

# REHAB GROUP'S MID-TERM REVIEW OF THE SOCIAL INCLUSION ROAD MAP 2020-2025

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RehabGroup  
Investing in People, Changing Perspectives

# Introduction

Our submission provides feedback for the Mid-Term Review of the *Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020 - 2025*. In this submission, we respond, through the viewpoints and experiences of our service users, to the questions posed in the Mid-Term Review:

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

The evidence presented in this submission is based on the findings of focus groups carried out with over 70 of our service users across 8 centres around the country. Each focus group took the questions from the consultation and discussed them at length to get our service users lived experiences of Social Inclusion in Ireland. We combined the feedback from focus groups with our experience as a front-line disability services provider and advocator for the rights for people with disabilities to ensure that we can submit a comprehensive submission.

Our focus groups, consisting of people who use RehabCare services and National Learning Network (NLN) students, were held in September 2022. Participants include people with lived experience of many different types of services/supports. Some of advocates that participated in this consultation are current active members on our Regional Advocacy Committees, which cover the East, South and North-West of the country.

It is clear from participants' responses that aspects of the *Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020 – 2025* have not yet been achieved and their lived experiences as people with disabilities tell a much different story. Below, we go through some of the main areas raised in our focus groups.

## Our Response to Mid-Term Review of the *Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020 - 2025*

- **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?**

The overall reception to this question was negative. Many of our participants felt that there has been no success in reducing poverty and social inclusion since the publication of the Roadmap for Social Inclusion. In contrast, they felt that there was now more poverty than ever.

“There is more poverty now than ever!”

“We feel very little or no progress has been made in relation to reducing poverty or social exclusion since the publication of this roadmap.”

Some of our participants thought outside their own circumstances to highlight clear and present examples of poverty in Irish society: “There are lots of families living in emergency accommodation. Nothing has improved for them!”

Participants highlighted contributory factors in this increased level of poverty including: The Covid pandemic, a lack of employment opportunities for people with disabilities, and the current cost of living crisis.

“There has been no change we’re still on the same money and everything like food, bills are going up”

“Covid hit and things went the opposite direction. Things got worse!”

“There aren’t enough employment opportunities.”

- **In your experience, what has worked well in reducing the number of people in Ireland experiencing poverty and social exclusion? 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 feedback to this question was resoundingly negative and completely one sided with almost no responses suggesting that anything had worked well in reducing the number of people in Ireland experiencing poverty and social exclusion. The overwhelming majority suggested that it had not worked well and that's the challenges had increased. The majority stated that there were challenges still facing people with disabilities and that there were barriers in their way with regards, the cost of living, employment, housing, and social exclusion. The clear response was that so far the Roadmap had failed and had made little to no impact

“The government hasn’t done much so far that we can see”

“Nothing has changed.”

“Things are getting worse, not better.”

“Disabled people are affected greatly in Ireland as they have a higher cost of living and require extra accommodations when looking for a home”

“people with disabilities are excluded from the workforce, they cannot afford to work and to lose their medical card etc.”

“There haven’t been any improvements made that we have seen or felt”

“it's difficult to answer what has worked well or not in reducing poverty and social exclusion”

“We don't see a road map, instead just a blank canvas that has no clarity.”

- **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?**

## **Social Welfare**

“When people do not have money they are unable to socially interact with others as they find it demoralising and embarrassing”

People with a disability living in Ireland have a high “at risk of poverty” rate. The Disability Allowance, and other social welfare payments for people with disabilities, are insufficient. Survey participants expressed that it needs to be increased to meet the cost of living with a disability.

The Cost of Disability Report has indicated that the cost of disability increases depending on the severity of the disability. Their estimations indicate that the cost of a severe disability ranges from €9,600 to €12,300 extra per year and between €8,700 and €10,000 extra per year for those with limited disabilities. These are hugely significant financial burdens faced daily by people with disabilities. The participants of our focus groups know that only too well: “It would be great to have enough of an income to be able to live, pay bills and have a bit of a social life. I should be entitled to go away with my friends. At the moment I can’t afford to do this.”

A Cost of Disability Payment that has extra payments depending on the severity of the disability would make a key difference to the poverty experienced by people with

disabilities. The fact remains disabled people experience lasting poverty at over five times the national average. (19.2% vs 4%) so significant measures need to be taken.

## **Housing**

A person's independence and social inclusion rely heavily on their ability to live independently without having to rely on family support. Our focus group participants emphasised this need:

“Affordable housing/ cap rents.”

“An increase in the amount of Social housing for people with disabilities”

“Prioritizing of people with additional needs on local authority housing lists.”

“Housing should be made more accessible and more available to people, it should support our right to be independent and not reliant on those around us.”

