

# Building a Just Society



*"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 promote and campaign for policies to achieve full employment for all.*

*We also campaign for an acceptable standard of living for unemployed people and their dependents. The INOU is an anti-sectarian, anti-racist, non-party political organisation which promotes equality of opportunity within society."*

*INOUE Mission Statement*

## INOUE

Irish National Organisation of  
the Unemployed  
Araby House  
8 North Richmond Street  
Dublin 1  
Phone: 01 - 856 0088  
Email: policy@inou.ie

When launching the *Programme for Government*, the Government stated that *"at its core is a simple objective: to make people's lives better in every part of Ireland"*. To achieve this, the Government said that:

- ◆ *"We want a fair society based on a strong economy*
- ◆ *We want thriving communities in urban and rural Ireland*
- ◆ *We want an Ireland that looks after its people from the time they come into the world to the time they leave*
- ◆ *We want an Ireland where everybody is given the opportunity to succeed, where nobody is left behind*
- ◆ *We want people to have the peace of mind that comes from feeling safe and secure in their lives"* (p10)

The ambition expressed in this quote is to be welcomed. The INOU now urges the Government to ensure that Budget 2017 plays its part in securing a better future for people who are unemployed; who are living with a disability; who are parenting alone; who are living in communities that rarely experience economic growth; communities that are living on the margins of Irish society; people who are facing discrimination because, for example, of their age, their ethnicity.

The theme of this year's National Economic Dialogue was *'Growth towards a Just Society'*, to realise such a society, it will be essential for Government to deliver on *"the process of budget and policy proofing as a means of advancing equality, reducing poverty and strengthening economic and social rights. We will also develop a new Integrated Framework for Social Inclusion, which will outline measures to help eliminate any persisting discrimination on grounds of gender, age, family status, marital status, sexual orientation, race, disability, religion or membership of the Traveller Community."* (PfG, p6)

To ensure that this commitment is inclusive of unemployed people it will be important for a new equality ground to be introduced, a ground that is noticeable by its absence, and that is the ground of socio-economic status.

### Budget 2017:

- ◆ **Context**
- ◆ **Adequate Income**
- ◆ **Supportive Activation Programmes**
- ◆ **Supportive Employment Services**
- ◆ **Access to Decent Employment**
- ◆ **Education and Training**
- ◆ **Community Supports**

# Context

According to the latest Quarterly National Household Survey, Quarter 2 2016, there were 2,014,900 people employed in Ireland: the last time this figure was over 2m was in the final quarter of 2008. However, there were 154,700 more people in employment at the height of the Celtic Tiger: 2,169,600 in Q3 2007. In Q2 2016 1,553,000 people were employed full-time and 461,900 were employed part-time: representing 77% and 23% of those in employment. This compares to 82% and 18% of people employed in Q3 2007: when 1,779,400 people were employed full-time and 390,200 were employed part-time. Feedback to the INOU shows an on-going concern about the quality of employment available in local areas. Also at the INOU's Annual Delegate Conference (ADC) in May "A number of delegates highlighted the need for more jobs. Some delegates noted that this issue is even more acute in rural areas. This was an area where delegates remarked that joined-up thinking was necessary across the State Departments and between the State and Employers." "One of the delegates highlighted the direct role for the State in job provision and said that the embargo and moratorium on recruitment to the public service needs to be changed."



In Q2 2016 there were 187,800 people unemployed, of whom 95,900 were unemployed for more than a year. The last time there were less than 100,000 people unemployed for more than a year was in Q3 2009, when there were 80,300 people long-term unemployed. In recent years the Central Statistics Office has published a figure called the *Potential Additional Labour Force (PALF)*, and what this figure captures are people who are not deemed unemployed because they did not answer 'yes' to the job seeking and job availability questions. In Q2 2016 there were 39,200 people described as being part of PALF, a figure that has remained over 30,000 since the crisis hit. Behind these statistics are people who have lost heart trying to find work, a challenge noted at the ADC was "Employers not getting back to people when they apply for jobs". For other people there are logistical difficulties that cannot be sorted out until they start work, yet starting work without resolving these difficulties is problematic. Access to affordable childcare and transport are two such issues, and addressing them can be particularly challenging if the work on offer is short-term, piece-meal or uncertain.



