

An Enabling Budget



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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The theme of this year’s National Economic Dialogue was: *“The economy in 2030: enabling a sustainable future for all”*. Throughout NED four Ds were referenced: demography; decarbonisation; digitalisation; and deglobalisation. Each of these will have an impact on the type of labour market Ireland will have in 2030, each presents challenges and opportunities for the type of work people will be able to access, and whether or not it supports them to live their lives to the fullest extent possible.

The measures announced in Budget 2024 will lay down the foundation of whether or not a sustainable future is realisable for people living in Ireland by 2030. And to that end it will be absolutely essential that this Budget strives to address social exclusion and economic inequality.

Such a focus is in keeping with Ireland’s Well-being Framework. As the IGEES paper entitled *“Well-being and Public Policy: Utilising a well-being perspective to inform the budgetary process”* notes *“The approach to well-being that informed the development of the Well-being Framework is based on Sen’s capability approach. The capability approach focuses on the “capabilities of persons to lead the kind of lives they value – and have reason to value”.*” (p7) and later on that *“From a public policy perspective, the capability approach focuses attention on describing people’s lives and the challenges they face. It also emphasis how policy can create opportunities for people to change or progress their lives, or intervene in a more targeted manner when opportunities may be at risk of being denied by factors such as poverty or deprivation.”*

Under the heading / dimension ‘income and wealth’ of the Well-being Framework the descriptor of ‘well-being as public policy’, it states *“The financial resources that shape the range of feasible choices available to an individual to meet their day-to-day needs and wants and the opportunity to mitigate personal, economic and societal risks and vulnerabilities.”*

In the Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025 there is a commitment, number 25, to *“Consider and prepare a report for Government on the potential application of the benchmarking approach to other welfare payments.”* At the INOU’s Annual Delegate Meeting held in May, 2023, the following motion was unanimously passed: *“The INOU demands that the Government benchmarks 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: such action is urgently required as the cost of living and the poverty experienced by unemployed people and others dependent on a social welfare payment continues to increase.”* It is imperative that this approach is the one used when benchmarking social welfare payments is undertaken.

INOUE 2024 Pre-Budget Submission covers:

- ☞ **Context**
- ☞ **Adequate Income**
- ☞ **Supportive Employment Services**
- ☞ **Employment and Programmes**
- ☞ **Education and Training**
- ☞ **Social Inclusion**

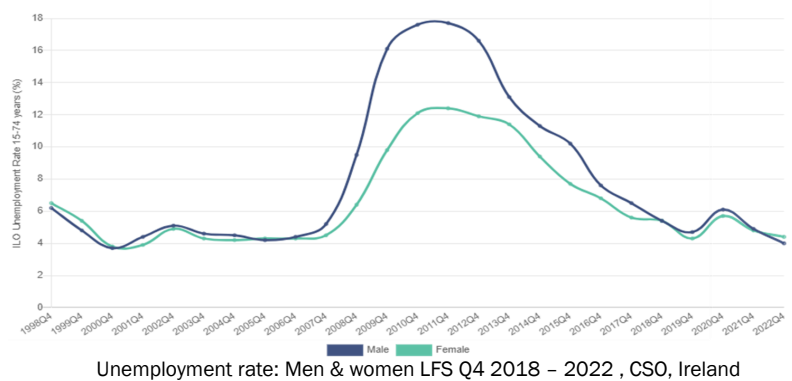


Context

On May 24th, 2023 the Central Statistics Office (CSO) published the Labour Force Survey (LFS) for the first quarter of 2023, which covers the months January to March. 2,608,500 people were employed in this quarter, an increase of 102,700 on Q1 2022, and an historic high for Ireland. A 3.7% increase in full-time employment accounted for the majority of the increase in employment. The employment rate was 73.6%, an increase of 0.8 percentage point over the year, and the highest since this data series began. Women accounted for 41% of people in full-time employment in Quarter 1 2023. Part-time employment increased by 5.4% to 561,700. Women accounted for 68% of people in part-time employment. While, part-time underemployment increased by 10.5% to 110,700 people, and almost two-thirds of this figure were women.

