



Delivering Change and Achieving Ambition: Progress on the Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025

**CWI/EAPN IRELAND
PREPARATORY WORKSHOPS:
KEY PROPOSALS TO THE SOCIAL
INCLUSION FORUM 2024**

Introduction

The Social Inclusion Forum is part of the Government's structures to monitor and evaluate the State's strategy to address poverty and achieve social inclusion. This annual event is part of the institutional structures put in place to underpin the implementation, monitoring and on-going development of the Government's social inclusion and anti-poverty agenda. It provides a forum for wider public consultation and discussion on social exclusion and poverty issues and the implementation of the strategy to tackle them, in particular for people experiencing poverty and social exclusion and the organisations/groups that work with them. The Forum also provides an opportunity for engagement between officials from Government Departments, community and voluntary organisations and people experiencing poverty.

Launched in 2020, The Roadmap to Social Inclusion 2020 – 2025 is the current national strategy and the theme of SIF 2024 is 'Delivering Change and Achieving Ambition: Progress on the Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025'. In 2024 there is a focus on the four themes of:

- Core Essentials – Housing, health and transport
- Social inclusion and disabled people
- Supporting Communities
- Employment

European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) Ireland and Community Work Ireland (CWI) collaborate annually to organise a series of workshops to support participation at the Social Inclusion Forum. This year EAPN Ireland and CWI decided to take a different approach to the preparatory workshops. As EAPN Ireland and CWI have previously reported, the key issues participants raised and wanted heard at the Social Inclusion Forum are not new and are not unknown. Many have been stated and repeated in one guise or another at previous SIFs and in other policy spaces. Rather than focusing on issues the preparatory workshops, and this report from them, shifts to the focus towards the proposals and solutions necessary to tackle these issues and challenges – whether emerging, persistent and/or structural.

Over 150 people registered and more than 100 people attended seven online and hybrid workshops and thematic specific roundtables. Participants were from all over the country, from a broad range of backgrounds and experiences. Each workshop provided the context and the opportunity for detailed discussion. We thank all those who gave their time and energy to this process.

Beginning with overarching proposals and moving to proposals specific to the four themes of this year's SIF, this report summarises the solutions for change put forward by the participants with the aim of bringing about change for those people and communities experiencing poverty and social exclusion. The report also contains direct quotes from participants which are integrated throughout in blue text.

1. Overarching and intersecting proposals

Developing a culture of co-creation and collaboration with communities

Use a collaborative policy-making model to ensure that policy reflects what will work for people and communities and avoid recent episodes such as the abandonment of the Green Paper on Disability Reform. Policies that are developed without the active participation of communities affected by that policy are much less likely to be successful.

Avoid the imposition of consultation fatigue, which occurs when people's contribution is not heard.

'Engaging is emotional labour'

A collaborative/partnership approach should be prioritised not just at the start of the policy process, but throughout in terms of implementation and review.

Support a model that is underpinned by the *Values and Principles for Collaboration and Partnership*, the Community Platform *Collaborative Governance* document and the *Guide for Inclusive Community Engagement in Local Planning and Decision-Making* that, taken together, would form a useful frame for collaborative approaches to governance, planning and decision making.

Standardise this approach across all government departments –the Green Paper on Disability Reform, as highlighted above, is a recent example of the consequences of not investing in co-production.

The cost of participation of people from impacted communities needs to be recognised, with people reimbursed. This needs to be done in a way that discourages people through concerns of the impact on their income supports, possibly with thresholds.

Developing strategic approaches

Long-term, sustainable planning, resourcing and thinking is needed rather than short-term, one-off, band aid approaches. These must involve effective and sustained funding, implementation, monitoring and review, etc. to ensure things are working and on course.

In developing policy, start with mapping what we want to be achieved, and then plan for the policies to achieve this. This will involve strong policy makers working outside of silos and connecting with grassroots communities and representative groups.

“So, I kind of feel that the resources are all being directed toward addressing crises and it’s all reactionary, and that impacts on strategic stuff. Rather than developing a side-by-side approach to addressing a crisis, the longer-term goals just seem to be dropped. I’m not sure that would happen in the area of the economy, but it seems very easy to happen within the area of social supports and community development and healthcare.”

Implementation and mechanisms for accountability

Implement agreed policy in full and in collaboration with representatives of the communities affected by the policy.

