

Roadmap for Social Inclusion Consultation

About NCBI

Consultation Questions

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?

- There has been a reduction in the general numbers of people living in constant poverty since the introduction of the Roadmap for Social Inclusion in January 2020 which must be welcomed however, there is no evidence to show that people with disabilities have experienced similar reductions. In fact, based on SILC data, all three categories measured increased from 2020 to 2021 for those unable to work due to long-standing health problems with those in consistent poverty rate increasing from 16.2% to 19.2%¹.

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

- Poverty impact assessments and Equality/Gender Proofing assessments of policy measures have been a welcomed however, consideration should be given to reviewing the effectiveness of measuring impact of policy decisions.
- Recent budgetary decisions to provide short-term support to people in receipt of financial supports from the Department of Social Protection are welcome but there needs to be a longer term focus on supports for people with disabilities. Recognising and supporting people with the Cost of Disability should not be on a short-term basis.

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?

- The implementation of the EU Web Accessibility Directive has not been maximised which means that many people who are blind or vision impaired are unable to independently complete forms or apply for government/state services online. This further excludes people who are blind or vision impaired when it comes to consultations where they are

¹ [Poverty and Deprivation - CSO - Central Statistics Office](#)

unable to complete the consultation independently as the websites are not compliant with WCAG 2.1 AA standards. A Digital Accessibility Fund should be established to support Government Departments, State Agencies, schools, hospitals and all other public bodies to comply with the European Web Accessibility Directive legislation.

- Employment opportunities remain extremely limited for people who are blind or vision impaired with currently only 24% of people active within the labour market. Recent feedback from NCBI service users indicated many issues with the Reasonable Accommodation Fund (RAF) and the Employers Retention Scheme. The lack of awareness of the RAF among employers is well documented, with zero uptake from employers in 12 counties across the country in 2021². Full implementation of the Comprehensive Employment Scheme and engagement with relevant bodies to ensure successful outcomes for people who are blind or vision impaired is required to address the low levels of employment for people who are blind or vision impaired.
- The Free Travel Scheme is synonymous with independent living for many people living with sight loss. However, there are currently 1,071 NCBI services users who are deemed ineligible to access the Free Travel Scheme even though their sight is significantly compromised and they are unable to obtain a driver's licence as a result of their low vision. NCBI and the Irish College of Ophthalmologists believe this is a serious issue and requires immediate action. We know from the 2016 Census, the most common difficulty (at 43.3%) reported by people with sight loss is related to participating in leisure activities or using transport. The Cost of Disability Report clearly shows the average extra yearly transport costs for people who are blind or have a serious vision impairment is €737. Government should immediately expand the criteria of the Free Travel Scheme to include all those with a long-term eye condition which renders their level of vision insufficient to meet criteria for a driver's licence in the Free Travel Scheme.

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?

- Recognition the people with disabilities have to meet the increased cost of living with fixed incomes while also using that fixed income to cover

² [Social Welfare Benefits: 4 May 2022: Written answers \(KildareStreet.com\)](https://www.kildarestreet.com/social-welfare-benefits-4-may-2022-written-answers)

the cost of disability which was outlined in the Governments Cost of Disability report. This should be addressed through the introduction of a Cost of Disability payment, as advocated for by many organisations including NCBI.

- Accessible housing for safe independent living is essential for everyone and not least for people who are blind or vision impaired. Although efforts are made to standardise assessment by some local authorities to accommodate and adapt housing to support people with medical needs, there are specific barriers for those living with sight loss. These barriers include location of the house in a poorly lit area and remote access to public transport, inappropriately narrow doorways and passages, poor lighting inside the house, trip hazards such as loose carpets, entrance steps to the house and steps to rooms within the house, lack of contrasting colours on kitchen worktops, poorly identified knobs on cooking hobs etc.
- Additionally, the cost of inflation and the cost of disability are not recognised within the current Housing Adaptation Grant or Mobility Aids Grant for people who need to make adjustments to the house in which they are currently living.
- The loss of Blind Pension and Disability Allowance upon taking up short term contracts or accessing grant or project funding leaves people living with sight loss financially vulnerable. Grant and project funding provided to those in self-employment to start a company, accept a commission or complete a project should not be considered as means tested income when calculating eligibility for Blind Pension or other similar payments. Funding for this purpose is based on applications that detail the costs associated with the start up or project and do not equate to profits accrued. Recognition that grant and project-based funding is not income and therefore not considered as means tested income for the purpose of Blind Welfare Pension and other social welfare payments
- All public bodies in Ireland have responsibility to promote equality, prevent discrimination and protect the human rights of their employees, customers, service users and everyone affected by their policies and plans. This requires a full implementation of the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty as per the Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014.

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.

- It is important that the Roadmap continues to work towards the eradication of poverty as it is a very strong statement, even if it is challenging to achieve in real terms.
- Introduction of a Cost of Disability payment to tackle the extra cost of disability.
- A review of the Personal Assistance Scheme to ensure people who are blind or vision impaired have access to PAS to ensure they have the freedom to decide on the things they want to do. We are aware of people with a vision impairment waiting for periods of 7 years to get access to PAS which has a detrimental impact on their ability to engage in social activities along with other daily tasks.
- Full implementation of the Comprehensive Employment Scheme and engagement with relevant bodies to ensure successful outcomes for people who are blind or vision impaired.
- Introduce a quota for the NGO sector, similar to that in the Public Sector, and expand supports offered to the sector such as the Reasonable Accommodation Fund.
- While there are several bodies responsible for the implementation of funds and supports for students with disabilities, support services for students attending tertiary education depend on the education provider and the type of course that the student is attending. This sporadic plan significantly impacts on access to learning and personal development and independence for students who are blind or vision impaired. Provision of ringfenced funding to each education provider to ensure consistency in supports available through access and disability offices for all students in all further and higher education providers to ensure equitable supports, irrespective of the college and course attended by the students.
- The Student Grant Scheme is available to students across further and higher education once the student is attending an approved course in an approved institution. The Student Grant Scheme is administered by the Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI). Although SUSI is a considerable support for many students, it is not available for students who are studying part time courses. This significantly hinders opportunities for

many students who are blind or vision impaired who wish to pursue third level education but are unable to commit to a full-time course for a variety of reasons. Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) Student Grant Scheme should be expanded to include part-time students.

For further information or questions, please contact Lorna Fitzpatrick, Advocacy and Engagement Manager on lorna.fitzpatrick@ncbi.ie