

Renew, Rebuild, Recover



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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At the start of the year no-one envisaged the arrival and impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the health and well-being of people living in Ireland. There was talk of an election; full employment; environmental, health and housing crisis. Then the pandemic struck in late February, the country was in lockdown by late March, and the word ‘normal’ took on a whole new meaning. Now, as the country moves on from a national lockdown, deals with the need for and consequences of local and sectoral lockdowns, there are concerns about the viability of many businesses in a socially distanced world, and the impact this will have on employment / unemployment over the longer term. In the meantime what Brexit will finally look like, the impact of automation and digitalisation on how, where and by whom work will be undertaken raise serious questions. While further waves of the virus and how these will be managed could exacerbate the social, economic and environmental challenges facing the country.

The Government introduced the Pandemic Unemployment Payment and Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme to temper the employment / unemployment crisis the public health response to COVID-19 pandemic created. Initially they were introduced as short-term measures, but as the scale of the crisis became apparent, their duration increased, and changes were made to both schemes. On September 1st the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme was replaced by the Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme.

From mid-March to the end of June the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) was a flat rate payment of €350, which the INOU felt acknowledged the inadequacy of existing Jobseekers’ and working age payments. Then a two-tiered system was introduced, whereby people who earned less than €200 when they were working would receive a PUP of €203, the equivalent of a full main claim on a Jobseeker’s payment, and those who had earned more than €200 would remain on the €350. PUP will now remain open to new applications until the end of the year, but a three-tiered system will apply from September 17th, with no-one receiving more than €300.

Many people will argue that the best route out of poverty is a job. However, this only holds true if people can access a decent job: a job where people know what their weekly income will be, and that this income will support them to house, feed and clothe themselves and their families. Through the INOU’s Welfare Rights Information Service and regional Discussion Forums serious concerns have been raised about the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Ireland’s labour market. In particular, the terms and conditions of employment people are returning to when their former place of work re-opens.

Ireland must address emerging and existing challenges in an equitable and inclusive manner. To that end, the theme of the INOU Pre-Budget 2021 Submission is renew, rebuild, recover.

INOUE 2021 Pre-Budget Submission covers:

- ☞ **Post COVID-19**
- ☞ **Adequate Income**
- ☞ **Supportive Employment Services**
- ☞ **Employment Programmes**
- ☞ **Education & Training**
- ☞ **Access to Decent Work**
- ☞ **Community Based Organisations**



Context

In August the Central Statistics Office (CSO) published the Labour Force Survey (LFS) for the second quarter of 2020, which covers the months April to June. This release includes information using the International Labour Organisation standard methodology, alongside estimated figures capturing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Irish labour market.

According to the standard LFS methodology, 2,222,500 people were employed in this quarter, 77,600 fewer people than in the same quarter in 2019. In Q2 2020, 118,700 people were unemployed, 12,100 fewer people than in Q1 2019. As a consequence, the labour force was lower at 2,341,200, and the participation rate has fallen below 60% to 58.9%. It is worth noting, that during the last crisis the lowest the participation rate went was 61.1% in Quarter 1, 2013.

When the impact of COVID-19 is factored in, the numbers of people employed drops to 1,783,567, and the numbers of people unemployed increases to 531,412. Looking at the rates: the employment rate moves from 65.7% to 52.2%, and the unemployment rate from 5.1% to 23.1%.

In this Labour Force Survey, the CSO have also produced a COVID-19 Adjusted Measure of Employment for July. According to this figure an estimated 1,947,922 people were employed and the adjusted employment rate was 57.2%. Even though this figure is an improvement on the estimated figure for Q2, it is still lower than the lowest the employment rate during the last crisis: 59.6% in Q1 2011.