Over the year the Labour Force rose by 3.3% to 2,719,100 people. The labour force consists of people who are in employment plus people who are unemployed. Two factors influence changes in the Labour Force: the demographic effect (+79,400) and the participatory effect (+7,300). The participation rate measures the share of the total population aged 15 years and over who are in the labour force. The participation rate in Q1 2023 was 64.9%, while for women it was 59.5%, and 70.6% for men.

In Q1 2023, 110,700 people were unemployed, a decrease of 16,000 people over the year. The unemployment rate was 4.1%, a decrease of 0.7 ppt over the year. The unemployment rate for women was 3.8%, an annual decrease of 0.9 percentage point; while the unemployment rate for men was 4.4%, an annual decrease of 0.6 ppt. Women accounted for 43% of the unemployed in Q1 2023, a decrease of 2.4 percentage points on the same quarter in 2022. The unemployment rate for young people aged 15-24 years was 8.6%, a decrease of 1.1 percentage points over the year. Looking at the unemployment figures from an age and gender perspective, the unemployment rates for men were higher than for women in Quarter 1 2023, except for three age groups: 15-19; 55-59; and 65-74 year olds.



The number of people deemed long-term unemployed decreased by 26.5% to 32,100 people, while the long-term unemployment rate decreased by 0.5 percentage points to 1.2%. The CSO notes, excluding people whose duration was not stated, that “Just under a third (31.6%) of unemployed persons were in long-term unemployment in Q1 2023 which is down from 36.1% a year earlier”. 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 survey. In Q1 2023, PALF stood at 78,500. The Principal Economic Status (PES) captures data on how people described themselves, for example whether they are at work or unemployed or a student or on home duties. In Q1 2023, 157,300 people described themselves as unemployed, a decrease of 5,000 over the year.

At the INOU's Annual Delegate Conference delegates discussed a range of questions including the challenges facing organisations working on the ground, people who are unemployed and distanced from the labour market, within a context of increased employment and reduced unemployment. Amongst the issues raised were:

- ☞ Little understanding or respect for people who are out of work.
- ☞ Noted that this can be a more difficult situation.
- ☞ If working a few hours for greater than three days, can't get a Jobseeker's payment.
- ☞ If the person is not ready for full-time work, should be encouraged to do shorter working day – lack of respect for that.
- ☞ For some young people a lack of confidence - need to combat isolation and provide earlier supports.
- ☞ Work experience could be very useful for some.
- ☞ Mental health issues for people, lack of supports, isolation and impact of Covid.
- ☞ People not able to take up a payment.
- ☞ Employment supports only one element, other issues need to be discussed before supporting some people currently unemployed with employment.
- ☞ A likelihood of Government attaching less importance to unemployment and unemployed people.
- ☞ Precarity of small number of companies employing large number of people - worry for households, sometimes both partners working in same large company.
- ☞ Worry that previously when high unemployment, everyone is in this together, not now.
- ☞ Difference between urban and rural – lack of banks, post office locally, poor Wi-Fi in places.
- ☞ Confidence shaken when unemployed for long time – stigma with being unemployed.



Adequate Income



On February 22nd, 2023 the Central Statistics Office (CSO) published the results of the *Survey of Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2022*. SILC is a household survey which provides the data from which key national poverty indicators are derived, including the at-risk-of-poverty rate, the deprivation rate, and the consistent poverty rate. The CSO noted that the participants for this survey were interviewed in the first six months of 2022, while the income and poverty estimates are calculated on 2021 income.

In 2022 the at-risk-of-poverty rate increased by 1.8 percentage points to 13.1%. The CSO noted that without the COVID-19 pandemic income supports this figure would have been 20.5%. While if all social transfers are excluded, the at-risk-of-poverty rate would rise to 36.7% - 1.9 percentage points lower than 2021. Social transfers would include Child Benefit, Housing Assistance Payment, Jobseekers payment, Pandemic Unemployment Payment, One Parent Family Payment, pensions, illness and disability payments.

