

INOUE Meeting with the Joint Committee on Enterprise, Trade and Employment

SEPTEMBER 2024



INTRODUCTION

The Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (INOU) welcomes the invitation to make a submission to and meet with the Joint Committee on Enterprise, Trade and Employment on the issue of unemployment blackspots. This submission will cover challenges that face people who are unemployed, be they living in areas that would be deemed ‘unemployment blackspots’, face exclusion from / isolation in the labour market because of the community they are from and /or their particular personal or familial circumstances.

“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.” (INOU Mission Statement)

The organisation has over a hundred and ninety affiliated organisations and six hundred individual members. We work at a local and national level on issues affecting unemployed people and others reliant on a social welfare payment. We provide a range of training for people who are unemployed and organisations working with people distanced from the labour market; we provide a welfare rights information service, primarily by telephone, by participating at in-person events; we analyse and discuss with our membership relevant Government policies; undertake advocacy work; and work with a wide range of other organisations on issues of common concern.

CONTEXT

▪ Labour Force Survey Quarter 2 2024

On August 22nd, 2024 the Central Statistics Office (CSO) published the Labour Force Survey (LFS)¹ for the second quarter of 2024, which covers the months April to June. In this quarter 131,200 people were unemployed, an increase of 9,000 people over the year. The unemployment rate in Q2 2024 was 4.6%, an increase of 0.2 percentage point (ppt) over the year. The unemployment rate for women was 4.5%, 0.3 ppt higher than the same quarter in 2023. The unemployment rate for men was 4.6%, the same as Quarter 2, 2023. Women accounted for 46.8% of the unemployed in Q2 2024, 1.5 percentage points higher than in Quarter 2 2023.

The unemployment rate for young people aged 15-24 years was 12%, a decrease of 0.2 percentage points over the year. The unemployment rate for people aged 25-74 years olds was 3.5%, an increase of 0.3 percentage point. Young people accounted for 34% of the unemployed in the second quarter of 2024, two percentage points lower than a year ago.

The number of people deemed long-term unemployed decreased by 14% over the year to 26,900 people. The long-term unemployment rate fell by 0.2 percentage point to 0.9%, the first time this figure has gone under 1%. The CSO notes that, excluding people whose duration was not stated, *“Over a fifth (21.3%) of unemployed persons were in long-term unemployment*

¹ The Labour Force Survey (LFS) is a large-scale, nationwide survey of households in Ireland. It is designed to produce quarterly labour force estimates that include the official measure of employment and unemployment in the state using the International Labour Organisation (ILO) classification.

in Q2 2024 which is down from 27.6% a year earlier”. Women accounted for 38% of the long-term unemployed in Q1 2024, 6 percentage points lower than in Quarter 2 2023.

The Potential Additional Labour Force (PALF) captures people who may not fit into the official definition of unemployment, whereby people have to be actively seeking work for the previous four weeks and available to take up work in the coming two weeks of the survey². In Q2 2024, PALF stood at 122,700, an increase of 22.6% or 22,600 people on Q2 2023. The CSO noted that *“Of those who stated that they wanted to work but were not seeking work or available for work in Q2 2024, 35.2% said this was due to education or training. This compares to 28.7% a year earlier and 23.7% in Q2 2022. Persons not seeking work due to own illness or disability accounted for 28.6% of the total in Q2 2024, down from 32.6% in Q2 2023 and down from 35.4% in Q2 2022.”*

In the Labour Force Survey data is also collected on people’s Principle Economic Status i.e. how people identify themselves, which is the data captured and statistic used in the Census. The following table compares Quarter 2 in 2024 and 2022, the quarter in which Census 2022 was carried out:

Statistic	Principal Economic Status	Sex	ILO Economic Status	Unit	Value Q2 2022	Value Q2 2024
Persons aged 15 years+	Unemployed	Both sexes	All ILO economic status	Thousand	155.5	175.3
Persons aged 15 years+	Unemployed	Both sexes	In employment	Thousand	..	7.4
Persons aged 15 years+	Unemployed	Both sexes	In employment full-time	Thousand	..	..
Persons aged 15 years+	Unemployed	Both sexes	In employment part-time	Thousand	..	..
Persons aged 15 years+	Unemployed	Both sexes	In employment part-time - not underemployed	Thousand	..	..
Persons aged 15 years+	Unemployed	Both sexes	In employment part-time - underemployed	Thousand	..	..
Persons aged 15 years+	Unemployed	Both sexes	Unemployed	Thousand	77.0	83.2
Persons aged 15 years+	Unemployed	Both sexes	Potential additional labour force	Thousand	27.9	36.0
Persons aged 15 years+	Unemployed	Both sexes	Others not in labour force	Thousand	46.2	48.7

Source: QLF23 available at <https://data.cso.ie/#>

² This is the ILO definition of unemployment. ILO stands for the International Labour Organisation.