Accountability is crucial - There is a need for appropriate and transparent mechanisms to ensure accountability, and for existing mechanisms to be effectively used to improve the systems currently in place.

“Policy rich, implementation poor”

“You can have all the fancy terminology in the world but unless there is accountability and implementation it goes nowhere”

“There’s a whole host of disability strategies coming from different departments. It’s not necessarily the policies that are the issue, it’s implementation and not always having the funding and monitoring structures, and so on, set up afterwards.”

“Who checks if something is being implemented? And what happens if it isn’t?”

“There needs to be independent evaluations, otherwise it is pointless, a whitewash”

Putting Equality and Human Rights at the centre

There needs to be a stronger focus on the implementation and enforcement of the Public Sector Duty requiring all public bodies to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and protect human rights.

Intersectionality and integration

Break down the silos between government departments and develop a whole of government approach to address social issues, acknowledging that they are experienced in an intersectional way. Ensure better integration of work between departments where their respective roles intersect (e.g. Housing, Health, DCEDIY & DSP for disabled people - if one is not working properly, the others are impacted).

Many of the barriers that are in place will need to be addressed cross-departmentally. To effectively address many of these issues, silos will need to be dismantled, joined-up thinking, and whole of Government approaches are what are needed.

There is a need to recognise and address the double, triple, multiple and intersectional discrimination experienced by people.

“An important point is when you have so many different strategies, operating in silos from different government departments. Taking housing and health, you have the housing strategy for disabled people which is located in the Department of Housing primarily. Then you have the disability action plan, around disability services located in DCEDIY. But for disabled people, they need the housing and they need the social care supports, so you need those operating in tandem. So, it’s the overarching coordinating mechanism that’s often missing, to look at all the different strategies from different government departments and how do we bring these together and deliver them in a coordinated way.”

Social Cohesion

Much more needs to be done to address social cohesion in tandem with social inclusion. Clearer communication must be in place to tackle misinformation, disinformation and the scapegoating of marginalised groups and minorities. The Government must develop and implement clear strategies and approaches in conjunction with affected communities.

Additional funding should be allocated for cultural exchange programmes and awareness raising and training for communities on the strategies of far-right agitators. Additional funding should be allocated to grassroots and voluntary groups promoting social cohesion at local level. These grants should be available on a multi-annual basis to allow organisations to develop medium to long-term objectives.

Training should be available to all media professionals to facilitate sensitive reporting regarding migration, race, religion and ethnicity, as well as sexual orientation and gender, disability, etc. Information on community events and integration supports should be made available in multiple languages, in accessible formats. The Criminal Justice (Incitement to Violence or Hatred and Hate Offences) Bill 2022 should be supported through training for all relevant public service bodies.

Universal and Targeted Initiatives

Use a combination of universal and targeted approaches with a greater focus on tailoring policy and targeting the needs of communities and groups most likely to experience poverty and social exclusion.

“A mainstreamed approach is sufficient when outcomes are identical for all components of the target groups; when evidence shows a clear gap between the situation of Roma and Travellers versus the rest of society (e.g. regarding their health and housing situation), policies should be adjusted, and specific measures should also be developed.”¹

Data

Address the data gaps, including through collection and dissemination of disaggregated data, for the communities who are most likely to be living in poverty and with deprivation, discrimination and social exclusion. This would help make effective and evidence informed policy. It is ironic that the survey designed to measure poverty (SILC) does not cover the communities most at risk of poverty.

Targets

Policy targets need to be assessed to ensure they are fit for purpose. Where they are, the policies need to be adequately resourced. There needs to be more co-design of strategies and policies in greater collaboration or partnership working with the sector in their implementation. The sector is a key delivery partner for the State and should be engaged as such.

