

General Election 2020



INOUE MISSION STATEMENT

“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

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According to the most recent Labour Force Survey, Quarter 3, 2019, 128,000 people were unemployed and the unemployment rate was 5.2%. While 34,900 people were long-term unemployed and the long-term unemployed rate was 1.4%.

Looking at the same quarter before the 2016 General Election, 227,100 people were unemployed and the unemployment rate was 9.9%. While 116,700 people were long-term unemployed and the long-term unemployed rate was 5.1% in Q3 2015.

The improvement in these figures is welcome. However, the fact that the headline figures are moving in the right direction can be cold comfort to people who become unemployed; who remain unemployed; who find it difficult to find a job because of their age, address, ethnicity, family status, disability, and / or skills set.

Finding a job is a job in itself, and like others jobs, most people need support to be able to do it well, in particular to secure a decent job.

It is also important to remember that the unemployment figures only capture people who answered ‘yes’ to two questions: that they were actively seeking work over the previous four weeks; and were available to take up work over the coming two weeks.

There are a variety of reasons why people answer ‘no’ to these questions. They may have lost heart seeking employment as they have had little success to date; have logistical issues to address that they feel will take time to resolve e.g. childcare.

The Central Statistics Office publishes other data that captures a broader, more complete picture, including the Potential Labour Supply Indicators. In Q3, 2019 the broadest of these, PLS4 stood at 17.6%, while in Q3 2015 it was 17.5%.

A lot of work remains to be done to achieve an inclusive and equitable labour market, an issue the incoming Government must address. In the meantime, people must be supported to be able to meet a minimum essential standard of living.

This document covers the themes of:

-  **Adequate Income**
-  **Supportive Employment Services**
-  **Activation Programmes**
-  **Access to Decent Work**
-  **Community Based Organisations**

Adequate Income

In November 2019 the Central Statistics Office published the Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) for 2018. SILC is a household survey that captures information on a range of income and social transfers. Amongst the data produced by SILC are key national poverty indicators including the 'at-risk-of-poverty' rate; the deprivation rate; and the consistent poverty rate.

- ☞ The at-risk-of-poverty rate is defined as *"the share of persons with an equivalised income below a given percentage (usually 60%) of the national median income"*. In 2018 the at-risk-of-poverty threshold increased by 9.2% to €13,505.
- ☞ The deprivation rate is defined as *"Households that are excluded and marginalised from consuming goods and services which are considered the norm for other people in society, due to an inability to afford them"*. The four indicators with the highest percentage of individuals experiencing deprivation were: without heating at some stage in the last year (38.9%); unable to afford a morning, afternoon or evening out in the last fortnight (54.7%); unable to replace any worn out furniture (77.3%); and unable to afford to have family or friends for a drink or meal once a month (61.3%).
- ☞ The consistent poverty rate captures people *"who are defined as being at risk of poverty and experiencing enforced deprivation (experiencing two or more types of deprivation)"*.

In 2018 the national level at-risk-of-poverty rate was 14%; the deprivation rate was 15.1%; and the consistent poverty rate was 5.6%. The picture for unemployed people is very different. In 2018 their at-risk-of-poverty rate was 47.3%; their deprivation rate was 41.6%; and their consistent poverty rate was 27.6%.

As these figures illustrate, key poverty indicators are much higher for unemployed people than the national figures. This was also true for other groups of people in 2018:

- ☞ The consistent poverty rate for people who were 'not at work due to illness or disability' was 21.3%; their deprivation rate was 36.7%; and their 'at-risk-of-poverty' rate was 47.7%.
- ☞ People whose educational attainment is 'primary or below' had a consistent poverty rate of 9.6%; and an at-risk-of-poverty rate of 24.4%; and a deprivation rate of 21.9%.
- ☞ Households where there was no one at work had a consistent poverty rate of 17.8%; a deprivation rate of 28.9%; and an 'at-risk-of-poverty' rate of 38.6%.
- ☞ Households with 1 adult aged <65 had a consistent poverty rate of 13.6%; their 'at-risk-of-poverty' was 34%; and their deprivation rate was 23.9%.
- ☞ Households with 1 adult with children aged under 18 had a consistent poverty rate of 19.2%; an at-risk-of-poverty rate of 33.5%; and a deprivation rate of 42.7%.

