

INOUElection 2007 Manifesto



The Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed would like to bring to the attention of all political parties and others standing in the forthcoming election issues of concern to this organisation.

The INOU is a federation of unemployed people, unemployed centres, unemployed groups, community organisations and Trade Unions. The INOU represents and defends the rights and interests of those who want decent employment and cannot obtain it. We also campaign for an acceptable standard of living for unemployed people and their dependants.

Over the past five years the labour force and employment have grown by more than 15%. However, unemployment has also grown. For example, according to the CSO's Quarterly National Household Survey 27,100 people were long-term unemployed in Q4 2006. In the same quarter in 2001 only 21,400 people were long-term unemployed.

In the last five years 122,082 people have been made redundant. A significant element of these redundancies have been manufacturing jobs: a phenomenon that is not unique to Ireland but a common feature across Western economies. However, a more recent and very worrying feature is the redundancies in the more knowledge based type jobs. While job creation remains the envy of many other countries the quality of this employment growth and the reliance on the construction sector raises serious questions about longer-term sustainability.

In this context the INOU looks forward to working with the new Government on the following issues and in particular to ensuring that unemployed people and others distant from the labour market can access a decent job:

New Target to eliminate long-term unemployment

The National Anti-Poverty Strategy in 2002 set a target to eliminate long-term unemployment by 2007: not only has this target not been met but there are now more people long-term unemployed. As a matter of urgency the INOU is calling for the lack of any such target in the recently launched National Action Plan for Social inclusion to be addressed.

Youth Unemployment

Youth unemployment and early school leaving are clearly interlinked issues. The INOU is calling for an employment lead option with a built-in specific education and training element as one potential solution to the worrying levels of youth unemployment and early school leaving.

Rural Unemployment

Regional variations in employment and subsequently unemployment are evident. For example, in the latest National Quarterly Household Survey, unemployment in the Border region was 5.1%, the South-East was 4.8% while the national average was 4.1%. As the National Development Plan noted construction provides 15% of employment in the Border, Midland and West Region. A concerted effort is required to address these regional variations and in particular to ensure that these areas are not severely hit by a downturn in the construction sector.

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Maintain social welfare payments

We welcome the increase in the lowest rate of social welfare to effectively 30% of the gross average industrial earnings. However, given the very significant cost of living increases over the last 5 years, the INOU are calling on the new Government to not only maintain the value of the lowest rate of social welfare payment but to increase it over the next 5 years.

Activation

There will be two systems up and running shortly: the Department of Social and Family Affairs 'Active Case Management' and the FÁS administered 'National Employment Action Plan'. The INOU is calling for these systems to truly place the customer and his or her needs at the centre of their work: which would be in keeping with the official approach to Quality Customer Services.

To this end it is important to put in place appropriate supports, rather than penalties, to ensure people access good training, education and employment opportunities. It is crucial that these supports enable people balance their working and care commitments.

Ensure the progression into work is smooth

The State is working on this issue but a lot more needs to be done to systematically address the poverty traps that prevent people moving from welfare to work. It is particularly important that people making this progression have access to good, timely and accurate information.

Family Income Supplement

Only 40% of those who are entitled to this payment avail of it. The best way to address this is to make this payment automatic. 'How' presents a challenge: one potential way forward could be to link it to the Child Dependent Allowance but the logistics of this would need to be teased out. In the interim to encourage increased take up, parents should be informed automatically on FIS as they are about Child Benefit.

Redundancies

The rise in redundancies has put the issue of unemployment very much back on the agenda. Clearly, Ireland needs to consistently and innovatively re-visit its labour market strategies. From the INOU's point of view these strategies must strive to ensure that people distant from the labour market are supported in accessing decent sustainable employment.

Public Services

Public services are particularly important to address issues associated with social exclusion. The INOU is calling for the provision of adequate resources, improved integrated planning and delivery to bring Irish public services up to the EU standard.

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