and feedback and the difference between consultation and participation.

Andy O'Hara, Pavee Point, said organisations made a great effort to engage people and they welcomed having a voice but they did not see over time any evidence of their input having an impact on their own areas or communities. Things were happening on the ground but the issue was with communication. There was little feedback on what happened as a result of their involvement and people became disillusioned. There was a risk of disengagement of the very people we wanted to reach.

There are many positive government policy commitments but, on the ground, resources are not allocated to support implementation. There was a lack of accountability about the Forum process, about what is being done and what has been achieved.

Continuous feedback from the Social Inclusion Forum was needed and people wanted to see more evidence of how their input had shaped actions on the ground.

The need for regular progress reports was raised also by Felicia Loughrey, Longford Community Resources. Following a Forum, they should be able to go back and say 'this is what is going to happen and this is when it will start'. People then would understand the process. It was important to have continuous communication through the year between the DEASP and people on the ground. She suggested regular emails every three months with progress reports they could give back to their groups.

<u>Participation and consultation</u>

There was a lot of talk about high-level participation and being included in decision making but over time people saw it as being at the lower end of consultation, which was a one-way process, whereas participation was a two-way process.

On another aspect of consultation, Paul Uzell of All Together in Dignity (ATD) said that, in addition to people who had a disability, certain other groups, such as homeless people, found it hard to express themselves in seeking services or in consultations. He suggested that such people should be allowed to bring advocates with them to help them voice their needs.

RAPID model

Mary Blackmore, Paul Partnership, said the RAPID[19] programme in the early 2000s provided a useful model. Then, in 45 geographic areas, local-level state agencies were sitting down with local communities, meeting regularly and planning for investment in local areas.

The then minister used to meet them three times a year to build up to a national event. Each time, Pobal, which managed the meetings, had experienced facilitators who looked at common issues that were coming up across the 45 areas and fed it back. Issues across the areas became evident. A lot of feedback went back to the communities and there was a lot of positivity.

She suggested that the DEASP should organise the pre-Forum regional consultation workshops directly and take a proactive role on consultation in order to maintain communications. Regional consultations were needed in advance of the Social Inclusion Forum and she would welcome the opportunity of meeting the minister and giving input in the lead-up to the Forum.

In response to this point, it was pointed out that the EAPN and CWI had links to regional groups and might find it easier than the DEASP to get buy-in.

Communication

Annette Patton of Inishowen Development Partnership said that social exclusion often was a source of shame for some people and might stop them from speaking up. More communication from the Social Inclusion Forum, which linked their situation to national policies and actions to improve matters on the ground, would help remove that sense of embarrassment and encourage them.

Ms Patton also raised the need for community voices to be heard in other formats than the Social Inclusion Forum, such as on radio programmes. People needed encouragement to speak up.

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[19] Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development. The RAPID Programme and the Community Facilities Scheme have now amalgamated to become the Community Enhancement Programme (CEP).

The same speaker urged greater advance notice of the regional workshops. Many groups were not part of existing networks and might be left out. The point was made by another speaker that the advent of the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) might result in fewer people being contacted about consultations.

The Forum was a process of dialogue and dialogue should include actions, according to Michelle Kearns, National Traveller MABS, who proposed that action should come out of their workshop. The group proposed as a solution that a public campaign take place to reduce the stigma of poverty, following the example of the mental health awareness campaigns.

Smaller groups

Sam Blanckensee, Transgender Equality Network Ireland (TENI), advised looking beyond the 'typical' marginalised groups to include people who were not currently obvious, saying that transgender people experienced discrimination. 'Look out for what or who is not here,' in seeking representation of smaller groups.

Workshop 3: Equality proofing public expenditure: lessons for poverty proofing

<u>Background</u>

The workshop opened with a briefing by Eilis Ní Chaithnía, of the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCI) followed by the presentation by Caroline O'Loughlin, of the Department of public Expenditure and Reform (DPER). Eilis Ní Chaithnía, of the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCI) facilitated discussions.

Ms Ní Chaithnía briefed participants on the work done by the NWCI on the issue of gender budgeting. In the lead-up to Budget 2018, the NWCI completed a report setting out for government how it could follow through on its commitments to tackle inequality through using the budget process.

In February 2018, the NWCI gave its assessment to the Budgetary Oversight Committee of the Equality Budgeting Pilot initiative. It concluded the DPER had the same approach to equality budgeting as the NWCI in that it saw it as broad as well as deep.

Public resources are mainly allocated through the national Budget, usually based on government priorities or national policy. The Budget can be tested, or proofed, to measure how the share-out of resources between different policy aims or target groups affects the lives of people in society. This can show where policies need to be changed or re-focused. This process is called 'equality proofing'.

The Irish government is committed to developing the process of budget and policy proofing 'as a means of advancing equality, reducing poverty, and strengthening economic and social rights'. These steps are part of a wider range of reforms to the budget process, which are set out in the Programme for Partnership Government 2016–2020.

The planned reforms aim to provide a framework for greater consultation on and amendment of the annual Budget and an objective process to evaluate budget outcomes.

It is hoped these steps will help to measure the effectiveness of public policy and will bring greater transparency and accountability into the allocation of public resources.

To carry out effective equality-proofing the impact of budget decisions on different sections of the population must be measured accurately and people who will be affected by policy changes must be consulted about the impact they have on them. The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission may be called on for its expertise in guiding the process[20].

A number of structures are being set up to help in this process of consultation and evaluation, both within government departments and in the newly established Parliamentary Budget Office. A Budgetary Oversight Committee has been set up to consider budget submissions and proposals from a gender and wider equality viewpoint.

Caroline O'Loughlin of Department of Public Expenditure and Reform DPER then gave a presentation on the Department's Equality Budgeting Initiative. She summed up the Department's approach to equality budgeting:

- Equality budgeting is a tool to provide greater information on the equality impacts of proposed and/or ongoing budget measures.

- It is good budgeting.

- It should be integrated into the routine budgetary process.

In a current pilot of equality budgeting being carried out by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER), the main focus is on gender equality, partly because of the availability of statistical data broken down by gender.

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[20] Background information in this section on the budget reform process and equality proofing is based on the report by the NWCI 'Gender Budgeting is Good Budgeting'.
https://www.nwci.ie/images/uploads/Gender_Budgeting_is_Good_Budgeting_NWCI.pdf

Staff in DPER set out the approach the pilot initiative would take for the 2018 budget cycle in the policy paper 'Equality Budgeting: Proposed Next Steps in Ireland'[21]. This was published on Budget Day 2018, which took place on 10 October 2017. The initial focus would be on gender as an equality dimension and it would be set within the existing framework for performance budgeting.

Government departments that had equality targets would review and assess their policies for their impact on gender equality and their alignment with the high-level gender equality objectives and indicators set out at programme level.