In their most recent update of the Minimum Essential Standard of Living, the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice noted that *"Deep income inadequacy is a persistent issue. Certain household types are particularly vulnerable to deep income inadequacy as particular characteristics of these household's need are not adequately covered by the current structures of the social welfare system. Deep income inadequacy is now exclusively found in households which are headed by one adult, i.e. single working-age adult and lone parent households, or in households with older children"*. (p35)

In May 2019, at the INOU's Annual Delegate Conference delegates called *"on the Government to benchmark all social welfare rates at a level which is sufficient to lift people above the poverty line and provide them with a Minimum Essential Standard of Living, and to only consider indexation when these benchmarks have been attained"*. The incoming Government must answer this call.

THE INOU CALLS ON THE INCOMING GOVERNMENT TO:

- ☞ **Benchmark all Social Welfare rates at a level which is sufficient to lift people above the poverty line and provide them with a Minimum Essential Standard of Living.**
- ☞ **End the age segregation still evident in the Jobseeker's Allowance payment.**



Supportive Employment Services

In June 2019, the INOU published *Building a Quality Public Employment Service* which built on the organisation's work of exploring unemployed people's experiences of the Intreo model as delivered by the DEASP; LES; and JobPath providers. In the document we noted the importance of achieving a Public Employment Service "that is open to and available to everyone of working age who wishes to avail of the service including:

- ☞ Unemployed people in receipt of a Jobseeker's payment
- ☞ Unemployed people not in receipt of a Jobseeker's payment
- ☞ People working part-time
- ☞ People who are underemployed
- ☞ People out of work and in receipt of other Social Welfare payments
- ☞ People working in low-paid jobs
- ☞ People looking for a change of career
- ☞ People who are very significantly distanced from the Labour Market" (p2)

It is interesting to note that the European Union's second Country Specific Recommendations to Ireland in 2019 highlighted the need to: "Provide personalised active integration support and facilitate upskilling, in particular for vulnerable groups and people living in households with low work intensity".

Amongst the *Key values and principles* in the INOU report, we noted the importance of:

- ☞ Belief in the potential and capacity of the person
- ☞ Respect and dignity
- ☞ Informed choice
- ☞ Working in partnership with person using the service
- ☞ Working in partnership with other organisations, including education and training providers and a range of community and statutory support agencies
- ☞ Actively promoting equality and social inclusion
- ☞ Enabled by:
 - ☞ Ethos of continuous professional development
 - ☞ Effective recruitment
 - ☞ Good management (p4)

The INOU is keenly aware that important employment services and supports are delivered through the Jobs Clubs, EmployAbility and the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme. In recent consultations on employment services two broad themes emerged: addressing the remaining barriers to work and further incentivising the take-up of work. Amongst the proposals to address these issues were: a pilot initiative; a high support employment service team; increase the level of childcare financial supports and available places; increase the duration from three to five years that people in receipt of Jobseekers payments can retain their medical card after taking-up work; review the current system and change it from an hours-based, rather than days-based system which would incentivise the take-up of part-time work; and ensure the effective roll-out and delivery of Public Sector and Equality Human Rights Duty.

THE INOU CALLS ON THE INCOMING GOVERNMENT TO:

- ☞ **Resource the provision of good career and employment guidance to support unemployed people to make informed choices.**
- ☞ **Address the remaining barriers to work and further incentivise the take-up of work.**
- ☞ **Support people to address the initial costs of taking up employment, in particular the costs of travel and childcare.**
- ☞ **Ensure that individuals and communities most disadvantaged in the labour market are pro-actively provided with tailor made supports to address their issues.**



Activation Programmes

According to the most recent Live Register figures, there were 48,737 people participating in Activation Programmes in November, 2019. Of this number 17,009 people were in education and training programmes, and 31,728 were on employment programmes. Community Employment continued to be the biggest activation programme, with 21,279 participants.