■ Census 2022

On December 5th, 2023, the Central Statistics Office (CSO) published **Census 2022 Profile 7 - Employment, Occupations and Commuting**.³ Amongst the key findings the CSO noted was that the Unemployment Rate⁴ was 8% in April 2022, five percentage points lower than Census 2016, and eleven percentage points lower than Census 2011.

In Census 2022 information on unemployment comes from how people responded to Question 28: how would they describe their principal status? People were asked to tick one of the replies below:

1. Working for payment or profit
2. Looking for first regular job
3. Short-term unemployed (less than 12 months)
4. Long-term unemployed (12 months or more)
5. Student or pupil
6. Looking after home / family
7. Retired from employment
8. Unable to work due to permanent sickness or disability
9. Other, and here people were also asked to write in their reply

Looking at question two from an age and gender perspective. The unemployment rate for young men was 7.9% and for young women 6.7%. The unemployment rate in the Census is calculated as the number of people unemployed, or looking for their first job, as a proportion of all people in the age group who were either at work, unemployed or looking for their first job. Unsurprisingly, for this question the percentages dropped for older age groups.

The age profile / spread for people who identified themselves as short-term unemployed was different. Again the highest rates were found amongst people aged 15-24 years, 5.3% for men and 4.9% for women. The female unemployment rate was higher amongst the older age groups, for example people aged 55-64 years, the female unemployment rate was 2.7% in comparison to 2.4% for men. The overall short-term unemployment rate was 3%.

The unemployment rate for people who identified as long-term unemployed was higher amongst older people. The age group with the highest long-term unemployment rate were people aged 55-64 years, with a male rate of 6.1% and a female rate of 5.5%. The female long-term unemployment rate was higher than the male rate of people aged 65 years and more: 3.9% in comparison to 2.6%. The overall long-term unemployment rate in was 4%.

Under the heading *Unemployment Rates by Town* the Central Statistics Office (CSO) notes that *“towns with at least 1,500 people, Ballaghaderreen in County Roscommon had the highest unemployment rate at 24%, followed by Lifford in Donegal (22%) and Kilrush in Clare (20%).”*

On the issue of long-term unemployment, the CSO stated that *“Lifford (Donegal) had the highest long-term unemployment rate at 12%, followed by Belturbet (Cavan) and Ballaghaderreen (Roscommon), both at 11%.”* While the *“towns with the highest rate of short-term unemployment were Portumna (Galway), Ballaghaderreen (Roscommon), Lifford and Bundoran (Donegal), all with a rate of 6%.”*

³ Further information on the Census 2022 reports published by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) are [linked here](#).

⁴ The Census unemployment rate is calculated as the number of people unemployed, or looking for their first job, as a proportion of all people aged 15 years and over who were either at work, unemployed or looking for their first job. This is based on the self-declared Principal Economic Status of people completing the Census.

On October 26th, 2023 the Central Statistics Office (CSO) published **Census 2022 Profile 5 - Diversity, Migration, Ethnicity, Irish Travellers & Religion**. Amongst the key findings was that the “number of usually resident Irish Travellers increased by 6% to 32,949. Looking at the overall population, 15% were aged 65 years and over compared with just 5% of Irish Travellers.”

The following table looks at the Principal Economic Status questions for two perspectives: the overall population and Irish Travellers. In 2022, the overall or national unemployment rate was 8%, while the unemployment rate for Travellers it was 61%. As a matter of urgency Ireland must commit to addressing the scale of the socio-economic exclusion Travellers experience.