Some of the objectives to be assessed by their respective departments included:

- Childcare (Department of Children and Youth Affairs)

  Objective – to support women's participation in the labour force by promoting accessible and affordable childcare

- Arts culture and film (Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht)

  Objective – to increase funding for female talent in the Irish film industry

- Sports grants (Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport)

  Objective – to achieve greater participation of women in sporting activities

- Apprenticeships (Department of Education and Skills)

  Objective – Increase female participation in apprenticeships

- Research grants (Department of Businesses Enterprise and Innovation)

  Objective – to increase the level of female recipients of Science Foundation research grants

- Smoking (Department of Health)

  Objective – ensuring that funding to reduce smoking impacts people of different genders and socio-economic backgrounds equally.

The objectives and targets were reported on in the Revised Estimates Volume and progress on meeting targets was reported on in the Public Service Performance Report.

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[21] http://www.budget.gov.ie/Budgets/2018/Documents/1.Equality%20Budgeting%20-%20Proposed%20Next%20Steps%20in%20Ireland.pdf

Ms O'Loughlin told participants that DPER was looking at proofing not just for gender but for social equality. They would have to figure out how to refine or best use the current techniques and indicators, as well as wider economic factors, in order to do equality proofing. The first need would be to decide on what the priorities were.

The next steps would be to expand the initiative, assess feedback and engage with other departments on the process. As part of this, an Equality Budgeting Steering Group was to be established to provide advice on how to advance the initiative.

Departments would be supported in developing the skills needed for equality proofing. Lessons could be learned from other countries such as Austria, where there was both a constitutional and a legal requirement for equality-proofing processes.

Discussion

Seeking to build on the lessons of the gender-proofing pilot and apply them to wider equality proofing, people discussed the theme 'Equality proofing of public expenditure and the lessons for poverty proofing'.

People welcomed the gender-budgeting initiative and were very glad to see that the DPER planned to expand it. They welcomed the openness and invitation for feedback on equality budgeting.

The discussion that followed was prompted by the same two questions put to all the discussion groups.

Main issues

Speakers highlighted issues that mainly related to older people, people with disabilities, members of the Traveller and Roma communities and young people, particularly those from the Traveller and Roma communities. Some problems were specific to one group; some affected a number of groups equally.

All participants agreed that, for older people, small increases made in the Budget were often wiped out by cuts in grants or increased charges. In the case of older people who were living only on the state pension, items like property tax, TV licence fee and refuse charges could push them into poverty.

There had been very little increase in the old age pension since the recession. An increase in payment was needed to help pensioners, and other groups, out of poverty traps. Waivers for property tax and other charges would also help people on low incomes.

It was agreed that this issue affected all groups, especially people who had a disability who needed to be included in any measures taken.

Inability to access jobs or education affected many sectors but had its hardest impact on members of the Traveller and Roma communities and on people with disabilities. The lack of work or education opportunities had a knock-on effect on mental health, especially among young Travellers where there is a very high suicide rate. Speakers recommended the use of job and education quotas for people who were Traveller, Roma or had a disability, as one remedy.

The need for a strong focus on young people was stressed, with high youth unemployment a 'huge problem'. Lack of access to employment or education led to other serious issues among young people.

Equality budgeting process

Speakers stressed the need to focus also on social inequality in budget proofing. It was felt that both Poverty Impact Assessment (PIA) and Social Impact Assessment (SIA) were very important as part of wider equality proofing.

As part of the budget process, an equality budget statement should be published alongside the Budget as was done in other jurisdictions.

Follow-up analysis was one of the other tools that departments could use, citing as an example Dr Mary Murphy's assessment report on decisions made on Budget 2018.

Asked if the OECD basis for gender proofing was being used, Ms O'Loughlin said they had engaged with the OECD but also had found examples in countries such as Austria.

People asked how government departments had been chosen for the pilot programme and which would be part of next year's pilot. They were told that the departments firstly volunteered for inclusion and in expanding the programme DPER was pursuing further departments most appropriate. DPER would also look to feedback from stakeholders on this.

Speakers stressed the need to get buy-in across government departments, saying that much greater direction was needed to create cohesiveness between departments and partnership with other countries that carried out equality budgeting. Departmental social inclusion officers needed to be at a high enough level to be able to influence change.

<u>Equality Budgeting Steering Group</u>

The planned Equality Budgeting Steering Group prompted much discussion. Ms O'Loughlin said that DPER was planning to promote awareness of the Public Service Performance Report to help engage stakeholders.

All the participants said that their organisations would be interested in being involved.

Asked how the Equality Budgeting Steering Group would be established, Ms O'Loughlin said that budgetary and broader equality expertise would need to be brought together.

DPER was looking at specific issues in relation to the group at present but believed it would need to be broadened in time depending on the area of expertise required.

She added that DPER was in the process of identifying members but decisions had not yet been made. The NWCI and IHREC were regarded as obvious experts in the field but it would be ministerial appointments initially and the decision would be made by the Minister.

The NWCI would set out what would be the best form for the group to take to help inform the decision-making process. There were a number of different fora that allowed for expert input.

Many workshop participants said they intended to make submissions to DPER about participating in the Equality Budgeting Steering Group.

<u>Transparency and consultation</u>

The Department's openness to feedback on equality budgeting was welcomed. The point was made that, in policy development, consultation with stakeholders was best practice. There was a need to bear in mind how unintended consequences arose and how to avoid them.

Transparency and information in relation to working groups and committees were important if there were to be opportunities to engage in ongoing policy development. It was felt that certain groups, such as people with disabilities, were excluded at present.

It was recommended that, when setting up processes that allow people/groups to play a part in policy development, departments should use structures that already existed, such as the Community Platform and the Community and Voluntary Pillar.

Proofing and impact assessment

In relation to gender proofing, speakers urged that current commitments in the National Strategy for Women and Girls[22] be expanded for pilot programmes. There was a need to be inclusive when looking at gender proofing.

The challenges of measuring the impact of policies and services as opposed to money payments made through the Budget were highlighted. While the effect of payments can be assessed relatively easily, it was much more difficult to measure the impact of services. Speakers made the point that the SWITCH[23] model worked very well in analysing the effect of money measures but could not capture or measure the impact of services on households. Yet the need to measure accurately the impact of services was stressed.

Data

Specific gaps or problems with the available statistics were raised. Figures should be broken down for smaller target groups or sub-groups to allow more specific targeting. Measures also were needed to capture information on areas that were not being measured under current methods or certain groups of people who were not being reached by supports or services. Specifically, an ethnic identifier was needed for equality proofing.

In summing up, people stressed the need to go beyond measuring what is easy and to broaden equality budgeting beyond gender to address wider social inequality.