In 2017 a two strand approach was adopted for Community Employment (CE) and placements were categorised into: (i) Social Inclusion - which sought to provide an opportunity for those who are very distant from the labour market to work and deliver services in their local communities; (ii) Job Activation - which sought to provide people who are long term unemployed with employment opportunities and more labour market relevant work experience.

The INOU believes that CE needs to be able to accommodate both the social inclusion and activation strands, and that whether it applies to a particular position or not will depend on the person filling it. To that end a good assessment of the participant's needs, their ambitions, and how these can be addressed and realised is critical. To undertake this work well, CE projects require on-going access to integrated and timely supports, including eligible participants, and good local collaborative working arrangements.

At the INOU's Annual Delegate Conference in May a motion from the INOU's General Branch was passed which sought that *"unemployed people who are in receipt of credits should be able to avail of current and future Community Employment and Employment programme places in local community organisations"*.

Concerns have been raised with the INOU that too many courses are now pitched at a level that some unemployed people, in particular young men, cannot access, as their learning level is at best Level 4. This is now making what were in the past traditional routes into decent employment harder to access e.g. apprenticeships, for learners who found formal education and training off-putting and inaccessible.

Given the relationship between employment and educational status, a visible pathway between accreditation of a wider range of learning provision and an improved labour market outcome is vital, in particular for people more distanced from the labour market.

Addressing skills gaps could make a big difference to people who are unemployed, working in less secure employment, and people who are distanced from the labour market: it could provide them with an opportunity to acquire skills that are deemed marketable and ones that could lead to decent employment.

It will also be important to acknowledge the work of community based education and training that provides key access points to people more distanced from the labour market, provision that often includes a focus on personal or soft skills, which are increasingly valued in the labour market, and seeks to address socio-economic exclusion.

THE INOU CALLS ON THE INCOMING GOVERNMENT TO:

- 👉 **Open up access to employment programmes for unemployed people signing on for credits.**
- 👉 **Ensure that unemployed people's participation in employment programmes is by choice and that they are facilitated to gain good work experience and enhance their skills.**
- 👉 **Resource the provision of good advice and guidance to support unemployed people to access appropriate education and training.**
- 👉 **Acknowledge the cost of participation in education and training and support adult learners to meet these costs to facilitate their participation.**
- 👉 **Properly resource community groups in their work addressing the needs of people very distant from the labour market.**



Access to Decent Work

The International Labour Organisation states that “Decent work involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men”.

The INOU remains concerned that Brexit and the changing nature of work, in particular digitalisation, could have a detrimental effect on people more distant from the labour market, and reduce their capacity to secure and maintain economic independence. It will be critically important to map out the potential impacts and ascertain how best to address these developments so that they do not exacerbate socio-economic exclusion.

There are particular challenges facing people who are distanced from the labour market. In Quarter 1, 2019 the Central Statistics Office (CSO) published their latest data on equality and discrimination. This survey captures the experiences of people who are unemployed as the CSO captures data on people’s Principal Economic Status. People who are unemployed were amongst those reporting the highest rates of discrimination, at 30.2% which is considerably higher than the State figure of 17.7%. Looking for work is included in the heading *Workplace discrimination*, and the group with the highest rate of discrimination were people who are unemployed at 24.6%. The State figure under this heading was 9.4%. At present under Ireland’s equality legislation an unemployed person cannot address this discrimination: this must end, and the next Government must address it properly.

The INOU receives feedback from individual members and affiliates about the difficulties in securing access to a decent job. Amongst the issues raised are:

- ☞ uncertainty of hours;
- ☞ accessible and affordable transport to get to / from work;
- ☞ childcare and other caring costs;
- ☞ skills and experience mismatch with available employment;
- ☞ access to good information; and
- ☞ the particular challenges facing women; people living in / from particular communities; minority groups; people with disability; and older people.

