

Question: 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%.

Question: 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.

Question: 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.
- Employment opportunities remain extremely limited for people who are blind or vision impaired with currently only 24% of people active within the labour market. There are 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 2021.
- Travel remains a major concern. The Free Travel Scheme is synonymous with independent living for many people living with sight loss. However, there are currently people 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.

Question: 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.

- Introduction of Cost of Disability payment.
- Accessible housing for safe independent living. 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 that need to be addressed. Cost of inflation and the cost of disability need to be recognised within the current Housing Adaptation Grant.
- 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.

- Full implementation of the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty as per the Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014.

Question: 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.
- A review of the Personal Assistance Scheme to ensure people who are blind or vision impaired have timely access to PAS.
- Full implementation of the Comprehensive Employment Scheme and engagement with relevant bodies to ensure successful outcomes for people who are blind or vision impaired.
- The sporadic support available to students with sight loss in third level 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.
- Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) Student Grant Scheme should be expanded to include part-time students.

Question: The Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020 – 2025 includes 7 high-level goals. Please indicate below which of these goals are most relevant to your participation in the Mid-Term Review.

Extend employment opportunities to all who can work;
Ensure work pays – fair pay, fair conditions for workers;
Provide income security for older people;
Support families – reduce child poverty;
Reduce poverty among people with disabilities – help them to maximise their ability;
Build inclusive communities – encourage active citizenship;
Ensure that all people have access to quality services

Question: Which county are you located in?

Would prefer not to say

Question: Are you responding on a personal basis or on behalf of an organisation?

Organisation

Question: Which organisation are you responding on behalf of?

NCBI