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[22] National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020
http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/National_Strategy_for_Women_and_Girls_2017_-_2020.pdf/Files/National_Strategy_for_Women_and_Girls_2017_-_2020.pdf

[23] In its research The Economic and Social Research Institute examines the impact of policy changes in taxation, welfare and pensions on real households to inform policy debate. It uses SWITCH (Simulating Welfare and Income Tax Changes), a tax benefit model, which uses detailed data on incomes, tax and welfare compiled by the CSO Survey on Income and Living Conditions to simulate how households are affected by the rules of the current system and by proposed reforms. https://www.esri.ie/research/taxation-welfare-and-pensions/

Workshop 4: Childcare policies: supporting participation and early childhood development

Background

The workshop opened with a presentation by Eugene Waters, of the Early Years Division of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, followed by Frances Byrne of Early Childhood Ireland. June Tinsley, Head of Advocacy, Barnardos Ireland, facilitated discussions

Eugene Waters laid out government policy for early years care, which is delivered through the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. Ireland did not have a long tradition of young children attending pre-school services but the introduction of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme of free access to a pre-school programme had been a 'game changer'.

Over 117,000 young children were now registered on the ECCE programme across 4,300 childcare services, which is a take-up of almost 90 per cent.

Mr Waters referred to an EU study that showed that the benefits of a young child enjoying access to early education could be seen throughout that person's life in terms of school completion, progression to third-level education, lack of criminal activity and take-up of employment. For every €1 of public money invested in early childhood education, there was a return of €7.

Quality, accessibility and affordability were important considerations for the Department in early childhood education. There was a focus on social inclusion. Equality and diversity training was offered to workers in the sector and children of all backgrounds and levels of ability attended together.

The fact that childcare workers tended to have the minimum level of qualifications was a challenge facing the development of the early childcare sector. However, if a graduate-level standard were required, the cost and delivery of childcare would be affected.

Mr Waters described the current programmes for early childhood education:

- Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), a universally available, free, pre-school education programme, which was availed of by 117,000 children over the age of three years and two months. It was provided through about 4,500 community and privately-owned crèches.

- The Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) provided varying levels of support depending on the degree of need to children with disabilities to enable them to participate in the ECCE programme. Children with disabilities did not need to have been diagnosed to avail of the AIM scheme.

- Community Childcare Subvention (CCS), which is a universal payment for parents of children under three, in which 36,000 children take part.

- Community Childcare Subvention Programme (CCSP), in which childcare costs are reduced to parents on low income. The DCYA pays part of the costs and parents pay the remainder. It is available 52 weeks of the year and is open to children up to 15 years of age. Some 35,000 children benefit from this scheme.

- Training and Employment Childcare (TEC), which is targeted to support parents who are on eligible training courses or in some cases returning to work by providing subsidised childcare places. Some 500 children avail of this support.

The Affordable Childcare Scheme proposed in the Childcare Support Bill, which was going through the Oireachtas, would amalgamate existing targeted childcare support schemes into a single scheme.

He named the DCYA's next priorities:

- Launch the National Early Years Strategy, which spanned departments and was now in its final draft

- Introduce the Affordable Childcare Scheme and related supports for child-minding and after-school care

- Increase investment in the Early Years system

- Work to improve the quality of care and professional standards in the early years.

Investment in early years care had increased by 80 per cent in the last three budgets but was still below the OECD target for national investment levels.

In her presentation on childcare policies, Frances Byrne, Early Childhood Ireland (ECI), profiled the early years sector and public attitudes to the importance of the first five years in a child's development.

Early Childhood Ireland was the biggest representative body in the early years sector with 3,800 members from interested organisations, associate members and parent and toddler groups. Service providers made up 86 per cent of the overall membership.

Most childcare in Ireland was privately run and the not-for profit sector was small and often not sustainable. The 4,448 childcare services in Ireland were broken down into 73 per cent privately run and 27 per cent community based. In both private and community services, the same service was provided and there was an inclusive mix of children.

The care on offer through the early years sector ranged from full day care (33 per cent); sessional programmes (92 per cent); part-time care (39 per cent); afterschool services (41 per cent) and breakfast club services (19 per cent).

Some 186,190 children availed of care in various forms of early years settings, ranging from babies of 0-12 months to school-age children of six years and over.

Ms Byrne raised the need to provide some specialised childcare settings, for example, for children whose parents had drug-related issues.

There was a problem of affordability for low-income parents. Childcare services were expensive because of insufficient investment. The current level of investment of €250m per year was too low.

Working conditions for childcare staff were an issue. A large number of people worked for 38 weeks, when services were open, and had to sign on the dole during holiday periods.

In its advocacy role, ECI sought to ensure quality in care for babies and children, sustainability, provided through a professional sector with high-quality training and standards, and affordability for parents.

To ensure high-quality care, opportunities for staff training and a system for continuing professional development for childcare workers were needed.

ECI supported the concept of progressive universalism, where services were provided for everyone and extra supports were in place for those that needed it. It advocated a Scandinavian model of early years provision, citing Finland's combination of childcare and childminding, and strong policies around parental leave.

There was huge public recognition of the importance of the first five years in a child's life. A majority of adults surveyed in 2018 (75 per cent) believed that the education of children under five years was as important as that for children over five. Two in three surveyed (65 per cent) believed that childcare should be free to all children.

A similar barometer of public attitudes to childcare should be produced each year to show the level of support for free, early years childcare for all.

Discussion

The discussion that followed dealt first with the main issues in relation to childcare policies for people who were poor or excluded.

Overall, people at the workshop stressed the need to recognise the importance of play in a child's development.

A number of speakers said people and politicians should be informed of the importance of early years stimulation for a child's development and the importance of investment in the early childhood sector. A public awareness campaign was proposed both to promote awareness of early childhood development and the important role played by parents.

Participants in the workshop agreed on the need to retain ambitious targets for investment in early childcare because it would be the key driver of resources, policies and actions and would benefit the most vulnerable.

Frances Byrne said that parental leave in the child's first year was very important as a child needed a one-to-one relationship with his or her parents. ECI favoured giving parental leave to the mother only in the first year, to encourage breastfeeding. June Tinsley also spoke of the need for paid parental leave.

June Tinsley did not agree with the focus on childcare in the National Development Plan as purely a way of getting both parents out to work and not recognising the value of quality childcare for the child's development. Tax credits for childcare were 'a quick fix' but they were not the solution as they excluded families who were not in the tax net or didn't guarantee quality service through having well paid and trained staff. Overall, children were not prioritised and Ireland had not invested enough in early years services.

Disability

A gap in the Access and Inclusion Model for children with disabilities was pointed out. It offered supports only when a child reached pre-school years but there was a period between the end of maternity benefit and the start of the AIM when children with disabilities were not supported. The speaker urged equal access for all, including children with disabilities.

There was some discussion as to whether services and settings should be classified as education or as childcare. One speaker said that children with disabilities, including those with autism, needed two years of pre-school education. The setting should be classified as an education rather than a childcare one and the focus should be on early childhood education, and not childcare.