¹ EUROPEAN COMMISSION ASSESSMENT OF IRELAND’S NATIONAL TRAVELLER AND ROMA INCLUSION STRATEGY, 2016

2. Themes

2.1 Core Essentials

Transport

- Expand and extend access to public transport in rural and underserved areas and design routes on the basis of community need.
- From a rural perspective, without a robust public transport system in place for people in rural areas, it adds to the cost of living and puts people at risk of poverty.
- Improvements in the quality and number of Local Link services, need to continue to scale up if they are to meet need. This has to be done in consultation with local communities to see how to most effectively and usefully do this.
- Connecting Ireland is going in the right direction, but a lot more needs to be done, including greatly increasing investment in services and promoting and raising the profile of the service as an essential service.
- A one size fits all approach is not necessarily going to be suitable - transport that is flexible for the needs of people in the community is what is needed including addressing the access needs of older people and disabled people.
- In more urban areas where there may be more transport options available, affordability remains an issue for many people. If the Government is to seriously support the use of public transport, then more needs to be done to ensure its accessibility, availability, affordability and acceptability.
- Public transport booking fees should not be applied for people with the Full Travel Pass. The use of such fees is a barrier for disabled people and older people, and should be abolished.
- The delivery of services by public transport providers must ensure a focus on accessibility as a requirement - this includes in terms of location, quantity and quality of public transport options, suitable training for all employees, effective complaints mechanisms and remedies.

“And feeding into that the idea of transport then that all links up, because if you’ve got things in similar or accessible places, you’ve got less journeys to make. It’s very difficult to manage employment or education when you’re in that scenario, so transport is very important.”

Health

- We need to improve access to health services and increase accountability for those in a position of responsibility. There are increasingly longer waits, including for appointments to see GPs. This is a greater problem for those with particular needs, such as children with disabilities or other specific needs.
- It is important to have joined-up policy that addresses the social determinants of health. One example is to improve people’s environment and reduce pollution through providing more and affordable public transport, but also investing in cycling and walking infrastructure so that they are a good alternative to private transport. Another example would be to enable those living in emergency type accommodation to be able to prepare their own meals, rather than in many cases having no choice but to eat unhealthy food. This includes people who are homeless and International Protection Applicants, including many in the Direct Provision system.
- Fully implement Sláintecare and address the private interests that impact its implementation and the delivery of the health system.
- Greater resources and supports are needed to address mental health, including the specific mental health issues facing communities such as Travellers.
- Provide training for current and future healthcare professionals in intercultural practices.

“There is no specific reference to the regionalisation of healthcare and how that might impact the delivery of service provision. A population-based model is good in theory, but when populations are changing rapidly there needs to be a responsive mechanism in place to support.”

Housing & Accommodation

- Introduce a plan to provide incentives and opportunities to downsize.
- Put in place better mechanisms for accountability and a change of policy to address the problems of dereliction, including of social houses, and free up places for people to live. The accountability mechanisms need to be agreed and driven from central level to address the following - who owns the home?; who is responsible for addressing the dereliction and how?; by when etc will it be addressed?. It should also include a 'use it or lose it' policy. Implementation is critical in making it work.
- Introduce a policy on the conversion of unused office space into homes.
- Strong policy/legislation is needed to tackle the current practice of large corporations being able to 'asset bank' land and property and drive up the price of housing, undermining the goal of affordable homes.
- Increase the resources for the Age Friendly programme to ensure there are sufficient staff to cover all areas.
- Address the issue of former asylum seekers being unable to move from direct provision accommodation because they cannot source alternative accommodation, and provide them with access to homeless services.
- Address the disproportionality associated with several groups at risk of experiencing homelessness and emergency accommodation such as Travellers and lone parents.
- Adapt all schemes to retrofit and/or improve energy rating to include Traveller accommodation, and the accommodation of others such as those in the direct provision system.

“Around things like energy poverty, which we should be playing a much greater role in, and particularly for local authorities at a local level. The retrofitting scheme for warmer homes is diabolical. How long will it take for local authorities to actually get the social housing stock that they own and manage effectively retrofitted? It's going to be over 20 years. The ambition is not there and the funding is not there. Social housing in and of itself...why would you not go for something like that? Particularly those are the groups of people who potentially are on lower incomes. And there is no retrofitting scheme for private rental properties, and 30% of our population rent. The fact there is no scheme available for private rented homes is beyond the pale.”

- Fully implement the outstanding actions from the Policy Statement on Housing for Older People. When the implementation group was brought together, there were a number of actions that were taken back into governing departments. Now an action plan needs to be put in place to ensure that they are delivered.
- Increase the number of apprenticeships in areas related to house construction.
- Develop a more targeted approach to address energy poverty, including retrofitting, focusing on those most at risk of having to choose between 'heating or eating'.
- Ensure that state provided accommodation is culturally appropriate e.g. in the case of Travellers that the provision of such accommodation is reflective of traditions and cultural requirements.
- Implement the Expert Review on Traveller Accommodation, as a matter of priority, and in consultation with Traveller and Roma groups to address the failure to deliver. Also stop the mis-use of the Traveller Accommodation budget to block Travellers accessing accommodation.