Principal Economic Status Questions	Everyone	Irish Travellers
Population aged 15 years and over	4,080,771	20,969
1. Working for payment or profit	2,293,738	3,518
2. Looking for first regular job	33,494	1,170
3. Short-term unemployed (less than 12 months)	68,097	805
4. Long-term unemployed (12 months or more)	105,277	3,545
5. Student or pupil	447,261	2,777
6. Looking after home / family	269,984	3,710
7. Retired from employment	648,884	987
8. Unable to work due to permanent sickness or disability	188,561	3,882
9. Other, and here people were also asked to write in their reply	25,475	575

On September 28th, 2023 the Central Statistics Office (CSO) published **Census 2022 Profile 4 - Disability, Health and Carers**. Under the heading *Disability and Everyday Living* the CSO covers a range of issues including *Work, Unemployment and Long-Lasting Conditions and Difficulties*.

The CSO notes that “Some 34% of people aged 15 years and over with a long-lasting condition or difficulty experienced to any extent were at work.” The unemployment rate for this group of people was 13.4% - 14.3% for men and 12.5% for women.

While for “Some 17% of people aged 15 years and over with a long-lasting condition or difficulty experienced to a great extent were at work.” The unemployment rate for this group was 22% - 23.8% for men and 20.1% for women.

And for “Some 44% of people aged 15 years and over with a long-lasting condition or difficulty experienced to some extent were at work.” The unemployment rate for this group was 11.2% - 11.9% for men and 10.5% for women.

▪ Pobal HP Deprivation Index

On November 2nd, 2023 the 2022 [Pobal HP Deprivation Index](#) was launched. The Index uses data from Census 2022, analysing ten measures of an area’s levels of disadvantage. These include educational attainment, employment status and the numbers living in individual households. Almost 19,000 small areas (50-200 households) were indexed leading to the development of a detailed map of the relative affluence and disadvantage.

The definition of deprivation Pobal uses states that: *The fundamental implication of the term deprivation is of an absence – of essential or desirable attributes, possessions and opportunities which are considered no more than the minimum by that society.* (Coombes et al., 1995)

The Index covers three subject matters: demographic vitality; social class composition; and labour market situation. These are derived from data on age dependency; population change; low or high educational attainment; employment / occupational status e.g. professional / managerial; person per room; people parenting alone; people with low skill levels; male or female unemployment.

At the November launch it was noted that:

- *Nationwide there have been improvements in the majority of communities driven by measures such as employment and population growth, which overall has seen Ireland return to 2006 levels.*
- *However, many disadvantaged communities have not seen the same level of improvement, putting them further from the average in relative terms. The number of people living in areas classed as very or extremely disadvantaged has increased from 143,506 individuals to 195,992.*
- *Disadvantaged communities experience significantly higher levels of unemployment and low educational attainment, with higher rates of lone parents evident.*
- *Urban areas contain the highest proportion of both highly disadvantaged and highly affluent areas, while rural areas tend to see less of these extremes.*
- *Disadvantage is disproportionately experienced in small pockets in Dublin city centre, north and west suburbs, on the outskirts of Cork, Waterford and Limerick and in a small number of rural towns.*
- *Relative affluence, as measured by the Index, continues to be seen in South Dublin and in the commuter belts surrounding Dublin, Cork and Galway. New housing developments outside cities are also leading to new areas of affluence being recorded outside of traditional suburban areas.*

EMPLOYMENT AND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT CHARTER

On July 12th, 2021, the Government published Pathways to Work 2021-2025 noting that “*the goal of Pathways to Work 2021-2025 is to ensure that as many of these opportunities as possible are filled by people who are unemployed. This includes all unemployed, those whose jobs were lost due to COVID-19, those already on the Live Register pre-pandemic and those in society that face particular challenges in finding and sustaining employment.*” (p8)

Amongst the eighty-three commitments *Pathways to Work* contained was Commitment 62 which sought the “*Re-launching and promoting the Employer Youth Employment Charter with a target of signing-up 300 employers.*” (p74) In September 2014 the Tánaiste and Social Protection Minister Joan Burton launched the previous document, entitled the *Employment and Youth Activation Charter*.

In preparation for the new Charter, the Department of Social Protection (DSP) asked the INOU to consult with young unemployed people about what they would like to see in such a document, what would be helpful for them to find a good job. In total six focus groups were run. The INOU are grateful to the Connections Programme, Finglas, Dublin; Youth Work

Ireland in Dundalk and Tipperary; SWAN Youth Services, Dublin; and Accenture, Dublin for their support in organising these Focus Groups.

In response to the question *“What commitments would you like Employers to make to help young people access a good job?”* the participants sought the following:

- Give opportunities to young people;
- Applications welcome from young people;
- Applications welcome from young people without experience;
- Will treat young people’s applications fairly and will treat young staff fairly;
- Welcome diversity.

