An Inclusive Recovery

INOU 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."

INOU

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Over the past year Ireland has sought to manage the impact and implications of COVID-19 on people's everyday lives. Given concerns about the variation of the COVID-19 virus, the country will only fully emerge from the latest lockdown in Mid-October. It is unlikely that the full impact of this health crisis on the labour market will be seen until COVID-19 supports like the Pandemic Unemployment Payment and the Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme are wound down.

In early June the Government published the *Economic Recovery Plan* which said "*Our approach follows a number of important markers all reinforcing each other to align our economy for recovery, renewal and sustainable growth"* and "*Our overall ambition is to exceed pre-crisis employment levels by having 2.5 million people in work by 2024."* There are four pillars to the plan, with the second focusing on "*Helping people back into work by extending labour market supports and through intense activation and skills*".

In mid-July the Government published *Pathways to Work 2021-2025* and noted "*Stated simply, 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)

On page 36 the Government identified seven ways in which Intreo must adapt including:

- *To respond to the capacity and scale challenge, Case Officer capacity will increase to cater for increased client volumes as will the number of employment scheme and programme places.*
- *To deal with the challenge of delivering a personalised service and showing flexibility/adaptability and given the need for the service to deal effectively with clients from a range of backgrounds and with a range of capabilities it will improve client profiling to personalise the service.*
- *To adapt to the external environment, to take advantage of digital delivery and at the same time deliver a personalised service to clients Intreo will adapt its own internal organisation structure, further accelerate the investment in the management and professional development of the critical cadre of Case Officer staff and improve the promotion of its service to jobseekers.*
- *To ensure jobseekers can acquire the necessary workplace skills, Intreo will invest in analysis of labour market needs, co-ordinate activities across, and ensure seamless referral between, Intreo and the further education and training sector.*

In seeking to improve employment services and supports for jobseekers, it will be essential that they are person centred and strive to provide unemployed people with real choices and meaningful options. It will be equally important that in Budget 2022, the Government addresses the issue of income adequacy for unemployed people. And to that end Jobseeker's payments must be increased by €10 per week.

INOU 2022 Pre-Budget Submission covers:

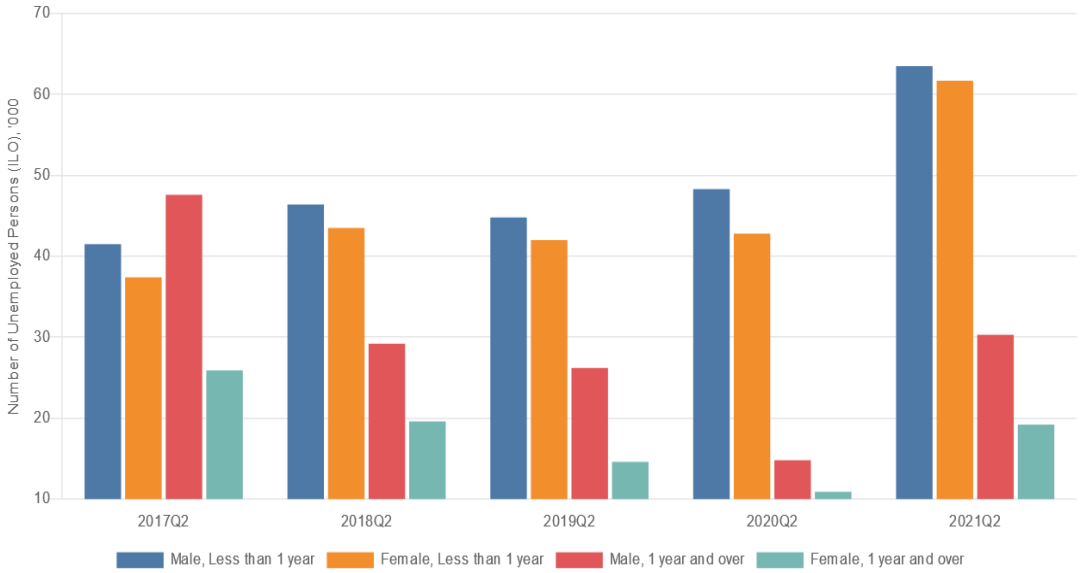
- ☞ **Context**
- ☞ **Adequate Income**
- ☞ **Supportive Employment Services**
- ☞ **Access to Decent Work**
- ☞ **Employment Programmes**
- ☞ **Education & Training**
- ☞ **Community Based Organisations**