The SILC data is presented under a number of difference categories including Principal Economic Status (PES). Under PES, the at-risk-of-poverty rate for people who identified themselves as unemployed was considerably higher – at 35.6%, a rise of 12.4 percentage points over the year.

The CSO notes that the “enforced deprivation rate is the percentage of persons that are considered to be marginalised or deprived because they live in households that cannot afford goods and services which are considered to be the norm for other households in society.” This rate captures people in the population who were not able to afford at least two of the items / activities contained in a list of eleven.

The deprivation rate for 2022 was 17.7%, an increase of 3.9 percentage points. The deprivation rate for unemployed people was substantially higher - at 48.6%, an increase of 17 percentage points.

At the national level the consistent poverty rate, which captures people who are at-risk-of-poverty and experience deprivation, rose by 1.3 percentage points to 5.3%. Again this figure was significantly higher for people who are unemployed - at 18%, an increase of 7.8 percentage points over the year.

Amongst the other groups with noticeably higher consistent poverty rates were people unable to work due to long-standing health problems (19.7%); households with one adult aged under 65 years (14.5%); households with one adult with children aged under 18 years (14.1%); no person at work in the household (13.8%); and people whose tenure status was rented or rent free (12.9%).

As noted on the opening page of this pre-budget submission, at the INOU’s Annual Delegate Conference held in May, delegates called on the Government to benchmark social welfare rates to ensure that people are lifted above the poverty line and can enjoy a minimum essential standard of living. According to the most recent report from the Vincentian MESL Research Centre there has been an increase in income inadequacy in 2023 in comparison to previous years. On page 24 of the report, they note “Working age households and individuals without children, show income inadequacy when dependent on social welfare. A working-age single adult household type demonstrates deep income inadequacy, with a full Jobseekers payment meeting 76.7% of MESL expenditure need*, when living alone in an urban area. This represents a nominal income shortfall of €63 per week.”

With regard to families with children, on page 25 they note that “The inadequacy of current social welfare supports to meet each aspect of minimum needs is apparent, with the cumulative result of deep income inadequacy in both cases. The inadequacy of adult rates is compounded by the inadequacy of the child rates, and the further inadequacy of supports for one adult headed households and older children results in a deeper level of inadequacy for the one parent household composition.”

Amongst a range of commitments in the Programme for Government, *Our Shared Future*, the Government says they will “Protect core weekly social welfare rates”. (p74) Given the inadequacy of social welfare payments before the current rise in the cost of living, the impact of this rise on people’s ability to make ends meet, it is absolutely imperative that the Government increase social welfare payments by at least €25 per week.



Adequate Income

At the National Economic Dialogue, the INOU was one of twenty-nine NGOs to urge the Government to increase Fuel Allowance rates in line with cost-of-living increases, and expand eligibility by *“including those receiving Working Family Payment; removing the waiting period for those recently signed on to Jobseekers Allowance; and covering the living arrangements of Traveller families”*.

Another commitment in the Programme for Government is one to *“Improve jobseeker supports for people aged under 24 over the lifetime of the Government”*. In 2009 a reduced Jobseeker’s Allowance payment for young people was introduced, and after a number of combinations of age and rates now includes people aged 18-24 years who are not living independently or in receipt of housing supports. As Jobseeker’s Allowance is a means tested payment, any young person receiving it is living in a family with fewer means, and so in the interests of equality and social inclusion, it would be important to end this age segregation and treat this group of young people as full adults.

Over many years in our pre-budget submissions the INOU has called for the re-introduction of a pay-related Jobseeker Benefit payment; and the restoration of the duration on Jobseekers Benefit to pre-2008 crisis changes: when the maximum duration was 15 months or 12 months depending on the person’s number of PRSI contributions. Currently, JB is paid for a maximum of 9 months or 6 months.