The full report is available on the [INOU’s website](#).

On May 28th, 2024, Minister Heather Humphreys and Minister Peter Burke launched the new Charter, now called the [Employment and Youth Engagement Charter](#). In their press release they noted that the new Charter *“will support new pathways to employment among young people”*; and will call on *“employers to provide work experience opportunities for young people and people from disadvantaged groups”*.

The Charter contains six options including:

- Take advantage of employer incentives and supports which help give jobseekers work experience and offer pathways to employment, including the Work Placement Experience Programme, the JobsPlus Scheme and the Wage Subsidy Scheme;
- Avail of an Intreo briefing to find out how they can support the hiring of Intreo candidates;
- Host an event to offer advice to jobseekers on how to search for a job, write a CV and prepare for interview;
- Offer motivational talks to young jobseekers by sharing your knowledge on how to get job ready, or start a business;
- Develop a mentoring programme to offer guidance and support to jobseekers;
- Help reduce youth unemployment by recruiting young people with the support of Intreo.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

The INOU has called for the significant gap in Ireland’s equality legislation to be addressed, the gap that leaves anyone who has experienced socio-economic discrimination unable to seek redress for experiences that can undermine a person’s confidence and self-worth.

This is a long-standing issue and ask.

For example, in 2004, 2010 and 2014, as part of the Quarterly Household Survey, the Central Statistics Office (CSO) produced an equality module. Amongst the data collected is respondents’ Principal Economic Status - people will identify themselves as at work or unemployed or a student or on home duties or retired or others. In the table *‘Persons who have experienced discrimination classified by employment status and nationality Q3 2014’*, the state wide figure was 12% across the three time periods, but for people who were unemployed the figures were much higher, at 29%, 22% and 23% respectively.

Then in July 2019, as part of the Labour Force Survey, the CSO published an equality and discrimination module. In the table *‘Percentage of persons who experienced discrimination’*

the state wide figure was 17.7%, while the figure for people who were unemployed was 30.2%. The CSO noted that *“Almost one in eight (11.8%) persons experienced discrimination when Accessing services, while nearly one in ten (9.4%) cited Workplace discrimination.”* Again these figures were higher for people who were unemployed, with regard to ‘Workplace discrimination’, unemployed people had the highest percentage: 24.6. While for ‘Accessing Services’, 17.4% of unemployed people reported experiencing discrimination. Five other groups reported a higher percentage for accessing services, including non-white ethnic backgrounds (23.1%); persons who identify as LGBTI+ (19.6%); non-Catholics (19.2%); persons aged 18 to 24 years (19.1%); and persons with a disability (18.3%).

In March, 2024 the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights published their concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Ireland under the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. On the issue of non-discrimination they stated that: *Taking note of the comprehensive review process of the Equality Acts, the Committee remains concerned about the continued absence of comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation in the State party. It is also concerned about the prevalence of socioeconomic, racial and gender inequalities and social stigma and discrimination against disadvantaged and marginalised groups (art. 2 (2)).*

The Committee went on to recommend to Ireland that we:

(a) *Adopt comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation that:*

- (i) *Includes explicit references to all prohibited grounds of discrimination, including socioeconomic status;*
- (ii) *Includes definitions of direct, indirect, intersectional and multiple discrimination;*
- (iii) *Establishes a prohibition against discrimination in both the public and the private spheres;*
- (iv) *Establishes effective judicial and administrative mechanisms against discrimination, including by introducing provisions on reparations in discrimination cases;*

(b) *Take all measures necessary, including targeted special measures, to prevent and combat the persistent discrimination, racism and inequality faced by people of African descent, Traveller and Roma communities, migrants, persons with disabilities, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons, especially in the areas of decent work, social security, health care and services, adequate housing and education;*

(c) *Ensure that all equality strategies, policies and programs to combat discrimination faced by disadvantaged and marginalised individuals and groups are developed in partnership with those individuals and groups and receive sufficient financial, human, and technical resources, including through the effective application of the Public Sector Duty, and that their implementation is regularly monitored and evaluated by ensuring oversight by the relevant social partners;*

(d) *Refer to the Committee’s general comment No. 20 (2009) on non-discrimination in economic, social and cultural rights.*

It is absolutely critical that Ireland finally addresses this gap in our equality legislation, that we do so as a matter of urgency, and give full effect to the ambition contained in Ireland's *Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025*: to make Ireland one of the most socially inclusive States in the EU.