Context

On September 24th the Central Statistics Office (CSO) published the Labour Force Survey (LFS) for the second quarter of 2021, which covers the months April to June. They continued to provide information using the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) definitions of employment, unemployment and inactivity, and estimated figures taking into account the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the labour market.

Using the standard LFS methodology (ILO), 2,349,100 people were employed in this quarter: an increase of 211,000 on Q2 2020. Full-time employment increased by 101,800 over the year to 1,872,600 people. Part-time employment also increased by 109,100 to 476,500. Over the year employment increased for both men and women. Part-time underemployment also increased: to 53,700 for men and 69,200 for women. In Q2 2020, women accounted for 59% of people who described themselves as underemployed, and in Q2 2021 this figure was 56%.

The CSO also published a COVID-19 Adjusted Measure of Employment for the ends of June, July and August. Under this measurement, at the end of June the numbers of people employed falls to 2,120,778. While the estimate figures for July and August were 2,185,773 and 2,205,494, reflecting the further re-opening of the economy.



According to the standard LFS methodology the Labour Force rose by 274,000 to 2,533,200 over the year. Two factors influence changes in the Labour Force, the demographic effect, which was positive (+16,100); and the participatory effect, which had an even stronger impact (+257,900). The participation rate in Q2 2021 was 63.1%, a significant improvement on Q2 2020 when it was only 56.9%, the period when the COVID-19 pandemic hit the labour market hardest.

In Q2 2021, 184,100 people were unemployed: 63,000 more people than in Q2 2020. The unemployment rate was 7.3%, an increase of 1.9 ppt over the year. The number of people deemed long-term unemployed was 49,500 and the long-term unemployment rate was 2%. In Q2 2020 these figures were 25,700 and 1.1% respectively.

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 Q2 2021, 218,800 people described themselves as unemployed: a decrease of 56,300 on the same quarter last year.

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 Q 2 2021 PALF stood at 178,200: a decrease of 114,200 over the year.

When the impact of COVID-19 is factored in and everyone who is on a Pandemic Unemployment Payment is assumed to meet the ILO definition of unemployment, at the end of June the numbers of people unemployed increases to 413,687 with an unemployment rate of 16.2%. While at the end of July 2021, the adjusted measure of unemployment was 356,648 and the unemployment rate was 13.5%. And in August the COVID-19 adjusted unemployment estimate declined to 335,178 and the unemployment rate was 12.4%.

Adequate Income

At the INOU's Annual Delegate Conference in May, the General Branch, the mechanism through which unemployed people play an active part in the running of the organisation, put the following motion to the Conference: *The INOU calls on the Government to increase Social Welfare payments, in the context of the tacit acknowledgement by Government, with the introduction of the Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment, that these rates are too low.* The motion was passed unanimously.

Earlier in the year the INOU ran two online events on the future of Ireland's social welfare system. On the issue of income adequacy participants noted the advocacy work undertaken by a range of community and voluntary sector organisations on the issue of benchmarking: seeking to (i) lift people above the poverty line and (ii) support them to meet a minimum essential standard of living (MESL), based on the work of the VPSJ. Participants also noted that regrettably, there is no reference to this form of benchmarking in the *Programme for Government, Pathways to Work* or *Roadmap to Social Inclusion*.

However 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.
- Consideration will be given to increasing all classes of PRSI over time to replenish the Social Insurance Fund to help pay for measures and changes to be agreed including, inter alia, to the state pension system, improvements to short-term sick pay benefits, parental leave benefits, pay-related jobseekers benefit and treatment benefits (medical, dental, optical, hearing).
- 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. (p74)

In the most recent Survey on Income and Living Conditions, *SILC 2019*, the Central Statistics Office (CSO) noted that the 'nominal equivalised disposable income per individual' stood at €23,979 in 2019. The at-risk-of-poverty threshold is derived from this figure, usually at 60% of its value. In 2019 the at-risk-of-poverty threshold was €14,387.