Another speaker, said learning took place through play and its importance should be recognised. Children needed interaction. In her project, all activities took place outside but they got through the curriculum.

Childcare Support Bill

Several points were made about affordability and the level of access to childcare. The cost of childcare was an issue for many, including parents in the 'squeezed middle'.

Speakers raised the proposal in the Childcare Support Bill to cap supports under the Affordable Childcare Scheme to 15 hours per week for children whose parents were not in training, work or education. It was felt that this move would serve to marginalise those children further but would not break the cycle of poverty[24].

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[24]The normal pattern for the free pre-school year is three hours a day, five days a week over the school years. (www.citizensinformation.ie)

One speaker said ESRI research had shown that beyond a certain number of hours a week, there could be a negative effect on a child from being in childcare but for children on lower socio-economic levels or some children of single parents, it actually helped them[25].

Childcare Workers

A point had been made about a possible link between better training for childcare staff and the affordability of services. However, one speaker said, the fact that primary teachers were better trained had never been discussed in terms of affordability for parents. A second speaker said that many childcare workers were on less than the minimum wage and should be treated, and paid, as teachers.

June Tinsley said 98 per cent of childcare workers were women and almost all were low paid. Because women were doing the care work, it was not valued by society. The average wage in childcare was €11.93 per hour. Policies should be more responsive towards social inclusion.

Mr Waters responded by saying that childcare workers should have the same security as primary teachers. However, one should not 'schoolify' early years but should move to a more vocational image of care. He cautioned against losing the value of care.

The DCYA recognised the importance of training for staff and the need to make sufficient funding available to support this. It had increased the capitation grant to service providers and paid them €10.50 per child per week to allow people with higher qualifications to be hired.

On the proposed 15-hour cap for certain children in the Affordable Childcare Scheme, Mr Waters said that a lot had still to be determined in relation to this provision.

Under the provisions of the Bill five sponsor agencies could override the 15-hour cap, for example, a social worker could decide that a family needed an intervention and a child needed childcare support and could reverse the cap.

The legislation allowed the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs to determine what constituted work or education.

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[25] https://www.esri.ie/publications/childcare-early-education-and-socio-emotional-outcomes-at-age-5-evidence-from-the-growing-up-in-ireland-study/

For someone on a zero-hour contract, the minister could decide that one hour of work was work and that could open up childcare. Some people might be eligible for early childcare support even if they had not started work, for example, in the time between getting a job and actually starting.

The cap would not be a 'binary guillotine' for people who might not have the capacity to work, for example, someone who had had an accident, or in the case of prison. Apart from the five sponsor agencies, the Department's intention would be to define the law in a way to catch as many people as possible as opposed to exclusion.

While they could not say how the Childcare Support Bill would go through the Oireachtas, they had been overwhelmed by the level of cross-party support. The Bill had already gone through the Dáil and Seanad and was now to be considered back in the Dáil.

In relation to the second question of opportunities for target groups to get involved in the creation and delivery of policy, Mr Waters said the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs wanted to strengthen parents' voices.

The Childcare Support Bill would provide for online support for parents, working groups and workshops on transitioning from childcare to school.

Workshop 5: Community work at local level: its contribution to understanding and responding to poverty and social exclusion

Background

The workshop began with a presentation by David Dalton, Department of Rural and Community Development on the national policy landscape. Ann Irwin, joint national co-ordinator of Community Work Ireland, then gave a presentation on community work at local level. Hugh Frazer, European Social Policy Network and Maynooth University facilitated the discussions.

David Dalton said there had been very significant cultural changes in recent years, with two programmes, the Community Development Programme and the Local Development Programme, coming together, along with changes to funding. Following this period of significant change, now is the time to take stock of how these changes have affected the focus of what can be achieved

There were different perspectives on these changes:

- From a statutory perspective the process had involved rationalising, streamlining and giving greater coherence

- From the viewpoint of the community sector, the process was seen as having a lack of focus on community work and no recognition of the role of community work in tackling disadvantage.

Mr. Dalton referred to the national policy document, 'Our Communities, the National Framework Policy on Local and Community Development'[26], which had been published at the end of 2015. The Framework Policy was an overarching, high-level vision for the State's engagement with the local development and community development sectors.

In November 2016, the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government had hosted a National Forum on Local and Community Development in Ireland. The forum had set out the key issues and priorities that forum participants had felt needed to be addressed, as well as actions they had proposed to tackle them.

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[26] Department of Rural and Community Development 2015. *Our Communities: A Framework Policy for Local and Community Development in Ireland.* https://drcd.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/our_communities_-_national_forum_november_2016_-_summary_report.pdf

Mr Dalton said that recent programme and policy developments were bringing a renewed focus on community development. In terms of implementing the framework policy, a clear signal of the Department's intent could be seen by the establishment of the Cross-Sectoral Working Group to develop the Implementation Plan. This work was being carried out based on an agreed set of values.

He stressed the importance of collaboration and partnership working, saying that no one sector could do it alone. The delivery of solutions was more likely to be effective when all sectors worked in partnership to address key challenges.

Ann Irwin then spoke about community work in Ireland. Community Work Ireland had always believed in and worked to promote the right of people and communities that were marginalised to have a say in decisions, policies and programmes that affected them.

Ms Irwin defined community work as a developmental activity made up of both a task and a process. The task was social change to achieve equality, social justice and human rights. The process meant using the principles of participation, empowerment and collective decision making in a structured and co-ordinated way.

Ms Irwin said the reasons why community work was needed at a local level were:

- Better and more effective policies, better programmes, better outcomes

- It built strong and resilient communities

- It created the conditions where agencies (including local authorities government departments and others) could engage meaningfully and directly with communities

- It was cost effective

- It built social cohesion, a sense of belonging, sense of shared ownership and responsibility to others.

Ms Irwin spoke about the Consultation Principles and Guidelines issued by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform[27].

- They committed to greater citizen consultation and involvement to strengthen democracy and improve public services, in the belief that this was essential to the functioning of government institutions and economic growth.

- Meaningful participation increased the legitimacy of public decision-making, improved people's knowledge and awareness of complex policy challenges, helped decision-makers to make better decisions and could lead to better-quality delivery of services.

Ms Irwin said that the cumulative effect of the cuts in spending and rationalization had been clearly outlined in the report by Brian Harvey on behalf of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions[28]. There had been movement from a process whereby communities identified their own needs to a tendered-out process, the report found. Ms Irwin referred to *The All-Ireland Standards for Community Work*[29] published by Community Work Ireland on behalf of the All-Ireland Endorsement Body for Community Work Education and Training (AIEB).

Ms Irwin concluded by noting that some very positive work had been taking place in the Cross-Sectoral Working Group**.** Community Work Ireland in this space would continue to look for the following:

- Recognition and respect for the contribution community work made to addressing poverty, social exclusion and inequality

- A programme to support independent community work

- A programme of continuous professional development for community workers

- Training for those charged with monitoring community work programmes or programmes with a community work element.