PROMOTING SOCIO-ECONOMIC EQUALITY IN EMPLOYMENT

On May 9th, 2024 the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) hosted a conference on the theme of [*Achieving Equality at Work - Promoting Socio-Economic Equality in Employment*](#).

IHREC noted that the aim of this conference was *“to examine ways to promote socio-economic equality in employment in practice for socio-economically disadvantaged groups”*. And that an *“important way to achieve this is to support employers to take positive actions as part of their commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion to enable these groups to gain employment and progress in the workplace”*.

The INOU participated in one of the morning panels, which focused on *Tackling Socio-Economic Inequality in Employment*. In the presentation we noted that:

- In our work with other CVS organisations, a number of issues arise regularly, including address, accent, how people look, how they dress, the schools they went to, the type of accommodation they live in, whether or not they are employed.
- In keeping with the experiences of people from ethnic minorities, people facing socio-economic discrimination often experience it at both an individual, familial and communal level.
- This in turn impacts on peoples' experiences of a range of services and opportunities including education, health, economic and social services.
- There is a well-established correlation between educational status and employment status.

Two of the learners on the INOU's [*Building Futures*](#) course participated on the panel in the afternoon workshop on *Employment of Long-term Unemployed People - Accessing and Progressing in Decent Work*. This workshop sought:

- *To understand the barriers to employment from the perspective of people with lived experience of long-term-unemployment*
- *To take into account that some long-term unemployed people have multiple barriers to overcome.*
- *To showcase supports and ways and means to overcome those barriers and examples of good practices, including employment support programmes, social enterprise and community benefit clauses in public procurement*
- *To enable participants to leave with the ways and means to practically reach, and support the inclusion of people with disabilities/disabled people to access decent work and thrive in their workplaces.*

Amongst the issues raised at this workshop was the importance of community and adult education in creating opportunities for people who are long-term unemployed, who have faced a range of challenges in their lives to be able to articulate these issues, explore meaningful options, and progress into further / higher education and / or employment opportunities.

In the week of this conference IHREC published a [Policy Statement on Socio-Economic Status as a ground of discrimination under the Equality Acts](#). In the recommendations at the beginning of this report IHREC states that the *“Commission reaffirms its position that Irish equality law should be amended to prohibit discrimination on the basis of socio-economic status.*

The Commission recommends that:

- *an asymmetric approach is applied in defining the new socio-economic status ground.*
- *indicators are included within the definition of the ground.*
- *thorough research, including consultation with minoritised groups, is carried out by the State to determine the most effective indicators.*
- *the provision ‘other than on a temporary basis’ is removed from the definition of socio-economic disadvantage in the 2021 Bill.*
- *the provision ‘socially or geographically identifiable group’ is removed from the definition of socio-economic disadvantage in the 2021 Bill.*
- *further consideration is given to the rationale for the comparisons between persons of different socio-economic status in sections 3, 4 and 8 of the 2021 Bill.”*

The INOU is part of [Add the 10th Alliance](#) which is proposing the following as a potential definition of socio-economic status:

“Socio-economic status means social or economic disadvantage resulting from one or more of the following circumstances:

- a) poverty,*
- b) source of income,*
- c) illiteracy,*
- d) level of education,*
- e) address, type of housing or homelessness,*
- f) employment status,*
- g) social or regional accent, or from any other similar circumstance;”*

SUPPORTIVE EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

At the INOU’s Annual Delegate Conference (ADC) in May, 2024 the organisation called *“on the Government to deliver wrap around employment and sup-port services that really meet the needs of people who are unemployed, regardless of whether or not they are on a social welfare payment, and to support them to access decent work while appropriately addressing any barriers they experience.”*

Employment services was one of the themes of the Roundtable discussions at the ADC and delegates expanded on the issues raised in this motion. The importance of acknowledging progression for the individual was discussed – be that onto an employment, education or training programme, part-time or full-time work or self-employment. One delegate noted that *“Clients should not be threatened with withdrawal of payment when they are exercising their right to take up legitimate options (choosing Tus / CE etc)”*. There were calls to *“refocus employment services”*; *“reinforce that the individual is the core of employment services”*; and *“acknowledge & track all individual achievements”*. Such an approach would be in keeping with the Department of Social Protection’s own mission which *“is to promote active participation and inclusion in society through the provision of income supports, employment services and other services. We value public service, customer focus, engaged staff, innovation and professionalism.”* (DSP Annual Report p13)