Amongst the other data produced by SILC are key national poverty indicators including the 'at-risk-of- poverty' rate; the deprivation rate; and the consistent poverty rate. At the national level the at-risk-of- poverty rate declined from 14% in 2018 to 12.8% in 2019. While the deprivation rate increased from 15.1% in 2018 to 17.8% in 2019. The deprivation rate for people who are at-risk-of-poverty decreased by 2.4% over the year to 42.7%. The consistent poverty rate declined by 0.1% to 5.5% in 2019.

Principal Economic Status is amongst the figures the CSO break down the Survey of Income and Living Conditions data into, which captures data on people who are at work, unemployed, a student, on home duties, retired, or not at work due to illness or disability. The three indicators of at-risk-of-poverty, deprivation, and consistent poverty were considerably higher for unemployed people than the national figures.

In 2019, the at-risk-of-poverty rate for people who were unemployed was 35.4%, the only group with a higher rate was people who are not at work due to illness or disability, at 37.5%.

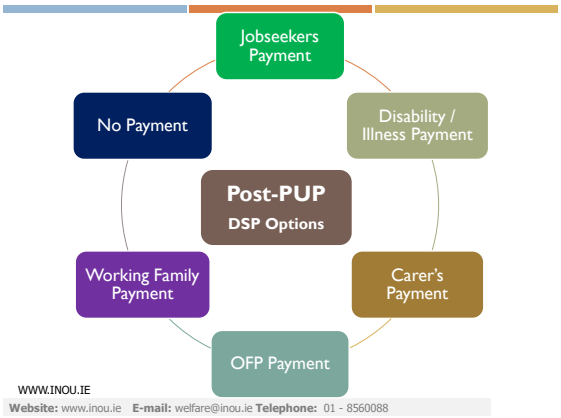
The deprivation rate for people who were unemployed was 36% in 2019. Two groups had a higher rate: again people not at work due to illness or disability at 43.3%; and people parenting alone with children aged less than 18 years, at 45.4%. The indicators for people who are parenting alone comes from the Household Composition breakdown of the SILC data, where one parent families' rates of poverty are considerably higher than other households.

The consistent poverty rate for people who are unemployed was 20.2% in 2019, the highest rate across any of the detailed data. The CSO also produce information on the 'number of persons at work in the household'. The poverty rates for households with no-one at work were considerably higher than other households with people at work. 'Jobless' households as they are sometimes called had an at-risk-of-poverty rate of 34.1%; a deprivation rate of 31.9%; and a consistent poverty rate of 17.3% in 2019.

Adequate Income

The flexibility the system has shown over the past year and a half has been extraordinary. Long standing issues of concern for the INOU were addressed at a speed and to an extent to be commended. For example, to be eligible for the Christmas Bonus a person must be on a Jobseeker's Allowance for at least 15 months, the same is true for the Fuel Allowance. This time period refers back to a time when Jobseeker's Benefit could last for up to 15 months. In last year's Budget this eligibility criteria was brought down to 4 months, though only for the Christmas Bonus.

In the *Economic Recovery Plan* changes to the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) were announced, though as the economy's emergence from the lockdown varied, the timetable was altered. Access to the PUP was closed to new entrants from early July; full-time students last payment was September 7th; the PUP levels above the standard Jobseeker's maximum primary payment of €203 were cut by €50; though anyone on €203 has until October 22nd to apply for a Jobseeker's or other working age payment. As the graph illustrates people moving off a PUP onto another working age payment may find that they are not eligible for one, the rules associated with other payments are more complex than the PUP.