Access to the Living Wage and greater certainty of hours and therefore improved income security would be important developments for any incoming Government to pursue. Some people who experience discrimination in the labour market seek to address their unemployment through self-employment and an important support for them is the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance (BTWEA). According to the latest figures there were 4,192 participants on BTWEA in November, 2019. Currently the scheme runs for two years, but the INOU believes that an additional year should be introduced to support people to make the most of this option, and that the participant should be able to retain 50% of their social welfare payment.

THE INOU CALLS ON THE INCOMING GOVERNMENT TO:

- ☞ **Ensure that decent work is at the heart of all employment and jobs policies.**
- ☞ **Plan for the full impact of Brexit on the labour market and ensure unemployed people and vulnerable workers gain access to a decent job.**
- ☞ **In planning for the increased digitalisation of work, ensure that unemployed people and vulnerable workers are supported to adapt and enhance their job prospects.**
- ☞ **Actively support the roll-out and attainment of the Living Wage.**
- ☞ **Fully support unemployed people seeking to address their unemployment through self-employment.**
- ☞ **Add socio-economic status as a ground into Ireland’s equality legislation.**



Community Based Organisations

Of particular concern to the INOU is the development and maintenance of independent community based organisations and their work with people experiencing social and economic exclusion. The organisation believes that supporting provision incorporating personal and community development is essential, in particular supporting community based providers to maintain and develop their work. Such work also facilitates people of working age to explore the personal, familial and communal challenges facing them, how best to address them, and how to make the most out of the opportunities such learning presents.

The INOU is a member of the Community Platform and over the past year we have worked on election manifestos incorporating three core values: community, participation, and decency. For the INOU, adequate income, supportive employment services and activation programmes are critical for participation, while decent work is an integral part of decency.

The Community Platform defines the value of community as people looking out for each other and having a sense of belonging; communities that are welcoming, inclusive, and nurturing; and building communities that are socially, economically, culturally, and environmentally sustainable.

The value of community should motivate government and national representatives to resource, create, and empower communities where: people are connected to each other and have a sense of place and belonging; difference is valued and incorporated in an inclusive manner; and resilience is fostered alongside a capacity to respond to challenges of environmental sustainability, justice, and social inclusion.

In 2019 the *Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities A five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland 2019-2024*, and the values underpinning it were particularly welcome and they are: active participation; collectivity; social justice; sustainable development; social inclusion; human rights, equality and anti-discrimination; and empowering communities. Community based organisations must be properly resourced to ensure that any such strategy delivers for people who are unemployed, distanced from the labour market, and living with socio-economic exclusion.

The *National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland 2019-2022* was also published in 2019 and it was welcome that noted amongst the “spectrum of social enterprise activity in Ireland” were “‘Deficient Demand’ social enterprises which seek to meet a demand for goods and services within a community where there is insufficient demand for the operation of a regular market due to inherent economic and social disadvantage or low density of population,” (p10).

Later on in the report the Department notes that “Financial supports for social enterprises in Ireland are often provided through labour market activation programmes which provide work placements or training in social enterprises to help unemployed people to improve their employment options. In other cases, grants are provided to social enterprises, for example through the Community Services Programme (CSP), towards the cost of employing staff to enable them to deliver local services. CSP is particularly important for social enterprises operating in the community and voluntary tradition.” (p19) It is also important to note that these programmes play a variety of roles, roles which it will be important to maintain:- an opportunity for participation; an access point to the labour market for many people; and an important resource for many community based organisations.

THE INOU CALLS ON THE INCOMING GOVERNMENT TO:

- ☞ **Resource the development and maintenance of independent community based organisations and their work with people experiencing social and economic exclusion.**
- ☞ **Support the community and voluntary sector, an important entry point for people more distanced from the labour market, to play its part in meeting training needs and providing lifelong learning opportunities.**
- ☞ **Properly support ‘Deficient Demand’ social enterprises.**