# Adequate Income

In the Programme for Government it notes *“We accept that the economic recovery remains incomplete and fragile. Many people have yet to feel the benefit of the upturn in the economy. Many families are still struggling financially. Many communities - both rural and urban - have inadequate services and infrastructure.”* (p32) At the INOU’s May Annual Delegate Conference the delegates called *“on the Government to significantly increase Jobseeker payments – at a minimum to the rates in early 2009 – including reversing the cuts to younger jobseekers.”* This call was made in recognition of the financial difficulties facing unemployed people, the fact that the poverty rates experienced by unemployed people are considerably higher than the national average.

According to the most recent Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2014, unemployed people’s at risk of poverty rate was 35.9% in comparison to the national figure of 16.3%; their deprivation rate was 53.4% in comparison to a national figure of 29%; and their consistent poverty rate was 22.6% in comparison to a national figure of 8%.

In their report on Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL), the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice (VPSJ) noted *“The data shows that working age households without dependent children are also experiencing income inadequacy when dependent on social welfare”* and that *“The single adult household faces income inadequacy of €63 per week, despite receiving Rent Supplement and the full rate of Jobseekers.”* (p13) Restoring working age social welfare payments to 2009 levels would go some way to addressing these issues and alleviate poverty.

The INOU regards the introduction of age segregation to Jobseekers Allowance payments as discriminatory and strongly believes that on equality grounds they should be reversed. The VPSJ in their work have also noted that *“The cost of an MESL for an unemployed young adult living in the family home is €154 per week, more than 1 ½ times the reduced rate of JSA for adults aged 18 to 24.”* (p14)

The INOU welcomes the Programme for Government’s acknowledgement that *“At the same time, economic repair must be complemented by social repair.”* (p33) To that end and in keeping with a motion to the INOU’s ADC *“The INOU calls on the Government to fully restore the Christmas bonus and to facilitate access to this payment for people who are unemployed for at least 12 months i.e. when they are deemed to be long-term unemployed rather than the current access point of 15 months”*. Unemployed people who do not make the transition from Jobseekers Benefit to Jobseekers Allowance, because of their family or personal circumstances, find themselves without employment supports and services. To alleviate this situation it would be important to restore the duration of Jobseekers Benefit to 12 and 9 months from the current maximum durations of 9 and 6 months depending on the recipient’s PRSI contributions.

In July the Government revised upwards the Rent Supplement and Housing Assistance Payment limits, a commitment made in the Programme for Government. This development was welcome, however the housing crisis remains and many unemployed people and others continue to struggle to acquire and maintain a roof over their heads. It is absolutely critical that Budget 2017 provides sufficient resources to seriously address the social and affordability housing challenge facing Ireland.

## The INOU is calling for Budget 2017 to:

- ◆ Start restoring social welfare rates to 2009 levels with an €8 per week increase.
- ◆ End the inequitable age segregation to Jobseekers Allowance payments by reversing the cuts to younger jobseekers.
- ◆ Fully Restore the Christmas bonus and change the eligibility criteria from 15 to 12 months.
- ◆ Increase the duration on Jobseekers Benefit to 12 and 9 months.
- ◆ Scale up significantly social housing provision to address the level of demand.



# Supportive Activation Programmes

In the Programme for Government it says that *“In recognition of the vital role of schemes such as the Rural Social Scheme, Community Employment Schemes, BTEA and Farm Assist in rural communities and in activating the unemployed, we will ask the Minister for Social Protection to make suitable recommendations to strengthen provision in this area”*. (p104)

The theme of the INOU’s recent Regional Discussion Forums was employment programmes. Amongst the issues raised was the importance of these programmes in facilitating unemployed people’s participation in their community; and the key role these programmes can play in urban disadvantaged communities. It is vitally important that participation on these programmes is by choice and that people can self-refer; that proper supports for participation are put in place; and that people truly experience these programmes as a stepping stone into decent and sustainable employment.