There was a call for community based services, accessible and open to all, where people *“should be allowed the time and supported to change career”*. Such an approach would be in keeping with the Future Jobs Ireland 2019 deliverable to *“Enhance the career advice service provided through the Public Employment Service to include offering support to those currently in employment who may need to identify new opportunities as a result of technological and other changes.”* (p57)

In late May the Government published [Pathways to Work, 2021-2025 Updated Strategy \(following the Mid-Term Review\)](#) and in the introduction Minister for Social Protection, Heather Humphries TD noted that *“it is important that we adapt our policies and services to the changing social and economic circumstances –including an aging population, increased levels of inward migration, and the transition from carbon intensive to green production. To address these and other challenges, to encourage even higher levels of labour market participation, particularly by under-represented groups, and to be ready to respond in the event that there is a downturn in economic circumstances, it is important that our public employment and further education and training services are ‘match fit’.”* (p2)

Under Strand 1 of Pathways to Work, *Working for Jobseekers*, there is a commitment to *“Provide, and increase take up of, relevant education and training programmes for jobseekers and people who are unemployed and wish to re-enter the labour force, in the context of changing skills needs (demand led).”* (p8) And on page 10 another commitment to *“Develop and implement a communications plan to promote the services of Intreo, including greater use of digital platforms, gov.ie, engagement with stakeholder groups, and national, local and regional press and radio services.”* It would be important that these communications state clearly that Intreo is open to everyone of working age, and that all service users will be provided with good advice and guidance. It must be remembered that there are people who would identify as being unemployed, but who are not in receipt of a qualifying payment for many of the employment supports and services that are currently available.

Under Strand 4, *Working for All – Leaving No One Behind*, there is a commitment to *“Developing and operating ‘Returner’ programmes to encourage and support people who left the workforce and have been outside of the workforce for some time to take up employment.”* (p17) Such programmes are to be welcomed, but a truly inclusive public employment service open to everyone of working age, supporting the realisation of a more inclusive and equitable labour market is critical, especially as the world of work is fundamentally changing.

In our pre-budget submission the INOU is calling on the Government to:

- Ensure that employment services are person centred and work with people in a supportive and pro-active manner, working with people so that they can avail of the most appropriate option for themselves.
- Pro-actively provide individuals and communities most disadvantaged in the labour market with tailor made supports to address their issues, including high support wrap around services.
- Resource the provision of good career and employment guidance to support unemployed people, regardless of whether or not they are on a payment, to make informed choices.

EMPLOYMENT AND PROGRAMMES

At the INOU’s Annual Delegate Conference one motion called *“on the Government to increase the Community Employment and TUS payment rates to further enable people to take-up these*

positions.” At the conference further calls were made for a travel card to be introduced for participants on these programmes, similar to students cards; and in areas where there is limited transport, introduce a voucher system to support people to participate. Concerns continued to be raised at the lack of a specific training budget for Tús participants, and there was a call for an increase in the training supports on Community Employment. The INOU is aware that there can be underspends on CE training budgets, while it can hard for some participants to access their preferred training options – more expensive, at a higher QQI level, or unaccredited soft skills. To that end it would be important to ensure that the supports available are flexible and can be adapted to address the needs and ambitions of the participants. The INOU welcomed the new pilot for people aged over 50 who are signing on for credits to be able to access Community Employment, and calls on the Government to introduce a similar pilot for Tús.

Another motion at the ADC called *“on the Government to change the system for working part-time and signing-on to one based on the number of hours worked rather than the number of days. The current system is very unfair and is impacting on unemployed people taking up some work opportunities.”* This is a long standing issue for the INOU and has been raised by organisations like the NESC. Part-time work can be a useful route into employment for people trying to manage other issues in their lives: facilitating people to take up these options is important - to support people who may be a distance from the labour market or to support people who may have limited access to transport and / or childcare.