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[27] https://www.per.gov.ie/en/consultation-guidelines/

[28] Irish Congress of Trade Unions 2012. *Downsizing the Community Sector: Changes in employment and services in the voluntary and community sector in Ireland, 2008-2012*. Dublin: ICTU. https://www.ictu.ie/download/pdf/downsizingcommunitysector.pdf

[29] Community Work Ireland 2016. *All Ireland Standards for Community Work.* CWI. http://www.communityworkireland.ie/all-ireland-standards-for-community-work/

<u>Discussion</u>

Dealing firstly with the main issues in community work for people affected by poverty, people stressed the important work of community organisations in terms of capacity building and community development. Cuts to the community sector had badly affected services and supports to people on the ground and led to a loss of community infrastructure at a local level.

While national strategies and frameworks were essential, responses also should develop a capacity to provide tailored services that responded to people's needs and circumstances at a local level.

Programmes were rolled out without reference to a rural/urban divide. National programmes needed to take account of the fact that there were different requirements in rural and urban areas.

Speakers stressed the need for an integrated, cross-departmental response to implement what was already there in the light of the question, 'how does it all come together for people wanting to access services at a local level?'

Community Work

It was noted that there was a lack of respect for and trust of community work as a profession. Community workers knew the issues and what was happening on the ground.

Independent community work was informed by the needs of the communities on the ground and responded to needs identified by local communities. There should be more support for such work.

The example was cited of the SAOL Project's work in relation to Hepatitis C. It was a proactive, community-based, peer-led approach with very successful outcomes. However, this project struggled to get its work acknowledged while private sector addiction models were treated differently and with more respect.

The point was made that the cohesion and alignment processes at local level had left many communities feeling disempowered and the community sector decimated. Thus, investing in rebuilding local community infrastructure was essential and community work needed to be valued and treated like a proper practice.

One speaker said that in recent years there had been too much subservience to local authorities. There was also a concern that the Public Participation Networks were seen as 'the only show in town'. The need for training on the value and importance of community work was stressed for those taking part in the various monitoring structures at a local level.

Regulation

Speakers also raised the demands of regulation and compliance requirements. While they recognised the need for accountability 'feeding the bureaucracy' took up time and meant that workers had less time to do the actual work. Participants felt there were too many meetings of various committees to attend, all of which meant there was less time being spent dealing with the actual issues being experienced by communities. There had to be some realism in terms of what could actually be given in the form of documentation on an ongoing basis.

It was felt also that there was too much emphasis on numbers as an output. A stronger emphasis on dignity and respect was needed.

<u>Funding</u>

Speakers raised the need for sustainable, multi-annual funding, saying that some really good, local initiatives had ceased due to time-limited funding. In addition, the short-term nature of funding delivery meant that nothing could be planned in advance as it was impossible to know if a project would be funded the following year, whereas this would not happen with other sectors, such as teachers.

Concern was expressed also that social inclusion services were being privatised. Experience from similar practice in the UK and Australia had shown that the result was a destruction of community-based infrastructure.

Competitive tendering was not an appropriate way of funding community development as, among other things, it tended to lead to large-scale winners at the expense of small, local initiatives.

<u>Traveller Issues</u>

There was a lot of discussion on discrimination and related issues that members of the Traveller community faced. Speakers said there was a need for a specific approach to dealing with Traveller issues and that Travellers were the most marginalised group in Irish society.

Travellers were invisible and not heard. Overall, there was a lack of empathy and respect in terms of Travellers getting access to services.

Local authorities did not want to engage with Traveller organisations. The Horse Project in Offaly, part of the Offaly Traveller Movement integrated men's health plan was given as an example. The project had been launched in 2011 and had had a number of successful outcomes but the Horse Project was still waiting for some land to be designated by Offaly County Council.

There was a consistent lack of delivery of Traveller accommodation by specific local authorities. Allocations were being returned to the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government annually and no one was being held accountable. No group housing schemes or halting sites were being built and the Caravan Grant was gone. People said that if local authorities could not deliver, the responsibility should be taken from them.

The recognition of Traveller ethnicity had been a huge step for Travellers. However, it had not translated across all areas of society, including legislation. An example was given of the Trespass Law, which appeared to be used exclusively against Travellers.

Issues of Traveller health were also discussed. Travellers had a lower life expectancy compared to the national average and Travellers infants suffered a higher mortality rate compared to the settled population. However, Traveller primary health care workers were down to 12-hour contracts and this issue had been raised consistently over a number of years.

Community Employment

Community employment was being used by the State as a form of cheap labour and participants asked how it could become sustainable employment. Community employment was valuable work and a scheme like this was needed in terms of delivering vital services at local level. A value should be put on this type of job.

Speakers urged a move away from short-term programmes to recognition that CE schemes were delivering essential services and that those services should be provided on a secure, long-term basis and towards creating sustainable jobs.

The Meals on Wheels service was said to be having the same difficulty of being an essential service but with no commitment to forward planning.

Children

A lack of services for children, particularly those with disabilities, was also raised. There were long waiting lists for children with special needs to be assessed. More focus on ensuring access of children and teenagers with disabilities to local community services and more support for children with complex disabilities were needed.

The difficulties that many migrants had in accessing services and the problem of hidden homelessness, with families living in overcrowded situations, and the negative impact this had on mental health, were also raised.

4.1 Main policy pointers of workshop discussions

At the close of discussions, people in each workshop summed up the most important points they wished to make. The conference rapporteur reported these key points to the full conference during the afternoon session. They were as follows:

How to Use the Public Sector Duty (PSD)

- The PSD offers a strong opportunity if it were applied across all public bodies. It is proactive in its application.

- The PSD should be a fundamental mechanism in the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion process and plan, to develop and embed a culture of respect for human rights and equality in the delivery of services from bottom up to top down.

- The PSD should be used to build a better approach to communicating with diverse groups of people at both service user and staff levels. This should include feedback. Training in human rights and equality should be provided at all levels.

- Implementation of the PSD should be a condition for any group to receive public funds for service delivery, as part of any procurement process.

- There is a need to gather ethnic equality data across all services, in a human rights-compliant manner, in order to meaningfully implement the PSD and measure progress.

- The ability to enforce the PSD needs to be backed up by powers of investigation and the use of sanctions for non-compliance.

Strengthening the Voice of the Social Inclusion Forum

- It should be the role of the Forum to create a vision for the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion, to enable everybody's voice is heard and to hold government to account for progress made on reducing poverty and social exclusion. To do this, the Forum needs to be independent and robust, which is not the case at present.

- People on the ground often put a lot of effort into taking part in consultations or with the Forum but seldom can see how their input has been acted on or made a difference to their community. They can lose heart with the process. They see it as being at the lower end of consultation rather than operating as an equal partnership. The solution lies in better and more regular feedback from the DEASP that tells people what has happened over the year, what changes or actions have taken place. In that way they will understand the process.