Since Budget 2023, the Department of Social Protection has engaged in a consultation process on a proposed Jobseeker’s Pay Related Benefits Payment. The INOU were concerned about a number of aspects of the DSP’s proposal. First of all the proposed duration an unemployed person could be on this payment is a maximum of six months in a twenty-four month period. On the income front the INOU is particularly concerned for people who work in low paid employment. In some cases the person making the claim may well be better off seeking to access an alternative payment, for example Jobseeker’s Allowance or a One Parent Family Payment. However, these payments are means tested, have a range of qualifying conditions and are not automatically open to people who may apply for them.

In the past an unemployed person eligible for a Benefit payment could claim a prescribed aggregate of a weekly rate of benefit payment, including any increase payable (Qualified Adult and / or Child); weekly rate of pay-related benefit payable; and the weekly equivalent, as determined by the Revenue Commissioners, of the refund of income tax. Notwithstanding that a lot of people claiming a Jobseeker’s Benefit payment are claiming only for themselves, excluding people from a Qualified Adult and / or Qualified Child Increase who have family responsibilities is not a good way to proceed.

At present if a person on a Jobseeker’s Allowance payment receives an offer of part-time work, they could find themselves in a dilemma if that work is spread over the whole of the working week, rather than concentrated over three days or less. In the DSP’s Pay Related Benefit consultation they outlined a proposed Working Age Payment that could help to address this issue. It could also facilitate people for whom part-time work may be a more realistic option. It will be important to see what is in the Strawman for this proposal when it is published later on in the year. In particular if point nine on page thirty of the consultation document is realised, which states *“This would be to guarantee a basic income floor and ensure that in all cases a person’s income increases when they work.”*



IN BUDGET 2024 THE INOU CALLS ON THE GOVERNMENT TO:

- ☞ **Increase Social Welfare payments by €25, and adjust related supports so that people do not lose this increase through, for example, an increase in their differential rent.**
- ☞ **Facilitate earlier access to the Christmas Bonus and the Fuel Allowance for people on Jobseeker’s Allowance.**
- ☞ **Increase the Fuel Allowance by seventy-four per cent.**
- ☞ **End the age segregation still evident in the Jobseeker’s Allowance payment.**
- ☞ **Re-introduce a pay-related element to Jobseeker’s Benefit and restore its duration to pre-2008 levels.**
- ☞ **Introduce a work-friendly Social Welfare system for Jobseekers reflective of changing work practices, based on hours worked rather than days worked.**
- ☞ **In the meantime increase the daily earnings disregard for JA to €25 per day for both the main claimant and qualified adult equally.**



Supportive Employment Services

The development of an inclusive labour market and access to decent work are key issues for the INOU. Ireland's Public Employment Service, employment, educational and social protection policies have key roles to play in making this a reality for people of working age.

At the INOU's recent regional Discussion Forums the issue of people who are particularly distant from the labour market and who would struggle, if strictly applied, with meeting the Genuinely Seeking Work criteria of a Jobseeker's payments was explored. There can be many reasons why a person may find themselves in these circumstances: the impact of long-term unemployment on their health and wellbeing; a hidden disability; a lack of confidence and skills employers are seeking; exclusion from the labour market for a variety of reasons including their age, ethnicity, the family or community they are from; isolation and a lack of social interaction.

This issue was further explored at the INOU's Annual Delegate Conference (ADC), some members believe a payment in between a Jobseeker's one and a Disability one is required to financially support people who struggle to find employment, but would not meet the criteria for a disability payment. While, at one of the Discussion Forums participants felt the proposed Working Age Payment may resolve some of the challenges facing people for whom full-time employment would be a challenge - as it should facilitate more people to take up part-time employment. The importance of pre-engagement, developmental supports have also been raised at a range of events.

In NESF's report no. 160 *Understanding the Irish Economy in a Time of Turbulence*, under the sub-heading *Re-examining Barriers to Rewarding Work*, they note that "There is a strong socio-economic gradient to these patterns. Educational achievements are lowest for people from disadvantaged backgrounds, with those from lowest-skilled social classes and lone parent families gaining lower Leaving Certificate scores than their peers, and having lower literacy scores at the age of nine. Literacy levels are lowest among boys, migrants, and the most disadvantaged. Those whose mothers had a degree were almost twice as likely as those whose mothers had Junior Certificate or below as her highest level of education to participate in higher education themselves (Growing Up in Ireland Study Team, 2019)." (p40)

Given this 'strong socio-economic gradient' it is absolutely imperative that Ireland adds socio-economic status as a ground into our equality legislation as quickly as possible. Such action is essential to ensure that policy measures and practices, like Equality Budgeting and Public Sector Duty, are fully inclusive of people experiencing social and economic exclusion.