“There is under-provision not under-funding in the area of Traveller accommodation. So, there is a need to review if the current model of national allocation which can be drawn down by local authorities is fit for purpose, as it allows for local authorities who may want to exclude Travellers from the area to do so by not drawing down any budget and then not being held accountable.”

“For disabled people, housing is a huge issue. Before the housing crisis, there was already a huge issue in terms of a shortage of accessible accommodation. But now, with the general level of need, it's an even bigger issue. Some of those more specific issues can get lost in the drive to increase supply, but you also need to increase the supply of accessible accommodation. And then for disabled people, it really interacts with the need for social care supports and the issues around lack of services there.”

2.2 Community & Community Development

- The Roadmap for Social Inclusion Goal - *Empower communities to address social exclusion* – ignores the structural causes of poverty. The associated commitments are not fit for purpose and do not consider the difficult social issues that the community sector is trying to address, often with resources that do not allow for organisations to meet demands.
- Take a new approach so that the Roadmap for Social Inclusion recognises community work as an essential in addressing poverty, social exclusion and inequalities in a way that is participative, collective and empowering.
- Fund and resource autonomous community development and community development infrastructure to a level of critical mass, allowing for the employment of qualified community workers, in sufficient numbers and on good working conditions, to be able to address the social issues of the time.
- Mainstream and expand the community development programme.
- Address the retention issue where qualified community workers are opting out of community-based organisations to work in local authorities and other agencies that are better resourced and can provide better working conditions. Community workers working with marginalised communities are often overworked, underpaid - it can be overwhelming. Resourcing, recruitment and respect are needed urgently.
- Recognise and acknowledge the work being undertaken by organisations and networks whose work is underpinned by community development including the Women’s Collective Ireland, the National Traveller Partnership and the Community Development Programme.
- Acknowledge the importance of community spaces and hubs for marginalised communities that create spaces for engagement and interaction and promote social cohesion, and resource their development in areas where they are lacking.
- Community Education, which works from a holistic approach, needs to be more highly valued and adequately funded to make education more accessible, and with jobs available to people from the communities that it serves.
- Community centres need to be fully accessible in all ways, including their location.

2.3 Disabled People

- Instigate and maintain effective and genuine engagement with Disabled People’s Organisations (DPOs) and ensure that policy and strategies are designed, implemented and reviewed on the basis of co-creation.

“As with many historical precedents, the current situation and treatment of disabled people will be seen in the future as a crime against disabled people. The solution is systematic direct dialogue with DPOs who have genuine mandates for the people they represent. To be a true dialogue, this means ensuring adequate resourcing and capacity to allow meaningful systematic dialogue between disabled people, DPOs and state structures.”

“There is a sense that with the Green Paper they completely lost the trust of the disabled community”

“All these able-bodied people are trying to make policy for disabled people. They’re trying to envisage the barriers that we will meet. Why aren’t there disabled people saying the barriers? Disabled people need to be involved when making policy for disabled people.”

“It is vital for democracy to have disabled people at the decision-making table. It is a disservice to society and to democracy if we are invisible.”

- Acknowledge and take concrete steps to tackle ableism and unconscious bias in society that informs and may negatively impact the design and implementation of policy. The approach to this should be developed in collaboration with disabled people and DPOs.
- Implement a programme of Disability Equality training across the board for officials and policy/decision makers which tackles the ableism and unconscious bias - rather than disability

awareness training - to create the paradigm shift needed to effect change. This training should also be provided to those providing public services and professionals in all areas, public and private.

- Implement the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and use it to underpin and inform all policy, strategies and plans that directly or indirectly affect disabled people, including in their design and implementation.
- Ratify the UNCRPD Optional Protocol.
- The language and approach of strategies that impact on disabled people needs to change from one that is based on a medical model, that is often paternalistic, to one based on a social model and the rights of disabled people. The language used when referencing disabled people in the Roadmap for Social Inclusion needs to be reviewed to reflect this.
- Shift the approach that focuses on employment as a solution to poverty for disabled people to a more whole approach that addresses structural barriers to full participation in society.
- Ensure that all actions are based on removing the structural, including attitudinal barriers, to inclusion.