- People on the ground tend to see policies as 'wish lists' rather than actions. They want to see resources made available that will enable action to take place.

- The effects of social exclusion can be a 'source of shame' for people. A way of addressing that would be to see more communication in the lead-up to the Social Inclusion Forum that links national policy and actions on poverty with local initiatives.

- As well as people with a disability, certain other people, such as the homeless, may need advocates to enable them to take part in the Forum and in consultations where they can voice their needs.

- It is important to look out for people whose needs are not identified in the standard research studies, such as those facing the combined effect of income poverty and rural isolation, or undocumented migrants. Ask who or what is 'not there' when collecting data. The Forum must identify and reach out to groups who are not yet identified as excluded.

Equality Proofing Public Expenditure

- There is a specific issue for older people, when cuts to pensions or services such as free television licences combine with extra costs like the Property Tax and refuse charges to push people into poverty. The reinstatement of services/allowances and the introduction of a waiver for charges were recommended as a way to help alleviate poverty among older people.

- People with a disability, Traveller and Roma and young people in those communities are all affected by a number of shared problems. These include obstacles to getting jobs or an education. One effect of this exclusion is high suicide rates among all groups but especially for young Travellers. This needs to be addressed. One approach would be to set up job quotas for Travellers, Roma and people with a disability.

- There needs to be consideration of smaller datasets and not measure only what is easy to measure.

- Budget proofing should be extended to proofing for social inequality.

- An Equality Budgeting Steering Group is to be established. Transparency will be needed on the work of the group with information provided that will allow people to get involved in the equality-proofing process. To allow this, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform should use some of the processes that were used in the past for engaging people, such as the Community Platform and the Community and Voluntary Pillar. Equality proofing could be very effective if it is used to prevent or undo the worst effects of public expenditure decisions.

Childcare Policies

- There is a need for greater investment in the early years sector. It would help to improve the quality of care by supporting training and professional standards among staff. Staff in the early years sector should be treated the same as teachers but keeping the emphasis on the developmental nature of early years education.

- Investment in the early years sector is strongly favoured over giving tax cuts.

- In relation to the Affordable Childcare Scheme, the cap in the Childcare Support Bill of 15 hours care for children whose parents are not in training, work or education should be removed. Such a cap will only marginalise these children further but will do nothing to break the poverty cycle.

- A public awareness campaign is needed to inform the public, parents and politicians of the value and importance of a child's early development. Parents play a crucial role in this and need to be supported.

- Children with disabilities need supports. Those aged from six months to two and a half years cannot avail of AIM so parents can feel unsupported[30]. Facilities are often not accessible, especially to children with a disability.

<u>Community Work At Local Level</u>

- This group set down as its priorities the need to recognise community work as a profession, place a trust in it as an essential process and invest in it properly, recognizing and resourcing community development.

- Travellers are a particularly marginalised group in an Irish context and experience a lot of discrimination, poor access to services, inadequate housing and lack of basic facilities. Nothing to date has worked, commitments are often not delivered on and too often money allocated for supporting Travellers is not spent. There is no accountability or sanction for failure to deliver. A specific focus on meeting Traveller needs is required, which should be informed by a community development approach. All county councils should engage with and trust Traveller organisations.

- A lack of coherence and integration of services are a key challenge. A lot of work is being done at local level but from the viewpoint of service users it is very fragmented with poor co-ordination between services and service users. There should be better co-ordination between services in terms of meeting the needs of people and local communities.

- Local community infrastructure has been decimated. Cuts and changes in funding structures for community development have made the funding system more remote and less flexible with excessive requirements for accountability. At the same time, some funding is short term. There is a need for funding that is both more flexible and, when needed, will continue over a longer time.

- Better services for children, especially those with disabilities, are needed. Children with disabilities need supports to help them integrate into local community activities.

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[30] Children are eligible for the ECCE scheme between the ages of three and five and a half years. From September 2018 the starting age will be two years and eight months http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/pre_school_education_and_childcare/early_childhood_care_and_education_scheme.html

Section 05

Section 5

5 Translating the High-Level United Nations Sustainable Development Goals into reality in 2018 Ireland

This session and the resulting discussion were facilitated by Camille Loftus, consultant, researcher and lecturer on social policy. It began with a presentation on the UN High-Level Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by Leslie Carberry, of the Sustainable Development Unit in the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, which is responsible for Ireland's response on the UN SDGs. This was followed by Rachel Collier, co-founder of Young Social Innovators (YSI), who outlined how the SDGs were being put into effect through the work of the YSI.

5.1 Presentation Leslie Carberry, Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment

Leslie Carberry started by asking for a show of hands from those who knew what the UN SDGs were. The response, he said, was 'better than most'.

Mr Carberry explained that the SDGs were a UN programme of goals to achieve a sustainable future by 2030. He outlined what Ireland was doing on SDGs and how they related to the issues being discussed at the Social Inclusion Forum.

Ireland had adopted a whole-of-government approach on the basis that no one department could achieve all the goals on its own. Individual ministers were given specific responsibility for different parts of the SDGs. The Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (DCCAE) was responsible for co-ordinating the efforts on the SDGs and worked closely with other departments, including the DEASP.

When DCCAE had launched the Irish implementation plan, they had mapped all of Ireland's existing national policies and how they had related to SDG targets.

SDG 1, No Poverty, which was about alleviating poverty, was the goal that had the greatest relevance to the day's discussions. There was an international focus on ending extreme poverty around the world, where people lived on $1.25 per day. However, it was equally relevant to developed countries like Ireland because one of the targets was to reduce poverty, as defined in each country, by at least half.

'This demonstrates that it is a global agenda but it is nationally relevant'.

He then looked at some of the other top goals and their targets: No 2 was to End Hunger; No 3, Good Health and Well-being, was about access to health; No 4 was Quality Education, which in Ireland related to the DEIS schools programme. Goal No 10, Reduce Inequalities, in Ireland was for social inclusion and marginalised groups as well as the LGBT agenda.

His department's role was to coordinate the development of a national implementation plan that would put all these policies into an implementation framework for the next two years. This included explaining to people their relevance for Ireland and working with local communities in implementing the goals.

The first milestone for Ireland would be in July [2018] [31]when Ireland would present its first progress report to the UN national progress review.

Sections of that document would concern Goal 1, in which the focus would be on international aid because poverty eradication was a long-term aim of Irish Aid but they would be talking about social inclusion and poverty in Ireland as well. For that reason, he would be very interested in hearing what people had to say today.

5.2 Presentation Rachel Collier, Young Social Innovators (YSI) Ireland

Rachel Collier, CEO and joint founder of the Young Social Innovators programme, said YSI was translating the UN SDGs into reality in communities in Ireland. People under 18 years made up about 23 per cent of the population so any strategy for SDGs had to reach this part of the population.