Amongst the motions passed at the INOU's ADC was one calling "on the Government to deliver wrap around employment and support services that really meet the needs of people who are unemployed - regardless of whether or not they are on a social welfare payment - to support them to access decent work and to appropriately address any barriers they experience." This is a long standing call of the organisation, but is particularly important as an increasing number of people being referred to employment services are particularly distanced from the labour market and require a broader range of supports.

Another motion passed at the ADC, one from the INOU's General Branch - the mechanism through which unemployed people play an active part in the running of the organisation, and it stated that "Many people when they are or become unemployed are unaware of the different options and supports that might be available to them" and called "on the Department of Social Protection to ensure that unemployed people are properly informed about their options and the range of supports that are available to them." This is an issue that comes up regularly at the Regional Discussion Forums, and one recent proposal presents a potential solution: social welfare health checks that could assess if the person is on the most appropriate payment; ensure they are aware of all the supports they could receive; and pro-actively support them to improve their own circumstances.



IN BUDGET 2024 THE INOU CALLS ON THE GOVERNMENT TO:

- ☞ **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.**
- ☞ **Develop a social welfare health check that proactively informs people of available and appropriate supports and services.**
- ☞ **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.**
- ☞ **To that end provide high support wrap around services for people further distanced from the Labour Market .**
- ☞ **Add socio-economic status as a ground in Ireland's equality legislation.**



Employment and Programmes

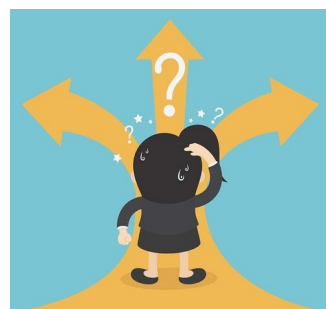
It is really important to ensure that decent work, which is Goal 8 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, is at the heart of Ireland's employment policies and programmes. Some people who experience discrimination in the labour market seek to address their unemployment through self-employment and an important support for them is the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance (BTWEA). According to the latest figures, May 2023, there were 2,247 participants on BTWEA. 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 with the participant retaining 50% of their social welfare payment in the third year. It is also important that people pursuing this option can access a wide range of enterprise supports. The OECD has undertaken work on inclusive entrepreneurship for the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, and it would be important that their recommendations are taken up and acted on.

For people seeking employment, one practical measure that could support people to undertake their welfare-to-work journey work, would be to automate access to the Working Family Payment. This would help to minimise the time gap between the individual taking up employment and gaining access to this support, which is particularly important for people with family responsibilities in low paid employment.

To that end 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 in rolling out the Living Wage, it would be important for the Government to learn from the work undertaken on this issue using a Minimum Essential Standard of Living approach.

At the INOU's ADC the importance of pre-employment supports was also noted. Concerns were expressed that people are afraid to take the step into employment or employment programmes: the impact of poor experiences previously; literacy and confidence issues; childcare and transport barriers; isolation and mental health issues arising post-Covid. Community based employment programmes, like Community Employment and TÚS - Community Work Placement Initiative, play an important role in creating access points to employment that might not otherwise exist for people who are distanced from the labour market. According to the most recent statistics, in May 2023 there were 18,649 participants on Community Employment and 4,394 participants on TÚS.