“Inclusion is a meaningless word if the barriers that prevent it are not removed”

- Be more proactive in relation to informing employers about the supports that exist to ensure reasonable accommodation for disabled people.
- Implement the recommendations from the Cost of Disability Report and provide the funding to support this.
- Make the medical card and secondary benefits available to all disabled people for life – remove the foolish review process.

“Make Work Pay, in terms of secondary benefits, that’s not bad policy. It went some way towards acknowledging that it’s a problem. Did it go far enough? Absolutely not. I mean, why don’t we have universal free travel whether we’re in work or out of work, no matter what? Why don’t we have universal medical cards, no matter what, no means testing?”

- Ensure that all services are proofed for the inclusion of disabled people and apply sanctions on services that are not inclusive.
- Ensure that all public transport is fully accessible and address the transport gap in rural areas.
- The Irish Government should immediately embrace the new European Disability Card and introduce all the necessary policy and funding for its full roll-out as soon as possible.
- Adequately resource Personal Assistants for disabled people as a right, not a luxury, and a necessity for people who need this support to live their lives, access employment and education, etc. Revise the application system for PAs to address the challenges associated with the process
- Ensure that there are places for disabled people with lived experience on relevant Strategic Policy Committees and other committees at local level.
- Address the under representation of disabled people in political life.
- Consider the needs of disabled people in planning and design of traffic/route reviews and pedestrianisation. This is also an element of tackling wider eco-ableism.

“There’s a lot of learning – at the moment in disability, there’s a lot of new strategies and strategies that have come to an end. So there’s a lot of learning from what hasn’t worked, like the National Disability Inclusion Strategy, the previous one has come to an end and there’s a new one being developed. Some of the learning from that – a lot of the indicators weren’t very outcome focused. It was a lot of process, setting up working groups, and so on. And maybe too many indicators to track, but not meaningful enough.”

2.4 Employment and Unemployment

- Review the public employment system and linked programmes so that they work from a person-centred culture that provides a holistic approach and tailored supports that people need and treats everyone with respect and as adults.
- Address flaws and shift the culture, approach and priorities in the social protection system that currently does not adequately protect people and avoid a culture that makes people avoid availing of opportunities for fear of losing secondary benefits and/or fear that if the opportunity does not work out, it will be impossible to get back in the door.
- The public employment system needs to be able to provide services and supports to everyone who needs it, irrespective of which payment they are on, if any.
- Adequately train and resource support services to ensure the provision of services considers the needs of people who are furthest behind. These can often be people with literacy issues, so communication and engagement should recognise this, and be appropriately targeted.
- Increase focus on addressing barriers, such as bias and stigma and more effectively tackle all forms of discrimination in the employment system. These are key reasons that people cannot access supports, employment or education. Currently, however, it appears to be the case that the focus is on the individual as “unwilling” and treating people with suspicion, rather than on systemic issues and barriers.
- Invest a greater level of support for those who are long-term unemployed to enter and remain in employment. Include employers and their representative organisation in conversations about access to the labour market, particularly for those long-term unemployed.
- There needs to be space and time to support people to become employment ready. Employment strategies, policies and plans need to ensure that piece is effectively built in. Provide supports and how people are able to access them in a way that is effective and meaningful for them – so it doesn’t become a case that any employment is good enough, that people are able to access quality work. Not just a case that there is a job –it has to be meaningful employment for the person.
- A crucial issue is income adequacy and ensuring people are provided with an adequate income to live on. This includes ensuring that people who may never be able to work are still able to live a decent life, and that payments match that aim.
- The provision of quality essential public services is crucial in supporting access to employment, and wider social inclusion. This includes childcare, the lack of access to it is a huge barrier for many – there needs to be a publicly funded or public model of childcare and early years education. The provision of an effective level of public transport is also crucial.
- Acknowledge the importance of community education. The Community Foundation Ireland and the Bechaire Fund research report, “The Power of Community Education: Supporting lone parents to fulfil their potential in education, employment, and society” demonstrates that lone parents who complete community education are highly likely to progress to further and higher education, training and paid employment. It also highlighted the importance of wraparound supports. The report recommends the utilisation of the power of community education to respond to employment needs and skills gaps by scaling up employability programmes targeted at lone parents, building on the learning from One Family's New Futures Employability Programme. This approach, and the culture of engagement that informs it, could be widened in scope to encompass other cohorts and tailored supports offered that address their particular needs.