Young Social Innovators promoted civic engagement of young people through social innovation in order to build a fairer, more inclusive and equal society.

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[31] See: Ireland: Voluntary National Review 2018: Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda to the UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.
https://www.dccae.gov.ie/documents/Ireland%20Voluntary%20National%20Review%202018.pdf

They defined social innovation as using creativity to find solutions to problems around them and to present the solutions.

It had promoted youth-led innovation in Ireland for 15 years. Working with teenagers, it was very practical. It was inclusive, for everyone and not just the few.

She welcomed the launch of the SDG implementation plan, which recognised the importance of public awareness. Participation was an important strand, giving stakeholders meaningful ways of achieving the SDGs, with follow-up and review of progress and opportunities to further develop the national implementation framework. It encouraged communities to make their own contribution and supported the alignment of policies and initiatives across government towards meeting the SDGs at home and abroad.

Education was important in all of this and would empower students throughout their lives to become active informed citizens who take action for a more sustainable future. Young people had a huge part to play.

Ireland needed skills, emotional intelligence and analytical skills. The education system was designed in the early nineteenth century to produce industrial workers but it needed much more than that now. It was tied to the economy but it needs education to bring us closer to creativity, to reaching our potential.

There is a need to emphasise our connectivity and the humanity in all of us and to find better ways to get young people involved. This was a massive opportunity to give them a more humanitarian world view where they saw there were things more important than themselves and their own communities.

Policies that make this happen are really important. How do we do it? Ireland is ahead in many ways because of the Young Social Innovators and Global Schools[32] programmes.

Ms Collier went on to say that she had set up YSI jointly with Sr. Stanislaus Kennedy. They challenge young people to take up issues that are important to them, to explore them, find out what is needed, come up with solutions and put them in place.

This was supported by a whole system of teachers, training, regional events and a national event that recognised student achievement. You had to build a system around something like this.

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[32] Irish Aid's WorldWise Global Schools is Ireland's national Development Education programme for post-primary schools. http://www.worldwiseschools.ie/about/

When young people get involved in YSI they had to identify issues that concerned them and they nearly all identified global goals around the SDGs. They are asked how these align with the SDGs and to go further and look at it in a wider sense, not just in their own schools and communities.

Projects

Ms Collier then presented some sample YSI projects from around the country.

Donegal FREE (For Refugees Entering Eire)

- Donegal has a large refugee population and students picked this subject because they were really concerned about them. They created welcome packs for Syrian families arriving in Donegal, brought in speakers to give them information, organised tours of Donegal and developed a game, which they translated into Arabic.

Sutton Off Grid

- Students decided to free their school from depending on the national energy grid by installing solar panels, having first done a lot of research on energy and contacted Sustainable Energy Ireland. They understand energy and climate change and the school now create energy for the national grid.

Waterford HOME

- This team's school is close to a direct provision centre. The young people wanted to understand the lives of people in direct provision. They found that families had been there for a long time and that they were badly affected by their conditions. They lobbied for earlier rehousing for asylum-seekers and continue to do so. Like Donegal, they developed a game, this one to show the challenges that families faced in direct provision.

Bare Necessities

- These students heard how young girls in countries like India could miss school for up to 140 days a year because they did not have sanitary ware when they had periods. They made packs of sanitary ware from recycled materials for girls in India, learning in the process about conditions for girls and the need for sanitary ware.

Tullamore water conservation

- Young people in Tullamore were concerned about water conservation. They developed a shower head fitted with LED lights that turned green, orange or red

depending on the time spent in the shower. The red light showed after seven minutes when it was time to get out. They are now buying in water conservation products from China and selling them locally.

Mapping Lesotho

- The group in this project used open-source software to link with partners in Lesotho and to map the southern African country. They got hundreds of school pupils around Ireland to map Lesotho – now the best-mapped country in Africa – and linked with students in Lesotho to verify their data.

Up to 14,000 students in Ireland take part in these kinds of projects. Students are often overlooked, they do not have a vote but they have a contribution to make. They are doing great work and coming up with great ideas.

There is a need to give young people the chance to implement the SDGs and come up with the ideas. It is important not just for the sake of the young people but for their communities.

Ms Collier ended by quoting from author David Bornstein[33]:

> "People who solve problems must somehow first arrive at the belief that they can solve problems. This belief does not emerge suddenly. The capacity to cause change grows in an individual over time as small-scale efforts lead gradually to large ones."

5.3 Exercise on translating SDGs into reality

The exercise that followed looked at how the SDGs could be translated into reality in 2018 Ireland. From 11 quality of life indicators used by the ESRI to measure the quality of people's lives and living conditions, people were asked to pick three that they thought should show the greatest improvement during the term of the new National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2018–2021 and to rank them in importance. They could add other issues or priorities to the list if they wished.

5.4 Open-forum discussions

The two presentations were used as triggers to prompt discussion and help draw out people's insights and suggestions. A wide-ranging discussion followed on the fundamental causes and solutions to poverty and social exclusion, and some basic but vital actions that were needed to reduce it.

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[33] David Borstein 2004. *How to Change the World.*

<u>Traveller community</u>

In discussions, the extreme discrimination and exclusion faced by Travellers were voiced. A speaker asked why Travellers were not mentioned as part of the UN SDGs and asked whether YSI included Traveller children. Rachel Collier explained that the students tended to be from second-level schools and Youthreach.

The speaker developed the question further pointing out that a lot of Traveller pupils, often the weaker students, opted out of transition year and even left school at that stage and asked if YSI could reach them.[34]

Turning to the SDGs, this speaker said that Travellers had been recognised as an ethnic minority but the level of discrimination was such that it meant nothing to them unless they were named in [anti-poverty and social inclusion] policy.

In the times when they had travelled the roads, they had freedom but today they had nowhere to go, no houses to go into. Although settled people could access camping areas anywhere, Travellers could not. The trespass laws, which Travellers had no say in, hung over them.

Health levels, including mental health, were very serious in the Traveller community. Traveller organisations looking for money to work for their community had to account down to the last detail. She wondered why Travellers were not a priority.

Other speakers described the problems Travellers faced, especially in finding jobs. Eighty-four per cent were unemployed and this lack of work was underpinned by racism and an assumption that they were not looking for work. Vast numbers of Travellers were looking for work.

Traveller accommodation was very poor and not getting any better. Travellers were left homeless because they could not have their own caravan or live on the side of the road, yet there were no sites and no accommodation for them.

Another speaker pointed out that services had no impact on Traveller or Roma people who had no Personal Public Service (PPS) number and could not claim their [social protection payment] increases.

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[34] https://www.youngsocialinnovators.ie/programmes-initiatives/social-innovation-action-programme-junior/ is a new programme aimed at those in the Junior Cycle so this would allow for contact at an earlier age.