Over the years the INOU's General Branch and affiliated organisations have called for unemployed people who are not in receipt of a payment to be able to participate on employment programmes in local community organisations. Concerns have been raised about the negative impact on people's health and wellbeing when they are unable to access supports and opportunities to participate. At the INOU's Annual Delegate Conference another General Branch motion stated that *"While CE projects are having difficulties recruiting, some people who have been working for a good number of years and become unemployed can often find it difficult to return to work and providing opportunities for CE might be useful for them. Similarly some people signing-on for Credits are unable to access Community Employment places."* Their motion which *"calls on the Department of Social Protection to reduce the eligibility duration criteria for CE; extend eligibility to include people who are signing-on for credits for a Jobseeker's payment but receive no payment and to ensure CE is as attractive as possible to unemployed people, including increasing the top-up amount"* was unanimously supported.



IN BUDGET 2024 THE INOU CALLS ON THE GOVERNMENT TO:

- ☞ 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.
- ☞ Automate access to the Working Family Payment to minimise the time gap between the individual taking up employment and gaining access to this support.
- ☞ Promote the roll-out and attainment of a MESL informed Living Wage.
- ☞ Ensure that unemployed people are supported to participate in the most meaningful option for them, one that will help them to enhance their skills and employment opportunities.
- ☞ Given the cost of participation on employment programmes, support participants to meet them by increasing the additional payment on these programmes by €10.
- ☞ Open up access to employment programmes for unemployed people who are not in receipt of a payment, in particular those signing on for credits.



Education and Training



Earlier this year, the OECD published their *OECD Skills Strategy Ireland - Assessment and Recommendations*. Amongst the key findings were (i) *Getting skills policies right is critical for ensuring societal well-being and inclusive and sustainable growth in Ireland*; (ii) *A number of megatrends are changing the skills needed for success in work and society* - an issue that was raised at NED through the four Ds of demography; decarbonisation; digitalisation; and deglobalisation; and (iii) *Skills policies should be at the core of Ireland's response to these trends*. In their report they identify four overarching priority areas including "Priority 2: *Fostering greater participation in lifelong learning in and outside the workplace*". Within this priority they state that "Encouraging a culture of lifelong learning is crucial to ensuring that individuals actively engage in adult learning after leaving the compulsory education

system. In turn, participation in different forms of adult learning results in a wide range of benefits, including higher wages for individuals, higher productivity for firms and higher levels of social trust. Across countries, there is a growing need to upskill and reskill regularly over the life course to adapt to labour market and societal developments. To foster greater participation in lifelong learning in and outside the workplace, Ireland should:

- ☞ strengthen incentives to participate in lifelong learning for individuals
- ☞ strengthen incentives to participate in lifelong learning for employers
- ☞ make lifelong learning more flexible and accessible."

In the Central Statistics Office's *Educational Attainment Thematic Report 2022* they note that "Unemployment rates (Q2 2022) for those aged 25-64 years old generally decreased as the level of education attained increased." Though early school leaving is not as big an issue as it once was, the contrast in employment / unemployment with those who complete their education is striking. According to this report: "Early school leavers had a lower rate of employment in Q2 2022 compared with other persons aged 18-24 (48% compared to 63%). The unemployment rate for early school leavers was 21% compared to 6% for other persons aged 18-24."

At the INOU's Annual Delegate Conference one delegate noted the importance of training and time to let people flourish; others noted that there is a need to increase the training allowance; concerns were raised that post-Covid 19 there has been a lack of information on training courses; others identified a need for more training. There was a call for a person centred service, which starts with the person and builds suitable training, programmes, work choices, job seeking skills around them. Such an approach is particularly important for people who are isolated and more distanced from the labour market and who will need a developmental approach to flourish.

At present Ireland is developing a national strategic framework for lifelong guidance, the Department of Education are leading on this work. Amongst the issues the INOU raised in the online consultation were:

- ☞ the creation of accessible supports for people of working age who are not on a Jobseeker's payment or on an education course, while ensuring that people who are on a social welfare payment or course can access the right guidance for them.
- ☞ accessible online and in-person supports that facilitate people to avail of whichever option or combination of options suits them best.
- ☞ an up-to-date portal / central hub where people can find all of the information they require – with good signposting and links to more detailed and up-to-date information if required.
- ☞ capture users and practitioners feedback to ensure the information is as relevant and easy to follow as possible, including social welfare and childcare supports.
- ☞ A strengthened practitioner emphasis on what the person they are supporting would like to do and mapping out how this can be achieved – exploring transferrable skills, qualifications, work experience, openings in the labour market.
- ☞ Lifelong guidance clearly has a role in play in enhancing people's well-being and its cumulative impact on our society and economy. It will be important to research if this holds true, how the different aspects of guidance interact or not with each other, where people can access them or not, and as Ireland evolves what types of new guidance are required to support unemployed people and others of working age to navigate a changing world.