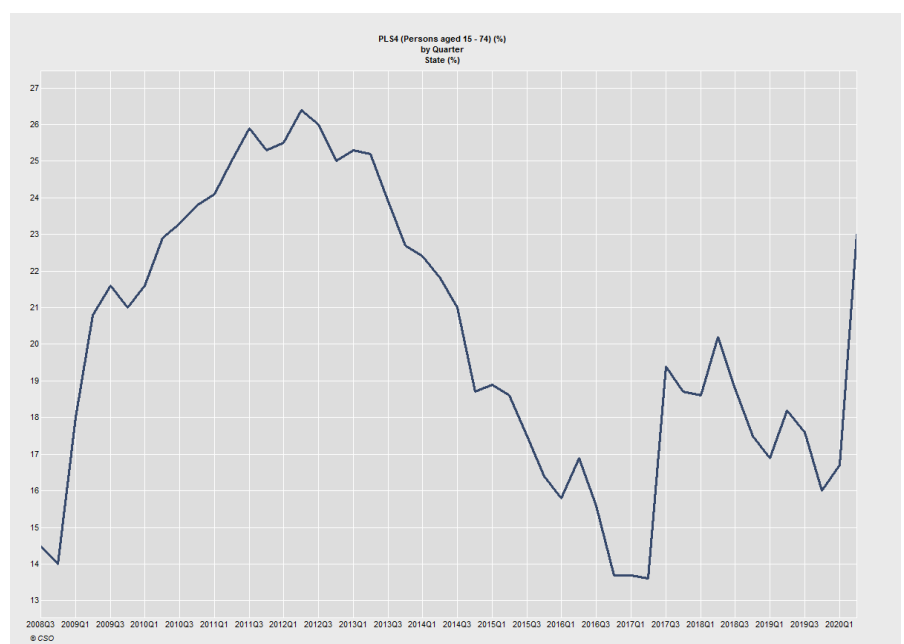
In this Labour Force Survey, other figures have not been adjusted for the impact of the pandemic. So, the numbers of people deemed long-term unemployed in Q2 2020 was 25,700 and the rate was 1.1%, bringing this figure back to early 2000s levels.

To be included in the official unemployment figures, people have answer 'yes' to two questions. Firstly, people have to be actively seeking work over the previous four weeks, and available to take up in the coming two weeks. There are many reasons people answered 'no' to these questions, including lack of hope in finding a job, care and transport challenges, waiting for their former place of employment to re-open. To capture people who are deemed 'inactive', but who would like a job all other things being equal, the CSO publish a figure called 'Potential Additional Labour Force'. PALF stood at 273,500 in Q2 2020, more than double the figure in Q2 2019 when it stood at 127,100.

Another interesting figure is the Principal Economic Status (PES) where the person describes themselves, for example, at work or unemployed or a student or on home duties. In Q2 2020, 275,100 people described themselves as unemployed, an increase of 109,900 on the same quarter last year.

For many years the Central Statistics Office have produced statistics called the *Indicators of Potential Supply of Labour*, the broadest

of which is called PLS4. This figure captures people who are unemployed, in PALF, others who want a job, who are not available and not seeking for reasons other than being in education or training, and people who are working part-time and underemployed. This figure gives a fuller picture of Ireland's employment / unemployment issues and as the graph illustrates was as high as 26.4% in Q2 2012 and was 23% in Q2 2020, not dissimilar to the COVID-19 adjusted unemployment rate.



Post COVID-19

The €350 flat rate at which the *Pandemic Unemployment Payment* (PUP) was paid from March 24th and the streamlined process through which people could access it, was welcome. The INOU regarded it as providing a recognition of: (i) the inadequacy of current working age payment levels; and, (ii) the complex nature of the current system which can be daunting for many people. Through the increased use of mywelfare.ie many PUP recipients have experienced a very different social welfare system: one in which they applied online one week, and received their payment into their bank account the next week. They also did not have to queue anywhere, an experience which many other unemployed people have found demeaning. The organisation would be aware of people who have been reluctant to make a Jobseekers Benefit claim, an entitlement people have built up through their PRSI contributions, because of the stigma associated with unemployment.