The Government have made a commitment to ensure that no one falls off a cliff edge when they come to the end of their PUP, yet the existing system is full of sharp and steep edges. People do not always make the transition from Jobseeker's Benefit to Jobseeker's Allowance, and even when they do the level of payment they receive may be lower. For young people living at home, their parents income is taken into account; for older unemployed people, their partner's income is taken into account; and / or they may have savings of their own. When Ireland emerged out of the 2008 crisis, the single biggest reason initially for the Live Register coming down was people not making the transition from JB to JA. It is the same means test, and has been for many years. In these circumstances it is not surprising that the PUP was introduced at the beginning of the current health crisis, as the existing system is inadequate. Though PUP is not without its shortcomings. For example, there is no option for people who were employees to work part-time and retain some of their payment. Yet, there is such a facility for people who were self-employed, and it is an option for people on a Jobseeker's payment, though there are anomalies.

The recent ESRI Budget Perspectives Paper: COVID-19 and the Irish Welfare System highlighted a number of issues of concern the INOU has raised for many years. These issues need to be properly addressed and include: the reduced Jobseeker's Allowance payment for young people aged between 18 and 24; the cut to the duration of a Jobseeker's Benefit payment, which was cut by six months; the fact that JB has not been pay related since the early 1990s; the fact two people could be working the same number of hours in a week, but depending on how they are spread out, only one may be entitled to any Jobseeker's support; the lack of in-work supports for people on low pay who do not have children.

IN BUDGET 2022 THE INOU CALLS ON THE GOVERNMENT TO:

- **Increase Social Welfare payments by €10, and adjust related supports so that people do not lose this increase through, for example, an increase in their differential rent.**
- **Introduce a work-friendly Social Welfare system for Jobseekers reflective of changing work practices, based on hours worked rather than days worked, with a re-designed earnings disregard to support jobseekers returning to / taking up employment.**
- **Maintain the Christmas Bonus at 100% and facilitate access to this payment and the Fuel Allowance for people on Jobseekers Allowance for over 12 months. Similar considerations should be given to long-term recipients of the PUP.**
- **End the age segregation still evident in the Jobseeker's Allowance payment.**
- **Re-introduce pay-related Jobseeker Benefit payments and restore its duration.**
- **Ensure that people are fully aware of all of their options when their Pandemic Unemployment Payment comes to an end.**
- **Support people who may wish to stay with their pre-COVID-19 employer to do so if that employment takes time to fully re-open.**

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Supportive Employment Services

Access to supportive employment services, ones that are built around the person seeking the support are critical for Ireland to recover from the current crisis well and to be able to manage the challenges and opportunities the changing world of work presents. Such a service must be open to everyone of working age, and people should be able to use it when they require it. This will be particularly important for people who were working in jobs that may not survive the impact of COVID-19, jobs that are vulnerable arising from the obligations to properly address climate change, and the changing world of work. A just transition is not possible without an accessible and inclusive Public Employment Service. *Pathways to Work* contains a number of commitments focusing on people who are parenting alone, people with disabilities, people who are Travellers or Roma, yet the diagram on page 33 of Intreo's model of engagement illustrates an activation service rather than a public employment service.

At the INOU's online event on the future of the social welfare system, participants noted that the same GSW rules apply everywhere, even though there are parts of the country where finding full-time employment can be a significant challenge. There was a call for more tailored supports and flexibility, and for the Department to be more respectful of the individual and their background education.

Another motion to the INOU's recent Annual Delegate Conference noted that *"As Ireland recovers from the social and economic impact of the COVID-19 health pandemic, it will be vital that decent work is at the heart of Government employment and jobs policies."* And that the *"INOU calls on the Government to deliver wrap around employment and support services that really meet the needs of people who are unemployed because of COVID-19 or were unemployed prior to the health pandemic and faced barriers in gaining access to the labour market."*

The *Economic Recovery Plan* talks of:

- *A range of measures will be introduced to support young people, disadvantaged groups and people distant from the labour market to find employment including:*
- *A new Government Youth Employment Charter;*
- *Expanding the delivery of employment services to Lone Parents;*
- *Introducing an Early Engagement model for jobseekers with disabilities, and promoting wider take-up of incentives and supports available for the employment of people with disabilities;*
- *Expanding the Jobs Plus scheme to 8,000 places and continuing to provide a higher incentive for the recruitment of young unemployed people; and*
- *Reserving places on employment services and training programmes for people from minority backgrounds of disadvantage, and consulting with stakeholders from the Traveller (and/or Roma) community to advise the PES in developing tailored support programmes.*

For these measures to produce good outcomes, the services and supports must incorporate Public Sector Duty and be in keeping with UN Sustainable Development Goals 5, 8 and 10:

- SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls;
- SDG 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all;
- SDG 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries.