At the INOU Annual Delegate Conference delegates called *“on the Government to deliver an effective and efficient employment and entitlement service to unemployed people regardless of the nature of their payment, including people who are not in receipt of a payment”*. An issue that arose at the Discussion Forums was the lack of access to employment programmes for people who were on Jobseekers Benefit, but who failed to move onto JA, because of their family circumstances. Yet, it was felt that an opportunity to participate on a programme like Community Employment could be beneficial to the unemployed person concerned. To address this issue, the Department could use the Probability of Exit (PEX) mechanism to identify people who would benefit from such an intervention and facilitate earlier access to employment programmes where appropriate. Another issue that has arisen is access to employment programmes for people who are ex-offenders. Before the crisis, access to activation programmes was fairly standard across working age payments, but since the crisis a number of anomalies have arisen. For example, an ex-offender can access CE but not Tús: this needs to be addressed as early access to such a programme could play an important role in supporting an ex-offender re-establish his or her life.

The cost of participation is an issue that is raised regularly, in particular the issue of transport, which is not only an issue in rural areas, but can also arise as an issue for participants in urban areas. To address this issue the INOU is calling on the Government to increase the top-up on employment programmes by €7.50, this coupled with an increase in the underlying social welfare payment would make a big difference to people’s lives and their ability to cope. Unemployed people who are participating on employment programmes and claiming for their partners and children, can find themselves financially no better off as they are over the PRSI threshold €352, which equates to 38.5 hours at the NMW of €9.15 an hour. In the Programme for Government, there is a target to *“Increase the minimum wage to €10.50/hour by 2021”* and to ensure this increase is meaningful, the PRSI threshold will need to be increased as well. As part of that process the Government should raise the PRSI threshold to €376, which would help address both issues.

## The INOU is calling for Budget 2017 to:

- ◆ Ensure employment programmes are a stepping stone to a decent job.
- ◆ Participation on these programmes is by choice and people can self-refer.
- ◆ Increase the top-up payment on employment programmes by €7.50
- ◆ Increase the income limit on which people start to pay PRSI.
- ◆ Facilitate access to employment programmes for all unemployed people, including people in receipt of no payment and ex-offenders.



# Supportive Employment Services

In the Programme for Government it states that *“The New Government will develop our work activation, social protection and further education services to ensure a seamless service for jobseekers. (p39)* Further on in the document it notes that *“The new Partnership Government will develop our social protection services into an active employment service that works with, and helps, jobseekers to return to work. We are determined that nobody will be left behind in the recovery and for this reason the Government needs to be more radical to end the plight of jobless households. In addition to implementing the ‘Pathways to Work’ 5 Year Strategy which aims to help 50,000 Long-Term Unemployed people into jobs, we will publish a dedicated ‘Pathways to Work for Jobless Households’ to support jobless households into employment.” (p40)*

At the INOU’s Annual Delegate Conference delegates called *“for all unemployed people to be treated with respect through the provision of welfare support and employment services and that at its core it seeks to address the needs of the unemployed and avoid unnecessary expenses being incurred when engaging in activity to move away from unemployment”*. Delegates also called *“on the Government to develop a person centred activation process that ensures that the individual is supported to make an informed choice: a process that seeks to enable people to participate but refrains from coercing people into unsuitable activation programmes or unsustainable jobs.”*

It is critically important that Employment Services staff are supported by way of access to continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities, so that they provide constructive employment services to unemployed people and others of working age. Employment services that incorporate good guidance and an ability to match the individual with the most appropriate intervention for them.