Travellers & Roma and employment

- Develop and introduce with the Traveller and Roma organisations a State Traveller and Roma Employment and Enterprise Strategy overseen by the relevant Departments. This strategy should have key targets and a sufficient budget.
- When measuring Traveller employment, the state needs to adopt a gendered lens to ensure that Traveller Women are receiving equal opportunities to participate in the labour market.

- Discrimination and racism in the workplace needs to have a zero-tolerance strategy, as we know from the 2022 Census statistics Travellers are facing huge amounts of racism when entering the workforce. To tackle this, cultural competency training within the labour market should be compulsory.
- Bias and stigma are massive barriers, and concrete steps need to be taken to address them at a societal level, and particularly within employment and education, including support services. Anti-racism and cultural competency training should be made compulsory for all essential services provision.

Migrants and employment

- Address the policy that prevents International Protection Applicants from working for six months and allow immediate access to the labour market – this would support their integration into society and help their financial independence and can coincide with the application process.
- Introduce a system to ensure migrant workers can access social protection, social insurance and pension systems and avoid the situation where they are paid in cash by employers to avoid their exclusion from social protection and income support.
- Recognise the qualifications of migrants, refugees and people seeking international protection to ensure that their employment reflects their qualifications.
- Effective recognition of prior learning for migrants, refugees and people seeking international protection is essential – they are often coming from situations where they were employed, with qualifications and experience, but the systems currently in place are not effective.

Disabled people and employment

- Remove the recently added requirement to answer questions on medical conditions from the publicjobs.ie. It is adding great stress for disabled people. This may be intended as a positive duty, but disabled people’s experience is that such information will be used as a negative filter and will result in disabled people being excluded. Also are there not data protection issues in providing such sensitive data on application forms?
- Address the challenges facing disabled people in accessing employment. Require the social welfare system to be more flexible in recognising that disabled people have conditions that often result in episodic flare-ups and mean they temporarily might not be available to work.² It takes many disabled people some time to settle into employment and they may end up having to break off their employment for short periods due to their impairment, or end up moving between short term contracts. Also, a more suitable and flexible kind of payment is needed than Illness Benefit. Employers also need to be made aware of this possibility as it can be difficult to get them to understand, without any negative risk to their conditions of employment.
- The Social Enterprise policy did not look at the self-employment of disabled people, leaving a gap in the policy - This is a gap that needs to be addressed.

“The so-called Comprehensive Employment Strategy for Disabled People, the NDA has been criticising it for ages for not dealing with work rehabilitation at all. There’s a whole scheme in there that they’re supposed to implement for workplace rehabilitation. About seventy-something per cent of us acquire our impairments while we’re of working age.”

Older people and employment

- Older workers in the workplace is becoming an increasingly important issue and needs to be addressed and planned for effectively and sustainably.
- Currently there are discrepancies around access to payment - e.g. older people deferring their pensions and losing access to illness benefits. This needs to be rectified.

² Currently disabled people have to notify the Department of Social Protection every time they leave work, and a new assessment of capacity has to be carried out every time. To avoid the stress and use of resources involved disabled people should be able to work for a year in a new job to make sure their employment is secure and before they are assessed in terms of their ongoing income supports.

- In terms of the social exclusion of older people, more needs to be done to address concerns about them being driven out of the workplace including through mandatory retirement ages.

Lone parents and Employment

- The specific barriers faced by lone parents need to be properly understood and addressed - e.g. caring responsibilities, childcare and the lack of access to it, lack of transport, uncertainty around access to education, and intersecting barriers that are often the responsibility of different departments. It is crucial that there be long-term, joined-up thinking and a whole of Government approach?

“When we talk about policy around lone parents, there’s really a lack of understanding of what that actually means in terms of the idea that they can just get to work. But for many it’s not that easy. We wish it was”

“What we need is free, or virtually free, public childcare model for all families. Particularly in rural Ireland, but anywhere really, the childcare system could and should be integrated into the institutions we have in our local areas, like schools and community centres. It is happening in some places, but it is very ad hoc and it is private, so we have no real control over where they are or how we plan for that over the long term, particularly as our populations are increasing.”

“If you’re a self-employed person as a lone parent, if you are working for somebody else, you’ll have a disregard of that income of about €165 a week. But if you’re self-employed they don’t take that into account at all, so whatever you earn as a self-employed person is taken in as means. So it’s really unfair, particularly to try and be flexible around your caring responsibilities, self-employment is actually one of those ways that can be really effective.”