This would also be in keeping with the Department of Social Protection's Mission to "*promote active participation and inclusion in society through the provision of income supports, employment services and other services*"; and overall objective for 2020 to 2023 to "*continue putting our clients at the centre of all our operations, providing an efficient and effective service and to continue developing our staff, structures and processes*".

IN BUDGET 2022 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.**
- ☞ **Inform people current supports including Working Family Payment, Back to Work Family Dividend, Payment Pending Wages, Fasttrack, and Part-time Job Incentive Scheme.**
- ☞ **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**

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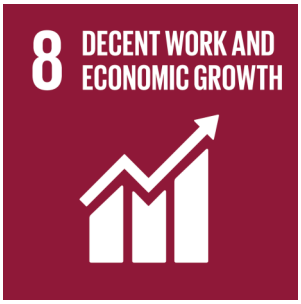
Access to Decent Work



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".*

In 2020 with the support of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Grants Scheme, the INOU ran a project on the theme of decent work. The report of the project notes decent work regularly features at the INOU's regional Discussion Forums; these forums involve participants from community organisations, Local Employment Services, Jobs Clubs, EmployAbility working with and supporting people to participate in education, training and employment programmes and gain access to a decent job.

Amongst the key findings of the project was the *"Need to ensure that there is greater awareness of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) definition of decent work, and the European Union's Pillar of Social Rights (PSR)."* Participants also noted that *"People need to be made aware of their right to exercise their rights without penalisation and to participation in discussions around conditionality and rights."*

Other key findings included:

- The concept of empowerment is a very important one, essential in practice, and needs to be an integral part of Ireland's employment services and supports.
- Need to address distance from the labour market, including people who are not on a social welfare payment, and capture their journey properly.
- Need to ensure that targeted programmes are properly supported, valued by and have good links into mainstream learning and employment opportunities. This should work in tandem with a systemic and sustained approach to address labour market exclusion.
- The need to properly address the challenges facing people seeking decent work who, for example, live in rural areas, who are Travellers, have a disability, parent alone, are returning to the labour market after a long gap, whose job has changed or become obsolete, young people who left school early, or people who have limited access to technology.
- Need to map the jobs that will be obsolete, identify their replacements, ensure people are given the opportunity to re-skill to avail of emerging opportunities.
- Need for those working on the ground to feed into Government policy development and implementation, and for their issues to be heard and responded to appropriately.

Access to the Living Wage and greater certainty of hours and therefore improved income security could make real improvements in many people's lives. The Low Pay Commission has been tasked with exploring how the Programme for Government commitment to *"Progress to a living wage over the lifetime of the Government"* can be met. This is an urgent piece of work given the challenges facing so many people trying to cover their costs of living.

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 2,381 participants on BTWEA in July, 2021, a decline of 736 over the past year. 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. Such a development could be part of the Government's expressed wish in the *Economic Recovery Plan* that *"A range of measures will be introduced to support young people, disadvantaged groups and people distant from the labour market to find employment"*. (p15)

IN BUDGET 2022 THE INOU CALLS ON THE GOVERNMENT TO:

- ☞ **Ensure that decent work is at the heart of all employment policies, supports and service delivery.**
- ☞ **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.**
- ☞ **Add socio-economic status as a ground into Ireland's equality legislation.**

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Employment Programmes

Community based employment programmes like Community Employment and Tús play an important role in creating access points to employment that might not otherwise exist for people who are long-term unemployed and distanced from the labour market. At the INOU's online event *Developing a Social Welfare System for the Future* it was noted that *"the Department could use schemes like CE and YESS to break intergenerational unemployment issues by introducing younger people to employment in a safe and understanding environment".*

COVID-19 threw up considerable challenges for organisations running employment programmes and the people participating on them. Even for community organisations that were able to adapt to the health restrictions and undertake some of their work remotely, not everyone had the space, opportunity or equipment to work from home. In turn this impacted on some participants ability to participate in on-line learning and skill development. Concerns have been raised that people's time on, for example, Community Employment, may not have been as constructive as it would otherwise have been, and that this should be taken into account if an unemployed person needs such supports in the future.