Good information provided in a timely and supportive way can make a big difference to people’s lives. For example, awareness of what the INOU calls the ‘fast-track system’ could support an unemployed person to access short-term work, build up their links with the labour market which ultimately could support them to move into sustainable employment. This information is available on [www.welfare.ie](http://www.welfare.ie), but lacking visibility as it’s part of the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ 20 ) on the Jobseekers Allowance page on the Department’s website. Similarly, moving into employment and moving away from a weekly payment to a monthly pay cheque can cause cash flow problems for some unemployed people, particularly those who have no other means, and may impact on their ability to take up employment. Access to a SWA payment, through the ‘payment pending wages’ mechanism could make a big difference to people in this circumstance, and could be a small investment by the Department for a much bigger return. Both of these mechanisms should be promoted by the Department.

In the Central Statistics Office latest *Equality Module*, August 2015, the second highest rate of discrimination was reported by people who are unemployed, 23%. To give unemployed people the full protection of the equality legislation it is essential that the Government add socio-economic status as a ground into Ireland’s equality legislation, and that the DSP incorporates a strong equality and social inclusion focus into its work.

## The INOU is calling for Budget 2017 to:

- ◆ **Build on the Department’s Strategic Objective to “Put the Client at the Centre of Services and Policies”**
- ◆ **Support frontline staff to deliver a person-centred service with good guidance and information on the best options.**
- ◆ **Promote the ‘fast-track system’ and ‘payment pending wages’ supports.**
- ◆ **Incorporate a strong equality and social inclusion focus.**



# Access to Decent Employment

In the *Programme for Government* it states “Specifically, the new Government will:

- ◆ *Target 200,000 extra jobs by 2020, including 135,000 outside of Dublin*
- ◆ *Reduce the unemployment rate to 6%*
- ◆ *Facilitate the return of at least 70,000 emigrants*
- ◆ *Prioritise balanced regional development, which will allow us to aim for an unemployment rate in each county that is within one percent of the State average by 2020” (p35-36)*

While welcoming this ambition, it is critical that targets are also set to ensure that people living in families and communities experiencing structural unemployment, parenting alone, or living with a disability, feel they are being truly included in Ireland’s economic and social development. It is imperative that across all relevant Departments and agencies there is a seamless flow of good information on employment and education and training opportunities, enterprise supports and welfare to work incentives to ensure that unemployed people are able to access available employment opportunities. To ensure better outcomes, it is also critical that employers are supported and encouraged to employ unemployed people and other people distant from the labour market, and that a real effort is made to ensure that people get access to decent and sustainable jobs.

So, where large scale job creation is announced, the INOU calls for the development of an integrated, inter-departmental and inter-agency approach that ensures that the maximum possible number of unemployed people get these jobs. The involvement of and buy in from the enterprise creating these employment opportunities from the outset is critical. Elements of an integrated approach would include early engagement with the company that announced the jobs with a view to gathering information on the nature of the positions to be filled, including clarification on the skills, experience and competencies criteria required to successfully do the jobs and also the recruitment process to be used for filling the positions. This in turn should inform the work of the local employment services and education and training providers with a view to ensuring that unemployed people are supported to access these positions.

It is critical that the welfare to work journey should be as seamless as possible. Information on available and emerging employment opportunities should be provided to unemployed people and others of working age in a pro-active and timely fashion. Such information should be complemented by CV and interview preparation supports; and clarity on the welfare-to-work incentives and in-work supports that could be available to support unemployed people to take-up work.

Ensure that unemployed people on the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance (BTWEA) are given every opportunity to make their business a success, including the extension of the duration of the BTWEA to three years. Such a chance is critical as so many unemployed people using this support are often addressing a lack of employment opportunities in their local labour market, including addressing the issue of ageism. To that end, it is essential that supports for small and medium sized enterprises also provide proper supports for unemployed people who wish to pursue self-employment.

