



An Roinn Gnóthaí Fostaíochta  
agus Coimirce Sóisialaí  
Department of Employment Affairs  
and Social Protection

# Report of the Social Inclusion Forum 2019

## Summary Report

August 2019



# **Report of the Social Inclusion Forum 2019 - Summary Report**

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Disclaimer: The views contained in this summary report reflect those of the speakers and the participants at the Social Inclusion Forum and do not necessarily represent the views of the Government or its Departments.

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# **Social Inclusion Forum, May 2019**

## **Summary report**

Prepared by Liza Costello, rapporteur

This summary report of the Social Inclusion Forum, held on 22 May 2019, presents the key points raised by participants during the questions and answers session and the thematic workshops.

### **1. Questions and answers session**

Many of the questions which were raised during the questions and answers session reflected some of the key themes that were to emerge later during the afternoon workshops. Below, the key points raised by those who asked questions are presented thematically.

#### **People with disabilities**

- The new strategy needs to have targets for people with disabilities.
- Employment levels and poverty rates are not improving for people with disabilities and in some instances are getting worse.

#### **Importance of ongoing consultation with NGOs**

- It is important for the Government to carry out continuous reviews of what works and what does not work. NGO input is an important part of this process.
- Commitments are needed regarding autonomous rural development; local agencies should have the option to express concerns on policy to government.

#### **Housing and homelessness**

- Housing and homelessness should be included among the indicators of the new strategy.
- The issue of how derelict properties in Dublin north inner city could be used needs to be addressed.

#### **Child poverty**

- It was suggested that a high level official responsible for child poverty could be established within each relevant government departments to drive targets and actions.
- There are anomalies in the new National Childcare Plan that impact on those not in employment or training, and it was requested that these be brought to the attention of Minister Zappone (the issue being that those who are not in employment or training will

have their entitlement to childcare reduced to three hours per day, down from full-time, as well as a reduction in the rate of pay).

### **Marginalised groups and employment**

- While unemployment figures are going in the right direction, certain marginalised groups still face challenges, particularly those with low socio-economic status.
- There is a lack of employment opportunities following education schemes in disadvantaged areas (north inner city Dublin).
- It is important for the new strategy to address the needs of such groups.

### **Groups not captured in key data sources**

- Certain groups are invisible within the data which is a problem when it comes to setting targets or metrics. A HSE statistician noted that there are some good data available and that strategies can be used to identify groups.

### **Mental health and unemployment**

- With regard to people with mental health issues, an effective inter-departmental approach is needed to provide access to health services for those who need it, and that this is something the new strategy needs to address.

### **Precarious work**

- There is a need to address the issue of precarious work, as well as in-work poverty, in the new strategy.

### **The new strategy**

- Questions were asked of the new strategy, including when it will be published, what its focuses are, and how it proposes to address the needs of minority groups who are not captured in the main data sources.

### **Older people**

- It was noted that the annual increase of €5 in state pension is insufficient, particularly for those reliant on the state pension; also, that older people should not have to wait until March to avail of budgetary increases, a practice described as discriminatory.

### **Need for cross-departmental coordination**

- There is a need for greater cross-departmental co-ordination, particularly in relation to the allocation of social inclusion funding.

### **Carers**

- The need for more respite support for family carers was raised.

## **2. The workshops**

This section presents the key points agreed by participants during workshop discussions.

### **2.1 Social inclusion at community level: Enhancing collaboration**

#### **Translating the national-level focus on collaboration to local level**

Participants shared concern regarding whether the focus on collaboration at national level would lead to a more collaborative approach on the ground. For example, when a client seeks one service from a local development company, they often are directed to many more services and programmes and this is how a wraparound service should be delivered. But funding applications and monitoring processes often require a service to strictly define the specific outcomes of a particular programme. Programmes, streams of funding and organisations are not aligning at local level. In some areas, Local Community Development Committees (LCDC) are not enhancing or fostering cross-departmental collaboration at local level.

- Will the new social inclusion strategy be funded across several Departments in order for them to work together?

#### **The importance of autonomous community development**

Many participants noted that community development needs to be re-energised at local level following the recession and austerity; this was seen as the key channel to increase social inclusion. In order to allow communities to foster this autonomous development, capacity building structures need to be put in place to increase the number of people who can participate in structures such as the PPN. In this regard, the role of qualitative data needs to be strengthened. Many of the realities of social exclusion and subsequent improvements in people's lives following access to services cannot be captured by purely quantitative data.