It will be important that a balance is struck between the sustainability of these payments and the negative impact of their withdrawal too soon and / or too quickly. The reality is that people who received social welfare payments invariably spend their money, and often in their local economy circulating badly needed cash to business in need of consumers and service users. In the *2020 Country Specific Recommendations for Ireland* the EU Commission notes “*Although these measures aim to abate the economic shock of the pandemic, the risk of significant output loss, bankruptcies and insolvencies, and an increase in unemployment and people at risk of poverty, remain high.*” It is welcome that in the July Jobs Stimulus a commitment is made to extend PUP until April 1st 2021. It goes on to note that “*Between now and April, there will be a gradual reduction in payment level, linked to previous incomes, bringing payments in line with existing social welfare levels over time.*” (p3)

The initial changes made to the PUP at the end of June introduced two flat rate payments, with recipients who earned less than €200 per week receiving the equivalent of a main Jobseeker’s claim, €203 pw. From September 17th, anyone who earned between €200 and €300 per week, their PUP will be €250 pw; and for those who earned over €300 per week, they will receive €300 pw. These developments are more in keeping with existing practice on Jobseekers Benefits payments, which has four levels of support based on prior average weekly earnings, though at significantly lower levels of support. However, there may be some people who would be better off on a Jobseeker’s payment, in particular if they are claiming for a Qualified Adult as well as themselves. So, it will be really important that people are properly informed of what supports are available, what their best option is, and how they can access it.

Given the return to work challenges that will be facing many people, it will be important to ensure that Working Age Employment supports are properly financed over the coming year. A virtue was made out of doing more for less during the last crisis, but if Ireland is to emerge out of this pandemic with a fairer and more inclusive labour market, then additional resources may be required to ensure that long-term unemployment does not re-emerge as an intractable problem. To that end decent, sustainable and quality work opportunities must be at the heart of all employment policy responses to COVID-19; and all unemployed people must be provided with good employment services and supports to ensure that they can access a decent job.

IN BUDGET 2021 THE INOU CALLS ON THE GOVERNMENT TO:

- ☞ Ensure any changes to the levels and eligibility of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment are well signposted and recipients are pro-actively informed.
- ☞ Strive to ensure that people are fully aware of all of their options e.g. a PUP recipient may keep their Working Family Payment, a JB/JA recipient cannot.
- ☞ Ensure that PUP recipients gain access the Public Employment Service and so plan an informed return to the labour market.
- ☞ Support PUP recipients whose previous job may be gone, or changed to such an extent that it is no longer a viable option, to re-train for a better job opportunity.
- ☞ Resource community based organisations in their work supporting people coping with the impact of COVID-19.



Adequate Income

In the *Programme for Government – Our Shared Future*, under the *Mission: A New Social Contract* it says the Government will:

- ☞ *Protect core weekly social welfare rates.*
- ☞ *Recognise the importance of ancillary benefits and eligibility criteria to vulnerable groups.*
- ☞ *As the economy recovers and employment grows, request the Commission on Welfare and Taxation to examine what changes can be made to employer and employee PRSI to improve existing benefits and provide additional.*
- ☞ *Progress to a living wage over the lifetime of the Government.*
- ☞ *Improve jobseeker supports for people aged under 24 over the lifetime of the Government.*
- ☞ *Increase availability of activation schemes including those run by local employment services. (p85)*

The most recent Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) was published by the Central Statistics Office in November 2019 for the year 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”.
- ☞ 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”. Amongst the indicators with the highest percentage of individuals experiencing deprivation were: without heating at some stage in the last year (38.9%); and unable to replace any worn out furniture (77.3%).
- ☞ 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%. As the following statistics highlight, the picture for unemployed people and other groups was very different:

- ☞ The at-risk-of-poverty rate for people who were unemployed was 47.3%; their deprivation rate was 41.6%; and their consistent poverty rate was 27.6%.
- ☞ The 'at-risk-of-poverty' rate for people who were 'not at work due to illness or disability' was 47.7%; their deprivation rate was 36.7%; and their consistent poverty rate 21.3%.
- ☞ People whose educational attainment is 'primary or below' had an at-risk-of-poverty rate of 24.4%; a deprivation rate of 21.9%; and a consistent poverty rate of 9.6%.
- ☞ Households where there was no one at work had an 'at-risk-of-poverty' rate of 38.6%; a deprivation rate of 28.9%; and a consistent poverty rate of 17.8%.
- ☞ Households with 1 adult aged <65 had an 'at-risk-of-poverty' was 34%; a deprivation rate of 23.9%; and a consistent poverty rate of 13.6%.
- ☞ Households with 1 adult with children aged under 18 had an at-risk-of-poverty rate of 33.5%; a deprivation rate of 42.7%; and a consistent poverty rate of 19.2%.

The two key ambitions for the *Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025* are:

- ☞ *To reduce the national consistent poverty rate to 2% or less of the population and,*
- ☞ *To make Ireland one of the most socially inclusive States in the EU.*

There are sixty nine commitments listed in the Roadmap including commitment twenty five which aims to: “*Consider and prepare a report for Government on the potential application of the benchmarking approach to other welfare payments.*” (p9) In 2018 unemployed people had a consistent poverty rate that was 4.8 times the national figure. If this situation is to be addressed in a socially inclusive manner, then serious action must be undertaken in Budget 2021 to address the income inadequacy facing unemployed people and others struggling to manage on social welfare payments.

IN BUDGET 2021 THE INOU CALLS ON THE GOVERNMENT TO:

- ☞ **Benchmark all Social Welfare rates at a level which is sufficient to both lift people above the poverty line and provide them with a Minimum Essential Standard of Living.**
- ☞ **To make progress on this issue, increase Social Welfare rates by €10; and adjust related supports so that people do not lose this increase through, for example, an increase in their differential rent.**
- ☞ **Maintain the Christmas Bonus at 100% of the normal weekly payments for Social Welfare recipients, and facilitate access to this payment and the Fuel Allowance for people on Jobseekers Allowance for over 12 months.**
- ☞ **End the age segregation still evident in the Jobseeker's Allowance payment.**



Supportive Employment Services

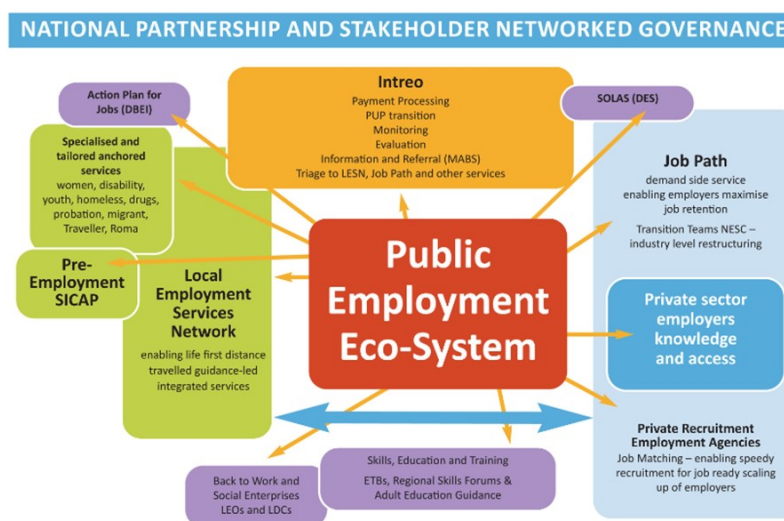
Amongst the High Level Goals in the *Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025* is to “Extend employment opportunities to all who can work” and amongst the commitments made to achieve this goals is to “Improve employment services for long-term unemployed people and marginalised groups.” It is important that clear policy underpins this work and to that end it will be essential to deliver on commitment three to “Develop and publish a successor employment services strategy to Path-Ways to Work, with a focus on increasing labour market participation and improving employment transitions.” The impact of COVID-19 on the labour market throws up considerable challenges for the delivery of this commitment in an inclusive manner, but it is vital that in addressing this new challenge that sight is not lost of long-standing structural inequalities in our labour market. To that end it welcome that the Jobs Stimulus says “The capacity of the Public Employment Service will be increased to support jobseekers through job search advice and assistance, including through contracted services such as JobClubs, JobPath and Local Employment Services.” (p4)