## The INOU is calling for Budget 2017 to support:

- ◆ **A properly resourced integrated, inter-departmental and inter-agency approach that ensures the maximum possible number of unemployed people get access to decent jobs.**
- ◆ **The pro-active and timely provision of good information and practical supports to unemployed people on decent job opportunities.**
- ◆ **The faster achievement of the commitment to increase the National Minimum Wage to €10.50 per hour.**
- ◆ **Extend the duration on Back to Work Enterprise Allowance to three years.**



# Education and Training

The recently published *Action Plan for Education 2016-2019 (APE)* notes that “*Education and training services support people throughout their lives. They play a huge part in developing their mental resilience and personal wellbeing. They equip people with the ability to adapt, to work with others, to think critically and to be creative. They give people the skills and knowledge to fulfil their personal goals.*” (p2)

At the INOU’s Annual Delegate Conference, delegates called “*for the provision of a full range of education and training supports for unemployed people which recognises diversity and specific needs when accessing training and education.*” The Programme for Government states “*We will support an increase in the number of flexible courses and opportunities available; giving people the opportunity to attend courses part time, during evenings, in the summer and at weekends.*” (p93). While this acknowledgment of the importance of flexible provision is welcome, it fails to recognise that for many people who need it, it is often unaffordable. Therefore, it is essential that the costs of participation in lifelong education and training are supported.

The provision of good quality information is critical, so unemployed people can assess their learning opportunities and improve their employment prospects. There is an urgent need for improved integration and transition between the employment services and education and training supports. Integral to this is getting the referrals / matching piece correct; and ensuring all programmes are open to unemployed people.

The proper provision of good quality guidance is also required to assess peoples’ existing skills, identify where there are gaps and how they should be addressed. As part of this development a fully functioning Recognition of Prior Learning system is required, so people’s existing skills and experience are acknowledged, further enhanced and developed. It is welcome that in the *Action Plan for Education 2016-2019 (APE)* under Action 44 there is a commitment to “*Develop a National Policy on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).*”

The INOU is keenly aware that integral to delivering a quality adult education experience for learners and ensuring that resources are used to maxim effect is:

- ◆ A comprehensive recruitment process that strives to match the individual to the appropriate course.
- ◆ Good programme supports including: a built-in induction period; high quality tutors; flexibility to take into account the life circumstances of the adult participants.
- ◆ Post progression supports to support the learner to find paid employment or a suitable further course of study.

Action 45 under the APE will “*ensure FET is meeting the specific needs of unemployed people and other groups impacted by disadvantage.*”

- ◆ *ETBS working closely with Intreo offices under new protocols expanding provision to DSP client groups in line with Pathways to Work 2016-20.*
- ◆ *Conduct research into barriers to participation in FET, with particular emphasis on unemployed people and other disadvantaged group.*
- ◆ *Research findings disseminated to providers to inform the annual service planning process.”*

## The INOU is calling for Budget 2017 to:

- ◆ **Improve local Education & Training access to improve job opportunities.**
- ◆ **Ensure all programmes are open to unemployed people including the 2 year Part-time ICT Conversion course.**
- ◆ **Increase income and service supports to facilitate participation and in particular to cover the costs.**
- ◆ **Improve access to guidance counselling and enhance matching of learners needs with appropriate provision.**



# Community Supports

At the INOU's Annual Delegate Conference, the delegates called *"on the Government to acknowledge the role and contribution of community and voluntary sector organisations at all levels of Irish society and to acknowledge this work through the provision of proper funding supports and the inclusion of the sector in the development and roll-out of social protection and employment policies and services."* To that end the INOU welcomes the commitment in the Programme for Government, and the improved resourcing of the SSNO multi-annual programme: *"to affirm the contribution of the community and voluntary sector to building a more just and prosperous society, and its strong focus on urban and rural regeneration. Community and voluntary organisations provide the human, social and community services in all key areas of our national life. In this work they contribute to the economy as well as create value for Irish society."*