The lack of a PPS number applied also to homeless people. When people did get their increase, they often were told their rent was going up. Another speaker noted there were problems with moneylenders and community grants were all gone.

Referring to the strategy of reducing poverty by taking people out of unemployment, it was suggested that someone who might be third-generation unemployed or a Traveller would need resources to help them in this situation.

Sustainable Development Goals and National Action Plan for Social Inclusion

A number of speakers noted that, while the SDG poverty goal was relevant, it would have been better to discuss how to incorporate some of the elements raised during the morning workshops into the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion itself, such as community work, strengthening the voice of the people and other collective work.

Some factors that were important to the plan were not included in the SDGs or the quality of life indicators used in the questionnaire. Some of these factors named were lack of a voice, of a say in decision making, lack of power, the need for fundamentals like housing, employment and education, recognition of diversity and redistribution of resources.

Several speakers raised the issue of housing and homelessness. One speaker noted social housing that catered for the need of older people, with appropriate bathrooms and handrails, was needed. Another speaker highlighted the failure of local authorities to follow up when tenants requested small repairs to their house.

<u>Mental Distress</u>

Paul Uzell, of All Together in Dignity, said that for people who were homeless, in income poverty or dealing with drug use, their mental distress was 'off the chart'. If you tackled poverty or homelessness, you would tackle a lot of problems with mental distress.

<u>Poverty</u>

Paul Uzell also said poverty was not just financial; there was a poverty of ideas and leadership. He referred to the difficulties people in the community had in getting funding for their work. If the UN SDGs were to be applied to Irish society, the old way of doing things would have to go.

Another speaker said people who were excluded often were afraid to ask for help or to talk to somebody about it in case they were turned away.

<u>Disability</u>

Participants representing people with a disability spoke of the constant difficulties they faced. Some people had problems with reading and numbers and would need help.

Breda O'Sullivan said we should not define people by their disability but by their ability. This was echoed by Karen Christine Wise, of the National Council for People with Disabilities, who objected to assumptions that all people with a disability were the same or could be 'pigeon-holed into the one box'.

'The government are our employees and they need to hear what we need and what we want is a happy life'.

Damon Matthew Wise Âü, also of the NCPD, said disabled people were working to improve things on the ground but had to do it as volunteers. Because of the regulations, they could not give more than 50 working days a year to advocacy. Although working as volunteers to represent people with disabilities, they were penalised and made to account for the time they gave to it. They no longer had the power to make recommendations and effectively were being side lined.

On a personal level, he spoke of the 'madness' of people being endlessly reviewed several times a year, having to provide documentary evidence that they had not gotten better ('the leg hasn't grown back'). People with disabilities had lost the Back to School scheme and their entitlement to carers for their children had been cut in half.

Other speakers referred to people being cut off the Disability Allowance or being cut down.

Patrick Daly spoke of the difficulties people who were deaf had in dealing with the routine failure to make provision for them, for example, not putting written information on buses or public services that asked people to phone rather than give an email address. He spoke also of the difficulty of getting work.

Lone Parents

Speakers highlighted the difficulties faced by lone parents, including at the cut-off point of seven years for One-Parent Family Payment[35].

One speaker told of how she was unable to return to education because of the need to work to support her child. Returning to full-time education was not possible for lone parents. She would have to pay several thousand a year for a part-time course, plus pay for books, travel and childcare, while supporting her child. Grants for part-time courses were needed. Issues like these had to be considered when dealing with the needs of lone parents.

Breda O'Sullivan also spoke of the problems of parents, especially lone parents, having to work, often on minimum wage, because their payments were reduced or finished when the child reached 15. Requiring lone parents to find employment when a child reached seven years created problems, especially as the child got older and did not want to go to a playgroup or after-school facility.

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[35] Lone parents move from the One Parent Family payment to the Jobseeker's Transition (JST) payment when the child reaches the age of seven. Entitlement to JST ends when the youngest child reaches 14 years and the parent moves onto Jobseekers payment or other appropriate payment depending on their circumstances.

Housing had been put out of reach. Third-level education should be free for all and young people could give a year's service to the country in return.

Immigrants and Migrants

Silvija Eze from Business in the Community spoke of the way immigrants, most of who work on the minimum wage, could not access education courses, either full time or part time. She noted it was really sad they could not access the opportunities they needed. They were not really included.

Investment and Resources

Many speakers stressed the need for investment and resources if there was to be real change. People working on the front line were being asked constantly to fix problems but there was no mention of resources. They needed to know what the budget was. If resources were not available then people would be wasting their time.

Funding methods inhibited groups from working to a long-term vision for the people in their community. Money had to be spent immediately which could lead to difficulty in developing a long-term plan or even hiring staff.

Another speaker raised the need to invest at an earlier stage and to look beyond the present to find new solutions. It was increasingly hard for community groups to test out new, small-scale initiatives on the ground and then to scale up if successful. Funding would be needed to deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals and to invest in testing new initiatives.

Although problems and their solutions were being identified, people kept coming up against barriers. People should be able to access services but services should fit the needs of the individual. A lot of the problem of poverty for lone parents and Travellers would be addressed through access to employment and supports to help them achieve that but it was not happening.

Several urged that the Minister for Finance or representatives of the Department of Finance should attend the Forum to hear about issues and talk about budgets.

Implementation

The time it takes to implement National Action Plan for Social Inclusion policy was discussed. It was pointed out that they were examining goals set up in 2015 and reporting back in 2018.

A speaker from Clare cautioned against a blanket approach to planning services and housing. When dealing with poverty and related issues, there may need to be one plan for the city and one for rural areas. Social housing in rural areas needed to make provision for transport. Using the town of Miltown Malbay as an example, there was no social welfare office, no community welfare officer if there was a need to get assistance and the only transport was one bus that left early in the morning and came back mid-afternoon.

There was a need for two-way communication between government and people who attend these consultations who did not see the results or know what was being done. When people in poverty came together to say what they wanted, there had to be a response from the government.

5.5 Closing remarks

Following these discussions, John McKeon brought proceedings to a close by thanking the Minister and everyone who had taken part for their contributions during the day. There had been a lot of productive discussion and sharing of viewpoints and suggestions.

He thanked everyone who had taken part in the regional workshops leading up to the conference and those who had spoken about their personal experiences as part of the report on the regional workshops. He extended thanks also to European Anti-Poverty Network Ireland and Community Work Ireland for facilitating the regional workshops and reporting the issues which were raised at these workshops back to the Forum.

Mr McKeon thanked all the staff of the Social Inclusion Division, who organised the conference and the staff of the Aviva Stadium Conference Centre whose support had helped in the smooth running of the day.

He finished by saying that a full report of the day's discussions and conclusions would be compiled by the rapporteur. The report will be submitted to the Senior Officials' Group on Social Policy and Public Service Reform and the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy and Public Service Reform and will be placed in the Oireachtas library for the information of members of both Houses of the Oireachtas.

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