Table A1 of the monthly Live Register release provides information on the numbers of people *'availing of Activation Programmes'*. In July 2021 there were 33,657 participants, a decrease of 5,086 on July, 2020. Over the year the numbers of people participating on employment programmes decreased by 9% to 26,781. Community Employment, which accounted 72% of the participants on employment programmes, had 19,196, 1,512 fewer participants than in July 2020. The only employment programme to grow over the year was the Part-time Job Incentive Scheme, it is a small scheme with only 240 participants. However, this represents a 116% increase over the year, reflecting the Budget 2021 measure that this scheme *"be made available to the self-employed who intend to resume their business but can only do so intermittently or on a limited/reduced basis when they leave the PUP"*.

In June's *Economic Recovery Plan,* 3,000 places on State Employment Schemes are announced under Pillar 2 which focuses on "*Helping people back into work by extending labour market supports and through intense activation and reskilling and upskilling opportunities, driven by Pathways to Work 2021-2025"*. This figure is similar to the announcement made in the 2020 July Jobs Stimulus, and reiterated as Commitment 11 in *Pathway to Work 2021-2025.*

At a range of INOU events concerns have been raised at the small increase received by participants on Community Employment and Tús. At the online event on the future of social welfare a call was made that the *"Department should look to increase the "CE wage" to recognise the hard and important work done by those on CE."* It was also noted that "*Currently there are lots of CE roles to fill with little uptake. It is agreed amongst the group that CE is a hard sell to prospective participants, as the small increase they receive is spent on transport and childcare required to take part."* At the event *"A question was raised as to why participants on Tús cannot avail of a training allowance like those on CE and that this is something that should change."* One participant also called for "*a two year option on Tús, and then progress to CE with training".*

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. Such a route to participation will be important for people who remain unemployed, but who do not make the transition from the Pandemic Unemployment Payment to a Jobseeker's one because of their personal or family situation.

IN BUDGET 2022 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 who are not in receipt of a payment, in particular those signing on for credits.**

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Education & Training

At the INOU's online event *Developing a Social Welfare System for the Future* participants noted that:

- The Department needs to be more respectful of the individual and their background education.
- There is a need for greater flexibility for Mediators, Case Officers, for those who are working in employment services to support people, in particular to be able to agree funding for training / education courses.
- There is an issue for people on the social insurance payment Jobseeker's Benefit (JB) who are not able to take-up or retain some training / education course places if they are not making the move to the means-tested payment Jobseeker's Allowance (JA).
- This could also be an issue for people moving off the Pandemic Unemployment Payment if they do not have an underlying entitlement to a Jobseeker's payment.
- Concerns were also raised about having to go to charities for funding to get recovering substance misusers back into education, a lack of sufficient supports.
- A service should be provided to the person, either from the Case Officer or a separate section, that should aim to guide the person through the early stages of employment, with a focus on supporting them in their new routine, training and the additional costs.
- For the 18-24 year olds there should be financial and training incentives to take up employment schemes and any training/upskilling available. This should include additional payments for those who take up these schemes or training, payments which could make up the equivalent of a weekly wage.