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”. And amongst the key values and principles 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

In late May, 2020 Maynooth University published *The High Road Back to Work: Developing a Public Employment Eco System for a Post-Covid Recovery* which the graph illustrate. Amongst the ten steps they recommended for an inclusive recovery are:

- ☞ Develop a ‘careful and hopeful’ employment service. It is crucial to prevent long term unemployment. Those considered ‘job ready’ need a ‘decent work first’ approach that recognizes people need post-trauma support. A capability approach will enable speedy recruitment into decent sustainable jobs.
- ☞ To leave no one behind it is essential to proactively include those who have not benefited from previous recoveries, including the long term unemployed. A work-life approach for those more distant from the labour market requires a tailored and guided approach, delivered through local employment partnerships.



IN BUDGET 2021 THE INOU CALLS ON THE 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.



Employment Programmes

Table A1 of the monthly Live Register release provides information on the numbers of people 'availing of Activation Programmes'. In May 2020 there were 59,125 participants, an increase of 13,905 on the same month last year. Over the year the numbers of people participating on employment programmes decreased by 10% to 30,031; while, the numbers of people participating on education and training programmes increased by 62% to 29,094 participants. The largest programme continues to be Community Employment, with 20,958 participants, though the SOLAS Full-time Training for Unemployed People is almost as big as it with 20,385 participants: the highest number recorded in the CSO's data base, which runs from January 2007 to May 2020.

In the *Programme for Government* it says, but does not elaborate on: "Put in place strong and varied labour market activation programmes." (p18) and later on it says "Increase availability of activation schemes including those run by local employment services." (p85) In the July Jobs Stimulus a commitment is made that "3,000 additional places will be funded on State Employment schemes such as Community Employment and Tús." (p4)

Under commitment forty nine of the *Roadmap to Social Inclusion* it states: "Complete the review of Social Inclusion through Community Employment and implement any recommendations arising." (p70) The INOU believes that CE needs to be able to accommodate both the social inclusion and activation strands, and that whether or not it applies to a particular position 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.

The INOU's General Branch, the mechanism through which unemployed people participate in the running of the organisation, have called for "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". Such a route to participation could become important for people who may not make the transition from the COVID-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment to a Jobseeker's one because of their personal or family situation. On June's Live Register, 20,699 people were classified as 'Other registrants', of whom 10,155 were aged 60-64 years of age.

In the *Roadmap for Social Inclusion* in commitment four, it states: "Review existing programmes as part of the new employment services strategy, to cater for the needs of marginalised groups/ socially excluded people." (p79) Prior to COVID-19 pandemic, INOU affiliates had raised concerns about the inflexibility of terms and conditions and recruitment to existing employment programmes. Workers on the ground are keenly aware of the role community based employment can play in supporting people who are particularly distanced from the labour market, and the importance of creating and supporting participation once someone has engaged.

COVID-19 has thrown-up new challenges for participants on and those running employment programmes. Like so many other places of employment, some community organisations were able to adapt to the lockdown, others were not. In some cases the nature of the work did not lend itself to home working, in other cases it did, but not everyone had the space, opportunity or equipment to work from home. This also impacted on some participants ability to participate in on-line learning and skill development. An acknowledgement of this reality and the provision of additional resources to ensure that participants and organisations can plan for and adapt to this new normal will be important.