#### **Resourcing community development**

Many participants noted that Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP) funding needs to be increased, as it is an essential element of providing a large number of services to often the most vulnerable people in our communities. Another aspect of resourcing that was discussed was about building or maintaining the infrastructure for social inclusion. This may not involve huge amounts of funding but just enough to keep a community centre open or build a youth club. It was noted how these spaces provide platforms for communities to work together and support each other.



## **2.2 Getting more from the data**

### **The importance of reliable data**

There was a discussion around administrative versus survey data. It was agreed that both types of data have their advantages and disadvantages and that it is important to not become reliant on one type of data at the expense of others. It was considered to be of particular importance to link administrative and survey data whenever possible.

### **The need to move beyond the standard measure for poverty**

It is important to take account of other factors beyond the items on the current deprivation list when measuring poverty in order to get the lived experience of people living in poverty.

Among the factors which should be considered are:

- childcare costs;
- housing costs;
- hidden legal costs;
- medical cards and the fear that taking employment may lead to them being removed; and
- socio-economic discrimination.

### **The need for qualitative data**

The group felt that qualitative data is needed to get the full picture of the lives of people living in poverty. This form of data can support and inform administrative and survey data that already exist. Funding needs to be made available to undertake such research.

## **2.3 Social inclusion and people with disabilities**

### **The decision-making process**

Attendees feel there should be an effort made by government to provide people with disabilities greater opportunities to participate in the decision-making process. This point was made particularly with reference to the development of policy documents such as the upcoming strategy document.

### **Gaps in relevant policy documents**

Participants shared concern regarding gaps in the National Disability Strategy and other relevant government policy documents. It was agreed that there needs to be a greater focus on self-advocacy.

### **Need for greater governmental support for resources**

There should be less of a reliance on grassroots solutions to issues such as development or local transport. The Government should increase its funding for resources in such areas.

### **Gaps in the research literature**

There is an absence of data and research findings regarding certain 'invisible' groups and niche situations, such as those with a disability who are self-employed or entrepreneurs.

### **Skills building**

Funding should be invested into building the skills and capacity of local service providers in supporting people with disabilities.

## **2.4 Housing and social inclusion**

### **Communication and training**

It was agreed that greater training and communication needs to take place for NGOs, front-line government staff and customers.

### **New housing forum**

It was proposed that a new housing forum comprising members from NGOs and government departments (Health; Housing, Planning and Local Government; and Employment Affairs and Social Protection) could be established. This could be a useful means of enabling collaboration.

### **Need for affordable housing**

The need to provide housing that is affordable to all was highlighted as an urgent issue.

### **Social housing**

It was agreed that there is a need to overcome the stigma that can be associated with social housing, as well as local objections.

## **2.5 The role of employers in social inclusion**

### **Inclusion and diversity**

It was noted that inclusion and diversity are different concepts; often, addressing one does not mean the other has also been addressed. Participants noted that some employers might feel they have addressed both by addressing a single, perhaps more visible example of diversity, and that among some, there may be an unconscious bias, so that some excluded groups are unlikely to benefit from such measures (for example, someone with a low socio-economic status).

### **Groups at particular risk**

It was noted that people of African descent can face particular challenges in trying to enter the Irish workforce; well-skilled people are not getting access to relevant employment. This can have a generational effect, whereby children observe and are discouraged by their parents' experiences.

### **Flexibility**

It was observed that there is a tendency among employers to think that the best way to address poverty is by giving someone a job. However, there are costs involved in returning to the workforce (like childcare, or risk of losing a medical car, for instance) which also need to be addressed.

## **2.6 Social inclusion and Traveller health and wellbeing**

### **Whole-of-Government approach required**

A whole-of-government approach is needed to track, respond and improve social inclusion, health and wellbeing for Travellers. It was agreed that a high-level official should be appointed within each government department to drive this.

### **Data collection**

Traveller data are hidden in most current statistical sources. There is a need for standardised ethnic identifiers to be introduced, across all government departments, to clearly identify Traveller data, leading to the availability of reliable statistical data on the Traveller community. These should be linked to any revised Survey of Income and Living Conditions (SILC) survey modifications.

### **Need for targeted approaches**

While there is a need for universal and mainstream approaches, there is also a real need for targeted approaches to be implemented. In the implementation of Traveller Health, the peer Traveller health worker model has proven to be effective. This model should therefore be replicated to respond to other Traveller issues such as accommodation, education and employment.

### **Traveller Health Action Plan**

There is an urgent need for the Traveller Health Action Plan to be agreed, resourced and implemented.



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