In the *Economic Recovery Plan* it notes that "*The original additional 35,000 places in education and training announced under the July Jobs Stimulus to support jobseekers to upskill and reskill for the labour market was added to with a further 15,000 places.*"

In *Pathways to Work 2021-2025* a number of Commitments deal with education and training including:

- Commitment 5 which will *"Fund 50,000 additional places in further and higher education, including via Skills to Compete, Skillnet Ireland, Springboard+ and the Human Capital Initiative."*
- Commitment 8 notes the Training Support Grant will increase from €500 to €1,000; and
- Commitment 9 will *"Increase participation and funding in Back to Education programmes to 7,700 places (demand led)."*

In the *National Recovery and Resilience Plan* published at the same time as the *Economic Recovery Plan* a number of measures focus on the role of education and training in supporting Ireland to emerge out of the current crisis. These measures include:

- ***Solas Recovery Skills Response Programme*** *will see a range of additional educational and training programmes rolled out as part of the Skills to Compete and the establishment of the SOLAS Green Skills Action programme focusing on providing training to address climate and low carbon economy issues;* (p6)
- ***Address the Digital Divide and Enhance Digital Skills,*** *by developing a new 10 Year Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy and of a new Digital Strategy for Schools.* (p4)
- *By expanding and streamlining lifelong pathways between and within FET and HE the Government is determined to achieve or preferably exceed the target on lifelong learning of 18% by 2025, thereby significantly exceeding our current rate and the current EU average.* (p19)

A strong commitment to social inclusion and equality must be evident in the implementation and delivery of these plans and strategy, otherwise there is a real danger that those most distanced from the labour market will be left further behind.

IN BUDGET 2022 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.**
- ☞ **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.**

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Community Based Organisations

Amongst the lessons identified in the NESC Secretariat Paper No. 22 *Community Call: Learning for the Future* was lesson five which says *"The community and voluntary sector played a key role in identifying and supporting the vulnerable, and there is a need to look at how such work can be sustained"*. (p29) The Paper also notes *"The important role of the community and voluntary sector in responding to local needs became clear in the work under Community Call. Some work is already under way to help develop the capacity of smaller local groups, and to support them and larger organisations through the funding difficulties engendered by the lockdowns. It is likely that this work will need to continue."* (p34)

At the recent INOU Annual Delegate Conference (ADC) the following motion was passed: *"The Belfast Unemployed Resource Centre supports the INOU calls on the Government to fully support the development and maintenance of independent community based organisations and their work with people experiencing social and economic exclusion, organisations which are critical to the delivery of inclusive employment and social services."*

In the *Programme for Government* the Government says it 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 are particularly important including: 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. This will become particularly important as Ireland becomes more digitalised and many people struggle to adapt.

Another motion to the ADC called *"on the Government to prioritise accessible, quality, affordable and comprehensive broadband coverage countrywide. This would also assist remote home working."* This motion came from the General Branch, the mechanism through which unemployed people play an active part of the running of the INOU. On page 3 of the *National Recovery and Resilience Plan* it says *"Ireland's ambition is to provide a better experience for citizens and businesses interacting with Government and, as important, to continue and accelerate the reform agenda through improvements in the way Government systems operate."*

While on page 48 of the *Economic Recovery Plan*, under *Pillar 4 - A Balanced and Inclusive Recovery*, in the section entitled *Improving Living Standards* it says "*Bridging the digital divide across Irish society including through enhancing broad digital skills with associated benefits around building confidence and motivation, in particular for older people, and a new 10-year adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy strategy through SOLAS, which is in development."* Community based organisations will have an important role to play in supporting people who have a range of literacy needs to be able to develop their skills to participate in Irish society and avail of emerging economic opportunities.

It is welcome that in this part of the *Economic Recovery Plan* the Government notes the importance of "*Supporting Social Enterprise, which can provide access to jobs for the most marginalised in society, including through the National Social Enterprise Policy 2019 – 2022 and the Working for Change: Social Enterprise and Employment Strategy*". Resourcing community led social enterprises to address issues of concern for them and to empower people themselves to address their needs appropriately will be particularly important.

In the section entitled *An Inclusive Approach* the Government says "*An increased focus will be placed on building an inclusive society and labour market with greater emphasis on good quality employment, increasing participation and reducing barriers as the economy recovers, ensuring the benefits of the recovery are widely shared."* Such a development will be critical and community based organisations have a key role to play "*as Ireland moves through the recovery, a space to discuss areas of shared concern affecting the economy, society, the environment, employment and the labour market more broadly must be ensured."* (p46)

IN BUDGET 2022 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 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.**

Supporting Unemployed People
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