IN BUDGET 2021 THE INOU CALLS ON THE GOVERNMENT TO:

- ☞ 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.
- ☞ Acknowledge the cost of participation on employment programmes and support participants to meet these costs by increasing the top-up payment on these programmes by €7.50.
- ☞ Properly resource community groups in their work addressing the needs of people distanced from the labour market and people managing the impact of COVID-19 on their labour market participation.
- ☞ Open up access to employment programmes for unemployed people signing on for credits.



Education & Training

In the *Programme for Government* it says they will “Use the Human Capital initiative to deliver a wide range of education and training programmes for jobseekers in tertiary education, including fast turnaround specific skills training, conversion courses into areas of skills shortage and emerging technology.” (p18) Later on they note they will “Further develop access programmes to Higher and Further Education for students from disadvantaged groups, including members of the Traveller Community, those in direct provision and those who are socioeconomically disadvantaged.” And “Publish a new literacy, numeracy and digital skills strategy to support learners.” (p111)

On July 16th, 2020 the Government launched “Future FET: Transforming Learning, The National Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy” covering the period 2020-2024. On page 43 of this new FETS it notes “Of course, there is a short-term imperative for FET to lead the response to the critical up-skilling and re-skilling needs of those who have lost their jobs as a result of Covid-19” and that “Building on this approach by combining and ramping up three strands of FET provision - transversal skills development to help employability; building the digital capabilities now required for almost every job; and specific Level 4-6 courses targeting growth sectors and occupations - and linking this to tailored advice and support, there is potential for an immediate and powerful labour market activation response.”

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. While the COVID-19 pandemic has thrown up additional challenges as many learners struggled to maintain or develop their involvement as they did not have access to the digital resources required to participate.

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. The additional education and training provision identified in the July Jobs Stimulus is welcome, however greater care is required to ensure the skills divide is not further exacerbated.

In the new FETS it states that “There are many cohorts with diverse needs, such as people with disabilities, new migrants, Travellers, the long-term unemployed, ex-offenders and women returners. All these require focused types of support to address their particular circumstances and needs. For such groups, the FET system should adopt a more targeted approach to addressing barriers around participation, completion and progression for marginalised and prioritised cohorts. ETBs should work in partnership with community and voluntary organisations who can represent or reach out to particular groups and facilitate a pathway to re-engage with education through FET.” (p47)

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. It is welcome that in the new FETS it acknowledges: “Community education plays a critical role in this regard, supporting participation and re-engagement in education and training, with around 50,000 learners across FET each year. An extensive network of community education providers work in partnership with ETBs, using their local reach and connectivity to develop learning projects to address local needs and empower their learners and communities.” (p45)

IN BUDGET 2021 THE INOU CALLS ON THE GOVERNMENT TO:

- ☞ Provide good career and educational guidance to support people to access the most appropriate course.
- ☞ Ensure there is good sign posting within and across the system so people of working age know where they can go to get the most appropriate supports and provision.
- ☞ Run clear information campaigns on what is available, who is running what, and where people can access the most appropriate provision.
- ☞ Acknowledge the cost of participation in education and training and support adult learners to meet these costs to facilitate their participation.
- ☞ Properly resource learning that focuses on personal and community development and presents learners with opportunities to address issues in their own lives.
- ☞ In planning for the increased digitalisation of work, ensure that unemployed people and vulnerable workers are supported to adapt and enhance their digital skills.



Access to Decent Work

The negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Irish labour market will carry on for the foreseeable future. In the Central Bank of Ireland Quarterly Bulletin QB3 July 2020, they note that *“Employment is projected to decline by 11.9 per cent in 2020 before rebounding by 7.6 per cent (156,000 jobs) in 2021.”* (p43) They look at a number of potential scenarios and say that *“In the severe scenario, employment is projected to decline by 14.4 per cent before recovering by 5.9 per cent in 2021, as the impact of a second wave of the virus would mean a stronger adverse effect on labour-intensive and consumer-facing sectors due to stricter physical distancing guidelines and lower consumer sentiment. The unemployment rate for 2020 is expected to average 16.6 per cent, declining to 12.4 per cent in 2021.”* (p44-45)

Alongside this scenario, the INOU remains concerned that Brexit and the changing nature of work, in particular digitalisation, will have a detrimental effect on people more distanced 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.