*We will increase funding levels to support the sector, and develop a multi-annual funding model that focuses on quality, effectiveness and efficiency. We will produce a coherent policy framework and develop a strategy to support the community and voluntary sector and encourage a cooperative approach between public bodies and the community and voluntary sector."* (p131)

While also welcoming the commitment in the Programme for Government to ensure *"balanced regional development"*, it will be important to ensure that communities living with structural unemployment in urban areas are not left behind, communities that saw little of the Celtic Tiger. To that end it will be important that the investment envisaged in the Intreo offices; the distribution of good information on available jobs; the strengthening of the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme; the development of new Community Development Schemes; the increased funding for RAPID areas; the recognition and strengthening of activation schemes is inclusive of disadvantaged urban areas.

The INOU would also recommend that local communities are supported to address their local socio-economic needs through the provision of resources to support the development of social enterprises. The role played by initiatives like Community Employment and Tús in the delivery of local public / community services and employment opportunities for unemployed people and others distant from the labour market should be acknowledged. It is essential that the progression outcomes from these programmes for participants to the wider labour market are improved by highlighting the very real skills and work experience acquired through participation in these programmes. It will be equally important to support and resource good quality alternative and community based learning; to ensure the provision of meaningful information on the options that are available, their relevance and usefulness to the learner and his or her needs; to map out clear progression links to other education and training opportunities, and ultimately to a decent job.

## The INOU is calling for Budget 2017 to:

- ◆ Properly support CVS organisations addressing social and economic exclusion.
- ◆ Support local communities to address their local socio-economic needs through the provision of resources to support the development of social enterprises.
- ◆ Support and resource good quality alternative and community based learning.





# Budgeting for a Just Society

## IN SUMMARY THE INOU CALLS ON THE GOVERNMENT TO:

- ◆ Start restoring social welfare rates to 2009 levels with an €8 per week increase.
- ◆ End the inequitable age segregation to Jobseekers Allowance payments by reversing the cuts to younger jobseekers.
- ◆ Fully Restore the Christmas bonus and change the eligibility criteria from 15 to 12 months.
- ◆ Increase the duration on Jobseekers Benefit to 12 and 9 months.
- ◆ Scale up significantly social housing provision to address the level of demand.
- ◆ Ensure employment programmes are a stepping stone to a decent job.
- ◆ Participation on these programmes is by choice and people can self-refer.
- ◆ Increase the top-up payment on employment programmes by €7.50
- ◆ Increase the income limit on which people start to pay PRSI.
- ◆ Facilitate access to employment programmes for all unemployed people, including people in receipt of no payment and ex-offenders.
- ◆ Build on the Department's Strategic Objective to *"Put the Client at the Centre of Services and Policies"*
- ◆ Support frontline staff to deliver a person-centred service with good guidance and information on the best options.
- ◆ Promote the 'fast-track system' and 'payment pending wages' supports.
- ◆ Incorporate a strong equality and social inclusion focus.
- ◆ A properly resourced integrated, inter-departmental and inter-agency approach that ensures the maximum possible number of unemployed people get access to decent jobs.
- ◆ The pro-active and timely provision of good information and practical supports to unemployed people on decent job opportunities.
- ◆ The faster achievement of the commitment to increase the National Minimum Wage to €10.50 per hour.
- ◆ Extend the duration on Back to Work Enterprise Allowance to three years.
- ◆ Improve local E&T access to improve job opportunities.
- ◆ Ensure all programmes are open to unemployed people including the 2 year Part-time ICT Conversion course.
- ◆ Increase income and service supports to facilitate participation and in particular to cover the costs.
- ◆ Improve access to guidance counselling and enhance matching of learners needs with appropriate provision.
- ◆ Properly support CVS organisations addressing social and economic exclusion.
- ◆ Support local communities to address their local socio-economic needs through the provision of resources to support the development of social enterprises.
- ◆ Support and resource good quality alternative and community based learning.



**INOUE Contact: Bríd O'Brien, Head of Policy & Media, [policy@inou.ie](mailto:policy@inou.ie)**