Self-employment can be an important route into a job for people who are unemployed, in particular people who, for example, face exclusion because of their age or ethnicity. Under Pathways to Work Strand 1, *Working for Jobseekers*, there is a commitment to *“Increase funding and places for enterprise start-ups by jobseekers with a target of support for 4,200 jobseekers to start their own business”*. To better support the long-term viability of the enterprises people seek to develop, the INOU is calling on the Government to increase the *Back to Work Enterprise Allowance* from two years to three years – with 100% in year one, 75% in year two, and 50% in year three. The *Back to Work Family Dividend* is also a two year support, extending it by one year would be a welcome development. To that end a full rate QCI would be paid in year one, a half rate in year two, with a quarter rate in year three being introduced.

In our pre-budget submission the INOU is calling on the Government to:

- Facilitate employment programme participants to access their most meaningful learning option.
- Given the cost of participation on employment programmes, support participants to meet them by increasing the additional payment on these programmes by €10.
- Facilitate people signing on for credits to access Community Employment and Tús programmes.
- Support people to address the initial costs of taking up employment by introducing a travel card or a voucher system if people are living in areas with few public transport options.
- To further support participation improve access to affordable and accessible childcare and eldercare.
- Introduce a work-friendly Social Welfare system for Jobseekers based on hours worked rather than days worked. Increase the daily earnings income disregard for JA to €25 per day for both the main claimant and qualified adult equally.

- Extend the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance to three years - pay 50% of the participant's social welfare payment in the third year.
- Extend the Back to Work Family Dividend by one year - a quarter rate QCI in that year.
- Add socio-economic status as a ground in Ireland's equality legislation⁵.

COMMUNITY BASED ORGANISATIONS

Community based organisations are a key access point to the labour market for many people and communities who are furthest from it; important providers of education and training opportunities that support people to address their needs in a holistic manner.

In [Key Proposals to the Social Inclusion Forum 2024](#) report, under the theme of *Community and Community Development* there was a call to “Acknowledge the importance of community spaces and hubs for marginalised communities that create spaces for engagement and interaction and promote social cohesion, and resource their development in areas where they are lacking.” The report also notes that “Community Education, which works from a holistic approach, needs to be more highly valued and adequately funded to make education more accessible, and with jobs available to people from the communities that it serves.” (p6)

The INOU is a member organisation of the Community Platform which has called for the creation of inclusive, resilient, sustainable and empowered communities; for the Government to build on the pilot Community Development Pro-gramme and support the establishment of autonomous community development projects in and with marginalised communities.

At the end of January, 2024 the INOU made a submission to the Department of Community and Rural Development on the preparation of Ireland's second National Social Enterprise Policy. Our submission focused on social enterprise in its role in providing employment opportunities for unemployed people and others who are furthest, excluded from the labour market; and the importance of supporting community led social enterprises, in particular where people are seeking to address the socio-economic exclusion and inequality facing their communities. The role of social enterprises in creating safe spaces for people to participate in, to meet and participate in the local community they now reside in, has since been raised as an important issue.

INOUE affiliates who are involved in social enterprises have noted that they have two roles that can pull against each other: (i) to run a business and keep it going, both socially and economically; and (ii) to offer employment and progression opportunities to people who might not otherwise access them. In particular, people who are long-term unemployed, have a disability, are ex-prisoners, are members of the Traveller and Roma communities, migrants, are living in rural and isolated areas, or are living in urban disadvantaged areas. Securing proper funding to maintain and develop these two roles can be a continuous and time consuming challenge.

The reality is that in many communities given the challenges of marginalisation, disadvantage and / or isolation, there is insufficient income to generate a surplus as the communities / families / people using these services cannot afford the market rate. If they could, the private-for-profit sector would already be meeting their needs. It is essential that as social enterprise policy evolves and clearer funding lines come on stream that sight is not lost of the important work undertaken by community based providers, often operating on limited resources and seeking to address socio-economic exclusion within their own communities. The funding

⁵ Please see pages 6-8 of this submission on this issue

needs of these social enterprises must be acknowledged and addressed, enhanced investment must be made available, and their role as hubs for people to develop their digital skills and capacity in an increasingly technological world supported.

In our pre-budget submission the INOU is calling on the Government to:

- Properly resource community groups in their work identifying and addressing the needs of 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 supporting employment, education and training opportunities.
- Properly support community led social enterprises seeking to address exclusion from the labour market and improve access to affordable supports and services, including digital access and the investment to understand and adapt to the technological changes underway.

Thank you for your time and consideration

Contact:

Bríd O'Brien

INOUE Head of Policy and Media

Email: policy@inou.ie

Website: www.inou.ie