In the *Statistical Yearbook of Ireland 2019*, published by the Central Statistics Office in October, amongst the groups with the highest rates of ‘perceived discrimination’ were people who were unemployed at 30.2%. This compares with a national rate of 17.7%. Almost one in eight (11.8%) people said they experienced discrimination when accessing services, while nearly one in ten (9.4%) talked of workplace discrimination. Unemployed people had the highest rate of workplace discrimination at 24.6%, while 17.4% experienced discrimination in accessing services. At present under Ireland’s equality legislation an unemployed person cannot address this discrimination as there is no socio-economic status ground. This situation must end, and the Government must act swiftly on its commitment to *“examine the introduction of a new ground of discrimination based on socio-economic disadvantaged status to the Employment Equality and Equal Status Acts.”* (p89, P4G)

The focus of UN Sustainable Development Goal 8 is to *“Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.”* 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 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. The Jobs Stimulus notes there will be *“10,000 additional places on work placement and experience schemes available for those unemployed for over 6 months.”* (p3) It will be absolutely critical that such schemes lead to a decent job, create real openings for people and do not become an end in themselves.

Access to the Living Wage and greater certainty of hours and therefore improved income security could make real improvements in many people’s lives, and it will be important for the Government to act on its commitment to *“Progress to a living wage over the lifetime of the Government.”* (p85, P4G)

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 3,395 participants on BTWEA in May, 2020. 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.

IN BUDGET 2021 THE INOU CALLS ON THE GOVERNMENT TO:

- ☞ Ensure that decent work is at the heart of all employment and jobs policies.
- ☞ Automate access to the Working Family Payment and streamline this access to minimise the time gap between the individual taking up employment and gaining access to this support.
- ☞ Fully support unemployed people seeking to address their unemployment through self-employment.
- ☞ Increase the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance to three years, and pay 50% of the participant’s social welfare payment in the third year.
- ☞ Actively support the roll-out and attainment of the Living Wage.
- ☞ Plan for the full impact of Brexit on the labour market and ensure unemployed people and vulnerable workers gain access to a decent job.
- ☞ Add socio-economic status as a ground into Ireland’s equality legislation.



Community Based Organisations

On page 106 of the *Programme for Government* it says “We will initiate a new Anti-Poverty, Social Inclusion and Community Development Action Plan framed around the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals, underpinning sound community development practices, and reflecting a response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on poverty and social inclusion.”

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a particularly negative impact on those with fewer personal and communal resources, people who often rely on the support and resources of local community based organisations. It will be critically important as Ireland emerges out of this crisis that independent community based organisations are supported to maintain and develop their work with people experiencing social and economic exclusion. 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 participation presents.

The INOU is a member of the Community Platform and collectively we have worked on election manifestos incorporating three core values: community, participation, and decency. For the INOU, adequate income, supportive employment services, good quality education, training and employment 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 the *Programme for Government* they note the plan cited at the beginning of this page “will build upon the Department of Rural and Community Development’s Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: A five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland 2019-2024.” And later on the Programme says the Government will “Fully implement Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities, the five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland up to 2024.” (p107)

The values underpinning this five year plan 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.

On page 107 of the *Programme for Government* it says “We will build on Ireland’s first ever National Social Enterprise Policy.” In 2019 the *National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland 2019-2022* was published. The INOU welcomed that included 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 including: an opportunity for participation; an access point to the labour market for many people; and an important resource for many community based organisations. The *Roadmap for Social Inclusion* describes the Community Services Programme as providing “funding to community organisations for specific staffing costs with a focus on disadvantaged communities and the employment of people who are distant from the labour market.” (p66)

IN BUDGET 2021 THE INOU CALLS ON THE 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.**

