

Roadmap for Social Inclusion: Mid-term Review

Public Consultation

The Irish Local Development Network CLG (ILDN) is the representative body for Ireland's Local Development Companies (LDCs). These 49 not-for-profit groups are building inclusive, vibrant communities and better life chances for people in every part of Ireland. They assist communities and disadvantaged persons / groups with personal development and well-being, social inclusion, employment training and placement, enterprise and social enterprise, community development, environment and climate action. They are innovators, collaborators and delivery partners in the sphere of social inclusion. As such, ILDN welcomes the opportunity to feed into this process.

What progress do you feel has been made in reducing poverty and social exclusion since publication of the Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020 – 2025 in January 2020?

In the context of the COVID pandemic 2020/2021 it has been difficult to judge sustainable progress, due to the important but temporary emergency measures that were undertaken by the State to support household incomes during that time. According to the CSO Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2021, without COVID-19 income supports, the at risk of poverty rate would have been 19.9% in 2021 as opposed to 11.6%, and median household disposable income would have decreased by 6.2% when in fact it increased by 5.8% to €46,471 compared to €43,915 in SILC 2020. Furthermore, The Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020 – 2025 aims to reduce the consistent poverty rate to 2% by 2025. The consistent poverty rate in SILC 2021 was 4.0%, compared with 4.7% for the previous year.

The figures above are welcome however due to the war in Ukraine, inflation and the energy crisis, there is a sense that the gains achieved in 2021 are being eroded. Measures have been made in budget 2023 to try and mitigate the above issues but it will take time to assess their adequacy. What is important to note is that poverty is not equal among those experiencing it and ILDN argue that targeted bespoke measures are required for certain individuals particularly within cohorts such as Roma, Carers, people with disabilities, victims of domestic abuse, migrant workers, homeless people, people living with addiction and members of the Traveller community.

The Social Inclusion & Community Activation Programme (SICAP) is the State's national social inclusion programme and was a key responder to both the COVID 19 Emergency Response and now the Displaced Ukrainian Emergency Response. The 5% budget increase announced for the programme in budget 2023 which followed a 10% budget increase in 2022 is welcome progress, but still far short of where the programme needs to be in order to combat poverty and tackle social exclusion. Greater budgetary commitment to social inclusion, with focussed and targeted initiatives, is essential if targets are to be met.

In your experience, what has worked well in reducing the number of people in Ireland experiencing poverty and social exclusion?

Emergency Income supports were significant during COVID 19 and Budget 2023 appears to have established significant measures to address the cost of living crisis. There has been significant employment growth in recent months also. The employment rate for those aged 15-64 was 72.8% in Q1 2022 compared to 65.6% in Q1 2021 and 69.6% in Q1 2020. The community and voluntary sector during the COVID emergency also deserve great acknowledgement where they developed initiatives to protect vulnerable people and households within their communities. Local Development Companies worked with the C&V sector to establish befriending projects, Food Banks and Meals on Wheels, deliveries of medicine and referrals into the relevant support agencies. The capacity within this sector for responsive, flexible and timely engagement on the ground has been vital and requires greater investment by government.

And in your experience, what has not worked so well or is challenging in reducing the number of people in Ireland experiencing poverty and social exclusion?

As previously stated poverty is not experienced equally in society and in many cases, this can be compounded through social exclusion. There are many people who are hidden or isolated within their communities, those who have poor English language skills, have low levels of self-esteem, low levels of education, have issues with mental health, disability or addiction, or experience loneliness, fear, abuse, racism or prejudice. As a result, they cannot access education, labour market opportunities, or have sustainable employment, access public services or easily integrate with their local communities. Extra funding through direct social welfare payments is helpful but it does not deal with the root cause of poverty or social exclusion.

The Digital divide is prevalent among those who are most disadvantaged in society. Access to broadband is one barrier but so is digital literacy. Many public services due to the COVID pandemic have moved online through MyGov.ie and similar platforms and have reduced the option for walk in services and acceptance of paper-based applications. This has put public services further out of reach from those in poverty and who are socially excluded. Issues such as GDPR also make it harder for support organisations to act or mediate on their behalf when accessing public services.

Support organisations who engage with disadvantaged groups and individuals have also experienced a distancing of Intreo and DEASP from them at the local level to deal with localised issues or individual cases. In the past local interagency working groups were established which facilitated relationship building among local Intreo/DEASP staff and those working in DEASP funded programmes such as TUS and community employment and other schemes. These relationships allowed issues or blockages to be resolved quickly for DEASP clients as direct contact could be made between the relevant personnel. This conversation has now been removed in many geographic areas and replaced with all communication to be sent to generic email addresses which can be slow to respond and who don't easily consider complex cases.

What would you like to see prioritised in terms of moving people out of poverty and social exclusion, up to the end of the Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020 – 2025 in 2025?

Continued funding increases for the national social inclusion programme SICAP as it combats poverty and tackles social exclusion, and the capacity for focus on particular issues and groups.

Greater investment in those who work in the C&V sector who support people who are disadvantaged and/or experiencing poverty through security of employment, career development and continuous professional development. This investment will give a larger return in terms of moving people out of poverty and social exclusion, through supporting this sector to attract and retain talent, commitment and passion.

Greater engagement between DEASP and support agencies including local development companies at the local level to foster collaborative working.

A review of how people experiencing poverty and social exclusion access public services considering transport and the digital divide.

Consider more how health and well-being and environmental sustainability are also linked to social exclusion and poverty.

Greater inter departmental working and joined up thinking (i.e. HSE, Tusla, DEASP and DRCD) with the C&V and local development sector on anti-poverty and social inclusion initiatives and programmes. Even consider co funded programmes between departments, community-based organisations and local development companies for example that are bottom up designed. This would lead to better outcomes for those who are experiencing poverty or social exclusion.

If there are any specific aims, ambitions, commitments or targets in the Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020 – 2025 that you would like to comment on, please provide details. This can include identifying gaps in what is included in the Roadmap, or any other comments you may have.

Environmental sustainability and climate justice are linked to poverty and social inclusion. This would capture energy poverty, food poverty, clean air, pollution and access to green spaces. Any climate ambitions, commitments or targets which are relevant should also be included in the roadmap's ambitions, commitments or targets.