While searching for housing people with disabilities are impacted by; the lack of available, accessible houses with supported living packages, difficulties navigating the social housing application process due to its inaccessible nature, and issues regarding decision making when they enter into tenancy agreements. In addition, people with disabilities face many extra barriers, which can affect educational opportunities and contribute to unemployment and a lack of income.

If the roadmap is serious about addressing social inclusion it needs to encourage investment in building accessible social housing units, and the requirement that any new build housing for use by local authorities will be universally designed and accessible to all. It also needs to seek increases in, and modernisation of, supports for those living independently to cover the cost of living and support for modern necessities like broadband.

## **Transport**

It is needless to say that the one key driver in amongst all aspects of social inclusion, whether they be employment, education, or social activities with friends, is transport to and from each of those activities. Transport, and in particular accessible rural transport, was a key highlight of the feedback from our focused groups. Our participants credited transport as particularly important for any aspect of social inclusion and stated that the difficulties they have encountered with regards accessing accessible transport have seriously impacted their social life and social inclusion:

“Better National transport service with improved accessibility and improved rural infrastructure”

“We need more money, better transport”

“With rural transport in Ireland, it’s just not doable to have a social life”

Inaccessible transport is a specific contributor to the isolation and exclusion of the people who use our services. Transport is often unreliable and infrequent, particularly in rural areas, and neither it nor its infrastructure is accessible. This effect prevents the people who use our services from achieving their desired personal progression socially, educationally, or professionally.

To address these needs the Roadmap should encourage significant investment in local Link services to expand on the service it already provides and ensure those services are accessible to disabled people. It should also seek the introduction of alternative financial support for people who require more individualised travel support when looking to access transport.

- **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.**

Employment is a recurring theme both in the road map itself and also in the results of our survey. It is a key target established within the roadmap to: **reduce poverty among people with disabilities and also to improve employment outcomes among disabled people**. The European Commission Country Report for Ireland 2019 revealed that Ireland has one of the lowest employment rates for people with disabilities in the EU (26.2 % compared to 48.1 % in the EU in 2017).

In order to achieve the targets within the roadmap the government would also need to live up to its own expectations of employment outcomes, for example: its 6% employment of people with disabilities in the public sector. This is a target that has not yet been reached by government and were it to be achieved it would stand out as an example for other sectors and encourage the employment of people with disabilities.

What our participants have highlighted is the importance of employment not only to tackle poverty but also to support social inclusion. It is a clear goal for people with disabilities that the opportunity to go out into employment would not only give them the experience of work but also spending time with colleagues and socialising: “The importance of employment is a way of meeting new people. The government needs to realise that we want to be a part of the community by being employed and feeling we have a place.”

The feedback from our focus groups also highlighted a dire need for greater support for people with disabilities to enter employment. Our participants felt that there was a chronic lack of opportunities in employment for people with disabilities:

“There are not enough supports to people with disabilities to help them find and keep jobs.”

“Ensure everyone has the same equal rights in employment.”

“Extend employment opportunities to all who can work.”

“Create more employment opportunities.”

Obviously without the opportunity to enter employment the likelihood of poverty is going to increase exponentially. The importance for support to acquire but also to retain employment is huge. The Government should encourage and incentivise employers to take Disability Awareness and Diversity Training to reduce anxiety or hesitancy about employing a person with a disability or mental health challenge.

## What is Rehab and what do we do?

The Rehab Group is the largest not-for-profit organisation in Ireland providing specialist services to persons with a disability and people who are at a disadvantage. We provide direct services to over 10,000 people including children and adults. We champion the values of diversity and inclusion for persons with a disability or disadvantage in their communities throughout Ireland.

Our mission is to help change the lives of the people we serve by helping them to become more independent and more included in their communities, by empowering them with the skills and confidence to be active in the workforce, and supporting them to be in charge of their health and wellness. The Rehab Group is comprised of RehabCare, National Learning Network and Rehab Enterprises. We specialise in residential, supported accommodation, respite and day services; home support services, further education and training; and employment for individuals with a disability and people who are disadvantaged.

Funded by the HSE, RehabCare is the care division of the Rehab Group providing 52 residential/supported accommodation services, 70-day services including resource and outreach centres, 10 respite services for adults and children, and home support services to both children and adults across Ireland.

National Learning Network (NLN) is the education and training division of the Rehab Group specialising in individualised, person-centred training and education with a specific focus on persons with a disability. We support over 7,000 students each year, between the ages of 16 and 65 who have experienced a setback, an accident, a mental health issue, an illness, an injury or have a disability to progress to further education and training or employment. NLN is funded through the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and the HSE.

Rehab Enterprises provides sustainable employment for persons with a disability. It operates a unique integrated model of employment, where employees with disabilities work alongside employees without disabilities across a number of sectors.



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