IN BUDGET 2024 THE INOU CALLS ON THE GOVERNMENT TO:

- ☞ Acknowledge the cost of participation in education and training and properly support adult learners to meet these costs to facilitate their participation.
- ☞ 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.
- ☞ 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.



Social Inclusion

At the INOU's Annual Delegate Conference (ADC) the impact of the lack of accommodation and the need to build more homes was raised. At the one of the recent Regional Discussion Forum the impact of poor health, housing, lack of appropriate services on people's ability to make whole of life decisions was discussed; alongside the cumulative impact of marginalisation, exclusion and isolation on people's lives.

Goal 7 of the Roadmap for Social Inclusion covers "Core Essentials: Healthcare, Housing, Energy and Food" and aims "To ensure that all people can live with confidence that they have access to good quality healthcare, housing, energy and food", stating that "This goal recognises that access to basic essential services on a free or subsidised basis to people on low incomes can reduce costs to be covered from within that low income." In the recent Mid-term review of this Roadmap it notes that "Feedback from the mid-term review indicated that the current challenges in relation to housing represent a challenge to reducing poverty and improving social inclusion in Ireland" and that "During the remaining timeframe of the Roadmap there will be a focus on the delivery of commitments in relation to the provision of social housing, measures to reduce both energy poverty and food poverty" (p54) *Housing for All* replaced the housing policy cited in the Roadmap for Social Inclusion: *Rebuilding Ireland*, and though the mid-term review notes that work on delivering on social housing is "In Progress on schedule with ongoing delivery", serious concerns remain that the scale of this delivery is not where it needs to be to meet the challenges facing so people.

In the Government's publication *Values and Principles for Collaboration and Partnership Working with the Community and Voluntary Sector* they note that "The purpose of this document is to provide an agreed set of values and principles that will underpin the relationships necessary at all levels to provide effective support to communities in particular the most disadvantaged and marginalised." The values listed in this publication include: social justice; empowering communities; sustainable development; active participation; human rights, equality and anti-discrimination; and social inclusion.

At the INOU's Annual Delegate Conference (ADC) one the barriers raised to people's participation was a fear of filling in forms and the impact of the closure of local Community based centres on advocating and supporting people to address this fear. In the feedback from the roundtable discussions it was noted the importance of engaging with communities on issues of concern and how they should be resolved. Amongst the principles are collaboration, and under this heading the Government notes the importance of working "in collaboration with relevant stakeholders and communities to support sustainable approaches to policy and programme development and implementation." Supporting and maintaining independent autonomous community based organisations is vital to ensure that the principles and values contained in this publication can be realised. It is also vital as community organisations can be a very important, and at times only access point to the labour market, for people who are particularly distanced from it. To that end it will be important to ensure that funding for programmes like the Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme; the Community Services Programmes; the Family Resource Centres; and Community Development Pilot Programme are meaningfully enhanced in the forth coming budget.

Just as the ability to create one's own job through self-employment can assist people to address their unemployment, the creation and maintenance of community lead social enterprises can be very helpful for communities experiencing socio-economic exclusion. Of particular concern are enterprises that are seeking to address a need in their community that is not being addressed by the state or the private-for-profit sector, and these are called deficient demand social enterprises. As Ireland prepares its next national social enterprise policy, it will be particularly important to ensure that community lead social enterprises are properly supported to undertake their work.



IN BUDGET 2024 THE INOU CALLS ON THE GOVERNMENT TO:

- ☞ **Comprehensively address the housing and transport challenges facing so many people.**
- ☞ **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.**

